

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

### Module 2 – Religious Literacy Activity 6 – Sacred Spaces

#### Overview

In this activity students will take virtual visits to sacred spaces of their choosing.

#### Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Further cultivate *appreciative knowledge* of various faith traditions through exploration of sacred spaces.
- Continue to cultivate a *narrative imagination* in order to appreciate the religious commitments of others.
- Consider and reflect on what it means to receive and reciprocate acts of hospitality.

#### External Materials

- [Kotel \(Western Wall in Jerusalem\) \(Judaism\)](#)
- [Kotel \(Western Wall in Jerusalem\) \(Judaism\) panorama](#)
- [Great Mosque of Mecca during hajj \(Islam\)](#)
- [Great Mosque of Mecca \(Islam\) 360](#)
- [Harmandar Sahib \(Golden Temple\) in Amritsar \(Sikhism\)](#)
- [The Baha'i House of Worship in Chicago \(Baha'i\)](#)
- [History of the Baha'i House of Worship in Chicago \(Baha'i\)](#)
- [Hindu Monastery in Kauai \(Hinduism\)](#)

#### Activity Content

“You just have to see it for yourself!” Have you ever felt this way after trying to describe a travel experience to a friend? So often, our memories and descriptions fail to fully represent what we “felt” when we visited a place or space that made an impression on us. Part of what makes travel personally meaningful is how we perceived the place - what gave us goosebumps! Did we feel connected? Did it speak to our soul?

“Pictures just don’t do it justice.” This is often the case with religious sites, or perhaps the much better description - sacred spaces. Sacred spaces are designed so that individuals can connect to their religious beliefs in ways and means that may be absent in daily life. While not all sacred spaces are official buildings or locations, they do hold many features in common. They are often places of refuge, providing opportunities for both personal reflection and communal praise or lament. While built for believers, throughout history all great religious traditions have used their

sacred environs to practice hospitality to visitors. Few remain off-limits. How we receive that hospitality is just as important for us as it is for our hosts. Visiting sacred spaces provides us with another tangible means to acquire *appreciative knowledge*, but it also allows us to engage our *narrative imaginations*; thoughtfully observing and considering why sacred spaces have value for the believer who calls it home but also respectfully receiving the opportunity to be “invited in.”

## Student Assignment Options

### 1. Visiting Sacred Spaces:

- a. Choose two of the sacred spaces listed above. Set a timer for 10 minutes on your device and visit each space as an uninformed visitor - meaning you just stumbled upon the site. You are here to learn, to try and develop your *appreciative knowledge*. As you visit, jot down simple notes on the following:
  1. What is the first thing that caught your attention?
  2. What colors, textures, objects did you see?
- b. Now, we are going to return to the site with the goal of activating our *narrative imaginations*. Consider the following questions:
  1. What is there to admire in what you are seeing?
  2. What does ‘worship’ look like here?
  3. What feels familiar to you? Are there things that resonant or remind you of your own tradition?
  4. Do class, gender, or other distinctions seem to matter in this place? How so?
  5. Does anything you see make you feel uncomfortable? Why? Really think about it as this will be helpful in the next Response activity.
  6. Do you think a visitor would have a meaningful experience in your place of worship?

### 2. Creating a Visitors Guide for Sacred Spaces

- a. Imagine you have been tasked with creating a one-page visitors guide for your choice of the religious sites above. Your audience (or tour group) is made up of fellow Christian students. Your job is not to create a tour based on history or content. Your job is to adequately equip your tourists to have a successful and respectful visit. First, choose one of the pieces of content above and spend 20 minutes exploring as a tourist. Then, turn to the task of preparing your visitors guide. Remember, this is one page that could be handed to them upon “entry.” The following structure may prove useful:
  - i. *An introduction paragraph explaining the “posture” a Christian could take to maximize their visit.* What do you think you could say here that would make a Christian more at ease? Revisit your own notes on what made you uncomfortable in the first response activity. Could you address that concern here in a way that would be helpful to others?
  - ii. *A list of do’s and don’ts.* What rules should guests follow in order to be respectful visitors? While it makes sense to keep these simple (think

bullet points!), add a thoughtful, one to two sentence explanation after each.

- iii. Finish with a *concluding paragraph that suggests how Christians can be encouraged in their own faith or challenged to consider the role of space in their own faith practice*. Again here, think about your own experiences from the first Response activity, particularly your answers to what you found admirable *or* what caused you discomfort.

### Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Explore:* Interfaith America's [Guide for Religious Site Visits](#).
- *Explore:* If your instructor has given you a lot of latitude in deciding how you'll organize your response to a site visit, you might get ideas from two sample syllabi that include site visit assignments. :
  - [Site Visit Guidelines to Places of Worship](#) by Dr. Suzanne Watts Henderson at Queens University Charlotte.
  - [Interfaith Site Visits and Self-Analysis Paper: Final Project Assignment](#) by Dr. Dan Mathewson at Wofford College.
- *Explore:* Learn more about sacred sites and the people who worship there by researching the construction process or architecture of sacred spaces. There are even lessons on [Khan Academy!](#)
- *Explore:* [Sacred Land Film Project](#) is an excellent site that collates together multiple resources for exploring sacred sites in various Native American communities across the United States. In addition, the site is now home to the 8-part PBS series, [Standing on Sacred Ground](#).