

Faith and Me

Unpacking Different Beliefs and Understandings

The Bonner Community Engagement Curriculum

Overview:

Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, New Age, and Buddhism are the most common religions that are practiced around the world. However, not everyone understands these religions and the faiths and traditions that come with them. In this workshop, participants will tackle the issue of self and spiritual exploration, a Bonner Common Commitment, in a unique way. Establishing safe space guidelines, participants will be challenged through a series of question to think about and reflect upon their beliefs. Participants will then break into groups and be tasked on becoming experts on one of six religions presented. After participants will be introduced to important people who were empowered by their faith to take action towards social justice. Participants will end with a discussion/reflection on the knowledge gained from the workshop.

Category:

Spiritual Exploration, Communication, Diversity, Personal, Understanding, Reflection, Faith

Level:


Applicable towards all students who are empowered to explore their own identity and challenge their knowledge on the different religions presented.

Recommended Bonner Sequence:

This training is recommended for second or third year students, as part of the Dialogue Across Diversity and Inclusion 4x4 model, Stage 3: Application and Discussion.



Second or
Third Year
Students

| Dialogue Across Diversity and Inclusion 4x4 Student Developmental Model | | | |
|--|---------------------------|---|------------------------|
| Stage 1: Exposure | Stage 2: Understanding | Stage 3: Application and Discussion | Stage 4: Adaptation |
| | |  | |

Focus or Goals of this Guide:

- Participants will practice safe space rules and come to an understanding about six major religions around the world and the beliefs that accompany them.
- Participant will reflect upon their individual beliefs.
- Participants will gain resources for self-identification and reflection regarding their own evident individual characteristics.
- Participants will be challenged to become experts on a religion and present to the group.

Materials:

- Projector
- Computer
- Safe Space Norms for Dialogue Handout
- Contemplation Handout
- Fact Sheets on Six Major Religions Around the World Handout
- Religious Social Justice Activist Handout
- Notecards and writing utensils
- Art Supplies (ex. markers, flipchart)

How to Prepare:

Review the trainer guide. Become familiar with the safe space guide in order to establish a safe space within the workshop as well as the handouts. Prepare the handouts and other materials for the workshop and pass them out before starting the workshop. Review and modify the workshop to fit the size of participants.

Brief Outline:

This workshop is organized around leading participants through a series of engaging activities of spiritual exploration. The goal is that participants will be able to engage in

conversation with other participants about faith and become experts on the basic practices of six major religions around the world. It is important to encourage the participants to speak truthfully do to the establishment of safe space.

The outline for this 70-80 minute workshop has the following parts:

- | | |
|------------------------------|---------------------------|
| 1) Safe Space Norms | suggested time 5 minutes |
| 2) Contemplation Questions | suggested time 20 minutes |
| 3) Become an Expert Activity | suggested time 30 minutes |
| 4) Religious Followers | suggested time 10 minutes |
| 5) Follow-up Discussion | suggested time 10 minutes |

Part 1) Safe Space Norms

Suggested time: 5 minutes

Create a safe space by listing the safe space norms for dialogue and elaborating on each norm. Emphasize that **all** participants who are involved in the workshop are required to abide by the safe space norms in order to ensure that everyone is comfortable with what will be shared during this workshop. The norms can be found on the handout with more detail.

Safe Space Norms for Dialogue:

- Make "I" statements
- Be aware of non-verbal expressions
- "Seek first to understand, then to be understood"
- "Tell me more..."
- Respect Different Opinions
- Silence is O.K.
- What is said in groups, stays in groups
- Encourage participation
- Say "Ouch"

Note: If the facilitator or participants feel there are norms missing, then feel free to add them.

Part 2) Contemplation Questions

Suggested time: 20 minutes

Now ask participants to each grab a notecard and a writing utensils. Explain that you will be asking a series of questions, which they are to reflect upon. They will have some time to write down any thoughts on the provided notecard after you pose each set of questions. Start with question set one.

Question Set One:

- Does life matter? If so, how?
- Does your life matter?
- How do you make it matter? Or what do you do to make it matter or give it meaning?
- How do we identify ways to express what we believe?

Pause for a few moments between each question to provide students time to think. Allow about five minutes for contemplation after each set of questions is answered. You may write the questions on a blackboard or flip chart as you pose each question. Ask participants to share any thoughts they may have for the two (or more) question sets. You can either divide participants into groups if you have a large group or have everyone in the group discuss. Move onto question set two.

Question Set Two:

- Is there a great being, higher power, higher authority that exists in your belief?
 - If so, how do you describe or identify it?
- Do you think we are, as humans, accountable?
- What happens at the end of life?
 - Is there a heaven? A hell? Or anything else?
- When someone says that they believe in God(s), what thoughts come to mind?
 - Do you think God(s) (with a capital G) or god(s) (with a lower case g)
 - How do you conceptualize God(s)?
 - If so, is it difficult or easy to do?

The following two sets are optional and suggested for experienced and/or religious affiliated schools.

Question Set Three:

- How do we make the connection to a “higher power” or God(s)? Creation?
- Where do you go to commune with your god(s)?
- Are there places where you feel more connected? (church, mosque, nature, etc.)
- Are there other experiences you’ve had during which you feel a strong connection with your god(s)?

Question Set Four:

- In what or whom do you believe?
- What does faith look like?
 - How do we know when we see it?
 - How do we identify people who are faith filled?
 - What do they look like?
- Do you talk about faith with your peers?

Part 3) Become an Expert Activity

Suggested time: 30 minutes

Now that participants have reflected on their beliefs, its time to become experts on the basics of six major religions (Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, New Age, and Buddhism). The easiest way to do this is to have everyone go through and count off, starting with 1 and ending with 6 to establish 6 groups. The goal of this activity is to allow everyone to develop a basic understanding of these six religions. After groups have been established, give each group some art supplies and the fact sheet that goes with the assigned religion. Also pass out the Fact Sheet: Six Major Religions Around the World handout to be filled out when participants are presenting. Allow participants 20 minutes to create a presentation on the specific religion that was assigned.

Then, once everyone is done, have the six different groups present to the rest of the group, as they are the experts of their assigned religion. As each group is presenting make sure the participants know to fill out the Fact Sheet: Six Major Religions Around the World handout. If time allows and if there are questions for the presenters from the audience, allow the presenters to answer a couple. Continue this cycle till all the groups have presented their assigned religion.

Note: The participants are welcomed to look up information as well to add to their presentation.

Part 4) Religious Followers

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Now that the participants have a basic understanding of the six major religions presented, lets explore how well known people took their faiths into account when advocating for social justice. Allow participants to either break into groups and read aloud about the six major religious followers or have the participants popcorn read

them out loud. If split have the participants come back together and discuss new findings, thoughts, or questions they may have with the group. Worksheet on page 16.

Part 5) Follow-Up Question/Reflection

Suggested time: 10 minutes

Then, bring the group back together for a reflection and discuss (add reflection questions if you would like):

- What do you think was the purpose of this activity? (ex. in order to see how similar people are even though they could appear different on the outside)
- What was possibly something new you can take away from this activity?
- What are some interesting facts you found and why?
- Why as Bonners do you think this training was important to perform?

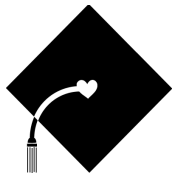
Credits:

- Developed in 2017 by Baneen Al-Akashi, Bonner at Allegheny College
- Blumberg, Antonia, and Carol Kuruvilla. "11 Religious Americans Who Fought For Freedom." *The Huffington Post*. TheHuffingtonPost.com, 03 Jan. 2017. Web. 29 June 2017.
- "Connecting with the Divine." *EveryStudent.com*. EveryStudent, n.d. Web. 29 June 2017.
- History.com Staff. "Mohandas Gandhi." *History.com*. A&E Television Networks, 2010. Web. 17 July 2017.
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- Staff, MJL. "Judaism." *My Jewish Learning*. MJL, 2002. Web. 17 July 2017.
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Followed by Handouts:

- Safe Space Norms for Dialogue (page 7)
- Contemplation Questions (page 8)

- Fact Sheet: Six Major Religions around the World (page 9)
- Fact Sheet: Christianity (page 10)
- Fact Sheet: Islam (page 11)
- Fact Sheet: Judaism (page 12)
- Fact Sheet: Hinduism (page 13)
- Fact Sheet: New Age (page 14)
- Fact Sheet: Buddhism (page 15)
- Religious Followers Who Fought for Social Justice (page 16)



Safe Space Norms for Dialogue

Make "I" Statements

Phrases like "I think" or "I feel" or "in my experience" can prevent another person from feeling attacked by your comments.

Be aware of non-verbal expressions

Our body speaks volumes. Give some thought to how what you are "saying" affects others.

"Seek first to understand, then to be understood"

In other words, be open and listen generously-put aside thoughts of what you want to say next.

"Tell me more..."

Ask clarifying questions. Probe gently to understand a viewpoint different from your own. Find out how people arrive at their opinions, not just what their opinions are.

Silence is O.K.

There are lots of ways to participate. Actively listening or listening closely can be one form of participation.

Respect Different Opinions

Be open to conflicting viewpoints and do your best to make this a safe space for each other.

What is Said in Groups, Stays in Groups

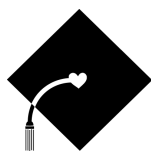
Psychological safety comes from knowing that our comments won't be repeated elsewhere or attributed in another context. In other words, take the learning and leave the names.

Encourage participation

Please allow everyone to speak. Try not to monopolize the conversation.

Say "Ouch"

If you feel that a comment might be hurtful; be prepared to gently explain how you understand a comment to be painful.



Contemplation Questions

Please answer the following questions below and then discuss with the rest of the group.

Question Set One:

- Does life matter? If so, how?
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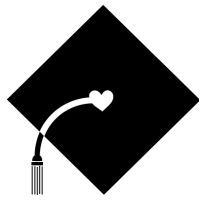
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Question Set Four:

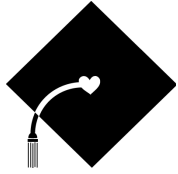
- In what or whom do you believe?
- What does faith look like?
 - How do we know when we see it?
 - How do we identify people who are faith filled?
 - What do they look like?
- Do you talk about faith with your peers?



Fact Sheet: Six Major Religions Around the World

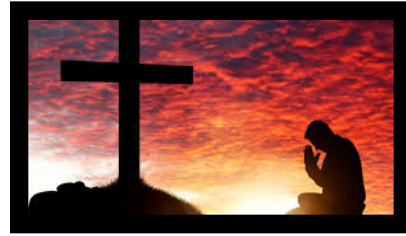
Fill out this worksheet as participants' present information on each religion.

| The Three Abrahamic Religions | | |
|-------------------------------|---------|----------|
| Christianity | Islam | Judaism |
| | | |
| Three Other Major Religions | | |
| Hinduism | New Age | Buddhism |
| | | |



Fact Sheet: Christianity

Being tasked the job to become an expert on Christianity, read the information below and come up with a presentation to educate your fellow participants on this religion. Be ready to present and if time promotes to answer questions. You are also welcome to use the internet if you want to add more information.

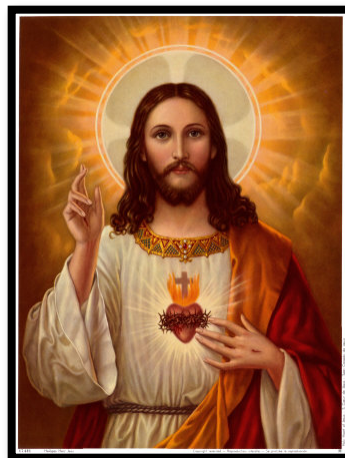


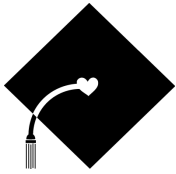
Christians believe in a loving God who has revealed himself and can be known in a personal way, in this life.

Faith in Jesus Christ himself, not just in his teachings, is how the Christian experiences joy and a meaningful life. In his life on Earth, Jesus did not identify himself as a prophet pointing to God or as a teacher of enlightenment.

Christians regard the Bible as God's written message to humankind. In addition to being an historical record of Jesus' life and miracles, the Bible reveals his personality, his love and truth, and how one can have a relationship with him.

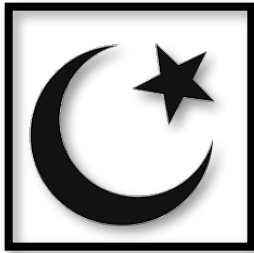
Whatever circumstances a Christian is dealing with in their life, the Bible teaches that they can confidently turn to a wise and powerful God who genuinely loves them. They believe that he answers prayer and that life takes on meaning as they live to honor him.





Fact Sheet: Islam

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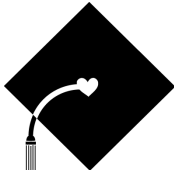


Muslims believe there is the one almighty God, named Allah, who is infinitely superior to and transcendent from humankind. Allah is viewed as the creator of the universe and the source of all good and all evil. Everything that happens is Allah's will. He is a powerful and strict judge, who will be merciful toward followers depending on the sufficiency of their life's good works and religious devotion.

Though a Muslim honors several prophets, Muhammad is considered the last prophet and his words and lifestyle are that person's authority. To be a Muslim, one has to follow five religious duties: 1. Repeat a creed about Allah and Muhammad; 2. Recite certain prayers in Arabic five times a day; 3. Give to the needy; 4. One month each year, fast from food, drink, sex and smoking from sunrise to sunset; 5. Pilgrimage once in one's lifetime to worship at a shrine in Mecca.

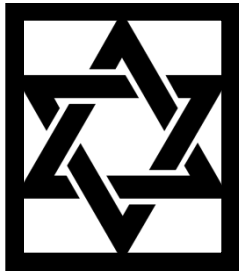
For many people, Islam matches their expectations about religion and deity. Islam teaches that there is one supreme deity, who is worshiped through good deeds and disciplined religious rituals. After death a person is rewarded or punished according to their religious devotion.





Fact Sheet: Judaism

Being tasked the job to become an expert on Judaism, read the information below and come up with a presentation to educate your fellow participants on this religion. Be ready to present and if time promotes to answer questions. You are also welcome to use the internet if you want to add more information.



Jews believe that there is a single God who not only created the universe, but with whom every Jew can have an individual and personal relationship.

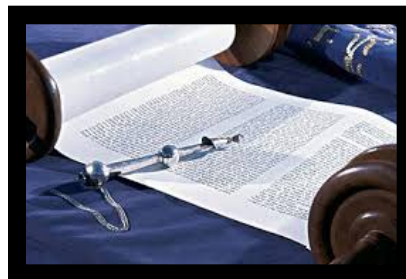
They believe that God continues to work in the world, affecting everything that people do. The Jewish relationship with God is a covenant relationship. In exchange for the many good deeds that God has done and continues to do for the Jewish People...

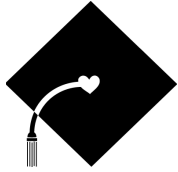
- The Jews keep God's laws
- The Jews seek to bring holiness into every aspect of their lives.

Jews believe that God appointed the Jews to be his chosen people in order to set an example of holiness and ethical behavior to the world. Jewish life is very much the life of a community and there are many activities that Jews must do as a community.

For example, the Jewish prayer book uses WE and OUR in prayers where some other faiths would use I and MINE.

Jews also feel part of a global community with a close bond Jewish people all over the world. A lot of Jewish religious life is based around the home and family activities.





Fact Sheet: Hinduism

Being tasked the job to become an expert on Hinduism, read the information below and come up with a presentation to educate your fellow participants on this religion. Be ready to present and if time promotes to answer questions. You are also welcome to use the internet if you want to add more information.

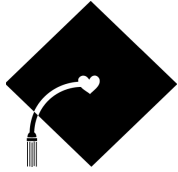


Most Hindus worship one Being of ultimate oneness (Brahman) through infinite representations of gods and goddesses. These various deities become incarnate within idols, temples, gurus, rivers, animals, etc.

Hindus believe their position in this present life was determined by their actions in a previous life. Hinduism therefore provides a possible explanation for suffering and evil in this life. A Hindu's goal is to become free from the law of karma...to be free from continuous reincarnations. Only the soul matters which will one day be free of the cycle of rebirths and be at rest.

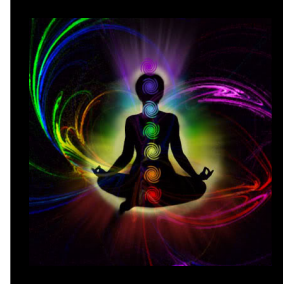
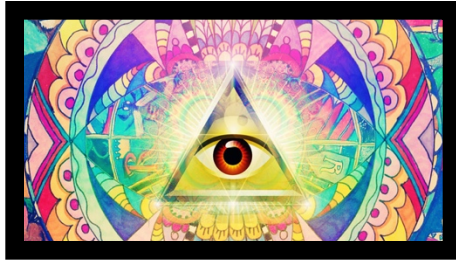
Hinduism gives a person freedom to choose how to work toward spiritual perfection. There are three possible ways to end this cycle of karma: 1. Be lovingly devoted to any of the Hindu deities; 2. Grow in knowledge through meditation of Brahman (oneness)...to realize that circumstances in life are not real, that selfhood is an illusion and only Brahman is real; 3. Be dedicated to various religious ceremonies and rites.





Fact Sheet: New Age

Being tasked the job to become an expert on New Age, read the information below and come up with a presentation to educate your fellow participants on this religion. Be ready to present and if time promotes to answer questions. You are also welcome to use the internet if you want to add more information.



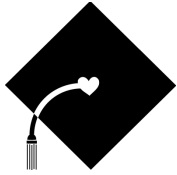
New Age promotes the development of the person's own power or divinity. A person in New Age would see themselves as deity, the cosmos, the universe. In fact, everything that the person sees, hears, feels or imagines is to be considered divine.

Highly eclectic, New Age presents itself as a collection of ancient spiritual traditions. It acknowledges many gods and goddesses, as in Hinduism. The Earth is viewed as the source of all spirituality, and has its own intelligence, emotions and deity. But superseding all is self. Self is the originator, controller and power over all. There is no reality outside of what the person determines.

New Age teaches a wide array of eastern mysticism and spiritual, metaphysical and psychic techniques, such as breathing exercises, chanting, drumming, meditating...to develop an altered consciousness and one's own divinity.

Anything negative a person experiences (failures, sadness, anger, selfishness, hurt) is considered an illusion. Believing themselves to be completely sovereign over their life, nothing about their life is wrong, negative or painful. Eventually a person develops spiritually to the degree that there is no objective, external reality. A person, becoming a god, creates their own reality.





Fact Sheet: Buddhism

Being tasked the job to become an expert on Buddhism, read the information below and come up with a presentation to educate your fellow participants on this religion. Be ready to present and if time promotes to answer questions. You are also welcome to use the internet if you want to add more information.

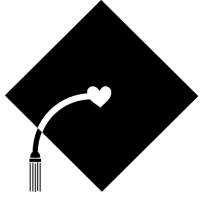


Buddhists do not worship any gods or God. People outside of Buddhism often think that Buddhists worship the Buddha. However, the Buddha (Siddhartha Gautama) never claimed to be divine, but rather he is viewed by Buddhists as having attained what they are also striving to attain, which is spiritual enlightenment and, with it, freedom from the continuous cycle of life and death. Most Buddhists believe a person has countless rebirths, which inevitably include suffering. A Buddhist seeks to end these rebirths. Buddhists believe it is a person's cravings, aversion and delusion that cause these rebirths. Therefore, the goal of a Buddhist is to purify one's heart and to let go of all yearnings toward sensual desires and the attachment to oneself.

Buddhists follow a list of religious principles and very dedicated meditation. When a Buddhist meditates it is not the same as praying or focusing on a god, it is more of a self-discipline. Through practiced meditation a person may reach Nirvana -- "the blowing out" of the flame of desire.

Buddhism provides something that is true of most major religions: disciplines, values and directives that a person may want to live by.





Religious Followers Who Fought for Social Justice

Civil rights leader and preacher Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had a dream — not only that black Americans would be granted full equality but that all people, regardless of race, religion or creed, would have the right to life and liberty. King is perhaps best known for promoting nonviolence and peaceful resistance as avenues for human rights activism, frequently putting his own life on the line by demonstrating, organizing and speaking out against bigotry and discrimination.

Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. (Jan. 15, 1929 – April 4, 1968)



A United Church of Christ minister who fought for minority rights. He was born in Hawaii to parents of Japanese ancestry, and experienced discrimination during World War II. After moving to Seattle in 1959, he acted as an advocate and defender of the city's gay community. He later founded the Asian Coalition for Equality, which brought Asian Americans together to campaign against intolerance and joined with African Americans who were also seeking equality.

Rev. Mineo Katagiri (Aug. 1, 1919 - Nov 15, 2005)



Malcolm X emerged as a prominent leader of the Nation of Islam, promoting black nationalism and challenging racial integration as the goal of the Civil Rights movement. He broke from the Nation of Islam in 1964 but remained committed to religious life as a vehicle for human rights activism. While on the hajj pilgrimage in Mecca, he wrote a letter remarking on the “spirit of true brotherhood” he had witnessed.

Malcolm X (May 19, 1925 - Feb. 21, 1965)



Human rights activism was deeply embedded in the life, history and spiritual philosophy of Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel. Born in Warsaw, Poland in 1907, Heschel lived through the rise of the Nazis and narrowly escaped the horrors of the Holocaust by fleeing to London in 1939 and later arriving in New York City. By the time he entered the Civil Rights movement, Heschel had already established himself as a professor of ethics and Jewish mysticism.

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschek (Jan. 1, 1907 - Dec. 23, 1971)



His Holiness the XIVth Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is the spiritual and temporal leader of the Tibetan people. During his travels abroad, His Holiness has spoken strongly for better understanding and respect among the different faiths of the world. Towards this end, His Holiness has made numerous appearances in interfaith services, imparting the message of universal responsibility, love, compassion and kindness.

The 14th Dalai Lama (Feb. 22, 1940 - present)



Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi was known to his many followers as Mahatma, or “the great-souled one.” He began his activism as an Indian immigrant in South Africa in the early 1900s, and in the years following World War I became the leading figure in India's struggle to gain independence from Great Britain. Known for his ascetic lifestyle—he often dressed only in a loincloth and shawl—and devout Hindu faith, Gandhi was imprisoned several times during his pursuit of non-cooperation, and undertook a number of hunger strikes.

Mahatma Gandhi (Oct 2, 1869 - Jan 30, 1948)

