

Charter for a Partnership of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam

in the Conceptual Development, Construction, and Use of a New
House of Prayer and Learning, the House of One, on Petriplatz in Berlin

Preamble

On Petriplatz, where the medieval city of Berlin-Cölln was founded, something new is about to arise: a new edifice, a house of prayer and learning, open to all, in which Jews, Christians, and Muslims can worship and get to know one another and engage with the secular majority of the city as well, seeking dialogue and discourse – a house of prayer and at the same time a house of interdisciplinary study of the religions, their history, and their current role in Berlin and in Germany.

Petriplatz, the seed from which this city grew up, was shaped by religion in significant ways. From its beginnings through the centuries, it has witnessed the interpenetration of religion and the city's civic culture. The first resident of the city whose name is known was a pastor of the Petrikirche, mentioned in a document dated 1237. That year has been taken by the history books as the year of Berlin's founding and has served as the point of reference for the city's anniversary celebrations. The House of Prayer and Learning, the House of One,, will breathe new life into Petriplatz as a landmark representing the engagement between the three monotheistic religions and the city, and among the religions themselves, that is free from bias and prejudice. In this way, it will restore this place's symbolic importance as a traditional locus of interplay between religious and civic life, while taking into account the changed circumstances of our time.

If we succeed in granting each of the religions a space in which they can live openly and engage with the public; if we succeed in fostering reflection on our own identities and those of others from multiple perspectives while also being accessible to others, and that together; if the representatives of the three religions engage with one another such that those who seek and inquire about religion find our approach enriching and come to us for (three) initial answers; if we succeed in all this, then Berlin will find its future in the very place of its birth, and the city will benefit from the best that the three religions have to offer. Given the three religions' respective self-conceptions, this can only happen in a way that preserves theological differences and contradictions rather than glossing over them. The new building will therefore be structured to grant each of the religions its own separate worship space (House of Prayer), which opens into a shared central space (House of Learning). Separately (in the respective Houses of Worship) and yet in immediate, tangible proximity, the new building is a church, synagogue, and mosque under one roof.

Judaism, Islam, and Christianity share a faith in a “world-transcending creator, who created humankind and made men and women free so that they might be stewards of the world and work to make it just.” (Wolf Krötke) The three religions are related through their orientation toward canonical scripture and their – thoroughly diverse – references to biblical figures such as Noah, Abraham, or Ismael. A more critical examination yields an even greater array of commonalities and structural parallels. “In the back and forth between religious traditions with regard to various specific problem areas, [we must] discover anew those things that unite and separate us,” and the ways in which they are interwoven with each respective religious practice and way of life (Klaus von Stosch).

Notwithstanding all that divides the religions, which will endure and which should not be buried but rather, honored with the “praise of difference” (Navid Kermani), there is a shared history among the religions, a history of suffering and injustice, but also of successful coexistence. The foundation on which the construction and future use of the new House of Prayer and Learning will rest is our commitment to carrying this history forward each and every day in the middle of Berlin, writing the next chapters as a story of peace rather than as a story of evil. “People and nations and creeds will remain separate. They will live on as different entities. But they will know that they belong together, that they are all part of one humanity, that they should live together on this earth, recognizing and understanding one another, and, when there is need, helping one another.” (Leo Baeck)

In this spirit and in an earnest effort to achieve mutual understanding, the undersigned pledge to pursue ways of living together that promote peace and social justice and preserve nature.

I

The faiths and traditions of the three religions have in common several core values meant to be lived and realized, in our hearts and by our deeds. From these are derived corresponding fundamental intentions to act, which are of critical importance to the undersigned, who will build and use the new House of Prayer and Learning (cf. Parliament of World Religions, Chicago 1993).

A. Commitment to a culture of non-violence and respect for all life

In times in which violence in word and deed threatens peace within each religion, in the city, and in the nation, the interactions among the three religions and between the religions and the larger society must be governed by a culture that serves as a beacon to the city, one in which prejudice and injustice are countered *non-violently*, so as to safeguard and accept the dignity and identity of each and every person and in this way satisfy the rights and duties enshrined in the Basic Law of Germany. Accordingly, the signatories will not oppress or harm any other person. They reject any kind of violence as a means of dealing with differences and likewise pledge not to provide material or moral support to third parties whose actions run counter to this culture of non-violence.

B. Commitment to a culture of solidarity

It is the wish of the involved parties that the construction and future use of the House of Prayer and Learning should be distinguished by mutual respect, a desire for exchange, and reciprocal consideration. The undersigned pledge to respect the life, dignity, individuality, and diversity of their partners.

C. Commitment to a culture of respect and a life of integrity

Respect for others grows with respect for one's self. If a dialogue among the monotheistic religions were to descend into sanctimonious lecturing on the one hand or, on the other, a white-washing of differences that effaces one's own identity, then it has failed. Instead, the purpose of this enterprise concerns the public and transparent representation of each of the religions through worship as well as through conversation with the other religions – and all those who are interested and seek out the House of Prayer and Learning with curiosity and questions.

D. Commitment to a culture of equal rights

The participants in the construction and use of the House of Prayer and Learning, invited by the Protestant Congregation of St. Peter and St. Mary, shall be equal partners and accord one another mutual respect in all their dealings. None of the religious communities intends to connect their involvement in the construction and use of the new House of Prayer and Learning with the goal of proselytizing to the other religious communities.

No person, whether man or woman, should be viewed or treated as a second-class citizen
Or exploited in any way.

II.

In accordance with Section 1 and thus with the basic principle of the Charter and the purpose of the bylaws of the non-profit association, “A New House of Prayer and Learning for Good Relations among Judaism, Christianity, and Islam in the Heart of Berlin” (*Ein neues Bet- und Lehrhaus auf dem Petriplatz für eine gute Nachbarschaft von Judentum, Christentum und Islam im Herzen Berlins*), the undersigned, who will construct and use the new religious building, explicitly reject the following:

A. Actions that belittle or disparage the other religious communities or which encourage third parties to such belittling actions. These include actions and words that serve to disseminate false claims about the other religious communities which the party making the claims knows to be false.

B. Actions that directly serve political purposes, i.e. which directly further the intentions of a country, a party, or a political organization.

III.

The representatives of the religious communities are subject to the following binding agreements with regard to their work together on the construction and use of the House of Prayer and Learning:

A. The individual institutions, which are responsible for the project through their membership in the association “House of Prayer and Learning Petriplatz, Berlin”, House of One (*Bet- und Lehrhaus Petriplatz Berlin e. V.*), each represent their respective religions. However, none of them claim to be the exclusive representative. Subject to the requirement of unanimous approval by the board of the association, other institutions may also join the project and lend their voice, thus giving expression to the full diversity of life in each of the three religions, as long as they also pledge to uphold the principles of this Charter in their use of the House of Prayer and Learning.

B. Disputes between the institutions representing the religions regarding their substantive work or the use of the facility will be decided by the board of the Bet- und Lehrhaus Petriplatz Berlin e. V. association after consultation with the Board of Trustees and/or the academic advisory council. Each of the religious communities shall have equal representation on the board.

C. Actions in contravention of the principles and stipulations of this charter or the mission of the association as set forth in the bylaws will result in the offending institution being excluded from the board of the association. The procedure for such an exclusion from the board is laid out in the association bylaws.

Berlin, October 12th, 2011

Signed by the founding members of the association “House of Prayer and Learning Petriplatz, Berlin” (Bet- und Lehrhaus Petriplatz Berlin e. V.)