

Rome, WCC pursue conversion guidelines: Establishing a shared code of conduct

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The World Council of Churches launched in mid-May a three-year joint study project with the Vatican aimed at developing a shared code of conduct on religious conversion and proselytizing.

“The issue of religious conversion remains a controversial dimension in many interconfessional and interreligious relations,” said Hans Ucko, head of the WCC’s interreligious relations office. “We hope that at the end of this study project, we will be able to propose a code of conduct that will affirm that commitment to our faith never translates into denigration of the other.”

The project, named “Interreligious Reflection on Conversion: From Controversy to a Shared Code of Conduct,” began at a May 12-16 meeting in Rome, the Geneva-based WCC announced.

Some of the sharpest disagreements in recent years have been between the Catholic Church and the Russian Orthodox Church, the latter charging Rome with encroachment in traditionally Orthodox regions. Disputes have also arisen in Latin America, where traditional Catholic churches are challenged by evangelical and Pentecostal missionaries.

The WCC-Vatican study will discuss first religious conversion from a Christian perspective and later the establishment of a shared code of conduct, which is expected to distinguish between witness and proselytization.

It will aim to make respect for freedom of thought, conscience and the religion of others a primary concern in any encounter between people of different faiths, officials said.

Leading the project are the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue and the WCC Office on Interreligious Relations and Dialogue. Representatives of Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and indigenous religious traditions are expected to participate, in addition to Christians. -*Ecumenical News International*