

# YMCA Global Conversation Primer

## *Exploring Christian Identity, Expression and Narrative in the 21st Century Global YMCA Movement*

### 1. Welcome

Welcome to this important conversation. In the period April to August 2025, the YMCA is creating space across the globe to reflect on its Christian identity in the 21st Century. Whether you consider yourself Christian, of another faith, or of no faith, your voice is absolutely welcome and valued in this process.

### 2. The purpose of the Conversation

This conversation invites us to reflect together on the Christian identity of the YMCA — its roots, how it's lived today, and how it can be expressed in the future. It is not about changing anyone's beliefs, but about exploring and naming what unites us and deepening our mutual understanding. All of these conversations are part of a global process, commissioned by the World YMCA Executive Committee, and rooted in our shared commitment to inclusivity, local autonomy, and respectful dialogue.

A Steering Committee was established to guide this process, and it continues to do so now. The Steering Committee has designed the format for this conversation, after feedback from three successful pilot conversations run in 2024 with YMCA National General Secretaries, YMCA National Board Chairs, and with a group of young YMCA Change Agents.

The conversations will take place in the period April to August 2025 via two formats: **National Conversations**, organised by YMCA National Movements, and online **Youth Dialogues**, organised by World YMCA.

### 3. What this Conversation is ... and is not

- This conversation **IS**:
  - A space for respectful listening and sharing
  - An opportunity to explore the YMCA's Christian history and future
  - A process that values all voices, including those of other faiths and no faith
- This conversation **IS NOT**:
  - About changing your local YMCA's identity or practice
  - A theological debate
  - About agreement — it's about understanding

## 4. What you'll be asked to reflect on – Four unchanging questions to be used in all Conversations, anywhere

1. What does it mean to be a Christian Movement in 2024?
2. How can the YMCA be inclusive of people with Christian faith, other faiths, and no faith?
3. How do we manage our collective space as a global Movement with diverse beliefs?
4. What stories or experiences have shaped your understanding of the YMCA's Christian identity?

## 5. Background

The YMCA began in 1844 as a Christian response to the needs of young people. It has since grown into a global movement present in 120 countries, serving over 60 million people annually. Across this diversity, the Christian identity of the YMCA is understood and expressed in many different ways — from strongly faith-based to faith-inclusive and to secular expressions.

This conversation honours that diversity. All are welcome in this shared reflection.

## 6. Values and inclusion

This conversation is guided by the YMCA's Value Statement on Inclusion. We strive to be open to all — regardless of ability, age, culture, gender, race, religion, sexual orientation, or socio-economic background. The YMCA believes in unity, not uniformity.

We invite you to speak honestly and listen generously.

## 7. What happens next?

Each individual National Conversation and each online Youth Dialogue will feed into a global summary to be presented to the YMCA World Council in 2026. Your voice will help shape a shared statement on what it means to be a Christian Movement in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century.

***Thank you so much for taking part in this journey.***

Please see all the information housed on the [YMCA Christian Identity Conversation webpages](#).

Geneva, April 2025