

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

Module 2 – Religious Literacy *Activity 2– Seeing the Religious Diversity Around You*

Overview

In this activity, students will broaden their view of religious diversity in the US and begin thinking about important questions to ask when developing religious literacy.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Expand their knowledge of the religious demographics in the United States
- Learn to look for diversity around them
- Identify how demographic trends create a need for civic pluralism and interfaith engagement
- Practice asking questions and researching answers that help build religious literacy

External Materials

- Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.com
- Public Religion Research Institute, www.prii.org

Activity Content

The United States is the most religiously devout and religiously diverse nation in the Western Hemisphere. The overwhelming majority of Americans regularly interact with people who believe differently from themselves--in schools, workplaces, and neighborhoods. This doesn't always mean that we're aware of the religious diversity surrounding us, however!

Becoming a Christian who knows how to love and serve people who believe differently requires knowing more about the people who live all around you. A great place to start is simply learning more about the religious demographics of the United States. *Which religions are practiced in the United States? What percentage of people identify themselves with those religions? Do certain religions tend to be practiced in some regions of America rather than others? What religions are prevalent in your own community, city, and state?* In this activity, you'll begin to answer these questions and more!

Student Assignment Options

1. Spend 30-45 minutes learning more about the religious demographics of the United States. Consider using the following sites as resources (although you can use other sources as well, if you choose):
 - Pew Research Center for Religion and Public Life, www.pewforum.com, looking specifically at the data and resources under the "Religion" heading.

- PRRI (Public Religion Research Institute), www.prrri.org, specifically exploring the Religion and Culture section (the American Values Interactive Map may be of interest to you).
- a. Choose 3 of the following questions and write a 1-2 paragraph answer:
 - i. What percentage of Americans identifies with each of the major world religious traditions?
 - ii. How does religious affiliation vary by geographic location, race/ethnicity, economic class, etc.?
 - iii. How does religious affiliation correlate to political affiliation?
 - iv. How does religious affiliation correlate to positions on major social issues?
 - v. How does the religious landscape of your state compare to other states?
 - vi. How do the religious demographics of America seem to be changing? What trends are emerging?
 - vii. Other questions of your choice?
 - b. Write 1-2 paragraphs that reflect on what you have learned in your research. Be sure to note if what you learned confirmed your perceptions of the religious landscape in America and/or if you were surprised by anything you learned.

2. During a past practicum or internship, have you observed that people you served identified with different religious traditions? If so, which ones?

3. Think about your possible future profession. What questions would you want to ask to better understand your workplace and the community in which your workplace is situated? Make a list of at least 3 questions.

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Watch:* PBS documentary [“God in America”](#) (6-part series; each part is one hour long) to learn more about this history of religion in America and how America became one of the most religiously diverse and devout countries in the world. When watching the documentary, also consider: Which stories aren’t being told? Which religious groups aren’t featured?
- *Read:* *American Grace: How Religion Unites and Divides Us* by Robert Putnam and David Campbell. Don’t feel daunted by the size of the book; instead focus on a few chapters of interest to you. For example, you might read chapters 14 and 15 to get a sense of why Putnam and Campbell believe a healthy American society depends upon us getting to know people who are different from us.
- *Read:* Robert P. Jones’ essay “Pluralism After White Christian America” in *Out of Many Faiths* by Eboo Patel (Princeton & Oxford, 2018).