

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

Module 1 – Christian Foundations for Interfaith Bridge-Building
Activity 2 – Virtues for Engaging Religious Diversity as a Christian

Overview

In this activity students will be introduced to three key virtues that help Christians constructively navigate interfaith engagement in a manner that is consistent with their faith commitments. Students will have the opportunity to reflect on the meaning of these virtues and apply them to a real-life situation.

Learning Outcomes

Students who successfully complete this activity will:

- Be introduced to the key virtue of **Appreciative Knowledge**, which will be used to broaden one's understanding of the experiences and humanity of religious others.
- Consider how to cultivate the virtue of a **Narrative Imagination**, actively placing oneself in the shoes of a religious other.
- Engage in **Reflective Commitment**, a process of refining one's reasons for their own religious beliefs and learning to communicate those beliefs thoughtfully in an interfaith context.

External Materials

- ["Building Interfaith Community at Work"](#)
- ["Building Community in Quarantine"](#)
- ["We Form Each Other"](#)

Activity Content

As Christians, we believe confidently in the truth of Christianity. At the same time, confident belief does not mean we will never have questions and never have anything else to learn as we grow in our faith. The Christian life requires humility. As the Apostle Paul says in 1 Corinthians 13:12, "For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known." None of us has the full knowledge that we will have one day in heaven. An exciting aspect of recognizing our limitations is realizing that we always have more to learn! Just as we can get excited about learning more about the natural world in our biology classes, or about the traditions of other cultures in our sociology classes, we can also pursue learning about other religions with humble excitement.

When we are learning something new, we need to be good listeners. In humility, we realize that we need to listen to a professor teach and listen to the ideas expressed in a text. We seek to understand the new concepts, and then we decide what we think about them. It's only after we've made sure that we really understand an idea that we have earned our right to evaluate or critique that idea. The same practice of listening is crucial in interfaith engagement. By listening

to the views of people from different religious traditions, we have the opportunity to try to really see the world through their eyes and understand why they believe what they believe. In addition, we pay attention to their context and do our best to try and understand how the world looks from different perspectives.

In this learning activity, you are going to practice listening and learning as you are introduced to three important virtues that will help you live out your Christian belief in the context of interfaith engagement. The goal of learning to practice these three virtues is to become a committed Christ-follower who knows how to have healthy relationships with people who orient around religion differently.

First, we need to adjust our learning posture and intentionally approach the stories of others with a desire to truly learn, not just gather more information or facts. *Appreciative Knowledge* is a virtue which seeks to recognize the contributions of other traditions, have sympathetic understanding of the distinctive history and commitments of other traditions, and develop ways of working with and serving other communities. The objective of *appreciative knowledge* is to move beyond mere tolerance to a place of appreciation for faith difference.

Our second virtue is what ethicist Martha Nussbaum calls a “*Narrative Imagination*.” This requires one to cultivate an imagination which gives the “ability to think what it might be like to be in the shoes of a person different from oneself, to be an intelligent reader of that person’s story, and to understand the emotions and wishes and desires that someone so placed might have.” A *Narrative Imagination* requires us to move beyond sympathy to the higher skill of empathy. In essence, while we should start from considering what we can learn from another person (*appreciative knowledge*), we can use our *Narrative Imagination* to develop a more nuanced position of being ready to, “imagine what life is like for [that person].”

Third, the virtue of *Reflective Commitment* helps us find balance between our openness to learn from others and our commitment to our own faith. When practicing the virtue of reflective commitment, we process what we are learning about other religions in dialogue with our own religious beliefs. You may have questions about Christianity after you learn more about someone else’s religious beliefs or their reasons for not being a Christian. Or, you might find that you really value an aspect of another person’s religious practice, like fasting or prayer, and become curious about how you could adapt that practice into your own life as a Christian. The virtue of *Reflective Commitment* leads you to dig into questions and learn more about your own faith. In doing so, you have the chance to deepen your knowledge of and commitment to Christianity. And, learning to humbly ask and seek answers to questions about your own faith, you’ll end up with a stronger faith than you had before!

Student Assignment Options

1. Exploring Virtues:
 - Carefully re-read the descriptions of each of the virtues above. Think of these virtues as lenses/glasses with which you approach content in a very specific way. Then, rewrite each virtue in your own words.
 - Prepare to read and view each of the three selections below by following these steps.

- Activate your designated lens. **you may need to refer to it often as you go until it becomes familiar.*
 - Read/View the Selection “through” your lens.
 - Consider the reflection questions after you have completed each reading.
- A. (Lens - *Appreciative Knowledge*) ["Building Interfaith Community at Work"](#):
- Did you acquire new knowledge of Islam through Farah’s story?
 - Can you compare your own experiences at work to Farah’s?
 - What did you learn about what life can be like as a Muslim woman in the U.S.?
- B. (Lens - *Narrative Imagination*) ["Building Community in Quarantine"](#)
- Do you resonate with Kyle’s hesitance around bringing up certain topics and the assumptions that come with them?
 - How did you feel as you read about Kyle’s experience with feeling a sense of “otherness” in the Roman Catholic faith?
 - Could you imagine yourself in Kyle’s shoes as you read? What felt familiar to you?
- C. (Lens - *Reflective Commitment*) ["We Form Each Other"](#)
- Do you think you have done interfaith work without knowing it?
 - Rida makes connections between her work as an interfaith leader and a dancer? Do you have a passion/hobby/activity that you can make the same connections with?
 - Have you ever heard of the term, *unconscious bias*? Does that resonate with you? Have you ever been in a situation where you suddenly realize your bias? How did you reckon with it?

2. A Case Study Reflection:

- Read the Pluralism Project’s Case Study ["Driven by Faith"](#).
- Practice narrative imagination, appreciative knowledge, and reflective commitment by answering the following questions
 - Make a list of the reasons why a Muslim cab driver does not want to transport passengers with alcohol.
 - If you were the Muslim cab driver, how would you likely feel about the initial solutions to refer passengers to alternative cab companies or for passengers to hide the alcohol in a special bag?
 - Imagine that you are Steve Wareham. What does it look like to approach the case with humility? Describe what you would need to do if you were applying appreciative knowledge, narrative imagination, reflective commitment in this case.
 - Can you think of a scenario where a Christian business owner might want to refuse services to a client based on her or his religious beliefs? How might the clients feel about this refusal of services? What would seem like a reasonable solution?

Going Deeper: Additional Resources

- *Read:* Catherine Cornille's book, *The Im-Possibility of Interreligious Dialogue*. Cornille provides an in-depth exploration of many virtues related to interfaith engagement and the intersections between them.
- *Read:* A version of these virtues is explored in chapter 5 of *From Bubble to Bridge: Educating Christians for a Multifaith World*.
- *Watch and read:* The personal narratives used in this exercise are all taken from [Interfaith America Magazine](#), a digital magazine with a multitude of contributions featuring voices from a diversity of religious backgrounds.