

Interfaith Dialogue

Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Rev. Virginia Jarocho-Ernst, September 2006

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting:

From the Wikipedia:

The terms **interfaith** or **interfaith dialogue** refer to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (ie. "faiths") at the both the individual and institutional level leading to tolerance and mutual respect. It is distinct from syncretism or alternative religion, in that dialogue often involves promoting understanding between different religions to increase "tolerance" towards others, rather than to synthesize new beliefs. The History of religion shows that conflict has been more the state of affairs than dialogue.

From the *Apocrypha*:

I shall light a candle of understanding in thine heart, which shall not be put out.

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.) (Include the ritual sharing of meaningful objects to welcome newcomers to the group.)

Focus Reading:

Excerpts from *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* by Diana L. Eck

I begin this exploration with my own experience, not because my experience is so special but because it illustrates the kinds of personal, social, and theological encounters that are increasingly the reality of our common world. Today people of every faith meet one another, develop deep personal or professional friendships, perhaps even marry one another. Our experience with people of other faiths may be difficult or rewarding or both. In any case, our "interfaith dialogue" does not usually begin with philosophy or theory, but with experience and relationships. Individually and collectively, our experience has now begun to challenge traditional religious thinking and to contribute decisively to the reformulation of our theologies.
– p.2

The meeting of Banaras and Bozeman, "East and West" can be duplicated in a hundred keys and a hundred languages. The encounter of worlds and worldviews is the shared experience of our times. We see it in the great movements of modern history, in colonialism and the rejection of colonialism, in the late-twentieth-century "politics of identity" – ethnic, racial, and religious. We experience our own personal versions of this encounter, all of us, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, or Muslim; whether Buddhist, Apache, or Kikuyu; whether religious, secular, or atheist. What do we encounter with a different world, a different worldview? How will we think about the heterogeneity of our immediate world and our wider world? This is our question, our human question, at the end of the twentieth century. – p.11

Focus Questions:

What experiences have you had in encountering others of different faiths?

What were some of the difficult moments in that experience? What were the positive moments?

What did you learn about other religions in these encounters?

What did you learn about your own religion in these encounters?

What more would you like to know about each?

Checkout/Likes and Wishes:

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice:

Love is not concerned

With whom you pray

Or where you slept

The night you ran away

From home.

Love is concerned

That the beating of your heart

Should kill no one.

-Alice Walker