

Christian Leadership in a Multifaith World Curriculum Designed by Interfaith America & CCCU

Module 1 – Christian Foundations for Interfaith Bridge-Building

Activity 6– “But What About...?”:

Big Questions That Arise When Christians Engage in Interfaith Activities

Overview

In this activity, students will reflect on key questions that often arise when Christians engage in interfaith cooperation activities and reflect on their own hopes and fears for interfaith engagement.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Consider theological questions that arise when Christians engage in interfaith activities.
- Reflect on their own hopes and fears about participating in interfaith activities.
- Reflect on the skills they have and the skills they need to develop in order to engage in respectful dialogue with people from other traditions.

External Materials

- “Religious Pluralism” by David Capes in *Life Questions Every Student Asks: Faithful Responses to Common Issues* edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber, InterVarsity Press, 2020.
- “You Don’t Have to Water Down Your Identity” by Amber Hacker in *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* (IVP Academic, 2016) (p.71-73).

Activity Content

When Christians contemplate engaging in conversations with people from other religious backgrounds, there are a set of “big questions” that often arise: What if I don’t know my own faith well enough to answer their questions? What if I offend them? How do I “love my neighbor” for who they are and also share the gospel with them? These questions can sometimes lead to paralysis that prevents Christians from learning about other religious traditions or from forming meaningful relationships with people from other backgrounds. However, if approached directly with care and authenticity, these big questions can draw Christians into meaningful engagement with others. Such engagement can result in a deeper understanding of our faith commitments and can build bonds that strengthen our civic communities.

Student Assignment Options

Before beginning the activities below, spend some time reflecting on your own attitude toward interfaith engagement: Imagine meeting someone from another religious tradition and having the opportunity to talk with them over a long walk or meal. Describe how you are feeling: Are you nervous? Excited? Scared? Name your fears and hopes.

Read [“Religious Pluralism”](#) by David Capes in *Life Questions Every Student Asks: Faithful Responses to Common Issues* edited by Gary M. Burge and David Lauber, InterVarsity Press, 2020.

- **What is respectful dialogue?**

In his chapter, “Religious Pluralism,” David Capes opens by writing that “These days it seems people respond to authentic expressions of faith with either apathy (‘Whatever’) or outrage (‘How dare you?’).” (p.159) He goes on to write, “Rather than apathy and outrage, the better posture toward different religions and beliefs should be one of respectful dialogue.” (p.161)

- Describe how both apathy and outrage are obstacles to respectful dialogue.
- Have you experienced apathy or outrage in your own encounters with someone from another tradition? What did you do? What did you say? What did someone else say to you? How can you move beyond apathy and outrage toward respectful dialogue?

- **Will I compromise my faith if I study other religions?**

Some people think that participating in interfaith activities can cause Christians to lose their faith. However, Capes describes the growth that happens in our own faith when we learn about other religions. He writes, “As my rabbi friend is fond of saying, ‘He who knows only one faith knows none.’ The Christians I know who have the best handle on who they are and what they believe have at some point juxtaposed their own faiths over against another (or others). It is in that compare-and-contrast mode that clear lines come into focus.” (p. 166)

- Why do you think it is important to learn about other religions in order to better understand Christianity? Share one thing you’ve learned about another faith that has sparked new growth or learning for you about your own.

Read *“You Don’t Have to Water Down Your Identity”* by Amber Hacker (*From Bubble to Bridge*, IVP Academic, 2016, pp. 71-73).

In this essay, Amber Hacker shares how her faith in Jesus and her identity as a born-again Christian inspire her to work for Interfaith Youth Core. She writes, “I do interfaith work not despite the fact that I’m a Christian, but I do it because I am a Christian. To me, being a Christian and an interfaith leader aren’t mutually exclusive but are mutually enriching.”

- After reading Amber’s essay, describe what she means by “mutually enriching.” How do interfaith relationships strengthen her Christian faith?
- How might interfaith engagement strengthen *your* faith?

- **How do I form authentic relationships with people who are not Christian?**

Capes includes a list of ways to “develop relationships of respect between Christians and non-Christians” (p. 167). Which of these come easy for you? Which seem more difficult?

1. *Listen more, talk less. You may learn something important.*
2. *Don’t label people or try to fit them into neat, little boxes.*
3. *Don’t pretend to have all the answers. Be willing to say, “I don’t know.”*

4. *Put yourself in the other's place.*
5. *Be authentic. Recognize when you are trying to push your own agenda.*
6. *Be a true friend with no other motives. Don't make people your 'project.'*

- **Additional Personal Reflection**

- Review the rest of the “Religious Pluralism” chapter by David Capes. Which of the other questions he asks are important to you? How would you answer them in your own words?
- For more on the power of relationships across religious lines, read the paired essays “A Christian in the Muslim Student Association” by April Lenker and “Sometimes It Takes One” by Ola Mohamed” in *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World* (IVP Academic, 2016, pp. 177-181).

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Explore:* [Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey \(IDEALS\)](#) explored questions about students' religious practice and interfaith experiences on 122 college campuses across the country. You may find the data points interesting for further research.
- *Read:* Richard Mouw, “The Challenge of Other Religions” (Chapter 9) in *Uncommon Decency: Christian Civility in an Uncivil World*.