INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDING GUIDE

United Religions Initiative

PREFACE

We welcome you to this Interfaith Peacebuilding Guide, motivated by the threefold purpose of the global United Religions Initiative, "to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings." In other respects, too, this guide reflects the character and scope of the United Religions Initiative (URI), its sponsoring organization:

It is designed for and dedicated to people from all religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions around the globe.

It is motivated by the values and principles of interfaith living and action expressed in the URI's Charter (see Resources), itself constructed through four years of consultation with constituencies worldwide.

Its activities nurture the deepening of individual faith, understanding, and commitment, while building meaningful, constructive, long-lasting relationships, in short, cultures of peace.

It employs an approach to peacebuilding that involves individual self-examination and grounding in a personal spiritual path, strengthening group work in creating meaningful respect and understanding, and empowering effective group action in the larger community.

It anticipates and aspires to serve many forms of interfaith understanding, cooperation, and action within and among interfaith groups of many kinds. At the same time, it recognizes and addresses the need for deepening of reflection and understanding within individual denominations and faith traditions, including frequently the need to heal internal rifts, build understanding among disputing groups, and forge a common commitment to interfaith action

It fuses proven conflict transformation skills and methods with positive-change approaches, in particular, Appreciative Inquiry, which has helped URI from its inception to foster deep interpersonal connection among people of diverse traditions, as well as a forward-looking orientation to establishing positive vision and action for the future.

For those of you who are new acquaintances to the United Religions Initiative, it is a global network of some 200 Cooperation Circles (CCs) that are locally rooted and active, regionally supported, and globally connected. The URI organizational design invests the greatest amount of authority and autonomy in the most local units of organization, with regional and global structures serving the whole mainly through communications, coordination, support for local capacity building, and fundraising. As a nonhierarchical structure composed of self-organizing groups, the URI embodies a unique model of global organizing. CCs must have at least seven members who represent at least three different faith traditions; and they may organize in any manner and around any issue or activity that is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose, and Principles of the URI Charter.

We invite you to engage this guide in a way that meets your individual or group's needs and to make it work for you. We would welcome hearing your feedback at any time, as well as how you have used and adapted it for your needs. You may contact us at: Interfaith Peacebuilding Guide, United Religions Initiative, P.O. Box 29242, San Francisco, CA, 94129-0242. Barbara@uri.org. www.uri.org.

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Table of Contents

INTRODUCTION

Religion is playing a larger and larger role in national and global politics in today's world. Many governments have awakened to the importance of faith in the lives of their citizens and also to the consequences of ignoring or dismissing religion as a vital — and potentially destructive — force in human affairs.

Today, people of faith from all over the world are stepping out boldly, courageously, to put their teachings and practices to work for the greater good — in building understanding across lines of division that tear our societies apart, in advocating for social justice, and in building peace. Faith-based peace workers are creatively finding ways to deal with complex problems by using and further developing the resources for peace found in their religious and spiritual traditions. They are greatly enriching the selection of approaches and methods available for peacebuilding by both religious and non-religious practitioners alike.

People of diverse faiths are also actively joining hands across religious boundaries to create strength through joint action, and in so doing they also serve as powerful models for living and thriving in our increasingly diverse communities and an increasingly interconnected world.

We welcome you to the United Religions Initiative Interfaith Peacebuilding Guide, a work that emerged out of an interfaith network of people around the world who are committed to ending violence among religions and creating cultures of peace, justice, and healing. This guide is designed for and dedicated to all people of faith — of religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions — around the globe. We hope that it will be a resource for those who are new to

interfaith encounter, as well as those who have many years of experience in building interfaith relationships.

The guide contains resources for individuals and groups asking:

○ How can we help lessen fear and mend division within religious communities, as well as among religions by deepening intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue?

○ How can we create a "safe space" for people of diverse faiths to work together in support of conflict resolution, healing, reconciliation?

○ How can we collectively learn to use our differences as assets in contributing to more comprehensive peace processes?

○ As people of shared and diverse principles, how can we develop the sensibilities, tools, and skills for dealing with differences of many kinds from an interfaith perspective?

○ How can we best mobilize sustainable, constructive action?

Building peace is a human heritage and capacity that has a long history in societies, cultures, and religious traditions. Capacities for creating societies of justice and peace are present in most faith traditions. The means are multiple and the desire and daily practice universal, even in the midst of great violence. They touch every level of human interaction and experience. Through this guide we hope to draw from, nourish, and contribute to what is already happening. We hope to become part of a conversation that brings more of it to light and strengthens collaborations.

This Guide in the Context of Peacebuilding

Peacebuilding is a relatively new term. It was coined about a decade ago by the then-Secretary General of the United Nations Boutrous Boutrous-Ghali to refer to a set of activities devised to promote peaceful relations among conflicting parties, especially after a peace agreement has been signed. Many scholars and practitioners now use the term to refer to activities carried out at any stage of a peace process. We adopt that broader view of peacebuilding in this guide, using it as an umbrella term that assumes a nonviolent approach and refers to all attitudes and activities aimed to assist people in resolving conflicts and building sustainable relationships.

It its broadest sense, peacebuilding is about building peaceful, stable communities, and societies.[1] Peacebuilding recognizes that peace is "an active process in which people may, in some cases, promote conflict [through nonviolent action] in order to improve the conditions and relationships of others or themselves."[2] Ultimately, peacebuilding aims to prevent further violence and destructive conflict; heal individuals and societies from the effects of violence; and reconcile individuals and communities, "so that a shared future might be possible."[3]

Peacebuilding is oriented to transforming the system as a whole, not just individual parts of it. It relates to the individual, community, society, and the international system. It has an impact on assumptions, values, attitudes, issues, and relationships. Peacebuilding is made up of countless small and large actions, some that are in response to immediate needs such as relief of suffering or the calming of tensions and others designed for longer-term impact. Some peacebuilding strategies may require sustained action over decades to yield results, particularly those designed to bring about changes in social, political, and economic structures and systems.

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[1] *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual* (Vatican City: Caritas Internationalis, 2002), 4.
[2] Susan L. Carpenter, *A Repertoire of Peacemaking Skills* (Consortium on Peace Research, Education, and Development, 1977), 4.
[3] Paula Green, "Contact: Training a New Generation of Peacebuilders," *Peace and Change* 27:1 (January 2002), 101.

Peacebuilding is both a field of practice and of scholarly study. It builds on decades of peace research and developing theories and practice of conflict resolution, nonviolent activism, and work in related fields such as human rights and socioeconomic development. It is a dynamic field in which the focus has expanded from preventing and ending violent social conflict to the study of systemic and other causes of conflict to the study of post-conflict processes of restoration and reconstruction. It spans many different disciplines such as history, psychology, sociology, anthropology, biology, political science, education, communication, public policy, among others.

The role of ordinary citizens in peacebuilding cannot be underestimated. As the veteran American peacebuilder Louise Diamond has said, "the power for peacebuilding resides with the many and not just the few."[4] To build an effective and sustainable peace we need to develop leadership and participation in at every level of a society, from citizens working locally at the "grassroots" to create a foundation of trust between people on different sides of a conflict, to people active in many different capacities at the national, regional, and international levels.

The Interfaith Contribution to Peacebuilding

Groups and individuals working for interfaith understanding hold powerful keys for unlocking conflict, wherever it is found. Inherently, most faiths aim to bring peace to their followers and to humanity. At the same time, religious differences are often easily manipulated and used to mobilize communities and individuals for violence. Thus, learning to understand the meaning of religious differences — and becoming comfortable with the many diverse "voices" of religious and spiritual expression — reduces the possibility of religious radicalism and the intolerance, hatred, and violence that so often accompany it. It can also motivate people to actively engage in building connections and relationship across religious divides and act to correct injustice.

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[4] "Building Peace: Who's Responsible?" *Pathways Journal* (Fall 1996), http://www.pathwaysmag.com/9-96diamond.html.

Every longstanding faith group has an historic reservoir of meanings that give shape to identity. They have powerful symbols and rituals that give expression to collective needs and desires. They also have a wealth of principles, values, and practices that can build peace and cooperative relationships among enemies.

Religious peacebuilding — which includes interfaith peacebuilding — is now a recognized area of practice and study in the larger peacebuilding field. It brings into play distinctive sets of meanings and interpretations, motivations, causes and effects, and strategies. Its contributions include the prophetic and moral voice and authority of faith, the institutional resources of many faith groups and communities, the intermediary and advocacy roles often played by religious and spiritual adherents, and also a focus on the restoration of relationships and community.

The discipline and transformative power of religious and spiritual teachings and practices are a special ingredient that interfaith groups bring to peacebuilding as a whole. These include the vital qualities of empathy and compassion, courage and self-sacrifice, self-awareness and self-control; a belief in the transformative power of love and positive regard; faith in the face of seemingly impassible obstacles; and a predisposition toward healing and reconciliation.

Interfaith peacebuilding is a way to access these reservoirs of meaning and practice for the benefit of all. It is also a way of including a segment of society that often is excluded from power politics and formal peace processes.

Interfaith peacebuilding includes many types of initiatives and activities aimed at building understanding, respect, and joint action among people of faith. Examples include interfaith dialogue and the sharing of rituals and practices of faith; interfaith action on social welfare and economic development; and active peacemaking designed to bring parties in conflict together, to name just a few key categories of action.

Given that most people active in interfaith groups are private citizens with no special training but who are concerned about the situations in their communities and country and have a deep commitment to working for peace, activities at the grassroots are often most appropriate.

Peacebuilding activities that are especially suited to grassroots interfaith efforts are those that help build understanding and cooperation across lines of division in a society, and which develop new ways for dealing with differences peacefully and productively. Interfaith groups create spaces for safety, acceptance, understanding, insight, and transformation to occur. Simply coming together to work collaboratively in an interfaith setting is a peacebuilding action. It develops cultures of peace

Grassroots interfaith peacebuilders make a difference by:

- bringing diverse groups together
- listening with openness to others
- educating and breaking down stereotypes
- inspiring hope
- building trust for dealing with tough issues
- creating an inclusive sense of community that embraces those who are "other"
- being models of constructive ways of dealing with differences
- supporting a willingness to change unjust systems and structures that cause pain to others

What Skills and Perspectives Do Interfaith Peacebuilders Need?

We want this Interfaith Peacebuilding Guide to support the foundational work of forming and sustaining interfaith groups. It begins with methods for promoting tolerance, respect, and understanding among peoples of diverse faiths and for reducing prejudices and stereotypes. It seeks to build skills for creating and sustaining a safe, productive group environment, including decision-making, creating a shared vision, developing shared leadership, and for overall communication. For those groups wanting to become outwardly active in their community or beyond, it includes a range of practices for peacebuilding that offer options that can be matched to the capabilities and interests of most grassroots interfaith groups.

This guide presents an approach to peacebuilding that focuses on the positive power and potential of human beings — the capacities for peace inherent in every human system — and it draws the analytical focus to that positive potential for the purpose of more effectively mobilizing it. It combines the sharing of new knowledge and drawing out of the experience and wisdom already within the group in a powerful combination that builds confidence and creativity in interfaith peacebuilding.

It complements existing peacebuilding methodologies with a unique interfaith perspective with three phases: (1) We engage in deep personal reflection and ground ourselves deeply in our own faith tradition. (2) Out of appreciation and respect for ourselves and others, we develop our capacity to deal with our differences. (3) We apply our insight and experience to actively contribute to the efforts of peacebuilding in the larger community.

The diagram on the following page illustrates our approach to supporting interfaith peacebuilding.

Our Approach to Supporting Interfaith Peacebuilding

Taking Effective Action Together

Honing Our Skills to Help Each Other

Building Constructive Relationships

Grounding
Personally and
Spiritually
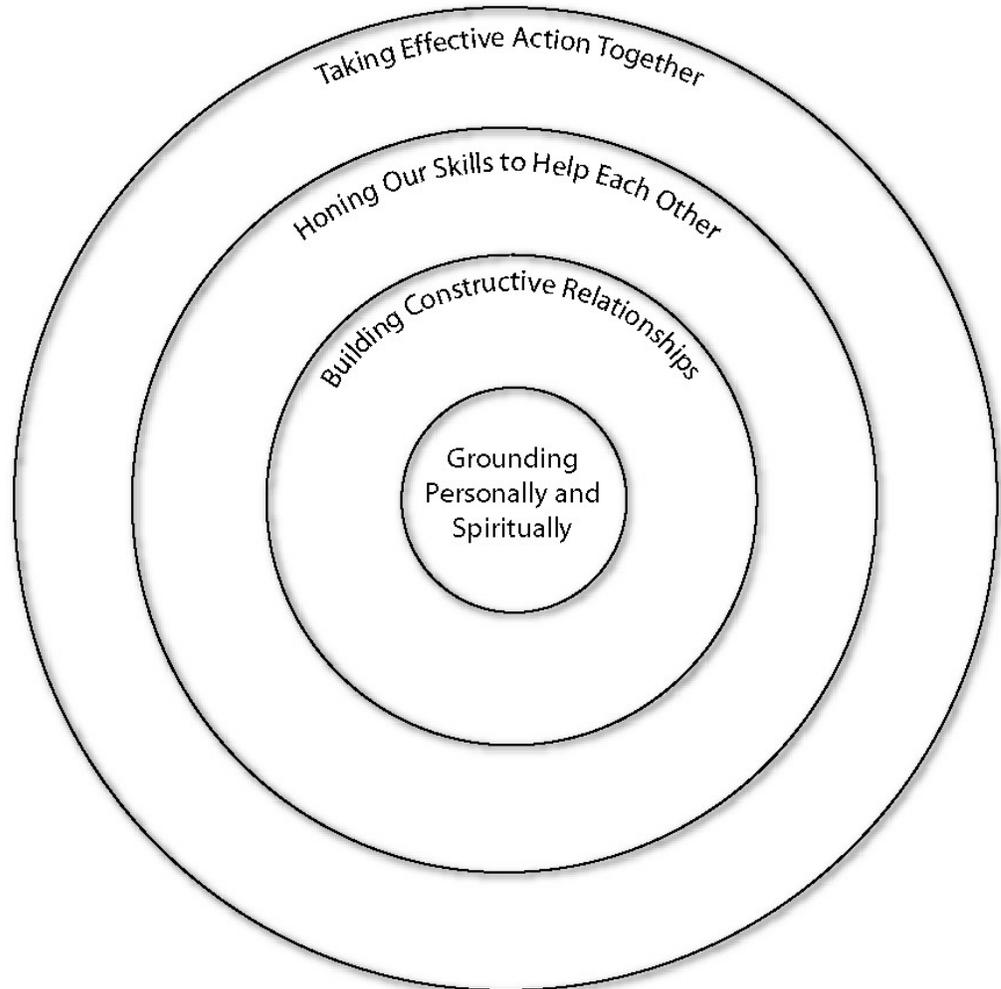
The central circle represents the personal attitudes and perspectives that help an interfaith group to function. It suggests a spiritual center — the knowledge of and grounding in one's own spiritual teachings. It calls for honesty and self-criticism in assessing how one lives the spiritual qualities and highest calling of one's tradition. It also calls for knowledge of and openness to others, for empathy and compassion. Finally, it implies a willingness to change, to develop and grow.

The second circle represents the perspectives, attitudes, and skills in interfaith group relationships, including appreciation and respect, open communication, deep listening, and mutual trust. It asks us to be willing to have difficult conversations for the purpose of going deeper in our relationships and for enlarging our perspectives about our similarities and differences. Recognizing and accepting differences are not a simple act. And yet, as our experience in large and small conflicts shows us, these qualities and skills are critical for solving conflicts constructively, and for keeping them from spiraling into destructive forms. Good intentions are necessary, but they alone are not sufficient to solve conflicts or deal with differences.

Sections two, three, and four in the guide address these first two circles.

The third circle represents the willingness to engage and build the skills that will help a group take on projects and activities in the broader community with confidence. This includes learning and practicing skills and methods for leading respectful and constructive dialogue, bringing healing and reconciliation to individuals and severed relationships, and finding nonviolent ways of resolving our differences. It takes wisdom and insight to respond appropriately to conflict situations. It takes courage, skill, and commitment to engage with conflict nonviolently, despite the pain of victimhood and suffering associated with conflict. It is also inspiring to be able to unlock the potential forces of change in individuals and communities through faith-based nonviolent strategies and practices.

Section Five addresses the third circle.

The fourth circle represents the activities that will help a group honor the commitment to wise and responsible action and to the preparation it requires. Taking cohesive group action requires joint decision-making, developing a good understanding of the needs and opportunities to serve, appreciating and using the resources already in the community as well as the assets within the group, identifying and working effectively with partners, creating a shared vision for what the group hopes to do and a plan for carrying it out, and doing it all through a process of shared leadership and careful listening, visioning, and participation. We need both critical analysis and a transformative vision to work effectively in building peace locally and globally.

Section Six addresses the fourth circle.

We believe that these are all vital parts of the whole, and represent different activities, or perhaps different phases, in the life of an interfaith group. The three parts of the journey: inward, outward and in community are held together with spiritual discipline that keeps the whole in balance. This is the special challenge of interfaith peacebuilding: how do we create connected spirituality for connected action? — connected to people of different faiths and connected to our work in the world, whether we define that as outwardly-focused activity or as primarily an inward focus through prayer and inner transformation.

We know how easily conflict is fueled by certain religious teachings. The energy needed for peacebuilding has a different quality — it is made of bonds painstakingly built and maintained over time with trust and the willingness to take risks. Where conflicts are deep, this work may seem very small and very slow. We believe, however, that we have no choice, individually and collectively, but to learn to transform those attitudes, feelings, behaviors and structures that sustain destructive forms of conflict. Interfaith peacebuilders have a crucial role to play in this transformation.
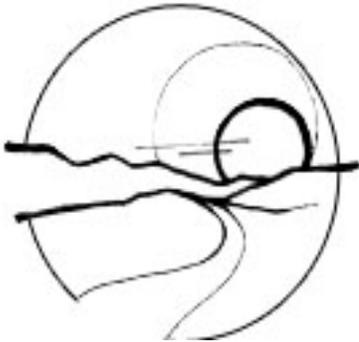
OVERVIEW OF THE GUIDE

This guide was conceived as a resource for interfaith groups — those "everyday gandhis"[5] who are making a difference one meeting at a time in their local communities. It is for people of diverse faiths who have been strangers (or worse, enemies) who become friends and allies dedicated to peace, justice, and healing. The guide has been designed for groups that are just starting out in their life together, as well as those that are more established and yet seek to strengthen their planning and sharpen their skills for building interfaith understanding and taking action.

With some adaptation, the activities in this guide can also be used by single-faith groups that want to reach out to other faith groups or would like to bridge differences within their own religious or spiritual community. Any group interested in learning more about other traditions and participating in interfaith activities will find something of use in these pages. Even interested individuals can deepen their own understanding by working with those parts of the activities that begin with individual, particularly, for example, in Section Three, "Understanding Other Faiths."

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5 See http://www.everydaygandhis.com/.

Considerations in Designing the Guide

The designers of this guide took a number of considerations into account in its development:

An Interactive and Participatory Training Methodology

We wanted the guide to truly honor local capabilities and indigenous wisdom and to draw the local group's attention to its own values and resources. The guide therefore uses a participatory, interactive, and learner-centered approach in all of the activities offered. The guide actively involves members of an interfaith group in learning and exploring together. The activities are designed to build on the understandings, knowledge, skills, and experiences that members bring with them and therefore are "elicitive," meaning that they were designed to draw out participants' knowledge as the basis for discussions and learning. This approach allows the activities to be adapted to meet the interests, needs, and cultural context of the group.

The guide has been written so that the activities can be undertaken by the group itself, without having to rely on the assistance of an outside facilitator. With an appropriate amount of planning, it should be possible for members with a moderate amount of experience in facilitating group discussion to conduct many of the activities. We want to empower interfaith groups to do their own work and to develop the competence and confidence to also be able to facilitate the more challenging and even risky sessions.

Culturally Appropriate

We have written this guide in the hope that it is suitable for to groups in many different cultural contexts. The stories, readings, and handouts come from all over the world. We nonetheless encourage you to adapt each activity in a way that will work well in your context, while still keeping in mind the original intent. Later in this section we offer guidance on how to do this.

Focus on the Special Role of Interfaith Groups

There are many manuals and books written for peacebuilders. This is a guide for interfaith peacebuilders. It therefore brings a distinctive perspective to peacebuilding and is grounded in the values and the special potentials that communities of faith and especially interfaith bodies have for transforming conflict. A document of the World Conference on Religion and Peace describes those potentials this way:

Many religions possess social and moral characteristics that give them the potential to act as constructive forces for peace and conflict transformation. Dispersed throughout societies and often organized at the national and international levels, religious communities represent significant potential channels for communication and action. Religious traditions establish ethical visions that can summon those that believe in them to powerful forms of committed action.[6]

The potential of religious and spiritual communities for making an impact for peace is multiplied when you consider the principles upon which interfaith groups are founded and the commitment to peace and understanding these groups display merely by virtue of their existence. This commitment is eloquently captured in the principles of the United Religions Initiative (see **Resources Section** of this guide).

Grounded in a Positive-Change Perspective

Positive approaches to peacebuilding pay particular attention to local resources for change — those strengths, capacities, and best practices and experiences — that are present in every culture and can be more actively mobilized for peacebuilding. They focus on what gives life to the system and work to strengthen those factors, rather than placing a primary focus on analyzing root causes of the conflict for the purpose of reducing them. Many of the activities in this guide are grounded in a positive-change approach. One such methodology, Appreciative Inquiry, connects people to these peace-generating resources and uses them to help create a shared vision of the future and to mobilize for action.

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[6] Cynthia Sampson, "Conflict Transformation Commission Seventh WCRP World Assembly: Preparatory Document," World Conference on Religion and Peace, Amman, Jordan, November 25-29, 1999.

The guide provides an opportunity for peacebuilders to become directly acquainted Appreciative Inquiry and to view peacebuilding through its lens (see activities 6-6 to 6-9).

How This Guide Is Organized

The guide is divided into six major sections. Each section can "stand alone," and this allows the users to work with whatever section or sections are most timely and of greatest interest. For those users who are considering working with the entire guide, the activities have also been developed to be used sequentially, and indeed, the designers had a certain logic in mind as we put the pieces together.

Foundational Skills

Section Two contains activities to develop the foundational skills that any interfaith group needs to master in order to get the most out of its meetings. This section will be especially useful for groups that are newly forming or for those that would like to refresh these essential skills and become even more competent in using them. While these activities are not the more "glamorous" ones in the guide, without them no interfaith group can expect to learn and grow. The activity on deep listening, for example, helps us realize how complicated listening can be. Each of the activities that follow in subsequent sections assume that groups have achieved some level of competency in these foundational skills, so the activities in this section help a group prepare to work with the rest of the activities in the guide.

Understanding Other Faiths

Section Three has two subsections. The first is built around the premise that knowing oneself is an initial step in interfaith peacebuilding. This subsection helps users clarify their own values and attitudes about their religious or spiritual path, appreciate the commonalities and differences within their tradition, and come to terms with some of the paradoxes, open questions, and challenges of the active practice of faith. It also begins the process of opening doors to communication with people of other traditions. For example, "I thought you would never ask!" (Activity 3-3) invites each participant to prepare two questions about the teachings and practices of one of the other religious or spiritual traditions represented in the group.

The second subsection invites us to deepen our understanding of other faiths with creative activities that include drawing an interfaith map of the local community and using art to explore religions.

Building Interfaith Community

Section Four also has two subsections. The first offers activities that build awareness of how our perceptions influence our thinking and behavior, as well as activities to uncover positive potential in a group or situation. The second subsection invites interfaith groups to deepen their understanding of their own and others' religious or spiritual path by exploring such topics as how my religion contributes to the inclusion or exclusion of the "other," and by tackling more difficult issues an interfaith group might face, such as bias and prejudice.

Areas of Work for the Interfaith Peacebuilders

Section Five is especially relevant for those interfaith groups that want to take a next step in learning how they can become an active force for peace within their community. This section builds some entry-level skills in conflict analysis, interfaith dialogue, nonviolent action, and reconciliation.

Taking Action

Having explored the main ways in which interfaith groups take in the previous in Section Five, Section Six helps the interfaith group to consider the unique contribution it could make as in interfaith peacebuilding. Activities include considering the potential opportunities and risks in taking action, surveying the community for potential partners, and creating a vision and an action plan for moving forward.

How the Sections Are Set Up

Each of the six sections of the guide is organized in the following manner.

Introduction

This explains the purpose for the section and what the user can expect to find within it.

Activities

The activities are the core of this guide. They take the form of discussions, experiential exercises, and reflections. Each activity includes a purpose statement, descriptive directions, a list of materials needed, an indication of length of time it takes to complete the activity, the optimal group size, and ratings of the level of risk involved for the group in undertaking the activity, the ideal level of experience in group facilitation that the person leading the exercise should have, and the level of complexity of the exercise (see further explanation of ratings below).

Stories

The stories in each section have been collected from around the world to illustrate the concepts, ideas, approaches, and practices contained in the guide. They represent real experiences of individuals and groups working in an interfaith context and are meant to be inspiring and to illustrate what is possible.

Readings for the Section

Each section has a set of short readings related to interfaith activity and peacebuilding by practitioners and scholars. There is also a bibliography at the end of the guide with additional readings of interest.

Rating the Activities

Not all activities will be appropriate for all groups. To assist leaders in choosing the best activities for their group, each activity has been rated as either "high," "medium," or "low" in the following three dimensions:

→ **Level of Complexity:** Some activities are more complicated to carry out than others. They may require more preparation time, need special equipment, involve the preparation of handouts, or need the participation of others beyond the immediate group. Good preparation will influence the quality of the experience, so it is important that adequate attention is given to preparing each activity. One factor in selecting an activity, then, is for leaders to assess whether they have adequate time and materials to prepare properly for it.

→ **Level of risk:** By this we mean the amount of "stretching" beyond the "comfort zone" (normal level of comfort) that the group is likely to require to complete the activity. There may be a danger of hurt feelings, disagreement, even animosity or deepening of prejudices, any of which might pose a risk to the completion of the activity or to the ongoing group dynamics. Of course the risk level of any single activity will vary from group to group and culture to culture. What feels comfortable to one group may seem risky to another, and group leaders will need to make a judgment for their group. One of the purposes of this guide, however, is to invite groups to challenge themselves by trying activities that will allow them to mature and grow in their openness and mutual understanding and trust as an interfaith group. To do this involves some risk, yet the ability to engage with difficult topics and to hold risky conversations is at the heart of deep interfaith work. Factors that determine the appropriate level of risk include how long the group has been together, the quality of the group's interactions, the level of trust that has been established, and the intensity and types of conflict the group has experienced or that are present in the larger community.

→ **Facilitation Experience Level of the Leader:** The activities in this guide have been carefully designed so that interfaith groups can plan and carry them out on their own, without having to rely on an outside expert facilitator from outside. Group members themselves can take turns playing the role of facilitator. Some activities do, however, require a higher level of skill to lead than others. We have therefore rated each activity according to the level of facilitation experience that the leader ideally should have. Even so, we encourage leaders, like groups, to "stretch" by challenging themselves to try activities that are new to them and will help them grow as a facilitator. Facilitation is a key tool of the religious or spiritual peacebuilder. There is no better way to gain facilitation skills than by practice!

Basic Principles for Leading Interfaith Activities

Here are some basic principles that the designers of this guide consider to be essential for leading interfaith activities.

Establishing Equality

Religious and spiritual traditions offer different paths in the discovery of truth(s). In interfaith gatherings we assume that all members of the different faith traditions are equal. In interfaith work for peacebuilding, equality is a central core value.

Developing a Culture of Pluralism and Inclusion

A foundational value and principle of interfaith community-building and peacebuilding is pluralism. It recognizes the right of diverse faith traditions to coexist without promoting one view of religious truth. The interfaith group must never be a space for attempts at conversion. On the contrary, interfaith peacebuilding is precisely a forum for promoting inclusion of all faiths and all voices. There are, indeed, still boundaries that distinguish the diverse religious and spiritual identities brought into the interfaith circle. In the interfaith context, however, these boundaries must not be held up or manipulated to exclude another or to establish a sense of religious superiority on the part of some.

Preserving Symmetry

In interfaith peacebuilding, the principle of symmetry is employed to provide group members with an equal opportunity to articulate and express their religious identities and to fulfill their different spiritual needs. It is important, therefore, for leaders to be aware of asymmetries — imbalances — in relationships among members of the group and to safeguard against those dynamics in the group, particularly among parties with current or traditional enmities or a history of economic, social, and power asymmetries.

Creating a "Voluntary Atmosphere"

Leaders should insure that group members are "invited" to participate in activities in a manner that allows them to say "no" without feeling embarrassed or put on the spot. While we assume that for the most part people who join an interfaith group are ready to engage with other members, there are many reasons why a group member may not want to participate in a particular activity. He or she may be feeling vulnerable, angry, or even just bored. As adults, members take responsibility for regulating their participation in ways that help them feel in control of their learning. It is the leader's job to do everything possible to create a productive and safe learning environment. It is the individual group members' job to speak up and let others know how they are experiencing a certain activity, especially if it feels too risky to participate.

Interfaith peacebuilding activities are based on respect for individual and group limits and boundaries. There are certain things that for individuals and for religious or cultural traditions are not easy — or permitted — to share, for example, interfaith prayer, entering other houses of worship, certain kinds of information, touching, greeting, etc. Creating an atmosphere that invites sharing and participation, but leaves people free to choose not to, is critical.

Going Beyond the "Comfort Zone"

Leaders must also develop a sensitivity to know when it is appropriate to gently encourage participants to go beyond the types and levels of interaction that have become comfortable for them as a group. This is an important issue in interfaith work. Some groups may never want to take on activities that may cause some discomfort for members of the

group. Others may be ready and willing to tolerate the discomfort in order to reach a new level of understanding and to connect at a deeper level. It is clear to the writers of this guide that there is a lot to be gained by going deeper together and that this is the challenging work of interfaith groups. At the same time, individuals or groups must never be made to feel less worthy or unsuccessful if they are not ready for more high-risk activities. Often times if the leaders are willing to move beyond their own comfort zone, their modeling of confidence can help other members join in. If, however, the leaders cannot tolerate the discomfort themselves, they will not be able to help others stretch in new ways.

Building Participation

It is a right of each member of an interfaith group to actively participate and to help shape, guide, and lead the group's activities. The diverse perspectives and styles that different members bring can help the group discover and learn new ways of communicating and doing things — of being together in community and developing cultures of peace.

Deciding How to Use This Guide

As already noted, we invite and encourage you to adapt this guide and its activities to meet the needs and interests of your group or a given situation. Some groups may want to work with the entire guide in a systematic way. Others may be drawn to a particular section or sections or to specific activities that seem especially relevant and timely. Still others will look through the guide and try out activities in various sections as "the spirit moves them," not necessarily in any order. Once a group has tried out activities with its own members and is comfortable in leading them, it might want to consider taking the guide or parts of it out into the community and leading these activities in religious congregations, schools, or other types of community groups. Here are some possibilities to consider:

Integrate with Another Event: If you are planning a conference, meeting, or gathering whose goal is to further interfaith understanding or explore the role of interfaith groups in peacebuilding, you may be able to use one or two activities from the guide at an appropriate moment in the event. Many religious groups, for example, have an annual conference or gathering. If peacebuilding is a theme, "My Sources of Inspiration as a Religious or Spiritual Peacebuilder" (Activity 3-4) might be a good kickoff to the conference, to set the stage for what is to come.

→ **A Morning, Afternoon, or Evening Workshop:** A set of two or three activities would nicely fill a half-day or an evening workshop. For an event bringing participants from different faiths together for the first time, for example, leaders might choose "Creating a Safe Environment" (Activity 2-2) and then "Telling My Story: Influences on My Spiritual Journey" (Activity 3-1) and "I thought you would never ask!" (Activity 3-3).

→ **A One-Day Workshop:** A day-long worship is a good length of time for people to get acquainted and engage in interesting and useful discussions with one another. Interfaith groups interested in creative expression, for example, might use "An Interfaith Map of Our Local Community" (Activity 3-6), "Art As a Tool for Interfaith Understanding" (Activity 3-8), "Exploring Religious Art and Architecture" (Activity 3-9), and "Art that Heals and Art that Hurts" (Activity 3-10).

→ **A Three-Day Workshop:** For those groups wanting to move forward in their work more quickly, a three-day workshop offers that possibility. In this case it is particularly important to have skilled leaders to keep things moving in a productive manner and to help the group get the most out of its time together. A three-day workshop requires careful preparation. Leaders should carefully select activities both to serve the needs of the group and also to be sure the sequence of activities flows well from one to the next. If, for example, an interfaith group is ready to explore possible ways of taking in its community, a three-day workshop would allow it to sample a number of possibilities from Section Five, such as doing a

conflict analysis of the situation they face, conducting interfaith dialogues, engaging in a nonviolent action, or contributing to healing and reconciliation. Section Six activities might be used to guide then in having a session with potential partners and using Appreciative Inquiry to create a vision and plan of action.

→ **Over Several Months or a Year**: For groups that are seeking a focus for their work, the guide can help them structure an "agenda" for a series of meetings over an extended period of time. This was the way in which the guide can be put to the maximum use, as a step-by-step process for building awareness, understanding, and skill in interfaith encounter and action.

The Role of Leader

As we have said, this guide does not presume that a group will engage an outside facilitator to lead the activities. They may be facilitated by group members who know how to create an environment that encourages inquiry and exploration. The leader enters into a process of joint discovery and learning with the other participants, not so much as a trainer or teacher but rather as a facilitator who ensures the integrity of the group process. It is a good idea to rotate leadership among members of the group so that different people have the opportunity to practice facilitation skills. With a reasonable amount of preparation, a commitment to learn and grow, a willingness to learn by doing, and an ability to solicit and learn from feedback, virtually anyone who enjoys interacting with other can lead these activities.

Often it works well to have two members work together as co-leaders. In an interfaith group this models what the group is trying to accomplish on a larger scale — being able to cooperate and collaborate on achieving shared goals. The basic skills of a good facilitator include many of the basic skills of a good peacebuilder!

Adapting Activities to the Needs of the Group

We offer below examples of three main types of adaptation that will be useful for certain types of groups: adaptations for the local culture, for groups based on gender, and for age-based groups. There are certainly other ways in which these activities may be adapted, so if this section triggers your creative energies, we are pleased! Your eye may stop, for example, at a particular question or part of an activity that you want to pull out and try out on its own. You might want to vary the pattern of moving in and out of small and large discussion groups, sometimes choosing to stay in the large group, if time is limited or a feeling of intimacy and depth has been achieved; or, conversely, doing more work in small groups if that will provide a safer environment for the discussion at hand; or, for an even greater degree of safety, having the group break into pairs. We encourage just this type of experimentation, and urge you to use this guide in whatever ways best meet your needs.

Adaptations for Culture

Although we have attempted to design the activities to accommodate diverse cultures, further adaptation may be required. Often such adaptation will come at the stage in which a group "processes" or reflects upon what they have experienced and learned in an activity just completed. Posing discussion questions such as the ones below helps to "customize" the guide to your own special needs.

- ○ How have we seen this concept working in our culture?

- ○ How are things the same or different here?

- 1. What would we need to change in this tool to make it more appropriate to our local situation?

Adaptations for Age

With minor adaptations, a number of these activities can be appropriate for children and young people. Adapting activities for youth usually means simplifying them and having just one clear focus. For example, creating "An Interfaith Map of My Local Community" (Activity 3-7) would be an excellent for older children. Instead of dipping into the many questions given for reflection and discussion, for children one central question is enough: "What are the religious or sacred sites that we know of in our neighborhood or our community?" Then, as children draw their map, the activity itself can generate a discussion naturally.

Adaptations for Gender

Any of the activities in this guide can be adapted for use with groups that are all women or all men. Again, it is the questions for reflection that are most likely to change. If, for example, the group has only women — or some other type of group is specifically focusing on the role of women in religion — the questions might include:

○   How has my religion treated women? What does it teach about the differences between men and women? In what ways has it excluded or included women?

○   Who have been women of great faith and compassion?

○   Which women do I look to as sources of inspiration?

○   What has been the role of women throughout the ages in religious peacebuilding?

○   What is the unique role of women today in interfaith peacebuilding?

Preparation

The extent of preparation required varies from activity to activity in this guide. For all activities the leaders will want to do the following.

Set Up the Room

How the room is arranged has an impact on the participants and the way they experience their time together. In many — perhaps most — cases, when an interfaith group meets, some type of circle arrangement works best. If the group is so large that in a single circle the distance between people is too great, then concentric circles, smaller circles, or clusters of people around the room might work better. If, however, the group is experiencing some type of conflict, it may be more comfortable for groupings of participants to sit on opposing sides.

The cultural context and situation are also important to consider in choosing an appropriate seating arrangement. Leaders should keep in mind the basic principles for leading interfaith activities — developing a culture of pluralism and inclusion, establishing equality and preserving symmetry, and promoting the maximum participation of all — and think through the implications of these principles for how they set up the room.

Read Through the Activity

Decide on any adaptations in the activity and pay close attention to the materials needed and the ways in which the activity has been rated. A high level of complexity means that you will want to spend more time preparing.

→ **Decide How to Lead**: If you are working with a partner, decide which of you will lead the different parts and how you will work together. Having clear expectations of each other and agreements for how you will proceed will help the activity move smoothly and will model good teamwork for the participants.

→ **Prepare Materials and Make Arrangements:** Photocopy any handouts and gather other materials or equipment needed to make the activity a success. Make any special arrangements needed. If, for example, the activity calls for inviting a resource person or visitor, check on the availability of the person(s) so that adaptations can be made if they're not available or is someone will be coming in their place. Spend enough time briefing the visitor(s) so that he or she knows the purpose of the visit and a little bit about the group.

→ **Prepare Flip Charts**: Flip charts are often useful for writing up the purpose of an activity, instructions for the group, and questions that you would like the group to discuss. This is best done before the session begins, with writing in large print so that everyone can read it. In addition, writing down the participants' ideas, observations, and responses to questions allows everyone to keep track of what is being said; it can also be very useful if the group is working on something that is important to preserve for the future or to refer back to in a future session. Leaders must be sensitive, though, to when a flip chart might assist the work of the group and when it might get in the way of important conversation.

If flip-chart stands and paper are not available, you might use other large pieces of paper and tape them to the wall or compile the purpose, instructions, questions, etc., in a handout for participants. Leaders in various cultural contexts know how best to convey information to participants and have their own techniques and methods for doing so.

→ **Ready Yourself to Lead**: Leading a group is an important way of serving others. Some of the activities in this guide are quite provocative and require deep reflection and discussion. It may be helpful to take a few quiet moments before beginning an activity to do whatever best prepares you for being your best self and for leading in a strong, compassionate, and caring way.

Agreeing on Guidelines for Interaction

One of the first steps in the life of an interfaith group is to jointly identify and agree on some guidelines for how you want in interact in your times together. These agreements will help create a safe space in which the work can take place. This is an important activity that leaders must facilitate. The guidelines for interaction are best if they emerge from the group itself, though perhaps with the help of resource materials that other groups have developed. Once agreed upon, the guidelines become vitally important. They can be referred to at the beginning of each meeting or each activity undertaken in this guide as a kind of code of behavior that the group can use as a tool. If, for example, the group is experiencing a challenging moment in its process, the guidelines can suggest a way forward. As a group grows in its life together or as it tries some of the more challenging activities in this guide, it may want to revise or add to the list of guidelines established earlier. "Creating A Safe Environment" (Activity 2-2) helps a group establish guidelines for interaction and also provides suggestions for what might be included.

Basic Facilitation Skills

There are a few basic skills that will be useful in leading the activities in this guide. Some leaders naturally have these skills and others may need to work on developing them. Leading these activities is a good way to practice facilitation skills, which are some of the basic building blocks of interfaith peacebuilding work.

Explain the Purpose

A basic leadership skill is the ability to explain the purpose of an activity. For adult learners, knowing why they are being asked to do something is very important. This is also important for participants in interfaith groups who are being encouraged to disclose information, answer difficult questions, or hold risky conversations. If participants understand the purpose and goals of an activity, they are better able to engage with their full vitality and commitment.

Use the Guidelines for Interaction

The guidelines for interaction that have been identified and agreed upon by the group are a vital tool for leaders. In fact, one of the most important jobs of a leader(s) is to ensure that the guidelines are followed, revised as necessary, and to let the group know when you feel they are not being observed. The guidelines can help pinpoint problems in the group process and point the way to solutions.

Talk and Listen

Many of the activities in this guide ask the leader to give a short talk to present introductory material or new information. This is an important role the leader will play — to present new concepts and ideas clearly and to help a group understand, digest, and apply this information to their own context. Equally important is the ability to listen carefully, sensitively, non-judgmentally, and non-defensively, as well as, of course, to facilitate meaningful discussions in the group.

Summarize and Paraphrase

One of the ways group members know they have been listened to is when a leader paraphrases what has said by repeating it in his or her own words and then checking the accuracy with the speaker and the group. Likewise, at the end of certain steps as well as at the end of the activity as a whole, it is important for the leader to be able to summarize what has been said in a way that honors all of the contributions made. These two skills are the hallmark of a good facilitator.

Track the Conversation

Keeping track of the conversation and being able to make reference to things that were said earlier in the activity is another important skill. Sometimes a leader may want to make a quick note of something that is said, to remember it and refer back to it later. For group members, the sense of being tracked or followed is very important. It makes them feel valued and their contributions remembered.

Use Silence

Brief moments of silence in a group, both planned and unplanned, can be very useful. It is not necessary to fill every minute up with words. If the leader is comfortable with occasional silences, it helps participants become comfortable as well. Sometimes it is good to ask for a moment of quiet reflection, particularly if there has been a heated discussion or deep feelings have been shared. The use of silence varies from culture to culture, so leaders will naturally need to take into account for their context.

Ask for Feedback

Leaders who are willing to ask for feedback on how well they conducted a session can learn a lot that will be useful in the future. Each of the sections in this guide has a set of evaluation questions that will help groups assess how well they have "mastered" that particular section. It is also useful to do a quick evaluation of each individual activity and of the leadership style used. One good way of doing this is to ask participants to first share things that they liked about the session and how it was conducted. Their responses can be listed on a flip chart. The next step is to ask what participants would like to see done differently the next time and to list these responses as well. Co-leaders may want to take a few minutes after the session to reflect on this feedback and on how it felt to work together.

FOUNDATIONAL SKILLS

Where to begin? Our key building block for interfaith peacebuilding work is relationship. We want to create a safe space in which to nurture relationships through understanding and respect. Before we begin building peacebuilding skills, we need a solid foundation of relationship from which we may dare to vision and dream and deal with difficulties together.

We encourage groups that are newly forming and taking the first steps into the realm of interfaith peacebuilding engagement to begin here. Indeed, even for more well-established and experienced interfaith groups, it is wise to revisit these activities as an opportunity to refresh and renew the agreements that underlie their work, so that they do not devolve into unexamined assumptions but evolve and grow with the group.

In the three activities that follow, the group will first generate guidelines for their own meetings and gatherings — guides to their interaction that are unique and relevant to the group's own members. The second activity encourages group members to discern what "being safe" really means for them in this interfaith context and to create a set of agreements for achieving and maintaining a safe space. Finally, we offer a lively exercise that opens our eyes to the hidden complexity of listening, which leads easily to misinterpretation of one another and will motivate us to seek deep listening skills.

2 – 1 Holding an Interfaith Gathering

Conducting an interfaith meeting is quite different from running other meetings we have in our lives. The tone of the meeting, the process used, the guidelines for interaction followed are all important in building a climate of learning and trust. Here we use an elicitive activity in which members share their own wisdom about what works best in holding interfaith meetings, leading to a consensus on how this particular their group will operate. Of interest here are general guidelines for conducting and participating in a meeting. More specific guidelines for holding an interfaith dialogue, an activity that many interfaith groups engage in, are discussed in Section Six.

Purpose

⊙ To help interfaith groups identify their own best practices for running effective, satisfying, and inclusive gatherings.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session**: Present the topic, the importance of holding effective gatherings in an interfaith context, by making the following points:

   ❍ **Form follows function:** Interfaith groups have a unique function, and the form of the meeting should be congruent with its function. That means, for example, if the function of the group is to learn how to trust one another, then the form or structure of the gathering must provide a safe environment within which trust can be built.

   ❍ **Process matters:** It is in gatherings of various sorts that much of the work of an interfaith group gets done. Paying as much attention to process or the way the work is accomplished, is as important as content or what is being discussed.

❍ **Guidelines for interaction, or agreements, are vital:** Most interfaith groups give all participants an opportunity to express their feelings and their views. Yet this can be challenging for some people if they do not know what to expect before the discussions begin. Guidelines for interaction are an important part of helping group members know what to expect from their time together. Such guidelines are behavioral norms; they lay out expectations regarding such things as:

▪ Confidentiality — how information shared within the group will be handled by the other participants.

▪ Respect — how we will demonstrate our acceptance of the other group members and their diverse perspectives and positions.

▪ Leadership — how we expect leadership roles to be carried out and shared or rotated.

▪ Time and attendance — what are the time frames and norms for beginning and ending and expectations of members regarding attendance.

2. **Individual Work:** Ask participants to reflect on what a successful interfaith meeting looks like (or a meeting in a similar context with which they are familiar) by answering the following question:

❍ Think of a time when you attended a meeting or gathering of a diverse group of people that you felt was satisfying and effective in accomplishing its purposes. A meeting, for example, that helped every member feel included, valued, and respected. A meeting that felt special from the moment it began. It may have been a previous gathering of this same group or, perhaps, a gathering in your religious congregation, at work, at a retreat or conference of some sort. Share a story from that meeting. Describe what made it so outstanding in as much detail as you can.

3. **Small Group Sharing:** Ask participants to form groups of four to six people.

→ Ask each person to share his or her story or example of an effective meeting.

→ After the sharing, ask the small groups to come up with at least one best practice that leads to a successful interfaith meeting. Examples might include: starting with an opening ritual, having the agenda distributed beforehand, telling of stories, allowing time for socializing and sharing food, designating a process facilitator, setting guidelines for interaction, etc.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Have the large group reconvene and invite each group to share its practice.

→ Make a list of the best practices presented by the small groups.

→ Ask the group to decide which of these to adopt for their own use.

→ Post the list where everyone can see it. It might be helpful to post the list again or have it available as a handout for the next few meetings, until the group has internalized these practices and they become the norms of the group.

→ If the list needs further refining, decide who will do that work and when it will be brought back to the group for its approval.

Materials needed: Flip charts or large paper and markers

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 1½ hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

2 – 2 Creating a Safe Environment

"Safe space" refers to the group's environment in the psychological as well as the physical sense. Only when people feel safe will they be willing to go deeper in their relationships with one another. Paying attention to this core concept is therefore central to the work of interfaith groups. Each of us has a different sense of safety and what is required in order for us to feel secure in a group environment. This sense is influenced by our experiences, our culture, our religious and spiritual teachings and customs, and our own psychological make-up. What it takes to create a safe space can vary from time to time, even within the same group, depending upon the level of risk involved with a particular activity being offered. In the following activity we will discuss the concept of safe space and its importance in an interfaith setting — and find out what "safe" means to each member of the group

Purpose

⊙ To develop guidelines for creating a safe space in the group environment.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Make the following key points:

   ❍ It is appropriate for each group to establish its own purpose and standards for engagement. Not all groups are willing or interested in deep exploration. Some may simply want to learn about the customs of other faith traditions, while others will be interested in sharing more deeply from their religious or spiritual understandings and in creating breakthroughs in relationships among group members.

   ❍ If a goal of the group is to work toward deep connection among members, understanding how members view safety and deciding how to create it is important. The goals of the group will determine the level of risk its members wants to undertake in their explorations. This may be revisited from time to time, for goals may be expected to change over time.

2. **Large Group Discussion**: Discuss the following questions:

   ❍ Why is creating a safe space so important in interfaith work? What does it enable a group to do?

   ❍ What are the consequences of not feeling safe?

   → Share that some interfaith groups have adopted a vision that has implications for how members will engage with one another and the level of risk they will take.

   → Pass out the principles that the United Religions Initiative adopted (see handout).

   → Ask members what they think. What level of safety do they imagine would be required to truly live up to the principles of the URI?

   → Give some examples of how safe space has been created in interfaith situations and ask members for examples.

   → Pass out the handout.

3. **Sharing in Pairs:** Next have participants pair up and share with their partner a story of what "being safe" means to them.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Reconvene the entire group to share experiences from the pairs. Pose questions to the whole group:

   ❍ What is the range of meanings that this group holds of "being safe"?

   ❍ How much risk are we willing to take in helping this group to become a truly religiously diverse and tolerant community?

   ❍ What do we need to do to make sure this is a "safe space" for our members?

   → On a sheet of flip chart paper, ask the group to brainstorm actions that can be taken to create a safe space in the group. Gather as long a list as possible.

   → Ask each individual to choose their top five suggestions by marking the items on the list with a checkmark or a colored dot.

→ Re-write the list with the items that received the most check marks. Review each item and check for clarity. Ask the group if it is willing to commit to trying out these guidelines over the next several meetings.

Materials needed: Flip chart paper and markers; two handouts: URI Purpose, Preamble and Principles" and "Examples of Creating a Safe Space"

Size of group: Any size that will be comfortable in the space

Time needed: 1½ hour

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

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2 – 3 Deep Listening

Listening is a critical skill that can all too often be taken for granted. There are many techniques designed to enhance our ability to listen effectively. We are unlikely, however, to employ them unless we recognize how complicated listening is, and how flawed our assumptions can be based on our inaccurate and incomplete interpretations of messages. Sometimes we assume what we think we heard is what was actually said. People communicate not just data or facts, but emotion and intent, and it is the totality of what is being communicated that we must listen for to truly understand the speaker.

Purpose

⊙ To challenge our assumptions and heighten our insight into the listening process.

Directions

1. Introduce the Session:

    → Pass out small cards and pens

    → Assign participants a number (count off) to print on their card that is big and easy to read.

    → Have the participants find a partner and designate one partner as an "A," the other as a "B".

2. **Sharing in Pairs:** Have the A's tell the B's a true story from their lives.

    The story should be only sixty to ninety seconds long. It may be from any period or aspect of their lives (e.g., something that happened this week, something that happened in childhood).

    → The B's should LISTEN ONLY. They should not interrupt or ask questions.

    → When the A's finish, have the B's tell a story.

    → Have the partners exchange cards. Each person now has the card with the number of the story they just heard.

3. **Sharing in New Pairs:**

   → Each person now tells the new partner the story that she or he just heard, in the first person (i.e., "I took the goldfish…."), as accurately as possible, as if it is her or his story. Stress that each participant is to attempt to tell the story exactly as they heard it. (Note to facilitator: Do not tell the participants that they will have to repeat their partner's story until this point.)

   → When both participants have told their stories, ask them to exchange cards.

4. **Sharing in New Pairs:** Have everyone find another new partner.

   → This time, ask people to make sure that they are not paired with someone who has a card with a number they have already seen. This process ensures that people will not get their own story back or hear the same story more than once.

   → Again, have the participants exchange stories (as above) and swap cards.

5. **Large Group Discussion:** Have the participants form a circle and one by one tell the story that they just heard. Debrief the exercise, using the following tips:

   → Have the participants share randomly, rather than going around the circle. This will enhance their ability to stay present and be receptive.

   → Ask people to listen to the stories without commenting or "claiming" their own story, until all of the stories have been told. The impulse may be strong to correct the stories in the moment, but the flow will be smoother and the debrief richer if the participants can wait until everyone has spoken.

   → Debrief the story-telling experience using some of the following questions:

     ❍ How many of you felt your story remained accurate?

     ❍ Did anyone not recognize her or his story?

     ❍ Did you listen differently once you knew you were going to have to repeat the story you heard?

❍ How did it feel to have your story repeated in its current form?

❍ How did it feel to tell someone else's story?

❍ What kinds of things can we listen for? (e.g., information and facts, emotions, the intent or point of the story) Which were the easiest to discern? Which were the most important? How do they relate to each other? Which are the most "real"?

❍ What kind of things did we change in our telling? Why? (e.g., we forgot some details; we wanted to make connections to close gaps in logic; in telling the story as our own, we inadvertently or deliberately made it more personal, for example, we changed the gender of key people)

❍ What did we "make up" that we were sure we heard?

❍ How did the tellers interact with the listeners who were silent?

❍ Did you change the story based on the non-verbal cues of the listener? Why or why not?

❍ Why bother listening if no one truly gets it right?

❍ How is it we are able to function in the workplace when we misunderstand one another so easily?

❍ What should we do with this information to improve the effectiveness of our listening?

❍ How can we listen more effectively?

Variations

→ If there are more than sixteen to twenty people in the group, split it into two or more subgroups. Make sure you do this at the beginning of the process, so that each subgroup will be sharing all the stories they told. You need not have a facilitator for each subgroup. The only part of the process for which the entire group needs to be divided is in the last round of sharing stories in a circle.

→ Pick four people to work in front of the rest of the group: A, B, C, and D. Send C and D out of the room. Have A tell a story to B. Then invite C back into the room and have B repeat the story as exactly as possible to C. Then invite D back into the room, and have C tell the story. Finally, have D tell the story to the whole group. This version takes less time and allows the participants to watch the process of how the story changes.

→ Do the variation above in two rounds, in subgroups of eight, four participants relating the story and four watching. Then switch. This will allow everyone to participate and watch without taking an inordinate amount of time.

Materials needed: Cards (3 x 5 inches) or small pieces of paper, pens

Time needed: 45-60 minutes

Number of people: Variations in directions are offered for groups of different sizes

Level of complexity: Moderately high

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

UNDERSTANDING OTHER FAITHS

"If religiously committed people are to contribute to the world's transformation, they must know who they are: what their tradition impels and compels them to be and do and why," write educators Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee.[7]

This section contains activities to help groups and individuals build this type of strong foundation for authentic interfaith dialogue.

Some of the activities stress the self-awareness and skills needed to listen and speak about our own teachings and practices. Others address important inner work for understanding our attitudes toward those with a different understanding, and for dealing with the tendency to reject others and/or our fear of rejection by them. As theologian Anita Thomas writes:

"Prejudices cannot be undermined through discussion or even prayer, but by working on our emotional reactions. The dialogue with our self before the dialogue with others is more important than the dialogue itself!"[8]

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[7] Mary C. Boys and Sara S. Lee, "Protestant, Catholic, Jew: The Transformative Possibilities of Educating Across Religious Boundaries," *Religious Education* 90:2 (Spring 1995).
[8] Anita Thomas, "Our Resistances to Interreligious Dialogue," *Reconciliation International* 9:5 (1994), 1-2.

One activity helps us explore the complexity and internal diversity of our own tradition, so that we avoid a simplistic or generalized approach to other traditions. Finally, we offer suggestions for creative ways for groups to talk about their religious/spiritual meanings, allowing for authentic conversations to occur, and for exploration and appreciation of one another's traditions.

The skills of interfaith understanding as practiced and presented in this section include:

- self-awareness (awareness of our values, attitudes, feelings and behaviors);

- the ability to speak clearly and fully about our religious identity, about our teachings and practices — without fear and without defensiveness or a need to prove to others that we are right;

- active and nonjudgmental listening as others speak of their own spiritual journey, identity, beliefs, and practices;

- awareness of our attitudes and responses to those who do not share our beliefs, whether in other religious traditions or in our own.

Speaking of our faith with people of other traditions is not always easy. We fear that they may not understand our words or concepts or will reject or challenge us on points of disagreement. Listening to people of other faiths can also be challenging; we may discover reassuring commonalties and intriguing dissimilarities, but also, very likely, some disturbing differences.

Interfaith understanding develops gradually. It is a result of encounter, reflection, active learning, and outreach. The path to understanding cannot be mapped out in advance. It is a journey that is both appealing and bewildering, and can be marked by welcome discoveries along with doubts, by acceptance as well as rejection. Becoming aware of our own strengths and limitations can be an empowering process that prepares us for meaningful interfaith interactions.

When in interfaith relationships we openly encounter differing understandings and practices, we confront the often-conflicting and

contradictory ways that religious and spiritual traditions handle the critical questions of existence. Our spiritual philosophies and deepest values can be our most solid anchor in life, and when these are called into question or challenged by competing "truth claims," this can be uncomfortable at the least, or worse, frightening and upsetting. John V. Taylor writes of the theological basis of interfaith dialogue:

> "[E]very human being finds it difficult to sustain contradictions and live with them. Instinctively, we either try to destroy what is opposed to our understanding of truth, or we pretend that the antithesis is unreal. . . . It takes a high degree of maturity to let the opposites co-exist without pretending that they can be made compatible."[9]

Our own spiritual and religious insight can support us on this journey. We must be knowledgeable and articulate about our own faith (as well as aware of the limitations in our knowledge) in order to speak of it effectively to others. We must also rely on our spiritual strength to help us transcend our personal limitations and prejudices, which can be barriers to communication, cooperation, and peace. Writes interfaith scholar Terry C. Muck:

> "It seems to be extraordinarily difficult for human beings to disagree agreeably about simple things…It is almost impossible for people to disagree agreeably about really important things like religion. In this sense, I'd like to suggest interreligious dialogue is an emotion or attitude toward other people that not only allows for differences, but also postulates them and accepts them as fact, but not as truth."[10]

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[9] John V. Taylor, "The Theological Basis of Interfaith Dialogue," First Lambeth Interfaith Lecture, November 2, 1977, *Crucible* (January-March 1978).
[10] Terry C. Muck, "Interreligious Dialogue and Evangelism," *Buddhist-Christian Studies* 17 (1997), 139.

Suggestions for How to Use This Section

Activities 3-1 to 3-5 in this section can be used as reflective exercises for individual study or as group exercises. On an individual basis, they can be used for self-discovery and exploring ways that we personally as individuals might help others better understand the religious and spiritual aspect of our lives.

For all group exercises, it is vital to create an environment that is open, safe, confidential, nonjudgmental, and validating for each participant ("Creating a Safe Environment," Activity 2-2). This does not mean participants are asked to give up their devotion or faithfulness to their religious tradition or spiritual path. They are asked only to work together at creating a nonjudgmental setting in which deep and personal stories can be shared. Each individual decides what to share and how deeply. Some people are more adventurous and outgoing; others are more quiet and private. Every person should feel welcomed to participate and enjoy the activities in whatever way they feel most comfortable.

3 – 1 Telling My Story: Influences On My Spiritual Journey

Purpose

- ⊙ To reflect on and share the sources and values of our own religious tradition or spiritual path, and to increase our awareness of the diversity and richness of that path.

- ⊙ To practice extending to one another a respectful, open ear and holding authentic conversations, as well as to increase our understanding and trust and build relationships.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Start with a brief discussion.

   - ❍ How can we listen so that others can speak about their religious identity without fear or defensiveness?

   - ❍ How can we speak about our own teachings and practices so that others do not feel we are trying to convert them?

   - ❍ How can we remain centered in our beliefs while listening to others who are centered in theirs?

   - ❍ What are some of the risks and difficulties that the group can identify?

   - ❍ What principles of interaction would the group like to adopt to make this exercise comfortable for everyone? (See Section Two.)

2. **Individual Work:** Allow quiet time and working space for participants to draw or write the answers to some of following questions of their choosing before they are shared with others. Alternatively, their responses can be prepared ahead of time.

   - ❍ Visualize the spiritual story of your life as a river or another image that appeals to you (perhaps as a mountain, a road, a journey, a tree, or other image).

❍ What were its beginnings? What sources nurtured you along the path or fed its roots (e.g., teachers, parents, spiritual mentors, community experiences)?

❍ Have you followed a single path, or have there been multiple branches? Has it changed course?

❍ Has it been smooth or perhaps bumpy or turbulent? What difficult places have needed to be cut through or crossed over? Describe the easy and hard places, dams or rockslides, still places, steep or rushing times, floods, droughts, turbulence, warmth, or coldness.

❍ How large is the river? Is it narrow or wide? Is it deep or shallow?

❍ What is the river's relationship to its surroundings? Is it solitary or in company? Who are or have been companions and co-travelers along the way?

❍ What is happening for you right now in your story? What changes or growing edges? New intentions? Sketch in or describe a possible future.

❍ Looking back over your spiritual journey, what values did you keep or change over time? Can you identify one value that has been close to you the entire journey?

3. **Sharing in Pairs:** After each person has had time to reflect and answer the questions (30 minutes), ask everyone to find a partner with whom to share their reflections.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the whole group back together. The questions below can be used to reflect on this activity. The decision about how much to share is up to each person.

❍ What themes did you and your partner's stories have in common?

❍ What were some of the differences that emerged?

❍ How did you feel or react in hearing your partner's story?

❍ What came up that wasn't expected?

❍ What part of this activity most increased your trust and comfort level?

❍ Was there a particular part that was uncomfortable for you? How did you handle that?

❍ What would you suggest that we do next time to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

Materials needed: Large sheets of newsprint or other paper, makers, paints, crayons or other art supplies; paper and pens for writing; easels, chart paper, and markers for capturing key points of small group or large group discussion

Size of group: From two people to as many as can comfortably be accommodated in the space available (if participants choose to draw their stories, they will need room for large pieces of paper, and everyone will need some quiet space to reflect and share)

Time needed: 2-3 hours, depending on the size of the group and whether the responses are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

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3 – 2 "Why I love to be a _____"[11]

Purpose

⊙ To practice speaking about, and listening to, the teachings and perspectives of other religious and spiritual traditions with respect, openness, and appreciation.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask each person to think of an experience they have had of open, respectful communication across religious boundaries, and to tell another person in the room about it briefly, taking just a few minutes for both to share. Invite two or three volunteers to share their partner's experience briefly with the whole group.

2. **Explain the Task:** Tell participants that you will invite them to complete the phrase: "Why I love to be a _____" with whatever word or phrase most clearly describes their spiritual or religious identity, expression, path, or practice. Before you do so, share the following points and invite a brief discussion on spiritual/religious identity in the group.

   For some of us, filling in the blank is not difficult — some of us have a strong, clearly defined religious identity. For many people, religious faith is something you are born into. Others have made a clear, conscious choice to adopt a new faith. Still others may feel more on the margins of established traditions and institutions, in a time of religious transition, or they may identify with the teachings and practices of more than one tradition. Sometimes it takes courage to name our faith — or lack of faith — for fear of disapproval or being stereotyped negatively.

[11] This activity is inspired by a workshop of the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington, D.C., "Why I love to be a . . ." and a series of conferences sponsored by the Center for Christian-Jewish Understanding, "What Do We Want Others To Teach About Us?"

3. **Individual Reflection:** Give participants 20-30 minutes of quiet time to prepare the following information:

❍ Fill in the blank "Why I love to be a _____" with whatever word or phrase most clearly describes your spiritual/religious identity, expression, path, or practice.

❍ Write or tell about the reasons you love to be who you are in your religious/spiritual life right now.

❍ What would you like others to teach about your faith as you live it? Prepare a brief "lesson" that someone from another faith could use to teach about yours. Some dimensions to include could be:

- How you identify yourself, what you call yourself, in relation to your faith.

- Core teachings.

- Key differences you have from others in your tradition or in other traditions.

- How you live your faith in daily life.

- What values, rituals, and practices are central to your living of your the teachings of your tradition?

- How would you like others to speak and act around you in relation to your faith?

- Is there anything else that others should know to be a good neighbor, friend, colleague?

4. **Small Group Sharing:** When the group has had some quiet time to respond individually to the questions, form groups of two to four people and ask them to spend 10 minutes each sharing answers. To the extent possible, the groups should be formed of people who do not know each other well and who are from diverse traditions or different groupings within a faith community. Ask people to listen silently while others are speaking and to save clarifying questions for after they have finished.

5. **Large Group Discussion:** After all have shared, bring the whole group back together to reflect on the following questions:

❍ What feelings came up as you spoke about yourself? As you listened to others?

❍ What were the easiest things to hear and understand? The hardest?

❍ How did people use the language of their faith in their explanations?

❍ Were all of the terms and concepts clear to you? What was not clear?

❍ Was language used that caused discomfort for you or for others?

❍ What part of this activity most increased your trust and comfort level?

❍ What would you suggest that we do next time to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

Materials needed: Large sheets of newsprint or other paper, makers, paints, crayons or other art supplies; paper and pens for writing; easels, chart paper, and markers for capturing key points of small group or large group discussion

Size of group: From two people to as many as can comfortably meet in the space available

Time needed: 1-2 hours, depending on the number of people present and the time allowed for preparing answers and sharing with others; less time if responses to initial questions are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Low

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Low

3 – 3 "I thought you would never ask!"

Purpose

- ⦿ To practice asking and answering honest and respectful questions about our religious and spiritual traditions and to help the group open doors of communication to people of different faiths.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Invite a brief discussion on the importance of speaking from our traditions, not for them as official representatives.

   - ❍ How can people who are not religious scholars or leaders best speak for their tradition?

   - ❍ How does it affect communication and group dynamics if people speak as if they are representing their tradition rather than speaking only for themselves?

   - ❍ What can individuals and the group do to be resources for one another for increased understanding of different traditions?

2. **Personal Introductions:** Ask participants to introduce themselves by describing their religious tradition or spiritual path, as well as the connections that they may have to other traditions (e.g., raised in a family of multiple faiths, converted to a different faith as an adult, has extensive knowledge about a tradition they do not practice). Even well-established groups benefit from a round of introductions focusing on the knowledge and connection their members have with different traditions.

3. **Identifying Traditions:** Make a list on a flip chart of all the religious/spiritual traditions and expressions mentioned in the introductions. For each item on the list, ask if there is at least one person in the group who feels comfortable answering questions about it. Adjust the list as necessary.

4. **Individual Work:** Invite each person to think of two questions about the teachings and practices of one of the other traditions or expressions on the list (including other expressions within their own tradition they would like to know more about). The questions should be in the spirit of genuine inquiry, not commentary or criticism. Ask the group which type of question they would prefer to answer:

    ❍ Why don't people in your tradition do _____?

    ❍ Please tell me about why people in your tradition _____?

    Hand out two cards or small strips of paper in two different colors to each participant, and ask them to write one question on each paper. The cards or papers are collected, and sorted by color.

5. **Large Group Questions and Answers:** Starting with the first colored set, select one of the questions to read aloud. If the question is directed to a particular faith, and someone is present who can answer the question, they are given 2-3 minutes to do so. Other members of that tradition can add a different perspective. It is important to maintain a sense of collective inquiry and openness and not of debate. Different interpretations and explanations are welcomed as enriching everyone's understanding.

    Continue selecting and reading questions, trying to ensure that all faiths present have a chance to answer one or more questions. If there is time, the second colored set of cards or papers can be read. If time is limited, the remaining questions can be read aloud, and time set aside to return to them at another time.

6. **Closing:** Invite the group to identify three themes they would like to know more about and several ways that they can try to learn more about them.

Materials needed: Two sets of colored cards or strips of paper; a basket or box to collect them in

Size of group: 10-20 people; a larger group may have more religious diversity

Time needed: 1-2 hours, depending on the number of people present and the time allowed for preparing answers and sharing with others; less time if the questions are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Low

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

Suggestions for adapting: This activity can be done in a number of ways, depending on the size of the group, how well individuals know one another, and their preferences for small or large groups. A smaller group might ask questions of one another questions. A larger group might break up into pairs for asking and answering questions.

3 – 4 My Sources of Inspiration as Religious/Spiritual Peacebuilder

Purpose

- ⊙ To better understand what inspires us and sustains us as peacebuilders including diverse sources of inspiration.

- ⊙ To reflect on our peacebuilding values and skills and the experiences and influences that helped us to develop these.

- ⊙ To be aware of differing inspirations for peacebuilding.

- ⊙ To understand the connection of religious meanings to peacebuilding practice.

Directions

1. **Individual Reflection:** Give participants 15-20 minutes of quiet time to prepare their answers to the following questions:

    Peace skills and peace teachers:

    - ❍ Think of one peacebuilding skill that you have and how you developed that as a strength. Can you identify the circumstances, the actions, and experiences that helped you develop this skill?

    - ❍ Was there someone in particular whose teaching or example was critical? What in this person's character, qualities, words, or actions were most influential for you?

    - ❍ Was there a religious or spiritual dimension in the development of your skill as a peacebuilder? What religious or spiritual values, teachings, or role models inspire you to further develop your skills as a peacebuilder?

My ideals and understandings about peace and peacebuilding.

❍ What words define or describe "peace," "peacefulness," "peacebuilding" for you?

❍ Take a few minutes to reflect on what has inspired these ideals — do they come from writings, scripture, study, the arts, the example of others, personal insight?

2. **Small Group Sharing:** Form small groups of four to six people and ask each group to share their answers to the questions.

3. **Large Group Discussion:** After all have shared, bring the whole group back together to reflect on the following questions:

❍ What common themes, examples, models have come up?

❍ What differences have emerged?

❍ What strength can the group find in the similarities? The differences?

❍ What challenges might result from the differing ideals and understandings?

Materials needed: Optional personal writing materials

Size of group: From two to as many as can comfortably meet in the space available

Time needed: 1-2 hours, depending on the number of people present and the time allowed for preparing answers and sharing with others; less time if questions are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Low

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

3 – 5 Exploring Commonalities and Differences within Traditions

Purpose

- To appreciate and respect the differences within our own religious and spiritual traditions and the diversity within other traditions.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Make some of the following key points, and invite a brief discussion.

   Religious traditions have many roots and branches. When we speak in general terms of a religious tradition, we can overlook the profound differences and diversity present in many of them: differences visible in clothing, art, symbols, architecture, and in how people live their lives, which typically derive from differences in religious interpretations, philosophical perspectives, ethical viewpoints, or politics. It can be as difficult or more difficult for people from differing groups within the same religious community to understand one another as it is for people from totally different traditions with whom differing teachings and perspectives are to be expected. Understanding how religious traditions and spiritual expressions can be internally varied and diverse can help us prevent over generalization or stereotyping of our own tradition or that of others.

2. **Individual Reflection:** Pass out a copy of the handout for this activity to each person in the group, and ask them to decide how broadly or how narrowly they would like to define their tradition for purposes of this exercise. Participants may choose to work with a broad category, such as Buddhist, Muslim, Jewish, Humanist, or a narrower denominational focus within a tradition, such as Christian Orthodox.

   Next, ask the large group to brainstorm a few examples of issues within their own tradition that would fit into the different circles

and areas of the diagram on the handout. The diagram is meant as a tool to stimulate conversation and reflection and to represent each participant's perspective, so members of the same tradition or denomination do not need to agree on these points. When the group understands the exercise, ask each person to fill in the diagram individually and to answer the questions for reflection below:

❍ How would you describe the different subgroups in your tradition?

❍ What issues have caused the most disagreement?

❍ Which subgroups are closer, which are further apart, in their interpretations of doctrine, ethical choices, and lifestyle issues?

❍ Where do you fit on the diagram?

3. **Sharing in Pairs**: Ask each person to find a partner to share their observations. The partner may be from the same or from a different religious/spiritual tradition or expression.

4. **Large Group Discussion**: After all have shared, bring the whole group back together to reflect on the following questions:

❍ What overall insights did you gain from this exercise?

❍ What are some of the factors that hold faith communities together? Or push them apart?

❍ Are all of the differences religious or do some have to do with other types of group identity, such as culture and ethnicity, nationality, age, gender, economic class, or other distinguishing characteristics?

❍ What does your faith tradition say about the differences within it? How does it handle the differences?

❍ What part of this activity most increased your trust and comfort level?

❍ Was there a particular part of the activity that was uncomfortable for you? How did you handle that?

❍ What would you suggest that we do next time to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

Materials needed: Handout; flip charts or large paper and markers

Size of group: From two to as many as can comfortably meet in the space available

Time needed: 1-2 hours, depending on the number of people present and the time allowed for preparing answers and sharing with others; less time if the questions are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Low

ℭℬ Handout 3-5

Exploring Commonalities and Differences Within Traditions
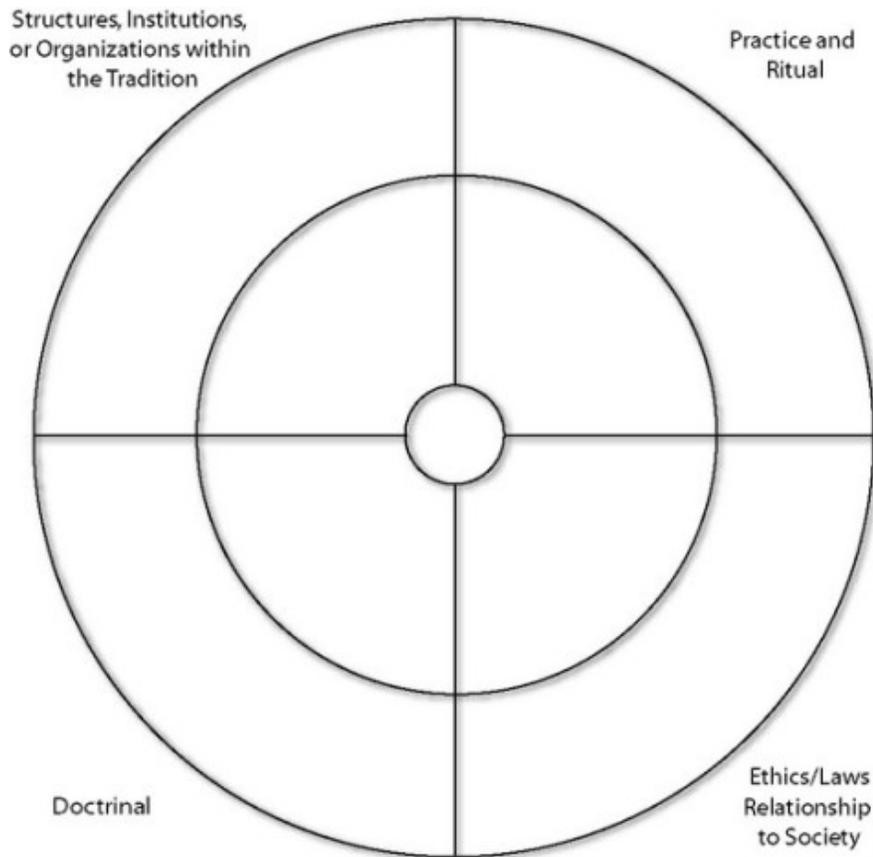
- ⊙ What is central to your tradition? (inner circle)

- ⊙ What do most people in your tradition share or agree on? (middle circle)

- ⊙ What are the areas of greatest diversity or disagreement? (outer circle)

3 – 6 An Interfaith Map of Our Local Community

Purpose

⊙ To increase our awareness of how much we know and how much we have yet to learn about other religious traditions and spiritual in our home community, region, or society.

⊙ To lay the foundation for building interreligious bridges.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Invite the group to discuss what they know about how different traditions designate and consecrate religious space and how they use it (e.g., for prayer, pilgrimage, various forms of ritual).

2. **Large Group Mapping:** Working with a real or rough map of your town or region, ask the group to brainstorm and mark on the map the answers to the following questions:

    ❍ Where are the religious and sacred sites that we know of? (Examples might include places of worship, prayer, or spiritual practice; grand or inconspicuous structures; spaces that are shared across groups, such as tombs, memorials, special parks or other parcels of land; and other locations that have religious/spiritual significance.)

    ❍ What sites outside of our immediate community or region are also visited and used by people from our community (e.g., places of pilgrimage or retreat, places of worship)?

    ❍ Do cardinal or other directions or places in the world hold special meaning? Overlay these points or directions on the map.

    Note to Group Leader: If the group is large, you may want to form smaller groups and provide each with a small map on which to draw. Each group then transfers its drawing to a larger map at the front of the room.

3. **Large Group Reflection:** Ask the group to reflect on the following questions:

    ❍ Places sacred for indigenous traditions are often not recognized as religious sites. Are there any sites that we know of near or around our region that are considered sacred and yet may not be recognized by others as such? Are there groups not wanting their sacred sites to be known publicly or used in ways considered sacrilegious, particularly if legal protection is lacking?

    ❍ What connections do the different religious communities in your area have with one another? In what ways are different groups visible or invisible to one another?

    ❍ What are the ethno-cultural roots of the people in our community, and how has immigration or globalization affected the religious map of our community? How is this represented in the religious map?

    ❍ Are there tensions at the boundaries between religious and cultural groups or controversies surrounding the location of places of worship or other types of sacred sites?

4. **Closing:** Invite the group to discuss what they would like to do to follow up on this activity.

Materials needed: Large street or similar map, detailed enough to accurately locate buildings and other sites; board or wall to mount the map; stickers or labels to mark locations; blank book or notebook for capturing descriptions of the sites marked

Size of group: 15-20 people

Time needed: 2 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

Suggestions for adapting: This map can be used as the basis for continuing research on the religious identities and connections in the community, over the course of several meetings or a longer period of time, as more people place themselves on the map. Members can continue locating sacred places and landforms, noting their meaning and functions, and increasing their knowledge of religious traditions and their connections to the community.

3 – 7 Comparative Themes

Purpose

⊙ To share information and perspectives on areas of interest to members of different faith traditions in a structured group activity that offers an opportunity to move into more complex or controversial areas.

Directions

1. **Preparation**: Select a theme for exploration. These themes can range from light to deep or controversial, depending on the interest of the group. This activity can be repeated for different themes, so it might be helpful to begin with simple themes to get some experience with the activity and then move into more complex or controversial themes. The group may wish to review the suggestions under Foundational Skills in Section Two, and "Building Interfaith Community" in Section Four for how to establish and maintain safe space and trust within the group.

   Some examples of themes include:

   ❍ peace and conflict

   ❍ food

   ❍ health and healing

   ❍ gender relationships

   ❍ marriage and children

   ❍ death and the afterlife

   ❍ the meaning of suffering

   ❍ prayer

2. **Small Group Sharing**: Form small groups of four to six people, if possible with different religious traditions and spiritual expressions represented in each group. Ask each group to discuss the theme from the standpoint of the different traditions represented in the group and to record key points on large sheets of paper for sharing with the whole group.

3. **Gallery Walk:** Post the papers where everyone can see them. Give the group time to walk around the room and read the notes.

4. **Large Group Discussion**: Ask the group to reflect on the following questions:

   ❍ What did you learn from this exercise?

   ❍ If the group found some differences, are they all religious differences, or do some reflect culture or other factors?

   ❍ What was the most interesting part of this exercise? Why?

   ❍ What was the most challenging part of this exercise? Why? How did you as an individual handle it? How did the group handle it?

   ❍ What would you suggest that we do next time to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

5. **Closing:** Invite the group to discuss a follow up to this activity.

Materials needed: Flip chart or large sheet of paper; markers and tape

Size of group: As many as can be comfortably accommodated in the space available; it is important to have multiple faith traditions represented or different groups from within a tradition

Time needed: 2 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

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3 – 8 Art as a Tool for Interfaith Understanding

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore how interfaith groups can use expressive art to deepen communication and understanding.

Directions

1. **Preparation:** Gather art supplies — these can be inexpensive children's art supplies or a variety of materials, for example, clay, sticks, stones, colored paper and glue, berries, or beads. Paper can be scraps or reused office paper.

2. **Introduce the Session:** Invite a brief discussion on the different ways that art is used to express religious meaning and differences in custom and teaching about what is appropriate.

3. **Select the Theme:** Ask the group to select a theme for the activity. Some examples of themes are: personal spiritual experiences, religious teachers or teachings, metaphors (light, darkness), symbols, our story of creation or origin, how our lives reflect our understandings, our understanding of our relationship with the sacred, how different traditions use the hands in prayer.

4. **Individual Reflection:** Allow time for centering and reflection, and for getting comfortable with the idea that no one needs to be 'an artist' to do this exercise. Ask participants to work silently with the materials in any manner they feel comfortable, to communicate through color, shape, design, collage, or other forms.

5. **Gallery Walk:** When all are ready, gather around each work in turn, and ask each person to share on whatever way they wish.

Materials needed: Art supplies

Size of group: As many as can be comfortably accommodated in the space available; it is important to have multiple faith traditions represented or different groups from within a tradition

Time needed: 2 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

3 – 9 Exploring Religious Art and Architecture

Purpose

⊙ To deepen understanding of religious meaning as expressed through the art and architecture of different traditions.

Directions

1. **Preparation:** Ask each person to bring in photographs or drawings of religious and spiritual places, preferably the place in their local area where they themselves worship, meet, pray, or practice. Where sacred places are not disclosed or shared with those outside of the community, this exercise can focus on publicly shared elements, such as the exterior of buildings, or general characteristics. The questions in Step Two may be handed out and prepared in advance.

2. **Reflection in Groups of Same Tradition:** If the group is large enough, ask people to gather with people of their own tradition first and compare the significance of some of the elements listed below. Alternately, take a few minutes of quiet time for members of the group to reflect and answer the questions individually.

   ❍ Is there meaning in the use of height and depth — in the height of ceilings, in going up high, in looking up, or in going down into the earth?

   ❍ Is there meaning in the use of light and darkness?

   ❍ What are the different meanings of indoor and outside spaces? How and when are different spaces used?

   ❍ Is there meaning in the use of shapes and spaces (e.g., a rectangle or a cube, a circle or a sphere)?

   ❍ Is there significance in the choice of colors? In the choice of materials used? In the use of sounds?

   ❍ Do certain directions (as in east, west, north, south) have special meaning?

   ❍ What is the significance of the ways people move or the position they take when they pray?

❍ Is there a role for artwork (e.g., sculptures, paintings) or artistic expression (e.g., dance, song, drama, poetry), and what is its significance?

3. **Small Group Sharing in Mixed Religious Groups**: Then ask people to gather in mixed-faith groups of four to six people, with as many traditions as possible represented in each group. Ask them to spend 5 minutes each sharing their answers.

4. **Large Group Discussion**: When all have shared, bring the whole group back together. Ask someone in each group for a summary of what they found to be most significant and enlightening, most intriguing or unusual. Were there some commonalities, and what were the greatest differences among the traditions represented?

5. **Closing**: Ask the whole group to reflect on what they have heard and shared and to consider ways to follow up on the activity.

Materials needed: Flip chart or large sheet of paper; markers and tape

Size of group: As many as can be comfortably accommodated in the space available; it is important to have multiple faith traditions represented or different groups from within a tradition

Time needed: 2 hours

Complexity: Low

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

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3 – 10 Art That Heals and Art That Hurts

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore how positive images of other religions are created and to understand the power of such positive images to affect our attitudes and perceptions.

- ⊙ To raise our awareness of how negative imagery affects our perceptions of other faiths, to become more aware of how imagery within our own tradition may be painful and uncomfortable to others, and to understand more about the religious and historical factors behind such images.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Invite a brief discussion on the power of positive and negative portrayals of other religions in shaping our attitudes or beliefs about them. Make the following points:

   Speaking about negative images of religious traditions can be uncomfortable or painful, if conflict or tension still exists, or if people remember past harm and injustices. We might feel ashamed of images that vilify others. Or, there may be a tendency to that the meaning is not in the negative image but rather in a religious teaching, and therefore this should not offend others. The focus of this activity is not to blame, but to better understand ourselves, others, and the impact of our thoughts on others.

2. **Individual Reflection**: Ask each person to take some quiet time to think of one positive image of another religious group, whether it be of the tradition's music, scripture, art, or other some other aspect — in other words, specific images or reference points that portray that faith community or a member of it as having some specific positive characteristics.

3. **Large Group Sharing:** Ask people to describe the positive image and explore the following questions:

  ❍ Was it easy to find examples of positive images? If not, why not?

  ❍ At what period or periods in the history of your tradition would members have been (or be today) most open to holding and sharing a positive image of another tradition or traditions? Are positive images of other faiths being created today?

  ❍ Are negative images being created today? If so, how, where, and by whom? About whom?

  ❍ What purpose are these negative images serving within the your religious or spiritual community?

4. **Small Group discussion**: Form small single-faith groups. Ask each group to think of examples of how their faith portrays other faith groups or individuals in a negative way. Ask people to think of specific characteristics that are used to describe others. The following questions can be used to focus the discussion:

  ❍ What are the historical roots of the images? When were they created and why?

  ❍ Are there outdated images from another period that are still present today in literature, art, or music?

  ❍ Are there negative images that are still connected to present-day teachings and practices?

  ❍ Are there negative portrayals of faith groups in religiously-inspired popular culture, for example, on stage or film or in art exhibits?

  ❍ How are the groups being viewed in this way responding to the negative portrayals?

5. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the group back together to share their examples of negative images. After all have shared, ask the group to reflect on what they learned and experienced as they worked through this activity.

6. **Closing:** Ask each person to write a brief description of a positive image they would like members of another faith community to hold of them and their community. What outstanding characteristics of their tradition would they would like to have portrayed? Share these images with the whole group. Remembering the great diversity of religious traditions and spiritual expressions in the world, the group may want to make a commitment to also seek out positive images of other traditions not present in the group.

7. **Follow-up Activity:** Create a book containing positive images created by members of the group about one another's traditions. The images might be represented in poetry, song, art, prose, metaphor, or some other form. Add images as time goes on of other traditions living in your community or region.

Materials needed: Flip chart or large sheet of paper; markers and tape

Size of group: As many as can be comfortably accommodated in the space available; it is important to have multiple faith traditions represented or different groups from within a tradition

Time needed: 3 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

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3 – 11 How are we doing?

Purpose

⦿ To pause and reflect on the experience and learning from the activities in this section.

Directions

1. **Individual Reflection**: Answer the following questions individually either before the meeting or during quiet time for reflection at the meeting.

   ❍ How did it feel to try to speak fully, clearly, and openly about your religious identity, your spiritual journey, your teachings and practices?

   ❍ What was difficult? Did it become easier with practice?

   ❍ What did you discover about yourself and others?

   ❍ What are your "growing edges," areas you can work on to progress in your understanding of other religious and spiritual traditions and to be more skillful in interfaith interaction?

   ❍ What questions, concerns, or doubts do you have?

   ❍ What else do you feel you need to know or do?

2. **Small Group Sharing**: Form small groups of four to six people to share responses to the questions above.

3. **Large Group Discussion**: When all have shared, bring the whole group together to reflect on the following questions:

   ❍ What have been some significant markers of the journey the group and its individual members have shared? What new knowledge, perspectives, skills, trust have been gained?

   ❍ What are some significant questions and doubts that have arisen? What challenges?

   ❍ What can the group do in the future to create more trust, understanding, and creativity in its interfaith dialogue?

○ Partner Reflection: Make the point that new skills develop from a combination of experience, reflection, and practice. Ask participants to work with a partner on the following:

○ Select two skills presented in this section that you would like to work on.

○ For each skill, try to identify one situation in which you used the skill effectively, and one situation in which you did not.

○ Discuss with your partner how you might improve your ability to apply these skills. What experiences might you seek out to practice your two skills?

4. **Large Group Reflection:** Bring the whole group together to reflect on the following questions:

○ What would you suggest that we do in the future to create more trust, more understanding, and more creativity in our interfaith dialogue in this group?

○ What additions or changes do we want to make in our group's principles of interaction to reflect this?

Materials needed: Copies of this activity to pass out to participants, if desired

Size of group: From two to as many as can comfortably meet in the space available

Time needed: 1-2 hours, depending on the number of people present, and the time allowed for preparing answers and sharing with others; less time if questions are prepared ahead of time

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

STORY   Sacred Space Design Competition

In September of 2003 a novel challenge was announced to the world: a challenge that was met by 159 entries from 17 different countries. The objective was to design a space that could inspire and sustain the shared experience of the sacred without sacrilegious or inappropriate images or references. It was to be a space that both allowed those who gathered there to practice their own faith tradition, while at the same time being hospitable to people from all traditions.

The competition was sponsored by the American Institute of Architects, San Francisco Chapter; EURIMA (Expressing the United Religions Initiative in Music and the Arts); the Interfaith Center at the Presidio, and in partnership with the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions (CPWR) and the United Religions Initiative (URI).

By February, 2004, the 159 entries had been mounted on 2-by-3 boards in a gallery in San Francisco. After being judged by a jury of 10, assisted by 16 religious advisers, four winning entries with seven honorable mentions were chosen for further display.

The competition invites us all to consider what is sacred space? How can we move beyond the familiar and yet exclusive physical frameworks of our own worship spaces into something that celebrates the global experience of the sacred, where 'something happens' and no-one is disrespected or excluded.

The entrants to the Sacred Space Design Competition came up with a startling and rich variety of ideas. Ideas that stretched the gamut from a simple depiction of a woman floating on her back in an infinite expanse of water, through an 'eco-friendly earth dome' that 'hides a peculiar magic', to complicated, multi-roomed, multi-layered structures.

The question of how we can translate our spirituality into inclusive, worshipful space had not been answered for all times. This particular competition may be over, but all of us are invited to keep exploring the challenge. What would our response be to the challenge?

SECTION FOUR

BUILDING INTERFAITH COMMUNITY

In the World Council of Churches call for interfaith peacebuilding communicated in a press release in August 2003, the moderator stated: "Dialogue is more than simply exchanging views. Rather, it is the experience of living together, reflecting together and working together. The aim of dialogue is not negotiation; its aim is mutual empowerment and deepening mutual trust."

This section helps groups to work on the skills, attitudes and knowledge needed to forge effective and deep interfaith group relationships. The purpose of this section is to build a strong foundation for interfaith work, and then to go deeper — allowing members to deal with more complicated topics and issues that can enrich relationships and explore what is required of us to do deep interfaith work of enduring consequence. It allows participants to use their own group as a "laboratory" to explore what it means to build authentic community. This is not a simple thing. It takes courage and willingness to journey together to deeper places of understanding.

In this section there are two subsections. The first, Activities for Trusting and Seeing More Clearly, teaches ways of constructing relationships of mutual respect and trust across the boundaries of religion, helps us to understand and acknowledge the lenses through which we each see the world, develops our appreciative eye for noticing what is going well, and generally makes us all more aware of how we want to be together.

The second subsection, "Activities For Risking More Challenging Issues," provides exercises that help a group struggle with issues that may cause conflict and division, and which we find difficult to address, or prefer to avoid— awareness of our own biases or negative stereotypes, ways in which we as people of faith have sometimes let each other down, and times when our religions have been a source of exclusion or conflict. These are issues for which we most need the awareness, appreciation, empathy, communication skills and trust that are developed in the earlier activities of this section.

Activities for Building Trust and Learning to See More Clearly

Let us let go for a time out of our "habits of the mind" and explore new ways of experiencing our daily living and the world around us. "As we work together to restore hope for the future, we need to include a new and strange ally - our willingness to be disturbed. Our willingness to have our beliefs and ideas challenged by what others think. No one person or perspective can give us the answers we need to the problems of today. Paradoxically, we can only find those answers by admitting we don't know. We have to be willing to let go of our certainty and expect ourselves to be confused for a time."[12]

Let us reach out to others and extend the hand of trust to the "other" believing that each of us is fully human and that by being willing to take the first step, we are making an opening for others to join us. We are building an interfaith community of brave peacebuilders.

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[12] Margaret J. Wheatley, *turning to one another: simple conversations to restore hope to the future* (San Francisco: Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 2002), 34.

4 – 1 The Lenses Through Which We See The World

Everyone sees the world through the lenses of his or her own identity group. These are the lenses of religious belief, cultural, and ethnic orientation, gender, and life experiences. What we believe to be true is relative to who we are. Our perceptions of events, people and relationships influence the way in which we view conflict, the solutions and strategies we design and intimately the actions we decide to take. As we become more aware of these lenses, we are able to see how they influence us. This deepens our understanding of who we are, allows us to adjust or widen our views, and increases the choices available to us for how we want to behave and act.

Purpose

⊙ To explore the concept of multiple realities.

Description

1. **Introduce the Session:** Show the picture "Old Woman/Young Woman and ask people what they see. Acknowledge that most people see either the old woman or the young woman first and then later may be able to see both. Share that this activity is about our perceptions and how it is possible to view the same picture differently. Make some of the following key points:

   ❍ Ask members if they have been in a situation in which there were very different interpretations of the same event? Ask them to share some examples.

   ❍ It is natural to assume that if several people experience the same situation – for example a car accident – that each would remember it and then describe it in a similar way. However, we know from experience that this is not the case. Like wise, if we show the same picture to a group of people we find that it does not necessarily convey the same meaning.

   ❍ The differences become even greater if we add the variable of culture. For example, "since friendship universally implies a positive rapport between people, it is tempting to assume that friendship also involves the same attitudes, same expectations, and same obligations around the world.

❍ However, there are some big differences, for example, between Egyptian and American interpretations of the concept of friendship. "Americans show a greater concern with the number of friendships and a strong social, emotional need for friends. They are also more concerned with the close, emotionally satisfying nature of the friendship than with its duration or permanence…. For Egyptians, friendship is more heavily laden with affects of love and brotherhood. They place importance on lasting ties by stressing such qualities as loyalty, fidelity, and faithfulness."[13]

❍ When we add the differences of age, gender and religion, we are adding to the likelihood that our perceptions and interpretations of life events will be quite different and the meaning of family, friendship, courage, trust, peace and war will also be different. As an interfaith group, we know that our religious and spiritual traditions play an important role in our meaning making processes.

❍ The best way to "unpack" these perceptions and the assumptions we make about how the world works, is to share them with one another and to talk them through together.

❍ Being aware of our lenses and understanding how they influence us, can open us up to new ways of seeing and increase the choices we have to act.

2. **Small Group Work:** Ask members to form groups representing the same religious tradition or spiritual path and to discuss among themselves their answers to the following questions:

❍ A newcomer to our group would typically see….

❍ We welcome newcomers by….

❍ We view friendship as….

❍ We deal with conflict by….

❍ We understand peace to mean….

❍ You will know you have violated our expectations and norms when….

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[13] Margret Nisi Brena, "Charting the Hidden Cultural Dimension: Comparative Assessment of Peoples' Perceptions, Meanings, Ways of Thinking," Institute of Comparative Social and Cultural Studies, Inc., 8.

❍ The most important lens that shapes the ways we view the world are….

❍ The facilitator can post these questions on a flip chart or prepare them in a handout.

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Take each phrase one by one and ask each of the groups to provide its answer. Once all of the phrases have been completed, lead a discussion about reactions to the activity and what was learned. Raise the questions of how gender, cultural, ethnic and racial group, and life experiences also shape reality.

Materials needed: Handout, "Old Woman-Young Woman"

Size of group: 8-30 people

Time needed: 2 hours

Level of Complexity: Low

Level of Risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

ᘓ Handout 4 - 1

Old Woman-Young Woman

4 – 2 Making Judgments: The Role Religious and Cultural Traditions Play

NOTE: This section is being redesigned: September 2004.

This activity involves working with a "real life" case that raises the issue of how far we ought to go in protecting minority practices that the majority considers to be immoral. The group debates the case with a set of guided questions. The intention in offering this activity is to surface some of the stereotypes and prejudices we carry against indigenous people and to discuss our assumptions and beliefs about what is moral and when or if the rights of the individual should be protected over the rights of the collective. The case also relates to the historical asymmetric relations that developed between colonial religions and the local indigenous spiritual practices and belief systems.

Purpose

⊙ To explore how our religious and cultural traditions influence our value judgments.

☙ Handout 4 - 2

4 – 3 Developing An Appreciative Eye

One of the important competencies a group can develop is the ability to recognize its own positive potential. There are signs of this potential that we often overlook or do not take the time to lift up. As interfaith groups work towards becoming change agents in their communities, they must start at home by being the change they wish to see in the world. If we want more appreciation, tolerance and understanding, let us cultivate it among us.

Purpose

- ⊙ To practice seeing and acknowledging positive attributes of the members of the group and the group as a whole

Description

- → Attach to a wall an envelope for each member of the group, and write each name on one envelope in big letters. Reserve one envelope and title it "Group." Tape up the envelopes so that they are open and notes can be deposited inside.

  Facilitator Note: This activity works best if the group has had some time together. It can take place during the course of a single meeting or stay up over the course of several meetings.

1. **Introduce the Session:** Introduce the Appreciative Mailbox, making some of the following points:

   - ❍ This is an activity that involves acknowledging the good and helpful things group members do that contribute to the overall health and well being of the group.

   - ❍ These can include such things as helping members to clarify what is being said, supporting members in taking risks with each other, challenging the group to go deeper in their

conversations, helping to set up the meeting, sharing a word of kindness with a member who needs comforting, and many other things.

❍ It is important to practice noticing what others and what we as a group are doing well. We are expert at identifying what is wrong or what we dislike. We look for the root causes of the problem but we rarely look for and analyze the roots causes of success.

❍ A first step at building these skills of analysis is to notice when things are going well. In this way we are building our competence in recognizing positive potential and if we can do it for ourselves we will also be able to do if for others.

→ Share Guidelines: Agree with the group on how long you will keep the mailbox up. It could be for the duration of just one meeting or over several. Also agree when the mailboxes will be checked for mail. If using the mailboxes over several meetings, the group may want to check the contents at the end of each meeting and read aloud any notes in the group envelope. In this way the feedback will stay current. Suggest the following guidelines for using the mailboxes that can be modified in any way that is appropriate for the group.

❍ This activity is entirely voluntary. Any time you notice something going well in the group or you wish to acknowledge a particular person, write a short note and slip it into the envelope. You may wish to express appreciation, for example, for a kind word, a small generous act, or a challenging question that invited the group to go deeper in their conversation.

❍ When a group member notices something that the group as a whole is doing especially well, he or she is invited to write a note to the entire group and deposit it in the group envelope.

❍ Members are free to sign their name to the notes or to leave them blank. It can be useful to have the names signed because then members can check back with each other to clarify any feedback that was given.

❍ Describe the behavior that you are acknowledging as specifically as possible so that the person will know what to continue doing in the future. For example, rather than saying "You did a great job today" say "I liked the way you led the session today. It was very helpful when you asked us to take a

few moments of quiet time when the discussion began to get heated."

2. **Check Mailboxes**: At the agreed interval(s), participants take down their envelopes and read their messages. Ask a group member to read aloud to everyone the contents of the group envelope.

3. **Group Check**: Hold a brief discussion with group members about the contents of any notes written to the whole group:
    ❍ How does it feel to be acknowledged in this way?
    ❍ Are there any members who have a different view?
    ❍ Are there other positive things this group did today that we could take note of?
    ❍ In what ways can you see the group growing stronger?
    ❍ What are areas we still want to work on?
    ❍ What are some ways we can use this technique with others outside this group? How would we have to modify it?

Materials needed: Envelopes, markers, tape

Size of group: Any size

Time needed: 20 minutes, or one hour at the end of several sessions of working together

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

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4 – 4 The Power of the Positive Question

How we enter a situation has a tremendous influence on how we are perceived and on the future actions we will take. Asking questions is the traditional way of understanding people's interests and needs. This is the "needs assessment" phase that often comes before action. It is useful, however, to look at the first questions we ask as being start of our intervention and to explore how asking positive questions can help orient people to possibility rather than problem.

Purpose

⊙ To introduce the notion of asking questions as intervention and to explore the impact that asking positive questions can have on individuals, groups, and communities.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask the group for an example of a positive question. Ask why the asking of positive questions might be important. Make the following points:

   ❍ Questions can be used as tools to help bring about change.

   ❍ Positive questions help an individual or group access the best of their experience so that it is available to them to be replicated or to serve as inspiration for what is possible.

   ❍ By asking positive questions we are developing an "affirmative competence" or the ability to see potential and possibility even in difficult times.

   ❍ Positive questions help us to create a positive image about the future and a powerful positive image can lead to positive action.

   → Share some of the interview questions from the United Religions Initiative's Visions for Peace Project, and distribute the handout, "Examples of Positive Questions."

2. **Small Group Task:** Divide the group into small groups of four to six people. Assign a different theme to each group, and ask the groups to develop as many positive questions as they can think of around their theme. Give some examples of positive questions in each of the themes to get the groups started. Some possible themes are:

   ❍ Raising awareness of interfaith values and action within our group

   ❍ Helping an individual reflect on his or her experiences with interfaith work

   ❍ Working within a group whose members span boundaries of a conflict

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Review and give feedback on the questions that have been generated.

   → Ask the group members how they think they could apply the skill of writing positive questions to their interfaith work.

   → Share some ways in which inquiry using affirmative questions is being conducted in peacebuilding.

Materials needed: Writing materials, flip chart or blackboard; handout, "Examples of Positive Questions"

Size of group: Thirty is a good size, though any size works

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of Complexity: Medium

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

ℭℨ Handout 4 - 4

Examples of Positive Questions

1. How would you describe your success? What can you do to replicate it?

2. What has worked? What have you learned?

3. What do you hope for?

4. Who is someone who has stood out for you as an example of an outstanding peacemaker?

5. When have you found a source of inner strength and used it to help you get through a difficult time? How might you use that strength now?

6. What are the three best qualities that you bring to this work?

7. What do you value most about yourself, your group, this community?

8. What are you most proud of?

9. What are some of the outstanding accomplishments of this community?

10. What are some present or past examples of when relations between these two groups were particularly respectful and productive?

STORY **A Trust Walk in South Africa**

In South Africa the trust walk was being conducted with a group of international and local NGOs (nongovernmental organizations) at the Wilgespruit Fellowship Center. A black South African was paired with a white partner. First the white partner was blindfolded and led around. She reported feeling quite confident with her partner in the lead and after a few minutes was moving with ease.

Then it came time to switch. The black South African's behavior changed substantially. His steps were halting and his brow became covered with sweat. His partner was gentle and patient trying her best to communicate non-verbally that this was a safe experience. Yet, the longer the walk went on the more fearful and resistant he became.

Finally the walk ended. As the blind fold was removed and the man saw that he was close to where the walk had started near all the other participants and their partners, he burst into tears of relief and pain at the same time. I thought you were leading me away he said to his partner. I thought you were leading me to jail or bringing me into harm's way.

As the two talked together and then with the whole group it became clear that the Black South African had been re-living the trauma of life under Apartheid. He shared that he had never had a positive relationships with a white person and that the trust walk was the first time he had experienced one.

Activities for Dealing with More Challenging Issues:

Taking Risks Together

Participating in interfaith interaction is often associated with new discoveries about our own religious tradition or spiritual path, as well as that of the other. Discoveries of these sorts and personal growth and change cannot be accomplished without learning to ask difficult questions and facing the challenge of confronting differences in our current and historical ways of worshiping, believing, and living.

Difficulties in dealing with differences stem from our individual perceptions and misperceptions, ways in which our own religious leaders have socialized us in approaching issues of difference, our past experiences with other faith groups, and deep-seated fears, concerns, and mistrust of the "other."

Because of these complex feelings and attitudes, many interfaith groups explicitly or implicitly choose to avoid dealing with differences or difficult issues. They emphasize commonalities and similarities and focus their efforts on positive, feel-good experiences only. When new or veteran members raise difficult issues, the group may be quick to dismiss them as not within its mandate or irrelevant to its mission.

Avoiding difficult issues and differences helps maintain a certain level of harmony and order within the group. There are, however, consequences of such an approach for the interfaith group.

- ❍ The degree of trust may be limited since individuals are not certain what and how others think about controversial and difficult issues.

- ❍ Interfaith conversations and interactions might feel to some as if they are superficial and not entirely genuine if they do not respond to important and challenging issues.

○ People in the larger community might characterize the interfaith group as naive or as disconnected from the "real" issues that divide the diverse community.

Some interfaith groups are reluctant to approach difficult issues and differences among its members out of a concern that such discussion will create more divisions or further animosity in the group. When, however, a certain level of trust and familiarity among the group members have been established and if appropriate preparations have been, the group may be ready to take the next step toward dealing with challenging issues and taking risks together. In so doing, the main objectives would be:

○ to assure members that it is possible in the interfaith setting to raise such issues and still maintain a level of trust and commitment to working together and finding ways to address them in the group and outside;

○ to reassure group members of their individual and collective rights to believe in and shape their own identity.

The following set of activities are designed to provide an interfaith group the opportunity to explore some of its differences and difficult issues. Obviously there are many other avenues for confronting differences. The principle we underline in this section is the need to surface such differences as a way of strengthening interfaith understanding.

Primary and Secondary Language

The language of religion is a rich area for interfaith groups to explore once trust and safety have been established.

The primary language of religion comprises those concepts, principles, stories, and other forms of teaching and expression that are particular to an individual faith group. They are deeply meaningful ways of conveying our spiritual or religious truths; but they can also be misinterpreted or cause discomfort for adherents of other traditions or spiritual paths. The use of primary language may be heard by others as a direct challenge to their own religious or spiritual understandings, or even evoke memories of historical enmity or polemic between certain faith communities.

In an interfaith setting, many people understandably feel uncomfortable in sharing their most deeply held beliefs in their own primary language with others, for fear of offending or being misunderstood. It is natural in many interfaith settings for people to revert to a secondary language, a more universal language of moral concern, which serves as a form of diplomatic language in creating trust and a sense of safety in the relationship. For an established interfaith group to persist, however, in using only secondary language would have the effect of limiting the depth of understanding and trust that can be achieved and that are necessary for the group to face the issues of pluralism and do peacebuilding in religiously diverse communities.

To communicate deeply about our faiths with respect for ourselves and others, sensitivity and balance in the use of both primary and secondary religious language are needed. Articulating the distinction between these two forms of expression will be clarifying and helpful in creating create a safe space that allows people to talk about rituals, teachings, and practices that promote common values, inclusion and tolerance as well as those rituals, teachings and practices that can be used to promote exclusivity, prejudice, and ultimately violence.

Characteristics of Primary and Secondary Language

Primary language includes statements of faith and practices that are

- ❍ deep, intimate, and specific to one's religious tradition or spiritual path;

- ❍ understood and held as truth by other members the faith community;

- ❍ difficult to understand or relate to for those not educated in it;

- ❍ may lead to division and exclusivity if not carefully framed.

- ❍ Some examples of primary language are:

- ❍ Mohammed is the last of the prophets

- ❍ Jesus Christ is the Son of God

- ❍ the concept of Nirvana Buddhism

Secondary language is a more universal form of expression that

- ❍ makes a human connection and brings people of diverse faiths closer together;

- ❍ emphasizes our similarities and stresses common concern (e.g., racism, intolerance);

- ❍ uses words of commonality such as "brotherhood" or "sisterhood," "peace," "equality," "love";

- ❍ serves as an appropriate and safe first step in interfaith engagement

If we are willing to stretch beyond the comfort zone of secondary language, we can explore in primary language the richness of our different traditions with open minds. This will take interfaith dialogue to a transformative level in which differences are tolerated and unique modes of faith expression are better understood, respected, and appreciated.

Challenges in Using Primary Language

To avoid inadvertently offending or abusing some members of an interfaith group through the use of primary language, we should proceed cautiously, one step at a time, frequently consulting with one another on sensitive issues.

One very sensitive issue is the act of participating in a practice or ritual from the sacred tradition of another. For many people, being respectful and tolerant of another's teachings and values is very different from being expected to participate in speaking the words in the primary language or performing practices or rituals of a different religion. Assuming that a participant in interfaith group can or will perform the rituals offered by others may bring the person face to face with the limits of his or her primary-language tolerance. Here is an example of someone unintentionally forcing their primary language on others in a ritual.

⊙ In a group of twenty-five people in interfaith dialogue, a nun asked if she might begin the group's morning gathering with her own blessing. The facilitator, a Muslim man, agreed without asking her for her plan (a mistake!). She asked that the members of the group wait outside and enter one at a time. When it was the facilitator's turn, the nun asked him to sit down and nun attempted to remove his shoes to wash his feet, as a Christly gesture of service and humility in her faith. He protested that he did not wish to have his feet washed, that this was a cultural issue for him. The other Christians in the group naturally understood the love and spirit of this act, but those of other faiths resisted the ritual or had difficulty relating to its meaning.

What could the nun have done to make her primary-language ritual relevant for the interfaith group? The following are some possible ways to use such a primary ritual:

❍ First, consult the group and offer options, such as respectfully observing or joining a group ritual but participating only in those aspects that feel comfortable and would not compromise one's own primary-language understandings.

❍ Second, qualify its use: "you will not become Christian by going through this ritual."

❍ Third, explain its meaning for Christians and see if other faith groups have similar rituals or practices.

The nun's intentions had been good, but her use of a primary-language ritual unannounced and without qualification or a progression of options for participants could have led to conflict in the group. In most interfaith settings there are limits to the extent to which members will agree to participate or tolerate primary-language statements and acts. Acknowledging and accommodating these limits is important.

Another challenge to overcome in our interfaith work is that primary language can be easily manipulated or misrepresented by others to formulate stereotypes of the group in question, leading to prejudice against specific religious groups, often out of fear of conversion.

Stereotypes, which can be functional at some level in communication, are often acquired from the media or through a lack of direct information, experience, or knowledge. Asking a Muslim acquaintance "how many wives do you have?" is an example of making an assumption based on preconceived notions. The stereotypes we hold of other faith groups will keep us from learning about and understanding others' perspectives. Stereotypes can be destructive to building relationships in an interfaith setting.

Whenever we develop stereotypes about people of other faiths and assume they are correct, we place ourselves on the path to prejudice. These not-necessarily-correct images are dangerous because they can produce negative attitudes. Prejudice and negativity then lead to discrimination, which prevents peacebuilding behavior from taking place by forming a barrier between yourself and others.

Generalization → stereotype → prejudice → discrimination

Despite the fact that prejudice does not necessarily always lead to discrimination (laws might prohibit actual discrimination, among other possible mitigating circumstances), the negative attitude of religious prejudice carries the potential of mobilizing people for segregation or violence.

Stereotyping is also used as a defense against conversion, or losing members, especially youth, to another faith. Unless we are aware of this dynamic, a barrier goes up that prevents members of interfaith groups from creating deep connection and genuine relationships with one another.

Investing efforts to move from the initial stages of fear and prejudice towards acceptance and respect for others can help interfaith groups to use their primary language to make deeper connections among members of the group. And vital interfaith dialogue at the primary-language level will, in return, lessen the fear and ignorance that leads to the cycle of prejudice and violence. Reversing that cycle is our work.

4 – 5 Religion As a Source of Inclusion and Peace

Rather than dividing us, religion can be the force empowering people from around the world to work together and build cultures of peace, justice, and healing. Using the resources of our different faith traditions, we can work together in the name of peace for a transformed, healed world.

In fact, all religions promote universal values of peace, harmony, love, and selflessness. Teaching and practices do vary quite distinctly, however, in different traditions for how to achieve such ideals. These understandings are often transmitted from generation to generation by way of stories, myths, and special sets of codes and interpretations.

Becoming aware of these peace-promoting teachings, values, and practices is an empowering process, which often allows the interfaith dynamic to become even more constructive since it emphasizes common purposes at the core of different traditions.

Purpose

⊙ To identify positive religious and spiritual sources that promote tolerance, inclusion, and peace; and to illustrate the similarities and shared values in all religions in the group.

Directions

This activity has three parts: individual reflections, intrafaith discussion and exploration, and interfaith discussion. Prepare by sharing the material on "Primary and Secondary Language" from the introduction to this Section.

1. **Introduce Part One — Individual Reflection:** In order to allow a deeper exploration process and provide an opportunity for each individual to express and formulate his or her ideas regarding their sources of inclusion and peace in their own faith, we begin it is important to start with an individual reflection. This reduces the tendency of members to follow the ideas and interpretations put forward by a leading member of their specific faith in the group.

2. **Individual Work:** Ask each member of the group to write or think about specific values and practices in his or her faith in response to the following request. Allow about 10 minutes.

   Share a teaching, value, practice from your religious tradition or spiritual path that has been or can be used to promote respect, inclusion, and peace.

3. **Introduce Part Two — Intra-faith Dialogue:** The main objective of the intra-faith discussion is to explore the differences within a faith group, not only the similarities, and to discover the various ways adherents explain various practices and beliefs.

4. **Small Group Sharing:** Have participants gather in same-faith groups to share their individual reflections. Keep groups small enough so that all may participate. If there are ten in one group, split it into two groups of five each. Ask each group to select a facilitator for the discussion.

   → Clarify that the purpose of the process is not to arrive to a consensus or agreement regarding the different teachings, values, or practices that have been shared by the various individuals.

   → Encourage the groups not to debate but to try to understand the reasons and justifications behind each person's selection of the different practices that can promote inclusion and peace.

   → Ask each group to write on a flip chart the list of teachings, values, and practices they have identified, with a brief explanation of each factor.

   → Alternatively, ask the group members to illustrate these factors in their faith that can lead to inclusion and peace. The use of art provides people ways to express their concerns and different interpretations without having to worry about narrative explanations of the specific practices. It is also an effective way to defuse a certain degree of tension around the subject.

   → Allow forty-five minute to one hour for this discussion.

5. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the large group back together, and have each group present its findings on their flip charts or drawings.

6. **Part Three — Interfaith Sharing in Small Groups:** Next have participants meet in mixed-faith groups to share their insights about teachings, values, and practices from their faiths that have been used to create an environment inclusion and peace. The small groups should have as much religious diversity as possible.

   → Explain that during this discussion it is important to allow all members to share their views and explain their selected values and practices.

   → Encourage members from different faith groups to ask questions and to share myths and stereotypes they may have about the other.

   Note to Facilitator: Interfaith groups find such exercises empowering and a source of hope. There is, however, also a tendency to challenge members in the group regarding the gap between the ideals and real practices of their faith tradition.

   If this happens, it is important to direct the group discussion to focus on the positive sources in each faith group and to postpone the discussion of when religion is used for exclusion and violence for the next session

7. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the whole group back together for a comprehensive look at the experiences participants had in this activity. Some possible suggested questions are:

   ○ What similarities in teachings, values, and practices did you discover among the faith group in your small group?

   ○ What were some of the different ways in which religious traditions express their ideals and practices of inclusion?

8. **Closing:** Emphasize, in concluding, that we each have a responsibility to explain the sources of inclusion in their tradition to others (insiders and outsiders), in order to combat the discrimination and prejudice that grow out of ignorance.

Materials: Writing materials for individuals. Flip chart or chalk board.

Size of group: This can be adapted to any moderate-sized group. If there are more than six or seven in one faith group, make more than one group of that faith.

Time: 3 hours

Complexity: Moderate

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

4 – 6 Religion As a Source of Exclusion or Conflict

Historically, religious persecution of different sects and religious splinter groups has occurred as a result of processes of reevaluating and reinterpreting the scripts or traditional teachings. This process of change can only take place, however, if there are individuals and groups who take the risk of reinterpreting their own traditions. By refusing to accept or abide by certain religious interpretations and practices that have excluded the "other" or encouraged prejudice, religious individuals and groups have contributed to peace and better understanding of their own faith tradition.

In many religious and spiritual traditions there are teachings that can be interpreted, manipulated, and used to incite violence, exclusion of the "other," and even to dehumanize people outside of that faith. Historically, when religious identity has been used destructively or mobilized in conflict dynamics, it has often been done by political leaders to mobilize religious followers in support of their own aspirations to power.

The teachings, values, and practices that lead to exclusion or the "dark side" of religious traditions are either hidden or presented as justified teachings to followers, especially during wars, conflicts, or tensions in the community. Their influence is seen in distrust, hatred, competition over religious sites, and even lynching and mob behavior (for example, Christians who used biblical teachings to justify slavery or, in South Africa, apartheid; Muslims who used religious teachings to justify attacks on a global scale and against innocent civilians; Jews who oppressed and killed Palestinians in the name of God; Sri Lankan Buddhist monks who justified the killing of Tamils; and Hindus in India who religiously justified the lynching of Muslims in Gujarat).

Being aware of our own tradition's teachings, values, and practices norms that can lead to or interpreted by an outsider as a form of exclusion and source of violent behavior is an essential step in individual's formation of religious identity formation. The individual's awareness and articulation of such religious sources is a form of prevention and restraint from blindly following one's own religious clergy or political leaders who manipulate religious beliefs to dominate

or for political gain. This type of awareness is also important for interfaith engagement so that a person may be able to correct certain negative images and interpretations often associated or attributed to his or her religion by others.

Sharing such teachings, values, and practices from one's own religious teachings in an interfaith setting is highly sensitive and often requires a great deal of trust and preparation in the group. Not all people are equally comfortable in talking about their religious beliefs and practices. In fact, such a process can be effective and helpful in an interfaith group only the group has built a good level of trust among its the members. In addition, there must be a willingness to engage people within one's own faith community as an initial step, and this can sometimes be more challenging than discussion across communities. It is important that there be a facilitator or group leader who can provide strong encouragement and support for the interfaith group through the process. In addition, confidentiality should be assured by members of the group

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore and become aware of the negative and destructive potential of certain religious teachings when they are manipulated or presented to promote exclusion, prejudice, and ultimately, violence against the "other"; and to encourage members to take individual responsibility for their religious or spiritual interpretations and practices.

Directions

This activity has three parts: individual reflection, intrafaith discussion and exploration, and interfaith discussion. The activity should be preceded by the discussion of "Primary and Secondary Language" from the introduction to this section and the previous activity, "Religions as a Source of Inclusion and Peace."

1. **Introduce Part One — Individual Reflection:** In order to allow a deeper exploration process and provide an opportunity for each individual to express and formulate his/her ideas regarding their sources of exclusion and conflict in their own faith, it is important to start with an individual reflection. Beginning with individual reflection reduces the tendency of members to follow the ideas

and interpretations put forward by a leading member of that specific faith in the group.

2. **Individual Work:** Ask each member of the group to write or think about specific values and practices in his/her faith in response to the following request. Allow about 10 minutes.

    Share a teaching, ritual, or practice from your religious tradition or spiritual path that has been or can be used to promote exclusivity, prejudice, or violence.

3. **Introduce Part Two — Intra-faith Dialogue:** The main objective of the intra-faith discussion is to explore the differences within a faith group, not only the similarities, and to discover the various ways adherents explain various practices and beliefs.

4. **Small Group Sharing:** Have participants gather in same-faith groups to share their individual reflections. Keep groups small enough so that all may participate. If there are ten in one group, split it into two groups of five each. Ask each group to select a facilitator for the discussion.

    → Clarify that the purpose of the process is not to arrive to a consensus or agreement regarding the different teachings, values, or practices that have been shared by the various individuals.

    → Encourage the groups not to debate but to try to understand the reasons and justifications behind each person's selection of the different practices that can promote exclusion and conflict.

    → Ask each group to write on a flip chart the list of teachings, values, and practices they have identified, with a brief explanation of each factor.

    → Alternatively, ask the group members to illustrate these factors in their faith that can lead to exclusion or violence. The use of art provides people ways to express their concerns and different interpretations without having to worry about narrative explanations of the specific practices. It is also an effective way to defuse a certain degree of tension around the subject.

    → Allow one hour for this discussion.

5. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the large group back together, and have each group present its findings on their flip charts or drawings.

6. **Part Three — Interfaith Sharing in Small Groups:** Next have participants meet in mixed-faith groups to share their insights about teachings, values, and practices from their faiths that have been used to create an environment of exclusion and intolerance. The small groups should have as much religious diversity as possible.

    → Explain that during this discussion it is important to allow all members to share their views and explain their selected values and practices.

    → Encourage members from different faith groups to ask questions and to share myths and stereotypes they may have about the other.

7. **Closing:** Bring the whole group back together and congratulate them on the achievement of being able to share such difficult issues about their own faith communities an interfaith setting. Such a level of sharing indicates that the members have built a good degree of trust in their group. Emphasize, in concluding, that we each have a responsibility to explain the sources of exclusion in our own faith community to others (insiders and outsiders). Not only are these sources of exclusionary behavior, they also are the bases for stereotypes and prejudice by others against our own faith.

Materials: Writing materials for individuals. Flip chart or chalk board.

Size of Group: This can be adapted to any moderate-sized group. If there are more than six or seven in one faith group, make more than one group of that faith.

Time: 3 hours

Complexity: Moderate

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of the facilitator: Medium

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4 – 7 Activity Religious Stereotypes and Prejudice

Purpose

⊙ To deepen our understanding of religious stereotypes and prejudice, and to learn how to confront religious stereotypes and prejudice.

Directions

1. **Introduce Part One:** Ask group members to think of an incident in which they were the victim of stereotyping or prejudice because of their religious beliefs.

2. **Small Group Sharing:** Ask participants to form groups of three and to share their stories, focusing on the following questions:

   ❍ How did you feel in that situation?

   ❍ What did you do?

   ❍ If the same situation were to happen to you today, what would you do differently?

   → Allow time for each person to share their reactions to these questions.

3. **Introduce Part Two:** Ask each member while they are still in their small groups to think of a situation that took place in the past in which they were the person who used negative stereotypes, prejudice, or discriminatory attitude against some one from another religion.

   After each member identifies a situation, ask them to share their stories and focus on the following questions:

   ❍ How did you feel in that situation?

   ❍ What did you do?

   ❍ If the same situation were to happen to you today, what would you do differently?

→ The second phase of this exercise requires more trust among the members of the interfaith group. Some members might be emotionally tense, nervous, and feeling vulnerable as a result of the exposure in the small group. The following are some recommendations to reduce the tension and allow the process of learning to be completed:

→ Move between the groups to observe certain expressions of anger and frustration.

→ Encourage members of the group to offer their support to each others during and after the three members have completed their stories.

→ Allow enough extra time and space for members to deal with their emotions and the dynamics of the triads.

→ Remind members that they do not have to share their stories if they do not feel comfortable or for any other reason.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the large group back together and discuss:

❍ Ways in which our religious differences can be manipulated and used to inflect injuries.

❍ Ways in which each individual has been exposed to experiences and images in which they stereotypes or have certain degree of prejudice against other religions.

❍ Share some practical ways or sources in which the interfaith groups have countered or worked against religious prejudice and stereotyping.

Materials needed: Individual writing materials; large sheets of newsprint or other paper

Size of Group: Any moderate size

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Complexity: Moderate

Risk: Moderately high

Experience level of facilitator: Experienced and sensitive

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4 – 8 Confronting our Bias and Differences

Purpose

⊙ This activity will assist the interfaith group's members to examine, identify, and confront their individual as well as collective biases, and gain new information and insight on the sources of these biases.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Introduce this activity as a forum to individually explore the questions: "What does my faith tell me about the others in the group?"

2. **Individual Work:** Ask each member look around and reflect for few minutes on the following questions:

   ❍ What negative features, characteristics, or beliefs does his/her faith or certain members of their faith attribute, teach or imply about the other faith groups in the room?

   ❍ What are the rituals or stories that can be manipulated, changed or interpreted to support such perceptions?

   ❍ Why you do (or do not) believe such perceptions?

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Advise the group that during the discussion of each of these questions, they should:

   ❍ ask questions of clarification

   ❍ withhold any judgmental expressions against the speaker

   ❍ observe the guidelines for interaction the group has developed on listening, confidentiality, safety, etc.

   ❍ use qualifying expressions to clarify the messages (e.g., "some people in my faith…," "I know that Christians believe in … but I….")

In conclusion, acknowledging the difficulties and challenges that face individuals and interfaith groups in addressing the bias and inherent contradictions between the different faith belief systems is crucial to the growth and sustainability of the interfaith encounter.

→ A constructive approach to bring a closure to the discussion in this area of interfaith dialogue can be pursued through the exploration of concrete methods to address the consequences of these differences and misperception. Thus, the facilitators can pose the following questions as a form of conclusion.

○ What can be done to correct such perceptions among the group members?

○ Does any one have personal or general examples to illustrate ways in which the biases or misperceptions were handled?

→ Another possible way to elicit the alternatives to deal with these perceptions can be accomplished if the facilitators ask each member to write suggested actions on a separate piece of paper. Bring the suggestion to a box-no name required). Each member can place one card with a brief description of such belief and a story illustrating what can be done with it. Then, group members can read some cards and discuss each one of them.

4. **Closing:** At the end of the exercise, the group members are invited to share a ritual or activity that allows them to reestablish trust and reassure each others' support.

Materials needed: None

Size of Group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: High

Experience level of facilitator: High

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4 – 9 Work with Prejudice/Social Distance Survey

Individuals have different boundaries and criteria for their relationship with "the other." The degree of closeness and the willingness to establish connections with "the other" are determined by our own religious, cultural, and contextual conditions. Our religious values and norms guide us in shaping our relationships with other religions. Religiously pluralist communities often challenge our willingness to reach out to the other. The degree of willingness and comfort to connect with the religious "other" can be reflected through the distance that we would like to keep from the other.

Social distance is a measurement tool that reflects a set of attitudes of a person with regard to creating certain relationships with the "other." It gives a general view of how the individual feels about certain aspects of his/her relationships. The scale has been used since 1925 by sociologist Bugrades who intended to measure the social distance between the white dominant majority and the minorities in American society.

Becoming aware of our own boundaries and the other's perceptions of the type of distance we maintain in interreligious connection can further enlighten our understanding of our own faith and interfaith relations.

Purpose

⊙ To explore religious and social attitudes and values that guide members of the interfaith group in issues related to intermarriage and citizenship.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session**: Ask each member to think of his/her relationship with individuals from other religions at work, in sports, in community, etc.

○ Make sure to revisit the guidelines for dialogue.

○ There is no one correct choice in answering the questions in the religious and social distance scale. All choices are valid.

○ The purpose is to explore boundaries and the values behind them without negatively judging member's responses.

2. **Individual Work:**

→ Many religions can be listed in this survey. The group or facilitator can select the religions that they are interested in exploring; they do not need to answer for all the religious groups. For example, if the group is interested in exploring their attitudes towards Islam and Buddhism, facilitators should prepare the chart to focus on these two groups, however they may add another group for comparison.

→ Distribute the attached Social Distance Survey handout (or your version of it). Ask individuals to respond to the questions even if they do not know any person from specific religious group.

→ Allow 10-15 minutes for selecting the answers. Ask group members to total their scores for each column.

→ The scores for each column cannot be more than: twenty-seven points (because selecting the last question (as a visitor only) contradicts the previous one (accepting the person from other religion as a citizen). Thus a person who marked all the first six questions will have a total score of twenty-seven.

3. **Small Group Sharing:** Divide into small groups (three or four members in each group). Ask members to share their scores and explore the following questions:

○ What motivated you in answering the questions?

○ What does you score mean?

○ Did you have any reservations regarding any of the categories?

○ How does your faith guide you in your choices?

4. **Large Group Discussion:** To make a composite chart of the whole group, each individual gives his or her score for each religion to the facilitator (or a recorder), who lists all the scores for each religious group on the chalk board or flip chart, then totals for each religious

group. For example, to find out the attitudes of the group members toward Christians, ask each participant "what is your total score in the column for Christian?" Count how many people in the group scored twenty-seven, how many scored twenty, and on down.

When you have completed writing the scores and sums for each column, ask group members to reflect on the following questions:

❍ Based on the scores, what religious identity does this interfaith group feel most closed to?

❍ What religious identity does this group feel most distant from?

❍ What affects our choices in being close or distant from other religious groups?

❍ What do you notice about the clustering of scores?

❍ What religious values and norms affected your choice in being close or distant to certain religious groups?

5. **Closing:** It is important to conclude this exercise emphasizing the following points:

❍ People have different criteria in determining their degree of closeness to and distance from another religion. Articulating these criteria contributes to interfaith understanding.

❍ In creating relationships with individuals of other religions it is important to be aware of our limits and boundaries.

❍ Interreligious intermarriage is not necessarily an accurate measure to religious openness/pluralism. Refusing interreligious intermarriage is not an indicator of prejudice.

Materials needed: Handout, "Social Distance Survey"; pencil for each participant; flip chart or chalk board; a calculator would be handy

Size of group: 15-35 people

Time needed: 1½ to 2 hours

Level of complexity: Moderate to high

Level of Risk: Moderate

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

❧ Handout 4 – 9

A "Religious" Social Distance Survey

Instructions: Place an X in each box to which you would say YES.

	Christian	Hindu	Muslim	Jew	Shinto	Atheist	Buddhist	Indigenous
7 = Given the chance would marry?								
6 = Would have as a daughter-in-law or son-in-law?								
5. = Would have as a neighbor?								
4 = Would have as a member of my club/organization?								
3 = Would have as a friend?								
2 = Would welcome as a citizen of my country?								
1 = Would welcome only as a visitor to my country?								
Total for each category/column *								

*Add your total score in each column by adding the points that correspond with your choice in each question. For example, willing to marry a Christian is 7 points, having a Hindu as a friend is 3 points.

4 – 10 Appreciating Our Connectedness

This activity will assist the interfaith group's members to examine, identify, and celebrate their individual as well as collective values of inclusivity, pluralism, unity, etc. and gain new information and insight on the positive sources of each religion.

Purpose:

⊙ To enhance the values of inclusivity inherent in our faith traditions.

Directions:

Prior to this actual dialogue meeting, members are encouraged to think about their beliefs and attitudes that bring inclusivity or encourage pluralism, in relations to other faith beliefs of other members in the group. Also each member is asked to bring an item or something that represent such values in their faith.

1. **Introduce the Session:** This activity is a forum to explore the question: "What values, beliefs, and rituals in my faith encourage me to reach out to other faith groups? Ask each member to look around and reflect for few minutes on the following questions:

   ❍ What positive features, characteristics, or beliefs does his/her faith or certain members of their faith attribute, teach or imply about the other faith groups in the room?

   ❍ What are the rituals or stories that support such perceptions?

   ❍ How are such religious beliefs or norms expressed in daily lives?

   During the discussion of each of these questions, it is recommended to:

   ❍ ask questions of clarifications question

   ❍ withhold any judgmental expressions against the speaker

   ❍ remind the group of guidelines it has developed on: listening, confidentiality, safety, etc;

❍ use qualifying expressions to clarify the messages (examples would be: "some people in my faith...," "I know that Christian believe in ... but I....")

In conclusion, acknowledging the positive aspects and sources in each faith can be a source of empowerment to both the individuals and the groups as well. Utilizing such sources and highlighting them can promote the growth and sustainability of the interfaith encounter.

A constructive approach to bring a closure to the discussion in this area of interfaith dialogue can be pursued through the exploration of concrete methods to advance the actual implementation of these positive sources in each faith in real life situation and in the specific interfaith context. Thus, the facilitators can pose the following questions as a form of conclusion.

❍ What can be done to increase the awareness of these positive sources in each religion?

❍ Does any one have personal or general examples to illustrate ways in which these positive sources enhance interreligious relations?

❍ Celebrating our strengths: A possible way to highlight these sources and bring a closure to the activity can be accomplished by asking members to place the present or share the item that they brought with them to the meeting. These symbolic items can be kept in the room as a reminder of the connectedness among the interfaith group members.

Materials needed: Personal items symbolic of faith

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

AREAS OF ACTION FOR INTERFAITH PEACEBUILDERS

The purpose of this section is to provide resources for interfaith groups interested in building skills for actively contributing to the peace of their community. There are many possible peacebuilding skills and approaches that can be implemented in an interfaith context. In this section, we have selected those that:

- ⊙ are of a scale and complexity feasible for interfaith groups to carry out;
- ⊙ have a religious or spiritual component;
- ⊙ are skills the group can learn and practice together.

The skills and approaches of interfaith peacebuilding presented in this section are:

- ⊙ conflict assessment
- ⊙ interfaith dialogue
- ⊙ nonviolent action
- ⊙ healing and reconciliation

These areas cannot be covered in the few proposed activities, but this section provides an opportunity for the interfaith group to examine some basic frameworks, gain some experience with them, and evaluate them as paths for action in interfaith peacebuilding. Section Six contains a sequence of evaluative and reflective steps the group can take to help it plan specific actions and strategies.

Although interfaith groups are excellent forums for direct peacebuilding activities, none of the proposed options are presented here as mandatory activities. It is recommended that members of the interfaith group discuss and agree upon the level of activities that they want to adopt in this section, with the understanding that each individual has the right to participate as much as he or she is willing and able.

Activities for Developing Analytical Tools for Interfaith Peacebuilding

As individuals, groups, societies, we are continually analyzing situations of conflict that we are involved in or those that we witness or hear about. Our worldview and belief system (not just faith) influence the questions we ask and the judgments we make about the causes of conflict, about who is at fault, about consequences and costs, about desired solutions, and about how or when we or others might intervene to stop the conflict, to relieve suffering, or to assist one of the parties in conflict. Becoming aware of the significant role that our personal, societal, and religious understandings play in approaching conflict is an essential step toward finding creative alternatives and constructively engaging with others.

When conflict analysis is based only on our personal experience and understanding or that of our group, it can be incomplete or faulty and can lead to an escalation of conflict. A lack of objectivity, a limited knowledge of constructive options, or s lack of attention to the larger context of the conflict (such as time scale or consequences for others) can result in negative or destructive choices.

To stand back and take a deeper look at what are often very complex situations requires time, critical self-reflection, and a willingness to explore different perspectives. Research in political science, peace studies, conflict resolution, psychology, history, biology, philosophy, and other fields can suggest tools and questions to consider in understanding the behavior of individuals, groups, societies, and nations in conflict.

Equally important is our awareness of why we are looking to gain understanding of a conflict. Do we want to affix blame for punishment, seek opportunities to intervene constructively, protect and support a weaker party, seek means to prevent similar conflicts, or keep the conflict from spreading? Our understanding of the meaning of peace and how to build it, of our own capacities and opportunities, and of our

own motivations, worldviews, interests and values will determine the questions we ask and the answers we seek.

The purpose of this subsection is to help clarify how different analytical and religious perspectives affect and shape the participants' assumptions, values, definitions, and motivations about peace and conflict. Such understanding is a necessary step prior to engaging in peacebuilding action.

The last activity is a joint-analysis exercise that asks participants to select their own conflictual issue or case study and jointly analyze it using the various tools that have been covered in the previous three activities.

5 – 1 Tools for Conflict Analysis

Purpose

- ⊙ To encourage independent thinking and reflection about the questions we ask and the types of knowledge and understanding we seek about the conflicts in our lives and in our societies.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Remind participants that conflict of some form or scale is ever present in human life. All of us have intimate knowledge and wisdom about working with conflict. By practicing analytical skills in our own conflict situations, we can increase our skills and empathy in understanding the conflicts of others.

   → Give participants a few minutes to think of a conflict they have been involved with or have been close to on one or more of the following levels:

      o interpersonal — with friends, colleagues, or family members

      o within groups — within a faith community, an organization, a workplace

      o between groups — between organizations, families, or other groups of people divided on an issue

      o between communities — between ethnic or religious groups or other types of communities

2. **Large Group Setup:** Facilitate the group's selection of one conflict or case study to use as a focus for their analysis.

   → Have them select a situation that members of the group are familiar with, but not one that is a source of conflict within the group. (Note that Activity 5-4, "Joint Conflict Analysis," focuses on a conflict on which the group has differing positions.)

→ Pass out handouts 5-1a, "Tools for Analysis: Conflict Escalation," and 5-1b, "Tools for Analysis: Conflict Dynamics with Unequal Power."

3. **Small group work:** Divide the group into small groups of two to six people.

→ Assign each group or ask them to select one of the tools on the handouts to use for their conflict analysis.

→ Ask the groups to work separately on their analysis for 30 minutes.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the groups together to share their findings. Then explore as a group the following questions:

❍ What overall insights did you gain from this activity?

❍ What is the value of the different approaches? Did some seem more meaningful and useful than others? Why?

❍ What other analytical lenses might be used? (Note that religious perspectives are explored in the next activity.)

❍ If anyone in the group has specific knowledge of or was a witness to or party in the conflict selected, do they think that the analyses were accurate and useful? How do they feel about having a conflict they are close to analyzed by others?

❍ What further study and practice does the group need with conflict analysis tools?

Materials needed: Easels, large sheets of newsprint or other paper, markers; handouts: "Tools for Analysis: Conflict Escalation" and "Tools for Analysis: Conflict Dynamics with Unequal Power"

Size of group: 20-25 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

ℂ乤   Handout 5 – 1a

Tools for Analysis:

Conflict Escalation

Each conflict has its own unique history and life cycle, but many conflicts have similarities, indicating that there are some common patterns in how people respond under the stress of conflict. Becoming aware of patterns in conflict can be helpful in seeking to prevent a conflict from escalating out of control. It is also useful for those seeking to transform how groups and societies handle conflict by suggesting mechanisms and institutions that can channel the energy of conflict into constructive rather than destructive channels.

Directions

There are several models describing patterns in the escalation of conflicts. The example below has been simplified for the sake of this exercise. The escalation of conflict is not inevitable; conflicts can move toward or away from escalation or into more constructive patterns of communication and resolution. People or groups in conflict may also decide that the conflict is not worth the continued risk or effort and move away from it, leaving the conflict unresolved or ending or reducing commitment to the relationship.

1. What is the main pattern of the conflict case you have chosen for analysis?

    - avoidance or withdrawal?

    - intensifying engagement?

    - flaring up and cooling down?

    - recurring cycles of unresolved conflict?

    - a combination of constructive and destructive patterns?

    - other?

2. Take a few minutes to read about the different stages of conflict escalation described in the table on the next page.

    - Do these stages apply to the conflict situation you have selected to study?

    - At which stage is the conflict now?

    - What events or incidents in the conflict situation you are analyzing might correspond to the different stages of conflict escalation?

3. The group may want to diagram the history and development of this conflict showing its phases and changes.

4. What are the implications of your analysis for peacebuilding efforts?

Stages of Conflict Escalation[14]

	Stage	Characteristics	Corresponding Events and Incidents
1	Discussion	• Communication relatively accurate • Level of disagreement benign • Willingness to take risks • Generally open about others	
2	Disagreement The difference is not easily resolved, causing anxiety and frustration.	• Simplified and rigid negative stereotypes • Self-protection • Crystallization of interests and opinions • Efforts to point out inaccuracies on the other side • Unease, irritation • Growing level of emotion • Non-disclosure of information • Misinterpretation of other side's motives • Reduction in communication	
3	Polarization Faith is placed in tactics and argument, no longer in what is fair or beneficial.	• Desire to dominate • Increasing power and appearance of power • "We are good and they are evil" • Perceptual distortions and false assumptions • Polarized groups develop • Loss of empathy	
4	Fight or Flight	• Desire to withdraw or cause other to withdraw • Win-lose thinking. • Willing to hurt or humiliate the other • Blaming others	
5	Destruction "Together into the abyss"	• Other party viewed as non-human • Desire to destroy opposition • Any means to justify the ends • "The fight must go on" • Ideological warfare	

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[14] Drawn from R. J. Fisher and L. Keashly, "The potential complementarity of mediation and consultation within a contingency model of third party intervention," *Journal of Peace Research* 28 (1991), 29-42; and Thomas Jordan, "Glasl's Nine-Stage Model of Conflict Escalation," http://mediate.com/articles/jordan.cfm (2000).

ℭβ   Handout 5 – 1b

Tools for Analysis:

Conflict Dynamics with Unequal Power

Quaker peace scholar and practitioner Adam Curle used the diagram below[15] to draw attention to the dynamics of conflicts between people or groups with unequal power.

unpeaceful ←	RELATION	→ peaceful

		Static	Unstable	Dynamic
POWER	Balanced		3. Negotiation	4. Sustainable Peace
	Unbalanced	1. Education	2. Confrontation	
		Latent Conflict		

Low High

AWARENESS OF CONFLICT
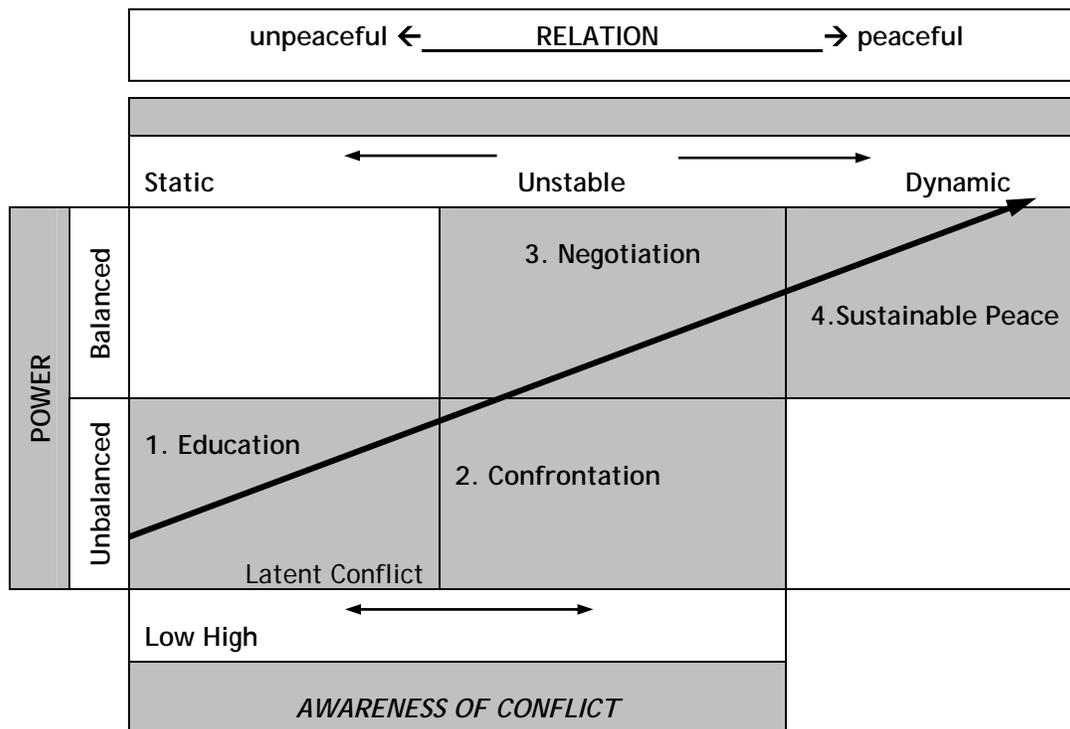
[15] Adam Curle, *Making Peace* (London: Tavistock Press, 1971), as adapted by John Paul Lederach in *Building Peace: Sustainable Reconciliation in Divided Societies* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Institute of Peace Press, 1997), 65.

Directions

→ Read the excerpt below from *Building Peace* by John Paul Lederach, a scholar and peacebuilder from the Christian Mennonite tradition, in which he explains how peacebuilders can use this diagram to understand the complex dynamics of asymmetric or unequal power relationships, and to find practical and appropriate methods to transform unpeaceful structures and relationships into a dynamic and sustainable peace.

→ In small groups, explore the following questions:

- o In the conflict situation you have chosen to analyze, do the parties have equal power to make decisions and to advocate for their needs and interests?

- o If not, how great is the difference in power?

- o Has this changed in the course of the conflict? How?

- o Is the conflict expressed openly? Is there resistance, hesitance, or intimidation that keeps the expression of conflict from coming out into the open?

- o Do one or more of the parties use:

    - ▪ education ("conscientization") to raise awareness?

    - ▪ confrontation?

    - ▪ negotiation?

- o Are there others who are involved in this conflict as:

    - ▪ educators, raising awareness?

    - ▪ advocates, supporting nonviolent confrontation?

    - ▪ mediators, supporting negotiation?

- o Where on this diagram would you place this conflict at this point in time?

- o Where on this diagram is the conflict heading?

- o What specific actions could outside parties take to help move this conflict toward a sustainable peace?

From *Building Peace*, by John Paul Lederach[16]

Curle proposed that we understand the movement toward peace through the roles that emerge in a typical progression of conflict through four major stages. In Quadrant 1 in his matrix, conflict is latent or "hidden," because people are unaware of the imbalances of power and injustices that affect their lives. At this point, Curle argues, education in the form of *conscientization* is needed. The role of educator in this quadrant is aimed at erasing ignorance and raising awareness as to the nature of the unequal relationships and the need for addressing and restoring equity, as seen, of course, from the view of those experiencing the injustices.

Increased awareness of self, the nature of relationships, and context leads to demands from the weaker party for change. These demands are rarely immediately achieved and more typically are not even heard or taken seriously by those benefiting from the status quo. Hence, the entry of advocates who work with and support those pursuing change. As described in Quadrant 2, the pursuit of change involves some form of *confrontation.* Confrontation brings the conflict to the surface. It is no longer hidden. The confrontation itself, however, involves a series of choices regarding how the conflict will be expressed and how the concerns will be addressed. These choices range between violent or nonviolent mechanisms or a combination of both.

Change will require a rebalancing of power in the relationship by which all those involved recognize one another in new ways. Such recognition will increase their basic needs and will legitimate their concerns. In Quadrant 3 confrontation moves toward *negotiations* if those involved increase the level of awareness of their interdependence through mutual recognition. In essence, negotiation means that the various people or groups involved recognize they can neither simply impose their will on nor eliminate the other side, but rather must work with one another to achieve their goals. Mutual recognition is a form of power balancing and a prerequisite of negotiation. The roles of conciliation and more formal mediation are aimed principally at helping to establish and support the movement from violent confrontation toward negotiation.

In Quadrant 4 successful negotiations and mediation lead to a restructuring of the relationship that deals with the fundamental substantive and procedural concerns of those involved. This is what Curle refers to as "increased justice" or "more peaceful relations." He is quick to point out that at any point in the progression, conflict can jump ahead, or cycle between several of the quadrants for extensive periods of time.

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[16] Lederach, *Building Peace,* 64-66.

5 – 2 Religious Approaches to Conflict and Peace

Purpose

⊙ To explore more specifically how our religious identity influences our understanding of conflict and peace and how this might differ from a more "typical" analysis of conflict causes and dynamics.

Directions: Religious Approaches to Conflict

1. **Introduce the Session**: Explain that as with all of the exercises in this section, the purpose is not to come to definitive conclusions, but to explore commonalities and differences in our understandings about peace and conflict.

2. **Large Group Activity**: Facilitate the group's selection of a conflict situation for study during this activity. The list generated in the previous activity could be a place to start in selecting a case. The group should have at least general knowledge of the situation chosen.

3. **Individual Reflection**: Ask participants to reflect on the ways in which the teachings of their religious or spiritual tradition influence their views of a conflict situation as they answer the following questions according to their own belief system:

   ❍ What would your faith tradition say are the root causes of this conflict?

   ❍ Would your perspective lead you to automatically judge which of the parties are right and which are wrong in terms of issues, positions, and possible resolutions to the conflict?

   ❍ What would your tradition say that the parties involved in the conflict should do to resolve the situation?

   ❍ What does your religious tradition say to you about whether and how to intervene to help this situation?

4. **Small Group Sharing:** After the group has had enough time to respond to all of the questions individually, form groups of two to four people and ask them to spend 10 minutes sharing their answers. The groups should be formed by people who do not know one another well and who are from different traditions or different groups within one faith community. Ask people to listen silently while others are speaking and to ask clarifying questions the speaker has finished.

5. **Large Group Discussion:** After all have shared, bring the large group back together to reflect on the following questions:

    ❍ What were the differences and similarities in the responses?

    ❍ What strengths for interfaith peacebuilding can the group find in the differences?

    ❍ What challenges might there be due to the differences?

    ❍ What are the implications overall for interfaith peacebuilding?

Directions: Religious Approaches to Peace

1. **Introduce the Session:** Begin the discussion by reminding the group that religious visions for peace have long been a sustaining force for peacebuilders, providing strength, hope, and courage in the face of war, violence, and oppression.

2. **Paired Sharing:** Ask participants to pair up with a partner from a different religious or spiritual tradition. Provide a few minutes of silence for reflection on the following questions, after which participants share their reflections with their partner.

Think of one important metaphor or image for peace in your tradition.

❍ How is this image connected to the root teachings of your faith?

❍ Describe in detail the qualities and aspects of this image.

❍ Does it represent the present, past, or the future?

❍ If this image for peace could be fully realized this moment, what would change?

❍ What are the implications of this image for peacebuilding? How, for example, might its meanings be tapped to inspire or guide practice?

3. **Large Group Discussion:** When all have had a chance to share, bring the group back together.

❍ Ask each person to quickly name (but not give a long description of) the metaphor or image of peace their partner shared with them, and also a key religious teaching or belief that it is linked to.

❍ When all have spoken, ask the group the following questions:

❍ What was different, what was similar in the images of peace?

❍ What are the implications of these images for interfaith peacebuilding?

Materials needed: Easels, large sheets of newsprint or large paper, markers.

Size of group: 20-25 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

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5 – 3 Religious Peacebuilding Analysis and Action:

Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore how religious understandings of conflict and peace influence planning and engaging in peacebuilding action.

Directions

1. **Individual Reading:** Distribute the case study and allow 15 -20 minutes for participants to carefully read it.

2. **Small Group Discussion:** Form small groups of two to three people to discuss the case study. The following questions can be used to guide the discussion:

   - ❍ How were religious and nonreligious lenses used in analyzing the causes and dynamics of conflict in Sri Lanka?

   - ❍ How were religious and nonreligious lenses used in planning for and engaging in peacebuilding actions by the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement?

   - ❍ What are the similarities and differences between the conclusions in this case study and those that members of the group would come to using their own experiences and religious teachings as guides for analysis?

   - ❍ What would an interfaith analysis of this conflict case look like?

   - ❍ What would an interfaith peace plan look like?

   - ❍ What are the implications for interfaith peacebuilding?

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the group together, and have participants share the highlights from the small group discussions. After all have shared, ask the group to reflect on the following questions:

   ❍ How can religious approaches to the understanding of conflict and peace contribute to the peacebuilding efforts of the group?

   ❍ What challenges would the group face in using religious perspectives in planning, carrying out, and evaluating peacebuilding activities?

Materials needed: Easels, large sheets of newsprint or other paper, markers; handout, "The Sarvodaya People's Peace Plan"

Size of group: 20-25 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Complexity: Medium

Risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

ℂℬ   Handout 5 – 3

The Sarvodaya People's Peace Plan

Background

The nineteen-year civil war between the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) and the Government of Sri Lanka has resulted in the death of over 60,000 people. Approximately 800,000 people, one-third of whom are children, have been displaced, sometimes several times. Of the 2.5 million people living in the areas directly affected by conflict, approximately 1 million are children under the age of eighteen.[17]

The Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement in Sri Lanka "… began as an educational experience in the mid-1950s, when a group of high school teachers in Colombo, Sri Lanka, decided to translate their convictions into action. They organized 'shramadana' camps in which groups of students from relatively affluent urban homes gave up their vacations to share their resources, especially their time, thoughts and efforts, and work in the country's most backward and out-caste villages, whether Sinhala, Tamil, or Muslim. They went wherever they were invited."[18]

Conflict Analysis[19]

It is common knowledge that there is a disturbed situation in Sri Lanka today where legalised structural violence prevails and extra-legal violent methods are used as well to resolve conflicts. Some call it an "ethnic problem." Some others call it a "terrorist problem." Yet others call it a "militant struggle for liberation." There are still other groups trying to identify it with a more simplistic description, calling it a kind of war between the Sinhala Buddhist majority and the Tamil Hindu minority. Whatever it is, there is violence and counter-violence which has already taken a toll of several thousand lives, most of them innocent and powerless people who could not comprehend what was going on around them.

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[17] See http://www.unicef.org/infobycountry/srilanka.html.
[18] See http://sarvodaya.org/Introduction/sarvodayaover.html.
[19] Excerpted from A. T. Ariyaratne, "Nonviolent Buddhist Problem-Solving in Sri Lanka,"
http://www.globalnonviolence.org/docs/buddhism/chapter8.pdf.

What is most needed seems not to be highly academic peace plans, full of minute legal details, but a down to earth approach within the reach of ordinary citizens of the country. As a non-academic, I agreed to speak on this subject because it is in such a layman's exercise that I am involved, with others, through the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement, at the moment. Most people feel that Sarvodaya is "Buddhist thinking" in development action. Also, the Sarvodaya efforts can be described as peacemaking in Sri Lanka in the Buddhist context. As I am qualified to talk only about what I am directly involved in, I will confine myself to Sarvodaya efforts in peacemaking.

Let me have a look at the political structure. Political parties in practice promote what is called in Buddhism the four defilements, namely, *chanda*, *dvesha*, *bhaya,* and *moha*. By *chanda* we mean the bringing about of alienation between one another in the minds of the people. The existing caste, linguistic, racial, communal, or other differences are surreptitiously and sometimes openly used by political parties to promote their own self-interest, instead of promoting compassion and the idea of well-being of all in the minds of people.

Dvesha is ill will. Organised gossip, rumour, falsehood, and so on supplement various kinds of apparently democratic, political, and economic propaganda, carried out by most of the leaders of political parties. This explains the origin of a lot of the violent confrontations we witness in Sri Lanka today.

The third characteristic, *bhaya,* is mutual fear. In post-independent Sri Lanka, while an unjust, unhealthy, and a borrowed party political system was kept going for the benefit of a small class of people, to whatever party they belonged to, mutual suspicion and fear among common people also kept gathering momentum.

The economic goals, structures and processes that are officially promoted also are not, in my opinion, conducive to building peace in a Buddhist way. Promoting consumerism is one extreme which Lord Buddha rejected as Kamasukhallikanuyoga.

So the economic environment is not conducive to the mental peace and contentment of individuals and communities when it is supported by a vicious power-oriented political system. In a Buddhist society, neither political nor economic activities promoted by the state should

contradict the teachings of the Buddha. Furthermore, in both these fields of human activity there are teachings that can guide a state dedicated to following the teachings of the Buddha.

Primarily, a Buddhist has to abstain from killing, stealing, committing adultery, lying, and consuming intoxicants. When all five injunctions are formally promoted directly or indirectly by the state it is far from building a Buddhist economy. When speaking of economic development, Lord Buddha not only stressed the importance of increased efficiency in production (*Uttana Sampada*), but also the importance of the protection of resources and the environment (*Arakkha Sampada*), a friendly social milieu in which economic activities should take place (*Kalyana Mittata*) and a wholesome lifestyle towards which all the economic activities are directed (*Sama Jeevakata*).

Production and consumption do not constitute the totality of life and society. They are the material foundation on which higher objectives pertaining to human life and culture are to be attained. The way in which production, distribution, consumption, technology, and marketing are carried out determines whether these higher objectives are promoted or hampered. The economy in Sri Lanka makes it very difficult to realise these higher aspirations. The lack of a spiritual balance is resulting in widespread ecological and environmental problems which in turn affect the thinking and conduct of human beings.

The Sarvodaya Peace Plan in Action[20]

The Sarvodaya approach to peacemaking is twofold. Firstly, the movement tries to re-establish a value system while also promoting technologies and structures that would lead to a sustainable society. Secondly, the movement addresses itself to the problems that need immediate attention even though their origin is in the present arrangement of the political, economic, and social structure of our society. The latter programme is something like bringing relief, rehabilitation, and reconciliation to people who have been affected by violence. The former is an attempt to remove the causes that have brought about the present state of unrest.

Sarvodaya is a Buddhist concept. It literally means the "awakening of all." *Shramadana* means, "sharing of one's time, thought, and effort." Sarvodaya thought and Shramadana action form the foundation upon which the movement was begun.

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[20] Excerpted from A.T. Ariyaratne, "Nonviolent Buddhist Problem-Solving in Sri Lanka,"
http://www.globalnonviolence.org/docs/buddhism/chapter8.pdf.

That which is easiest to part with or share with others are one's thoughts and efforts. So, the Sarvodaya activities begin with Shramadana camps where men, women, and children in communities share their labour to satisfy various needs of communities.

In Buddhist philosophy four principles of social conduct are advocated. They are *dana* (sharing), *priya vacana* (constructive speech), *arthacharya* (constructive activity), and *samanathmatha* (equality). In a Shramadana camp, these four principles are always kept in the forefront and practiced. For peacemaking the psychosocial benefits of a camp are often more important than its physical achievements. The participants in these camps come from many different sociopolitical backgrounds and after going through the Shramadana camp experience they usually leave with barriers overcome and a feeling of being one with humanity. Peacemaking on a national level is inconceivable without all the people in the country coming together on a psychological level.

I should even venture on to call such a process spiritual infrastructure building. In a Buddhist society, loving kindness, compassion and respect for life are given highest priority. As children we were not allowed to harass, harm, or kill even a small living insect like a mosquito. In the Karaniya Metta Sutta, the Buddha teaches the importance of extending loving kindness towards all beings. A friendly mental energy is irradiated from the minds of people who live in a cultural milieu in which respect for all life is an accepted principle. In such a spiritual climate, the language spoken to one another becomes pleasant and interpersonal relationships become constructive, affectionate, selfless, and nonviolent.

In a Buddhist society, it is essential that a sustainable and simple lifestyle is encouraged and held in high social esteem. Without resorting to wrong livelihood, it is possible in most instances to maintain such a lifestyle with locally available resources. Self-reliance and community projects can play a vital role in achieving such needs.

Sarvodaya's Objectives and Strategies[21]

Objectives

- ☉ Transform the consciousness of war.
- ☉ Break the stalemate in thinking that leads to perpetual war.
- ☉ Articulate a comprehensive peace program, implemented at the village level.
- ☉ Plan and execute peace activities at the village level, using every Sarvodaya program and project.
- ☉ Form linkages and dialogue with all parties. Revive mutual respect, confidence and trust among all Sri Lankans.

Strategies

- ☉ Use the Peace Meditation to take the war out of our hearts and thoughts. The Peace Meditation anchors our minds and hearts to nonviolence and awakens in us a deeper level of compassion.
- ☉ Work with all victims of the war, including the combatants, their families, civilians, children, and others.
- ☉ Change the climate of war to a climate of peace.
- ☉ Redirect the conversation about war and peace; redefine the war.
- ☉ Do emotional healing (taking the fuel out of the fire). Actively build bridges between the Sinhalese and Tamil people, as well as all other ethnic and religious groups.
- ☉ Talk about the "Sarvodaya Peace Plan" in all conversations, meetings, and Sarvodaya sponsored events.
- ☉ Actively resist all acts of violence, no matter who perpetrates it and no matter what the stated reason.
- ☉ Implement the 5R Programme (Relief, Rehabilitation, Reconstruction, Reconciliation, and Reawakening) to assist all those who have suffered in the war in all parts of the country.

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[21] "The Solution to Continuing War: An Overview of the Sarvodaya People's Peace Plan," http://sarvodaya.org/PeaceInitiative/SarvodayaPeoplesPeacePlan.htm.

5 – 4 Joint Conflict Analysis

The field of conflict resolution and transformation offers many tools and techniques that can be applied to an interfaith setting, among them: conflict analysis, visioning, problem solving, and compassionate listening and communication skills. This section focuses on one of the basic and primary tools that can assist interfaith group members to enhance their understanding of their own conflicts. Participants can use this conflict-assessment tool to further their own dialogue processes or to assist in planning a conflict intervention.

Often people who are involved in a conflict situation or live in a conflict zone find it challenging to capture the dynamics and history of their own conflict. This activity asks participants to analyze a conflict in which the participants are involved and on which the group is divided. The major challenge, then, is to be able to conduct such an analysis in a joint forum, considering all the parties' perspectives, as opposed to the typical practice of describing the conflict using our own set of lenses only.

Our religious, national, ethnic, or other types of biases affect the way in which we interpret the history and issues in a conflict and frame the solutions. It is much more comfortable to tell our own story without consideration of the view of the "other." One of the reasons conflicts persist is that parties often are unable to take into consideration the ways and perspectives of others. To counteract the tendency to view conflict unilaterally, this activity gives members of the group an opportunity to think jointly about their conflict's history, issues, and possible alternatives for dealing with it.

Purpose

- ⊙ To deepen our understanding of the complexity of a conflict and challenge our ability to respect other views.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Remind participants that even in cohesive and friendly groups, members experience conflict differently or have differing views on conflicts in the larger society. People may wish to bring in information that documents their viewpoint on the conflict.

2. **Small Group Analysis:** Form small groups of four to five people. Ask each group to select an issue on which they hold differing strong views and to analyze the selected conflict situation using the some of the questions on the handout as a guide.

   Explain that the objective of each group is to attempt an objective analysis, taking into account the perceptions of the different members. The purpose of this exercise is not to resolve the conflict, but to understand its complexity.

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the groups together to share their findings. The following questions can be used to guide discussion:

   ❍ What overall insights have you gained?

   ❍ What were the challenges you faced in conducting a joint analysis of a conflict on which you have strong views?

   ❍ What are the implications for the group's work in peacebuilding?

   ❍ What might the group do to follow up or continue this activity?

Materials needed: Writing materials: handouts: "Conflict Analysis Framework" and "Conflict Analysis Chart"

Size of group: 20-25 five people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Medium

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

☙   Handout 5 – 4a

Conflict Analysis Framework[22]

The Parties and Their Relationship

❍ Who are the parties?

❍ Who is responsible for making the decisions?

❍ Who may be affected by potential solutions?

❍ Who may be able to block or ensure a particular decision?

❍ How is each party organized?

❍ What is the power base of each of the parties?

❍ How has the power been used in the situation?

❍ What do each of the parties want?

❍ What has been their relationship in the past?

❍ What is the current status of the relationship?

❍ What is their desire(s) for a future relationship?

❍ Is religious affiliation is used to form parties? If so, how?

The Substance

❍ What are the issues?

❍ How does each party see the available options for each issue?

❍ What are the needs for data and information?

❍ How does religion affect the nature of the issues?

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[22] Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Jerusalem, November 1995.

Background, Context, and Formal Process

- ❍ What is the history of the situation? How has religion affected the various perceptions of the conflict's history?

- ❍ Are there any external conditions that must be observed or parties that must be followed?

- ❍ Is there a formal process that is typically used for resolving these issues?

Strategic Issues

- ❍ Are there any likely existing forums for resolving the issues?

- ❍ How does each party set its alternatives?

 C３ Handout 5 – 4b

Conflict Analysis Chart

Options		
Cultural Religious		
Historical		
Power -		
Power +		
Interests		
Positions		
Parties		

Activities for Holding an Interfaith Dialogue

Dialogue has become one of the basic tools of interfaith relationships. At this critical time we, people of faith, need to sharpen this tool, to travel into the harder places, and find the way into deeper, more meaningful and transformative dialogue. This guide invites us to go further than we have gone before.

The exercises in this section will pull together skills we have covered in earlier sections, and help the group learn to use them in planning an interfaith dialogue event as a peacebuilding tool for their community.

The term *interfaith dialogue* is, in a general sense, a shorthand description for many forms of interfaith interaction. There is no one fixed model of interfaith dialogue that practitioners or scholars can point to as most effective or beneficial in peacebuilding. The nature of the participants (their intentions and goals, level of awareness, level of risk taking, background, etc.) and the context (political, economic, and social conditions and nature of the interfaith relations, etc.) determine the type of interfaith dialogue that will work in various settings.

In a more particular sense, the term *dialogue* is used to describe conversation characterized by deep listening, speaking from the heart as well as the mind, and open-ended in its goals and course. Not all "interfaith interaction" is dialogue in this sense of the term. Some interfaith interactions involve debates, or formal or informal teachings (lectures and presentations). The dialogical interfaith process takes place in a group space that allows for new explorations and learning about one's own and others' faiths, and moves people to recognize their own biases and to walk new paths with people of other faith groups. The handout "Listening in Dialogue" (Activity 5-7) may be given to group members to help explain the more particular use of the word dialogue.

There are two main types of interfaith interaction:

1. One type focuses on exploring theological differences and commonalities between various faith groups. This can take place through examination of scriptures and other texts and the meaning of religious rituals, practices, and/or holy sites.

2. The second type of interfaith interaction focuses on religious interpretations and approaches to contextual issues, such as those in the social, political, or cultural spheres.

Many interfaith groups combine the two types in their interactions, despite the usual call of religious clergy to confine theological explorations to interfaith discussion among specialists in each of the faith groups.

The following proposed activities invite all participants to explore and experience these two levels of interfaith dialogue, while acknowledging that many of the people taking part do not consider themselves to be experts in theology. The activities invite participants to express their understanding of their faith in their own words regardless of the level of expertise in theological matters. Groups and individuals may, however, also invite experts from their faith groups to provide background information on any of the issues under discussion.

5 – 5 Interfaith Dialogue as a Tool for Change:

Case Study

Interfaith dialogue is a process of interaction in which the spirituality of the participants is central to the encounter experience, to building relationships, and to helping change attitudes. It may focus on gaining a deeper theological understanding of one's own and others' religious belief systems, gaining knowledge and familiarity with the religious rituals and practices of the "other," or on political and social issues (especially those that affect the participants in the dialogue).

Sharing a developed example of interfaith dialogue, such as watching a film or reading a case study, is a good way to begin conversation in a group and will help to stimulate thought and discernment among the members. A report from an interfaith dialogue group that includes Muslims, Christians, and Jews in Israel and Palestine is included in this activity.

Purpose

- ⊙ To prepare the group to explore how it can use interfaith dialogue as a tool for change in its community.

Directions

1. **Preparation**: Choose a film or video that documents an interfaith dialogue. A list of recommended titles is in "Interfaith Books, Articles, and Films," in the Resources section of this guide. Feel free, however, to use other films or documentaries that are accessible to your group. If a film is difficult to obtain or show, you may substitute a case study of your choosing or use the example below. The goal is to use an actual example of interfaith dialogue to engage group members in discussion regarding their own style of interfaith dialogue.

2. **Introduce the Session**: Set the stage for discussion of the film or case study by asking participants to share their ideas about and perceptions of a successful interfaith dialogue.

→ Share the list of proposed questions for discussion afterwards.

→ Ask participants to take notes on the film, giving thought to how this case(s) of interfaith dialogue relates to our group work?

3. **Large Group Viewing or Reading:** Show the film or distribute copies of (or read to the group) a case study of interfaith dialogue, for example, "Interfaith Dialogue in Israel-Palestine: A Report from Interfaith Encounter Association."

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Facilitate a discussion regarding the nature of dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding. Use some or all of the following questions to start the discussion. Have someone note the main points of the discussion on a flip chart or chalkboard.

❍ What is interfaith dialogue according to the members of the group in the film or case study?

❍ What are the goals of interfaith dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding?

❍ What conditions are necessary to engage in meaningful interfaith dialogue?

❍ How is interfaith dialogue different from other forms of dialogue? What can be accomplished through interfaith dialogue?

Use this second set of questions to focus the group on itself by comparing their reactions to the cases shown in the film:

❍ How is our interfaith interaction and dialogue different from the case presented?

❍ Is this case appropriate to adopt in our context?

❍ What are the strengths of our group compared with the case study presented?

5. **Closing:** Summarize some of the main themes that emerged from the discussion. Some key categories are: criteria for successful interfaith dialogue; obstacles facing interfaith dialogue groups; and sources of inspiration for interfaith groups. Time permitting, you may invite the group to address the following question:

   ❍ Based on the film or case study and this discussion, what is appropriate for our group to do next in terms of interfaith dialogue? (The group might wish to pursue further preparation by exploring other films or publications such as books, documents, or reports on interfaith dialogue.)

Materials needed: Interfaith film or video and projector or printed case study; list of questions, writing materials

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: Approximately 1½ hours (add discussion time of 45 minutes to 1 hour to the length of the film)

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

ଔ Handout 5 – 5

Interfaith Dialogue in Israel-Palestine[23]

Reconciliation in Judaism, Islam, and Christianity

Some forty participants came to the sixth Israeli-Palestinian interfaith conference, organized by the Interfaith Encounter Association (IEA) and the Nablus Youth Federation (NYF). The conference was mainly funded by the European Commission and also enjoyed a generous grant from the Public Affairs Office of the United States Embassy in Tel Aviv.

This conference was, unfortunately, less successful then previous conferences on the level of interaction between the full two groups. However, there were many sub-groups formed during the conference — either the planned small groups or groups formed spontaneously or at the initiative of participants — that reached meaningful depths and created wonderfully positive interaction between those who took part in them. We believe that the problems this conference suffered from are largely a result of the fact that both IEA and NYF insisted to continue the process even during the Muslim fasting month of Ramadan and in any case we are committed to do our best to improve the process in the future. Still we have to bear in mind that such a conference succeeded to happen in our present reality and that it did have the humanization impact on its participants. Therefore we do see this conference as an important step forward, even if a bit smaller than usual.

The conference started on Thursday with dinner that broke the fast of the Muslim participants, many of whom spent many hours on the roads from Nablus. Then we moved to the plenary hall where we opened the conference with introductions by the directors of NYF and IEA and with greetings of the representative of the United States Embassy, Ms. Cherrie Daniels, director of the American Cultural Center in Jerusalem, who stressed the essential role of such dialogue in the process of building peace in the region. Following the opening remarks, participants went into small groups, introducing themselves through personal information and through the sharing of a reconciliation story from their social life. The evening concluded with a performance of the joint Jewish-Arab group of Ofer Golani and Abu Nicola who sang songs in Hebrew and Arabic with the active participation of the audience.

23

Friday started with the study of the Jewish view of reconciliation. It started with a presentation by Dr. Michael Kagan, who spoke about the reconciliatory move from a black-and-white picture to the colorful picture of the rainbow, that represents the acceptance of the variety of humankind and giving room to each color to improve itself on its own pace. Then he described the stories of hatred between brothers in the Torah — Cane and Abel, Jacob and Esau, Joseph and his brothers — and their correction in the harmonious brotherhood of Moses and Aaron. Finally, he spoke about the annual cycle of reconciliation that starts with reconciliation with one's self in Pesach, when each person is expected to go out of his personal limitations (*Meizarim*) represented by Egypt (*Mizrayim*), moves to the Ninth of Av that opens the hearts to the suffering of others, then to the Day of Atonement when we are with God like angels, and finally in Sukkot when we are with the whole of humanity.

Then we all joined the Muslim Jumaa prayer after which we started the Muslim session. Ms. Raneen Msmar presented the Muslim view: God formed the human beings, preferred them over other creators, and gave them the ability to think and create and be aware of their being and gave them resources for creativity. A central concept in Islam is the *Shura* — to sit and discuss, to talk about different opinions and accept them. It is a social issue that exists also in governmental approaches. Raneen concluded that Islam is a religion of reconciliation and peace, and although politics distorted the real purpose of the religions, it didn't manage to destroy everything as we are still sitting here and talking peace.

The issue was further elaborated in the small groups. They talked about what is reconciliation and how can it be achieved. In the Islamic tradition, when there is a conflict between two people they approach the Kadi (the Judge) that refers them to the Koran, and asks them to read it together first and see if they can find the solution themselves, without external help. Then a *Sulha* (reconciliation) is performed and compensation is given if needed, in a good atmosphere accompanied with food. After the Muslim session, we listened to and actively participated with the Drummers Circle who came to visit us and to give us the unique chance to drum together. After the Jewish Kabalat Shabbat prayer and dinner we came together for a *Hafla* (a party).

Saturday began with the Christian perspective delivered by Dean Ross Jones of St. George's College in Jerusalem and the following discussion: True reconciliation happens when we look at the end for which God created us, an end represented by the harmony of the Garden of Eden. God wants us to live in peace with himself and the world, as well as with each other. The Tower of Babel then describes lack of communication as a punishment for the human self-centeredness that destroyed our harmony. True reconciliation, therefore, must involve both a

restoration of communication and a recovery of the humility that counteracts self-centeredness. Not only does reconciliation involve both forgiveness and justice, it is greater than both and happens alongside both. Reconciliation can never wait until after either forgiveness or justice is felt by both sides.

Perhaps the most original ethical contribution made by Jesus is the command to "love your enemy," and the teaching is made in many ways. We must individually and corporately reach out to others in a different way than we have done in the past. We reach out in the confidence that God will guide us, because ultimate reconciliation is a gift of God. That guidance is the power of the Holy Spirit and it is not by accident that Pentecost enabled all to hear "in their own language." Communication and reconciliation had been restored. So we begin by acknowledging the sovereignty of God. Then we are very honest with ourselves and others about our own contribution to the present mess the world is in. Finally we ask God to guide us in responding only to the BEST that is in ourselves and the world, and that includes giving of ourselves for our enemies, as well as for those we love. God and the world deserve no less.

Finally we concluded in a concluding session and fare welled with jointly praying the Jewish and Muslim prayers for safe travel — for the long journey the Palestinian participants were starting back home.

A report from the grassroots Middle Eastern URI group, Israel Interfaith Encounter, to the United Religions Initiative network, November 2003.

5 – 6 Facilitating Interfaith Dialogue

Conducting dialogue is a complex process that requires careful preparation and trust building, as well as appropriate conditions for dialogue. It also requires experience, which comes with practice. This activity is intended to be repeated several times as practice, selecting a new theme and/or setting each time, in order to build up experience and confidence.

Purpose

⊙ To allow the group to identify and practice the skills needed to conduct interfaith dialogue as a tool for peacebuilding in the larger community.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Begin by looking as a group at the guidelines and best practices developed in Section Two, especially "Holding an Interfaith Gathering" and "Creating a Safe Environment." These may be made available as a handout or written onto large sheets of paper and posted in the room.

    ❍ Remind the group as well of the points discussed in the previous activity, "Interfaith Dialogue as a Tool for Change: Case Study," and distribute Handout 5-6, the guidelines for "Listening in Dialogue."

2. **Large Group Discussion:** Ask the group to explore what guidelines, best practices, and skills are most important for interfaith dialogue, as opposed to other forms of dialogue, or other forms of interfaith interaction? Post this list of interfaith guidelines to refer to during the rest of this exercise.

3. **Setting the Stage for Interfaith Dialogue:** The next several steps involve the group in setting up and conducting an actual dialogue and exploring important conditions and practicing certain skills as they do so.

→ Ask the group to discuss how the room should be arranged and how the dialogue participants should be seated.

→ Go ahead and set up the room, trying out several ways to do it and exploring the advantages and disadvantages of different setups.

→ Select a room layout to try out in the dialogue.

→ Ask the group to select a pair of people to be co-facilitators for the first part of a dialogue.

→ Have the group develop a role description for the facilitators, which is written on a large sheet of paper and posted on the wall as a reminder during the practice dialogue.

→ Select a topic of interest to the group for the practice dialogue.

→ Each co-facilitator team can prepare some initial questions to lead the discussion (see, for example, questions in "Models for Interfaith Dialogue," Handout 5-8b).

→ After setting the group guidelines, the facilitators may propose some of the following questions for discussion (this is a generic set of questions; the facilitators and participants should change them to fit their context and topic under discussion):

❍ What are the primary issues, as perceived by you or your faith group, with regard to this topic?

❍ In your view, how do other people in this group or outside it perceive these issues?

❍ What are the obstacles or challenges that prevent others from agreeing with you?

❍ What is your vision for resolving these differences? How does your faith support and strengthen you to achieve this vision?

❍ How does your faith instruct you to handle differences such as these?

❍ What changes need to happen in order for you to accept, tolerate, or even simply hear the perspectives of others?

4. **Practice Dialogue**: Hold a practice dialogue, stopping after a pre-determined time (30-45 minutes) to review and discuss the dialogue process.

    → Invite the group members to "think like a facilitator" and say what they would do next, how they would like to see the dialogue proceed.

    → New facilitators can be chosen and the dialogue resumed for another set period, after which the dialogue is stopped.

5. **Large Group Discussion**: Ask the group to review the whole process, from setup to the end of the practice dialogue.

    ❍ How did this go?

    ❍ What did we learn about the skills we practiced?

    ❍ What seemed easy?

    ❍ What are some of the challenges of conducting dialogues?

    ❍ How should you deal with:

      ▪ people who won't stop talking?

      ▪ confrontation?

      ▪ confusion?

      ▪ tension?

      ▪ emotions?

      ▪ feeling unfinished at the end?

      ▪ other situations that the group brings up?

    ❍ What more can we do to develop these skills?

    ❍ If we conducted a real dialogue, what more would we have to know and do?

      ▪ Whom should we invite?

      ▪ How would this work with different groups?

      ▪ How would this work with power differences among the groups in dialogue?

      ▪ Differences in culture?

      ▪ Differences in age?

      ▪ Differences in gender?

      ▪ Other questions raised by the group.

6. **Closing:** Discuss whether the group would like to conduct more practice dialogues, selecting a new theme or practice setting.

Materials needed: Writing materials, large sheets of paper

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours is a minimum for this exercise

Level of complexity: Moderate

Level of risk: Low to moderate

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

℀   Handout 5 – 6a

Listening in Dialogue[24]

What is conversation? At the most basic level it is a generic term for people talking together. That seems pretty simple, and yet a good conversation — being able to connect with each other — is something we don't often experience. We yearn to be in community and we haven't been taught the skills to discern how to listen and speak to each other.

A practice that trains us to have meaningful conversations, to listen and speak with our hearts, is the art of dialogue. The word dialogue is used a lot these days — but often it turns out to mean a serial monologue! You say what's on your mind, then I say what's on my mind, and we are not really listening to each other. It could just as easily be done by two tape recorders talking to each other. There is no interaction.

The following guidelines have evolved from nearly twelve years of practicing the dialogue process with the Alliance for Spiritual Community, a grassroots interfaith organization, and The Listening Center, which offers classes, workshops, and retreats on the sacred art of listening. The roots of this practice come from the work of Dr. David Bohm, a physicist who became interested in the way humans learn and think, particularly collectively. Over the years he developed a deep understanding of this conversation which he called dialogue. One of the major points of his teaching is the distinction between dialogue and discussion.

Dialogue is from the Greek *dia* (through) and *logos* (meaning or word). So a dialogue is a flow of meaning through words in which new understandings emerge that might not have been present before. It is done in a spirit of inquiry — wanting to know. We look for shared meaning, beyond our individual understanding.

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[24] Kay Lindahl . Used with permission.

Discussion is from the Latin *dis* (apart) and *quatare* (to shake). It's the same root word as percussion and concussion — to break things up. A discussion is an analysis, looking for an answer. It is done in a spirit of looking for results. Each person states his or her analysis of the situation with the hope of influencing the other's position on the issue.

One is not better than the other — both are valid means of communicating. It's simply useful to know what kind of conversation you are engaging in. If one person is in the mode of a dialogue, wanting to explore an issue, and the other person is looking for a solution for this issue, they are really in two different types of conversations. It's small wonder that each person feels unheard. The first person wants to know why the second is in such a rush to action; and the second person is wondering why the first person can't make a decision. They are each listening for something different. They are not connecting. Listening to what kind of conversation we are in is not only useful, it is also a key to effective communication. The interplay between dialogue and discussion forms the dance of daily conversation. We simply need to know what dance we are in and learn the appropriate steps.

These guidelines are designed to facilitate this type of dialogue and to create a safe space for the conversation.

Guidelines

- Respect and honor differences: listen for understanding, not to agree with or believe what is being said.

- You don't have to agree with or believe what the other person is saying to listen to understand them. A wise person once said: "You can honor what someone says without owning it."

- Relate your personal experiences. Speak for yourself, not for others in the group or in your tradition. Avoid generalizations.

- The only person you can really speak for is yourself. Notice how often the terms "We all know," "Everyone says," "Of course," "You know" come into your conversation. Own what you say by using the word "I".

- Suspend assumptions, judgments, evaluations, titles, and status. Notice when you feel surprised or upset about what is being said. Look to one of these areas to see if you are letting them get in the way of understanding the other.

- Dialogue is a collegial experience with no seniority or hierarchy. Each person is an expert in their own lives, which is what they bring to the dialogue. When you find yourself judging or evaluating what is being said, simply notice it and then get back to listening to understand what is being said.

- Focus on inquiry and reflection. Ask open-ended questions with the intention of gaining insight and perspective. Take time to reflect on what has been said, to notice how we are connected.

- Dialogue is a slower conversation as we honor what's been said and reflect on what wants to be said next. Allow for times of silence.

- Release the need for an outcome. The purpose of dialogue is to be open to new understanding, not to come up with an answer or a solution.

- We live in a results-oriented culture. Dialogue is an opportunity to explore a topic. Discussion is a conversation in which you are setting goals and objectives and looking for results. These are two different types of conversation.

5 – 7 Criteria and Conditions for Effective Interfaith Dialogue: Assessing Our Own Dialogue Process

This activity is designed to assist members of an interfaith group in examining their perceptions regarding their ongoing interfaith dialogue process, to become more aware of the different individual and collective expectations and criteria that exist in the group, and possibly to improve the conditions for their interfaith dialogue.

Purpose

⊙ To evaluate and improve the effectiveness of interfaith dialogue.

Directions

1. **Preparation**: Ahead of time, encourage group members to think about their recent meetings and interactions with one another and to bring to this meeting an item that reminds them of the beginning of their work together in interfaith dialogue. This item will be used in the closing (see below).

2. **Large Group Discussion:** Introduce the following list of possible conditions and criteria that lead to an effective dialogue process, either by reading them or presenting them on a chalkboard or flip chart paper.

Effective Interfaith Dialogue: Conditions and Criteria

❍ Establish certain degree of open communication and trust.

❍ Address asymmetric power relationships in the group, making sure that the facilitation and group dynamics are based on fair representation and capture the needs of the minority members and not only members of the dominant culture(s), religion(s), or political group(s).

❍ The moderator and participants follow the rule of qualifying statements to avoid generalizations; for example, instead of saying, "Christians think or believe," you can say, "there are certain Christian groups who believe…".

❍ Focus on specific issues or tasks to accomplish.

❍ Allow time for *intra*-faith dialogue, too.

❍ At some point aim for actions or joint activities that provide the group with a concrete outcome for their series of meetings.

3. **Facilitate a discussion** of the above list of conditions with questions such as:

❍ How do these conditions apply to our interfaith group?

❍ Based on our experience, what can be added to this list?

❍ How can we measure the effect of our interfaith dialogue process?

→ The facilitator may also propose that the group identify the obstacles that prevent it from achieving its expectations, objectives, and full potential, and then discuss alternative ways to address these obstacles, especially those aspects of the process that the group can affect directly, such as time, scheduling problems, communication, etc.

4. **Closing:** Celebrating the group's accomplishments is an excellent way to conclude this activity. Ask participants to identify the positive aspects and the benefits for them from the interfaith dialogue experience, both as individuals and a group. Celebrate these accomplishments and learning by standing in circle and having individuals present to the group the items they brought with them, as a reminder of the journey that they have traveled together and a symbol of their renewed commitment to their interfaith dialogue.

Materials needed: Chalkboard or large paper

Size of group: Same as group in previous activities

Time needed: 2-3 hours, depending on the extent of detail and depth to which the group and facilitator decide to examine their ongoing interfaith dialogue process

Level of risk: Low to moderate, depending on subject of dialogue

Level of facilitator competency: Moderate

Level of complexity: Moderate

5 – 8 Bringing Interfaith Dialogue to our Community

Purpose

⊙ To explore opportunities for the interfaith group to take its role as peacebuilder into the community by utilizing the dialogue framework.

Directions

1. **Individual Reflection**: Ask participants to think of a current dispute or conflict in their community that they feel the need to address.

2. **Small Group Discussion**: In small groups of four to six members, select one of the conflicts identified by the people in the small group and conduct a discussion on the following questions (45-60 minutes):

   ❍ If initiating an interfaith dialogue to address this problem: What is the purpose and the specific objectives of the dialogue?

   ❍ Who should be invited to participate?

   ❍ Where should the dialogue take place?

   ❍ Who should convene it?

   ❍ Who will facilitate the dialogue?

   ❍ What specific preparations are needed prior to the dialogue?

   ❍ What would the first session look like in content and style?

   ❍ What are some methods for ensuring sustainability of the dialogue process?

   ❍ What are the criteria for assessing the success of the dialogue meetings?

3. **Large Group Discussion**: Have the small groups present the results of their work. Discuss as a large group the following questions and compare the responses of the different groups.

   ❍ What unique perspectives have emerged as a result of this discussion regarding interfaith dialogue?

○ As an interfaith group, what necessary preparations do we need to make in order to implement the interfaith dialogue in the community?

○ What challenges do we expect to face?

○ What resources are available to assist us in meeting such challenges?

Note: It is recommended that prior to finalizing a plan for interfaith dialogue in the community, the group should examine the process of action planning and other related themes in Section Six of this guide. This will strengthen the intervention plan.

Materials needed: Chalkboard or large paper for each group

Size of group: 4-6 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours, depending on the extent of details and the depth to which the group and facilitator decide to go in planning the interfaith dialogue in the community

Level of complexity: Moderate

Level of risk: Moderate, depending on the selected conflict

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

ɔȝ Handout 5 – 8a

Guidelines for Interfaith Dialogue

These are some possible guidelines for a dialogue group. Please note that any guidelines or agreements become the group's agreements only after the group has amended them as they wish and adopted them at the beginning of the dialogue meeting.

⊙ **Confidentiality:** Agree that personal details and disclosures are not discussed outside the group. You may, however, talk about yourself, your learning, and your personal experience of the dialogue.

⊙ **Respect difference:** You have the right to be different, as do all members of the group.

⊙ **No interruptions:** Give each speaker time to reflect, clarify thoughts, and articulate them. Wait until the other is finished before speaking.

⊙ **Equal time:** Take responsibility for how often you speak in the group and for allowing others equal time.

⊙ **No advice:** Come to your own decisions and conclusions about what is right and appropriate for you. Speak from your own experience and do not give advice to others (e.g., "If I were you I would…" or "You should…").

⊙ **Listen:** Pay close attention to what each person is actually saying, rather than "hearing" what you wish they would say.

⊙ **Speak in the first person — use "I" statements:** Speak directly from your own experience and use "I" or "I feel" rather than "everybody says" or "most people feel." Speak personally, for yourself as an individual, not as a representative of a group or a position.

⊙ **Responsibility:** Take responsibility for what you think, do, say, and feel in each session. Take responsibility for what you do *not* say as well.

⊙ **Disclosure:** Say only what you are comfortable with, no matter what others disclose.

⊙ **Pass:** Honor each person's right to "pass" if he or she is not ready or willing to speak.

> "All who are joined in a genuine dialogue need not actually speak; those who keep silent can on occasion be especially important. But each must be determined not to withdraw when the course of the conversation makes it proper for him to say what he has to say. No one, of course, can know in advance what he has to say; genuine dialogue cannot be arranged beforehand. It has indeed its basic order from the beginning, but nothing can be determined, the course is of the spirit, and some discover what they have to say only when they catch the call of the spirit."
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> Martin Buber[25]

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[25] *The Knowledge of Man* (New York: Harper and Row, 1965).

CB   Handout 5 – 8b

Models for Interfaith Dialogue

There are many possible designs and structures for interfaith dialogue sessions. The following set of questions and instructions may be helpful for groups or individuals in structuring their discussions. Moderators are encouraged to adjust the proposed questions according to their group's needs.

Inter-Group Dialogue[26]: This is an example of a facilitated dialogue between two or more groups. Participants meet first with other members of their own group to prepare answers to the questions below as the basis for discussion in the dialogue session.

1. What would you most like the other group(s) to understand about you?

2. What is an unsolved mystery for you about the other group(s)?

3. If you could ask the other group(s) anything, what would it be?

4. What do you appreciate about the other group(s)?

5. What is your "persistent complaint" about the other group(s)?

6. What is usually not said that needs to be said about your group's relationship with the other group(s)?

7. What would a breakthrough in your relationship with the other group(s) look like?

8. What do we most want to learn from the other group(s)?

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[26] GEM Initiative of Case Western Reserve University, Washington, D.C., 1999.

Facilitated Dialogue Among Individuals[27]: This set of questions can be used for a facilitated dialogue on a selected topic or issue on which there is a certain degree of disagreement among members of a group. Examples of possible topics are:

- ❍ Different religious interpretations or beliefs on specific topics from scriptures or other religious sources (e.g., understandings of life after death, justice, treatment of the stranger or "the other").

- ❍ Religious views on current political or social issues (e.g., the role of women, abortion, homosexuality).

After each of the following questions, allow a few minutes of silence for participants to think through their answer.

- ❍ What is your perspective on this issue? (2 minutes)

- ❍ What is a life experience you've had that shapes your perspective? (3 minutes)

- ❍ What is the heart of the matter for you? (2 minutes)

- ❍ What is your doubt or uncertainty about your perspective? (2 minutes)

- ❍ What questions of clarification would you like to ask the others? (5-10 minutes)

Interfaith Dialogue: A Tool For Confronting Our Biases And Differences: Dialogue is an effective way to enhance an individual's awareness of his or her biases toward other religions or spiritual paths. The format and questions for this exercise are in "Confronting our Biases and Differences" (Activity 4-9).

Interfaith Dialogue: A Tool For Appreciating Our Connectedness: Dialogue is an effective way to enhance individual awareness of personal strengths and the positive or constructive attributes in a person's faith group and that of others. The format and questions for this exercise are in "Appreciating our Connectedness" (Activity 4-11).

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[27] Center for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, D.C., 1999.

Cℬ Handout 5 – 8c

Sample Dialogue Format for Facilitators

This sample dialogue format is presented to illustrate the facilitator's (or co-facilitators') role and some of the considerations and steps that will be common to many different dialogue and discussion formats:

Establish that the main purpose of the dialogue is to clarify and understand the various beliefs and positions regarding the topic. There is no intention to reach an agreement at the end of the discussion. Have the group discuss and agree to these and other appropriate guidelines.

Facilitate the selection of a topic that the group members want to address or clarify. Allow participants to think and reflect on the topic individually for few minutes. If the group feels there is a need, allow time for members to first discuss their views in separate, uni-religious groups.

Allow adequate time for the group to discuss the issue or theme (not less than two hours). The facilitator may propose some of the following questions for discussion. (These are generic questions, which should be freely adapted to fit the topic and context.):

○ What are the primary issues as perceived by you or your religious or spiritual community regarding this topic?

○ How do people of other faith groups perceive this issue?

○ What are the obstacles or challenges that prevent others from agreeing with your perspective?

○ How does your faith instruct you in handling such an issue or disagreement?

○ What changes need to happen for you to be able to tolerate or even accept other perspectives?

○ What is your vision for resolving differences among faith communities on this topic? How does your faith help and strengthen you in achieving this vision?

During the course of the dialogue, the facilitator can help build understanding by highlighting common or similar beliefs or agreements as well as disagreements that have emerged. These can be listed on a flip chart or recorded in notes taken by the facilitator or a rapporteur.

It is essential that the facilitator observe the level of tension in the room and the stress and emotions expressed throughout the discussion. Helpful interventions can be reflecting some of these tense feelings back to the group and guiding the group members in listening more effectively to the different perspectives being expressed.

Depending on the nature of the discussion, the facilitator can bring some conclusion to a dialogue activity by asking participants to share their feelings regarding the discussion, new points of learning, etc. It is important to determine whether the group feels a need for further discussion of the specific topic or whether members feel the issues have been sufficiently explored and clarified.

Activities for Healing and Reconciliation

Conflicts often involve physical and emotional injuries and a great sense of loss. A difficult process of reconciliation and reconstruction is a necessary step to restore and build a genuinely peaceful relationship between conflicting parties. Even when agreements are reached and signed between governments or organizations, animosity, desire for revenge, distrust, and hatred may remain in the hearts and minds of many people who were affected by the conflict. There is a need for new direction and a source of power and authority that can provide hope and allow community members and leaders to move on with their lives. However, Pain and past injuries stand in the way of a new beginning. Religious values of forgiveness and reconciliation can be a highly effective source of inspiration and motivation for working on issues of healing and reconciliation in a postwar context.

Religious rituals and practices have been instrumental in allowing victims of conflict to forgive. The Bereaved Family Forum[28] is an inspiring example of a group that has created bonds between Palestinian and Israeli parents who have lost family members in the conflict between those two peoples. Forum members work together toward peace and reconciliation between their two wider communities.

Religious values and beliefs have generated a spiritual strength and power within and among believers who have worked on healing and reconciliation in their community. A Bosnian Muslim imam who lost all his family members in the Srebrenica massacre participated in interfaith dialogue sessions a few years later with Croatian and Serbian religious leaders. Asked how he could do that and how he felt about participating in such efforts, the imam replied, "In my faith forgiveness and reconciliation are among the highest virtues. I have to do this to be true to my faith."

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[28] Bereaved Family Forum, http://www.mideastweb.org/bereaved_families_forum.htm.

This section addresses the values and principles of healing and reconciliation in different faith traditions and illustrates the transformative power that these spiritual resources can bring to these processes of peacebuilding.

5 – 9 Cycle of Reconciliation and Forgiveness

Regardless of the nature and context of a conflict, certain reactions are common among people experiencing conflict and violence. Scholars and practitioners have developed different models and frameworks to capture the processes of healing and reconciliation. Another set of studies has focused on the conditions and factors that lead certain individuals and groups to engage in reconciliation, while others refuse.

Obviously, there are unique characteristics (cultural, social, religious, political, economic) involved in each conflict that make it difficult to generate one model of reconciliation that applies to all conflicts and all types of individuals.

Nevertheless, there are patterns of reactions in conflict situations that if identified, can be constructive in engaging people in the process of reconciliation. Religious and spiritual teachings and forces can play a significant role. The psychological and cognitive power derived from one's faith and the moral authority bestowed upon devout believers provide individuals and communities with a reservoir of strength that has allowed victims to break free from the cycle of victimhood and reach out to the enemy or the estranged "other" in a process of reconciliation.

Purpose

 ⊙ To understand the processes and patterns of reconciliation and healing in a conflict situation.

 ⊙ To examine and understand about the role religion can play in supporting or obstructing a reconciliation process.

 ⊙ To raise awareness of individual perceptions and community reactions to the process of reconciliation.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask participants to reflect on how their faith traditions instruct them to react to conflict and the potential for reconciliation. Are there certain conditions, for example, that should exist for a reconciliation process to take place? Distribute and explain the handout, "Cycles of Reconciliation and Forgiveness."

2. **Small Group Discussion:** Form small groups to explore the following questions:

   ❍ How does this cycle apply to your own individual and community conflicts?

   ❍ Can you recognize the stages in the cycle?

   ❍ Where do you see yourself and your community in this model of reconciliation?

   ❍ What factors in your context influence or determine people's behavior within the different stages? What would motivate members of your community to engage or refuse to engage in such processes?

   ❍ How might your religious or spiritual understandings help you or others in this process?

   → It is essential that facilitators avoid defending the model or reconciliation as presented in Handout 5-9, but rather invite the group to criticize and reconstruct the model to reflect their own experience with the cycle of violence and efforts toward reconciliation.

3. **Closing:** Conclude by emphasizing the following points:

   ❍ Becoming aware of one's own role and that of the community in maintaining the cycle of violence is a necessary first step in the process of reconciliation.

   ❍ Religious teachings, practices, and rituals can powerfully facilitate reconciliation processes thereby breaking the cycle of revenge and victimhood.

   ❍ Individuals and communities vary in their pace and willingness to move toward reconciliation.

❍ Reconciliation and healing, like other aspects of peacebuilding, are complex processes and cannot be accomplished in a single session. They may be lifelong processes, a journey in which individuals and their communities discover their deepest strengths as well as their limits in living with the "other."

Materials needed: Handout, "Cycles of Reconciliation and Forgiveness"

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 2 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

Cʒ Handout 5 – 9

Cycles of Reconciliation and Forgiveness[29]

Reconciliation

Establishing Justice:
Reviewing history
Negotiating solutions
Joint planning

Establish justice:
Admitting guilt
Public apology

Aggression

Act of "justified"
aggression

Injury
Pain
Shock
Denial

Creating the
"right" history

Surrender
Choice to forgive
Commitment to take risks

Desire for
justice/revenge

Realization of
loss—panic

"Why them?"
Re-humanizing the enemy

Anger—
"why me?"

Accepting loss
Naming/confronting fears

Suppression of
grief & fears

Mourning
Expressing Grief

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[29] Olga Botcharova, "Implementation of Track Two Diplomacy: Developing Model for Forgiveness," *Forgiveness and Reconciliation: Religion, Public Policy, and Conflict Transformation*, Raymond G. Helmick, S.J., and Rodney L. Peterson, eds. (Philadelphia: Templeton Foundation Press, 2001).

5 – 10 Healing, Forgiveness, and Reconciliation in our Faith Traditions

Religious teachings are rich sources for learning about reconciliation and healing. Few people, however, have taken the time to specifically explore such sources in their own tradition or that of other religious and spiritual traditions.

Religious rituals for reconciliation are powerful acts that often invoke strong emotions and can easily mobilize crowds into unexpected gestures of reconciliation and forgiveness.

Religious rituals are often blended with cultural practices and as a result, we may encounter followers of the same faith tradition who perform forgiveness and reconciliation rituals in different ways. This diversity of reconciliation rituals, even within the same tradition, provides a rich store of possibilities that the interfaith group can tap to promote peace in the community.

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore and understand the diverse values and practices of reconciliation in different faiths.

- ⊙ To raise individual and group awareness of their willingness to engage in processes of reconciliation and healing within their communities and also of the limits to their willingness to engage.

Directions

1. **Preparation**: Prior to the meeting, ask group members to bring stories of forgiveness and reconciliation from their religious scriptures or from their experience and also a specific religious ritual that is used in such a context.

2. **Large Group Discussion:** Have representatives from different faith groups present a story and ritual of reconciliation from their tradition. The presentation should not exceed 30 minutes. Allow discussion and questions following each presentation.

    → If the presenters invite group members to participate in the rituals of reconciliation, the facilitator or presenter should make clear that participation in such rituals is voluntary. Certain members may feel uncomfortable in participating, or to do so might violate their own religious requirements.

    → Some possible questions for the general discussion following the presentations are:

       ❍ What are the similarities in values and practices among the different faith traditions presented?

       ❍ What factors and forces make such rituals effective in bringing reconciliation and healing?

    → The facilitator may invite personal stories and examples from members of the group who have participated in rituals such as these in their community.

Materials needed: None

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

STORY: **Caterpillar and Snake**

An African fable about transformation[30]

You know the caterpillar and the snake, the cobra snake. The caterpillar and the snake were chatting, talking to each other in a tree. And the caterpillar said, "I don't know why people and children hate us. Every time they find me, they want to hurt me. They really try to hurt me because they think I ruin their furniture and their houses. They don't like me. I wish they liked me."

The cobra snake said, "You know what? I have the same problem. Every time they see me — the children in the playground — they try to hit me with a stick. They've never liked me." The caterpillar and the snake decided, "We have to do something about it." So the caterpillar went away for two or three days — in biologic time maybe one week. The caterpillar spun a cocoon and what comes out of that? A butterfly! The caterpillar became a butterfly . . . beautiful colors! And he told the snake, "You know what? I'm going to try this new identity and go to those people." The butterfly flies to the kindergarten, to the children's place, and the children see the butterfly. They play with it; they love it; they catch it but they don't harm it.

The caterpillar, now the butterfly — happy! — goes back and tells the snake, "Listen, they like me. They like my new outfit. They like my new identity . . . I'm going to stick to the butterfly." It flies; it's peaceful, having suffered no damage from those humans. The snake says, "I'm going to do the same thing" and it sheds its skin. And the snake crawls after it sheds its skin, and it does have different colors, brighter colors, right? But it's still a snake, right? The snake glides to the children, and the children see the snake and start hitting it with a stick. The snake hurries back to the butterfly. The butterfly asks, "What happened?" "Those people still think I am snake, although I shed my skin!"

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[30] This is an African folk tale with interpretation at the end by Mohammed Abu-Nimer.

The butterfly represents the transformation, the new identity that emerges from authentic peacebuilding. The snake represents the kind of settlement in which people reach a negotiated agreement but have no intention of respecting those agreements and there is no real change. They're just doing something for short-term conflict management.

Religious and spiritual traditions have wellsprings of teachings and practices that can deepen the connection among parties in conflict and help bring genuine transformation to the relationship.

5 – 11 Taking Healing and Reconciliation into Our Community

Engaging in processes of healing and reconciliation requires an enormous degree of courage and risk taking on the part of the people involved. Planning and implementing such processes on a collective basis, at the community or national level, is even more difficult and complex, and there are many challenges and obstacles that may block such efforts. Yet there are examples in which whole nations or large numbers of people have participated in healing and reconciliation processes. The German-French process of reconciliation and healing that followed World War II is often cited as an example of the enormous possibilities that exist when political, religious, and social institutions are all invested in such a process.[31]

This activity explores the possibilities and limits for interfaith healing and reconciliation. Further work in this area will be supported by the action-planning process in Section Six.

Purpose

- ⊙ To explore the possible contribution of an interfaith group to healing in their communities.

- ⊙ To increase the group members' commitment to promote healing in concrete and practical ways in their local environment.

Directions

2. **Small Group Work:** In small groups, ask participants to discuss the question:

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[31] See Alice Ackerman, "Reconciliation as peacebuilding process in Post-war Europe: Franco-German Case," *Journal of Peace and Change Volume* 19:3 (1994). See also the film, "For the Love of Tomorrow, " David Channer, producer and director (London: MRA Productions, 1983), in which a French woman who resisted German occupation meets German delegates to a conference in Switzerland in 1946 and experiences a process of transformation that allows her to conduct several trips to Germany to lecture and meet with German people and officials in a call for reconciliation and forgiveness.

❍ How can we as an interfaith group contribute to the healing of our communities?

→ Next ask the groups to identify three or four situations in the community where healing and reconciliation are needed. Preferably, the situations would be those in which group members themselves feel some need for healing.

→ Ask the groups to brainstorm a list of activities that can be helpful in starting new or supporting existing processes of reconciliation and healing, including symbolic acts as well as practical actions. It may help inspire and stimulate thinking for the facilitator or for members of the small groups to begin by sharing examples from other conflict areas or contexts. Have the groups prepare their suggestions on large sheets of paper to present to the whole group.

3. **Large Group Discussion:** Reconvene as a large group and ask each small group to present their suggestions, recording the proposed activities on a flip chart. Evaluate the list of possible activities according to the following criteria:

❍ Willingness: How willing are the members of the interfaith group to engage in a healing and reconciliation activity in the community?

❍ Experience: Do any of them have experience with this type of activity?

❍ Time: How long would an engagement be likely to take?

❍ Resources: Does the interfaith group have the resources to carry out an activity in the community?

❍ Risk: How risky is the specific activity being considered (emotionally, politically, for security, etc.)?

❍ Cooperation with other groups: Are there other groups inside the community or out who are conducting or might be interested in cooperating on this type of activity?

→ Organizing and carrying out an interfaith activity for healing and reconciliation is a major step in the life of many groups. It is essential that the group be patient and allow the time and space to reach an appropriate level of comfort and confidence in moving forward.

→ If the group does decide to become active in healing and reconciliation in the community, there are some basic conditions for successful action:

- The group should carefully prepare the ritual, event, or action and role play or rehearse it at least once ahead of time.

- Avoid obligatory participation for any shared religious rituals or practices.

- Balanced and fair participation is an important principle in whatever is undertaken. The wider the representation of different faith traditions in the activity, the more likely it will convey the desired message of healing and reconciliation.

Note: It is recommended that the group examine the process of action planning and other related themes in Section Six in this manual prior to finalizing its plan for taking action in the community.

Materials needed: Large sheets of paper, markers

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

Activities for Taking Nonviolent Action

Nonviolent action is a peacebuilding method in which groups or individuals take action to confront violence in some form, be it direct, indirect, or structural (i.e., unjust social, political, and/or economic systems). In comparison to other peacebuilding approaches (dialogue, conflict analysis, peace education, etc.), nonviolent actions demand a greater level of preparation due to the nature of the activities and the potential risks.

Nonviolent action is a form of constructive, active engagement in a conflict situation, often for the purpose of bringing about significant political or social change. Rather than pacifying a conflict, nonviolent action initially serves to escalate the conflict for the purpose of bringing attention to power imbalances and inequities in the system and to restructure the relationship between the contending parties so that they may participate in conflict resolution processes on an equitable basis. Ultimately, this improves the chances of sustainable peace. (See "Tools for Analysis: Conflict Dynamics with Unequal Power," Handout 5-1b.) There may be other forms of pressure used in nonviolent action (e.g., economic boycotts, the mobilization of national or world opinion, shame), but the action is taken with the conviction to not harm the other party, but to persuade it to change its behavior in the conflict.

In this subsection, members of interfaith groups can explore their own understanding of nonviolent values and strategies and that of their faith communities, their potential and their limits with regard to adopting nonviolent action as an interfaith tool for change, and they will have an opportunity to plan an actual nonviolent intervention.

As with other peacebuilding approaches, there are certain conditions that need to be present in the group to engage in such activities or even entertain such the possibility in an interfaith context. They include:

⊙ A sufficient degree of trust is needed among the members in terms of personal safety when such themes are addressed. Nonviolent action can be perceived as highly political and might endanger the group or individuals. Thus it is the responsibility of the facilitator and the group to discuss these issues carefully and weigh the risks.

⊙ When a specific nonviolent action is decided upon by the group, it should be planned as part of a larger set of actions and not as a one-time exercise. (See Section Six on developing a long-term action by your I©nterfaith group.)

⊙ There should be enough time to prepare and allow for role plays, to help participants understand and experience the consequences of their actions.

Note: To adequately prepare the group members, it may be advisable to engage an experienced outside trainer.

"The first thing is to learn and understand what it is; the second, to try it out for oneself. But it cannot be learned like arithmetic grammar. Learning and understanding nonviolence are done from within. So the first steps are self reflection, reflection on the principles, and conversion, that is to say, turning back against the common current."[32]

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[32] Lanza del Vasto, Warriors of Peace: writings on techniques of nonviolence, Michel Random, ed., and Jean Sidgwick, trans. (New York: Alfred A. Knop, 1974), 54.

STORY   Oscar Romero

"Peace is not the product of terror or fear. Peace is not the silence of cemeteries. Peace is not the silent result of violent repression. Peace is the generous, tranquil contribution of all to the good of all. Peace is dynamism. Peace is generosity. It is right and it is duty."

Archbishop Oscar Romero

On March 23, 1980, Archbishop Romero of El Salvador made the following appeal to the men of the armed forces:

"Brothers, you came from our own people. You are killing your own brothers. Any human order to kill must be subordinate to the law of God, which says, 'Thou shalt not kill'. No soldier is obliged to obey an order contrary to the law of God. No one has to obey an immoral law. It is high time you obeyed your consciences rather than sinful orders. The church cannot remain silent before such an abomination.... In the name of God, in the name of this suffering people whose cry rises to heaven more loudly each day, I implore you, I beg you, I order you: stop the repression."

The day following this speech, Archbishop Romero was murdered.

5 – 12 Nonviolent Actions in Our Faith Traditions

Most religious and spiritual traditions have certain teachings, values, and practices that can form a basis for nonviolent action. Many religious communities have one or more leaders (local, regional, national, global) who have placed their religious beliefs and practices into a nonviolent framework. This activity explores the roots of nonviolence in religious principles, values, and practices.

Purpose

⊙ To develop a deeper understanding of the similarities and differences in the teachings on nonviolence of different faiths traditions.

⊙ To deepen the link between faith and nonviolence on the individual and collective levels within the interfaith group.

⊙ To recognize the limits that each faith tradition imposes upon its members, while also understanding how certain religious leaders have managed to expand these boundaries in practicing nonviolence from a faith-based perspective.

Directions

1. **Preparation:** Prior to the activity, have the group choose a representative from each of the different faith traditions in the group to prepare a presentation of 20-30 minutes on nonviolent traditions in their faith. Encourage the presenters to identify specific materials and to bring stories, pictures, texts, and concrete illustrations in support of — or rejecting — nonviolent strategies. Alternatively, the group can invite guest presenters from a number of different faith traditions.

2. **Large Group Presentations:** Facilitators can assist the speakers in preparing dynamic and interactive presentations. Observing the time limit of 30 minutes for each presentation will maintain a conducive learning environment.

○ To encourage openness and learning across traditions, encourage participants to ask questions during or after the

presentations. Questions should be for clarification, to learn new information, and explore perceived contradictions. Explicitly ask participants to avoid framing questions in a manner that belittles the faith group being presented or minimizes its contributions to nonviolence.

3. **Large Group Discussion:** After the presentations have been completed, invite participants to compare their own teachings with those of the various presenters, exploring similarities and differences with regard to nonviolence and pacifism.

4. **Closing:** Various lessons can be highlighted at the end of this session, such as acknowledging the complexity and difficulty of applying nonviolent strategies in a comprehensive and effective way; the necessity for serious preparations on the part of nonviolent activists; and the possibility of powerful transformation that nonviolent action can bring in the lives of the interfaith group members.

Reading Note: Participants can be referred to the readings on nonviolence and religion in the Guide's Bibliography.

Materials needed: Presentation leaders may choose to bring in illustrative materials

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Medium; it would be advisable to have someone with training or coaching experience to help with volunteer presentations

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5 - 13 What Can We Do in Nonviolent Actions?

One of the obstacles for adopting nonviolent strategies is the mistaken belief that there are not many options and alternatives to violent reactions. Nonviolence practitioners have generated and hundreds of different ways in which a group or individuals can react to conflict and violence in nonviolent yet powerfully resisting ways.

Gene Sharp's pioneering work in the early 1970s is among the classic research efforts on this subject. It is often an effective entry point for starting a conversation about strategies of nonviolence. Sharp's long list of nonviolent-resistance actions may motivate the interfaith group to learn more about the nonviolent resources in different religious traditions and possibly to undertake some new forms of action.

Purpose

- ⊙ To raise participants' awareness of the range of possibilities for effective nonviolent action.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Pass out the handout, "Nonviolent Action — Sharp's List" and ask each member to read it silently.

2. **Small Group Discussion:** Form groups of four to six members to discuss the list and their responses to it. Questions that the groups can focus on include:

- ❍ Which of these nonviolent actions has been used in a conflict situation you are personally familiar with?

- ❍ Have you ever used any of these actions? What was your experience? What did you learn?

- ❍ Which items on the list do you think would be most effective to use with conflicts our group is currently aware of?

- ❍ Are there any strategies you would add?

- ❍ Are there any items you disagree with on this list? Why?

❍ What are the special concerns that might face an interfaith group in working with nonviolent actions?

3. **Large Group Sharing**: Bring the groups back together to share the highlights of their discussions. Develop a shared list of activities that the group is interested in exploring or learning more about.

Note: It is recommended that the group examine the activities for action planning and other related themes in Section Six prior to finalizing plans for action in the community.

Materials needed: Handout, "Nonviolent Action — Sharp's List"

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

℘ Handout 5 – 13a

Nonviolent Action – Sharp's List

METHODS OF NONVIOLENT PROTEST AND PERSUASION

Formal Statements
1. Public speeches
2. Letters of opposition or support
3. Declarations by organizations and institutions
4. Signed public declarations
5. Declarations of indictment and intention
6. Group or mass petitions

Communications with a Wider Audience
7. Slogans, caricatures, and symbols
8. Banners, posters, and displayed communications
9. Leaflets, pamphlets, and books
10. Newspapers and journals
11. Records, radio, and television
12. Sky-writing and earth-writing

Group Representations
13. Deputations
14. Mock awards
15. Group lobbying
16. Picketing
17. Mock elections

Symbolic Public Acts
18. Displays of flags and symbolic colors
19. Wearing of symbols
20. Prayer and worship
21. Delivering symbolic objects
22. Protest disrobings
23. Destruction of own property
24. Symbolic lights
25. Displays of portraits
26. Paint as protest
27. New signs and names
28. Symbolic sounds
29. Symbolic reclamations
30. Rude gestures

Pressures on Individuals
31. "Haunting" officials
32. Taunting officials
33. Fraternization
34. Vigils

Drama And Music
35. Humorous skits and pranks
36. Performances of plays and music
37. Singing

Processions
38. Marches
39. Parades
40. Religious processions
41. Pilgrimages
42. Motorcades

Honoring the Dead
43. Political mourning
44. Mock funerals
45. Demonstrative funerals
46. Homage at burial places

Public Assemblies
47. Assemblies of protest or support
48. Protest meetings
49. Camouflaged meetings of protest
50. Teach-ins

Withdrawal and Renunciation
51. Walkouts
52. Silence
53. Renouncing honors
54. Turning one's back

METHODS OF SOCIAL NONCOOPERATION

Ostracism of Persons
55. Social boycott
56. Selective social boycott
57. Lysistratic nonaction
58. Excommunication
59. Interdict

Non-cooperation with Social Events, Customs, and Institutions
60. Suspension of social and sports activities
61. Boycott of social affairs
62. Student strike
63. Social disobedience
64. Withdrawal from social institutions

Withdrawal from the Social System
65. Stay-at-home
66. Total personal noncooperation
67. "Flight" of workers
68. Sanctuary
69. Collective disappearance
70. Protest emigration (*hijrat*)

METHODS OF ECONOMIC NONCOOPERATION: ECONOMIC BOYCOTTS

Action By Consumers
71. Consumers' boycott
72. Non-consumption of boycotted goods
73. Policy of austerity
74. Rent withholding
75. Refusal to rent
76. National consumers' boycott
77. International consumers' boycott

Action by Workers and Producers
78. Workers' boycott
79. Producers' boycott

Action by Middlemen
80. Suppliers' and handlers' boycott

Action by Owners and Management
81. Traders' boycott
82. Refusal to let or sell property
83. Lockout
84. Refusal of industrial assistance
85. Merchants' "general strike"

Action by Holders of Financial Resources
86. Withdrawal of bank deposits
87. Refusal to pay fees, dues, and assessments
88. Refusal to pay debts or interest
89. Severance of funds and credit
90. Revenue refusal
91. Refusal of a government's money

Action by Governments
92. Domestic embargo
93. Blacklisting of traders
94. International sellers' embargo
95. International buyers' embargo
96. International trade embargo

METHODS OF ECONOMIC NONCOOOPERATION: THE STRIKE

Symbolic Strikes
Protest strike
Quickie walkout (lightning strike)

Agricultural Strikes
Peasant strike
Farm workers' strike

Strikes by Special Groups
97. Refusal of impressed labor
98. Prisoners' strike
99. Craft strike
100. Professional strike

Ordinary Industrial Strikes
101. Establishment strike
102. Industry strike
103. Sympathy strike

Restricted Strikes
104. Detailed strike
105. Bumper strike
106. Slowdown strike
107. Working-to-rule strike
108. Reporting "sick" (sick-in)
109. Strike by resignation
110. Limited strike
111. Selective strike

Multi-Industry Strikes
112. Generalized strike
113. General strike

Combination Of Strikes And Economic Closures
114. Hartal (closing of shops)
115. Economic shutdown

METHODS OF POLITICAL NONCOOPERATION

Rejection of Authority
116. Withholding or withdrawal of allegiance
117. Refusal of public support
118. Literature and speeches advocating resistance

Citizens' Non-cooperation with Government
119. Boycott of legislative bodies
120. Boycott of elections
121. Boycott of government employment and positions
122. Boycott of government departments, agencies, and other bodies

123. Withdrawal from governmental educational institutions
124. Boycott of government-supported institutions
125. Refusal of assistance to enforcement agents
126. Removal of own signs and place marks
127. Refusal to accept appointed officials
128. Refusal to dissolve existing institutions

Citizens' Alternatives to Obedience

129. Reluctant and slow compliance
130. Non-obedience in absence of direct supervision
131. Popular non-obedience
132. Disguised disobedience
133. Refusal of an assemblage or meeting to disperse
134. Sit-down
135. Non-cooperation with conscription and deportation
136. Hiding, escape, and false identities
137. Civil disobedience of "illegitimate" laws

Action by Government Personnel

138. Selective refusal of assistance by government aides
139. Blocking of lines of command and information
140. Stalling and obstruction
141. General administrative non-cooperation
142. Judicial non-cooperation
143. Deliberate inefficiency and selective non-cooperation by enforcement agents
144. Mutiny

Domestic Governmental Action

145. Quasi-legal evasions and delays
146. Non-cooperation by constituent governmental units

International Governmental Action

147. Changes in diplomatic and other representation
148. Delay and cancellation of diplomatic events
149. Withholding of diplomatic recognition
150. Severance of diplomatic relations
151. Withdrawal from international organizations
152. Refusal of membership in international bodies
153. Expulsion from international organizations

METHODS OF NONVIOLENT INTERVENTION

Psychological Intervention

154. Self-exposure to the elements
155. The fast
    a. Fast of moral pressure
    b. Hunger strike
    c. Satyagrahic fast
156. Reverse trial
157. Nonviolent harassment

Physical Intervention

158. Sit-in
159. Stand-in
160. Ride-in
161. Wade-in
162. Mill-in
163. Pray-in
164. Nonviolent raids
165. Nonviolent air raids
166. Nonviolent invasion
167. Nonviolent interjection
168. Nonviolent obstruction
169. Nonviolent occupation

Social Intervention

170. Establishing new social patterns
171. Overloading of facilities
172. Stall-in
173. Speak-in
174. Guerrilla theatre
175. Alternative social institutions
176. Alternative communication system

Economic Intervention

177. Reverse strike
178. Stay-in strike
179. Nonviolent land seizure
180. Defiance of blockades
181. Politically motivated counterfeiting
182. Preclusive purchasing
183. Seizure of assets
184. Dumping
185. Selective patronage
186. Alternative markets
187. Alternative transportation systems
188. Alternative economic institutions

Political Intervention

189. Overloading of administrative systems
190. Disclosing identities of secret agents
191. Seeking imprisonment
192. Civil disobedience of "neutral" laws
193. Work-on without collaboration
194. Dual sovereignty and parallel government

Drawn from Gene Sharp, *The Methods of Nonviolent Action* (Boston, 1973).

5 – 14 Effective Approaches in Nonviolent Actions:

Case Studies

There are many examples of effective nonviolent strategies to be shared with any group preparing to engage in such actions. For thousands of years, humans have reacted both in violent and nonviolent ways to address their disagreements and conflicts. Unfortunately, the nonviolent aspects of those human reactions were underestimated and neglected by scholars, politicians, and even religious figures. Religions and their prophets have carried the nonviolent message over the centuries; however, it was only in the last century, when the field of peace studies developed as an interdisciplinary field, that scholars and practitioners began documenting the range of impacts that nonviolence movements and actions can have on social and political structures, as well as individual perceptions and attitudes.

Even so, it is hard to capture the effects of a nonviolence movement in one study or report and even more so in a documentary film. Nevertheless, the following activity presents some case studies that give some indication of the range and types of nonviolent activities in different political and cultural contexts. We encourage you to locate the films recommended below or, if that is not possible, to locate an inspiring film, biography, or story that illuminates nonviolent strategies and actions.

Purpose

- ⊙ To expand the interfaith group's knowledge about the potential uses and impacts of various nonviolent strategies and actions.

- ⊙ To raise awareness of the possible applications of such techniques in diverse political arenas and conflict areas.

- ⊙ To provide information on the role of religion and religious leaders in launching nonviolence campaigns around the world during different periods of history.

- ⊙ To link individual interfaith groups with various nonviolent campaigns in the world.

Directions

1. **Preparation:** Choose one or more of the recommended films below.

   - *A Force More Powerful:* a film series that documents nonviolence movements in Chile, South Africa, Poland, Serbia, and the United States.

   - *Gandhi:* a three-hour feature film that reenacts the nonviolence campaign and the life struggle of Mahatma Gandhi.

   - *Romero:* a film that captures the struggle of the Archbishop of El Salvador, who was killed by military forces while organizing farmers in resistance to government land policies.

   - *Dalai Lama:* There are various interviews with the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, who has adopted a nonviolence strategy in resisting Chinese domination of his people.

2. **Large Group Discussion.** Some possible questions for group discussion are:

   - How did you feel watching this film? What are the most pressing thoughts on your mind after viewing it?

     - How do the conditions and strategies portrayed in the film compare to the context of your interfaith group?

     - What teachings in my faith would support or prevent me from engaging in strategies such as those presented in the film(s)?

     - Is our interfaith group willing/able/ready to engage in some of these types of activities?

     - Are there groups in the community that have some experience with such activities?

3. **Closing:** In debriefing this activity, it is important to remind group members that:

   - Success of nonviolence campaigns cannot be measured by short-term results only.

   - Every religious and spiritual group has a contribution to make to nonviolent strategies, as have all of the major faith communities at some point in history.

○ Even though these films and documentaries portray the successful and well-organized nonviolence campaigns, these movements at the same time were highly controversial, complex, internally challenged, and extremely strained by the political realities in which they operated. As a result enormous efforts were required to maintain some level of organization, coherency, and discipline.

○ Many of these movements were a collection of different coalitions, both secular and religious, that managed to agree upon a common strategy of nonviolence.

Materials needed: Film and means of projecting it

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

5 – 15 Building Skills for Nonviolent Action

Acquiring solid knowledge about nonviolence is a necessary step for designing any strategy and planning any action. Yet cognitive knowledge without significant real-life experience and practical training is not sufficient. Many nonviolence movements and organizations spend months and even years in training their members in how to physically, verbally, and psychologically resist nonviolently and how to sustain their level of engagement for their specific cause. The student movement inspired by Martin Luther King, Jr., in 1960s, for example, spent months training the students who led a "sit-in" at a whites-only lunch counter in Greensboro, North Carolina. The training included dramatizations of possible responses that might be expected from people who opposed racial integration by the African-American students. This strategy proved highly effective in preparing the nonviolent activists in withstanding the cruelty of attacks on them and sustaining their engagement.[33]

Purpose

- ⊙ To clarify individual and collective limits regarding a potential nonviolent action and the risks associated with it.

- ⊙ To begin linking attitudes and positions in support of nonviolent action with real-life, day-to-day settings and actions.

Directions

The exercise is an attempt to place participants in a realistic situation so they may examine their individual and collective reactions. The effect of the exercise depends on the nature of the case studies. The facilitator should be cautious in their selection and construction of the situations.

1. **Preparation:** There are two case studies or situations presented at the end of this activity (Handout 5 – 15). Give each participant a card with the description of a case or a role to play. The facilitator may prepare as many cases as desired.

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[33] Mary King, *Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.: The Power of Nonviolent Action* (Paris: UNESCO Publishing, 1999).

2. **Individual Reflection:** Allow a few minutes for reading silently. Ask each member to decide or think of a response to the question:

   ❍ "What would you do?"

3. **Small Group Discussion:** In small groups of three or four members, discuss the individual reactions and decide on a collective response.

4. **Large Group Presentations:** Ask each group to role play their reaction in a brief presentation of three to five minutes. Allow time for questions and answers after each role play. Some of the possible questions to explore are:

   ❍ What factors did you take into consideration in selecting this type of action?

   ❍ What are forms of preparation are needed for this action?

   ❍ What plans and steps are needed to deal with the possible consequences of such an action?

   ❍ Is this action feasible in your community or context?

   → In debriefing the exercise the following points can be restated:

   ❍ the links between values, attitudes, and behaviors in nonviolent actions;

   ❍ the importance of consistency in following through and taking steps to support one another;

   ❍ the level of risk involved in planning even a simple nonviolent action;

   ❍ the conditions required for nonviolence strategies to be effective.

5. **Closing.** Conclude by reiterating that there is a wide range of possibilities to nonviolently react to conflictual situations. The specific set of activities selected ought to be dependent upon the readiness of the interfaith group to act. There should be no imposition of any strategy or activity on group members without their willingness and adequate planning and preparation for carrying it out.

Materials needed: Handout, "Cases for Nonviolent-Action Role Play"

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

ɔʒ Handout 5 – 15

Cases for Nonviolent-Action Role Play

Situation 1:

"You are traveling to work on the bus, the same bus you ride to and from work everyday. You know many of the other riders, including the driver. One day, a person you have not seen before sits beside you. You soon discover that he belongs to your own religious group when he begins using derogatory language about people from other religions, who also are sitting in the same bus, although out of hearing range."

- ⊙ Has anyone in the group faced a similar situation?
- ⊙ What are some of the possible nonviolent actions that could be deployed in this situation?
- ⊙ What does your faith instruct you to do in this case?
- ⊙ What would you do?

Situation 2:

Your interfaith group includes about fifty people in a small city. Many of you have contacts with local merchants and city officials. Recently there have been some economic and political developments that shocked the country and your city. People are feeling more insecure now and are seeking help regarding their economic and political circumstances.

At a recent meeting, a new member of the interfaith group presented the following situation and appeal for your help:

Three police officers come every day to your street and demand a certain favor (bribe). Shop owners have been giving them "small gifts." Recently, however, some changes in the government have caused the level of insecurity to rise, and these officers began asking for a large amount of cash for protection. There are twenty shops in that street, and a committee of storeowners has begun meeting. They belong to different faith groups.

- ⊙ Has anyone in the group faced a comparable situation?
- ⊙ What are some of the possible nonviolent actions that could be deployed in this situation?
- ⊙ What does your faith instruct you to do in this case?
- ⊙ What would you do?

5 – 16 How Do We Select an Appropriate Nonviolent Action?

In theory there are countless alternatives by which we can nonviolently react to conflict and resist injustice. It is common, however, for people involved in and affected by a conflict to see the options as limited. When presented a range of many options for action, especially from different contexts (another country, culture, or religion), a typical response is: "But none of these options would work in my conflict or according to my faith."

Purpose

⦿ To train group members in ways to think about specifically and concretely about possible applications of nonviolent action in their own context.

⦿ To deepen their understanding of the nature and complexity of applying even the simplest of nonviolent acts.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Distribute the Handout 5 - 13, "Nonviolent Action — Sharp's List." Remind the groups of their guidelines regarding confidentiality and trust.

2. **Paired Sharing:** Allow 15-20 minutes for individual or paired reading and reflection on the list of nonviolent actions.

3. **Individual Reflection:** Ask each individual to write on a card or piece of paper two or three issues that he or she thinks the group can work on using nonviolent methods. Place the cards on the wall. Ask participants to review all the issues on the wall.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Select an issue that many group members have listed as a possible theme to work on. (If there is more than one issue that appears often, the group might decide to work with

more than one.) Explain that the purpose of this exercise is not to determine the outcome of the issue or prepare an actual plan of action, but to explore the possibilities, and to examine how and to what extent the members have internalized the depth and complexity of nonviolent actions.

5. **Small Group Sharing:** Having selected one or more issues, participants are invited to reflect in small groups of four or five on the following questions:

   ❍ Which of the actions from the handout on Sharp's List might be applicable to this issue in our context and why?

   ❍ How would your faith help you to engage in nonviolent action?

   ❍ What are the possibilities for implementing such actions in our context?

   ❍ What does the group and what do I individually need in order to carry out nonviolent activities of the types we're discussing?

   → Ask the small groups to record a few points from their discussion on a flip chart. Have each group make a list of the "things" — both items and preparatory steps — they would need in order to pursue nonviolent action in their community.

6. **Large Group Discussion:** Bring the group back together for a discussion of the list of needs that each group has prepared or presented. Emphasize the similarities as well as the uniqueness of the different lists. The output of the discussion can be a common list of needs that the group as a whole can address in future meetings, provided the group is willing to proceed with determining how to fulfill these needs and overcome the obstacles to nonviolent action. Some examples of needs are:

   ❍ additional knowledge

   ❍ hands-on training in nonviolent action

   ❍ financial resources

   ❍ locating existing nonviolence groups in the community

➔   Regardless of what the list of needs entails, it is the facilitator's role to pursue the question of what the group wants to do with the list.

7. **Closing:** Emphasize the following learning points from the discussion:

    ❍ There is a gap between the ideal models and strategies of nonviolent activism and the reality as perceived and experienced by people.

    ❍ Nonviolent action is complex, challenging, and requires serious and careful planning.

    ❍ Collective responsibility is the key for successful planning and implementation of nonviolent action.

Materials needed: Paper, writing materials, tape or other means for posting

Size of group: 20-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

TAKING EFFECTIVE ACTION

For some interfaith groups, their mere coming together can be viewed as a miracle, particularly in places in the world where complex conflicts are raging. Their existence can be a message of hope and a model for living a religiously pluralistic life. Other groups may be inspired to move beyond the work within their own group to take on projects and initiatives in the larger community. This section is designed to help groups that would like to undertake action in their communities to do so. The action will take different forms from group to group, from country to country, depending on the cultural, social, and political context; the opportunities that exist to do peacebuilding; the needs and resources in the community; and the interests, skills, and confidence of interfaith group members.

This section builds on the foundations of sustainable interfaith peacebuilding action that are presented throughout this guide — the need for personal and spiritual grounding and a solid foundation of respectful, knowledgeable, and honest interfaith relationship. Our direct experience of building bridges within our group, working with differences, and healing divisions prepares us to bring this work into the broader community. We encourage groups to keep these foundations in mind as they assess their readiness to "take action."

A specific point of reference for the work in this section is that which immediately precedes it, Section Five, which introduces users to four major areas of preparation and action in interfaith peacebuilding: building basic skills in conflict analysis, interfaith dialogue, nonviolent action, and healing and reconciliation. The present section invites groups — having built some skills and begun early discussions about action possibilities — to engage in a process of visioning and planning. For those groups coming to Section Six having explored the skills in Section Five, now is the time to step back and think in a more systematic and creative about way what your next steps should be. Or, for groups that may have been meeting for some time and have a clear sense of readiness for outward action, this section can stand alone. Once the direction is clear, however, you may want to go back to Section Five to work with those activities that will build skills in your chosen area of work.

One of the first steps in taking action is to learn from other successful interfaith activities about what works, and to understand the concepts and practices of positive approaches to peacebuilding (see Activity 6-1). At the same time it is important to take into consideration the complexities and risks of intervening in a social system (see Activity 6-2), some of which were also addressed in Section Five. Another early step is to learn more about the community in which your group operates. What are the key religious groups operating in the community? What projects and initiatives are already underway? What capacities and resources for peace are present that can be built upon? (See activities 6-3 to 6-5.)

Once your group is well informed about what interfaith action has accomplished in the past in your community and also has a feel for the current situation in your immediate context, the group is ready to decide its own course of action. The "4-D Cycle" of Appreciative Inquiry offers a process for creating a shared vision for the work that a group is being called to do and for developing a concrete plan to bring it about (see activities 6-6 to 6-9). Finally, the best way for a group to mature and grow in its peacebuilding work is to systematically evaluate and learn from the actions it takes (see activities 6-10 and 6-11).

This section of the guide will contribute to the growth of individual group members as well as the group as a whole, for in taking action there is much to be learned. It is through taking action that each of us learns more about our own strengths, fears, biases, and perceptions. We have an opportunity to test in a very direct fashion the ways in which our faith helps us to take risks and engage in the world of action. For groups, there are two levels of learning from working together on a project or activity. First, members learn about what works or doesn't work in peacebuilding, particularly if they take time for thoughtful reflection. They also come to better understand the powerful potential that an interfaith group can have by token of the sensibilities and skills that are developed, such as listening, effective communication, trust building, team work, and other essential group dynamics.

Activities for Gaining Inspiration and Facing Challenges

The world is filled with ordinary people who are extraordinary peacebuilders, like many of the people who will use this guide. They are regular citizens, men and women of religious and spiritual conviction. We don't hear much about these "everyday gandhis."[34] Few of them have advanced degrees in peacebuilding. They learn to engage in careful assessment and thoughtful strategizing and then, often armed with no more than basic peacebuilding skills, they follow their hearts, trust their intuition, and rely on their deep religious and spiritual grounding. They try things out. Sometimes they succeed and sometimes they fail. But they are always learning from their experiences and planning how to do it better the next time. Most will win no prizes for their work. Yet these are the people who offer us an antidote for helplessness. It is these peacebuilders who can inspire us with their courage and their willingness to take a stand for peace.

With so much that seems hopeless in our world today, we need to be inspired as peacebuilders and to help inspire others. This involves lifting up stories of courage, strength, and compassion; training ourselves to see small signs of progress or glimmers of possibility for breakthroughs; and allowing ourselves to be expansive and creative in our thinking about what could be. In peacebuilding, however, this stance must be tempered with an understanding that we live in a complicated world and that the practice of peacebuilding is multifaceted, complex, and challenging. So, while seeking the inspiration and stories that sustain hope, on the one hand, on the other hand, peacebuilders need to appreciate the complexity of the situations they face and to design their interventions having understood that there are no simple answers. The two activities that follow address both of these concerns.

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[34] See http://www.everydaygandhis.com/.

6 – 1 Positive Approaches to Interfaith Peacebuilding

As peacebuilders we face, time and again, challenges that can seem overwhelming, problems that are disheartening, violence and hatred that runs deep, and sometimes setbacks that seem insurmountable. Especially for those working in protracted situations, conflict can become a way of life, and hopelessness sets in along with an inability and unwillingness to think creatively about the situation at hand. We often forget that the past may hold some useful information about what may be possible in the present, or we overlook hopeful signs in the present because they do not fit our picture of where things are headed. In an effort to counteract the deep pessimism that has engulfed the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for example, a group of scholars is writing a book that details a period of great thriving, when Muslims, Jews, and Christians lived together in creative coexistent in Muslim Spain and the medieval Mediterranean.[35]

In addition, there are numerous aspects of current peacebuilding practice that create hopeful, empathetic, and cooperative dynamics among parties in conflict, such as identifying commonalties, building on small agreements, and using ritual to infuse meaning and new forms of shared experience into dysfunctional relationships.[36]

There are also specific methodologies that can help us, even momentarily, to move away from problem solving to possibility seeking. So often in human endeavor we begin our efforts to bring constructive change by identifying and analyzing what is wrong, and then we let the problem guide us as we try to change a situation for the better. As we work in situations of conflict, an exclusive focus on problems can magnify them ever more greatly, often bogging us down and hindering progress. Positive approaches to peacebuilding, on the other hand, can ground our movement through a change process in strengths and positive experiences.

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[35] See Joseph Montville and Heidi Paulson Winder, "Creative Coexistence in Muslim Spain As a Model for Positive Peace," *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators,* Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Pact Publications, 2003).
[36] See Mohammed Abu-Nimer, "Toward the Theory and Practice of Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding," *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators,* Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Pact Publications, 2003), 18-19.

Purpose

- ⊙ To introduce participants to the concept of positive approaches to interfaith peacebuilding.

- ⊙ To share ways in which these approaches actually work.

Directions

This activity involves a presentation on positive approaches and a small group task to identify ways in which focusing on assets, strengths, and positive images of the future can bring a more hopeful perspective to communities struggling with conflict.

1. **Introduce the Session.** Start the session by holding up a glass half full of water and asking participants if the glass is half full or half empty. Make the following points:

   - ❍ Many of us are used to seeing the glass as half empty. Often times we view our communities and the situations in which we find ourselves as "half empty" as well. We feel that we need to "fill up" the glass rather than taking the time to discover the strengths, assets, and resources that are right in front of us.

   - ❍ Perhaps one of the most important skills in peacebuilding is the capacity to see potential and possibility where others cannot.

   - ❍ As peacebuilders, we must lift up the stories of hope and compassion that offer us an antidote for the violent images we can easily grow accustomed to.

   - ❍ This is one of the characteristics of positive approaches — the use of stories to inspire and offer an alternative model of human relationship. There is, for example, a project called "everyday gandhis." Its purpose is to tell the stories of ordinary people creating peace in their communities, particularly in "hotspots" around the world. The project is a response to the saturation of violent images that surround us, perpetuating the erroneous notion that living as adversaries is normal and that the world is organized as a win-lose dichotomy. The goal of the everyday gandhis project is to refocus our attention on peace and healing and to nourish and inspire us with stories of people who embody peaceful living in a deep way.

→   Share the definition and characteristics of positive approaches using the handout, "What Do We Mean by Positive Approaches?"

2. **Small Group Task**: Form groups of four or five and ask the groups to identify examples of when they saw a positive approach being used.

3. **Large Group Sharing**: Ask each group to share their examples with everyone. Next, distribute the handouts with three case studies of positive approaches to peacebuilding: "Imagine Nagaland—the Courage to Be Positive," "Creative Coexistence Muslim Spain," "Proventive Peacebuilding."

4. **Small Group Task**: Form three groups and ask each group to take one of the case studies. Assign two or three of the following questions to the groups:

    ❍   What were the elements in this case that made it a positive approach?

    ❍   How might this approach work in our own context?

    ❍   Are there aspects in our culture or our faiths that support the use of positive approaches?

    ❍   How does our own interfaith group already employ elements of a positive approach?

    ❍   Does this case study have any lessons in it for us?

5. **Large Group Sharing:** Ask each group to present its ideas to the large group. Discuss how this interfaith group might use these ideas in its work. Ask the group to think about a potential project or activity it might like to undertake in the future. Challenge the group to think about this activity from a "positive-approach point of view" using questions such as these:

    ❍ What could be done to build on strengths and assets?

    ❍ How could the activity inspire hope?

    ❍ What could be done to help people see the possibilities and not only the problems?

    → List on a flip chart the ways in which a positive-change perspective could be incorporated into the activities of the group overall.

Materials needed: Flip chart and paper, markers, tape; handouts

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

ℭℬ Handout 6 – 1a

What Do We Mean By Positive Approaches?[37]

Positive approaches are a group of concepts, theories, and activities for working toward change in relationships, organizations, communities, and other human systems. Developed predominantly in the organizational development, education and training, psychotherapy, and counseling sectors, positive approaches are distinguished from more traditional, problem-focused approaches by the assumptions they hold and the characteristics they share. A primary assumption of most positive approaches is that in all human systems there are things that work well, or have in the past, and that these can be identified, analyzed, and built upon as the foundation for envisioning, designing, and implementing system change. Positive approaches often rely on interviewing for data collection and pay particular attention to how questions are framed, whenever possible seeking to discover when and how things are working at their best.

A basic tenet of social constructionist thought, which informs much of the thinking about positive approaches, is that there is a direct link between image and action and between positive image and positive action. Positive approaches, therefore, have a forward-looking orientation to producing change, rather than focusing on analyzing the ills of the past, and they place emphasis on creating a positive image of a preferred future.

Rooted in the experiences and lives or histories of individuals and groups in the system, positive approaches are culturally relevant and contextualized to each new situation. They value diversity as a source of creativity and innovation and seek the participation of diverse stakeholders so that the full system is represented in any change initiative affecting them. Positive approaches offer tools for bringing people together to discover shared values and purposes and for helping a diverse group plan and act together on a common future. They promote the distribution of power across the entire system, giving opportunities for any stakeholder to step into a leadership role as the situation dictates. The traditional concept of centralized control and coordination gives way to the idea of multiple centers of control and many points of coordination.

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[37] Extracted from Cynthia Sampson, "Introduction," *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators,* Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Pact Publications, 2003), 4-6. Used with permission.

A number of characteristics are common to positive approaches to social change:

❍ They share an orientation to the positive potential of human beings and draw the analytical focus to that positive potential for the purpose of more effectively mobilizing it.

❍ There is an emphasis on the importance of meaning-making, which is usually done together, in relationship with others in the system.

❍ There is an emphasis on eliciting and telling stories as a means of conveying holistic wisdom, knowledge, and meaning.

❍ Focused attention is given to indigenous resources for change, those strengths, capacities, practices, and experiences that are inherent in any system.

❍ Attention is given to that which inspires and gives hope in the human experience.

❍ Because it is assumed that a positive image leads to positive action, there is an emphasis on generating visual images and exhibiting positive examples.

❍ The intent is to motivate and mobilize for action.

୧୬   Handout 6 – 1b

Imagine Nagaland — The Courage to Be Positive[38]

Nagaland, a small and remote state bordering Myanmar in India's North East, has had a troubled political history over the last fifty years. What began as a nonviolent struggle for self-determination in the 1950s later took the form of a violent and armed conflict. The political issues remain alive even today. In 1963, Nagaland became the sixteenth state of the Indian Union. Since then, the situation of Nagaland's two million people has changed dramatically and a "see-sawing process has led alternately to despair and hope. . . . With the coming of statehood, Nagaland entered the era of planned socio-economic development, ending centuries of isolation and neglect, although the wounds and hurts of the past still caused pain to those who had suffered or lost their loved ones in the armed struggle." [39]

Peter Delahaye of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) and Bharat Krishnan, a management consultant who was advising UNICEF at the time, initiated a series of Appreciative Inquiry workshops in Nagaland, starting with a Discovery Workshop in April 2001. Seventy participants attended, more than thirty of whom were children and youth. Using the Appreciative Inquiry philosophy, participants were asked to inquire into "what gives life to Nagaland?" These exercises led to the development of six major themes, chosen by participants, for detailed inquiry across the state: unity, peace, and respect for all; education and employment; ecology and development; equitable development; respect for the rule of law; and Nagaland of our future. For many of the adults this was their first experience of interacting on an equal footing with children and youth. The participants, representing all stakeholders of the state eventually set a target of twenty thousand discovery interviews to be conducted over a period of ten weeks, representing one percent of the Nagaland population.

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[38] This account is drawn from Peter Delahaye and Bharat Krishnan, "Imagine Nagaland: The Courage to Be Positive," in *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators,* Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Pact Publications, 2003).
[39] Comments made by Sanjoy Hazarika, Managing Trustee of the Centre for North East Studies and Policy Research, as quoted in Delahaye and Krishnan, 169.

The topic "Nagaland of our Future," was addressed in the following way:

"We all share a sense of great pride in our culture, our people's hard-working nature, and the abundant flora and fauna that Nagaland has to offer. There have been unceasing efforts for peace and unity in the state, and we are now at a very opportune time where we can begin to build a new and prosperous future for ourselves. As adults, we are trustees and custodians of a wonderful future that our children expect as their legacy. And as children, we owe it to our elders to build on all the good things they bring to us from their hard work and values.

"It is up to all of us now, whether we are adults or children, to work together for jointly creating a Nagaland that we will all be legitimately proud of — building on our strengths, learning from our mistakes, but all the time thinking positively about a common dream that we all share. We have a tryst with destiny, and it is our individual and collective responsibility to make sure that we undertake this wonderful journey of development of Nagaland in a spirit of oneness and optimism.

"It is in this context that I would like you to share your stories, experiences, and dreams over the next hour or so. This will be a wonderful opportunity for you to be a partner in this exciting project of "Imagine Nagaland.

- ❍ As a citizen of Nagaland you do feel an attachment to it. What are the things that really make you feel a part of Nagaland?

- ❍ We all feel that perhaps if certain things improve, Nagaland would be a better place to live in. In your opinion, in what sphere do we have to concentrate to make our state better?

- ❍ Can you recall any incident that you have witnessed or heard of and that you wished for more of that kind to make Nagaland a better place to live in?

- ❍ Every child has the potential to develop his or her abilities. So how do you perceive the future of Nagaland where in ten years' time, every child with his/her potential can contribute towards the furtherance of the developed and civilized healthy state of society?

- ❍ Close your eyes and imagine you travel through a time machine seven to eight years into the future and see a fully transformed Nagaland. Can you describe what kind of a transformation (political, social, religious, economic, cultural) you see in this state?"

In order to cover people in all eight districts of Nagaland, the team had to adopt a cascading interview method whereby each person interviewed was asked to interview two more, and so on, with the numbers multiplying exponentially.

By the time the Dream/Design Workshop was held in late July 2001, six thousand interviews had been completed and mined for stories, best practices, and dreams by a band of student volunteers and government staffers. The workshop had nearly two hundred participants. Many of them were from the earlier two workshops, but about a third were new to Appreciative Inquiry, pulled in by the power of Imagine Nagaland. Nearly half of the participants were children and youth. The challenge was to facilitate the identification and ownership of a common ground between the dreams of children, adults, and also the government team that had been visioning for the past few months in a parallel, top-down process that was being conducted nationwide by the Indian government. The initial two days of the three-day workshop were spent in working with these three sets of stakeholders separately and then developing the common ground through plenary sessions.

CB Handout 6 – 1c

Creative Coexistence In Muslim Spain[40]

As the conflict continues to escalate between the Israelis and the Palestinians, each side increasingly despairs that they will ever be able to find a peaceful resolution to the conflict. Each side blames the other for the continuing violence and the failure to make peace. Many people on both sides believe that it is no longer possible to negotiate with the other. A deep pessimism has set in among the Jews of Israel that they can ever build community with the Muslims, and the Palestinians that they will ever be treated with dignity and respect by the Israelis.

Often, the people mired in the Middle Eastern conflict forget or are unaware that the Jews and Muslims have a history that extends beyond conflict. They also share positive a past — broad periods of history when neither group was victimized and both excelled. By reintroducing those positive histories, the parties involved in the conflict can begin to imagine the shared future that is essential for a peace process to succeed.

As the first step in an attempt to bring this history to life and to provide a roadmap for creative coexistence for Israelis and Arabs, seven historians are contributing to a book that will detail how in the eighth to fifteenth centuries, peoples of the three Abrahamic faiths — Judaism, Islam, and Christianity — lived together in relative harmony, neither oppressing nor being oppressed, and were able to create the greatest civilization that Europe north of the Pyrenees had seen.[41] With the book as a cornerstone, the plan is to then launch a multi-level, multimedia information campaign among Israelis and Palestinians so that they can draw on their positive past to generate a vision of a collaborative future. The hope is that the principles of tolerance that were applied in Muslim Spain and the medieval Mediterranean region could be revived today, and the people of the Middle East could benefit from revisiting the creative history of that period.

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[40] The following is based on Montville and Winder, *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding.*
[41] This book project originated at the former preventive diplomacy program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington, D.C.

One of the most positive eras in Islamic history and an era that Muslims still talk about with pride, Muslim Spain, as seen in the history of Al-Andalus, was a time of intellectual and material excellence. The Muslim rulers applied the tolerance of the Koran toward Judaism and Christianity and created an environment for cooperation, economic prosperity, and scientific achievement that not only preserved ancient knowledge, but also added significant contributions to the arts, science, medicine, engineering, philosophy, and literature. Writes historian T.A. Perry: "Coexistence was not modeled on the melting-pot theory, but rather on the interchange of different points of view, on a dialogue that could range from commonly shared tenets of moral philosophy to religious confrontation and polemic."[42]

In describing the millennium at 1000 A.D., Middle Eastern scholar Fouad Ajami writes:

> In Andalusia's splendid and cultured courts and gardens, in its bustling markets, in academies of unusual secular daring, Muslims and Jews came together — if only fitfully and always under stress — to build a world of relative tolerance and enlightenment. In time, decay and political chaos would overwhelm Muslim Spain, but as the first millennium drew to a close, there had arisen in the city of Cordova a Muslim empire to rival its nemesis in the east, the imperial world around Baghdad. . . . In the seven or eight decades that followed [Abd al-Rahman III's ascension in the early 10th century], the city would become a metropolis of great diversity. Blessed with a fertile countryside, the city had some 700 mosques, 3,000 public baths, illuminated streets, and luxurious villas on the banks of the Guadalquivir River, and countless libraries. Legend has it that the caliph's library stocked some 400,000 volumes.[43]

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[42] *The Moral Proverbs of Santob de Carrion: Jewish Wisdom in Christian Spain* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1987), 4, as quoted in Montville and Winder, *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding,* 138.
[43] "An Iberian chemistry," *U.S. News and World Report,* August 16, 1999, 44-50, as quoted in Montville and Winder, *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding,* 138-139.

Erna Paris, another scholar of the era wrote:

> The ambience that marked the early centuries of Arab rule in Spain could not have been further removed from the brutal Visigoths, or from Christian Europe in general. While Europe embraced ignorance and superstition, the Moors promoted scholarship. While Christianity denigrated the senses, the feel of Arab Spain was nothing short of sensual. . . . Public literacy was a government priority. Successive caliphs built libraries that were open to all; in fact, one tenth-century ruler, Hakam II, was so obsessed with books that he sent emissaries to Baghdad with orders to buy every manuscript that had ever been produced. . . . The Jewish poets of Andalusia were profoundly influenced by their Muslim compatriots, and from the tenth to the twelfth century, during the justly named Golden Age of the Spanish Jews, they, too, wrote remarkably beautiful verse.[44]

Although the political circumstances of the contemporary Middle East are different from medieval Spain, and modern Israel would not submit to Muslim or Christian rule, Andalusia might nonetheless offer a template for today based on of its principles of tolerance, cooperation, and coexistence. For example, Israel is a Mediterranean and Middle Eastern country; the countries that surround it are Arab, as are the Palestinians in the West Bank, Gaza, East Jerusalem, and almost twenty percent of the citizens of Israel. In this social and cultural context, it is conceivable that if the Eurocentric Jewish population of Israel could bring itself to recognize and respect the culture and history of the Arab world that surrounds it, there might emerge a new basis for political peace. Similarly, the Arab world could learn from the principles of tolerance practiced in Muslim Spain to enable it to accept the Jewish state in their midst.

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[44] *The End of Days: The Story of Tolerance, Tyranny, and the Expulsion of Jews from Spain* (Amherst, N.Y.: Prometheus Books, 1995), 40-42, as quoted in Montville and Winder, *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding,* 139.

℃ℬ Handout 6 – 1d

Proventive Peacebuilding[45]

By Samuel Gbaydee Doe

My journey as a peacebuilder began with stories of tragedy. I witnessed a brutal civil war that tore apart every fabric of my small country of just three million people, Liberia. More than three hundred thousand people were killed in seven years of barbarity. That war extended to neighboring Sierra Leone, the place of my birth. Since July 1990, I have been working with communities ravaged by violent conflicts in Liberia, Sierra Leone, and many other parts of Africa. Everywhere I travel, especially outside of Africa, I become a prime recipient of sympathy. People hail me for my work simply because I work with people who are suffering the agony of violence. Yet deep in my gut I know that the source of the energy that drives my work is not from these terrible stories. My energy comes from the glimpses of hope, the stories of small, seemingly insignificant individuals and communities who show inexplicable courage and resiliency in the face of terror. Their smiles and their hope in a peaceful tomorrow sustain me and make my work possible.

This experience forced me to begin to rethink the traditional peacebuilding processes that emphasize conflict, crisis, crisis management, and post-conflict rehabilitation. I realized that peacebuilding that is oriented towards conflict was not telling the whole story of the concept. It seemed limiting to me and was not inspiring hope and mobilizing the energy needed for growth.

Three yeas ago I began testing the idea of positive approaches to peacebuilding. My emphasis was on resiliency. I wanted to know what accounted for the resilience of some societies in the face of adversity and what could be learned from that. My interest grew in societies like Guinea, Kenya, the Gambia, Ghana, and Cameroon, which have high volatility for instability but yet are relatively stable. I increased my visits to those countries and started asking questions about their strengths.

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[45] This short essay was written in 2001. Samuel Gbaydee Doe is the executive director of the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding, headquartered in Accra, Ghana.

I identified two categories of resources that explain the relative stability of these countries. The peace-generating capacities of any society refer to those social, cultural, political, and religious institutions that promote the values of positive peace. They are the dynamic institutions that build peace continuously. The conflict-carrying capacities are those social, political, cultural, economic, and religious structures that accommodate tensions in a society. They do not promote peace. Instead, they ensure that conflicts are kept at the latent level.

At the West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), through the Proventive Peacebuilding Program we are conducting numerous action-oriented studies in various countries. The inquiries we conduct have helped both us and the communities we study to discover potentials needed to change their conditions.

In 2000 WANEP launched its Education for Peacebuilding Program in seven West African countries. This program seeks to strengthen the social processes that promote justice, peace, and social cohesion in communities through the school setting. It is promoting history, literature, and other arts in the West African societies that promote the values and attitudes of peace, justice, and social cohesion. The first stage of the program focused on the "attitude of teaching." It has demonstrated the role teachers play in building society and how their attitudes contribute in building individuals who have a positive or destructive sense of their identity. Especially in Liberia, teachers are discovering that affirmation, giving constructive feedback to young people, and including them in decisions made in the classrooms are making a significant difference in the lives of the children. Young people who benefit from the program show significant improvement in academic performance and social skills.

Our experience in West Africa demonstrates that by building positive images we are able to mobilize the resources needed to address obstacles and challenges in many communities. Proventive peacebuilding does not deny structural injustices that must be named and addressed. What it has done is to mobilize bolder and more courageous people. The courage they draw on to engage these structures comes from the hope that there is certainly a liberating future.

6 – 2 Complexity and Risk in Taking Action

The complexities of intervening in a conflict situation must be understood and appreciated if the action is to have the intended impact and avoid undesirable consequences or "side effects." This speaks to the importance of careful analysis and the ability to approach situations from a "systems" point of view. This in turn requires taking into consideration how the immediate situation is linked to the larger context and how an intervention into one part of the system can have repercussions in another. These linkages of micro and macro structures are essential for developing a critical understanding of the impact that the actions of a small interfaith group can have on the broader community, the country, and even the world.

Note that Section Five also raises some of these issues in providing tools for analysis, as well as questions and cautions for interfaith groups that are considering becoming involved in their communities in interfaith dialogue, nonviolent activism, or healing and reconciliation initiatives.

Purpose

⊙ To help participants appreciate the impact of their actions, particularly in conflict situations.

⊙ To create a "Hippocratic Oath for Peacebuilders."

Directions

This activity involves sharing information about the risks of taking action, inviting group to develop their own Hippocratic Oath, and creating an opportunity for each person to speak to his or her commitment to follow the oath.

1. **Introduce the Session:** Introduce the idea of the Butterfly Effect:

❍ Meteorologists who predict the weather began talking about something they called the Butterfly Effect several years ago. The idea was that if a butterfly chances to flap its wings in Beijing in March, then by August, hurricane patterns in the

Atlantic will be affected. Life is disorderly and unpredictable; the smallest change in conditions in one hemisphere can trigger titanic events in another. Likewise in peacebuilding, any action we take has implications that can stretch far beyond our immediate group.

❍ There is an American saying that goes like this: "He can't see the forest for the trees." This means that it is easy for human beings to get caught up in the details of what they are doing and loose sight of the big picture. In peacebuilding work we must see both the forest and the trees and recognize the potential impacts of our actions.

❍ We must recognize that to intervene is to take risks, and that the more we become directly involved, the greater the risks to ourselves, to our own institutions, and to the "recipients" of our interventions. It is not enough to mean well; we need to be responsible or accountable for all our actions.

❍ This session is about understanding the implications of the actions we take, recognizing the risk associated with peacebuilding work, and exploring the idea of a Hippocratic Oath for peacebuilders.

2. **Large Group Discussion:** Discuss the following questions about risk:

    ❍ What are the risks are associated with peacebuilding?

    ❍ Which of the risks is our group most likely to encounter?

    ❍ How will we deal with them?

    ❍ How much risk are we willing to take to work in our community?

    ❍ How do we deal with the fact that we may each have a difference level of tolerance for risk?

➔ Share with the group the following points about a Hippocratic Oath:

    ❍ The idea of a Hippocratic Oath for peacebuilding first came from Mary Anderson, author of the well known book *Do No Harm: How AID Can Support Peace — Or War.* The phrase "First Do No Harm" comes from the Hippocratic Oath that spells out a code of ethics for medical doctors.

○ As change agents, we must be aware that there are ethical questions and dilemmas facing us at all times. A strong commitment built on the foundation of our religious and spiritual values and a compassionate and courageous heart are important, but they are not enough. We must be clear that we are operating in a manner that will not make the situation worse.

○ In order to do this we must make sure that we are as fully informed as possible and that we are committed to serving all parties in a fair and unbiased manner, discriminating against none.

○ We must actively and continually seek to better understand the consequences of our actions paying close attention to the responses of those we are trying to help.

○ We must ensure that we use local resources, local traditions of peacemaking and healing, and involve all relevant stakeholders in our planning and implementation.

→ As a large group discuss the following questions:

○ What would we want our own Hippocratic Oath to say?

○ How would it take into account our religious and spiritual orientation?

3. **Small Group Work**: Form small groups and ask the groups to think about what should go into the group's own Hippocratic Oath. Have each group come up with several items.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Ask each small group to suggest one item for the Hippocratic Oath and then repeat the process, going around the room until all groups have exhausted their lists. Record the suggested items on a flip chart. Ask the group to review the list and make any suggestions for additions, subtractions, or revisions. Check with the group to see if it is ready to adopt this as its Hippocratic Oath. If it is, go to the next step. If not, assign a smaller group to work on the oath and bring it back to the next meeting for approval.

5. **Closing:** If the group feels comfortable with ritual and feels this is an appropriate step, create and enact together a ritual for adopting the Hippocratic Oath. It may be as simple as reading the oath aloud and asking each person to signal his or her acceptance of it by saying: "I support this oath and will do everything I can to live up to it."

Materials needed: Flip chart, paper, and markers

Size of group: 8-30 people

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Medium

Activities for Assessing Opportunity and Need

We all know that in starting up a project or planning an intervention it is customary to do a needs assessment. What is less common is the practice of doing an "opportunities assessment." This kind of assessment, in conjunction with the interfaith mapping exercise in Section Three and the conflict analysis tools presented in Section Five, can help focus attention on resources that already exist in the form of local capacities for peace and potential partners. There may be partners in the community who want to join with us, or we may want to become involved with projects that were initiated by others. Either way, we are bringing to bear on the situation energy far greater than ours alone.

6 – 3 Surveying Our Community

In every conflict context there are local capacities for peace — people, organizations, and experiences that can connect people and help solidify a sustainable infrastructure for peace. "Connectors" are everything that links people for peace across lines of division in a conflict area.[46]

 A vital aspect of peacebuilding is empowering the people experience conflict to make peace by supporting local efforts and capacities. Interfaith groups are in a unique position to access, mobilize, and further develop these local capacities. The first step is being able to identify them. This can require an ability to see potential and opportunity where others cannot. The following two activities involve preparation for meeting potential partners and creating a vision for the work you will do in the world. Participants discuss the concept of local capacities for peace and then, using their own context as a "living case study," identify the capacities for peace in their own situation.

Purpose

- ⊙ To enable members to identify local capacities for peace in their community.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask participants to think about what it means to be a "connector for peace." Offer this definition and have participants enlarge upon it: "Connectors are everything that links people for peace across conflict lines."

   → Share the following examples of connectors for peace with the group:

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[46] See Mary Anderson, *Do No Harm: How Aid Can Support Peace—Or War* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Reinner, 1999), 1-2.

○ In Chechnya, leaders of seven villages persuaded their neighbors to declare their villages "Zones of Peace." They went to the Russian commanders who surrounded them and negotiated that they would not be attacked if the villagers agreed not to harbor the militant separatists.

○ In Bosnia, a few men, sitting in one of their living rooms one night, began to discuss the war. They decided they cold not support the drive towards separation so they started a "Citizens Forum" and called a public meeting to see if others shared their concern. More than 2000 people showed up at that first meeting.

○ An old Garmi woman in Tajikistan described what she could do to avert future war. "I can teach my grandchildren not to 'play' war with the Kulyabis," she said. "I told my son the other day, don't teach your son to fight his neighbors. Let him forget the war!" She thought a minute. "And I can get my husband — he's a former school teacher — to go meet with his fellow teachers. Together they can figure out how to use the school room to teach people to get along again."

○ In Tajikistan again, a Kulyabi woman went out to welcome her returning Garmi neighbors who had fled during the inter-group fighting. She presented them with salt and bread and invited them to dinner at her home. She arranged a long table in her garden under the grape arbor, and she sat the Garmi returnees along one side and her Kulyabi neighbors on the other side. Face to face they ate together and, she says, they became reacquainted.

2. **Large Group Discussion:** Distribute the handout, "Connectors For Peace," and go over the concepts together. Using the handout as a guide, ask the group to identify the connectors for peace in their community.

3. **Closing:** Develop a list of the connectors, and discuss with the group different ways to use these connectors for peace. Tell the group that this list will become important as it creates a vision for what it wants to do in the community.

Materials needed: Handout, "Connectors For Peace"

Size of group: 8-10 people

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of Complexity: Low

Level of risk: Medium

Experience level of facilitator: Low

ℭℬ Handout 6 - 3

Connectors For Peace[47]

Each of the following connectors can supply natural linkages. These connectors may be used as foundations for peacebuilding programming. Connectors refer to everything that links people across conflict lines for peace, while dividers, or tensions, refer to those things that divide people. Dividers include sources of conflict, or the issues in conflict.

Systems and Institutions: In all societies where intrastate war erupts, systems and institutions like markets and communication systems, continue to link people across conflict lines. For example, local markets or the continued need to trade goods may bring together merchants from opposing factions in a conflict. Media sources (foreign or local news broadcasts on the radio or television) also provide linkages between people regardless of their affiliation. Irrigation systems, bridges, roads, and electrical grids are additional examples of institutional and systemic connectors.

Attitudes and Actions: Even in the midst of war and violence, it is possible to find individuals and groups who continue to express attitudes of tolerance, acceptance, or even love or appreciation for people on the "other side." Some individuals act in ways that are contrary to what we expect to find during war — adopting abandoned children from the "other side," linking across lines to continue a professional association or journal, setting up new associations of people opposed to the war. They do these things because they seem "normal" or "right." Often they do not think of them as extraordinary or even as "non-war."

Shared Values and Interests: A common religion can bring people together, as can common values such as the need to protect a child's health. UNICEF, for example, has negotiated days of tranquility based on the values placed upon inoculating children against disease. These same connectors sometimes act as dividers, but we tend to think more about the divisive effects of values in times of war.

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[47] *Peacebuilding: A Caritas Training Manual*, 172.

Common Experiences: The experiences and effects of war on individuals can provide linkages across the conflict lines. Citing the experience of war and suffering as "common to all sides," people sometimes create new anti-war alliances across conflict lines. Sometimes the experience of war unites individuals who are traumatized by violence, regardless of their different affiliations.

Symbols and Occasions: National art, music, historical anniversaries, national holidays, monuments, and sporting events (e.g., the Olympics) can bring people together or link them across conflict lines. They also divide individuals. One example is the story of soldiers during World War I who, on Christmas Eve, began to sing the Christmas carol "Silent Night" together before returning to war.

It is important not to assume any one category of individuals (women, for example) or organizations (churches, for example) are always connectors. These individuals and organizations, although they have the capacity to be connectors, are sometimes deeply committed dividers.

6 – 4 Meeting Potential Partners

Peacebuilders are increasingly thinking and acting in ways that cut across traditional boundaries. Organizations and groups working to prevent and resolve conflicts are recognizing the importance of inter-organizational cooperation to achieve positive and lasting results. As an interfaith group, it may be most appropriate to start with potential partners who represent the religious and faith traditions represented in the group, particularly if the conflict is religiously motivated. Interfaith groups have a role to play, however, in any conflict and partners come in many shapes and sizes. The United States Institute of Peace, in its special report, "Faith-Based NGOs and International Peacebuilding," states: "Faith-based organizations have a special role to play in zones of religious conflict, but their peacebuilding programs do not need to be confined to addressing religious conflict."[48]

Creating linkages with collaborators can often be very powerful. There are, however, some issues to consider. The criteria for the selection of collaborators should be clear, logical, and transparent. It is vital that the range of collaborators should reflect the variety and spectrum of the local population. Peacebuilders should take care that they do not "lift up" and empower one group at the expense of another.

In entering into partnership with other peacebuilding organizations there are other considerations such as shared vision, common values, and trust. Peacebuilding organizations should try to minimize conflicts among themselves. They should seek to develop coordinated strategies at the macro-level and ensure that these are reflected on the ground.[49]

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[48] David Smock, "Faith-Based NGOs and International Peacebuilding," United States Institute of Peace Special Report 76, October 22, 2001.
[49] Peacebuilding in War-Time Societies: Workshop Report (Geneva: Quaker United Nations Office, 1996).

Purpose

- ⊙ To meet key individuals and groups in the community, to learn more about their work, and to assess possibilities for partnership.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask participants to identify some examples of "improbable partnerships" — groups that never thought they could be partners or find something in common. Share some of the following ideas:

   - ❍ Partnerships in peacebuilding can be essential. Depending on the context, partners can be found in many places.

   - ❍ Partners may be local people and groups that you have identified as local connectors for peace. Partners may be other nongovernmental organizations, human rights groups, faith-based organizations, or even the military.

   - ❍ Working with partners helps share the load and allows for additional voices to help develop strategy and makes decisions.

   - ❍ There are, however, some cautions.

2. **Group Discussion:** Pass out the handout, "Choosing Partners — Considerations," and review with the group. Ask the group the following questions:

   - ❍ Are there any items you disagree with on this list? Why?

   - ❍ Are there any guidelines you would add?

   - ❍ What are the special concerns that might face an interfaith group in choosing partners?

3. **Small Group Work:** Ask the group to develop a list of people or groups they would like to meet. The purpose of the meetings is to learn more about peacebuilding initiatives in the community and to meet potential partners or allies **in future work.**

4. **Large Group Work:** Share the lists and develop a master list. Give participants a marker and invite them to show their top three preferences of people or groups they would like to meet by placing a dot next to those names on the list. Review the list and agree on the first people (as individuals or representatives of a group) to invite.

    Next, as a group, decide how to introduce the purpose of the meeting when contacting guests and how to explore some of the considerations listed in the handout. Decide on the best way to set up the meeting to achieve its purpose. If the group meets every month, it may make sense to hold this activity over the next three months; or, all three guests could be invited to one meeting. Assign members to contact the proposed guests and create a schedule.

Materials needed: Flip chart, paper, markers; handout, "Choosing Partners — Considerations"

Size of group: 10-30 people

Time needed: 2-3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low

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෬ Handout 6 – 4

Choosing Partners – Considerations

- **Diversity:** Do the prospective partners represent the variety and spectrum of the community?

- **Accountability:** Are they willing to share liability for potential risks and consequences and to be accountable along with our group for outcomes? Do they seem willing to be transparent about their agendas and plans?

- **Goals:** Are there common goals and compatible approaches to peacebuilding, or is there appreciation for the different approaches represented by the various potential partners? Is there a willingness to learn from one another and explore our assumptions about change?

- **Roles and Expectations:** Is there clarity about what roles each partner will play and a sharing of expectations about how we will work together?

- **Tolerance for Ambiguity**: Do we share an ability to tolerate the ambiguity and uncertainty involved in peacebuilding work?

- **Monitoring and Planning:** Are there mechanisms for joint planning? Is there a tradition of shared decision-making? Is there willingness to adjust the partnership over time? Is there agreement on the importance of monitoring the impact of the peacebuilding activities?

- **Mutual Respect:** Is there potential for developing an understanding and appreciation of one another? Are the potential partners willing to respect the diversity of the religions and spiritual traditions represented in our group?

- **Trust and Confidence:** Is there a free exchange of ideas? Is there a sense of solidarity?

- **Leadership:** Is there agreement on who will take leadership or how leadership will unfold, including how the group will be represented and what kind of "public face" it wants to have?

Activities for Creating Our Work in the World

As we have said, positive approaches to peacebuilding pay special attention to local resources for change — those strengths, capacities, practices, and experiences present in the population of every culture that can be harnessed for peace. In this subsection, we present Appreciative Inquiry as a tool for interfaith peacebuilders to access these resources, and to use them to create shared visions of the future and mobilize for action.

Appreciative Inquiry (AI) is founded on the belief that people, individually and collectively, have unique gifts, skills, and contributions to bring to life. One way of understanding how AI relates to interfaith peacebuilding is to consider the meaning of its two words. *Appreciate* is a verb that focuses on valuing and enhancing value:

- to recognize the best in people and the world around us;

- to perceive those things that give life (health, vitality, and excellence) to living systems;

- to affirm past and present strengths, successes, and potentials;

- to increase in value (e.g., an investment appreciates in value)

Inquire is a verb that opens us to see new possibilities and creates new potentials:

- to ask questions

- to study

- to search into and explore

Hence, Appreciative Inquiry is the study and exploration of what gives life to human systems when they are at their best. It is a methodology based on the assumption that inquiry into and dialogue about strengths, successes, values, hopes, and dreams is itself transformational.

Another assumption of AI is that the future is created and held in people's conversations, stories, relationships, and expectations. Image and action are linked — and positive image is linked to positive action. Our images of the future will therefore guide our actions; and through inquiry and dialogue, we can shift our attention and action away from problem analysis to lift up worthy ideals for the future. Appreciative Inquiry guides people to ask certain kinds of questions, make shared meaning of the answers, and act together on the responses. In so doing, it stimulates and strengthens those things that are most alive, most effective, and most life-giving in a human system.[50]

The four activities in this subsection guide participants through the Appreciative Inquiry methodology, known as the "4-D cycle" — discovery, dream, design, deliver. Each activity covers one of these four phases, and the activities are meant to be done in a sequence. These activities may be undertaken in a three-day workshop, or they may be extended over several weeks or months. Most of the activities can be accomplished in three hours, with the exception of the Design Phase, which might require several meetings to complete.

It is a good idea for the group to have completed activities 6-1 through 6-4 before embarking on the Appreciative Inquiry process. These earlier activities in this section offer an important perspective on positive approaches to peacebuilding. They also help a group to consider the complexities and skills of taking action; suggest steps for learning more about the community; and engage the group in a search for appropriate partners. In doing these activities first, a group's experience with the AI 4-D cycle will be a richer and more fruitful process. If an interfaith group has identified potential partners (Activity 6-4) it may want to include them in the 4-D Cycle activities.

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[50] See the "AI Commons," a website hosted by Case Western Reserve University, which provides case studies, a resource list, and other support materials for further grounding in this approach, http://appreciativeinquiry.cwru.edu/.

6 – 5 Discovering Our Strengths

The Discovery Phase of Appreciative Inquiry is key to the whole AI philosophy. It contends that the questions we ask determine the answers we find: if we look for problems, we will find problems; and if we look for successes, we find successes. In peacebuilding it can be a challenge to find success or things that are working in a conflict situation. It may be necessary to look back into history to find positive examples of living together across boundaries of race, ethnicity, religion, or any of the other barriers that divide us. We may have to highlight even the smallest examples of constructive interaction to be able to glimpse what could be possible.

But what about the inequities in systems and all of the other complicated challenges that are a part of complex conflicts in our world today? Does Appreciative Inquiry take these into account? Three leading AI practitioners explain: "We do not dismiss accounts of problems, stress or conflict. We simply do not use them as the basis of analysis or action. We listen when they arise, validate them, and seek to reframe them."[51] In conducting this process with groups in conflict we must be careful not to "gloss over" deep injustices or wounds that are felt by one party or another. If groups have not done sufficient healing and reconciliation work, it may not be the appropriate time to use Appreciative Inquiry.

We will be well served in our own interfaith groups, before we decide what we would like to do in the community, if we take the time to discover all of the affirmative values, assets, strengths, and successful experiences that exist among ourselves. Some of these flow from the strength of our religious convictions and from the teachings of our traditions. Others reflect professional experiences and skills we have gained and still others the years we have lived on this earth as productive and compassionate citizens and human beings. The composite of the group's strengths form its "positive core," and it is unique and indestructible. We can access this core if we ask ourselves

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[51] Diana Whitney, Claudia Liebler, and David Cooperrider, "Appreciative Inquiry in Organizations and International Development: An Invitation to Share and Learn Across Fields," *Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding" A Resource for Innovators*, Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney, eds. (Washington, D.C.: Pact Publications, 2003), 28.

the right questions — questions that bring to light the best of who we are and that enable us to become energized and "turned on" to our own strengths. It is this positive core that will allow us to create a shared dream for the kind of impact we would like to have in our community and world. This will enable us to become clearer and more intentional about the possibilities that lie ahead for us as interfaith peacebuilders, and to create a plan of action that fits us well by drawing out the gifts that we have to contribute.

Purpose

- ⊙ To set the tone of appreciation and curiosity and to discover the assets, strengths, resources, and successes of individual members and of the group as a whole, as a step towards creating a vision for the group as interfaith peacebuilders.

- ⊙ To begin the first step of the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D Cycle, the Discovery Phase.

Directions[52]

1. **Introduce the Session:** Ask each person to reflect on one strength, positive quality, or other asset that he or she has seen at work in this group. Share a definition of assets:

   - ❍ **Personal assets** — such as the skills, knowledge, and commitment of members

   - ❍ **Intangible assets** — such as the group's respected name and cooperative networks

   - ❍ **Hard assets** — such as financial resources, meeting space, access to vehicles and equipment (e.g., photocopy machines, supplies)

[52] These directions were adapted from trainer notes developed for the Peace Corps in 2003 by EnCompass of St. Michaels, Maryland.

2. **Large Group Discussion.** Go around the room and ask participants to share the assets they have seen working in the group. Explain that these assets are what we have to work with as we talk together about our highest hopes for the group. The assets are like the colors on a painter's palette with which the group will paint its picture of the impact it hopes to have in the world. It will paint its future.

→ Share the first story:

   ❍ This is a fable about an African farmer who spent many years traveling around his country and even venturing into other countries in search of a diamond mine. His journey took him to places he had never seen and to lands far away from his home. There was always someone enticing him to go further, with news that diamonds had been discovered in the neighboring region. Although he worked very hard to locate a diamond mine, as the years went by and he was still unsuccessful, he grew despondent. Finally the farmer died alone, an unhappy man.

   ❍ Back home his family gathered to grieve. The next day, one of his uncles, who had spent years as a young man working in a diamond mine in another part of the world, dug a hole near the house to build the foundation for a new storage shed. There in the soil, he discovered stones that he recognized immediately as diamonds in the rough. To the eye that cannot see potential, these stones would not have attracted any attention at all. But the uncle knew the value of what he held in his hand. All along the diamonds had been there. The farmer had traveled great distances to search for them, while they lay in the ground close to his house. He was unable to recognize them and to imagine that riches could actually exist under his own feet on his own land.

→ Share the second story:

   ❍ A group of Ethiopian NGO leaders was gathered for a workshop on peacebuilding, to learn new skills for addressing issues of ethnic violence. In discussing the topic of healing and reconciliation, participants shared how

power issues among elites can become an obstacle to reconciliation. The group commented that the challenge is how to make the leaders take the interests of the people into account. The trainer then asked the group this question: "What traditional mechanisms exist in Ethiopian society that could hasten the processes of reconciliation since participation in the mainstream population is often minimal?" This one question triggered an entire afternoon of sharing. Five different traditional rituals and practices of healing and reconciliation were identified. One powerful practice was demonstrated before the group. Participants played the role of two clans in conflict. Members of one clan, which had committed an act of wrongdoing, approached leaders of the clan that had been victimized. One of the perpetrators knelt in front of the other clan leaders and placed a large stone on his neck. The act of forgiveness was now in the hands of the clan members who had been wronged. They could choose to lift the burden of stone from the neck of the opposing clan member or refuse to do so.

As this practice was acted out in front of the group, there was a bit of embarrassed laughter as the enactment brought forth in such a vivid way this traditional and "unsophisticated" practice. By the end of the afternoon, however, the workshop had been transformed from a group of participants who had come to learn the latest peacebuilding methods from experts one that had been moved to their core and could see, perhaps for the first time, the possibilities for bringing about healing using what already existed in their own culture.

→ Make the following points:

❍ We do not always recognize our own worth. We have become used to valuing those things that come from outside rather than looking within.

❍ As peacebuilders, we must learn to see with new eyes and to help others to do the same.

❍ Assets-based approaches, in general, and Appreciative inquiry specifically can help us locate this positive core of

traditional practices, rituals, and simple-but-powerful ways of bringing about change in relationships among people and groups.

→ **Introduce Appreciative Inquiry.** Begin by asking participants to describe "assets-based approaches" in their words. After soliciting a few ideas, suggest that assets- or strengths-based approaches are often discussed in contrast with "problem-based" approaches. When using problem-based approaches, we attempt to identify problems so that we might work together toward solutions that reduce or eliminate those problems. Assets-based approaches, on the other hand, look at the strengths of a community so that we might build on them in creating a better future together. Appreciative Inquiry is one such approach that has been applied in projects and communities all over the world.

→ Briefly review the fundamental assumptions of AI using a prepared flip chart or the handout, "Fundamental Assumptions of AI."

→ Review the 1-2-3 approach using a prepared flip chart or the handout, "The Appreciative Approach."

→ Present the 4-D Cycle on a prepared flip chart or the handout, "AI Cycle," and guide the group through a quick discussion of each of the four steps:

o The Discovery Phase is a time to explore and appreciate the best of "what is." This is accomplished through storytelling and dialogue.

o In Dream Phase we begin to ask "What might be?" This is done through conversations about the our past successes as they are revealed through our stories and our wishes for achieving more such experiences in the future.

o In the Design Phase we begin to imagine "What might be?" We create shared visions about the kind of future we want to create by looking at the whole system and seeing where innovation and change are needed in systems, processes, structures, people, programs, and leadership.

  o In the Delivery Phase changes are initiated and monitoring, evaluation, and feedback systems are set in place.

3. **Discussion in Pairs.** Suggest that the best way to understand the AI approach is to engage in it firsthand. We will begin the Discovery Phase through interviewing and storytelling. Pass out the handout, "Interview Guide," and ask participants to find a partner, someone whom they would like to get to know better. Share the following instructions and guidelines for the interviews:

  ❍ We will work in pairs. One person will serve as the interviewer, and the other will be interviewed. After the first interview is over, we will switch roles, giving each person a chance to be interviewer and interviewee.

  ❍ The person serving in the interviewer role should encourage the person to delve deep into their experience to find positive, affirming stories. The interviewer can help by being an active listener.

  ❍ The interviewer should record the major themes or important ideas from the stories, but should not try to record everything. It is more important to actively listen than to serve as a reporter of all that the person is saying. Be sure to use the speaker's own words, not your translation.

  ❍ Remember to pace yourselves so that each person in the pair gets a chance to be interviewed. We will have about 40 minutes for the interviews.

  Facilitator Note: An interview guide has been provided. You should feel free, however, to adapt the questions to your group, keeping in mind that appreciative questions are designed to access the best of people's experience. For example: "Can you tell of an experience you had with your group that made you particularly proud?" Activity 4-4 in this guide gives members practice in writing positive or appreciative questions. Depending on the amount of time available for these interviews, you may want to choose several but not all of the questions in the interview guide. Make sure, though, that everyone answers question six. Allocate a minimum of 40 minutes to this step so that each participant has at least 20 minutes to respond to the questions. Set the expectation with participants that this is not a "normal " interview process.

While it may be possible to go through these questions and answer them briefly, we are looking for deep answers that come from the heart.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Invite participants to share with the larger group particularly compelling stories from their interviews. Thank each participant for sharing a story before soliciting the next one. Defer discussion of wishes until the next session.

5. **Individual Task:** The next step is to capture the group's themes. Invite participants to record on cards the best practices, values, assets, strengths, and other themes they heard in the interviews. Ask them to write one idea per card, clearly, using large letters.

6. **Large Group Activity:** Invite participants to post their cards on the wall to create the group's "positive core." Briefly group the cards into categories, and lead a discussion about the positive core that seems to be emerging out of the stories.

7. **Large Group Discussion:** Guide a discussion about the interviews, perhaps using some of the following questions:

   ❍ Think about the interviewing activity we just completed. What were your impressions? What stands out for you?

   ❍ What was easy about the interviewing? What was difficult?

   ❍ What did it feel like to tell the stories? How did you feel after hearing the group's stories?

   ❍ What made the questions powerful? Can you imagine adapting this activity for use in our community? How might the questions change?

8. **Closing:** Summarize the Discovery Phase by reminding the group that this stage focuses on the peak moments of excellence in a group or other form of human system. In this phase, we explore what made those moments possible, so that they might be replicated and built upon in the future.

Materials needed: Cards (5 x 7 inches), newsprint, markers, tape; handouts: "Fundamental Assumptions of AI," "The Appreciative Approach," "The AI Cycle," "Appreciative Inquiry Interview Guide"

Size of group: 6-40

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Low, but with some familiarity with AI

ೞ Handout 6 – 5a or Prepared Flip Chart

Fundamental Assumptions of AI

❍ In every society, organization, or group, there is something that works well.

❍ What we focus on becomes our reality.

❍ Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.

❍ The act of asking questions of an organization or group influences the group in some way.

❍ If we carry parts of the past forward, it should be what is best about the past.

❍ People have more confidence and comfort to journey to the future (the unknown) when they carry forward parts of the past (the known).

❍ It is important to value differences.

❍ The language we use creates our reality.

From *The Thin Book of Appreciative Inquiry*, Sue Annis Hammond, 1996

 C҄ȝ Handout 6 – 5b or Prepared Flip Chart

The Appreciative Approach

One Goal:

    ❍ To seek the root causes of success (not the root causes of failure)

Two Laws:

    ❍ What you look for is what you find (the questions you ask determine the answers you get)

    ❍ Where you think you are going is where you end up (images are powerful and they create the future)

Three Principles:

    ❍ If you look for problems, you find more problems.

    ❍ If you look for success, you find more success.

    ❍ If you have faith in your visions, you can accomplish a great deal.

Adapted from "Appreciative Learning Cultures," Frank Barrett

ↀ Handout 6 – 5c or Prepared Flip Chart

The AI Cycle

The AI Cycle diagram showing four stages:
- **Inquire / Discover** — Appreciating the best of "what is"
- **Imagine / Dream** — What might be?
- **Innovate / Design** — Creating the future
- **Implement / Deliver** — Navigating the Change
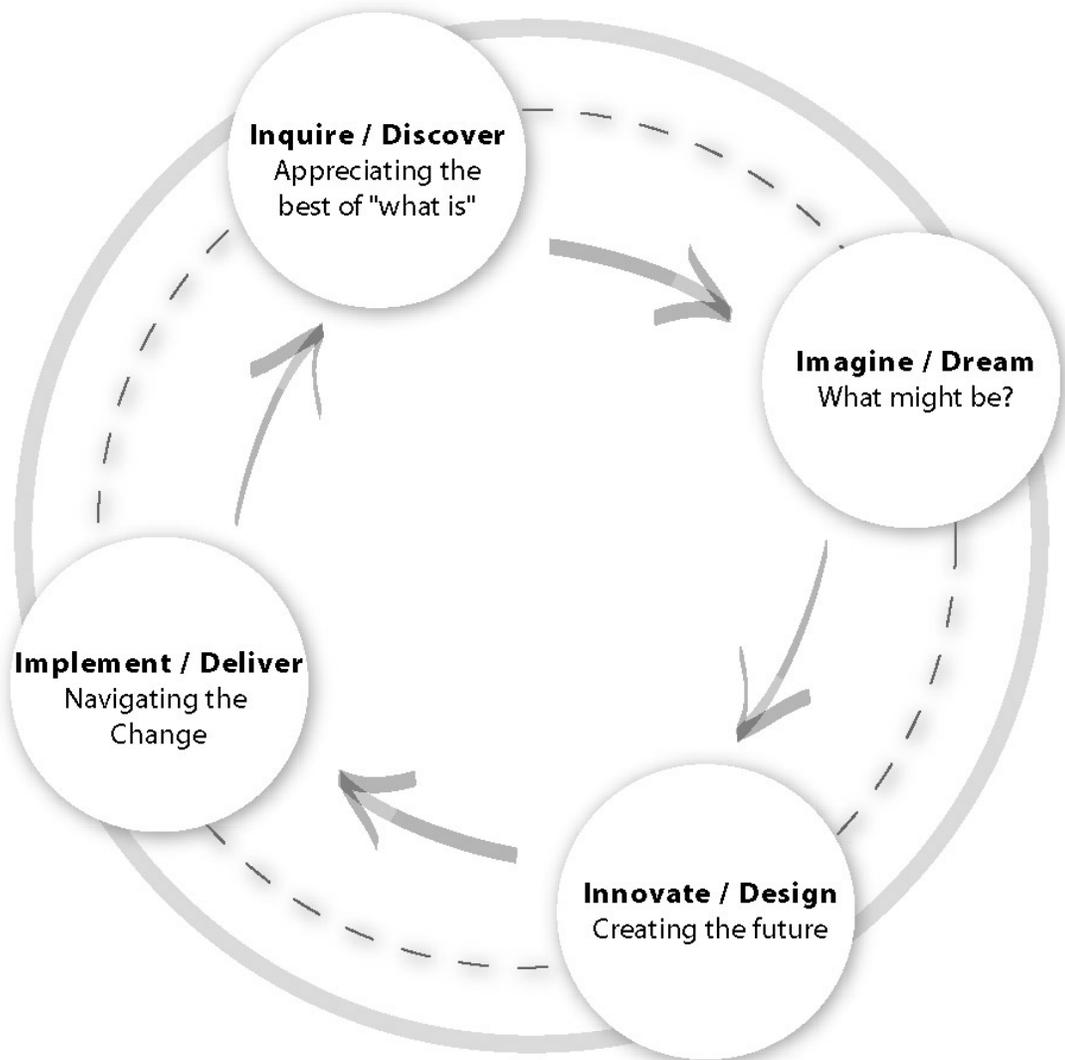
℅   Handout 6 – 5c

Interview Guide

Note to Interviewer: Take brief notes as you interview your partner.

1. **A peak peacebuilding experience: An important story from your life**

You, as well as everyone here, have been active in peacebuilding in many different ways. Share a story of one experience that stands out for you — a time when you felt particularly effective, challenged, alive, or transformed. A time when you felt like you used your full capacities and/or were able to draw out the best in others with whom you were working.

  ❍ What made this experience exceptional? What role did you play? What role did others play? What were the key factors that helped make it a peak experience?

2. **Values: What are the things you value deeply**; specifically, **the things you value most**

about yourself, your work, and this interfaith group?

  ⊙ Yourself: Without being modest, what do you value most about yourself — as a human being, a friend, a parent, a citizen, etc.?
  ⊙ Your interfaith work: When you are feeling best about your interfaith work, what do you value most about it?
  ⊙ This interfaith group: What is it about this group that you especially value? What is the most important thing that it has contributed to your life?

3. **Your contribution to peacebuilding**: Each of us brings unique gifts to the work of peacebuilding.

  ⊙ If we now had a conversation with some of the people who know you best, and asked them to share what are the three best qualities they see in you — qualities or capabilities that you bring to peacebuilding — what would they say?
  ⊙ What do you sense you are supposed to do before your life, this life, is over?

4. **Our inter-faith group**: Best moments

This group has been working together for ____(months/years). During that time there have been ups and downs, highs and lows, peaks and valleys. Interfaith groups, if they do their work well and deeply, are bound to face difficult moments. Sometimes there may be a natural urge to smooth things over too quickly. Think about a time when the group faced a challenge or a difficult moment and was able to persevere and learn from the challenge.

- ⊙ What enabled the group to face this challenge well?
- ⊙ How did the group draw on its own reservoir of inner strength?

Think now about some of the best moments in the life of this group — perhaps there was an event, initiative, or an activity that the group did particularly well. Or a moment in which there was a breakthrough in understanding between the members of our group.

- ⊙ Describe this moment. Why did you pick this moment as one of the best?
- ⊙ As you consider this moment, list several things that our group did particularly well.

5. Cataloging our own capacities for peace

Our group is made up of many talented members, each of whom makes a contribution to the group. Together our various skills, resources, knowledge, relationships, and experiences weave a tapestry that is the positive core of our group. This positive core consists of our "peace capacities" — our potential for bringing peace to our community and our world.

- ⊙ List as many capacities for peace (skills, knowledge, talents, relationships, resources, etc.) that you can think of that exist in our group.

6. Imagining the possible: Our special contribution to peace

Our group has a special role, a unique contribution to make towards building a culture of peace in this community. As you consider the capacities for peace that exist in the group, how could we best use these capacities? Think about all of the things that this group might do in the service of peace — hold an interfaith dialogue for the community, create events that promote healing and reconciliation, get involved in nonviolent action or in educating community members about the need for tolerance, appreciation for diversity, and peace.

- ⊙ If you could choose any project or activity for this group to undertake, what would you most love to see it choose to do?
- ⊙ What are three wishes you have for the future role of this group?

6 – 6 Dreaming and Visioning About Our Work

Creating a powerful dream — one that everyone can claim — is perhaps the most critical step in the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D process. The search for a vision to guide our lives has always been an important part of being human. Whether through traditional religion or indigenous practices, men and women have yearned for a compelling vision by which to steer the ships of their lives. For many Native Americans, the vision quest has been an extremely important part of life. This ritual provides the common person with access to spiritual realms for help. Traditionally, vision quests are a "coming of age" ritual, but they are also practiced by those seeking guidance in the affairs of life. The seeker may sleep on a bed of sage but for the entire duration of the vision quest he does not eat or drink. The quest may last just a day and a night or two, three, or even four days. The idea is for the seeker to pray from the heart and pay attention to the world around him. The seeker comes back from the quest ready to manifest the vision not only for himself or herself, but also for others in the community and world.

Just as personal visions are pictures people carry in their hearts, shared visions are carried in the hearts of people who belong to a group or a community. Personal visions derive their power from an individual's deep caring for the vision. Shared visions derive their power from a common caring. A shared vision has room for everyone at the table and all have had a hand at creating it. A shared vision makes our hearts beat faster and our aspirations soar.

The dream phase of the Appreciative Inquiry process is different from other visioning and planning methodologies in that it encourages stakeholders to create a compelling vision for the future based on the best of the past. This means that the dream is at once realistic, for at its foundation it is lived experience, and generative, inviting us to reach beyond the status quo to be the best that we can be.

Members of interfaith groups are already visionaries. They have seen the possibility of a world where the walls that separate us come tumbling down, a world in which we treat one another as members of one human family, with each welcome at the table. This activity allows members to create a vision of what their group would like to accomplish, from which will flow strategic planning and then action.

Purpose

⊙ To create a vision and guiding image for the group based on member's experiences of the past and hopes for the future. To identify the most enlivening and exciting possibilities for the group's work in the world.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session**: Ask participants to think of something that happened in their life that at one time they would have thought to be impossible, but later became possible. It could be something personal (I was able to get an advanced degree from the university; I was able to forgive an enemy), something that has happened in the community (we were able to bring together two parities who had not been talking with each other; we had the very first interfaith gathering with children) or in our world (apartheid ended; the Berlin Wall came down).

2. **Activity in Pairs**: Invite participants to find a partner and share their examples.

3. **Large Group Discussion**. After a few minutes, draw the group back together and ask for some examples of what was shared. Then share the following ideas:

   ❍ Often times we feel that change is impossible. We become used to having low expectations for ourselves, our groups, our community or nation, and our world. It becomes easier to argue about why something cannot be done than look for ways to make it happen. Hopefulness is seen as naive and unrealistic. Our world has, however, been changed by individuals who have had big dreams and refused to let them die. The impossible is always happening in our world.

→ Invite participants to take a few moments of quiet reflection on the positive core of the group, which has been posted on the wall, and ask themselves the question: "What is the world calling our group to be?"

→ Ask participants to share one of their wishes for the future role of this group (the last question on the interview guide). Continue in this way until each participant has had a chance to share at least one wish.

→ Ask participants to close their eyes, if they are comfortable doing so. Lead a guided visualization in which the members are invited to imagine the impact they would like to see their group have in the world. Try to help participants visualize what life looks like in this new interfaith group and in the community its hopes to serve, if their wishes for the future role of the group have been realized. (A sample visualization exercise is included in handout 6-7a.) If the group has worked with Section Five, remind members of what they have learned about the possible areas of involvement for interfaith peacebuilders.

Facilitator Note: Not all participants will be comfortable doing a visualization. An option would be to ask people to do a silent meditation about their hopes and dreams for the future to the group.

4. **Small Group Discussion:** Explain that we will be attempting to represent our visions and dreams in a creative way. Divide participants into small groups of no more than four or five, and give the following instructions:

❍ In small groups, have each person share his or her ideal image — the very image that he or she just had during the guided visualization.

❍ After all group members have shared their visions, they should begin to think about how they wish to represent these images using their creativity.

❍ Using the materials on the table, along with any other ideas or resources participants might have, the groups should create some representation of their ideal images. These might be collages, role plays, dances, sculptures, a ritual, and so on.

5. **Large Group Activity**: Invite groups to briefly share their creations with the large group. Emphasize that this is not a time for critique or judgment; groups should simply share their visual representations of their dream or other creative presentation and briefly describe them. Indicate that we are now going to take these powerful images and attempt to put them into words.

    → Explain that this exercise was the beginning of the Dream Phase of the 4-D AI Cycle. (You may wish to refer participants back to the flip chart or handout, "The AI Cycle.") The output of this phase is the "provocative proposition" or "possibility statement." This is an affirmation, a statement of what we want to be or have happen as if we are already there. It embodies the desired future or dream in words.

    → Review the prepared flip chart or handout, "Criteria for Good Possibility Statements."

    Facilitator Note: For some groups creatively expressing their dreams may be enough. Others will want to take this step of describing their dreams in words. For those that do not want to write possibility statements, this step may be skipped.

6. **Small Group Work**: Invite participants to go back into their small groups. Using the criteria listed, each group should merge the stories, wishes, and dreams they have discovered and into a written statement of possibility. Ask each group to write its completed possibility statement in large letters on a flip chart.

7. **Large Group Discussion**: Help the groups post their flip charts around the room. Ask each group in turn to present its possibility statement and suggest the following questions for review:

   ○ What do we like about this possibility statement?

   ○ What are the most compelling parts of this dream?

   ○ Does it make our hearts beat faster? Does it excite us?

   ○ What might we change to make it a dream that everyone can share?

Facilitator Note: If the group did not write possibility statements, lead a discussion of the dream presentations by adapting the questions above.

→ Share the idea that all the dreams have power and possibility. Even with excellent partners, however, a single interfaith group cannot do everything at once. We need to find out where the current energy and interest in our group lies and begin there. We will not, however, let the other dreams die or get left behind; we can revisit them at any time to see if we are ready to tackle them.

→ After all the dreams and possibility statements have been presented, ask the group to identify the most compelling dreams or pieces of a dream. Write each item on a flip chart so that a list of interesting possibilities for action emerges out of the dream work.

→ Give each individual three chances to vote for his or her preferred choices by placing a dot next to the item on flip chart. This gives a visual image of the group's interests and priorities.

→ Lead a discussion using some of the following questions:

❍ Reflect a bit on the Dream Phase. What stands out for you? What strikes you about this stage? What is the purpose of it?

❍ How did you feel during the creation of your dreams? During the writing of the possibility statements?

❍ Can you imagine using this part of the AI Cycle with groups in the community? How would you adapt it? Describe a situation in which you might use this phase of the 4-D Cycle.

→ Indicate that next we will explore the third stage of the cycle, the Design Phase.

Materials: Newsprint, markers, tape. Other materials for creative construction of dreams such as string, bits of fabric, whatever is available.

Size of Group: 6-40

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate, plus experience with AI

○3   Handout 6 – 6a

Our Future as Interfaith Peacebuilders:
A Visualization

Get comfortable, close your eyes if you like, and imagine that you are waking up in the year 2010 (or any year five years from the current date). Imagine that as you wake up, you are excited to find a community that is more harmonious, equitable, and alive than before. People from diverse groups are living in dynamic, creative interrelationship. This group — your interfaith group — has played a key role in helping to bring this about, in unique ways that reflect the interests and special skills and capacities of its members. This group is living fully up to its potential. It's living out the hopes you have for it and for the community of which it is a part.

Bring into your mind's eye this day in 2010. Imagine that this interfaith group is now fully engaged and involved in projects and actions that allow it to make its own special contribution to building a culture of peace. It is fully using all of its strengths and assets — its "positive core" is fully mobilized.

What is your interfaith group doing? Who is it working with? What kinds of partnerships have been formed? What projects is it working on?

Wander around your community and as you meet people in the course of the day, what pictures emerge that are inspiring and energizing? What are you feeling? What are people doing differently — in neighborhoods, in the marketplace, in the workplace, in government?

What skills are children learning in school? What kinds of programs are on radio or TV? What new kinds of activities do religious congregations engage in? What conversations do you have with family, friends, and with members of your religious community about these changes?

Congratulate yourself for being part of this social transformation. Open your eyes and return to this room at your own speed.

☙ Handout 6 – 6b or Prepared Flip chart

Criteria for a Good Possibility Statement

It is:

○ **Provocative:** It stretches and challenges us. It gets specific — "How do we make what we want tangible?"

○ **Grounded:** It gives examples that illustrate the dream as a real possibility because it is based on what the group has already been capable of doing and being.

○ **Desired:** If it could be fully actualized, you would want it as a preferred future.

○ **Affirmative:** It is stated in the present tense.

○ **Balances Novelty and Continuity:**

 o Novelty — the innovative and creative
 o Continuity — threads of identity, purpose, pride, wisdom, and tradition that are carried forward from the past

6 – 7 Design Phase

The Design Phase is where the detail is added to the interfaith group's dreams. It is an opportunity to flesh out the ideas that have the most interest for group members and to decide what would have to change about how the group currently operates in order to realize them. Innovation and creativity are not only the purview of the Dream Phase. In design, innovation is still called for along with strategic thinking and strategy development. Often times we jump too quickly from our visions to action planning. The Design Phase is the bridge between the dream and the action plan. It is the phase that gives form to the values and ideals embedded in our dreams. "In short it involves sorting, sifting, and making serious choices about what will be."[53] It is, in essence, designing the basic infrastructure that will support the realization of the dream. This phase requires careful consideration and lots of conversation. Of all of the phases, design may take the most time, occurring during several meetings over a number of weeks or months, as various ideas and options are considered.

Purpose

⊙ To develop a strategy for how to proceed with realizing the group's dreams and ideals.

Directions

I. **Introduce the Session:** Refer participants back to the AI Cycle flip chart, and invite someone to summarize the parts of the cycle have covered so far. Next, bring out the list developed in the last session of the most compelling dreams or pieces of a dream for which participants had "voted" with colored dots indicating the items that most interested and excited them. This gives a visual image of the group's interests and priorities.

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[53] Whitney and Trosten-Bloom, The Power of Appreciative Inquiry, 197.

→ Explain that the goal of this stage is to design our approach to realizing the shared dreams and ideals articulated in the possibility statements and the list we created of possible actions. Referring to the possibility statements on the walls and the list, ask, "What do we need to change or to continue to do to achieve these dreams for our group? How will we design the work ahead?"

→ Suggest that the group agree to work on the dream or dream elements that received the most "votes." While it is possible, particularly for larger groups, to work on more than one dream, it may be more realistic and practical if the group decides on a single focus for now.

→ Pass out the handout, "Design Considerations." Have participants read it with an eye to which of these considerations is an issue that might need to be addressed to realize our shared dreams.

2. **Small Group Work**: Divide into small groups and have each group choose two or three different design considerations to work on, so that all of the most important design considerations will be covered. Ask each group to suggest specific ideas or strategies that it would like the rest of the group to consider and write them on a flip chart.

3. **Large Group Activity:** Have the entire group walk around the room and have each small group, in turn, present its ideas. Ask participants to listen to all of the ideas first before beginning to discuss any of them. Ask them to pay attention to the possible linkages and connections between the different groups' ideas and allow their own group's work to be influenced by the thinking of the other groups.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Ask participants for their general observations and comments about what they have heard. List any "burning" issues or questions and save them to go back to later in the process. Next, ask the group to consider what kind of a process makes sense for working on design. The process should allow the group to learn to work together, share and test assumptions, create a common understanding of terms and concepts, and engage in a healthy give and take of ideas. The group might, for example, want to tackle two or three design elements at a time over several meetings, to give enough time to consider each one.

Materials needed: Flip chart paper and markers

Size of group: 6-40

Time needed: Two 3-hour sessions

Level of complexity: Low

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: moderate, experience with AI

℃℥ Handout 6 – 7a

Design Considerations

⊙ **Analysis**: Analysis is important before engaging in any peacebuilding activity. It not only includes issues of justice, power asymmetry, and the positions and interests of opposing parties, but also the consequences of taking action and the steps needed to deal with them (see "Activities for Developing Analytical Tools For Interfaith Peacebuilding."). What analysis have we done as a group and what are the results? What are the implications of the results for what we are considering doing? What additional analysis may be needed at this time? Who will do it and how? Who else needs to be involved?

⊙ **Goals**: It is important to translate our dreams into concrete goals and to be clear about what we hope to accomplish. What are our goals? What do we hope to accomplish with this dream or piece of a dream we have chosen? Who else shares these goals? How do they fit with our religions and spiritual traditions and teachings? What are our criteria for success? Nonviolence campaigns, for example, cannot be measured by short-term results alone. (See "Effective Approaches in Nonviolent Action Struggle: Case Studies," activities 5-14 and 5-15).

⊙ **Local Capacities for Peace**: We must be committed to spending time identifying local capacities for peace. This may require us to "dig deep," be persistent, and ask the right questions. What are the local capacities in our situation or community that we can build on? Who has experience and skills we could tap into? Who is a part of the "critical yeast" that makes things happen in this community? Have we identified the most important resources? How will we go about our continued search? Whom do we need to involve? What questions should we be asking?

⊙ **Positive Approach**: Positive approaches to peacebuilding require a certain ability to see potential and to create ways in which hope and resilience can be increased. Positive approaches often use affirmative questioning and lift up images that inspire and instruct. How can we frame this dream and the actions we are considering in a positive way? How might we use Appreciative Inquiry or other affirmative methods to further our dream? (See "Positive Approaches to Interfaith Peacebuilding," Activity 6-1.)

⊙ **Skills and Experience:** It is important not to undervalue skills and experience in the group, but it is also important not to overestimate what the group is capable of doing alone. Taking nonviolent action, for example, may require preparation and special training. Many nonviolence groups spend months training their members how to resist and sustain their level of engagement over the long haul (see "Building Our Skills for Nonviolent Action," Activity 5-15). It may be possible to find skills and experience that the group lacks through partner groups or individuals. What skills will we need to make this dream a reality? Will it be necessary to look beyond the group for these skills? Where will we find them?

⊙ **Partners and Networks:** Peacebuilding work cannot be done alone. In fact, more and more attention is being placed on coordination and cooperation among the various peace actors in a community. Peacebuilding requires a range of skills and capacities that any one group is unlikely to possess on its own. Networks are also growing and becoming more powerful. Being a part of networks, both local and global, can have some important advantages including access to experience and knowledge. What kind of partners do we need? Who are our potential partners? How should we approach them? What would interest them in partnering with us? What do we have to offer as partners? What kinds of networks should we consider joining? Why?

⊙ **Willingness to Engage:** Sometimes peacebuilders plan activities for others without involving them in the decision about whether or not they are ready to engage. In "Cycle of Reconciliation and Forgiveness" (Activity 5-9), for example, the issue is raised of whether community members would engage or refuse to engage in healing and reconciliation activities. How will we explore the readiness of members of our community to become involved in what we have planned? What is our strategy to involve them in the early planning and implementation so that their voices are heard from the beginning?

⊙ **Leadership:** Who takes the lead can be a sensitive and strategic issue in peacebuilding work. At times it is important that the visible leadership represent the diversity of the stakeholders involved. At other times it is useful for leadership to come from a completely neutral source. Who should take the lead in planning and implementation? What is our model of leadership? If shared leadership is our value, how will this look in practice? Who needs to be in visible leadership positions and who in the background? Do we need to look for a leader or sponsor with certain characteristics to spearhead our work and help build our credibility?

- **Sustainability and Long-Term Planning:** Sustainability is an important issue in peacebuilding. If, for example, the group wants to conduct an interfaith dialogue (see "Bringing Interfaith Dialogue to Our Community," Activity 5-8), it needs to identify mechanisms to insure sustainability of the dialogue process. If a group intends to engage in nonviolent action, the activity should be planned as part of a larger set of actions and not as a one-time only exercise. How will we make this dream and the actions we are planning now sustainable? What will we need to consider as aspects of a long-term plan?

- **Resources:** While much can be accomplished with minimal resources, some financial and other kinds of resources (transportation, photocopying, printing, etc.) may be necessary. What are the resources will we need to mobilize for action? Where can we find these resources? Is fundraising necessary? How will we do this and who will do it?

- **Complexity:** Many peacebuilding activities, including the ones suggested in this guide, are not simple one-time actions. Many require substantial preparation and a number of willing hands. On a scale of one to five, with one being low and five being high, how complicated would you say is the dream that we are considering? What makes it complex? What is our strategy for dealing with the complexity?

- **Commitment:** Many of us fall in love with the notion of being peacebuilders but may be unfamiliar with the time and deep commitment that this work can require. There may be moments of frustration and even danger. There may be countless hours spent in preparation and relationship building. How much time are we willing to commit to bringing this dream to reality? Do we have both the time and the level of commitment that this dream will take? How will we know? Who else can lend a hand?

6 – 8 Delivering the Action

This activity, the Delivery Phase, completes the Appreciative Inquiry 4-D cycle. It is perhaps the most important phase because is involves transforming discovery, dreaming, and design into concrete actions. Now is a time for the group to organize itself to begin the work of implementation. It is a time of excitement and energy. It is a time to reach out to others who may not have been involved up to now and spread the enthusiasm for what the group will undertake. This activity should take place after sufficient time has been devoted to the Design Phase and participants are comfortable with moving ahead. Traditional action planning processes can weigh participants down and become a burden, as more and more tasks are listed and assigned. It is important to plan well but also to find ways to allow people do the jobs they feel most interested in and passionate about.

Purpose

⊙ To develop a plan of action.

Directions

1. **Introduce the Session**: Summarize the AI Cycle up to this point and explain that the final step in the 4-D Cycle is the Delivery Phase. The task during this stage is to set the group's "compass" — to begin to plan out and take action indicated by the design work, to monitor the progress, and to make course corrections and continuous adaptations. This is a time of continuous learning, and the potential for innovation, creativity, and productivity is very high.

2. **Individual Reflection:** Ask participants to reflect on the work that has been accomplished so far. Ask each person to think quietly about the following questions:

❍ What are the three most important things we need to do next to keep moving forward?

❍ How do I most want to be involved?

❍ What do we need to do as a group to keep our energy and motivation high?

3. **Small Group Work:** Form small groups and ask the members to share their answers to the questions. Ask the groups to select what it considers to be the three most important things to do to move forward.

4. **Large Group Discussion:** Ask the groups to come together and share the results of their discussion, starting with the three most important things each group identified for moving forward. List the items on a flip chart.

→ Synchronize the priorities listed and get agreement from everyone about next steps. Decide who will carry these steps forward and in what time frame. Suggest that a way to maintain the momentum of the group during this stage is to make sure we are allowing for learning and reflection, for the making of mistakes, and for the ongoing appreciation and celebration of the efforts group members are making.

→ Decide how and when to continue the planning and implementation of activities. Work groups might be created or activities divided up among partners. Discuss how the work will be coordinated and what people will do to stay in touch.

5. **Closing:** Hold a celebration for all of the work the group has accomplished so far and all that is to come!

Materials needed: Flip charts or chalkboard and writing materials

Size of group: 6 to 40

Time needed: 3 hours

Level of complexity: Moderate

Level of risk: Low

Experience level of facilitator: Moderate

THE WAY FORWARD

"Religion is at the heart of social change, and social change is the essence of religion."

Sulak Sivaraska

"The world is waiting . . . for new saints, ecstatic men and women who are so deeply rooted in the love of God that they are free to imagine a new international order."

Henri Nouwen

As we are creating this first iteration of the URI Interfaith Peacebuilding Guide, in 2003 and 2004, we feel a sense of urgent need in the world. We believe that acting together from the deep core of our diverse religious and spiritual traditions is a power for peace that has not yet been fully recognized or mobilized, yet it is one that can help reverse the rising tide of fear and violence.

We join with many others on this journey of transformation, and we hope that this guide will be one of the helpful tools along the way, bringing practical skill-building activities to those who can put them to good use immediately.

Interfaith peacebuilding is telling a new story. Its many authors are creating a new narrative for us to live, about human cooperation and respect, in the name of that which for each of us is the sacred source of life.

We invite you to use this guide in any way that you like, and to let us know how it goes. This will be a living document, and it will grow and change as we learn together how to travel into new dimensions of interfaith peacebuilding.

Thus, in this conclusion, which is truly only a beginning, we invite you to magnify the story of Interfaith Peacebuilding. Tell us your stories of discovery and growth. We are listening and sharing the good news of interfaith pioneers becoming transformational peacebuilders.

We acknowledge as the source of this work the grassroots interfaith peacebuilders whom we know as members of United Religions Initiative.

May your work be filled with miracles, love and peace.

URI Peacebuilders

RESOURCES

United Religions Initiative   PREAMBLE, PURPOSE & PRINCIPLES

Preamble

○ We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world, hereby establish the United Religions Initiative to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

○ We respect the uniqueness of each tradition, and differences of practice or belief.

○ We value voices that respect others, and believe that sharing our values and wisdom can lead us to act for the good of all.

○ We believe that our religious, spiritual lives, rather than dividing us, guide us to build community and respect for one another.

○ Therefore, as interdependent people rooted in our traditions, we now unite for the benefit of our Earth community.

○ We unite to build cultures of peace and justice.

○ We unite to heal and protect the Earth.

○ We unite to build safe places for conflict resolution, healing and reconciliation.

○ We unite to support freedom of religion and spiritual expression, and the rights of all individuals and peoples as set forth in international law.

○ We unite in responsible cooperative action to bring the wisdom and values of our religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions to bear on the economic, environmental, political and social challenges facing our Earth community.

○ We unite to provide a global opportunity for participation by all people, especially by those whose voices are not often heard.

○ We unite to celebrate the joy of blessings and the light of wisdom in both movement and stillness.

○ We unite to use our combined resources only for nonviolent, compassionate action, to awaken to our deepest truths, and to manifest love and justice among all life in our Earth community.

Purpose

The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Principles

1. The URI is a bridge-building organization, not a religion.

2. We respect the sacred wisdom of each religion, spiritual expression and indigenous tradition.

3. We respect the differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.

4. We encourage our members to deepen their roots in their own tradition.

5. We listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust.

6. We give and receive hospitality.

7. We seek and welcome the gift of diversity and model practices that do not discriminate.

8. We practice equitable participation of women and men in all aspects of the URI.

9. We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence.

10. We act from sound ecological practices to protect and preserve the Earth for both present and future generations.

11. We seek and offer cooperation with other interfaith efforts.

12. We welcome as members all individuals, organizations and associations who subscribe to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.

13. We have the authority to make decisions at the most local level that includes all the relevant and affected parties.

14. We have the right to organize in any manner, at any scale, in any area, and around any issue or activity which is relevant to and consistent with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.

15. Our deliberations and decisions shall be made at every level by bodies and methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.

16. We (each part of the URI) shall relinquish only such autonomy and resources as are essential to the pursuit of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles.

17. We have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to meet the needs of our part, and to share financial and other resources to help meet the needs of other parts.

18. We maintain the highest standards of integrity and ethical conduct, prudent use of resources, and fair and accurate disclosure of information.

19. We are committed to organizational learning and adaptation.

20. We honor the richness and diversity of all languages and the right and responsibility of participants to translate and interpret the Charter, Bylaws and related documents in accordance with the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and the spirit of the United Religions Initiative.

21. Members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized.

Reading 1

What Is Peace?

By Louise Diamond[54]

Peace is more than the absence of war, violence, or conflict, though that is an important first step. Peace is a presence — the presence of connection.

Inner peace is about connection with our true and natural self, and a sense of being part of something larger. This connection gives rise to serenity, balance, and a feeling of well-being.

Peace with others is about our connection with the open heart, through which we remember our shared humanness. This brings us to the practice of conflict resolution, forgiveness, and reconciliation.

Peace in our communities and in the world requires a connection to respect for our multiple differences, and for the right of all people to justice, freedom, and dignity. This leads to trust, community, and co-existence.

Peace is a state of mind and a path of action. It is a concept, a goal, an experience, a path. Peace is an ideal. It is both intangible and concrete, complex and simple, exciting and calming. Peace is personal and political; it is spiritual and practical, local and global. It is a process and an outcome, and above all a way of being.

Ultimately, peace is about the quality of our relationships — with ourselves and with others. How can we live together, in the smallest individual and family units and in the largest networks of peoples and nations, in ways that honor who we are as dignified human beings?

WHAT IS A CULTURE OF PEACE?

The United Nations declared the year 2000 as the International Year of theCulture of Peace, and the years 2001 to 2010 as the International Decade for a Culture of Peace and Non-violence for the Children of the World. Governments, local organizations, and individuals all over the world are using these years to probe deeply into the nature and practice of a peace culture.

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[54] Louise Diamond, *The Peace Book: 108 Simple Ways to Create a More Peaceful World* (Berkeley, Calif.: Conari Press, 2001), xviii-xix.

This is a noble goal, and one I am fully aligned with. Yet, let's be honest: not having experienced a culture of peace, we don't actually know — any of us — exactly what it feels like, sounds like, looks like, as an integrated way of life. It exists for humanity as a dream, a hope, a vision, which we are in the early stages of realizing. We do, however, know what some of the key elements of a peace culture are.

When our norms as a family, a community or a society foster inclusiveness instead of discrimination, an attitude of 'we' rather than 'us versus them,' and partnership rather than domination, then we can be said to be living in a culture of peace.

When we automatically solve our conflicts through negotiation, rather than with guns or bombs; when we remember that we are all in this together, rather than assuming that any of us are entitled to have what we want at the expense of others; and when we treat every person, regardless of how they look, act, or worship, with equal dignity and respect, then we know we are living in a culture of peace.

When we engage in dialogue that bridges our differences, rather than debate that polarizes us; stand with the oppressed rather than the oppressors; and treat animals, forests, oceans, and all our natural resources as honored relatives with whom we share the earth, rather than as objects existing for our pleasure and our profit; then we are living in a culture of peace.

When we can go inside and touch the deepest chord of serenity and joy at will, rather than expecting our well-being to come from the outside; relieve our stress with meditation and relaxation rather than drugs or at-risk behavior; and express our feelings honestly and appropriately, rather than acting them out in hurtful ways; then we will know a culture of peace.

When we live from love rather than fear; let compassion triumph over hatred; seek reconciliation rather than revenge; and practice generosity instead of greed; then we will live in a culture of peace.

Reading 2

Unearthing the Strange: Mediation and the Journey Towards Other

By Brendan McAllister [55]

There is an ancient Chinese saying: "A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

A plaque framed on the wall of a friend of mine is a reversal of the Chinese dictum. It reads: "A journey of a single step begins with a thousand miles."

In the Northern Ireland situation we are used to offers of help from abroad. Whenever outsiders talk to me about the possibility of giving us help I usually tell them that the worst type of helpers from outside are those whom I call 'missionaries' who come with a pre-conceived idea of what we need and a plan to convert us to their way of peace. I tell them that the best kind of outside helpers are those whom I call 'pilgrims' who come among us with a healthy sense of respect and deference and with a mind that is truly open. The pilgrim among us does two particularly useful things:

Tells a good story - about their experience elsewhere, leaving us to apply it to our situation if that seems right - and

Asks a good question – the type of question which a stranger asks and which, if asked by a local, would be viewed with suspicion.

PEACE IS A RESPONSE THAT BEGINS IN THE HEART

I hope that my contribution here will be understood as the thoughts of a mere pilgrim thinking aloud. In keeping with the spirit of the saying on the office wall, my pilgrimage began when I sat at my desk struggling with the question of whether my personal instinct for peace is a response to the violence of the Troubles in Ireland.

If I had lived my life in a politically stable society, would I be so preoccupied by Peace? Is the Peace that is meaningful and important to me solely a response to violent conflict? If I did not know such conflict, what would peace mean to me? Is it a stand-alone phenomenon or is Peace always a response? And, is there a difference between being personally peaceful and living in a

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[55] CONFLICT RESOLUTION NOTES, 20:4 (2003), 3.

peaceful world? By this I mean, if there is no peace in the society around you, can you have peace within yourself?

I suspect you can in fact be peaceful or, rather, peace-filled in the midst of violence, though that requires a maturity which is, so far, beyond me.

However, the most essential point is that if Peace is a response to conflict, the origins of that response are within the human heart; that Peace begins as something personal.

SUSTAINING PEACE REQUIRES THE DEVELOPMENT OF METHOD

Peace is about balance. Where there is imbalance, peace is disturbed. And the primary arena of struggle, either a struggle to maintain balance or a struggle to redress imbalance, is within the human person, within the Self. to take root in order to stabilize the whole world is the human heart or, for the spiritual among us, within the soul.

I think that in the earlier years of our Troubles in Ireland, most peace activities came from the impulse of the heart: in the face of terrible violence, groups of citizens were moved to organize demonstrations for peace and, especially over a period of years in the mid 1970s, people responded in large numbers. With thousands on the streets in protests that appeared to unite the whole community, it seemed that violence could only wither and fade in the face of such collective moral outrage. But violence did not wither and fade. Indeed one veteran paramilitary more recently told me that peace demonstrations only served to anger paramilitaries who were disgusted by what they saw as simplistic condemnations and vowed to respond with an even greater determination to shake what they saw as the complacent self righteousness of the peace movement.

However, what actually happened as our Troubles stretched into years and political violence took on a durability in our lives was that some peace activists began to develop methodologies for peace. They came to realize that sustained peacemaking required more than the impulse of the sickened human heart. There was a need to move to the development of method. My own journey into the field of mediation was an example of that transition because, for me, mediation emerged as a potential method of building peace. And I should add that it is only one of a wide range of peace-building methodologies that have evolved in our society over the last thirty years.

MEDIATION IS A METHOD OF NONVIOLENCE

I should also like to make the point that some peace efforts are anti-violent and others are non-violent. For me, anti-violence is a belief that you can promote or defend justice by

opposing violence. Anti-violence is reactive to violence and while often does good in society, it tends to limit people to an awareness of what they are against rather than an agreed understanding of what they are for.

Nonviolence, on the other hand, is a belief that you can promote or defend justice by serving Truth, with Compassion.

In this respect, of course, Truth is viewed as multi-faceted, with no individual or group being in total possession of truth. Rather, as the peace philosophers, Jean and Hildegard Gos Meyr taught us, every human being carries within themselves at least a seed of truth.

So, love of truth - and a belief that it is to be found in some measure within every person's story - is fundamental to nonviolence

So is the need for compassion. And by compassion I mean an attentiveness to the suffering of others and a desire to relieve suffering. Mediation is a method of nonviolence because it seeks to unearth truth that is hidden or disguised and because it demands of the mediator that they give a degree of respect or compassion to all sides in a conflict, no matter how repugnant some people seem to be.

COMPASSION IS THE MEDIUM BY WHICH WE UNEARTH THE ORIGINS OF CONFLICT

If peace is ultimately a personal gift or a personal struggle, so is conflict. All conflict is ultimately personal because it involves human beings. All human beings are worthy of compassion, no matter how wrong their opponents may view them to be. In this respect, compassion and the search for truth provide a path by which we can be led to an understanding of the origins of conflict. The philosopher, Gaston de Bachelard, provided a good direction to the peace seeker when he wrote the following:

'What is the source of our first suffering? It lies in the moment when we accumulated silent things and harboured them within us.' Compassion, then, views people in conflict as suffering in various ways and seeks to relieve their suffering.

ENGAGING DIFFERENCE HELPS US LEARN ABOUT OURSELVES

The conflict in Ireland is one of the world's more celebrated and analysed affairs. But I have to tell you, as an Irish person whose life has been preoccupied with our conflict, I do not yet know the origins of our particular quarrel. Many nationalists in Ireland would react with incredulity to that statement. For them the origins are obvious and well documented: they lie in the centuries old occupation of Ireland by the British and will end when the British give Ireland

back to the Irish. However, ours is a disputed history, for many people from the unionist tradition in Ireland view the nationalist demand for British withdrawal as nothing more than an anti-democratic desire for secession from the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland. They view Irish nationalism as the cause of much of our difficulty.

If we want to know the origins of conflict we must enter its humanity. We must get to know the human beings who are within a conflict, whether they are victim, villain or, indeed, both. We must retrace the story of their anger and travel into the pain that lies within it. We must hear their sense of justice and discover the integrity that lies beneath it.

To do this we must be able to win the respect of those with whom we would work. Their respect does not necessarily involve winning their affection or, indeed, their trust. But to examine the origins of conflict, we need to enable those within it to have the kind of confidence in us that a patient holds for a dentist or an air passenger does for a pilot. After all, conflict intervention requires the participants to become vulnerable - to the danger that they will be over-exposed and weakened; that they may be disempowered and manipulated or perhaps most threateningly of all, that they may have to surface the source of their own suffering.

The town of Oldham, just outside Manchester, England, is one of a number of places in England, which have experienced racial and ethnic unrest in recent years. Some weeks ago I spent a few days there and on one morning I was introduced to an Inter Faith group of clerics from various traditions who have come together to improve relations across Oldham. I asked them to tell me what God was saying to them about their divided town. One Muslim imam replied through an interpreter. He said that, in the beginning, God had created a single unit of man and woman and then separated them into different nations in order that they should learn about themselves. In other words, the very diversity of humanity should serve to enable people to learn about themselves by interacting with each other.

DIFFERENCE IS ESSENTIAL TO ALL OF LIFE

Interestingly, this theme is central to the thinking of Jonathan Sacks, Chief Rabbi of England, in his new book, 'The Dignity of Difference'. According to Rabbi Sacks, we should view difference not as a difficulty to be overcome, but as the very essence of life. He observes that even in terms of simple biology, while all of life has four genetic characteristics in common, every eco-system is dependent on bio-diversity. Again, referring to Scriptures, Sacks traces the moment in the book of Genesis when Judaism and Islam go their separate ways. Says Sacks, "God splits up humanity into a multiplicity of cultures and a diversity of languages." According to Sacks, God effectively tells Abraham, "Be different, so as to teach humanity the dignity of difference." (as reported by Jonathan Freedland in 'The Guardian' newspaper, 27.8.02)

RECONCILIATION ADDRESSES EST-RANGEMENT AMONG PEOPLE WHO ARE DIFFERENT

Enda McDonagh is an Irish priest and theologian. A few years ago I asked him to help me understand the literal meaning of the word 'reconciliation'. McDonagh responded by talking about the Greek word 'Alos', meaning 'Other'. He explained that in the Greek, the 'Other' was someone who was different and whose difference appeared a threatening thing. (Indeed, my dictionary defines 'otherness' as the state of being different.) According to McDonagh, reconciliation is the work of bringing together those who are "hostilely different." Reconciliation requires respect for the Other. It means taking the Other fully seriously, including the bits that you do not understand. In our conversation, Enda McDonagh referred to various instances in the Jesus story which revealed how Christians should treat the stranger. For McDonagh, respecting the stranger – the Other –is not about excluding or wiping out difference. It is about taking the other fully seriously, including those parts of him which we do not understand; those dimensions which are strange to us. For him, the work of reconciliation is about serving a coming together of the strange. It requires a capacity to recognize 'the more' in the person who has offended us.

Conflict evolves when human beings cannot cope with difference; when the difference in the other person appears to threaten us. And we are more likely to feel threatened by things which we do not understand or which we find strange and alien. Reconciliation is the process by which we overcome estrangement.

MEDIATORS PROVIDE BRIDGES THAT HELP PEOPLE ON ONE SIDE TO JOURNEY TOWARDS THE OTHER

What is the mediator's bias? It is to be ever oriented towards the Other, whoever the Other is from one place to the next.

What is the mediator's challenge? It is to approach the 'Hard to Reach' and to engage the 'Comfortably Divided'.

What is mediation's essential character? It is to appreciate that all conflict is ultimately personal.

PEACE IS A LIFE TASK FOR THE PILGRIM

I have been professionally engaged in mediation within Ireland's deep societal conflict for ten years. As an indigenous practitioner I have to recognise that I am not outside of our conflict; by the very act of being born in Ireland I am part of the Irish problem. It was there before I was born and it will still find expression after I am dead. Hopefully, we are at an end of a terrible

period in the history of Ireland when conflict took on a violent form. However, the struggle to accommodate difference is a life task for my generation. Conflict is an enduring reality of my life journey and Peace is a Life Task. As a mediator my task is to journey towards otherness, wherever I find it.

Living in a divided society, the mediator's contribution is to help people to approach that which is strange in the Other and, in doing so, to encourage the gift of compassion, which, as I have said, is the medium through which we approach the origins of conflict.

Excerpted from a presentation at Eastern Connecticut State University Peace Conference, 9 NOVEMBER, 2002.

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Interfaith Peacebuilding Resources

Compiled by Emily Welty for Mohammed Abu-Nimer June, 2002

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Films:

Dalai Lama: There are various interviews with the Tibetan Buddhist spiritual leader, who has adopted a nonviolence strategy in resisting Chinese domination of his people.

A Force More Powerful: a film series that documents nonviolence movements in Chile, South Africa, Poland, Serbia, and the United States.

In the Name of God: examines the motivations which would ultimately lead to the drastic actions of the Hindu militants, as well as the efforts of secular Indians - many of whom are Hindus - to combat the religious intolerance and hatred that has seized India in the name of God.

Gandhi: a three-hour feature film that reenacts the nonviolence campaign and the life struggle of Mahatma Gandhi.

Romero: a film that captures the struggle of the Archbishop of El Salvador, who was killed by military forces while organizing farmers in resistance to government land policies.

What Do You Believe? Spiritual lives of American teenagers: a 50-minute documentary that paints a broad picture of the religious and spiritual lives of American youth as it delves deeply into the issues that are at the heart of humanity. **What Do You Believe?** features Buddhist, Catholic, Muslim, Native American, Jewish, Pagan as well as Christian teens.