



Guidelines for Interfaith Worship

The best way to plan interfaith worship is to plan it with people of other faiths. In the planning process, you can agree upon ground rules that are acceptable to all the leaders.

This is important because within faith communities there are different perspectives about what is happening in interfaith worship:

1. We are all praying to the same God, who is known to us in different ways, so we pray together.
2. We are not all praying to the same God so members of each faith offer prayers in the presence of the others but do not pray together.

In planning a service, it is good for the leaders to articulate how they understand what they are doing when they come together for worship. It may be that leaders are in different places on these issues, in which case they can plan a worship service that seeks to respect different viewpoints.

Guidelines

Scripture:

Reading passages from the sacred texts of each faith tradition represented is a good way to learn about each other's faith.

Passages should be chosen that have an inclusive or universal message.

Passages may include references to Jesus or Allah, or Israel but should not be confessional in theme. ("Jesus told a parable..." vs. "Jesus is Lord.")

No passage should be chosen that puts down people of other faiths.

A passage should be read by a member of the faith community that uses that scripture.

On occasion, a scripture passage may be read by someone outside of that faith community, but care should be given to what it means to read that as a sacred text.

It is appropriate to have scripture passages read in other languages, such as Hebrew or Arabic. Translations should be provided either written in the bulletin or with the passage repeated verbally in English.



Faith communities may offer additional readings which would enhance the interfaith service, i.e. poetry, non-scriptural sacred readings.

Prayer:

Prayer may be offered by people from their own faith traditions as well as common prayer by all.

A Christian can offer prayer in the name of Jesus, a Muslim in the name of Allah, and a Jew in the name of Adonai as long as this is done in the mode of praying in the presence of others. No one of another faith should be forced in the service to pray in a way that is inauthentic to them. Kindness and grace should guide the worship planning process.

When prayers are to be offered by the whole congregation, it is preferable to write or choose prayers that draw on universal images or names for God (i.e. Truth, Creator, Holy One, etc.). Be mindful that even “God” may be an issue for Jews who write it out “G-d”.

If a prayer is being said by the whole congregation, it may be sensitive to have a written introduction that invites people to pray this together as people are comfortable doing so. (Sort of like saying “Stand as you are able” rather than just “Stand.”)

When prayers are offered in other languages, such as Hebrew, Arabic, Spanish, or any language other than English, care needs to be taken to have translations appropriate for the community gathered. This can be done through written translations in the bulletin or with the prayer repeated verbally in English.. American Sign Language support may be offered as well.

Prayers may be spoken or chanted.

Silent prayer may also be used as a way of including people of many religions. Silence can be a mechanism for enhancing our unity and deepening our community experience.

Music:

Music can be a great way to highlight specific faith or cultural traditions and to get the community to participate.

Choose hymns or songs that have a universal rather than confessional message.

If a particular faith’s choir is doing an anthem, care should be given to seeing if the text is appropriate for an interfaith gathering.

It is appropriate for an interfaith choir to sing an anthem and lead community singing. Again, care should be given to choosing texts for anthems or hymns that are inclusive.



Instrumental music may highlight the diversity of faith and cultural backgrounds. It may also create a context for meditative prayer.

Actions/Gestures:

Sacred actions and gestures can increase awareness of other faith traditions and enable greater community participation.

Actions like lighting candles can include the community and be an opportunity to talk about different traditions' teaching/use of light, and/or a common meaning for all faiths.

Actions/Gestures (such as greeting one another in a worship context) should be done in a manner to respect both the tradition that the action comes from and the traditions of other faiths. (For example: people would be encouraged to greet those around them with nods and words rather than handshakes if Muslims are participating.)

Bulletins/Programs

The bulletin or program should be designed to help people participate fully. Care needs to be given to the font size, color, and images within the bulletin or program, i.e. depictions of God, holy personalities, or individual religious symbols should be avoided. Multiple language translations may also need to be available.

The bulletin or program can also be a teaching tool about why we gather for interfaith worship at this particular time. Knowing that people come with different understanding of interfaith prayer, there could be an invitation to participate as fully as someone is comfortable, allowing for different ways of participating, and encouraging appreciation and respect, and helping the community to be respectfully present with one another.

Scheduling of Events and Services

Care must be taken to assure inclusion through our scheduling. Holy Days, holidays, and worship timing should be considerations for planning. Our efforts in including groups may require us to think carefully about when and where interfaith events and services are held.

Resource List

<https://www.interfaith-calendar.org/>