ENCOUNTERING

WORKBOOK FOR

OTHER FAITHS

An Introduction to the Art of Interreligious Engagement

Maria Hornung

With Stephen M. Wright

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Revised, 2015 with Stephen M. Wright

Disseminated by the:

Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia

A nonprofit organization founded in January 2004 to advance mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation among faith communities, in order to work for the common good of the region.

Copies of this workbook may be ordered from:

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Copies may be obtained online freely from the Interfaith Center at:

http://www.interfaithcenterpa.org/documents/workbook.pdf

Introduction

Welcome to *Encountering Other Faiths*. If you desire to appreciate someone of another religion, practice, or tradition better, if you are open to discover truth, beauty, and goodness in the faith of another community, then you will find these sessions a treasure of insight, energy, and inspiration.

Developed out of years of collaboration with peoples of various faith traditions and formal interreligious studies, this seminar should prove constructive in helping to build communities of people longing to see and work toward deepening kinship and collaborating for the common good. It aims to address one of the major difficulties experienced by interested and committed people undertaking interfaith dialogue or encounters, namely, where and how to begin.

These sessions are not simply "theoretical." They are the work of heads, hearts, and hands. They are a journey in faith toward a deeper sense of the sacred and of the human family. This seminar offers a process that facilitates sharing and mutual learning, an experience of dialogue with those of another faith community, and an education in ideas that are integral to the mission of interfaith encounter and dialogue.

This seminar is a way to share with individuals and groups the exciting and necessary enterprise of interfaith dialogue in its several modalities. It is grounded in a lifetime of appreciating the truth, beauty, and goodness of various religious traditions. It is shaped in the experience of being neighbor and friend, of pursuing common cause, of sharing spiritual rituals and aesthetic cultural expressions, and of finding common ground in the midst of varied dogmas and belief systems.

This workbook lays out the basic design for each of nine sessions. Readings essential for thoughtful participation in the seminar are provided on pages 27-50. Participants in the seminar, *Encountering Other Faiths*, have found it very helpful to reflect on their experience of the sessions as they occur. The Appendix provides a useful format for personal reflection on Page 56. Although the process used in this model is divided into nine sessions, the series can be variously re-divided. In this case, the time commitment required for the series will vary. It is essential to give a minimum of 2 to 2 ½ hours for the sessions themselves as well as time needed to prepare for engaging the sessions.

The assumptions and principles underpinning the seminar are articulated on pages 51-52, which participants are highly encouraged to read. Facilitators of the series should read "The Facilitator's Guide," which offers helpful guidelines for the facilitation of the seminar, found on pages 53-54. A resources list in the Appendix indicates books that offer concise background information on the major world religions (Page 69).

Since the 1950s, interfaith dialogue has seen momentous changes. At the same time, the first decade of the 21st century has already seen many challenges to the concrete vision of constructive interfaith interaction. A reading is included on the history of the interfaith movement in America, beginning on page 36. More on themes and historical developments of interfaith dialogue is explored in “The U.S. & the Relevance and Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue” reading (Page 27).

In this workbook, we hope to offer a creative and open forum for engagement to be utilized by all people of any tradition or belief in community wishing to encounter and dialogue with those of another faith or path. Ideally, each community of faith or tradition planning to encounter the other would go through this workbook within their own community at the same time. This would provide an immensely rewarding and enriching mutual encounter as each group experiences Session Five together after preparation within their own community during the first four sessions. The different traditions may decide to operate from Session Five onward as an intercongregational endeavor. This would depend largely upon the context and sophistication level of the congregations.

The process of the seminar aims to provide space for the free interchange of ideas. Its structure is outlined in such a way that participants can articulate their experiences, learnings, and new findings. It simultaneously provides enough flexibility to adapt to changing realities. It is hoped that this balance is reflected in how the workbook is used and in the interest and enjoyment participants of all faiths & paths experience in their encounters with each other.

Many interfaith educators have mentored me as I undertook the creation of this workbook. I am grateful for the inspiration and critique of Leonard Swidler, Temple University professor of Interreligious Dialogue; Mahmoud Ayoub, Temple University professor of Islamic Studies; and Jane West Walsh, Jewish educator with expertise in interfaith dialogue. Their original work in the field of interfaith dialogue and their creative ideas have been building blocks in this new approach to introducing persons at the grassroots to interfaith engagement. I am grateful for the additional critique of Gity Etemad, Richard Fernandez, Henry Galganowicz, Josephine Kase, IHM, Ashvinder Kaur Mehta, Kana Mitra and Abby Stamelman Hocky of the Baha'i, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Protestant, and Sikh traditions in shaping this educational resource for greater sensitivity to the worldviews of others. Stephen Wright is grateful for the review and input of Reena Spicehandler, and of Richard Fox Young, Princeton Theological Seminary professor of History of Religions, for the 2015 update of the workbook.

A fuller treatment of the vision, ideas, and values underlying the work of this workbook can be found in the book, *Encountering Other Faiths*, by the same author, Maria Hornung, published by Paulist Press in 2007.

This workbook is a work in progress. Our learnings as we engage these seminars will give rise to new insights and improvements. The piloting of this model, as well as the dissemination of the workbook, is an ongoing project of the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia.

For more information on the process, on perspectives in successfully implementing the seminar, and on how to obtain more copies of the workbook, please contact Maria Hornung or Rev. Nicole Diroff, Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, 100 W. Oxford St Suite E-1300 Philadelphia, PA 19122, phone: 215-222-1012, www.interfaithcenterpa.org

May we walk together with peoples of faith to build a place of greater welcome and inclusive justice for Earth and her peoples!

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READINGS

APPENDIX

An Invitation

TO ALL WHO DESIRE TO REACH OUT TO OTHERS
IN COMPASSION AND TRUST

AWARE THAT, WHILE WE ARE DISTINCT FROM ONE ANOTHER,
WE DO HAVE COMMON GROUND

AND THAT TOGETHER WE MUST FIND THAT COMMON GROUND.

A NOTE FROM MARIA HORNUNG

In 1962, I went to Africa as a member of a religious community dedicated to the gift of presence among peoples in need of healing, receiving from them and giving of self, so that together we build a life more open to the creative potential of healing and reconciliation that lives within the human spirit.

This community, Medical Mission Sisters, is an International Community of 24 nationalities, living and expressing mission in 18 countries.

My life in Africa led me to live and engage in God's healing presence with others of like mind and heart from many traditions of faith and cultural heritage. In the settings in which I was blessed to live for over 25 years in Africa–in Kenya, Uganda, Ghana, Nigeria as well as other countries I was privileged to visit, I have collaborated with those of African Traditional Religions, of the Christian and Catholic traditions, and those of the Islamic tradition.

The spiritual grounding within the social and political fabric of most/all of these African societies was palpable to me from the very beginning. Contact with spirits and ancestors and awareness of the yet-to-be born were shaping influences in individual and communal life in villages and towns. Their well articulated and practiced values of inclusivity, understanding, and collaboration were not only essential for survival but were, for the people I lived with, of the essence of what it means to be truly human.

I left Africa with a vision of the relationships among people, and nature as well, that the Almighty Spirit holds out for us and that enables the building of a Society conscious of all of its members and challenged to meet their needs and foster their aspirations.

One of many instances of this vision that stands out for me is this one. One day, I was being introduced to the site of the ancient chieftaincy of the Akan people of Ghana. As we toured some of the earliest rooms of the Chief and his ministers we came to the "war room." The guide said to us, "…and since now a days there are no more wars, another use for this room needs to be found."

And I knew then in my heart, that it is worth devoting one's life to this… the day when there are no more wars… between individuals, communities, and nations. That is an icon of my hopes as we engage the work of encountering those of other faiths, daring to understand, daring to collaborate together to bring about a new world reality.

SAMPLE INTRODUCTORY LETTER TO CONGREGATIONS FROM RELIGIOUS COMMUNITY LEADER

Dear Congregation/Faith Community,

As stated in a previous announcement, we are embarking together on an important venture of understanding and cooperation by using the Encountering Other Faiths workbook and accompanying sessions. I hope you will join me on this journey as together we explore and clarify our own convictions and deeply held beliefs, as well as those of another community.

It is my hope that we can share and inform one another as we develop much-needed positive and helpful relationships with our own neighbors in faith. With issues of religious freedom and practice of worship in America constantly in the headlines today, it is imperative that people of faith and tradition come together, not only to dialogue, but also simply to encounter one another as people.

Interfaith dialogue and encounter does not mean that a participant must believe all religions are equally true or valid. In fact, interfaith dialogue is rather an appropriate venue for all to voice their own personal, deeply held beliefs and learn from the differences of others in an attitude of honesty and transparency. In doing so, we also find commonalities which supplement these differences, strengthening personal faith.

Together, we can celebrate our uniqueness as people of faith and practice alongside others who belong to a different belief or religious tradition.

Like any other program, these sessions require personal commitment, including a time commitment of 2 to 2½ hours per session and adequate time to prepare beforehand. Although there are nine sessions total in the program, the first five are the most essential. They examine our own tradition's commitments, our own personal interfaith experiences, what religious tradition would interest the group to encounter, and lastly, the interfaith encounter and dialogue itself. The group has the flexibility to pick one or two sessions from six through nine to process their interfaith encounter together after session five if they cannot go through all the sessions. It is imperative that each participant review the readings "The Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue" on page 34 and "Ground Rules for Interfaith Dialogue" found on page 39 before beginning this seminar, and especially before and during Session Five: "Engaging in Dialogue" for a constructive and mutually enriching experience for all.

Much appreciation is given to the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia for creating and disseminating this model of interfaith encounter and dialogue to be used in congregational or community settings.

May all be blessed as we encounter other faiths in a spirit of understanding and compassion!

Sincerely,

Pastor/Reverend/Rabbi/Imam, etc.

SESSION ONE

GATHERING TOGETHER

PURPOSE

Welcome, exploration of hopes and expectations, and planning for the seminar

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To welcome one another and share expectations

To set goals for the seminar

To establish basic parameters for the meetings

To plan for gathering information about religious diversity in our area of interest

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session One

"The Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 34)

PROCESS

Welcome by sponsors and facilitators

Welcome

Introduction, history of coming together and undertaking this process

Getting acquainted

- Please give your name, tell the group where you grew up and something about your neighborhood.
- Share with the group an early encounter you had with a person of a different religion, tradition, or spiritual affiliation.

Exploring motivations and expectations

Initially in "buzz groups" then in the large group, explore questions:

- What draws me or brings me to this process?

- What expectations do I have for this process?

Using the expectations, the group identifies achievable goals for the seminar.

Focus Theme: **The Meaning of Interfaith Dialogue**

(40 minutes for this exercise)

Facilitator highlights the reading (Page 34), soliciting comments from participants.

Review of assumptions and principles inherent to the process (Page 51).

Acknowledge and confirm the parameters for the sessions:

Dates, times, and location of the sessions.

Format of the sessions.

Acknowledge various responsibilities (e.g. ambience, refreshments, setup).

Facilitator introduces “Format for Personal Reflection after Each Session" (Page 56).

Establish the process for gaining information concerning religious diversity in the area of the group’s interest/focus, (e.g. neighborhood, county, local coalition):

Name the area; name the data already known by the group.

Determine what additional data are needed and how participants will cooperate in obtaining this. Two helpful ways to do this are (1) participant observations as they travel within the area of concern and (2) the website: http://www.thearda.com/.

Ask two people to collate the information and format it for Session Three.

HOMEWORK

Gathering of data concerning religious diversity in the area of group interest.

Review of Interfaith Encounter – simple-write up of encounter with a person of another faith (see Appendix, Page 65).

Reading: "The United States & the Relevance and Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 27).

Supplemental Reading: “A Brief History of the Interfaith Movement in the United States” (Page 36).

SESSION TWO

ASSESSING OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS OR TRADITIONS

PURPOSE

To develop insights about interfaith encounters and to become acquainted with sources of information about the beliefs, practices, and structures of other faiths or spiritual traditions

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To share accounts of personal encounters with those of other faith/spiritual traditions and to learn from these encounters

To become acquainted with guidelines for interfaith dialogue

To become acquainted with informative, concise resources on major religious traditions

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Two

- Simple write-up (each participant) of encounter with a person of another faith, belief, or spiritual affiliation (see Appendix Review of Interfaith Encounter, Page 65)
- "The United States and the Relevance and Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 27)
- "Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 39)
- References for concise materials on major faith traditions (see Appendix, "Resource List," Page 69, as well as participant suggestions)

PROCESS

Introduction

Review of expectations and goals generated in Session One.

Facilitator highlights from the reading, “The United States and the Relevance and Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue”.

Focus theme: **Process of exploring personal interfaith encounters**

(40 minutes is allotted for this theme)

In small groups, each participant shares a copy of their overview of an interfaith encounter; time is given for reading.

The presenter highlights the encounter; listeners ask questions for clarification; the presenter offers clarifications.

Listeners offer their own sense of the situation and response given; the presenter responds.

The above process is repeated with each presentation.

The group members take note of their shared learnings about dialogue with others.

In large group, members share their learnings

Members are invited to share insights and learnings.

The large group considers:

- What attitudes and behaviors lead to a positive outcome to interfaith encounters?
- What attitudes and behaviors are detrimental to a positive outcome of interfaith encounters?

Facilitator reviews “Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 39)

After input, “buzz sessions” are held in the large group.

Participants explore implications and offer insights about applications in real life situations.

HOMEWORK

Preparation of data concerning the diversity of worshiping communities in area of interest and concern.

Reading: “Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 42).

SESSION THREE

EXPLORING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR LOCALE

PURPOSE

To become acquainted with the presence of other faiths or spiritual traditions within our area of interest, and to become aware of the implications of this presence in relation to the modalities of interfaith dialogue

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To review the data concerning the presence of people of other faith/belief or spiritual traditions within the area of interest

To grow in awareness of the implications and potential contained in this data

To become acquainted with themes that lend themselves to exchange between those of different religious/spiritual traditions

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Three

- Data related to religious diversity in the area of the group's concern or focus
- "Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 42)
- "Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 44)

PROCESS

Review and explore the data concerning the presence of various faith and belief traditions within the area of interest:

Those who have collated the material introduce the group to their summary.

Participants offer insights as to the implications and potential for interfaith interaction suggested by this data.

Focus Theme: **The Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue**

(40 minutes allotted for this exercise)

The facilitator highlights the reading, "Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 42).

In small groups focused on the different modalities of interfaith dialogue, members consider:

a) their own experiences with these modalities and
b) what potential there is for furthering that modality within the area of interest or concern.

Small groups summarize their insights; these insights are shared with the whole group.

"Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue"

- Simple introduction by facilitator of reading (Page 44).
- Consideration of what themes will be used for exploration in Session Four.

HOMEWORK

- Review "Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 44).

- Refresh acquaintance with "Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 39).

SESSION FOUR

TREASURING OUR FAITH HERITAGE

PURPOSE

To articulate and affirm the authenticity and relevance of the aspects of one's own faith, tradition, or practice; to cultivate confidence, openness, and interest in the work of getting to know persons of other religious and spiritual traditions

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To become acquainted with the major themes used in exploring one's own and others' faith or spiritual traditions

To study one of the themes as members of a unique faith tradition

To dialogue about one or more of the themes

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Four

- "Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 44)
- Basic criteria for preparing questions for use in interfaith dialogue (Page 45)
- Concise information on faith traditions invited to dialogue in Session Five

PROCESS

Focus theme: <u>Engaging in dialogue</u>

(50 minutes allotted for this exercise)

Participants select (a) theme(s) for exploration.

Exploration of theme(s) chosen in small groups of three or more persons.

Facilitator reminds the participants of ground rules for interfaith dialogue.

Facilitator offers guidelines for sharing and discussion:

- How does one engage this theme personally? How does my identity as a person of faith support me in this?

- Use the questions given with the selected theme ("Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue", pages 44-45).

Insights and learnings shared in the group as a whole:

- Name commonalities discovered.

- Name distinctions discovered.

Facilitator introduces the idea of search for common ground taken from "Introduction to Common Ground" (pages 46-47).

Group selects themes for dialogue with guests in Session Five.

HOMEWORK

Read concise background material on religious or belief traditions of guests invited to dialogue in Session Five, provided by the facilitator using Resource List in the Appendix (Page 64) and/or facilitator's own proposals.

Review "Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 39).

Participants take responsibility becoming personally acquainted with the persons invited, and prepare to introduce them to the group and to acquaint the guests with the focus/theme of the session.

SESSION FIVE

ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF ANOTHER FAITH OR TRADITION

PURPOSE

To enter into a dialogue of faith and to open oneself to the truth, beauty, and goodness present in different traditions. To begin to appreciate both shared commonalities and distinct differences

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To meet with persons of other traditions and begin dialogic conversations with them

To gain a foundation for further possible exchanges and engagement with persons of other religions and traditions

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Five

Information on religious traditions of invited guests
"Ground Rules for Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 39)

PROCESS

Welcome and mutual introductions:

Welcome and introduction of guests.

Self-introductions of each interfaith dialogue guest, each group participant; each participant offers their name, religious or spiritual affiliation (if several are present); each shares what makes them interested in interfaith dialogue.

Focus theme: **Engaging in dialogue together**

(40 minutes are allotted for this exercise)

- In mixed small groups, guests and group members present their thoughts, views, and feelings on the theme(s) chosen for dialogue.

- Questions for clarification are entertained. These are preceded by mirroring back to the speaker what he or she has said, and obtaining their verification of the questioner's understanding of what was conveyed.

- Free flowing discussion by all is invited, guided by the ground rules.

- Small groups consider: highlights of their sharing, what they shared in common, where participant expressions differed from one another.

Learnings from small groups are shared in the large group:

- What discoveries have participants made in respect to the commonalities and distinctions shared among them on this theme?

- What have they learned about finding common ground?

Considering possibilities for further encounters and further collaboration between people of these particular faith communities:

In large group, brainstorming of avenues for further encounters and interactions between members of the different faith/spiritual communities.

Test for viability of the different alternatives.

Gratitude to the guests for their presence and contributions.

HOMEWORK

"Introduction to Common Ground" (Page 46):

Participants reflect further on sharings of Session Five:

- What commonalities were discovered?

- What differences were discovered, what is the nature of those differences?

Ideas concerning further collaboration with others are noted and printed for use in Session Six.

"Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 42).

SESSION SIX

EXPLORING COMMON GROUND WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS

PURPOSE

To confirm our discovery of common ground and the nature of the dialogue that fosters common ground; to articulate patterns of constructive dialogue and collaborative action with members of other religious traditions

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To integrate learnings from Session Five

To envision ways of further collaboration within the area of interest and concern

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Six

- Participant reflections on dialogue in Session Five
- “Introduction to Common Ground” (Page 46)
- "Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 42)

PROCESS

Introduction – Facilitator highlights “Introduction to Common Ground” (Page 46).

Focus theme: <u>Debriefing the experience of dialogue with those of other traditions</u>

(40 minutes are allotted for this exercise)

In small groups, members share the experience of dialogue in Session Five.

- Feelings experienced, understandings gained.

- Commonalities discovered; differences discovered, the nature of the differences.
- Learnings in relation to "common ground".
- Hopes in relation to further engagement with faith groups in the area.

In the large group, collate learnings from the small groups

Listen to learnings within the small group, note similarities and complementarities.

Generate group's own wisdom about working towards common ground.

Envisioning a future with others

In the large group consider future collaboration with those of other faiths or beliefs.

- What are the practical elements of the vision we see for the future?
- What are the hindrances to this practical vision?
- What directions would be helpful to move towards the future?

HOMEWORK

"Stages of Faith and Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 30).

Personal reflection:

- Since high school, what significant deepening of faith have I experienced? How has this experience transformed me? What experiences and persons helped in that transformation?

- How has *Encountering Other Faiths* influenced my own faith, belief, or spirituality? What two experiences have been significant for me?

- How has *Encountering Other Faiths* impacted my beliefs and attitudes towards people of other religious or spiritual traditions? How has it influenced my ongoing commitment to the future?

SESSION SEVEN

LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCES OF DEEPENING FAITH

PURPOSE

To explore the ground for commitment to interfaith engagement and/or dialogue as an experience of deeper faith. To plan for ways this commitment can interface with the mission of my larger community(ies)

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To gain recognition of personal faith experiences, to discern whether these are deepening through interfaith engagement

To assess the attainment of group goals thus far

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Six

Reflections concerning experiences in exploring common ground with those of other faiths in relation to *Encountering Other Faiths*
"Stages of Faith and Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 30)

PROCESS

Focus theme: **<u>Exploring personal growth in faith</u>**

(40 minutes are allotted for this exercise)

In groups of three or more share an experience of growth in faith or spirituality since the time of high school: What was the transformation you experienced? What experiences and persons helped in that transformation?

Deepening faith and *Encountering Other Faiths:*

- During the seven sessions experienced thus far, what two experiences have been significant for you or have had a strong impact on you?

- In what ways have these experiences affected your own faith or belief system?

Learnings in small groups are shared in the large group:

- In what ways has the experience of *Encountering Other Faiths* had an impact on your beliefs and attitudes towards people of other religious traditions?

- In what ways has your faith been deepened through the process and what has been helpful? What could be more helpful?

In the large group, review and assess how goals set in Session One have been addressed.

Sharing the experience of *Encountering Other Faiths:*

In the large group, consider how to share aspects of this experience and its learnings with the wider faith community: Who? What? When? How?

Assessing goals in light of *Encountering Other Faiths:*

In the large group, review and assess how goals set in Session One have been addressed.

HOMEWORK

Evaluation of the design and process of *Encountering Other Faiths:*

- Reviewing the seminar in general, how has it fostered the understanding of interfaith dialogue?
- What have been three main emphases of the seminar for you? For each of these, consider the questions: In what ways has each emphasis proved helpful? In what ways has it been unhelpful?
- Considering the overall design of the seminar, has it been clear? Has it been user friendly?
- During the seminar experience, what attitudes and skills have you acquired?

Reading: “Stages in the Process of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 40).

SESSION EIGHT

RESPONDING TO OUR "CALL" TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

PURPOSE

To deepen understanding of the process of *Introduction to Encountering Other Faiths*; to critique the process, and to support the participants in ways that they may help others become acquainted with interfaith dialogue

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To identify the design and processes used in this seminar

To articulate and confirm the most usable of these processes, and to identify an overall process that might best support participants in facilitating others' interest and participation

To identify resources for persons desiring to develop skills in facilitating and advancing interfaith dialogue

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Eight

- Personal evaluations of the process of *Encountering Other Faiths*
- "Stages in the Process of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 40)

PROCESS

Focus theme: **Assessment of the process for Encountering Other Faiths**

(40 minutes are allotted for this exercise)

In small groups, identify the sense of overall movement in the process.

- Using participants' personal reflections, small groups make a collation of their responses in assessing the process:

    - How has the seminar fostered interfaith/interbelief dialogue?
    - The main emphases of the seminar; what has been helpful, unhelpful?
    - Overall, has the process been clear, user friendly?
    - What attitude and skills have participants acquired?

- Sharing of observations and insights in respect to the collated participant assessments.

- Small group develop recommendations for a best process for supporting persons who are interested in beginning interfaith dialogue.

In the large group, small groups share their findings and recommendations. The large group considers:

- What modifications can be made that would generate a more usable process?

- How can the participants use these recommendations as tools for their own work?

Stages of Interfaith Dialogue

"Stages in the Process of Interfaith Dialogue" are highlighted by the facilitator.

In buzz groups, members reflect on how their experience contributes to greater understanding of these stages of interfaith dialogue.

Learnings are shared in the large group.

HOMEWORK

- Review: Spirituality: A Common Ground for the American People? from Winter's "Witnessing to the Spirit: Reflections on An Emerging American Spirituality" Page 48 or the "United Nations Earth Charter" (http://www.earthcharterinaction.org/content/pages/Read-the-Charter.html)

- Each person agrees to become acquainted with one expression of each of the tenets of universal love, compassion, justice and charity of his/her own faith tradition and one each of another faith tradition. Each of these is written on a piece of paper, 8" x 5 ½", one tenet to each paper.

- Each person meets with a person of another religious tradition and considers the question: What four principles do you both agree would form the basis of an approach to life issues that would foster greater access to justice for all? These four principles are noted on pieces of paper 8" x 5 ½", one to each paper, noting the faith adherence of the persons doing the sharing.

SESSION NINE

DEEPENING KINSHIP: COLLABORATING FOR THE COMMON GOOD

PURPOSE

To confirm tenets of universal love, compassion, justice, and charity within faith traditions and their potential for collaboration across interfaith boundaries for the common good

PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To become acquainted with the greater common good that can come alive through the collaborative work of women and men of different religious and/or ideological traditions

To begin to grasp the blessings, opportunities, and challenges for the American people posed by the pluriform nature of America's religious traditions

BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Nine

- Participants' work on tenets from at least two different religious traditions
- Participants' work on an approach to life developed in dialogue with someone of another faith tradition.
- Spirituality: A Common Ground for the American People? from Winter's "Witnessing to the Spirit: Reflections on An Emerging American Spirituality" Page 48
- "United Nations Earth Charter"

PROCESS

In the large group, participants share their work on tenets of universal love, compassion, justice, and charity, grouping the 8" x 5 ½"papers on newsprint in like categories. Later the content of this newsprint is typed up and given to the participants.

Focus theme: **Considering the blessings and challenges of interfaith engagement**

(40 minutes are allocated for this exercise)

Participants share their principles, noted on pieces of paper 8" x 5 ½"inches, for a more just society with the large group.

Themes are identified and contributions are grouped in accord with themes. All papers relating to the same theme are attached to one newsprint.

Small groups work on a theme. They harmonize the different contributions and they reach a consensus on an articulation that honors the various contributions.

The work of the small groups is shared in the large group. Discussion on the implications of this work follows.

Review of readings

Participants form small groups, joining with those who have worked on the same document:

- Group members share their insights.
- These are collated and five insights are selected and noted on newsprint in order to share them with the large group.

In the large group:

- Learnings from the small groups are shared.
- The large group considers the questions: What promise does such work hold for us in the 21st century? What are some difficulties in implementing these approaches?

Ritual of commitment

Participants enter into a simple ritual of personal commitment to foster Interfaith Engagement.

Closure

THE UNITED STATES AND THE RELEVANCE AND IMPERATIVE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Religious Traditions and the United States Today

> "The United States is becoming increasingly diverse. Perhaps the greatest challenge in U.S. society today is dealing with diversity issues – gender; sexual orientation; physically and mentally challenged people; intercultural, interfaith, and intergenerational relationships… In the past, all who came to these shores were expected to assimilate – that is to adopt the dominant culture and language and become part of the melting pot. Today people of different origins are proud of their primary culture and try to maintain it."[1]

Therefore, it becomes critical to the future of this country that its citizens encounter and come to know people of different backgrounds. They must become familiar with their worldviews and their hopes and struggles. They need to enter into mutual relationships with them, as neighbors, as seekers of a just society for all, as brothers and sisters in a mutually built society.

> One clear factor of life in the United States is religious pluralism. Some may still ask the quaint question: Is the United States a Christian nation? But, put this way, it is not a question about statistical facts but an ideological slogan in response to recent events. We were pluralistic in a religious way in the 1960's, but now religious pluralism is not just an important factor, but an essential element in our analysis. Today, there is no question that one of our features, if not one of our greatest strengths as a nation is our religious pluralism.[2]

Hartford Seminary has published a study: *Meet Your Neighbors – Interfaith Facts*. This is a comparison of the beliefs, practices, and vitality across Jewish, Christian, and Muslim congregations in America. These include: main line Protestant churches, Roman Catholic congregations, African American churches, Reform and Conservative temples, Orthodox Christian churches, evangelical Protestant groups and Islamic mosques. The study indicates that social outreach is a vital element of most faith communities. At the same time, the study reveals the great lack of interfaith relations among faith communities in general. In fact, for many faith communities this is not an operative priority.

In the United States, the demographics concerning the changing patterns of ethnicity and religious adherence give insight into the changing expressions of values as well as the overall cultural environment. Integrating and working creatively with these changes towards a stronger nation requires civic participation and proactive leadership. However, making ends meet, and providing for immediate and extended families under difficult economic circumstances, heavily impacts the priorities that demand the time and energies

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[1] Center for the Study of Religious Life, *Dialogue on Mission*, (Chicago: Claretian Publications, 2000), pp. 17 – 18.

[2] John Borelli, "The Catholic Church and Interreligious Relations" Presentation, Summer Studies (Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo, NY, 2003) p. 3.

of most Americans. This is a significant factor in the ability of many citizens to prioritize time to make their voices heard in public, religious, and educational arenas.

At the same time, with changes in relationships and the constant evolution of values and meanings in our society, Americans face the challenge of articulating our identity as a people. This is a creative and critical challenge. However, if this challenge is not met, Americans will less and less be able to benefit from the transformative experiences we encounter in the 21st century.

Convictions of Religiously Committed People in the United States

In conversations among scholars, committed religious people, and ordinary folk in the mosque, temple, synagogue, church, or hall, the belief has repeatedly resurfaced that for religions in the United States, the most religiously diverse country in the world, this is indeed a chance to "seize the moment," and the time for action is at hand. In many other similar moments, it has been assumed that if the chance to engage were not taken, another moment would come. Today, however, we might not have another chance if we do not embrace this opportunity. Doing this means that all have to cross over into other worlds of thinking and association, at a fair distance from our comfort zones. At the same time, consciousness of ecumenism, and more especially interfaith endeavors, is not high on the list of religiously committed people in the United States. This is even more significant in light of ever growing misunderstandings and conflict between religions and religious people within the United States.

In addition, interfaith or interbelief/interpath dialogue is often misunderstood as something that takes place as an exchange only among experts. There is not an appreciation of the various modalities of interfaith engagement, or of their benefits. There is no question that this is one of the most critically needed human endeavors in American society today. Those who have begun interfaith relationships in local, civic, and national arenas are among the prophets and healers of our times. Theirs are among the most important contributions to national discourse being made at the beginning of the 21st century.

The 2005 Annual Scholars (these included Jews, Muslims, and Christians) Conference offered insightful analyses of forces affecting interfaith engagement today. Some of the new threats to interfaith engagement today include (1) September 11th and the aftermath of that attack, (2) the United States' position in a world where so many lack the means to meet basic needs and attain self-determination, (3) the conflicts in the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Iraq, and (4) widespread identification of the new enemy as "Muslim," influenced by extremist terrorist groups such as Al Qaeda and ISIS. Anti-Islamic sentiment is notable among some Americans and the application of new security measures is selectively discouraging to all people of Middle East ethnic origin, including non-Muslims.

Threats to and inspiration for interfaith engagement have their roots in the gifts and shadows within the religious traditions themselves. An indisputable insight that has gained crucially needed recognition in the last fifty years is that no religion is monolithic. In each tradition, there are differences of interpretation. No one group/voice speaks for all the people of any faith.

We live in a world that is becoming "smaller" and is marked by territorial disputes and conflicts of economic interests. We also face the politicization of religious fundamentalism in all the world's major religions. We need to be honest and open in respect to the sins all of us have committed against others; all have martyrs from the others; each has

perpetrated the crimes. In some fundamentalist arenas, the moderates of the same religion are denigrated or expelled, resulting at times in intrareligious warfare. American religious experience is one of moderation. Herein lies its strength. However, insulation and isolation are also evidenced in some religious traditions in America.

World religions are doubtless dominant forces in society across national and economic boundaries; and religious feelings are being used to incite and to justify war. It is true that the human discovery of truth, beauty, and goodness provokes an assent to truth, beauty, and goodness. It should be an assent free from psychological, financial, and emotional persuasion. Yet, centuries of missionary activities of different religions evidence the use of tactics that are manipulative and oppressive, and at times in league with civil or colonial powers. This history demands our awareness and humble recognition as we enter the path of constructive interfaith interaction.

Teachings of all the major religions do speak of the "Golden Rule," or some variation of it, namely, extending to others the same respect one wants for oneself. However, there is much-needed elucidation and interpretation of the dogmas of these world religions in a way that leads to peace. Interfaith dialogue must work for the elimination of ignorance, misunderstanding, prejudice, and devastation. It must seek to overcome the insecurity that leads to phobias and offer resistance to religions participating in violence. It must make its goal to move individuals and peoples from unawareness to understanding, from exclusion to reciprocity, from fighting to cooperation.

In looking at the lives of religiously committed people, interfaith dialogue looms large as a major challenge. It is one in which few people are involved. At the same time the arenas in which religiously committed people are involved – service to those who are marginalized, the works of health care and education, advocacy for systemic change, witness to the rights for all, building communities, and others – can most effectively be addressed by people of various religious and ideological traditions working in collaboration. For this reason, interfaith, as well as interethnic, dialogue is integral to reducing the climate of conflict in the United States and for preserving a nation of equality, justice, and peace.

In the end, the most critical question to arise in the beginning of the 21st century with respect to interfaith relationships is, "How can we move interfaith engagement from the intellectual upper echelons to the classroom, to the public, to the grassroots?"

More on the history of the interfaith movement in America and on interfaith dialogue can be found on page 36.

STAGES OF FAITH AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Faith is a dimension of human existence, a generator of worldviews. It is both personal and communal. A person has a chosen way of relating to self, to others and to the transcendent, beyond the touch and feel of life's experiences. A person has a chosen worldview that influences thought and action. A community too has a chosen way of relating to the world that impacts and shapes attitudes, values and variously behavior.

The experience of the influence of others on our lives leads us to be aware of the kind of faith they bring to life. Is this person able to be a mature and cooperative member of his or her social circles? Is this person able to sense the justice and injustice of a system towards those of other social entities, especially minority and oppressed peoples? Is this person able to sense the call to create or to work for a better world in which all have access to life, livelihood, freedom, peace, and happiness? Faith is connected with all of these.

How do human beings mature in their faith? The journey is both a personal responsibility and an ongoing transformation to greater maturity. Most often such a journey is nurtured in a community of faith. At times this is a single community of faith; often it involves different circles of faith.

Attraction to faith communities and subsequent adherence to them can materialize in many ways: via one's birth family, avenues to address exigencies of life, educational systems, attraction to figures or persons of faith or to doctrines and other ways. As part of integration into the faith, one accepts the spirit, the values, and the norms as well as the predominant worldview. Indeed this process of integration cultivates a certain maturing in faith. The discernment and decision to embrace a faith community can be a significant event in one's life of faith. Basically, the journey dynamic is one of growing personal consciousness and choice as well as ongoing dialogue concerning the authenticity and relevance of the faith community itself. It culminates in personal commitment as well as in the desire to continue the search for the transcendent and the pursuit of right relationships.

After years of research and reflection, James Fowler developed an identification of what he termed stages of faith development. “We looked at faith as a way of knowing and seeing the conditions of our lives in relation to more or less conscious images of (God/the sacred) an ultimate environment…All of these play critical roles in shaping our actions and our reactions in life.”[3] These stages of faith comprise the following:

- **Stage One**: Intuitive-Projective faith that an infant receives directly from the nurturing and teaching of parents or parent figures; *["I'm this religion because my parents are this religion."]*

- **Stage Two**: Mythic-Literal faith in which one absorbs literally the myths, beliefs and practices of the community in which one is immersed; *["Adam and Eve ate an apple and sin entered the world." "There is a Santa Claus."]*

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[3] James Fowler, *Stages of Faith*, (Harper, San Francisco, 1981) p.92.

- **Stage Three**: Synthetic-conventional faith in which one owns a world of meaning that is shaped by the larger community to which one adheres and out of whose attitudes and values one shapes one's behaviors and evaluates what is good and evil – strongly conforming to that community's conception of an ideal adult; *["There are 'good guys' and 'bad guys'; my religion and my country are 'good guys'. I judge other religions based on my limited experience with members of those religions."]*

- **Stage Four**: Individuative-Reflective faith in which one's identity is now grounded in a reflected and acquired worldview with a sense of meaning differentiated from that of others; *["I see the need to critique my religion; I recognize positives and negatives in it"]*

- **Stage Five**: Conjunctive faith in which one integrates aspects of faith perspective or worldview, values and attitudes left aside in gaining the clarity and focus of the Individuative-Reflective stage of faith; *["I seek ways to foster that which is positive in my religion and to address problems within it. I seek to support others in efforts to be open to the positives of my and other religions and to be aware of the problems within them."]*

- **Stage Six**: Universalizing faith in which persons "become incarnators and actualizers of the spirit of an inclusive and fulfilled human community."[4] *["I see good in other faith traditions and am comfortable in working with members of those traditions to create a better human community."]*

Stage Three - The majority of people find their home here

In general, I find that a majority of younger and older adults find their home in Stage Three of Fowler's paradigm. This means possessing a worldview that does embrace people beyond their own family: people in their social, occupational, religious, and ethnic circles. But, if it does include persons of other ethnic or religious groups, the exchange is often based in limited or role type interactions. Their faith does not instigate a lot of interest in or concern for such folks. As long as competing interests can be satisfied and other crises do not loom on the horizon, interactions are generally civil and disinterested.
Significant others in the communities of which one is a part play a vital role in shaping of one's expectations and value articulations.

A very important facet of this stage of faith is that values and many principles that engender committed response remain tacit, or under-articulated. Untested assumptions tend to be pervasive. Authority of those bearing traditional roles in the community or the "consensus" of a peer group is the usual reference point as to what is acceptable and even ethical. One looks to such authority to validate one's worldview and for a sense of whether one is worthy or valuable.

From this stage there can emerge a personal sense of one's own story, its origin and its future with the challenge to interact in the present to shape this story. Remaining in Stage Three can yield a significant sense of comfort and reassurance. But there are pitfalls that result from ongoing internalization of the evaluations and worldviews of others. The development of one's own inner authority is jeopardized. Betrayal by significant others can result in despair about ultimate being. Without a compelling personal experience that provokes questions or urges one into alternative ethical choices, many people will remain in this stage of faith. Interfaith relations at any depth are very unlikely to be undertaken.

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[4] Ibid, p. 200.

Several things can provide the backdrop for a call to transition to the next stage of faith:

- Contradiction between two or more valued sources of authority
- Significant changes in the traditional community's worldview, values or practices
- Life events that cause one to reflect critically on the worldview, sense of meaning, values and practices held by one's community

"Leaving home" literally or figuratively often is the event that paves the way to analyzing meanings and values and to begin developing them further.

Stage Four - Most significant is the evolution of one's personal identity

Most significant in the Stage Four of faith is that personal reflection on life experiences and the work of a discerning heart lead to a consciously chosen worldview. One's personal identity grows in light of more conscious personal choices and decision-making. Faith is no longer contingent on the traditional network of significant others or through adherence to roles. One's sense of meaning is differentiated from that of others. Demythologizing is characteristic of this stage. There can also be a tendency to absolutize one's now unique critical thought and assessment of realities, symbols, and beliefs, which make up one's unique worldview in Stage Four.

What is the impact of Stage Four on the impetus for interfaith interaction? Often it is the encounter with a faith stance of someone of another faith tradition, or with someone who has herself moved beyond Stage Three, that enables one to meet the personal challenge to move into Stage Four and beyond. Surely, Stage Four of faith lays the foundation for seeing truth, beauty, and goodness in a faith perspective besides one's own.

Eventually inroads are made into one's somewhat neatly constructed Stage Four worldview as well as its attitudes and behaviors. These are likely to come from one's inner deposit of intuition, images, feelings, affections, symbols, myths, and paradoxes, notably those strong enough to claim one's attention. One senses a need to integrate these into a more balanced or holistic framework of life.

Stage Five - Appreciation of truth, goodness and beauty found in one's own and other religious traditions

The fifth stage of faith, Conjunctive, is where one is impelled towards an engagement in the deeper reality of life. The unique and authentic concepts and values that grounded a vibrant Stage Four of faith, are experienced as poles in a more integrated faith perspective. They are now accommodated within a more integrative frame of reference. One reworks and reclaims one's past. One is more attentive to and integrative of the insights of one's inner self.

One discovers and rectifies one's general unconsciousness concerning structural injustice, (especially if this injustice may have been engineered by or to the advantage of one's group of ethnic or faith origin or social class). The results of this inner movement are a commitment to justice freed from the radical biases of culture, religion, and political or economic entities. There is an attraction to assisting others in developing both a more reflective faith and a more integrative, inclusive, and generative faith stance.

Stage Five appreciates the truth, beauty, and goodness it finds in the symbols, rituals and myths of its own and other faith traditions. At this point, one can see that Stage Four readies one for the phenomenon of interfaith interaction as a necessity in today's world. One further sees that proactive and creative engagement in Interfaith Dialogue can begin in Stage Four and will blossom in Stage Five. It is the Stage Five person who has the faith and conviction to witness to this possibility and can support others in acquiring the faith and the capacity of dialoging across religions in the four modalities of interfaith dialogue.

Stage Six - Out of faith and trust persons lay their lives on the line for the sake of a fulfilled human community

Transition beyond Stage Five is not a common human phenomenon. A Stage Five person's inclusivity and genuine appreciation of his/her own faith and faith tradition as well as that of others is a rarity in our world. The general lack of such vision lays the groundwork for continual animosity, exclusion, misunderstanding, projection, stereotyping, self-interest, hatred, and violence. The Stage Five person finds him/herself in a liminal space. A liminal space is characterized by having one foot in the vision of a transformed world and one foot in an untransformed world.

This lays the ground for a call to Stage Six, a radical actualization. Stage Six persons have generated a worldview in which the sacred/God/ultimate environment is "inclusive of all being."[5] Out of their faith and trust they lay their lives on the line for the sake of a fulfilled human community. This is a community that is in touch with and cares for the whole web of life. They create spaces of possibility for moving toward a world freer of crippling and oppressing political, religious, social, economic, and cultural conditions toward a new world reality.

The processes espoused by the people characterized by Stage Six faith often call into question familiar structures in which we base our sense of security, and even survival. These prophetic individuals are often persecuted. Fully integrated human beings with a great sense of clarity, directness, and simplicity, who love life yet hold it loosely, are open to interaction, friendship, and dialogue with people at any stage of faith and in any faith tradition. Theirs is a universal community of humankind, of the whole web of life.

[5] Ibid, pg. 200.

THE MEANING OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The aim of interfaith dialogue is to search together for what is true and good, convinced that none of us knows all truth and goodness, and that in interacting together we can reach a greater ability to live the truth and goodness we discover. In the end, the conviction grows that, without engaging one another across religious boundaries, we cannot come to a full appreciation of truth and goodness.

Interfaith dialogue is an interaction between equals, between brothers and sisters. Underlying the practice of interfaith dialogue is a commitment to respect the other with no agenda to convert the other. When we sense that we are not yet brothers and sisters, we choose to be open to become so. We enter our encounters leaving behind condescension as well as positions of both inferiority and superiority.

Interfaith dialogue means reaching out to neighbors as well as family members who espouse a faith, tradition, or practice other than one's own. It means gatherings of citizens across faith boundaries to work for social concerns and justice at all levels of governance. It finds persons coming together to share common spaces of worship, ritual, and celebrations. It also means reflecting together on ways we hope to live in a troubled world, on ways we discover the sacred, and ways we educate and inspire our youth to goodness and service of others.

The word "interfaith" simply means "involving persons of different religious faiths."[6] The term "interreligious" can be used interchangeably with the word "interfaith." The usage of "interfaith" is distinguished from other religious dialogue terms, such as "*intra*faith/*intra*religious," and "ecumenics/ecumenism" the latter used mostly in Christian circles. The terms "ecumenics/ecumenism" denote dialogue, understanding, and a cultivation of greater unity and cooperative work within a single religion or tradition, often across denominational or sectarian lines. "Interfaith/interreligious" efforts broaden the scope of cooperation and dialogue to include persons of a different faith or tradition working together. In recent times, interfaith dialogue has expanded its religious roster to include non-traditional dialogue partners, such as Mormons, Baha'i, Unitarian Universalists, Native American religions, atheist/agnostic and ethical humanist groups, and others.

In interfaith dialogue, one's dialogue partner reflects one's own thoughts, hopes, and expressed values back to oneself, thus revealing another dimension about oneself. This can offer new choices in terms of moving towards greater congruence with one's stated values. Interfaith dialogue offers the possibility of creating within the self a greater openness to those of other religions and their cherished beliefs, now perceived as sources of truth, goodness, and beauty.

How does such an endeavor influence the person? It enables growth in maturity as a full human being. It imparts a greater sense of the human journey and insight into the nature of conundrums and conflicts as well as the potential for managing conflict and resolving impasse. Compassion and a personal sense of fulfillment are the fruits of interfaith dialogue in a person's life. Interfaith dialogue opens the participant to widening circles of

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[6] "Interfaith." Merriam-Webster.com. Accessed July 20, 2015. <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/interfaith>.

dialogue partners, supporting one's growth as a world citizen.

How does interfaith dialogue impact the world? In our increasingly digitally interconnected society, there is a tendency for development of impersonal relationships. Thus, there is a greater need for more authentic personal human connection in our time. This more intimate relationship furthers the possibility of a positive outcome without violence for both parties. It enables sacrifices that ensure all chances for justice and peace are taken. It has the possibility of a "conversion" such that nations could envision a purpose beyond self-interest, or that a nation's self-interest include the greater good of all, especially being attentive to those most oppressed.

Interfaith dialogue is hard work. Investment in this work has evidenced its great potential of being a way of relating and experiencing greater understanding of the "other." It has yielded many results: violence stopped, creativity come alive, levels of happiness increased, destructive energy turned to creative energy, and growth in the authentic human self. In interfaith dialogue, I as a person can be with you as you share your faith, and you can be with me as I share my faith. My own faith or practice as a believer or participant in a unique faith community or tradition is deepened; your faith as a believer in a unique faith community is deepened. Leading to a fellowship of faith, this is one of the final goals of dialogue.

A BRIEF HISTORY OF THE INTERFAITH MOVEMENT IN THE UNITED STATES

"The Ever-Growing Religious Movement That Doesn't Get Enough Attention"[7]

By Antonia Blumberg, Huffington Post – November 2014

Along with politics, poverty and culture, religion is often cited as a source of conflict throughout the world. However, the last 100 years reveal a growing interfaith movement in America -- one that promotes peaceful and productive interactions between religious traditions.

And it all began with a fair.

The 1893 World's Columbian Exposition in Chicago, IL drew millions of visitors to the windy city over its six-month run. Among its 5,978 educational addresses and meetings was the World's Congress of Religions, which hosted religious leaders from all over the world.

The congress marked the first organized, international gathering of religious leaders and is thought to be the nascence of formal interfaith dialogue. Hindu monk, Swami Vivekananda, spoke at the congress, greeting the 5,000 assembled delegates with the iconic words, "Sisters and brothers of America!"

A CENTURY OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

One of the first international groups to get organized after the fair was the International Council of Unitarian and Other Liberal Religious Thinkers and Workers -- now the International Association for Religious Freedom -- formed in London in 1900 with the stated purpose of uniting all those striving for fellowship and religious liberty.

With the outbreak of World War I, other interfaith efforts emerged. The Fellowship of Reconciliation (FOR) formed in New York just after war began in hopes of bringing people of faith together to promote peace, and it went on to become a leading interfaith voice for non-violence and non-discrimination.

With the second World War on the horizon, the World Congress of Faiths formed in London with the dual purpose of bringing people of faith together to enrich their understandings of their own and others' traditions and also to educate and report on religious happenings through its journal, Interreligious Insight.

Following the devastation of World War II and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Christian missionary Carl Allison Evans founded the New Jersey-based Fellowship in Prayer as a multi-faith organization that would use prayer and meditation to foster peace.

In addition to the work of humanitarian organizations, renowned world leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King Jr., Malcolm X and the Dalai Lama, inspired by their own faiths, promoted religious, racial and political freedom. Many scholars say the U.S. Civil Rights Movement, in particular, demonstrated the organizing

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[7] This article can be found at http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2014/10/28/interfaith-history-america_n_6061184.html.

power of congregations working together for social change, under the guidance of religious leaders like King marching side by side with Abraham Joshua Heschel.

In 1962, the Catholic Church took a giant step forward in interfaith relations by convening the Second Vatican Council. Before Vatican II, Catholics were discouraged from visiting other faiths' houses of worship -- but this all changed with the *Nostra Aetate*. This document, which officially took effect October 28, 1965, acknowledged the divine origin of all human beings and the truths present in other religions. It stated: “We cannot truly call on God, the Father of all, if we refuse to treat in a brotherly way any man, created as he is in the image of God.”

Many organizations followed the Vatican’s lead over the next few decades. Religions for Peace, based in New York and accredited to the United Nations, officially kicked off in 1970, and the Interfaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington formed in 1978. First formed in 1960 the Temple of Understanding helped publish the first directory of interfaith organizations in 1987 and over several years hosted meetings that paved the way for the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN), which was incorporated as a nonprofit organization in 1990.

A CENTURY LATER

By 1988, nearly 100 years had passed since the World's Congress of Religions and Vivekanada’s historic speech. A group of religious leaders and local organizers in Chicago came together to plan a centennial celebration, and through this, the Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions came into being.

In 1993, the Parliament hosted its conference in Chicago with 8,000 participants from faith backgrounds around the world. The organization went on to host meetings around the world every several years, and in September 2014 announced its first U.S. conference since 1993, to take place in Salt Lake City in 2015.

The 1990s also saw the birth of interfaith groups focused on the environment, including Green Faith in 1992 and Interfaith Power & Light in 1998. These efforts put ecological sustainability at the core of their faith-based activism.

With the growth of interfaith dialogue came increased academic and sociological interest in the ways pluralism affects religious life. Harvard University’s Diana Eck launched the Pluralism Project in 1991 to chart the development of interfaith efforts throughout the United States. And in 2001 the Pew Research Center initiated its Religion & Public Life Project to explore the intersection of religion and public life.

INTERFAITH'S NEW MILLENNIUM

Interfaith work expanded exponentially around the globe in the 1990s and 2000s with the formation of interfaith, multicultural efforts like the Interfaith Center at the Presidio (1995), Chicago-based Interfaith Worker Justice (1996), the Interfaith Center of New York (1997), the United Religions Initiative (2000), World Council of Religious Leaders (2002), Interfaith Youth Core (2002), the Charter for Compassion (2009) and President Obama’s Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge (2010).

The increase in interfaith awareness has played out in individuals' lives. Interfaith unions have increased from 20% of all marriages in the 1960s to 45% of marriages in the first decade of the new millennium. More and more Americans are exploring and

questioning their own faith, as well, making "unaffiliated" the second largest religious category after Christianity, according to Pew Forum.

Despite the long history of interfaith dialogue, religious intolerance is still a concern that threatens to undermine the hard work of devoted activists over the decades. Religious literacy is dangerously low in the United States, even among the faithful. At a time when Islam is particularly prominent in public discourse, only 38% of Americans say they actually know someone who is Muslim.

Interfaith dialogue can change this.

As Swami Vivekananda said in an 1886 address on “Practical Vedanta”:
"The moment I have realized God sitting in the temple of every human body, the moment I stand in reverence before every human being and see God in him -- that moment I am free from bondage, everything that binds vanishes, and I am free."

GROUND RULES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The ground rules of interfaith dialogue, offered by Swidler and slightly adapted here, are:

1. The primary purpose of dialogue is to grow in perception and understanding of reality and to act accordingly.

2. Interfaith dialogue needs to include: dialogue among subgroups/traditions within religious traditions, dialogue between those of different religious traditions and between religions and ideologies.

3. Each participant must come to the dialogue with sincerity and honesty and assume that one's partners are coming with the same dispositions.

4. In the dialogue one compares ideals with ideals and practices with practices, not one's own ideals with another's practices.

5. Each participant must be allowed to offer his or her unique self-definition. When interpreted by another participant, the one interpreted must affirm that he/she recognizes her/himself in the interpretation.

6. No participant must come to the dialogue with preconceived ideas as to where the points of disagreement lie.

7. Dialogue can only take place between equal partners. One must assess the dimensions of equality and inequality before the potential dialogue and remediate the latter if this is found to exist.

8. Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust.

9. Dialogue is also built upon a practice of healthy self-criticism of one's own faith tradition, beginning perhaps in areas where this tradition has made its own missteps.

10. Each participant must attempt to experience the partner's religion or ideology "from within."[8]

[8] Leonard Swidler and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in an Age of Global Dialogue*, (Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2000) pp.174 –177.

STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Coming to appreciate more deeply the truth, goodness and beauty of another faith is a process. Using the experience of people engaged in dialogue, Leonard Swidler of Temple University, has identified seven stages of genuine dialogue. With these stages, we reflect on our own journey.

Stage One: Radical Encountering of Difference

Early encounters with those of other religions are inherently challenging and even threatening as I face a worldview, a way of interpreting reality and ways of responding that are clearly Other. I soon realize that this disruption to my own worldview and ways of responding won't go away, nor will it accommodate to my own. I may be tempted to withdraw from the situation. The decision to move forward leads into the second stage.

Stage Two: Crossing Over – Letting Go and Entering the World of the Other

As I make the decision to engage the world of the Other sincerely I find myself called to explore, to learn anew and to reassess my norms as to adequate and appropriate expressions of values, and to critique my traditional attitudes. I find that I need to approach the worldview of the Other with openness and a bracketing of my stereotypes and prejudices. As I do this I find myself moving into Stage Three.

Stage Three: Inhabiting and Experiencing the World of the Other

The experience of empathy and interest then expands into a sense of freedom that opens doors to learn many things from this other world: what is of greatest importance, modalities of interaction, what causes suffering to those in this world ... As I experiment with integrating ways of thinking and acting, I sense an excitement and a deepening relationship with those of this world.

Stage Four: Crossing Back with an Expanded Vision

The new knowledge I have gained in alternative ways of thinking and acting is now part of my repertoire as I regain my sense of comfort in my own world. I am able to think and act from both perspectives as the context may require. My sense of identity has deepened, has changed, and no matter what choices I freely make to believe and to act, I can no longer accept that my former unilateral way of being in the world is the only way. My attitudes and concerns are irrevocably reshaped to hold the Other in view, in relationship.

Stage Five: The Dialogic Awakening – A Radical Paradigm Shift

I experience a profound shift in my worldview as well as an expanded consciousness of concerns and needs and causes of dysfunction in world realities. I can no longer return to my former worldview that did not have a place for this Other. Further I am irrevocably shaped to the possibility that there are a plurality of viable worldviews, concerns, and human responses. I sense the interconnectedness of myself and many/all Others, including Earth and all her needs and potentials.

Stage Six: The Global Awakening – the Paradigm Shift Matures

This stage of deep dialogue opens me to the common ground that underlies the multiple worlds with which I am surrounded. I perceive that the unique differences essential to these worlds are contained in a field of unity. I embrace an expanding world of communities of life with greater potential for ongoing dialogue and new learning and deepened relationships.

Stage Seven: Personal and Global Transforming of Life and Behavior

One of the most significant transformations of this journey is a greater and more encompassing moral consciousness and ensuing practice. The communion that I experience with all: self, others, and Earth is profound. I sense that my care for myself instead of being in competition with concerns for the welfare of other realities is integral to the care of the whole. I experience deeper meaning in relationships and in my whole life.

MODALITIES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The modalities of interfaith dialogue resonate with some of the primary patterns of human interrelationships in general. The following highlights these modalities.

- The neighborly dimension or modality, where we are open to and work to become friends in places where we live, work and socialize together, thus creating a culture of welcome for ourselves, for our children and for tasks we undertake.

- The practical or "making common cause" dimension or modality, where we collaborate to help humanity and to address human problems and issues.

- The depth or spiritual dimension or modality, where we experience the Other's religion or ideology from within or join together in rituals or celebrations.

- The cognitive dimension or modality, where we seek understanding of the truth, beauty, and goodness in various faiths, as equals, not attempting to proselytize or convert one another.

Initially identified by Pope Paul VI, these four modalities have been more widely articulated by religious leaders and educators. Religions and ideologies are not only explanations of the ultimate meaning of life, but also ways to live according to the explanation. Religions must find words to express how and why we are to live with integrity in the ever-changing circumstances of our lives, the changing configurations of global reality. Interfaith and inter-ideological dialogue that does not eventuate in action will grow hypocritical and ineffective. Action that does not result in greater understanding and deeper communication will grow sterile and give way to apathy. Neither can survive on its own.

Dialogue of Life

Perhaps the most ubiquitous arena for interfaith dialogue is that of being neighbor to one another. Americans have a well-developed ethic of neighborliness. This is seen when reflecting on the American spirituality as described by M. T. Winter. What is also clear is that increasing diversity in our population offers us a new challenge to make good on neighborliness, one that includes persons of different faiths and ethnicities. Clearly, in our schools, our city and town halls, in our social and religious functions, it is imperative to discover similarities in passion and convictions and to attend to the differences we experience as we engage one another.

Americans have a gift for friendliness. It is imperative to continue to work to maintain a common ground of evolving American heritage in the face of increasing religious diversity. This is the dialogue of life.

Dialogue of Action

Some human problems are so urgent that they demand social action. This applies to neighborhood, region, nation, and world. Experience in all quarters of the world has

proven that joint action is more effective. At times, problems have been ameliorated only when joint action has been applied. This joint action has also resulted in breaking down barriers between groups and has enhanced the motivations to act, as well as a greater self-understanding on the part of the various parties.

Provocative thinkers such as Gandhi and Teresa of Calcutta have highlighted the urgency of preferential option for the poor. In the context of these post-modern times, this preferential option needs to include the voiceless, the oppressed, and all of us who are unfree in a whole variety of ways. Making common cause, which is the ground of dialogue in action, includes addressing structural and individual manifestations of injustice, developing creative alternatives and caring for victims of societal injustice. All of this creates new spaces of common ground and greater unity among peoples of religious and cultural difference. This is the dialogue of action.

Dialogue of Spiritual Experience

One of the greatest sources of our sense of meaning, of our recognition of the immanent and transcendent in our midst as well as of our inspiration to value and commitment, is the spiritual experience. This includes experiences into which we are drawn or those which we design for our participation. This is the place where the depths of our religious attitude reside. Interfaith sharing in rituals, celebrations, periods of silence, rites of passage, or civic liturgy involves us in a deeper than usual investment of self. Here we say with our hearts and bodies that we recognize a mutual place of encounter where we find meaning and a mutual affirmation of values and commitment.

The aesthetic expressions of our diverse life realities are integrally linked in the recognition of our shared humanity. By way of images, insights, feelings and rituals we express different meanings with an openness to experience deep common ground. Such common ground becomes the understanding that supports our common journey into the future. This is all integral to dialogue of spiritual experience.

Dialogue of the Exchange of Beliefs, Dogma or Theology

It is perhaps here that the greatest challenge to interfaith and inter-ideological dialogue lies. One of the most crucial questions one asks is, “How can I speak so that, on the one hand, I maintain my own religious and ideological integrity, and on the other, I allow my dialogue partner to understand and recognize herself in my language?” People at the academic and institutional level, as well as those involved at the grassroots level, sense that our times demand we enter into this modality of dialogue.

When fear and apathy deter committed persons from engaging this modality of interfaith dialogue, it opens the way for gross misunderstanding, shallow stereotypes, and oppressive economic and political agendas. Dogma and belief are enmeshed in cultural frames. Unearthing beliefs from these contexts requires that one listen and lend oneself to the context as part of the process of recognizing the truth spoken. It asks that one then find ways to re-express it in one’s own context. This vital work again paves the way to increased common ground that facilitates all the other modalities of interfaith dialogue. This is the import of dialogue of exchange of dogma, beliefs, and theology.

MAJOR THEMES OF EXPLORATION FOR USE IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

1. **Discovery of the sacred/divine/formless/God/enlightenment/higher power** – How and where do you encounter the sacred/divine/formless/God? What sorts of experiences have you discovered to be part of this journey of encounter? Do you experience a "call" or yearning for intimacy with "God" or with some entity beyond ordinary human experience? In light of this, are you led to a specific spiritual path?

2. **Prophets/sages/ancestors/saints** – Are such persons important in guiding you toward becoming who you are called to be? Do any such persons within your religious tradition offer inspiration for living life, caring for the world, creating relationships of justice, peace, etc.? How do you relate to these prophets/sages/ancestors or spirits?

3. **Revelation** – What is the role, if any, of revelation in the embrace of your religious tradition? What are, for you, the main beliefs in your religious tradition? What do you experience as the basis for your beliefs? Are there intermediaries for revelation and for the interpretation of revelation?

4. **Meaning of human life** – What is the "creation story" – the story of how the world and all life began – in your religious tradition? What does this story say to you about the meaning of human life? What does it say about how human life is to be lived? What is it that you sense humans hope for? What limitations do you find humans face as they strive to attain that for which they hope?

5. **Writings/oral traditions** – What are the main scriptures or texts spoken of in your religious tradition? What importance do they have in your life? What is your ongoing relationship to the writings and oral traditions? How have your interpretations of these writings and oral traditions changed or matured over time?

6. **Evil/sin** – What religious stories best explore for you the origins, nature, effects, and roles that evil plays in human lives? If sin is a concept in your religious tradition, share your own understanding of it. How do you see wrongdoing or sin in relation to yourself or others? How do you understand sin in relation to societal realities? What do you believe is the role of human choice or human freedom in the face of evil?

7. **"Rightdoing"/righteousness** – What is your understanding of "rightdoing" or righteousness? What do you believe is righteousness in relation to God/the sacred? How is one responsible for living well or rightly in the world? What is your motivation for doing good deeds or acts of kindness? What do you believe redeems individuals/the world? How is "rightdoing" related to your tradition's sacred texts or writings?

8. **Death/afterlife** – What is the meaning of death for you as a member of your religious tradition? What do you believe happens after death? How do you prepare for death? What are the losses connected with the deaths of members of your communities, your friends, and your family members? What helps with these losses? What rituals are associated with death in your religion, and what is their meaning?

9. **Hope** – What in your religious tradition gives and sustains your hope in the face of personal loss, oppression, or rejection? What is a source of hope in the midst of

chaos and evil in the world? To whom or what do you turn when you are overwhelmed? As a member of your religious tradition, what do you see as positive or hopeful in the world? How is the acknowledgement of a transcendent reality (sacred/divine/formless/God/superior power) related to movement toward a better situation for all people and all creation?

10. **Role in the world** – What is your experience of the world? What is your analysis of the state of the world in the light of your experience? What is your personal response to your experience and analysis? Do you believe that the actions of individuals matter? How do you regard the most vulnerable persons in your society and throughout the world? What is your relationship with them? How do you hope to ultimately attain salvation/paradise/enlightenment/nirvana?

11. **Transformation** – What is your source of power or strength for you to become a noble person, an enlightened person, a person of matured faith? What aspects of your faith or belief support you on your journey and your faith community in its journey in this world? What does your religious tradition promise you? What further personal growth do you hope for?

12. **Community and relationships** – With whom do you share community? What religious beliefs and/or practices contribute to the formation and sustaining of your community? Do you see your religious group as community? In what sense? When differences or splits occur in your community or among communities, how are they reconciled? Do you see your community as separate from the world or as part of the whole? How do you perceive your religious community in relation to communities of other religions?

13. **Structure and leadership in the religious community** – How is your community of believers organized? What and who "holds together the experience" of the people of your religious tradition as community and as a faith tradition (i.e. holding common beliefs, worship traditions, etc.) Who exercises power? What kind of power do they have? What is your role in your faith community? What is the significance of your role?

Basic criteria for preparing questions

In engaging issues of interfaith dialogue, the very formulation of the questions for exchange is critical. The manual entitled "Interfaith Dialogue," developed out of many years of dialogue in the Philadelphia area, gives the following criteria for preparing good dialogue questions.

"All good dialogue questions share the following three elements:

- They have no single 'correct' answer.
- They are of interest to most of the group.
- They can be answered by any participant, simply by referring to his or her own knowledge, beliefs, opinions, experiences or feelings." [9]

[9] *Interfaith Dialogue*, A product of the Interfaith Lay Dialogue Project, Philadelphia, PA. Page 25. For more information, contact the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia or the Catholic Archdiocese of Philadelphia.

INTRODUCTION TO COMMON GROUND

We live in a milieu that is more diverse and complex than ever before—a milieu that sometimes seems very chaotic and seems to be moving in a direction opposite to the kind of world we want to see. At the same time, there is in this world an attraction of the movement to wholeness and creativity.

There is a coalescing and organizing of energy around this attraction that has given focus to the concept of *common ground*—and from that concept, finding common ground and creating common ground becomes essential. “Common ground” is a rich term for a reality that is captivating human consciousness. Two examples of places where this dynamic is operative are the United Nations and ecumenical/interfaith circles.

Key Elements of Common Ground

Two key elements are integral to common ground. The concept of common ground is born among people convinced there is something of great and mutual significance that they must live and work toward actualizing. It is characteristic of this great and mutual significance that it is rooted in the discovery of a mutually recognized common good: a shared ideal, which may apply to society or the world as a whole. It may be a point of survival, a cherished value, a faith conviction, a vision, or a dream. It is usually a place of great motivation.

The concept of common ground is borne out of a world of great difference, among persons who are aware of this difference and its vital importance. The differences among those who work towards common ground may be cultural, spiritual, political, economic, or religious. In the histories behind these differences, there are often oppressions, mutual alliances, domination, and inspired evolution. The divisions may also involve differences in worldviews, presuppositions, and visions of the best response to the problem faced or strategies to use.

Creating Common Ground

Even if it’s hard to admit, there is usually some, even if minimal, existing common ground among peoples. This already existing common ground is created or being created out of something already deeply shared. This can be concern for peace and security, concern to acquire basic necessities, desperation for the end to war and oppression, faith in the future of our planet, hope for the future of our children, or concern that our world be a place of healing and human flourishing.

Common ground is discerned first by discovering and owning the commonalities we share. Engaging our differences in light of our common concern or hope further creates common ground. However, our differences are not all of the same nature nor do they carry the same weight. Some differences are complementary, some are analogous (having different shapes in different settings), and some are truly contradictory. Part of the journey to greater common ground asks us to discern the nature of our differences.

Discerning the Nature of our Differences

Which of our differences truly complement one another and further develop our shared vision? It is imperative that we sustain flexibility towards creativity, towards pluriformity, towards pioneering new alternative expressions of religious values.

Which of our differences are analogous, the same value expressed uniquely in different cultural and situational settings? This is experienced because human communities are committed to concretizing their values in different situations, including ethnic contexts.

Which of our differences are truly contradictory? Upon what basis do we discern our way to consensus? One touchstone has been that which is life-giving will best foster fullness of life for all concerned.

Practices in the Search for Common Ground

Those who search for the common ground for the common good have learned the norms of the dialogue that are necessary to reach greater common ground. These center on deep listening and critical thinking. They are given in full in the reading on "Ground Rules for Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 39).

In a brief form, the attitudes needed include:

- Entering the dialogue with the attitude of a learner.
- Trusting that all others in the dialogue are also coming as learners.
- Cultivating increasing consciousness of one's own presuppositions.
- Willingness to articulate shortcomings in one's own view or practice.
- Being aware that one has a truth to share, but does not have the whole truth.
- Being aware that each truth is best and fully understood only in its own context.
- Comparing one's own ideals with the other's ideals and one's own practices with the other's practices, i.e., not comparing the other's practices with one's ideals.

SPIRITUALITY: A COMMON GROUND FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE?

After September 11th, the professors of Hartford Seminary, themselves of different ethnic and religious backgrounds, offered their reflections in a book entitled, *11 September: Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences* edited by Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi. The essay most relevant for this project is one by Miriam Therese Winter entitled, "Witnessing to the Spirit: Reflections on An Emerging American Spirituality." If we can admit of an emerging spirituality, then we may have provided ourselves with a sizable common ground. This has great potential for strengthening American identity and providing good leadership both here at home and in our interdependent place with other nations in this world of the 21st century.

In her reflection, Winter offers some criteria for spirituality:

- Spontaneity and openness and freedom to follow the spirit.
- Capacity for inclusion of peoples of many backgrounds and seeing diversity as a manifestation of the transcendent.
- Provision of a way of being in relationship with the sacred and with each other.
- Ability to transcend the divisiveness of theological differences.
- Provision of symbols.
- Potential to always provide us with public places to witness together that, despite our shadows, we are a "nation under God, indivisible."

Our spirituality holds us together as an American people and supports us in becoming who we want to be. Winter's contention is that spirituality, as an acknowledgement of the transcendent and our response to it, is not the result of September 11th but is the underpinning of that response. Thus the American response in the days and weeks after September 11th is an icon of a more enduring and often unrecognized reality, that of the American spirituality.

In an incomprehensible manner and an unimaginable way, Americans as a nation met God in the events of September 11th. What we did in that moment came from the depths of something that had been present all along: an evolving spirituality of the American people. We responded ***together***. People of all walks of life, from different religious traditions wept, prayed, and worked together. What surfaced to hold us together through our unspoken words, our deeds of self offering, love, and courage – what gave meaning to the words we spoke in common prayer, in compassion for those deeply affected, in grief and perplexity – was the spirituality of a nation in solidarity.

As something more than plain nationalism, Winter describes the characteristics of American spirituality. As these are congruent to a group's experience, they have the power to unite people. They can offer challenge for growth. They can reveal our identity to the stranger. They can provide expectations for the newcomer and an avenue for expressions of their gifts in a new environment, thus enriching the expressions of these characteristics. Winter not only defines these characteristics, but also elucidates the shadow or downside of these same characteristics. These are the challenges to the evolution of an authentic and relevant American spirituality:

- Spontaneity – heart-struck by the situation, sincerity in responding, taking risks, pioneering across psychic, social, and scientific boundaries. September 11th was a paramount example. *The downside in relation to our spontaneity is our propensity for instant gratification, lack of patience, lack of perception.*

- Generosity – hallmark of American response at home and globally, offering personnel, resources, ideas beyond the level of our comfort. *The downside is our hoarding of resources and inability to integrate the devastation caused by our disproportionate use and control of world resources.*

- Hospitality – a national trait of welcome founded on open doors and open hearts. Still a hallmark of the American spirit *but challenged by our prejudice and racism and fear of the "other."*

- Compassion – feeling for others in their suffering, meeting them there and working to remove the causes. But the question before us today: *whose suffering here at home and in other nations is able to claim this compassion and its support? And, more significantly, whose suffering goes unnoticed?*

- Courage - which built America as a people, made homes in difficult circumstances, engendered trust, created a new form of governance and built a future against great odds. *Courage is needed to expand our horizons, ensure liberty for all and shape our spirituality anew in changing times.*

- Sense of community – across this nation, people accepted others as neighbors, respected others working, celebrating, and deliberating hand in hand to weave the fabric of our society. *Now the sense of community is challenged by inequity in opportunity and access to resources and the constant pushing of the boundaries of our ethnic composition.*

- Adaptability – a people imprinted by a kind of adaptability that comes from a worldview that better is possible and a conviction that we will find a way. *We need to embrace the challenges and find creative alternatives so that in this country all can thrive.*

- Patriotism – born in the Declaration of Independence and the Bill of Rights, patriotism works to see that these are secure for all. It is not a blind and unquestioning following of leadership. It is a commitment to hold leaders and peers accountable for the values we espouse. *"In God we trust" we remember that we in America know God by many names.*

A crucial question is whether we, as a diverse population with our faith rooted in various religious and ideological traditions, can own the spirituality that represents the heart of who we are, and make that ownership part of a dynamic common ground moving us forward? Can we also embrace what we see together as the dysfunctions preventing our being "all we can be" and together from our various traditions root them out? Our future as a people depends on it.

If our American spirit is worth preserving, if we can find ground, for starters, in an American spirituality, people of various religious and ideological traditions working in collaboration must do it. This can become a quest for engaging interfaith dialogue as neighbors, as makers of common cause, as people who search out and celebrate

encountering the sacred – the deep myth of our lives, as explorers of the truth we know and seekers of the truth we have yet to know.

In a recent interfaith dialogue, it was mentioned that the United States has many exports, some of which we are proud of and some of which we are not. One reality we have not yet exported is our experience of sitting down at one table as many faiths, as friends, as seekers of the common good.

We have distinctly American ideals: all people are created equal; all are entitled to “life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness”; all are welcome to our shores, now one of the most multiethnic, multireligious societies in the world. Yet, we are challenged by national poverty, racism, engrained systemic violence, oppression, and prejudice revealed in our public life and structures. There is marginalization of minorities in spheres of governance, religion, politics, education, and social/economic possibility. We now face new frontiers of making good on moral, organizational, financial leadership in a world that must see to the good of all peoples and of creation itself. Our distinct American values have power to move us in the right direction, but not unless we are willing to extend our concept of “us” to include our sisters and brothers of all walks of life, as well as the whole world, throughout our planet.

PRINCIPLES OF *ENCOUNTERING OTHER FAITHS*

The process of "Encountering Other Faiths" is rooted in an appreciation of the Stages of Interfaith Dialogue as presented on pages 40-41. While this paradigm inspires our process, the exposure to interfaith encounter offered in this model is limited. The model actually prepares individuals for a crossing over and entering the world of the Other, offers simple experiences helping one to do so, provides an experience of shared space with persons of another faith, and finally, guides the participants into a debriefing concerning that experience. Thus, the model encourages deeper insight into and integration of personal interfaith encounters. It does this in a community setting that nurtures a deepening of one's faith.

A desired outcome of this work on dialogue is deep compassion for the Other. Who is, for me, the Other? It begins with the other persons in my inner circle of family, expands to include friends, members of my faith community, and extends beyond this to include other persons in ever-greater circles.

Basic Assumptions

This process is developed with the intention of being of benefit to members of a religious/spiritual or faith tradition who have an interest in relating to those of other faiths and spiritualities. The following are some assumptions concerning the folks who are interested in an introduction to interfaith dialogue:

1. The participants are likely to be people who know about their own faith, up till the high school level or at least until the time of the ritual of becoming a mature member of the faith community.

2. The participants are likely to be currently in contact with their chosen faith or spiritual community and thus consider themselves involved in the living and learning experiences of their communities.

3. Participants are likely to have grown beyond Fowler's Stage Three of faith and have made some moves to interact with or on behalf of people who are in some ways different from themselves. Interest in Interfaith dialogue evidences a faith level of Fowler's Stage Four (See pages 31–32).

4. Participants are likely to have commitments and priorities in their lives that demand their time and energy. At the same time, they are interested enough in effective interfaith encounter to prioritize time for this and have decided to make a commitment to the work involved in the process.

6. Participants are likely to have a wide range of knowledge, from none or a little to quite a bit, of the following: the multireligious diversity in this nation, their city or their local area; the basic tenets and practices of other faiths; current perspectives of their own faith; and the nature and the practices of interfaith dialogue. The format of this process can encompass this range of knowledge.

7. The process used in this model is divided into nine sessions and can be variously re-divided. The time commitment available for this commitment will vary. It is

essential to give a minimum of 2 to 2 ½ hours for the sessions themselves as well as time needed to prepare for engaging the sessions.

Basic Principles

1. The journey into interfaith dialogue has to be well grounded in the faith journey of the individual, the call to love as inspired by the faith tradition, and the vision of humans as brothers and sisters to each other. Other motivational forces might include: the exploration of human goodness and a better world, the desire to know more about other faiths, the desire to do what one can to counteract negative effects of religious fundamentalism and oppression. The motivation for some may stem from their relationship with a significant other, who has become or is an adherent of a different faith community.

2. The journey towards being a person of interfaith dialogue will occur best, like other such transformations, in the ambience of a group. Here one experiences: affirmation, critique, bonding, energy, example, acceptance, affirmation of the necessary changes, witness and celebration, and a forum where insights multiply. Thus the process is oriented to group forums, not individual forums.

3. Some of the aspects which the sessions should address are: increased participant knowledge of his/her own faith, some knowledge of at least one other faith tradition, an ability to listen to the Other with empathy and with the openness to learn, and cultivation of the ability to speak of one's own faith in language discernible by the Other.

4. The sessions should address the attitudes and skills of good dialogue.

5. The design of the process needs to facilitate the person in their goal of becoming someone who can engage interfaith dialogue in its four different modalities.

6. Articulation of the steps in the learning process is important, and those who are interested should be supported in the desire to acquire the skills to animate this learning process for others.

7. In the process issues such as unawareness of the presence of other faith communities, defensiveness in encounters with those of other religions, prejudices, generalizations that we are really all alike, and the tendencies to be absolutist need to be acknowledged.

8. For maximum benefit this learning experience should be shared in an ongoing way with the wider faith community for support, for witness, and for mutual engagements where possible.

9. The facilitation of the process is supported when two persons share this role. The facilitators undertake to prepare, to name and delegate tasks, to highlight readings and to oversee the general flow of the sessions to the benefit of the participants.

FACILITATOR'S GUIDE

Welcome to the exciting and meaningful work of supporting persons who want to get started with interfaith engagement. I choose *interfaith engagement* over *interfaith dialogue* because the latter sometimes conveys only the intellectual pursuit of interfaith encounters. In fact, these encounters have their grounding in many kinds of human experience. For convenience, four of these have been highlighted in this work: that of being neighbor to the other, that of working with others to address social concerns, that of entering into spiritual spaces or rituals or aesthetic or religio-cultural events with persons of other faiths, and that of exploration of beliefs, values, and meaning.

The theme of the seminar is most certainly that of "readiness" -- supporting persons into greater readiness to begin or continue their efforts in interfaith engagement. The seminar is useful for people with a wide range of knowledge about interfaith dialogue and specifics concerning other faith traditions. It counts on the participants' own adult accumulation of life wisdom. This wisdom is the stuff upon which the engagement with others builds.

Your role as facilitator in this endeavor is a vital one. This workbook is designed to support you and the participants on the journey of discovering more about interfaith engagement. It outlines a process that goes from welcome and goal setting to actual dialogue sessions and progressively to envisioning how such interactions shape a better world for all peoples.

The workbook offers a design of nine sessions most likely to foster the kind of engagement participants will find profitable and enjoyable. The workbook offers pertinent informative readings that give good background for each of the nine sessions. Thus, the workbook is a self-contained resource for the seminar.

The role of facilitating is much of the following:

- Supporting a welcoming and safe environment for dialogue for all participants.
- Extending oneself to the participants as they journey.
- Oversight of the logistics of the meeting.
- Preparation of resources needed for each session.
- Preparation for each session, becoming oneself conversant with the activities and the materials to be highlighted in the sessions.
- Assessing and reassessing the best flow of the sessions in light of the goals and needs of the participants.
- Assessing when the interest or focus generated by the participants indicates the need to take up a topic different than that which was scheduled.

The facilitator's role is to be attentive to and facilitate an ambience of comfort and safety, interest and openness so that conversation among participants can take place. Throughout the process, the hope is to expand the comfort zone, thus enabling the journey to greater trust. One should consider enlisting a co-facilitator, leader, or co-coordinator in the group participating in the sessions for greater expedition and facilitation. The facilitator should also keep the congregation or community's leader "in the loop," updating him/her as to the group's progress.

The facilitator needs to have both a grasp of the process and to be comfortable with the

developments that occur between the lines of the text that outlines the process. At the time the facilitator highlights material for the participants, she/he needs to be able to contextualize the presentation so that the participants grasp it well. The facilitator needs to express confidence in the adult learning process, in which the major learning dynamic comes from within the participants themselves. One begins and continues with "where the participants are." The participants are the shapers of the process. The primary goal is not naming theories, but engaging the process itself. The ground rules outlined on page 39 are important accountability pieces in this process, and the group of participants must review them and create any additional guidelines they wish to follow or deem important.

The facilitator needs to find a creative match between the participants' resources of time and availability and the work that can be attended to during those periods. This means making a plan for whether all the sessions will be used or only some of them. The optimum use of this seminar comes from engaging all nine sessions, giving 2 to 2 ½ hours for each session.

However, the reality is that groups may not always be able to commit to a nine-session option. The vision of this interfaith grassroots dialogue movement is to offer the opportunity and tools for dialogue to all who are interested. The first five sessions are the most essential, culminating in the actual interfaith encounter in Session 5. It is possible to achieve some introduction to the art of interfaith dialogue by doing six sessions, namely: Sessions 1-5 and a session from 6-8.

In any case, to offer good service to the group the facilitator needs to have become thoroughly familiar with all the material in the workbook. Such familiarity will also add to the comfort of facilitation.

In real life, there are occasions in which the planned time of the session winds up not being long enough to accommodate all the activities suggested and/or for the participants' unique need to dwell longer on certain topics. In this case, the priority needs to go to time for the "focus theme," which is indicated in each session. Experience has shown that small group work is significantly improved when a facilitator is appointed or chosen from among its members. With such support, small groups find themselves better able to allow for the participation of all and articulate their common learnings.

Any facilitator who has personally done the sessions or who has attended a coaching session for this work will find it a real help in doing the facilitation. Another resource for the facilitator is the book, *Encountering Other Faiths*, Paulist Press (2007).

For further assistance, please contact Maria Hornung or Rev. Nicole Diroff, Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, 100 W. Oxford St Suite E-1300 Philadelphia, PA 19122, phone: 215-222-1012, www.interfaithcenterpa.org

Facilitator's Personal Notations

FORMAT FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AFTER EACH SESSION

Participants in the seminar, *Encountering Other Faiths*, have found it very helpful to reflect on their experience of the sessions as they occur. They have found that having a format encourages making notations and aids the recall of significant experiences and learnings. Give a title to each session and offer your own responses to the open-ended sentences below.

Session One – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session One were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session One were:

Session Two – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Two were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Two were:

Session Three – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Three were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Three were:

Session Four – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Four were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Four were:

Session Five – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Five were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Five were:

Session Six – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Six were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Six were:

Session Seven – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Seven were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Seven were:

Session Eight – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Eight were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Eight were:

Session Nine – _____

Two things I found meaningful in Session Nine were:

During this session some of the feelings I experienced were:

The feelings I had lead me to think:

The session spoke to me about my own faith in the following way:

The session spoke to me about interfaith dialogue in the following way:

Things I found helpful, things I found unhelpful in Session Nine were:

REVIEW OF INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER

The Review of Interfaith Encounter begins with the writing of a narrative about a specific encounter with (a) person(s) of a different religious tradition. It continues with a reflection upon this encounter. It is followed with a sharing of this encounter with a small reflective group.

The following is a guide for the writing of the narrative and reflection.

1. *The context of the encounter*. This includes the setting and your history with the setting.

2. *The narrative of the encounter*. Write the story of the encounter in narrative form, including the characters in the story (their names can be changed if appropriate), telling what they said, telling what you said, and indicating how the encounter unfolded.

3. *The analysis of the encounter*. Try to focus on religious and cultural elements. Give some of the factors that shaped the incident, peoples' reactions, and your own feelings about the encounter. Name the key issues for you that have or have not been resolved.

4. *Implications and/or strategies for the future*. These may have been developed as part of the encounter or later as you continued to reflect on the encounter. Did this encounter bring about any change?

Adapted from the "Audit of Intercultural Relationships" done as part of the *Cultural Audit,* developed by the staff of the Chicago Theological Union, Chicago, ILL.

MINI-MIND MAPPING NOTES

Mind mapping is a simple tool that facilitates one's efforts to bring to mind several facets of known knowledge concerning a topic or focus question.

STEP ONE

Bring yourself to a place of composure. Have at hand two sheets of plain paper and a pen or pencil. Allow yourself some moments of quiet, being attentive to your breathing.

STEP TWO

Allow yourself to call to mind the question, topic, or issue you wish to address. Center your thought in a few words. Place these words in the center of a blank piece of paper. Draw a circle around these words in the center of the page.

STEP THREE

Allow your mind to entertain this topic from any angle; allow the thoughts to flow. Capture the different thoughts in a word or phrase. The word or phrase should capture the idea in as few words as possible. Place these words or phrases on the paper in different places radiating out from the circle at the center of the page.

STEP FOUR

Increase the number of phrases such that you feel a sense of having covered the topic to your satisfaction. You may do this by posing to yourself open-ended sentences: What I feel most about this topic is…. It has impacted my life in the following ways…. It relates to these other issues or topics.... My history with this topic reveals…. If we would value this topic more…. If we would avoid this topic more…. Others interested in this topic are.... The values suggested by this topic are…. An off-the-wall approach to this topic is…. Something humorous about this topic is….

STEP FIVE

Return to each word or phrase on the paper and attend to what suggestions it makes to you.

STEP SIX

Note the linkages between the various keywords or phrases and indicate these with lines or symbols

STEP SEVEN

Reconsider the focus question, topic, theme, and rename it to best capture the ideas which have surfaced. If it remains the best title, keep it.

STEP EIGHT

Consider what sequence of ideas seems most interesting to you; number them in this order.

STEP NINE

Either rewrite the mind-map so that it remains an easy reference to speak from OR develop an outline in linear form. This material can also lend itself to composing an essay.

RESOURCE LIST

This list offers some initial resources that contain basic concise information on different faith traditions and interfaith dialogue. This should provide an introduction to many of the world religions and provide grounding upon which to build a deeper understanding of these faith traditions. The advantage of these resources is their conciseness, and thus making them readily accessible, to the informal student. The disadvantage is that they can hardly do justice to the depth and complexity of the world's faith traditions. For this, the student needs to access more lengthy resources authored by adherents of the faith traditions themselves.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In her early years as a Medical Mission Sister, Maria Hornung served as a pharmacist in Africa, and then was called to education and administrative work. Her life in Africa spanned twenty-five wonderful years. Most recently, she completed a six-year term as Sector Coordinator of Medical Mission Sisters in North America, a position that connected her both nationally and internationally with pressing needs.

Believing in the great potential of faith groups to influence our world for the better, Maria Hornung undertook studies in interfaith dialogue at Temple University and received her Masters in Religion (Interreligious Dialogue). At present, she is the Adult Learning Consultant on staff at the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia.

Because so much discrimination and oppression of others finds its root in religious intolerance, Maria Hornung finds great joy in supporting people to develop a greater understanding of and empathy towards other religious traditions. She works with diverse groups, facilitating an understanding of their commonalities, and an acceptance of their differences.

Given today's global climate,
dialoguing with and respecting people of different faiths
is critical.
It is integral to a future of justice and peace.

MARIA HORNUNG

Stephen M. Wright is a Master of Divinity (MDiv) student at Princeton Theological Seminary. He completed a field education placement at the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia in summer 2015, and his projects included the revision of the Encountering Other Faiths workbook and planning & implementing a Dare to Understand Religious Communities program. Stephen thoroughly enjoyed partnering with the Interfaith Center and hopes to continue further with interfaith endeavors after seminary.

SPEAKING OF THE WORKBOOK

"Our Interfaith Center is working hard to strengthen interreligious understanding and collaboration. We realize that such understanding and collaboration is built on a deeper grasp of the values, tenets and practices of universal love, compassion, justice, charity and the forbiddance of evil in one's own faith tradition. It is further built on a discovery and appreciation of these same values in other religious traditions. Interfaith work is like a journey in which one climbs a mountain. The pinnacle of this mountain is the discovery not that "you are like me" but that "I am you." When this is realized, your hunger is my hunger; your difficulties are my difficulties; your illness is my illness; your happiness is my happiness and your success is my success. Out of this discovery and, hopefully, the mutual

discovery of what is divine in each of us, and the mutual discarding of what is not, together we can work for the common good. This seminar manual is a work in progress. As we strive hard in the effort, we will, by God's grace, continue to learn. We ask that God bless us and all who engage in this work." Imam Muhammad `Abdur-Razzaq Miller, Bawa Muhaiyyadeen Mosque and Fellowship

"A timely resource of high quality that fills an urgent practical need, this Interfaith seminar and manual is surprisingly complete for its size, and shows a promising sensitivity. Eminently usable, it mirrors the wide experience and good-judgment-under-pressure of is Medical Mission Sister author, Maria Hornung." James D. Redington, S.J., Associate professor in the Dwan Chair of Interreligious Dialogue, Jesuit School of Theology at Berkeley/Graduate Theological Union

"United Christian Church was blessed to have Maria Hornung offer her Interreligious Engagement seminar here in the fall of 2005. We had participants not only from this congregation, but from five other faith communities. This course is designed in such a way that it helps class members reflect on the meanings of their own faith as well as learn from those of different faith backgrounds. The process for engaging in small group conversations was especially helpful in modeling how to probe more deeply into one's own beliefs as well as learning how to reflect back what has been heard from others. Class members were very appreciative of the safe environment that both the structure and tone of this course provided for dialogue.

Participants were delighted to discover the number of commonalities between the various traditions. Class members also reported learning skills they would be able to use in dialogue with family members, neighbors, community groups and people with whom they work. Every participant emerged from this course with a deeper commitment to continue such interreligious conversations in the various arenas of their lives. The Interfaith Gathering of Lower Bucks County has also begun using the methods of dialogue learned in this class in its monthly meetings with great success." Susie B. Smith, Pastor, United Christian Church Levittown, PA.

"Maria Hornung has written an up-to-date tool for religious leaders who want to help themselves, and others, get started on the path of sincere and transformative inter-religious dialogue by first learning more about what it is and why it is important. My experience has taught me that learning about inter-religious dialogue IS inter-religious dialogue. I recommend this engaging yet easy-to-facilitate program to rabbis, ministers, priests, educators and lay leaders across North America who want to guide their congregants by taking that first step, together." Jane West Walsh, EdD, Jane West Walsh and Associates, Jewish educator and consultant with expertise in interreligious dialogue and adult learning.

"Sr. Hornung's work can be very helpful for those who are interested in dialogue. Currently it seems that people of Abrahamic religions are taking initiatives and engaging in it. The practical guide provided for how to start and progress in the conversations is the result of extensive experience and insights derived from it. The people involved in dialogue can derive enormous benefit from this work. People belonging to non-Abrahamic traditions, if engaged with dialogue, can get beneficial suggestions and understanding from this work. May this publication have wide and beneficial use." Kana Mitra, PhD, Hindu Community Leader, College instructor.