

Multi-Faith Study Series 01

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST IN A MULTI-FAITH WORLD

GROUP STUDY GUIDE FOR LEADERS



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SESSION ONE: A ROOM IN THE HOUSE OF GOD

OVERVIEW

Opening

- Introductions: Discovering who we are
- Why this study?

Exploring

- Key Elements of the Disciples tradition
- Disciples and Ecumenism
- Disciples and Multi-faith Engagement

Going Deeper

- Video: Cathedral Church of St. Paul, Boston, Massachusetts
- Poem: "The Chambered Nautilus"
- Scripture Study, John 14:1-3

Closing

- Prayer from the Jewish tradition

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A copy of "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement" (See Appendix 01)
- Means to show a video from the internet
- Bibles or copies of John 14
- Copies of the prayer (If you are using a computer and video projector, consider using PowerPoint slides instead of paper copies)
- A flip chart and marker
- Paper & pencils for optional activity

- Recruit a volunteer to read the poem, “The Chambered Nautilus.” (see Appendix 02) Ask them to prepare by reading it through in advance several times so that they can read it smoothly, in a reflective mood.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

- Read through the entire lesson and make your own notes as needed.
- Read the document, “Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement.” (See Appendix 01) You will not be using this document in this session, but it is good background material and will be used in subsequent sessions. As you read it, keep a log of your own questions and observations. These notes will likely provide much helpful material for your class.
- Preview the video in the Going Deeper section. (<https://goo.gl/jXmCai>)
- Be sure you have the right equipment arranged for showing the video to your class. A 15-inch laptop may suffice for a small group (less than 10) but most laptops do not produce sufficient sound, so you likely will need external speakers.

GOING THE EXTRA MILE—STRONGLY RECOMMENDED

- Reading or studying about interfaith engagement will never replace actual engagement in interfaith dialogue. Consider who you might know from another faith tradition that could enhance these sessions. Before inviting someone to join you, first engage them in conversation yourself about this class and what you would like to accomplish. Be clear on your goals. Inviting a guest who comes in with an agenda of her own may not be helpful. If your conversation goes well and is mutually beneficial, ask if that person (or persons if more than one) would do the honor of joining you for one or more of these sessions. Discuss what role they will play and what they are comfortable discussing. Modify your lesson plans accordingly. For example, invite your guest to respond from their perspective to the document, “Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement” in the Exploring section of this lesson. This might take the place of the video or the scripture study. Or you could ask your guest for their interpretation of the John 14 passage.

- One caution: Will anyone in your class take this as an opportunity to either attack the faith tradition of your guest or to try and convert them? (It has been known to happen!) If so, it would be helpful to discuss this with your guest beforehand and to also make clear at the beginning of the session that this is not an opportunity to engage in debate or arguments about the claims of another tradition or to engage in proselytizing. Encourage class members to be respectful of your guest and to also be honest with any questions they may have. In all things, treat one another with love.

LESSON PLAN

OPENING

1. Introductions. Welcome participants and briefly summarize the topic of the course in no more than one or two sentences.

If your class is less than 20, invite each person to introduce themselves and to share either something about the tradition of the Disciples of Christ they greatly appreciate, if they are familiar with Disciples, or if not, something about the congregation they appreciate. Start with yourself.

If your class is more than 20, invite the class to quickly form small groups of 3 or 4 and to do the same as above. Afterwards invite people to call out the appreciations they heard.

2. Why this study? Share the following in your own words.

We live in an increasingly multi-faith world. People of different faith traditions are no longer foreigners living in different countries. They are often our neighbors, co-workers, or even members of our extended family. While we may still think of our nation as predominantly Christian or of “Judeo-Christian” heritage, today the largest growing groups in many communities are from other religious traditions. And when we take a closer look at the history of this continent, we realize there were large communities with vibrant faith traditions of their own before the first settlers arrived. Some may see these different faith traditions as a threat to their way of life, where others might see them as a blessing. Roman Catholic theologian Hans Küng writes in his book on world religions, “There will be no peace among the peoples of the world without peace among the world religions.”¹

¹ Hans Küng, *Christianity and World Religions* (Orbis: New York, 1993), p. 443.

Disciples' Council on Christian Unity concluded in their document on "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement" that,

[W]e unequivocally affirm that to be faithful to God's call in today's religiously pluralistic world summons Disciples intentionally and whole-heartedly to engage in interfaith relations and work.

This study is not a study of world religions; rather, our goal is to understand why we, in the tradition we call the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), should engage in interfaith relations, how those relations intersect with our Christian witness, and what gifts we as Disciples have to bring to such relationships.

Early in Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) history, we preferred the term "brotherhood" to "denomination." The idea was that we were not simply another church institution, we were *family*, brothers and sisters in Christ. At the heart of that conviction was the notion that we have been welcomed by God into this family, and because of this conviction, we believe our calling is to welcome others as God has welcomed us. Scripture is full of references to welcoming the stranger or the sojourner. Can proselytism, seeking to convert another, be compatible with hospitality? To welcome another person is to accept that person as they are, without asking them to change who they are. Just as it would not be hospitable for the host to seek to change the guest, so too it would be most impolite for the guest to seek to change the host. And so, whether the host or the guest, we retain our identity as Disciples of Christ when engaged in interfaith relationships. What's more, to be authentic in our relationship, we witness to the truth we know in Christ. But in interfaith engagement, we also listen to the truth given by the witness of the other person. Only in doing so can we create a community of mutual respect and understanding, where "nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more." (Isaiah 2:4) The authors of this study believe that such a vision is needed today more than ever.

EXPLORING

1. Using a flip chart or white board, make 2 columns. Invite participants to list the core values of the Disciples of Christ. Write these on the flip chart in the first column. If any of the following are not named, add them to your list:
 - Importance of scripture ("Where the scriptures speak, we speak...")
 - Importance of education and Biblical study (the who, what, where, why, etc., or what we know today as historical-critical analysis)
 - Christian unity (our "polar star")

- Rejection of creeds (“no creed but Christ”)
 - Centrality of the table
 - Role of the laity (“priesthood of all believers”)
 - Gender equity (Ordination of women since 1874)
 - Mission focus
 - Environmental stewardship
2. In the second column, ask participants to name any ways each of these core values could be helpful for interfaith engagement.

Examples:

- Importance of scripture — A value shared by other traditions (Muslims, Christians and Jews are often called “people of the book”)
 - Mission focus — Our presence in other countries gives us many opportunities to learn about other traditions and develop interfaith relationships
3. Circle the item “Christian unity” (or whatever terms were used) and discuss the role Disciples of have played in ecumenical movements.

Summarize in your own words: From our first union in 1832 when Alexander Campbell's “Disciples of Christ” joined Barton Stone's “Christians,” Disciples have worked for Christian unity in most communities where Disciple congregations are present. In the “Declaration and Address of the Christian Association of Washington” in 1809, Thomas Campbell wrote, “The church of Jesus Christ is essentially, intentionally, and constitutionally one.”² Disciples have often made the prayer of Jesus in John 17:11 “that they may be one” a central rallying cry to unite Christians either in local associations of churches or in support of formal union conversations.

The famed Disciple preacher, Peter Ainslie, was known as a tireless crusader for Christian unity in the early 20th century and called for the creation of the Council on Christian Union in 1910, now the Council on Christian Unity (CCU), the first organization of its kind among North American denominations. Paul

² Lester McAllister and William Tucker, *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* (Bethany Press: St. Louis, 1975), p. 113.

Crow, as the leader of CCU for 25 years, has been a major champion of Christian unity in ecumenical circles most of his adult life. Disciples played a prominent role in the formation of the Federal Council of Churches, the predecessor to the National Council of Churches (NCC). Three Disciple ministers, Roy G. Ross, Joan Brown Campbell and Michael Kinnamon, have served as the General Secretary for the NCC and J. Irwin Miller was the first lay President. Disciples' historian Ronald E. Osborn sums up Disciples' long-standing emphasis simply as, "Disciples believe that God wills the oneness of his people."³

The drive for the unity of the church goes much deeper than a few verses of scripture, a prayer from Jesus or a letter from Paul (cf. 1 Corinthians 12). At the heart of Christian unity is a theological belief in God's design for the unity of the inhabited world (Greek: *ecumene* from which we get the word "ecumenical"), cf. Colossians 1:15-20. To be true "ecumenists" in this sense would imply not working simply for the unity of the church, but the unity of humanity. As we noted in the quote earlier from Hans Küng, humanity cannot live in peace until there is peace among religions. Interfaith engagement does not seek unity of religions in the same way that Disciples have sought to unify the church. Unity of humanity does not require a single, united religion, but it does require mutual respect of and appreciation for the varied religious traditions of humanity.

4. Questions for Discussion

- Can the Disciples appeal for Christian unity be broadened to include the entire family of God, all humanity?
- How might our core values contribute to such an effort?

GOING DEEPER

1. Give a brief introduction to the video, "Come and see': Nautilus sculpture extends Gospel invitation," then show the video. The video can be found here: <https://goo.gl/jXmCai>.
2. Ask participants to take a moment to reflect on the video as a volunteer reads Oliver Wendell Holmes' poem, "The Chambered Nautilus" (see Appendix 02.)
3. Take 5 minutes to share reactions to the video.

³ Ronald E. Osborn, *Experiment in Liberty* (Bethany Press: St. Louis, 1978), p. 106. For a good summary of the historical role of Disciples in ecumenism see "The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in the Ecumenical Movement" by Paul A. Crow, Jr. in *The Christian Church (Disciples of Christ): An Interpretative Examination in the Cultural Context* (Bethany Press, 1973).

4. Have someone in the class read John 14:1-3. Invite participants to share their understanding of those verses. Ask: how did the video add to your understanding? Should we, as Disciples, move from seeing our church as one room in the house of God to seeing Christianity in the same way? Is such a view threatening or exciting? Confusing or enlightening?

BONUS ACTIVITY

Pass out paper and pencils. Invite participants to take 2 minutes to imagine that they have been tasked for created a symbol for "A House of Prayer for All People" and to sketch their design. Invite anyone who is willing to share their design with the class.

CLOSING

Pass out copies of the *Kaddish* (see the next page). Share that each session will be closed with a prayer for a different religious tradition. Important: We are using these prayers for educational purposes. [Out of the respect for the integrity of other traditions, mindful Christians will be careful of appropriating elements of other traditions without careful consideration of their meaning within that tradition.] Today we close with the *Kaddish*, one of the most well-known Jewish prayers said for the dead. Be sure class members know that they are free to participate in this prayer or to silently say a prayer of their own.

THE KADDISH⁴

Glorified and sanctified be God's great name throughout the world which He has created according to His will. May He establish His kingdom in your lifetime and during your days, and within the life of the entire House of Israel, speedily and soon; and say, Amen.

May His great name be blessed forever and to all eternity.

Blessed and praised, glorified and exalted, extolled and honored, adored and lauded be the name of the Holy One, blessed be He, beyond all the blessings and hymns, praises and consolations that are ever spoken in the world; and say, Amen.

May there be abundant peace from heaven, and life, for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

He who creates peace in His celestial heights, may He create peace for us and for all Israel; and say, Amen.

⁴ <http://www.beliefnet.com/prayers/judaism/loss/mourners-kaddish.aspx>

SESSION TWO: LEARNING FROM OUR NEIGHBORS

OVERVIEW

Opening

- Introductions: First experience of a different religious tradition

Exploring

- Insights from Buddhism for Christians
- Witnesses of those adhering to more than one religious tradition

Going Deeper

- Video: Interfaith Service of Prayer, Eugene, Oregon
- Scripture Study: Isaiah 56:3-8

Closing

- Prayer from the Buddhist tradition

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- A copy of Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana's paper, *Three Insights from Buddhism That Made Me a Better Christian* (See Appendix 03)
- Means to show a video from the internet
- Bibles or copies of Isaiah 56:3-8
- Copies of the prayer (If you are using a computer and video projector, consider using PowerPoint slides instead of paper copies)
- A flip chart and marker or white board
- At least 2 different translations of the Bible; it is best if these are dissimilar translations. KJV, RSV and NRSV are more similar than dissimilar, so in addition to one of these, use a translation such as the TEV or a paraphrase such as The Message.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

- Read through the entire lesson and make your own notes as needed. If you are not familiar with Buddhism, read the Wikipedia article on it or chapters on Buddhism from a reliable source on world religions such as Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One*, Hans Küng's *Christian and World Religions*, or Huston Smith's, *The World's Religions*.
- Read the Appendix 03: *Three Insights from Buddhism That Made Me a Better Christian*. As you read it, keep a log of your own questions and observations. These notes will likely provide much helpful material for your class. Be prepared to answer the question, "What is 'pluperfect'?" (A verb tense in Latin and Greek with a point of reference in past time, e.g. "I already had made the call when you came.")
- For the discussion in Section 3, familiarize yourself with the story of Barton Stone and the Cane Ridge revival. Chances are good that your church library or your pastor will have a copy of *Journey in Faith: A History of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ)* by Lester McAllister and William Tucker. Read chapter 3 for a good description of the Cane Ridge revival. The story can also be found in *The Encyclopedia of the Stone-Campbell Movement*, "Cane Ridge Revival", p. 164ff. Shorter versions can be found on Wikipedia.com and at the website for the Disciples Historical Society. (<https://goo.gl/QzkCN9>)
- Preview the video in the Going Deeper section, available on YouTube at <https://goo.gl/RQnRKb>. (Or search "Interfaith Prayer Service International" and look for the video by that title from June 3, 2009. Note you will find more than one video about the Eugene Interfaith Prayer Service and other services. Choose the one that is most appropriate for your class.) Be sure you have the right equipment arranged for showing the video to your class. A 15-inch laptop may suffice for a small group (less than 10) but most laptops do not produce sufficient sound so you likely will need external speakers.
- Read the Wiki article, "How to Say a Buddhist Prayer" (<https://goo.gl/g4E8w8>) and choose one of the mantras in section 2 or the prayer in section 3 or 4. Make copies for the class. **Important:** Out of the respect for the integrity of other traditions, mindful Christians will be careful of appropriating elements of other traditions without careful consideration of their meaning within that tradition.]

GOING THE EXTRA MILE—STRONGLY RECOMMENDED

- Invite someone from the Buddhist tradition to join you for this session. Also see the note on this section in Session One.

LESSON PLAN

OPENING

1. Introductions. Welcome participants and briefly summarize the topic of this session in no more than one or two sentences. Note, even though you did introductions in the first session, it is usually good to do so again so that any new person in your group has another chance to learn everyone's name. If you are in a group where everyone has known each other for some time, you can make this exercise more fun by inviting people to give the nick name they were called as a child.

If your class is less than 20, invite each person to introduce themselves and to share their first experience of a different religious tradition. When and where did that occur? How old were you? What stands out about that experience for you? Start with yourself.

If your class is more than 20, invite the class to quickly form small groups of 3 or 4 and to do the same as above. Afterwards invite people to name the things they heard which were beneficial about encountering other religious traditions.

2. After everyone has introduced themselves ask the group, "What insights does this sharing give you about the diversity of our religious experiences (or the lack thereof)?"

EXPLORING

1. Introduce Dr. Shanta Premawardhana, President of the OMNIA Institute for Contextual Leadership in Chicago. Originally from Sri Lanka, the Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana was most recently the director for Interreligious Dialogue and Cooperation at the World Council of Churches based in Geneva, Switzerland. Previously, Shanta served as the Associate General Secretary for Interfaith Relations at the National Council of Churches of Christ, based in New York. Following seminary education in Sri Lanka and India, Shanta arrived in the United States in 1981 for graduate study at Northwestern University in Evanston, Illinois, where he earned his MA and PhD in Religion. Continuing to live in the Chicago area, he founded the Chicago Ashram of Jesus Christ, a Christian community with an outreach to South Asian immigrants and served for fourteen years as senior pastor of Ellis Avenue Church located in the south side of Chicago.

2. Invite class members to take turns reading the article, *Three Insights from Buddhism That Made Me a Better Christian*. Stop after each section to discuss. Below are suggested discussion questions. If you have a large class, break into small groups for discussion.

Section 1. Which describes the faith you first learned: Faith is about the destination, or faith is about the journey? How would you answer that now? Compare the teaching of the Buddha, "Work out your salvation with diligence" with Philippians 2:12. What do these teachings suggest about our faith journey?

Section 2. Why is discipline necessary for the journey? Use a flip chart or white board to list as many Christian disciplines you can name. (E.g. prayer, Bible reading, scripture memorization, meditation...) How have you found these disciplines helpful in your life? On a new flip chart or on a clean whiteboard, make 2 columns. Label one column "Journey Theology" and the other "Arrived Theology." Ask the class to list characteristics of each. Ask, "which best describes your theology?" Note, this is not about a "right" or "wrong" way of believing; rather it is more of a question of which is more helpful to you at this point in your life.

Section 3. Reflect on the early history of the Hebrew people. The patriarchs were nomads. From the time of Moses until the building of the temple by King Solomon, the ark of the covenant was kept in a tent. Is it mere coincidence that the Apostle Paul was a tent maker? Briefly tell the story of Barton Stone and the Cane Ridge revival. (<https://goo.gl/QzkCNg>) Consider how the origin story of the Disciples was like that of the early church or Judaism before the building of the temple.

- What would it mean to "live lightly" today, now that most churches have buildings and are more like temple Judaism than its nomadic predecessor? On the flip chart or white board, write sayings or stories told by Jesus or other Bible verses that support the importance of detachment from material things. (E.g. Matt 6:19f, 25-34; Luke 12:15-21; 18:18-25; 2 Cor 9:6-9)
- In light of these considerations, might we have more in common with the Buddhist notion of impermanence than we realize?

GOING DEEPER

1. Give a brief introduction to the video. This interfaith service is held on the 11th of every month at First Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) in Eugene, Oregon. It began in October, 2001, in wake of the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001. The service continues to this day (as of March 2018). The video is 10 minutes and 46 seconds. The video is available on YouTube at <https://goo.gl/RQnRKb>.
2. Suggested discussion questions:
 - What spoke to you in this video? Would you be comfortable in such a service?
 - What did you learn about other faith traditions?
 - What does it mean for Christians to engage in this type of prayer service?
 - Share examples of interfaith services you have attended.
 - What is the difference between interfaith dialogue and interfaith prayer? Is one more important or more necessary than the other?
3. Ask someone in the class to read Isaiah 56:3-8. Ask a second reader to read the same text from a different translation. Suggested discussion questions:
 - Foreigners, or Gentiles, were often not welcomed into the Jewish family. (This is why the story of Ruth is such a powerful story. Invite others to share what they remember about the backgrounds of Ruth and Naomi, and why naming Ruth, a gentile, as the great-grandmother of David is so surprising. Contrast that story with the exclusion of foreigners in the books Ezra & Nehemiah and the specific injunction against Hebrew men marrying gentile women.) Other passages make clear that Gentiles were welcomed at various times in Israel's history. What do these stories suggest to you about how foreigners should or should not be received? How would you express that today?
 - Share what you know about eunuchs. What might the modern equivalent of eunuchs be today?
 - Note the emphasis on outcasts in vs. 8 (of the Isaiah passage). If eunuchs and gentiles/foreigners (the "outcasts" of the day) were included in the temple of God, what lesson might we learn about how to treat today's "outcasts"? Who are the "outcasts" today being excluded?

- What is the significance of a “house of prayer for all peoples”? Is it possible in today’s world? What difference would it make?

BONUS ACTIVITY

If you have a guest from another religious tradition, engage that person in dialogue about the spiritual practices of their tradition. Look for practices that you may share (such as prayer and meditation) as well as practices that are not familiar to the Christian tradition. What do we as Christians gain from interfaith dialogue and increased awareness of other traditions?

CLOSING

If you have a Buddhist guest, ask if he or she would be willing to share a Buddhist chant. If not, close with this modern chant from the Buddhist tradition:

PRAY FOR THE HAPPINESS AND WELLBEING OF YOUR FRIENDS AND FAMILY⁵

May I be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my teachers be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my parents be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my relatives be well, happy, and peaceful.

May my friends be well, happy, and peaceful.

May the indifferent persons be well, happy, and peaceful.

May the unfriendly persons be well, happy, and peaceful.

May all meditators be well, happy, and peaceful.

May all beings be well, happy, and peaceful.

⁵ <http://www.wikihow.com/Say-a-Buddhist-Prayer>

SESSION THREE: CONVERSION OR DIALOGUE?

OVERVIEW

Opening

- Introduction: Share an experience of being “witnessed to”

Exploring

- Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement, Paragraph 8, “Encounter of Loyalties”
- Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement, Paragraphs 17-21, “Renewal through Interfaith Encounters”
- Michael Kinnamon, “The Theological Challenge,” *Can A Renewal Movement be Renewed?*

Going Deeper

- Video: Interfaith Press Conference in Solidarity with the Muslim Community, (including William Barber)
- Scripture Study: Isaiah 25:6-10a

Closing

- Prayer from the Muslim tradition (video)

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Copies of paragraphs 8 and 17-21 from “Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement” (See Appendix 01)
- A copy of Michael Kinnamon's “The Theological Challenge,” *Can A Renewal Movement be Renewed?* (See Appendix 04)
- Means to show a video from the internet
- Bibles or copies of Isaiah 25:6-10

- At least 2 different translations of the Bible; it is best if these are dissimilar translations; KJV, RSV and NRSV are more similar than dissimilar, so in addition to one of these, use a translation such as the TEV or a paraphrase such as The Message.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

- Read through the entire lesson and make your own notes as needed. If you are not familiar with Islam, read the chapters on Islam from a reliable source on world religions such as Stephen Prothero's *God is Not One*, Hans Küng's *Christianity and World Religions*, or Huston Smith's, *The World's Religions*.
- Read the Appendix, "The Theological Challenge" by Michael Kinnamon. As you read it, keep a log of your own questions and observations. These notes will likely provide much helpful material for your class.
- Preview the video in the Going Deeper section, available on YouTube at <https://goo.gl/bw85s4>. Be sure you have the right equipment arranged for showing the video to your class. A 15-inch laptop may suffice for a small group (less than 10) but most laptops do not produce sufficient sound, so you likely will need external speakers. Also preview the call to prayer for the closing: <https://goo.gl/Hmoxra>

GOING THE EXTRA MILE—STRONGLY RECOMMENDED

- Invite someone from a different religious tradition to join you for this session. Also see the note on this section in Session One.

LESSON PLAN

OPENING

Introductions. Welcome participants and briefly summarize the topic of this session in no more than one or two sentences. Note, even though you did introductions in the first two sessions, it is usually good to do so again so that any new person in your group has another chance to learn everyone's name.

If your class is less than 20, invite each person to introduce themselves and to share an experience of being witnessed to. When and where did that occur? How old were you? What stands out about that experience for you? Was it a positive or negative experience? Start with yourself.

If your class is more than 20, invite the class to quickly form small groups of 3 or 4 and to do the same as above. Afterwards invite people to share any observations or common themes from the sharing.

EXPLORING

1. Pass out the copies of "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement." (Appendix 01) Briefly describe its origin from the Council on Christian Unity (CCU), one of the general units of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). This report was prepared for the 2005 General Assembly of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ). Ask a volunteer to read paragraph 8. Suggested discussion questions:
 - Has anyone heard the phrase "encounter of loyalties"? What does it suggest to you?
 - What are some of the "deepest convictions" which you feel that would be important to share in an honest dialogue with someone from a different faith tradition?
 - If particularities of our Christian tradition are a gift from God that we are to share with members of other traditions, what does that say about the particularities of other traditions?
 - What is our chief responsibility in an honest dialogue with someone of a different faith tradition?

2. Ask volunteers to take turns reading paragraphs 17-21. Suggested discussion questions:
 - The authors of this report assert that it is possible to hold to the Great Commission of Matthew 28:19 ("Go therefore and make disciples of all nations...") without requiring the one to whom we witness to become Christian. Is this a new idea for you? Is it hard or easy to accept?
 - Do you agree or disagree that love "does not have to eventuate in ... conversion to Christ" (paragraph 18)? Why or why not?
 - Have you witnessed the use of "grace as a weapon of coercion" (paragraph 20)? If so, what was that experience like?
 - How might encounters with people of other faith traditions renew Christian faith (paragraph 21)?
 - Describe your own encounter with someone of a different faith tradition and how that has impacted you.

3. Pass out copies of Michael Kinnamon's, "The Theological Challenge." (Appendix 04) Introduce Michael Kinnamon, a Disciples of Christ minister, popular speaker, author, former Dean of Lexington Theological Seminary and former General Secretary of the National Council of Churches. Ask volunteers to take turns reading this excerpt from his book, *Can a Renewal Movement be Renewed?* As the paper is read aloud, invite participants to follow along and to underline any passages that especially speak to them. Suggested discussion questions:
 - Invite those who are willing to share one thing they underlined and why.
 - How would you answer the question, "Can our neighbors of other faiths be 'saved' without becoming Christians?"
 - What does it mean to affirm that "salvation belongs to God, God only"?
 - Does the idea that there may be ways to God other than through Jesus Christ threaten or change your faith? Why or why not?
 - Do you consider the "manyness of religions" a matter of fact to overcome or a "matter of principle" to embrace? What are the implications of each viewpoint?
 - Disciples began as a movement to unite all Christians around core Christian beliefs and practices. Does that focus on Christian unity give us any insight into interreligious dialogue?

GOING DEEPER

1. Introduce the video from the Interfaith Press Conference in Solidarity with the Muslim Community in Raleigh, North Carolina (<https://goo.gl/bw85s4>), noting that faith leaders from around the country have come together at various times to denounce acts of hatred and violence against any faith community. This is just one example of such acts of solidarity. Call to mind other recent acts of hatred or violence in the news against faith communities. Suggested discussion questions:
 - The Rev. William Barber, a Disciple minister and leader of the NAACP in North Carolina, questions the use of the phrase “radical Islam” to describe the beliefs of some terrorists when no one uses the phrase “radical Christian” to describe Christians who have attacked people of other faiths or minorities. Why is using “radical Islam” in this context wrong, and as Rev. Barber says, “race baiting”?
 - How important do you think it is for faith leaders or different religious traditions to join together for these kind of public statements? What impact does it have?
 - Would you consider this to be part of the Christian witness to the gospel? Why or why not?

2. The prophet Isaiah speaks of a time when all people of the world will join together on “God’s mountain” for a glorious banquet. Ask a volunteer to read Isaiah 25:6-10a. Suggested discussion questions:
 - What is the significance of the feast of “rich food” and “well-aged wines” (NRSV)? Jesus uses the image of a great banquet in many of his teachings and turns two loaves and five fish into a meal to serve a crowd of thousands with baskets left over. What role can food and eating together play today to unite people of different traditions?
 - “The shroud that is cast over all peoples” (NRSV, v. 7) might symbolize many things. What is the “shroud” today that covers all nations? How do you see God at work to remove that shroud?
 - The mountain referred to in this passage is commonly understood at Mt. Zion upon which the temple was built in Jerusalem. As anyone who has been to Jerusalem knows, it is more of a hill than a mountain (You look down on the Temple Mount from the Mt. of Olives next to it.) Furthermore, the Dome of the Rock now stands where the Jewish temple once stood and is considered the third holiest site in Islam.

Just a short distance away and clearly visible from the Temple Mount is the Church of the Holy Sepulchre, built over the site believed to be the tomb from which Jesus arose. In sum, the three strands of the Abrahamic traditions representing half of the world's people come together in a very real way around this mountain. And yet, ironically, nowhere are tensions higher and peace more illusive than in Jerusalem. This not the time to debate the causes or solutions to this perplexing dilemma. Instead, invite the class to engage in a moment of silent reflection on the contrast between the prophet's vision and the reality of the current situation as a volunteer reads the passage again (preferably from a different translation). After a minute of silence, ask, "What spoke to your heart in the silence?"

BONUS ACTIVITY

If you have a guest from another religious tradition, invite that person to share with the group their experience of what it is like to be part of a religious minority in this country. Are there times when that experience has been better or worse? What makes the difference?

CLOSING

For the closing prayer, play this call to prayer from the Muslim tradition (3.5 minutes): <https://goo.gl/Hmoxra>

SESSION FOUR: SHARING OUR GIFTS AS DISCIPLES

OVERVIEW

Opening

- Introduction

Exploring

- Scripture Study: 1 Corinthians 12:4-13
- Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement, Paragraph 25-37, Disciples' Gifts

Going Deeper

- Case studies on "Multiple Religious Belonging"
- The gifts of Disciples of Christ

Closing

- The story of the platypus
- Video: Carrie Newcomer, *Room at the Table for Everyone*
- Prayer from the Hindu tradition

WHAT YOU WILL NEED

- Copies of paragraphs 25-37 from "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement" (See Appendix 01)
- Copies of the articles "Exploring Religious Hybridity" and "From Adherence to Affinity." (See Appendixes 05 & 06) You will need sufficient copies of each for half of the class.
- Bibles or copies of 1 Corinthians 12:4-13
- At least 2 different translations of the Bible; it is best if these are dissimilar translations. KJV, RSV and NRSV are more similar than dissimilar, so in addition to one of those, use a translation such as the TEV or a paraphrase such as The Message.
- Means to show a video from the internet

- A copy of the platypus story from the article by Alan Amos, “Hybridity: A Personal Reflection.” (See Appendix 07)
- Copies of the song, “Room at the Table” (See Appendix 08)
- Copies of the closing prayer.

RECOMMENDED PREPARATION

- Read through the entire lesson and make your own notes as needed. Read each of the three articles in the Going Deeper session. After reading these articles, think about the people in your class, your congregation, friends and family. Do you know anyone who represents the concept of “Multiple Religious Belonging”? Consider how you might add that perspective to the discussion.
- Preview the video in the Closing section, available on YouTube at <https://goo.gl/z1QQKh>.
- Be sure you have the right equipment arranged for showing the video to your class. A 15-inch laptop may suffice for a small group (less than 10) but most laptops do not produce sufficient sound, so you likely will need external speakers.
- Choose one of the two options for the closing prayer from the Hindu tradition. If you choose the Gayatri mantra, preview the video and select a portion to use for the class. (You do not need to watch the entire two hours of the video!)

GOING THE EXTRA MILE—STRONGLY RECOMMENDED

- Invite someone who practices more than one religious tradition to join the class or invite a Hindu to join you and to lead you in a mantra at the close of the session. Also see the note on this section in Session One.

LESSON PLAN

OPENING

Introduction. Begin the class by asking people to share in just a few words or one sentence how many times in their life they have participated in a religious service or ritual other than Christianity. If there are any new people in the class, invite participants to first introduce themselves.

EXPLORING

1. In this session we will be looking at the gifts we bring to interfaith conversations and then we will consider the practices of observing more than one religious tradition. First, let's talk about our gifts as Disciples of Christ. Invite a volunteer to read 1 Corinthians 12:4-13. Invite another volunteer to read the same passage from another translation. Ask, "What gifts do we as individuals bring to interfaith relations?"

2. Let us consider the gifts we bring to this topic as a church. Pass out the copies of "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement." Invite participants to take turns reading paragraphs 25-37. Suggested discussion questions:

Which of these gifts are most important to you? Which do you think are most valuable for engaging in interfaith dialogue and developing interfaith relationships?

In light of these gifts, do you see Disciples as having any particular role in interreligious engagement? Do you agree that to be faithful to God's call that we are summoned to engage in interfaith relations and work (paragraph 37)? If not, why?

What hinders us from further engagement with people of differing religious traditions?

GOING DEEPER

1. Introduce the topic of multi-religious belonging, the practice of adhering to more than one religious tradition. (Note: the articles use the term "hybridity" which simply refers to a religious practice involving two or more traditions. Belonging to more than one religious tradition, however, is not necessarily the same as hybridity. For this lesson, we will just focus on the idea of multiple religious belonging.)

Use the first half of the article by Alan Amos, "Hybridity: A Personal Reflection" for background on the concept of multiple religious belonging. (See Appendix). Divide the class into two groups. Give copies of the article "Exploring Religious Hybridity" to one group and copies of the article "From Adherence to Affinity" to the other group. Give them five minutes to read the article silently. After everyone has had time to read the article, invite the groups to discuss the following:

- What was the event that involved either people or rituals of different religious traditions?
 - What theological issues, questions, or challenges did this situation present?
 - How was the issue resolved?
 - What are the takeaways from this example of multiple religious belonging?
2. Bring the two groups back together and ask each to share the scenario, the theological issues they identified, and what they learned from this example. Invite participants to share other examples of multiple religious belonging from their experience. Ask, "How should we as a church respond to such multiple religious belonging?"
 3. Invite the class to take another look at the statement, "Disciples of Christ and Interreligious Engagement" and ask: "Thinking again about the gifts of Disciples, how do these gifts speak to the phenomenon of multiple religious belonging? Is there room in our congregation and/or denomination for members who practice more than one tradition?"
 4. If appropriate in your setting, ask the class if they have any recommendations for your congregation in light of this study.

CLOSING

1. Allow at least 10 minutes for the closing of this session. Begin by lighting a candle and inviting participants to enter into a time of meditation as we seek guidance from the light of God in this world of multiple religious traditions, each claiming to reflect some of that light. Ask a volunteer to read the story of the platypus from the second half of Alan Amos' article, "Hybridity: A Personal Reflection."

2. Introduce one of the prayers below from the Hindu tradition. Note that Hinduism, often considered the oldest religious tradition that is still practiced, is itself the product of multiple religious traditions from Indian culture that has been synthesized into what we know today as Hinduism. Wikipedia refers to Hinduism as “an umbrella term comprising the plurality of religious phenomena of India.” Using just one of the two options below, invite the class to share in this prayer as they are comfortable, or they may choose to silently meditate.

OPTION A: THE GAYATRI MANTRA

Om Bhur Bhuva Svah
Tat Savitur Varenyam
Bhargo Devasya Dhimahi
Dhiyo Yo Naha Prachodayat

Prayers in Hinduism are often mantras that are chanted or sung. The Gayatri mantra is one of the oldest, dating back 2500 years, and is chanted daily by many Hindus. There are hundreds of Gayatri mantras on YouTube. This one, with an English translation in the background, is about 45 minutes: <https://goo.gl/epBefY>. Play a 5-minute segment while asking class members to take turns reciting the translation in English below, pausing 5 to 10 seconds between each recitation.

On the absolute reality and its planes,
On that finest spiritual light,
We meditate, as remover of obstacles
That it may inspire and enlighten us.

Fade out the music when you are finished.

OPTION B: A MODERN HINDU PRAYER

This prayer comes from Swami Omkarananda, the spiritual leader of the Omkarananda Ashram Himalayas. This can be read in unison or invite class members to take turns, each reading one sentence.

Lord, You are now with me, yet I am unable to see you. Grant me Grace, empower me to behold You. You are my Light. You are my Father. You are my eternal Mother. You are the Breath of my breath. You are everything. From all sides, at all times, You are watching me, seeing me, blessing me. You are in the children, in the creatures great and small. You are everywhere. Why don't You reveal Yourself to me?

Lord, lead me, guide me, purify me, render me peaceful, wise, strong, noble, saintly. As You are in me, express Yourself through me. Let me be a channel for the flow of Your Nature and Qualities. Not my personality, but Your Personality which is full of Perfection, finds Its expression through me. I don't want my will to be done, for my will is imperfect, exposed to wrong impulse, full of limitations. Thy Will is wonderful, perfect, omnipotent. Let Thy Will be done through me.

Lord, my intelligence makes many mistakes. What it thinks to be the right thing is often to be not so. Let Thy Intelligence which is omniscient guide my intelligence along the right and fruitful lines. My heart is limited in its love; sometimes I love people who are beneficial to me, and cease loving them when they no more serve my interests. Let Thy Love which is unconditioned rule my heart. My best plans to protect my interests are not free from unforeseen difficulties. Anything can easily burden me with cares and worries. Let Thy Wisdom, Thy Light, Thy Care, Thy Grace, conduct my life and preserve me in the experience of Thy Peace, Thy Power, Thy Happiness.

Look, O Lord, there Your sun shines. Adorations to You, God, in that sunshine. Adorations to You, God, in the form of all these men, women and children. Adorations to You in the form of all those that are near and dear to me. Adorations to You, God, in the form of all that is wonderful, great, grand, sublime, inspiring, sustaining, helping, guiding. Adorations to You, God, in the form of the breath without which I cannot live.⁶

Conclude on a note of celebration with the song by Carrie Newcomer, "Room at the Table." The video is available on YouTube at <https://goo.gl/z1QQKh>.

Pass out copies of the lyrics and invite the class to sing along. (You may want to play it twice!)

Thank the class for their participation in this series!

⁶ https://omkarananda-ashram.org/Publications/how_to_pray.htm

APPENDIXES

APPENDIX 01

DISCIPLES OF CHRIST AND INTERRELIGIOUS ENGAGEMENT

A REPORT FROM THE COUNCIL ON CHRISTIAN UNITY

THEOLOGICAL INTRODUCTION

1. As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we affirm and confess our belief in one God revealed in Jesus Christ as Creator, Reconciler, and Redeemer of all. We affirm that God loves all of creation and that all people are created in the image of God (Genesis 1:27). We acknowledge that through God's love, all people are related to one another as children of God and understand this common humanity and relationship to be gifts from God to the human race. Thus we accept God's mandate to engage in relationships with creation that give life and encourage life to flourish.
2. As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), we also recognize that we have been sent into the world to testify in word and deed to the love of God we know through Jesus Christ our Lord (John 17:18). We celebrate our distinctive identity as Disciples of Christ and openly seek opportunities to share the good news of God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ with the world. Yet we must confess that we have not always embodied this love in our relationships with people of other religious traditions. We have at times allowed a woeful lack of understanding and respect for other faiths to result in fear, distrust, and the dehumanization of our brothers and sisters in other religious traditions. We have mistakenly let factors of history, race, socio-economic location and politics shape our conceptions of other religions and have too quickly accepted misguided and harmful stereotypes.
3. While the Church has always lived in a religiously pluralistic world, the rich diversity of different faiths is more apparent to us now than ever before. We Disciples often find ourselves face-to-face with neighbors and co-workers, relatives, strangers, and friends who belong to different religious traditions. Relationships with such folk offer us unique opportunities to witness, love, and serve "to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8). Moreover, because we believe in a God who creates and interacts with the entire cosmos, we seek through relationships with people of other faiths to learn more about the God we know through Jesus Christ.

4. As members of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) called to life-giving relationship with all of creation, we see interreligious relationships as one of God's special callings in our time. We feel called to engage intentionally, along with other Christians, in interfaith work, learning practical ways to encounter people of diverse faiths in order to learn from them, to live in community with them, to develop mutual respect, and to discover areas of commonality. Because of God's creative relationship to us all, we see these religious others as intrinsically connected to our own religious life. As Disciples, we affirm that God calls us to be in intentional relationship and conversation with our neighbors in other faith traditions.

5. This document is an attempt to reflect upon who we are as Disciples of Christ, why we might engage in interfaith dialogue and work, the nature of interreligious relationships, and what gifts we have that uniquely prepare us for constructive and consequential interreligious engagement.

OUR IDENTITY AS DISCIPLES OF CHRIST

6. Interreligious engagement can take many forms, ranging from the personal and practical conversations of real individuals living together, to co-operative social ventures, to the joint study of sacred scriptures and deliberate theological dialogues, to shared experiences of worship and prayer. In each of these various types of encounter, however, a strong sense of one's own identity and an ability to convey that identity in a coherent fashion are critically important.

7. Therefore we remind ourselves of our Christian identity, the very heart of who are as Disciples, by citing the brief statement on ecclesiology by the Disciples Commission on Theology that was accepted by the General Assembly in 1997.

The Church is that community called into being by the Gospel, which is God's covenant of love in Jesus Christ, and given its life through the power of God's Spirit in order to praise and serve the living God. All those who accept this calling—of whatever race, nationality, or culture—are joined together as one people commissioned by God to witness by word and deed to God's love for the world. They signify their corporate identity by:

- **their common confession of faith that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of the living God,**
- **their incorporation into the body of Christ through baptism,**
- **their thankful celebration of Christ's saving work and abiding presence through the Lord's Supper,**

- **their common commitment to direct their lives in accord with the will of God as made known through the testimony of Scripture,**
- **and their shared experience of the Holy Spirit who empowers them for ministry as disciples and ambassadors of Christ to and for the world.**

This community, through its life of unity in diversity as well as its witness in word and deed, exists to glorify God, proclaiming from generation to generation and to the ends of the earth God's good news in Jesus Christ, participating in God's work of reconciliation, liberation, and redemption for all people, and thus living as a sign of God's coming reign.

8. We understand authentic interreligious engagement to be an "encounter of loyalties" which bears the most fruit when we are forthrightly Christian and our partners from different faiths are candid representatives of their own religious traditions. Only in a context where partners are open, honest and willing to humbly express their deepest convictions and practices can trust and friendships develop. Indeed, it is precisely the profundity of our differing beliefs and customs that offers the greatest hope for mutual challenge, shared learning, and spiritual growth. We reject the notion that interfaith encounter can only take place if we suspend our deepest Christian convictions. Rather we see our religious particularities as gifts from God that we share with members in other traditions.

GIVEN WHO WE ARE, WHY SHOULD WE ENGAGE IN INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS?

9. In light of this statement of theological identity, it is clear that **the Disciples are called by the Gospel of Jesus Christ to witness in word and deed to the living God for the benefit of the world.** It is the world toward which the witness of the Church is directed as a witness that intends to help and upbuild the world.

10. Further, it is obvious to Disciples that this contemporary world in which we live, and which the Gospel tells us God loves with an everlasting love, is fractured by oppression, violence, war, hatred and crippling fear. It is also a world of diverse religious traditions with diverse understandings of the roots of violence and oppression and it is a world overwhelmed by nation-states that seem locked into rivalries and enmities that threaten the human future. In short, it is a world in which misunderstandings, lies, and falsehoods provoke fear and much violence.

11. We confess that we Disciples are ourselves sinners in the midst of this violent turmoil in the world, and we have often perpetuated misunderstanding, told lies about strangers and enemies, and believed falsehoods about people from other cultures and in other religious traditions.

12. Even so, we believe that the Disciples of Christ, under the summons of the Gospel, have a strict obligation to be a community of witness to God in the midst of just this sort of violence-prone contemporary world. Such witnessing should never be ashamed of the Gospel of Jesus Christ and must incessantly seek to share that Gospel with the world. However, we also believe **such witnessing means conversing with, listening to, learning from, and living peacefully with those in the world who do not confess Jesus as Lord.** Indeed, we recognize that God's love is sometimes better witnessed to through listening and sharing than through what have often been ontological declarations.

13. We find further theological incentive for interreligious engagement through our belief that all people share a common humanity, that is, all are created *imago dei*, in God's image and have been already profoundly reconciled to God and to others, including the creation, in Jesus Christ (2 Corinthians 5:18ff.; Colossians 3:15ff.). Every person embodies something of the divine image and therefore may possess some ray of truth, some aspect of the Mystery of God we know to be revealed in Jesus Christ. Even while we know God through Jesus Christ, we affirm that all human understanding of truth is inherently limited and conditioned. The reality of God, in contrast, is intrinsically unlimited. God will always be greater than any human can comprehend or any religion can convey. We affirm that it is morally, ethically, and spiritually wrong for any person, group, or religion to claim exclusive access to God, God's love, grace, or salvation. When Christians and others have made such claims to exclusivity, much suffering and degradation has often been the result.

14. As Disciples we recognize that Scripture offers other examples of ethical and pastoral incentives for interreligious relationships. For example, in the Old Testament the stories of Abraham, Jethro, Ruth, and others, suggest that we have a certain responsibility to welcome and treat kindly those from outside our religious community. The virtue of hospitality to strangers is continued and amplified in the New Testament in the letter to the Hebrews, "Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by doing that some have entertained angels without knowing it," (Hebrews 13:2) and in Jesus' example in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37).

15. Furthermore, Jesus suggests that the whole of the law and the prophets are summarized in the commandment to love God and to love one's neighbors (Matthew 22:36-40). This then becomes the first and guiding commandment for Christians. Loving others surely entails respecting them, listening to them, and treating them as we would want them treat us (Matthew 7:12). Loving means not only the authentic sharing of our truth, but a deep listening to theirs.

In this light, we remind ourselves of the Scriptural injunctions that loving one's neighbors takes priority over proclaiming right doctrine or performing formal worship: before going to Church, *first* work things out with your estranged brother or sister (Matthew 5:23-24); don't let the observance of Sabbath duties prohibit you from doing good to your neighbor (Matthew 12:12).

16. We recognize that Scripture speaks with many voices and that certain passages have been used to discount and divide people in different faiths from one another. Yet we feel called to be peacemakers in the world and to find ways to strengthen human life in community. We trust that God is at work in creation and that, through Christ, all people will be reconciled to God and to one another. Through encounters with people of other religions we hope to find new understanding and to discover fuller and more meaningful ways to live in reconciled communities together. **We believe, therefore, that the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) is summoned into dialogue with persons in other religious traditions in all ways feasible and practical at all manifestations of the Church.**

INTERFAITH RELATIONSHIPS AND THE CHRISTIAN MISSION OF WITNESS

17. We Disciples affirm that our defining mission, as summoned by the gospel of Jesus Christ, is to witness to the living God for the benefit of the world. It is important to realize that the activities of witness are complex and multi-dimensional. Clearly one such witness imperative is that given by the risen Jesus: "Go therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew. 28:19). It might appear, therefore, that witnessing that does not succeed in making persons disciples of Jesus is a failed witness. Understood this way, then, the only proper witness activity that is appropriate toward 'non-Christians' is that which aims at their conversion to becoming disciples of Jesus.

18. We certainly want to affirm that witnessing that aims to proclaim the saving ultimacy of God's grace in Jesus Christ through the Spirit is an essential dimension of the Church's mission of witness. Having clearly affirmed that dimension, however, we believe that the Church's witness also includes activities that are still imperatives but may not require that those to whom we witness become Christians. For example, we are called to love strangers and enemies and 'non-Christians' in such a way that **we seek their good**. They may finally decide that their true good involves accepting Jesus as Lord and Savior. But our loving them does not require that, and therefore we could never coerce them to accept Christ. Further, the love of the Christian for others is a love that cares about who the other is, how she understands herself, and how she thinks and acts religiously in her own tradition. This kind of love for the other is upbuilding, is patient, seeks to create conversation and mutual understanding, and yearns to live with others in peace.

19. Hence we Disciples believe there is much work to be done in love—work which is essential to our mission of witness—in conversing with and engaging others that **does not have to** eventuate in their conversion to Christ. But neither do we believe that the possibility of becoming a disciple of Jesus must be renounced or prohibited from the conversation. Surely were such a conversion to take place it would only be through the work of the Spirit; Christians refuse to think the Spirit is under their control.

20. With this understanding of the complexities of witnessing which comprise the Church's witness to the living God, we affirm that we can and should be willing to faithfully embrace the inevitable tensions that such dialogues and encounters with others will occasion. It would be absurd to enter such dialogue by renouncing the gift of grace in Jesus Christ. It would also be absurd to wield that grace as a weapon of coercion. When we encounter and dialogue with others we are not expected to shed our cherished Christian beliefs, but neither are we called to ignore or condemn the others with their cherished beliefs.

21. Therefore, as Disciples of Christ we understand interreligious dialogue itself as a mutual quest for a deeper understanding of truth and thus to involve mutual sharing, mutual witnessing, and a mutual call to healthier ways of life. When Christians are able to balance their witnessing with a sincere receptivity to the witnessing of others, then both the evangelizing mission of the Church and the mutual uncovering of truth are accomplished. **We look forward to the renewal of our faith in encounters with our brothers and sisters in other faith traditions.**

22. We also affirm that dialogue and interreligious encounter involve an opening up in more than intellectual terms to the concerns of the other. We understand interfaith dialogue as a way of living out our Christian witness. In Jesus Christ, God's self communication to the world is not imposed on humanity—we are invited to listen, to learn, and to respond. Scripture reveals a God who not only speaks to the world, but also loves, listens, waits, challenges, and surprises. Thus we understand our calling to include a lifestyle of commitment to the core issues of our neighbors. We recognize that we can better provide aid to a needy world when we act together with partners from other religious traditions. Moreover, we understand that working side-by-side with our partners for global well-being and peace can have a transformative impact upon both partners and can open our eyes to the integrity and vitality in each of our respective religious ways.

23. We Disciples thus recognize that an honest and open dialogue between persons of different faiths involves some risk. Indeed, in any relationship in which our hearts and minds are open to another, we risk being hurt or losing certainty. We confess that at times we have avoided authentic interreligious engagement out of fear that our foundational beliefs might be challenged.

24. Yet the seriousness of our faith in God emboldens us to take such risks and leads us to anticipate what new insights or endeavors God has in store. With risk comes opportunity, and we place our trust in the Holy Spirit to guide us as we ask new questions, are open to transformation, seek both to encourage and critique, and hear how God has worked in the lives of others.

DISCIPLES GIFTS FOR ENGAGING IN INTERFAITH RELATIONS

25. Even while we enter interfaith relations as members of the universal Church of Jesus Christ, we seek to identify and celebrate those elements of our particular history and tradition as Disciples of Christ that uniquely prepare us for interfaith connection. Along these lines we highlight several **gifts** we have to offer to the universal Church and to our dialogue partners in other religious traditions.

26. We Disciples bring **the gift of understanding ourselves as a “people of the table.”** As a community of Christians who celebrate the centrality of the Lord's Supper, we experience the table of Christ as an open and welcoming table. For us, the table is a meeting place where the inclusive love of God encountered in Jesus Christ gathers together those who confess Jesus Christ as Lord, nurtures them, and seeks to create a sense of community among them and with the larger world. Yet the table is not our own. We encounter God's unmerited grace **as guests** at the table, and as such, we cannot put limits upon God's grace in different contexts.

27. As Disciples, we affirm that the table is where we discover one of our clearest visions into the nature of God. At the table we experience God's acceptance of us as people of worth and therefore we are empowered to see the worth of others. We rejoice that at the table we meet a God who builds bridges across the barriers that divide humanity. At the table we meet a Jesus whose lifestyle of servanthood and love provide for us a model of inclusion, compassion, and respect for all our neighbors. In remembering the death and resurrection of Christ, we prepare ourselves for a new life of reconciliation with God and all God's creatures. At the table we feel the Spirit of God empowering liberation and deliverance in our daily lives.

28. Historically we Disciples see the openness of the table as a symbol of protest against closed institutional systems and cultures that bred exclusion and division. Thus, **today we find in the open and welcoming table of Christ a compelling motivation for interfaith relations.**

29. We Disciples also bring **the gift of understanding ourselves as a “people of the book,” a people who maintain a deep appreciation for the Bible as another place where the nature of the Divine is revealed.** As a part of the Protestant tradition historically emphasizing *sola scriptura*, (Scripture alone) our founders encouraged a sincere and profound engagement with the Bible and an attempt to discern its essential messages and themes. Nevertheless, Alexander Campbell emphasized the importance of understanding the social and cultural contexts found in the biblical narratives. He saw the Bible as a human testimony to divine revelation. Since then, Disciples have been comfortable with notions of the historical conditioning of Scripture and revelation. We believe this heritage prepares us to appreciate religious developments outside of Scripture. With new questions in mind, we search the Scriptures for guidance on new ways to mature in our faith and in our love and service to others.

30. While a number of important themes run through the biblical texts, we Disciples believe that the universality of God's unconditional love enacted salvifically in Christ for all people is the grand theme of Scripture. We understand further themes such as redemption, justice, deliverance, grace, liberation, compassion, humility, and reconciliation in light of the primacy of God's unconditional and universal love. Thus in this broad theme we see ample reason to encourage the cultivation of interfaith relations. Indeed, **our conviction is that we appropriate God's love and further biblical themes only as they are lived out in relationships with our neighbors.**

31. We Disciples bring to interfaith encounters the **gift** of our intense appreciation for learning. Historically we understood our particular mission as including proclamation and education—we founded both churches *and* institutions of higher learning. We consider ourselves students of God's truth and have thus always valued a “reasoned faith.” We have resisted being boxed in by so-called infallible doctrines and have chosen rather to search for truth through a deep study of Scripture and by being open to and engaging in relationships with those around us.

32. Along these lines we bring the **gift** of vigorous, intelligent conversation within our own tradition, in which we have struggled to understand who God is and what God has striven to reveal to us about human destiny and the destiny of the world. Indeed, it is internal to faith that it incessantly seeks understanding and this empowers inquiry and dialogue. Disciples affirm that the God whom we seek to understand is a God who calls us in faith to seek to understand our brothers and sisters in traditions that often appear strange and opaque to us in our ignorance and fear. We gladly and earnestly engage in interreligious dialogue in the hope that the witness of other traditions might enrich our understanding and deepen our Christian discipleship. **As students of God's truth, we believe that there is much we can learn about ourselves, our neighbors, and how God works in the world from the encounter and engagement with people in other faiths.**

33. We Disciples bring the **gift** of two centuries of earnest pursuit of Christian unity in the midst of Christian communities divided by suspicion and discord. We are familiar with discord but we remain undaunted and hopeful. While we do not expect interfaith dialogue with other religious traditions to necessarily eventuate in a common theological confession, we do expect the Holy Spirit of truth to cast a broad light on a path to mutual understanding and to peace.

34. Further, we bring the **gift** of intense interfaith dialogue over several decades with our Jewish brothers and sisters. Through such dialogue we have been empowered to critique and rethink historic Christian attitudes and practices toward Jews. The dialogue has sharpened our grasp of the many beliefs we share with Jews and has led us as well to appreciate our significant differences. Both the shared beliefs and the differences have been discussed in a context of reconciliation and peace.

35. Finally, we Disciples bring the **gift** of our unflinching belief in God as the Ultimate Companion of all creatures who seeks their redemption in a tumultuous and often violent world. We believe in a God who cares deeply about truth and peace. God's definitive words to the world are words of forgiveness, rather than the threat of ultimate annihilation and punishment. We believe that the cross and resurrection of Jesus of Nazareth, a Jew in search of Jews and Gentiles, reveals God's search to ultimately redeem all creatures. We hope that all our conversing and witnessing might be to the glory of God. **We trust that God's glory will surprise us with new discernments of the Spirit and with the gift of new friends.**

36. Each of these gifts highlights a certain aspect of our Disciples identity. Explained in this way, we understand the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) to have a historical and theological trajectory toward interaction with people of other faiths. We believe that we cannot achieve our desire for deep Christian spirituality, true community, and a passion for justice without the help of our brothers and sisters in other religious traditions.

37. It is precisely in light of these wonderful gifts of the Disciples tradition that we unequivocally affirm that to be faithful to God's call in today's religiously pluralistic world summons Disciples intentionally and whole-heartedly to engage in interfaith relations and work.

APPENDIX 02

OLIVER WENDELL HOLMES, SR., THE CHAMBERED NAUTILUS

This is the ship of pearl, which, poets feign,
 Sails the unshadowed main,—
 The venturous bark that flings
 On the sweet summer wind its purpled wings
 In gulfs enchanted, where the Siren sings,
 And coral reefs lie bare,
 Where the cold sea-maids rise to sun their streaming hair.

Its webs of living gauze no more unfurl;
 Wrecked is the ship of pearl!
 And every chambered cell,
 Where its dim dreaming life was wont to dwell,
 As the frail tenant shaped his growing shell,
 Before thee lies revealed,—
 Its irised ceiling rent, its sunless crypt unsealed!

Year after year beheld the silent toil
 That spread his lustrous coil;
 Still, as the spiral grew,
 He left the past year's dwelling for the new,
 Stole with soft step its shining archway through,
 Built up its idle door,
 Stretched in his last-found home, and knew the old no more.

Thanks for the heavenly message brought by thee,
Child of the wandering sea,
Cast from her lap, forlorn!
From thy dead lips a clearer note is born
Than ever Triton blew from wreathèd horn!
While on mine ear it rings,
Through the deep caves of thought I hear a voice that sings:—

Build thee more stately mansions, O my soul,
As the swift seasons roll!
Leave thy low-vaulted past!
Let each new temple, nobler than the last,
Shut thee from heaven with a dome more vast,
Till thou at length art free,
Leaving thine outgrown shell by life's unresting sea!

APPENDIX 03

SHANTA PREMAWARDHANA, THREE INSIGHTS FROM BUDDHISM THAT MADE ME A BETTER CHRISTIAN

The Rev. Dr. Shanta Premawardhana is president of the Seminary Consortium for Urban Pastoral Education (SCUPE), 205 West Monroe Street, Suite 300, Chicago, IL 60606. This article was published in an email newsletter of the SCUPE, and we reprint it with permission.



Growing up Christian in predominantly Buddhist Sri Lanka, I learned very early that there was much to be gained from the study of Buddhism. The teachings of the Buddha sometimes challenged my assumptions about the Christian faith, and at other times they illuminated and clarified the words and stories of Jesus.



Here are three teachings by the Buddha that have shaped and enriched my Christian journey. Immersion in the Buddhist culture in Sri Lanka will give you similar perspective as well.

1. THE JOURNEY IS OUR HOME

Many preachers in the Baptist church of my youth, influenced by evangelical theology, often asserted that once you "accept Jesus Christ as your personal savior" you have arrived. Now you are saved, they said, nothing more is needed.

Buddhism has taught me:

We never arrive. We are always in the journey.



Buddhism's emphasis on journey is hard to miss. The Noble Eightfold Path that helps Buddhists to reach its highest goal of Nirvana begins by "entering the stream." It's a carefully constructed system that helps them step by step to reach to greater degrees of spiritual achievement.

Prince Siddhartha (the future "Buddha") grew up in a royal palace. His father, eager to mold him to become an emperor, protected him from the harsh realities of the world. Yet, venturing outside the palace he saw four sights: an old person, a sick person, a corpse and a recluse.

The obvious suffering of others began to gnaw at him. In what is known as the Great Renunciation, he left the luxuries of the palace, his wife and infant son, and went out into the wilderness in search of truth. Following a period of extreme austerity, and a conscious decision that the path to wisdom lay not in extreme prosperity or in extreme austerity, but in the Middle Way, he became the Enlightened One, the Buddha. For 45 years he traveled preaching and teaching this path. On his deathbed the Buddha said to his disciples: "All conditioned things are impermanent. Work out your salvation with diligence."

The notion that we are still on a journey is well within the Christian tradition. The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Philippian church, echoes the Buddha's sentiment, "Work out your salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12). Dr. Meinhardt Grum, who taught me New Testament Greek at the ecumenical seminary in Sri Lanka, reminded me that the pluperfect tense in Greek does not mean that you are "saved," but that you are "being saved." "You never fully arrive" he said, "you are always in process."

2. JOURNEY REQUIRES DISCIPLINE

Some Christian traditions, notably Catholic orders, require strict discipline of its followers. In my Christian formation, however, apart from an occasional emphasis on prayer, Bible reading, and weekly church attendance, there was very little discipline. An "arrived" theology does not need discipline. A "journey" theology does.

Buddhism has taught me this:

Without Discipline the Journey will Fall Apart.



Growing up I sometimes envied my Buddhist friends whose spiritual disciplines were obvious. They had memorized more Buddhist scripture in its original (Pali) language, than I could ever hope to do in my mother tongue (Sinhala) or even in English. Many of them had daily rituals of prostrating before their parents, the statue of the Buddha in their home and whenever they would meet a Buddhist monk.

Buddhism is very clear on discipline. The three-fold refuge with which every Buddhist begins the day is a constant reminder of the journey. All Buddhists would chant:

Buddham saranam gaccāmi

Dhammam saranam gaccāmi

Sangham saranam gaccāmi

("I take refuge in the Buddha, Dhamma [teaching] and the Sangha [community].")

Every morning the faithful follower takes five precepts to abstain from killing any living being, taking what is not given, from sexual misconduct, from false speech and from intoxicants. Those with a more intentional discipline take ten precepts, and monks follow an entire code. For lay persons, the five precepts are sufficient. For the one who is intentional about the path, regular meditation is required. And those who achieve higher stages, usually those in a monastic path are able to achieve wisdom.

By contrast, Christians in the Protestant traditions have often emphasized the important theological notion of grace. The unfortunate result is a de-emphasis on discipline. Many follow a daily routine, but a theological mandate requiring a specific practice is not emphasized.

3. JOURNEY REQUIRES US TO TRAVEL LIGHT

My Christian tradition gives me the impression that some things are permanent. The word "eternal" is used to describe a full life to which all people should aspire. God is seen as permanent, as is heaven, where we are enjoined to live in God's presence "forever and ever" - a phrase that is commonly used in hymns, prayers and benedictions. That sense that something beyond this world is permanent, gives me the sense that there is something in me that is permanent as well.

Buddhism does not. "*Sabbe saṃkharā aniccā*"—All conditioned things are impermanent—the Buddha said with great emphasis throughout his teaching.

When his disciples asked the Buddha about God, he was silent, believing that pondering on the divine may distract from the focus necessary to transcend the unsatisfactory condition of our existence. He was very clear, however, that there is nothing within a human being, not even a soul, that lasts forever. In fact, all things, including each of us, change from moment to moment. You are not the same person you were a moment ago. Our life's moments are like film footage, which, when played on screen looks like *one thing*, but if you look at the reel frame by frame, each is slightly different from the other. Therefore, he says, there is no need to cling to anything.

Clinging or craving is what causes the unsatisfactoriness of existence in the first place. So learning to get beyond that, following his precepts and path, is our spiritual quest.

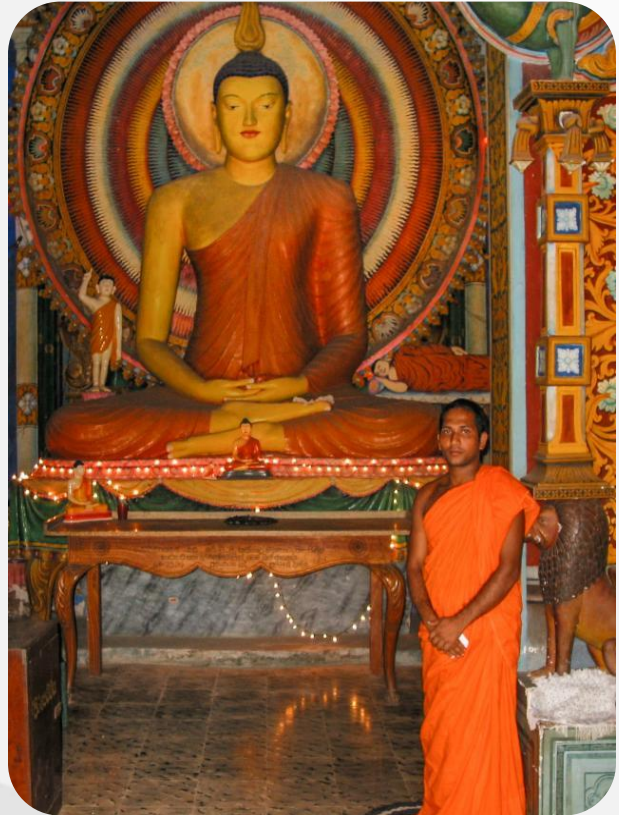
There is a strong Christian parallel. Karl Sundermeier, a German missionary with whom I worked early in my ministry used to say that Christians are called to live in tents—meaning, that they must live light, ready to move when God calls. The journey, of course, is a key biblical theme, from Abraham who was called to go out from his home in Ur of the Chaldees, the Exodus of freed slaves from Egypt, to Paul's journeys across the then known world organizing those who were liberated into communities disciples.

This perspective is often overlooked in Christian preaching and teaching in favor of themes of permanence and the eternal.

Buddhism has taught me this:

All things are impermanent. Therefore, I must learn to live lightly, and walk gently on this earth.

These and so many other insights have shaped my own spiritual journey.



APPENDIX 04

MICHAEL KINNAMON, THE THEOLOGICAL CHALLENGE⁷

The central challenge theologically is summed up in the question: What is the place of other religions in God's plan of salvation? Or, more personally, can our neighbors of other faiths be "saved" without becoming Christians? An extensive survey, published in 2008 by the Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life, found that "a majority of American Christians (52 percent) think that at least some non-Christian faiths can lead to eternal life." A substantial minority, however, believe that "mine is the one true faith," the only way of salvation; and the percentage of persons making such a claim has increased rather dramatically since 2002, especially among Black Protestants and white evangelical Protestants.⁸ Of course, sociological trends are no answer to a theological challenge; but such statistics make clear that this debate is, by no means, going away.

Even within churches involved in conciliar ecumenism, there is evident theological tension. The National Council of Churches' (NCC) policy statement, "Interfaith Relations and the Churches," adopted in 1999, affirms and encourages interfaith dialogue and cooperation. But when it comes to the question, "Can non-Christians be reconciled to God, and if so, how?", the statement reverts to the language of comparison: Some churches say this and others say that.⁹

The current "position" of the World Council of Churches—first articulated at the 1989 Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in San Antonio, and since repeated in other reports—is not comparative but paradoxical: "We cannot point to any other way of salvation than Jesus Christ; at the same time, we cannot set limits to the saving power of God.... We appreciate the tension and do not attempt to resolve it."¹⁰ A more recent document from the WCC (but one that has not received wide discussion in the churches), "Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding," does go further by emphasizing the humility inherent in our finitude:

⁷ Excerpt from Michael Kinnamon, *Can A Renewal Movement be Renewed?*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2014) chapter. 10. The entire chapter is reprinted with permission.

⁸ U.S. Religious Landscape Survey" at <http://www.pewforum.org/Many-Americans-Say-Other-Faiths-Can-Lead-to-Eternal-Life.aspx>.

⁹ "Interfaith Relations and the Churches," par. 33 at <http://www.nccusa.org/interfaith/ifr.html>.

¹⁰ Frederick R. Wilson, ed., *The San Antonio Report: Your Will Be Done, Mission in Christ's Way* (Geneva: WCC, 1990), pp. 32, 33.

...human limitations and limitations of language make it impossible for any community to have exhausted the mystery of salvation God offers to humankind.... [Thus we affirm] that salvation belongs to God, God only. We do not possess salvation; we participate in it. We do not offer salvation; we witness to it. We do not decide who would be saved; we leave it to the providence of God.¹¹

This argument reminds me of a report I helped write for my denomination, the Disciples of Christ, in the late 1980s. With regard to God's ultimate treatment of people of other faiths, our theology commission said in effect, Disciples are agnostic—we simply don't know. What we know is the grace of God we have experienced in Jesus Christ, an experience which gives us reason to trust that God will be merciful to others even as God has been merciful, beyond all deserving, to us.¹² To my ears, this sounded like a position most Christians could support. It was met, however, with vigorous opposition from persons claiming, among other things, that it undermined the church's evangelistic calling. As one of the milder responses put it, "It is difficult for people to give to Jesus the unreserved faith that he requires if they are thinking there are other ways to God besides him."¹³

Once again, we need to be clear about what is at issue and what is not. Every text on this subject from the world and national councils affirms the importance—the necessity—of bearing bold witness, in word and deed, to the saving love of God in Christ. This is not in question. But neither, surely, is the need to proclaim the Good News with sensitivity, respect, and a willingness to listen as well as speak. The new document from the WCC, the Vatican, and the WEA echoes 1 Peter 3: 15-16 when it says, "For Christians it is a privilege and joy to give an accounting for the hope that is within them, and to do so with gentleness and respect."¹⁴ Conversion, as the text points out, is the work of the Holy Spirit. Our task is to tell what we have seen, and to do so in a way that is consistent with the gracious message we proclaim.

There is also broad convergence—not full agreement, but convergence—among Christians that God is revealed in other religions and, thus, that engagement with them affords real opportunity to experience God's presence, perhaps in ways that are

¹¹ Religious Plurality and Christian Self-Understanding," par. 45 at http://www.oikoumene.org/fileadmin/files/wcc-main/documents/p2/fo_religiouspluralityandchristianself-understanding.pdf.

¹² The theology commission report can be found in the 1990 Year Book and Directory of the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ), pp. 286-92. It is examined in Michael Kinnamon, "Jesus Christ and Salvation," *Lexington Theological Quarterly* 28 (Summer 1993), pp. 125-37.

¹³ Quoted in Kinnamon, "Jesus Christ and Salvation," pp. 51-52.

¹⁴ "Christian Witness in a Multi-Religious World," A Basis for Christian Witness 1.

new to us. We can explore the great divine Mystery with others to our own spiritual benefit.

The question of salvation, however, remains a challenge. And there are others related to it. Are we prepared to say, for example, that God wills the diversity of religions? Theologians such as Edward Schillebeeckx, Paul Knitter, and Peter Phan are already posing this question. In Knitter's words, "Is the manyness of religions a 'matter of fact' – that is, something we have to recognize but also overcome? Or is it instead a 'matter of principle' – a reality that we have to embrace because it is the way things are supposed to be?"¹⁵

I cannot overstate what a momentous challenge this is for the "classic" Christian theological tradition! We often point to human sexuality as the most profound, transformative theological challenge facing our churches; but seen in wider historical perspective, the interfaith challenge is far more radical.

¹⁵ Paul Knitter, "The Religions Today: Their Challenge to the Ecumenical Movement," *Ecumenical Trends* 37 (March 2008), p. 7.

APPENDIX 05

KAREN HAMILTON

EXPLORING RELIGIOUS HYBRIDITY AND EMBRACING HOSPITALITY¹⁶

"To begin at the beginning, the concept of Religious Hybridity is not new in the Jewish/Christian tradition. There are many places in the scriptures and traditions shared by Jews and Christians where it can be seen. One example of the complex nature of multiple religious traditions can be seen in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah Chapter 45:1 and surrounding verses. The context is the Exile of the people of Israel in Babylon. They have been conquered and then sent, or at least the elite, governing classes among them, into exile in Babylon. But then the empires and the balance of power in the world around the people of Israel shifted. The Persians conquered the Babylonians and brought with that conquering a new kind of foreign policy. Instead of removing peoples from their lands, the Persians had a policy of governing by allowing people to remain or return to their home countries.

So it is in language of poetic grandeur that we read in the Book of the Prophet Isaiah of God calling Cyrus the King of Persia, "the Messiah", "the anointed one", because he does the will of God which is to return the people to their own land. One who is not of the people is one who does the will of God and who is recognized for that with one of the highest designations possible. Furthermore, there is no indication in the text that he does or ever will follow any other religious tradition than his own of Persia but he can still be and is the anointed one of the people of Israel. Even more, not only does Cyrus not follow the religion of the people of Israel, centered in the God of Israel, he does not even acknowledge or know the God of Israel. One can be a follower of one religion and a major actor in another.

A more recent example of religious hybridity in the Christian tradition – a theological and pastoral example – can be seen in the Sacred Heart Church of All Nations in Edmonton, Canada. In a blending, no, a marking of both Christian and First Nations traditions, the stand for the paschal candle is constructed from snow shoes, the stations of the cross have figures in First Nations dress and artistic style and as the Roman Catholic, Oblate priest explained to me, the buffalo hide spread on the floor before the altar represents God. For the past 25 years, the congregation of the Sacred Heart Church has been 70% Aboriginal and its style and symbols represent the hybridity of the Christian and First Nations traditions. As the Canadian, Anglican, Aboriginal bishop explained to me some months ago, very few Canadian Indigenous people would self-identify as completely traditionally First Nations in their religious beliefs and practices. Most carry religious hybridity.

¹⁶ Reprinted from *Current Dialogue*, a publication of the World Council of Churches, December 2015. Used with permission from WCC.

In a similar context in which I experienced the Sacred Heart Church of All Nations, I had a faith participant introduce himself, in a very matter-of-fact fashion, as Christian/Buddhist, something that is very common in Japan particularly in terms of the Shinto and Buddhist traditions. It is also very common for ministers and priests in the Christian tradition to be asked to perform interfaith marriages, knowing that the question of religious hybridity is not just one for the creation of a marriage ceremony that reflects multiple religious traditions. As a Christian minister, I have actually crafted and performed a Jewish/Muslim marriage service. The question of the living out or living into religious hybridity becomes both more challenging and more concrete with the birth and parenting of children. My concrete advice to families in such circumstances was to choose one of their religious traditions as the primary one for the children to grow up in but to ensure that they were comfortable in the context of the other – an embracing of religious hybridity rather believing that there is some kind of abstract, neutral position by which the children can and will not engage the traditions until they become adults and will then have the facility to choose to identify with one.

Since as my colleague, James Christie, proclaims, “Story is to Religion as Math is to Science”, I conclude with a story of some pastoral, theological realities in lived religious hybridity. I served a United Church of Canada congregation that went by the colourful name of St. James Bond. The congregation planned to sponsor refugee families from the former Yugoslavia and when the two families arrived – fathers, mothers and children, welcomed them with great enthusiasm. We had been told that the families were Muslim and after settling them into apartments and schools suggested we help them find a mosque that could be their religious home. Warmly and graciously we were told, over and over again by the families, that there was no need for a mosque to be found, that they were very happy at St. James Bond as their religious home. They settled in with us and we settled in with them. And then the day arrived when the two families appeared before me to receive Communion. The point of this story is not how I responded or indeed the fact that it was later discovered that while the two fathers were indeed Muslim, the two mothers were Orthodox Christians. The point of the story is that Muslims, given the chronology and shared traditions of Christianity and Islam as Abrahamic faiths, can live that kind of religious hybridity in that context.

James Christie shares his reflection on the same event:

Once upon a time, I was minister of the rather unusually named St. James Bond United Church in Toronto, Canada. The story of the church's name merits telling but on some other occasion. While serving there as Senior Minister, I, and subsequently my colleague, Dr Karen Hamilton, who is now the General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches, found ourselves challenged by a liturgical moment which pushed the boundaries of liturgical and ecclesial convention.

In the early 1990s, in the midst of the Balkan conflict, St. James Bond sponsored two refugee families fleeing the violence of the disintegration of the former Yugoslavia. In each case, the families consisted of a Muslim husband, a Christian wife, and young children, the children raised in the Christian tradition.

The families were warmly received by the church community, and swiftly became beloved friends and neighbours. To my knowledge, no pressure, explicit or implicit, was ever exerted on the families concerning religious practice or faith stance. They regularly attended worship gatherings, mainly, it seemed, as opportunities to engage with the community.

Then, something happened; something unprecedented. One Sunday morning, on which the Eucharist was to be celebrated, congregants were invited to come forward to the communion rail to receive the elements from the minister and elders presiding. Up came the new Canadian blended Muslim and Christian families: all of them, including the two Muslim men. The men held their hands out in the manner of their wives, children and neighbours, awaiting the elements.

What to do?

Let us credit the Holy Spirit. With but a heartbeat of hesitation, I gave the bread to our Muslim brothers. The Elder proffered the cup. The moment passed into eternity.

At the time, I recall thinking that I would rather be chastised by the Church for including at Christ's table a child of God who our Lord loves but who hardly conformed to ecclesial custom, than to be chastised at some moment in the *eschaton* by our Lord for excluding one of God's own, albeit unbaptized and of another faith. More recently I have wondered whether this incident was my introduction to the emerging world of multi-religious families and multi-religious belonging. Either way, I believe God was present.

Rev. Dr. Karen Hamilton is the General Secretary of the Canadian Council of Churches.

APPENDIX 06

CHARLES BUCK

FROM ADHERENCE TO AFFINITY: MULTIPLE RELIGIOUS BELONGING IN HAWAII¹⁷

ONE FUNERAL, THREE RITES

In 1996, I moved from San Francisco to Honolulu to become the pastor of a church that was founded by Chinese immigrants one hundred years ago this year. This church had had a hard time finding a minister. In fact, they went through ten years of interim ministry before I came.

As you can imagine, some things were put on hold during those ten years, mostly ideas for programming, but also, well, dying. There were relatively few deaths in the years before I came. And then as soon as I arrived, people started dying. It was one death after another. In fact, for the first two years that I was there, I averaged about two or three funerals a month, about one every other week. Someone joked that all these people had delayed dying until a pastor arrived. Literally, someone said, all these people were “dying for me to come.”

Among the scores of funerals I performed was one I will never forget. It was a Chinese man in his late 80s. He wasn't actually a member of the church. He was not much of a churchgoer at all during his life. But his son and family were very active members, and they wanted me to do his funeral. I explained that as a Christian minister I would, of course, do a Christian funeral. They were fine with that. Then they asked, “Could we have a Taoist priest come and do a Taoist funeral rite?”

That was a little unusual, but I've handled things like this before, especially when the deceased had been a member of a society that performed some farewell ritual at the time of death. The way I usually handle it, as I learned from a mentor years before, was to let that service take place before the Christian service. Easy enough.

But this family wanted more. They asked, “At the cemetery, for the interment, could we have a Hawaiian kahuna,” or priest, “come and do a native Hawaiian blessing?” I don't know why they wanted this since the deceased was not Hawaiian. He was fully Chinese, so the Taoist ceremony made sense. But Hawaiian? Clearly this was important to the family, and so I said, “Yes, after I finish the Christian committal service, I will step aside and let the kahuna do the Hawaiian blessing.”

¹⁷ Reprinted from *Current Dialogue*, a publication of the World Council of Churches, December 2015. Used with permission from WCC.

When I tell people this story, they usually laugh and say that this family probably wanted to cover all the bases. That is, since the father didn't go to church and they weren't sure where his soul would go, they were playing religious roulette: spin the wheel and hope that one of these services, Taoist, Christian or Hawaiian, was the right one. Or maybe it was like insurance: by doing all three rites they could insure that something would stick and some god would be pleased enough to grant Dad eternal life.

But I don't think so. Not in Hawai'i.

ONE RELIGION, AND MORE

Before I tell you why I don't think this family was doing that, let me give you an idea of how people in Hawai'i have generally dealt with multiple religions.

The first time Hawai'i had to deal with multiple religions is when the Christian missionaries arrived in 1820. Prior to that, *na kanaka maoli*, or native Hawaiians, practiced a religion that worshiped numerous gods. Evidence of this religion survives today through the *heiau*, temples made of stones; *`oli*, chants that tell the ancient stories; and *hula*, dances that give expression to the stories and prayers.

Then the first missionaries from America arrived in 1820, and suddenly there was a new religion in town. But there was no conflict. What happened was probably unique in all of missionary history: when Christianity came, there was no other religion, Hawaiian or otherwise, to compete with it.

A decade earlier, Kamehameha I defeated all of his rival kings on the other islands and unified the islands into one Hawaiian kingdom. When he died in 1819, his successor and son, Kamehameha II, influenced by his father's wives, abolished the *kapu* system, the laws and customs that dictated proper behaviour such as eating, the violation of which could result in death. He also ordered the destruction of the ancient temples and defeated in battle those who fought to maintain the ancient religion.

So with the abandonment of laws and religion to guide the conduct of the people, the missionaries stepped into a vacuum that they quickly filled with their new law based on the Bible and Jesus Christ. Along with the *ali'i* – the privileged classes including the royalty – converting to this new religion, and the missionaries' development of a written form of the Hawaiian language in which to translate the Bible into the vernacular, Christianity exploded. Churches were quickly established all over the islands. At one point in the 19th century, the largest churches in the world were Hawaiian churches with tens of thousands of converts.

For these missionaries, there was no question that there was one, and only one, religion. In fact, their mission was, in their own terms, to convert “pagans” and “heathen.” They looked with disgust at native Hawaiian practices and beliefs, which they considered primitive and barbaric. Because Christianity found such firm grounding in Hawaiian soil so quickly, the missionaries were able to make wide-sweeping and profound changes in Hawaiian society and culture. For example, they banned hula because it was considered too suggestive. And they required Hawaiians to cover their bodies in full western dress, suits for men and long dresses, or *mu`umu`u*, for women.

In the 1970s, a so-called “Hawaiian renaissance” took place, and native Hawaiians began to realize how much of their culture, religion and identity had been lost. Following the Civil Rights Movement on the USA mainland and the rise of ethnic studies departments in universities, Hawaiian studies emerged and blossomed, captivating a whole new generation of native Hawaiians who were reawakened to their identity and culture, which they now desperately sought to recover after having been submerged for the last 150 years. Except for very old Hawaiians who lived in remote areas, very few people spoke the Hawaiian language fluently and knew the culture and practices intimately.

With newfound pride, native Hawaiians enrolled in language classes. Immersion schools where only Hawaiian was spoken sprang up. Hula became popular – not the kitschy, grass-skirt type that entertained the tourists, but the one where every movement told the ancient and modern stories of Hawai‘i – and everyone joined a *halau* (club house). History texts used in all schools highlighted the overthrow of the Hawaiian kingdom in 1893 and the subsequent illegal annexation by the United States several years later.

Not surprisingly, in this environment, Christianity itself came under suspicion. Some of the more strident Hawaiians claimed that there was an inherent conflict between Christian faith and Hawaiian values. One could not be both Hawaiian and Christian. Like the missionaries who preached that Christianity was the one and only one way, now native Hawaiians began to believe the same, except that the way was not Yahweh.

Others, however, sought to reconcile the two and to re-think this one or nothing approach to their religious faith. These Hawaiians were not sure that it was necessary to choose only one or the other. Many were moved by the religious confession of their tutu, or their aunts, uncles and grandparents, who had a strong faith conviction in Christ nurtured by strong relationships with the missionaries. “We are Hawaiian and Christian,” they proclaimed.

One way of accommodating both was in 'Io, the first of all Hawaiian gods, the creator god of the universe, from whom came all the other gods. Native Hawaiians had many gods, thousands of them. But 'Io was the first among all gods, and therefore, some argued, God had actually been revealed and made known to the Hawaiian people centuries before the missionaries brought the word of Jesus Christ in 1820. So native Hawaiian religious practices maintained their own integrity and authenticity alongside Christian and others. There need not be conflict or contradiction between the Christian faith and Hawaiian cultural practices. A practical result of this has been the integration of Hawaiian cultural and artistic elements in the Christian worship service, such as the *'oli*, *hula*, *pu*, and *kahili* in many congregations, both Hawaiian and non-Hawaiian.

But there's another part of the history of Hawai'i that is important because it offered another way of dealing with multiple religions. That is the plantation history.

FROM ADHERENCE TO AFFINITY

When plantations were established to grow sugar cane, labourers were needed. Plantation owners used native Hawaiians to be sure, but they needed more. And so they lured labourers from China, Japan, Korea, Portugal, Philippines and Puerto Rico. And these peoples, alongside native Hawaiians, had to work together, live together, create a common language (pidgin) together, share meals together, socialize together, even, over time, marry amongst themselves and raise families together.

The result is that Hawai'i today is largely *hapa*, or, mixed races. In fact, if your family has lived long in Hawai'i, you are likely to count many races and ethnicities in your *'ohana*, or family. Most local people in Hawai'i can recite a litany of ethnicities that they embody. I have a friend who is Chinese, Hawaiian, Korean, and Filipino. Another one is German, Portuguese, Hawaiian and Chinese, and his grandchildren throw into that Vietnamese and Japanese with his children's marriages. Most people in Hawai'i have multiple ethnic identities. So my being Korean – and only Korean – makes me very boring!

All this intermixing and intermarriage also has meant interreligious understanding and practice. Living and mixing together for so long created an environment in which multiple faiths are represented not just throughout the islands, but in families as well. This is not strict *adherence* to the faith, but *affinity* with those who identify with it, and to respect it as authentic in its own way for that person. This is the key to living out multiple religious belonging in Hawai'i.

And now to return to that family who asked that their father's service incorporate a Taoist priest, a Christian minister and a Hawaiian kahuna. I knew that family well and in offering pastoral care to them, I knew that they weren't trying to "cover all the bases" just in case. I could tell, from the way they described their father, that for Dad, all three – Taoism, Christianity and Hawaiian – were important to his identity. He was not a "member" or adherent to any of the three faiths. He didn't practice any of these with any kind of regularity. But growing up and living in Hawai'i, he identified with all three of them.

Another reason that I know it wasn't "insurance" – that they were not just playing it safe in case he worshiped the wrong god – is because in Hawai'i, living with and among

different religions is as common as the surf and sand, the palm trees and the trade winds. Few people in Hawai'i are adherents to multiple religions, many not even to one religion. But people in Hawai'i are respectful of all religions. Atheists are few. It is part of the local culture to affiliate with multiple religions as a way of connecting with your neighbours, friends and acquaintances. If you are Christian and your Buddhist friend dies you will go to the service and participate in the Buddhist rites because it is the only right and loving thing to do.

For many in Hawai'i, multiple religious belonging is not so much adherence to multiple faiths, but affiliation with the people who identify with these faiths. Ultimately, it is about building relationship and community – important and necessary values in the diverse and complex local culture that is Hawai'i.

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APPENDIX 07

ALAN AMOS

HYBRIDITY: A PERSONAL REFLECTION¹⁸

At first I found the use of the term “hybridity” rather alien; in fact, it connected in my mind with the way in the Eastern Orthodox tradition that what is “other” or “strange” may be considered heretical. And yet I did not stop there; I realized that many of us within the Christian tradition have experienced not just one way of being a Christian and of worshipping but a number of ways, some of which seem to be in conflict with others. We may have grown through that experience to value these different strands, even when they are hard to reconcile one with another. And so to an extent my way of being a Christian is already somewhat “hybrid.”

Then I went on to realize that in my encounter with other faiths, with Islam and Judaism in particular, I could not learn and understand just as an outsider. I had to take a step of imagination and explore what it might be, what it might feel like, to be an insider. I needed to borrow another pair of eyes, perhaps to hang on to another’s garment of belonging, in order to see. And then I came to realize that I could also perceive my own faith in a different way having been through that experience.

But then, as I understood from the consultation on “Exploring Hybridity, Embracing Hospitality” held in Chennai there are those who feel inwardly part of more than one faith tradition, perhaps through family, through marriage, through life experience and encounter. Rather than just reacting against this “mixing of faiths,” I believe we gain much more from giving the time and the attention to understand what is going on, and what those who have this diversity of experience have to share with us.

This has also caused me to reflect on the origins of the Christian faith, that Christ was a Jew born within a religious tradition which he came to reform as well as to transcend; that he knew within himself the experience of hybridity, the challenge to bring into the Kingdom of God both old and new (cf. Mt 15:32). We have seen through history the terrible danger of rejecting “the Jewish face of Christianity,” in making the Jew the excluded outsider, perhaps partly in response to the earlier exclusion of Christian believers from the synagogues.

¹⁸ Summarized from “*Stories from the Billabong*” by James Vance Marshall and Francis Firebrace (London: Frances Lincoln Children’s Books, 2008.); Reprinted from *Current Dialogue*, a publication of the World Council of Churches, December 2015. Used with permission from WCC.

It is easier to exclude than to accompany; it is easier to prescribe than to listen; and yet as we trace the drama of Christ's life through the gospels, we find the absence of a "prescriptive" approach to living, and a willingness to look at each situation as it arose, and the needs and motivations of those who gathered around.

I have therefore come to see that the experience of multiple belonging to faith communities, of "hybridity", is a challenge to hierarchy and hierarchical ways of thinking and organisation. In some cases the person who experiences an attachment to more than one faith has to say "I can do no other" or "I can be no other." That challenges the religious institutions to a new tolerance and sensitivity. This also calls for a shift away from the leadership of a faith that defines its membership in a way that conserves the power and control of that leadership, to a new respect for the awareness and consciousness of the individual who believes. We are called to enter a new maturity in believing: "The wind blows where it pleases, and you hear its sound, but you don't know where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:18).

To sum up, perhaps the future belongs to those of faith who take the initiative in defining their own belonging to one faith community or another, and in asserting how and to what extent they belong.

This may indeed be a shift from Law to Grace – and to be a believer will be understood as a matter of grace rather than of birth status or recognition by hierarchy. Let me conclude with an anecdote.

PLATYPUS

I have just read a delightful children's story from an Australian aboriginal context which can be summarised as follows:

In the Dreamtime, when the Creator had made the different types of animals, mammals, fish, and birds, he found that there were a lot of bits and pieces left over. So he joined these bits and pieces together and created Platypus. And so Platypus has fur like a mammal, can swim under water, and mother platypus lays eggs like a bird.

Now the three groups of animals, mammals, fish and birds lived happily together to begin with, until they began to quarrel and fight because each group thought it was the best and the most important. The mammals thought they were special because only they had fur. Until Kangaroo's wife pointed out that Platypus has fur. So the mammals thought about this, and agreed to visit Platypus and ask him if he would join them in their fight against the fish and the birds. But Platypus just listened very carefully, and replied, "Thank you for asking me to be one of your family, I'll think about it."

Then the fish had a meeting; they thought they were special because only they can swim under water. But the Murray Cod's wife said, "What about Platypus? He spends most of his life under water." So the fish thought about this, and agreed to visit Platypus and ask him if he would join them in their fight against the mammals and the birds. But Platypus just listened very carefully, and replied, "Thank you for asking me to be one of your family, I'll think about it."

Then the birds held a meeting; they thought they were special because only they can fly and lay eggs. But Mrs Eagle pointed out that Mrs Platypus lays eggs. And so the birds thought about this, and agreed to visit.

HYBRIDITY

Platypus and ask him if he would join them in their fight against the mammals and the fish. But Platypus just listened very carefully, and replied, "Thank you for asking me to be one of your family, I'll think about it."

At last, in the cool of the evening, Platypus came out. All the animals fell silent. "I've made up my mind," Platypus said. "I am part of each of you and part of all of you. And that's how I want to stay. So thank you very much for asking me, but I've decided not to join any of you."

The animals didn't like this.

So Platypus went on: "Please let me explain. When the Creator first made us, he made each of us different. So each of us, in our own way, is special. But special doesn't mean better. None of us is better or worse than our neighbour. Only different. So we ought to respect each other's differences, and live together without fighting."

And when the animals thought about this, they agreed that Platypus was very wise, and had made a good decision.

And so it happened that an Aboriginal warrior overheard what Platypus had said, and so he made his people promise never to harm such a wise creature. Which is why no Aboriginal Australian will ever hunt and kill a Platypus – even if hungry.

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APPENDIX 08

CARRIE NEWCOMER ROOM AT THE TABLE¹⁹

Let our hearts not be hardened to those living on the margin

There is room at the table for everyone

This is where it all begins, this is how we gather in

There is room at the table for everyone

Too long we have wandered, burdened and undone

But there is room at the table for everyone

Let us sing the new world in, this is how is all begins

There is room at the table for everyone

There is room for us all

And no gift is too small

There is room at the table for everyone

There's enough if we share

Come on pull up a chair

There room at the table for everyone

No matter who you are, no matter where you're from

There is room at the table for everyone

Here and now we can be, the beloved community,

There is room at the table for everyone

¹⁹ Room at the Table appears on "A Permeable Life" on Available Light Records. By Carrie Newcomer ©2014 Carrie Newcomer Music (BMI)
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There is room for us all
And no gift is too small
There is room at the table for everyone
There's enough if we share
Come on pull up a chair
There room at the table for everyone

There is room for us all
And no gift is too small
There is room at the table for everyone
There's enough if we share
Come on pull up a chair
There room at the table for everyone



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