

ENCOUNTERING

WORKBOOK FOR

# OTHER FAITHS

An Introduction to the Art of  
Interreligious Engagement



Maria Hornung

**WORKBOOK  
FOR  
ENCOUNTERING  
OTHER FAITHS**

An Introduction to the  
Art of  
Interreligious  
Engagement

**Maria Hornung**

© Maria Hornung, Philadelphia 2007

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.*

3723 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104, USA

Copies of this workbook may be ordered from:

Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia  
3723 Chestnut Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19104

Phone: 215-222-1012; Fax: 215-222-1015

Copies may be obtained online from the Interfaith Center  
[www.interfaithcenterpa.org](http://www.interfaithcenterpa.org)

## INTRODUCTION

Welcome to *Encountering Other Faiths*. If you have a desire to appreciate someone of another faith 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 for a new world reality. It aims to address one of the major difficulties experienced by interested and committed people in undertaking interfaith dialogue. This difficulty is that of where to begin and how to begin.

These sessions are not "theoretical". They are the work of heads, hearts and hands. They are a journey in faith toward a deeper sense of the sacred, 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 the ideas that are integral to the mission of interfaith dialogue/engagement.

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 26-49. 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 51.

The assumptions and principles underpinning the seminar are articulated on pages 46 and 47. "The Facilitator's Guide" offers helpful guide lines for the facilitation of the seminar on pages 48 and 49. A resources list in the Appendix indicates books that offer concise background information on major religions of the world (Page 64).

Since the 1950s interfaith dialogue has seen momentous changes. Indeed, the spirit blows where it wills and gives birth to new possibilities. At the same time the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has already seen many challenges to the concrete vision of constructive interfaith interaction. In this workbook we hope to offer a creative and open forum for engagement.

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. Hopefully this balance is reflected in how the workbook is used and in the interest and enjoyment the participants 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 to greater sensitivity to the world views of others.

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 a 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, contact the Coordinator for Interfaith Education, Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, 2923 Chestnut St., Philadelphia, PA 19104, phone: 215-222-1012, [www.interfaithcenterpa.org](http://www.interfaithcenterpa.org)

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

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Table of Contents	5

### ENCOUNTERING OTHER FAITHS

Session One	
GATHERING IN FAITH	8
Session Two	
ASSESSING OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS	10
Session Three	
EXPLORING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR LOCALE	12
Session Four	
TREASURING OUR FAITH HERITAGE	14
Session Five	
ENGAGING IN DIALOGUE WITH PEOPLE OF ANOTHER FAITH	16
Session Six	
EXPLORING COMMON GROUND WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS	18
Session Seven	
LEARNING FROM OUR EXPERIENCES OF DEEPENING FAITH	20
Session Eight	
RESPONDING TO OUR "CALL" TO INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	22
Session Nine	
ENVISIONING A NEW WORLD REALITY	24

## READINGS

THE UNITED STATES, THE RELEVANCE AND IMPERATIVE OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	26
STAGES OF FAITH AND INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	29
THE MEANING OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	33
GROUND RULES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	34
STAGES IN THE PROCESS OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	35
MODALITIES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	37
MAJOR THEMES OF EXPLORATION FOR USE IN INTERFAITH DIALOGUE	39
INTRODUCTION TO COMMON GROUND	41
SPIRITUALITY: A COMMON GROUND FOR THE AMERICAN PEOPLE?	43
PRINCIPLES OF <i>ENCOUNTERING OTHER FAITHS</i>	46
FACILITATOR'S GUIDE	48

## APPENDIX

FORMAT FOR PERSONAL REFLECTION AFTER EACH SESSION	51
REVIEW OF INTERFAITH ENCOUNTER	60
MINI-MIND MAPPING NOTES	62
RESOURCE LIST	64
BIBLIOGRAPHY	65
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	67
SPEAKING OF THE WORKBOOK	67

# 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.

## SESSION ONE

# GATHERING IN FAITH



### **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 33)

### **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.

#### **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 33), soliciting comments from participants.

Review of assumptions and principles inherent to the process (Page 46).

**Acknowledge and confirm the parameters for the sessions**

Dates, times and location of the sessions

Format of the sessions

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

Facilitator introduces "Format for Personal Reflection after Each Session" (Page 51).

**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 Internet site: <http://www.worshipere.org>.

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

**HOMEWORK**

Gathering of data re: 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 60)

Reading: "The United States and the Relevance and the Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 26).

## SESSION TWO

# ASSESSING OUR ENCOUNTERS WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS



### **PURPOSE**

To develop insights about interfaith encounters and to become acquainted with sources of information about the beliefs, practices and structure of other faith traditions

### **PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES**

To share accounts of personal encounters with those of other faith 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 (see Appendix Review of Interfaith Encounter, Page 60)
- “The United States and the Relevance and Imperative of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 26)
- “Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 34)
- References for concise materials on major faith traditions (see Appendix, “Resource List”, Page 64) 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 34)**

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 worshipping communities in area of interest and concern

Reading: “Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 37)

## SESSION THREE

# EXPLORING RELIGIOUS DIVERSITY WITHIN OUR LOCALE



### **PURPOSE**

To become acquainted with the presence of other faith 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 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 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 37)
- "Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue," (Page 39)

### **PROCESS**

#### **Review and explore the data concerning the presence of various faith 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 are allotted for this exercise)**

The facilitator highlights the reading, "Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 37)

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 39)
- Consideration of what themes will be used for exploration in Session Four

**HOMEWORK**

- Review “Major Themes of Exploration for Use in Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 39)
- Refresh acquaintance with “Ground Rules of Interfaith Dialogue” (Page 34)

## SESSION FOUR

# TREASURING OUR FAITH HERITAGE



### PURPOSE

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

### PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

To become acquainted with the major themes to be used in exploring one's own and others' faith 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 39)
- Basic criteria for preparing questions for use in interfaith dialogue (Page 40)
- Concise information on faith traditions invited to dialogue in Session Five

### PROCESS

**Focus theme:** Engaging in dialogue

**(50 minutes are 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 39 and 40)

Insights and learnings shared in the group as a whole

- Name commonalities discovered.
- Name distinctiveness discovered.

**Facilitator introduces the idea of search for common ground taken from “Introduction to Common Ground” (pages 41 and 42)**

Group selects themes for dialogue with guests in Session Five

## **HOMEWORK**

Read concise background material on religious 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 34).

Participants take responsibility to become 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



### PURPOSE

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

### PARTICIPANT OBJECTIVES

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

To gain a foundation for further possible exchanges and engagement with persons of other faiths.

### BACKGROUND AND RESOURCE MATERIAL for Session Five

Information on religious traditions of invited guests  
"Ground Rules for Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 34)

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

### **Learnings from small groups are shared in the large group**

- What discoveries have participants made in respect to the commonalities and distinctivenesses shared among them on this theme?
- What learnings do they have in respect to finding common ground?

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

In large group, brain storming of avenues of further encounters with, interaction between members of the different faith communities

Test for viability of the different alternatives

### **Gratitude to the guests for their presence and contributions**

### **HOMEWORK**

"Introduction to Common Ground" (Page 41)

Participants reflect further on the 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 37)

## SESSION SIX

# EXPLORING COMMON GROUND WITH PEOPLE OF OTHER FAITHS



### 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 41)
- "Modalities of Interfaith Dialogue" (Page 37)

### PROCESS

Introduction – Facilitator highlights "Introduction to Common Ground" (Page 41).

**Focus theme:**        **Debriefing the experience of dialogue with those of other faiths**

(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

- 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 29)

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? What two experiences have been significant for me?
  
- How has *Encountering Other Faiths* impacted my beliefs and attitudes towards people of other religious 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 a 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 29)

### PROCESS

Focus theme: **Exploring personal growth in faith**

(40 minutes are allotted for this exercise)

In groups of three or more share an experience of growth in faith 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?

### **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 35)

## 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 35)

### 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 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 43 or the "United Nations Earth Charter", (<http://www.sjspirit.org/documents/UN%20Earth%20charter.html>)
- Each person agrees to become acquainted with one expression of each of 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 1/2", 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 1/2", one to each paper, noting the faiths adherence of the persons doing the sharing .

## SESSION NINE

# ENVISIONING A NEW WORLD REALITY



## 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 collaborating 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 pluriformity 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 43
- "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 1/2" 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 having 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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.”<sup>1</sup>

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.<sup>2</sup>

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 adherents 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

---

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

<sup>2</sup> 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### **Convictions of Religiously Committed People in the United States**

In conversations among scholars, committed religious people, the ordinary folk in the mosque, temple, synagogue, church, 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 *kairos* moment. In many other *kairos* moments, it has been assumed that if the chance to engage were not taken, another moment would come. Today, I suspect we might not have another chance if we do not embrace this opportunity. To do this, it 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 among religiously committed men and women in the United States. This is even more significant in light of ever growing misunderstandings and conflict among religions within the United States.

In addition, interfaith 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 entered 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The 2005 Annual Scholars (these included Jews, Muslims and Christians) Conference offered insightful analyses of forces impacting interfaith engagement today. Some of the new threats to interfaith engagement today are (1) September 11<sup>th</sup> and the aftermath of that attack, (2) the present United States' stance in a world where so many lack the means to meet basic needs and to attain self-determination, (3) the conflicts in the Middle East and Afghanistan and Iraq, and (4) widespread identification of the new enemy as Muslim. Anti Islamic sentiment is notable among some Americans and the application of new security measures is selectively discouraging to people of Middle East origin.

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 on this, and of extending to others the same respect one wants for oneself. However, there is need to elucidate and interpret 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 embrace as 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 21<sup>st</sup> 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?”

## 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 the 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 were 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."<sup>3</sup> 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."*]

---

<sup>3</sup> 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."<sup>4</sup> [*"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.

---

<sup>4</sup> 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 critically reflect 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 critique meanings and values and to begin to develop 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 leads 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 or himself 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, goodness in the meanings it can find 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."<sup>5</sup> 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/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.

---

<sup>5</sup> 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 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. And 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 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 live hope in a troubled world, on ways we discover the sacred, and ways we educate and inspire our youth to goodness and service of others.

In interfaith dialogue, one's dialogue partner reflects one's thoughts, hopes and expressed values back to oneself, thus revealing another dimension about oneself. This can offer one 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 endeavor influence the person? It enables a 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 resolving conflict and impasse. Compassion and a personal sense of fulfillment are the gifts of interfaith dialogue in a person's life. Interfaith dialogue opens the participant to widening circles of dialogue partners – supporting one's growth as a world citizen.

How does interfaith dialogue impact the world? In our times, there is a greater conviction about and skill for human intercourse. It generates belief in the possibility of a positive outcome without violence. It enables the sacrifices that ensure that all the 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 includes the greater good of all, especially 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. It has netted many results: violence stopped, creativity come alive, levels of happiness increased, destructive energy turned to creative energy, growth in the authentic self... I can be with you as you share your faith and you can be with me as I share my faith. My own faith as a believer in a unique faith community 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.

## GROUND RULES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

The ground rules of interfaith dialogue, also called the “Dialogue Decalogue”, offered by Swidler, slightly adapted, 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.”<sup>6</sup>

---

<sup>6</sup> 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 of me. 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 that have taken place on 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, when we do this as equals not attempting to proselytize or convert one another.

Initially identified by 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 interideological 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 interideological 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 or himself in my language?" People at the academic and institutional level, as well as those involved at the grassroots level, sense that our times demand that 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/superior 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 movement to or yearning for intimacy with “God” or with the someone or some entity beyond ordinary human experience? In light of this, are you called 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 the religious tradition offer inspiration for living life, care for the world, creating relationships of justice, peace...? 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/journey 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** – What religious stories best explore for you the origins, nature, effects, and roles that evil plays in human lives? What other things do you believe about personal and societal evil? How do you recognize and respond to evil? What do you believe redeems individuals/the world from evil? What do you believe is the role of human choice, human freedom in the face of evil?
7. **Wrongdoing**– What is your understanding of wrongdoing? If sin is a concept in your religious tradition, share your own understanding of it. What do you believe wrongdoing or sin is in relation to God/the sacred...? How do you see wrongdoing or sin in relation to yourself or others? How do you understand sin in relation to societal realities? How is one forgiven in light of sin or evil for which one is responsible?
8. **Death** – 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? And 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** – From whence comes the power 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 faith/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, *et cetera*.) 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."<sup>7</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> *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 always-inner-movement-to-wholeness and creativity.

There is a coalescing and organizing of energy around this attraction that has given focus to the concept, *common ground* – finding common ground, creating common ground. 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 that there is something of great and mutual significance that they must live and work for. It is characteristic of this great and mutual significance that it is rooted in the discovery of a mutually recognized common good or the common good of society or the common good of creation 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 born in a world of great difference, among persons who are aware of this difference and the vital importance of this difference. The differences among those who work towards common ground may be cultural, spiritual, political, economic, religious ... In the histories behind these differences there may be, often are, oppressions, mutual alliances, domination, 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 when we don't like to give credit to that fact, 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 engendered in the first instance by discovering and owning the commonalities we share. Engaging our differences in light of our common concern or hope then further creates common ground. But our differences are not all of the same nature nor do they carry the same weight. Some differences are complementary to one another; some are analogous to one another (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, our shared charism? 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 and ethnic contexts.

Which of our differences are truly contradictory and upon what basis do we discern our way to consensus? One touchstone has been that which is life giving, that which 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 34).

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 11<sup>th</sup>, 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 Chapter I am most interested in 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 21<sup>st</sup> century.

In her Chapter, 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; and, despite our shadows,
- its potential to always provide us with public places to witness together that 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 11<sup>th</sup> but is the underpinning of that response. Thus the American response in the days and weeks after September 11<sup>th</sup> is an icon of a more perduring reality, that of American spirituality.

In an incomprehensible manner and an unimaginable way, Americans as a nation met God in the events of September 11<sup>th</sup>. What we did in that moment came from the depths of what has been, and is an evolving spirituality of us as an 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.

Winter names the characteristics of American spirituality. As these are found congruent with 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 to our shores 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 11<sup>th</sup> 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 accepting 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 underpinnings 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 together see 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 that 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 American myths – all 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. As we are challenged by national poverty, racism, and prejudice revealed in public display and surveys, marginalization of minorities in spheres of governance, religion, education, and social/economic possibility, we 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 myths 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 and creation throughout the globe.

## **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 35 and 36. 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 an overview of simple experiences of crossing over and entering the world of the other, 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 29 – 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 ambiance 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 a person who can engage interfaith dialogue in its four different modalities.
6. Articulation of the steps in the learning process is important and for those who are interested, they 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 the 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 this 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, a fair amount to rather little, about interfaith dialogue and specifics concerning other faith traditions. It counts on the participants’ own adult accumulation of life wisdom. This wisdom is actually 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 the peoples of the world.

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 basically that 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.

Not only does the facilitator need to have a grasp of the process, but needs 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 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 time frames. 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, in today's world groups are not always 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. It is possible to achieve some introduction to the art of interfaith dialogue using an option of four sessions only, namely: Sessions 1, 4, 5 and 7. A group is able to achieve still more by doing six sessions namely: Sessions 1, 4, 5, and 7 plus session 2 or 3 and session 6 or 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 cater for 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, from among its members, a facilitator is appointed or chosen. 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 contact the Coordinator for Interfaith Education, Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia, 3723 Chestnut St. Philadelphia, PA 19104, phone: 215-222-1012 and website: [www.interfaithcenterpa.org](http://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:





## **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 still 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. This should enable an acquaintance with many of the world religions and provide a grounding upon which to build a deeper understanding of these faith traditions. The advantage of these resources is their conciseness and thus availability 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.

- Bowker, John, *World religions*, DK ADULT 1<sup>st</sup> American edition (1997)
- Brodd, Jeffery, *A Voyage of Discovery*, 2nd ed., St Mary's Press, Winona, MN, 2003 with some useful activities.
- Bush, Richard C. Dollarhide, Kenneth, Conversu, Hyla S. Nanji, Azim, Bumstead J. Robert, Yates, Kyle M., Weir, Robert F., *The Religious World: Communities of Faith*, MacMillan, New York (1982)
- Eck, Diana, *A New Religious America: How a "Christian Country" Has Become the World's Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, Harper, San Francisco (2002)
- Neuser, Jacob, *World Religions in America: An Introduction*, Westminster John Knox Press (2003)
- Noss, David S and John B, *A History of the World's Religions*, Macmillan Coll. Div. (1993)
- Novak, Philip, *The World's Wisdom*, Harper, San Francisco, 1995
- Oxtoby, Willard G. et al, *World Religions: Eastern Traditions, World Religions: Western Traditions*, Oxford University Press USA (1996)
- Renard, John, *The Handy Religion Answer Book*, Visible Ink Press, Detroit, 2002 (concise and comprehensive resource)
- Saint-Laurent, George E. *Spirituality and World Religions (A Comparative Introduction)*, Mayfield Publishing Co. Mountain View, CA, 1999
- Smith, Houston, *The Illustrated World's Religions*, Harper, San Francisco, 1994
- Smith, Houston, *The World's Religions*, Harper, San Francisco, 1991
- Stoutzenberger, Joseph, *The Human Quest for God*, Twenty-Third Publications, Mystic, CT, 2006
- CD: *Encyclopedia Britannica Profiles World Religions*, Encyclopedia Britannica, Chicago 2003

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Alfred, Mary V., "Epistemology, Learning, and Self-Development among Immigrant Women of Color: The Case of the British Caribbean Women in the United States," 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001alfred.htm>.
- Allen, John L. Jr., "Pluralism Conference Report," *National Catholic Reporter*, September 12, 2003.
- Armstrong, Joseph L., "Collaborative Learning from the Participants' Perspective", 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001armstrong.htm>.
- Ayoub, Mahmoud, *Islam, Faith and History*, Oneworld, Oxford, 2004
- Barnes SJ, Michael, *Theology and the Dialogue of Religions*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2002.
- Barnes, SJ Michael, *Walking in the City*, Cambridge Press, New Delhi, 1999.
- Bennett, Janet M. "Cultural Marginality: Identity Issues in Intercultural Training" in Michael R. Paige, Ed., *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, 1993.
- Bennett, Milton, "Towards Ethnorelativism: A Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity" in Michael R. Paige, *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, 1993.
- Borelli, John, Ed., *Handbook for Interreligious Dialogue*, Silver Burdett and Ginn, Morristown, N.J., 1988.
- Borelli, John, "The Catholic Church and Interreligious Relations" Presentation, Summer Studies, Christ the King Seminary, Buffalo, NY, July 8, 2003.
- Bristow, Edward Ed., *No Religion Is an Island*, Fordham University Press, New York, 1998.
- Brooks, Annie, Carolyn Clark "Narrative Dimensions of Transformative Learning" 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001brooks.htm>.
- Center for the Study of Religious Life, *Dialogue on Mission*, Claretian Publications, Chicago, 2000.
- Charaniya, Nadira K., Jane West Walsh, "Adult Learning in the Context of the Interreligious Dialogue Process: A Collaborative Research Study Involving Christians, Jews and Muslims" 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001charaniya.htm>.
- Ettling, Dorothy, "Leadership for Action: Wedding Adult Education and Social Change," 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001ettling.htm>.
- Fowler, James, *Stages of Faith*, Harper Collins, New York, 1981.
- Fowler, James, *Becoming Adult, Becoming Christian*, Jossey-Bass, San Francisco, 2000.
- Hellwig, Monika, *Understanding Catholicism*, Paulist Press, New York, 1981, 2002.
- Hick, John, *Philosophy of Religion*, Prentice-Hall, New Delhi, 1981.

- Interfaith Lay Dialogue Project, *Interfaith Dialogue— A Manual for Facilitators and Sponsors*, Interfaith Lay Dialogue Project, Philadelphia 2004.
- Markham, Ian S. *A Theology of Engagement*, Black well Publishing, Oxford, 2003.
- Markham, Ian and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', ed., *11 September – Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2002.
- Medical Mission Sisters, *Core Aspects of MMS Spirituality*, Medical Mission Sisters, Philadelphia, PA, 2001.
- Merriam-Webster, *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary*, Merriam-Webster Inc. Springfield, MA, 1984.
- Mojzes, Paul, "The What and How of Dialogue," *Interreligious Dialogue*, edited by M. Darrol Bryant and Frank Flinn, Paragon House, New York, 1989.
- Paige, Michael R., Ed., *Education for the Intercultural Experience*, Intercultural Press, Yarmouth, ME, 1993.
- Swidler, Leonard, *After the Absolute*, Fortress Press, Minneapolis, 1990.
- Swidler, Leonard, Ed. *For All Life – Toward a Universal Declaration of a Global Ethic*, White Cloud Press, Ashland, OR, 1999.
- Swidler, Leonard, *Toward a Catholic Constitution*, Crossroad Publishing Company, New York, 1996.
- Swidler, Leonard, Ed. *Toward a Universal Theology of Religion*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, NY, 1987.
- Swidler, Leonard and Ashok Gangadean, *Global Dialogue Institute – The Technology of Deep-Dialogue/ Critical Thinking*, Philadelphia, 2000.
- Swidler, Leonard and Paul Mojzes, *The Study of Religion in An Age of Global Dialogue*, Temple University Press, Philadelphia, 2000.
- Taylor, Edward W., John Dirkx, Daniel Pratt "Personal Pedagogical Systems: Core Beliefs, Foundational Knowledge, and Informal Theories of Teaching" 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001taylor.htm>.
- Tisdell, Elizabeth J., Derise Tolliver, Silvia Villa, "Toward a Culturally Relevant and Spiritually Grounded Theory of Teaching for Social Transformation and Transformational Learning", 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001tisdell.htm>.
- Walsh, John, *Evangelization and Justice*, Orbis Books, Maryknoll, New York, 1982.
- Winter, Miriam Therese, "Witnessing to the Spirit: Reflections on An Emerging American Spirituality" in Ian Markham and Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi', editors, *11 September – Religious Perspectives on the Causes and Consequences*, Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2002 ([http://www.hartsem.edu/centers/winter\\_article1.htm](http://www.hartsem.edu/centers/winter_article1.htm))
- Ziegahn, Linda, "Reflection and Transformation in the Intercultural Context", 2001 AERC Proceedings, <http://www.edst.educ.ubc.ca/aerc/2001/2001ziegahn.htm>.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

In her early years as a Medical Mission Sister, Maria Hornung served as a pharmacist in Africa, 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 Coordinator of Interfaith Education on the staff of 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

## 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 its 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.