



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

URI Lienz/Austria - Interreligiöses Team Osttirol

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Catholic, Muslim, Baha'i, Orthodox, Protestants and different traditions from Africa and Asia

Location of CC: Lienz, Austria

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Key Areas of Focus: To form a community of friends with people from all over the world, and with different religions who live in our surrounding. To help each other, pray together and be a symbol for a new society in the country.

Summary

URI Lienz, located in Lienz, Austria unites Muslims, Catholics, Baha'is, Orthodox, Protestants, and various traditions from Africa and Asia. The town has seen an increase in immigration from Africa and Asia with these new immigrants bringing their diverse traditions and religious practices. URI Lienz organizes various exhibitions on world religions, constructs interfaith prayers, and provides resources and support for refugees. URI Lienz work in Austria is helping to bridge important differences between locals and diverse groups in the area.



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1. *What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where the CC is working?*

Lienz is a medieval town in the Austrian state of Tyrol. It is the administrative centre of the Lienz district, which covers all of East Tyrol. It is small town with population of around 10, 000 inhabitants. Because this town is near Austrian and Italian board its inhabitants were always under huge influence of other cultures, religions and tradition. There is also a lot of refugees from Africa and Asia. Now in Lienz there are different faiths and traditions such as: Catholic, Muslim, Baha'i, Orthodox, Protestants and different traditions from Africa and Asia.

2. *Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where the CC works?*

Because Lienz is located near the border of two countries (Austria and Italy) there are refugee camps for people from all over the world. It is very important to build bridges between these cultures, traditions and religions in such a small town to help people here better understand each other, learn about different cultures, live in harmony, and make a better future for all.

3. *Please briefly describe the main activities or programs the CC is carrying out?*

Since 2004 we have organized many different exhibitions about the world's religions in schools and other places in Tyrol. We were the only participants from Austria attending the Parliament of the World's Religions in Melbourne 2009.

We are trying to build a place, even a physical building, for prayer and meetings for people from different faiths! We are helping refugees with practical support. On December 21, 2012, we began the "Light Walk" where people placed peace prayers in the neighborhood river and allowed the river to carry these prayers for all countries and people from different religions. A few days ago we finished a project focused on the theme , "justice in every kind - for all people of the earth".

The next project will take place during the "World Interfaith Harmony Week" with an exhibition on World Ethics in a school. We also are collecting stones from all over the world (from sacred places) to create a base, so that we can build a place of prayer for all people.

4. *Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?*

We are trying to build bridges between Catholic, Muslim, Baha'i, Orthodox, Protestants and different traditions from Africa and Asia.



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5. Please explain the method or strategy that the CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.

We bring people together through different activities and work in local communities. We organize exhibitions, pray together, and do a lot of volunteer work to improve life in our community. We organize meetings, share experiences and show people that we are all human beings with the same problems and that we can help each other make our local community a better place by using our differences as a good starting point.

6. Given the current context you described, what does the CC hope to achieve (goals)?

We want to make Lienz a meeting place for people of all different faith and traditions by setting a positive example for the rest of Austria and the world. Also, because we are the only CC in Austria we would like to motivate other people from our country to organize themselves and become a new CC.

7. How do you see this CCs work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?

Because Lienz is a place with 90% of Catholic population, we were quite a “closed” community. Through our CC activities we accept refugees from all over the world and we are becoming a more inclusive and liberal community.

8. How is the work of your CC helping to prevent religiously inspired violence or transforming conflict? (Ask in areas with open conflict.)

(This is not area with open conflict)

9. What are some observations or signs you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where the CC works?

We became a more inclusive and liberal community. We accept mix marriages (which was a big issue in the past). Also on the political level, the people show that they have become more open-minded because they are not voting for the racist parties as in other towns in their region but for the liberal parties that are supporting liberal and open views.

10. How is your CC’s work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

All of our CC work is in line with the principles and the mission of URI. We try to make harmony between people that are coming from different religions and traditional backgrounds and strive for positive change in our local community.