

YMCA Birmingham – Ethos Statement

YMCA Birmingham is an independent, non-denominational Christian charity affiliated to the national and international YMCA movement. The importance of Christianity to the Movement is explained within four statements:

1. The Paris Basis
2. The Kampala Principles
3. Challenge 21
4. The National Vision Statement

The ethos of the YMCA Movement is based on mutual acceptance of the Paris Basis of 1855, which is incorporated into the Memorandum of Association of YMCA Birmingham, namely:

'The YMCA is a Christian Movement which seeks to unite those who, regarding Jesus Christ as their God and Saviour according to the Holy Scriptures, desire to be His disciples in their faith and in their life, and to associate their efforts for the extension of His Kingdom. It welcomes into its fellowship persons of all religious faiths and of none'.

In accordance with its Christian values, the YMCA stands for:

- a worldwide fellowship based on the equal value of all persons
- respect and freedom for all; tolerance and understanding between people of different opinions
- active concern for the needs of the community
- united effort by Christians of different traditions

The founders of the YMCA movement deliberately chose language that was designed to be as inclusive as possible within the context of their time. There was much debate about adding further doctrinal statements to the Paris Basis in order to define more rigorously what they understood the statement to mean. They resisted that temptation in order to give discretion to local YMCAs and future generations.

The 6th World Council meeting in Kampala, Uganda, in July 1973, adopted the following declaration of principles:

The Paris Basis expresses that Christ is the centre of the Movement, which is conceived as a world-wide fellowship uniting Christians of all confessions. It is consistent with an open membership policy, involving people irrespective of faith as well as age, sex, race and social condition... Recognising the character of the YMCAs in the world today, this act of acknowledging the Paris Basis places upon the various associations and their members as fellow workers with God such imperatives as:

1. *To work for equal opportunity and justice for all.*
2. *To work for and maintain an environment in which relationships among people are characterised by love and understanding.*
3. *To work for and maintain conditions, within the YMCA and in society, its organisations and institutions, which allow for honesty, depth and creativity.*

4. *To develop and maintain leadership and programme patterns which exemplify the varieties and depth of Christian experience.*

5. *To work for the development of the whole person.*

This twin focus on Christianity and openness to people of all faiths and none remains at the heart of the YMCA's vision. In recognition of this in 2006 the National Assembly of the YMCA Movement in England agreed a National Vision Statement for the YMCA in England. This says:

'The YMCA's vision is of an inclusive Christian Movement, transforming communities so that all young people truly belong contribute and thrive.'

In 1855 representatives from 9 countries agreed the Paris Basis. Today the YMCA operates in 125 countries, including many from the Global South. Accordingly, in 1998 the Movement sought to agree a new statement that would build on the Paris Basis, but make it more accessible to a modern audience and reflect the priorities of a Movement that is now truly international. The result was Challenge 21, which says:

Affirming the Paris Basis adopted in 1855 as the ongoing foundation statement of the mission of the YMCA, at the threshold of the third millennium we declare that the YMCA is a world-wide Christian, ecumenical, voluntary movement for women and men with special emphasis on and the genuine involvement of young people and that it seeks to share the Christian ideal of building a human community of justice with love, peace and reconciliation for the fullness of life for all creation.

Each member YMCA is therefore called to focus on certain challenges which will be prioritized according to its own context. These challenges, which are an evolution of the Kampala Principles, are :

- *Sharing the good news of Jesus Christ and striving for spiritual, intellectual and physical well-being of individuals and wholeness of communities.*
- *Empowering all, especially young people and women to take increased responsibilities and assume leadership at all levels and working towards an equitable society.*
- *Advocating for and promoting the rights of women and upholding the rights of children.*
- *Fostering dialogue and partnership between people of different faiths and ideologies and recognizing the cultural identities of people and promoting cultural renewal.*
- *Committing to work in solidarity with the poor, dispossessed, uprooted people and oppressed racial, religious and ethnic minorities.*
- *Seeking to be mediators and reconcilers in situations of conflict and working for meaningful participation and advancement of people for their own self-determination.*
- *Defending God's creation against all that would destroy it and preserving and protecting the earth's resources for coming generations.*

To face these challenges, the YMCA will develop patterns of co-operation at all levels that enable self-sustenance and self-determination.

It is clear from these documents and statements that the Christian faith is the foundation on which the YMCA Movement is built, not just in England, but across the

world. For over 160 years YMCAs have been known as Christian organisations and places of Christian hospitality. If we wish to use the YMCA name and branding with integrity, the Christian faith must remain at the heart of our organisation too. We do not have the right as an individual member of the Movement to unilaterally compromise that foundation. To do so would have effects not only for YMCA Birmingham, but also for the broader Movement.

YMCA Birmingham accepts the Paris Basis as the ongoing foundation statement of the mission of the YMCA, and has adopted the National Vision Statement as articulating our aspirations for our own local Association. We also accept Challenge 21 as setting an ambitious agenda for local associations such as YMCA Birmingham. In addition we have adopted our own Mission Statement which seeks to reflect the context within which we work. Our Mission is:

'to inspire people to strengthen their community, by discovering their potential.'

Ethos has been described as 'what we believe in and the values we live by; the motivations that drive and undergird our corporate life'. This ethos statement is designed to ensure that our commitment to the statements outlined above is manifested in consistent behaviours that are corporately agreed and remain accountable within the line management structures of the Association. Accordingly the Board of YMCA Birmingham affirms its commitment to the following principles.

YMCA Birmingham:

1. ***is a non-denominational Christian charity whose primary purpose is to demonstrate Jesus' love for people in practical ways*** – we are not a church or para-church organisation; that is, our primary purpose is not confessional activity or proselytisation.
2. ***believes that our actions must be consistent with the faith which we claim is our guiding motivation*** – in the case of YMCA Birmingham we see ourselves as an organisation that is motivated primarily by the Christian narrative.
3. ***is firmly resolved to ensure that the Christian faith makes a real difference not only to what we do, but also to the way we do it*** – in seeking to follow the example of Jesus Christ we believe we should be doing different things in a different way to those organisations that do not share our faith basis.
4. ***recognises the special emphasis throughout the Bible that God gives to working with those who are poor, weak and vulnerable*** – we therefore see the work of the Association as a practical outworking of the Christian faith, and as part of a long tradition of Christian social action and concern.
5. ***also recognises that many other organisations may have different motivations, but a mission to undertake similar work*** – where possible we will seek to work co-operatively with such organisations, whilst being clear about our own faith motivation.

6. ***believes that in order to be an authentic part of the Christian narrative it is essential that at the heart of the organisation are people who have a personal commitment to the Christian faith*** – everyone is invited to *belong* to the YMCA, but in order to maintain our Christian identity major decisions at both an executive and strategic level have to include input from people who also *believe* that 'Jesus Christ [is] their God and Saviour according to the Holy Scriptures'.
7. ***seeks to inspire people to fulfil their potential (including their spiritual potential) from a Christian perspective and within a Christian framework*** – however, we recognise that their spiritual journey may take place outside of the Christian faith and we will work with other agencies and faith groups to ensure that spiritual development programmes reflect this.
8. ***will strive to ensure that all of our services are open to and suitable for people irrespective of their religious faith*** – under no circumstances will Christians receive preferential treatment in the allocation of services, nor will service users be required to engage in confessional activity or be open to proselytisation.
9. ***welcomes people of all faiths and of none to be part of our staff team, subject to the requirements of our Central Posts Policy*** – all members of staff will be subject to the same terms and conditions of service, irrespective of their religious faith.
10. ***holds that the Paris Basis defines clearly what the Movement's understanding of a Christian is*** – notwithstanding differences on other matters between Christians of different traditions, no other doctrinal statements shall be deemed as grounds for division between Christians within the Association or exclusion from services.

Irrespective of their personal faith position, all staff, volunteers and board members are expected to respect the Movement's Christian ethos and to uphold its values of:

- being inclusive and welcoming to people of all religious faiths and none
- promoting respect and freedom for all
- working for tolerance and understanding
- having an active care and concern for the community
- affirming the equal value of each person when caring for and working with others

YMCA Birmingham is committed to reflecting and authenticating its Christian ethos and values in its policies, practices and behaviours with transparency and integrity.