

## GUIDELINES FOR PARTICIPANTS IN THE WEEK OF GLOBAL INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

These are suggested guidelines for organizing interfaith dialogues in your local community. Each community is different, with different personalities and issues of concern, so all participants can adapt or modify these guidelines to meet their particular circumstances. The dialogues need not be elaborate; it is only important that people gather to share and listen, and hopefully work together for the future of their community.

### THE DIALOGUE

One day is to be selected during the week of September 15-21. Those actually participating in the dialogue can include leaders of the local religious communities, political leaders and members of the academic and business communities. While it is important to have community leaders as participants, it is suggested that those engaging in the actual dialogue also include persons from the general community population.

The dialogue could be made up of one panel presentation or several panels presenting different topics. It is suggested that the panels be no longer than 1½-2 hours with interaction between the panel and the audience. A moderator is essential to keep the program moving. If possible, try to avoid presenters reading long dissertations – a short introduction with exchanges between the panel members, and then the audience, works well.

### TOPICS FOR THE INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Following are suggested topics for dialogue. No one community will have all of these forums or panels, and the topics can be modified to so that they are suitable for the expected audience:

1) Common Values. What are the values and ethical foundations that are common to all religions? For example, love, respect, tolerance, forgiveness, mercy, human rights, peace, brotherhood, and freedom are values that encompass the foundation of religions throughout the world. A discussion could encompass how can these values, as well as history, beliefs and practices be understood and appreciated by others while at the same time respecting the integrity of each religious tradition.

2) Everyday Religious Practices. Participants can speak about the prayers, ceremonies, rituals, and special celebrations that are part of their religious traditions.

3) Youth. Involving young people is an important part of the Week of Global Interfaith Dialogue. Music and art are certainly areas in which young people can contribute, and for the dialogue itself they can speak about their

experiences in their religious practices and the youth organizations at their church, temple, mosque or synagogue.

4) Global Ethic and Good Governance. A panel might discuss how the ethical foundations of religion can contribute to the modern institutions of government.

5) Religious Responses to Violence. Religions in many parts of the world are subjected to structural, physical and gender based violence. A panel might report on these issues, and discuss concrete ways and strategies to transform structures of violence into structures of sustainability and peace.

6) Interfaith and Peace Education. A panel can discuss the structures of interfaith and peace education already existing and exchange insights about initiating programs of peace education in their local community.

7) Community Partnership Building. An important aspect of this process is to work toward implementing activities in the community that build on the experiences gained in the interfaith dialogue. Working together in community projects and engaging in community service activities together is an excellent way to bridge the misunderstandings that exist between religious communities and at the same time offering service to the community.

8) How can we better live together as part of the human community? Our world has become "smaller", with an interdependence that requires cooperation. The problems confronting the world are too great for each religious community to work in isolation. What are the joint approaches and common actions religious communities can take in such matters as the environment, social services, and human rights.

#### GENERAL CONSIDERATIONS

It is crucial that each participant and audience member approach each other with courtesy and respect – an interfaith dialogue is not a debate, it is an opportunity to listen and to share the foundations of what is important for each religious tradition while learning to understand the common elements inherent in each religion.

The purpose of dialogue is not to raise unpleasant historical episodes. It is a platform on which people can freely meet to get to know each other, providing a forum to celebrate and honor the diversity of our religious beliefs. The dialogues are an opportunity to examine the common spiritual foundations of the world's religious traditions, to define the underlying unity of all faiths. Indeed, when viewed in the context of spirituality, the religious excuses for many of the world's conflicts will disappear.

A moderator plays an important role in the actual dialogue. He/she should

be able to identify similarities, elements that parallel each other in different religions, and find resemblances in each religion.

### RELATED EVENTS

The day of interfaith dialogue is also the occasion for the sharing of music, art and food that are part of each religious tradition. There could be evening musical performances or music can be played at the time of the dialogue. Art works can be displayed during and after the event that can include photographs of the role that religion in their lives. And food always is a reason for people coming together to share and celebrate. Indeed, this is not only a day of sharing but also a day of celebration.

As more communities join the Week of Global Interfaith Dialogue each will contribute their own ideas about how this interaction will best take place. We will be able to convey these ideas on the Global Family for Love and Peace website so that each of us can share in the process of building interfaith work around the world.