

Interfaith FAQ

1. What is Interfaith?

Interfaith is defined by the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) as the engagement of people from diverse traditions, such as Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Secular Humanism, Judaism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Jainism, Baha'i, atheist, agnostic, and all other religious, non-religious, and philosophical traditions. Alternative words like "multifaith," "interreligious," or "multireligious" can be used interchangeably to articulate the same idea.

2. What is religious pluralism?

Drawing from Harvard scholar Diana Eck, IFYC articulates interfaith cooperation as the active engagement of religious diversity to a constructive end. Interfaith cooperation, which is interchangeable with "religious pluralism," has three essential components:

- Respect for individual religious or non-religious identity,

Respect for identity means that everyone can bring their full identity to the table. There's space for people to believe that they are right and others are wrong, and that their beliefs are true and others' are not. Interfaith cooperation is not syncretistic or relativistic; no one has to concede exclusive truth claims to be part of it.

- Mutually inspiring relationships, and

Interfaith cooperation builds relationships that move towards authentic friendships, even as space emerges for real conversations about disagreements and difference, with a sense that each person gains from the relationship.

- Common action for the common good.

Dialogue is important, but research shows that common action builds stronger communities. This is where interfaith cooperation has the potential to both create tolerant individuals and transform communal relations in a diverse society.

3. What is an interfaith leader?

In the same way that other social movements have a clear category of leadership, such as an environmentalist or a human rights activist, the interfaith movement needs a set of leaders equipped to make this vision a widespread reality. An interfaith leader is someone who casts the vision of interfaith cooperation, speaks out about the importance of interfaith cooperation, and mobilizes diverse people for dialogue and common action.

4. What is interfaith literacy?

Interfaith literacy is the appreciative knowledge of diverse traditions needed to be an interfaith leader.

Interfaith literacy includes:

- Knowledge of how one's own faith or philosophical tradition offers an imperative for engaging with others;

- Knowledge of the important historical moments in history that demonstrate interfaith cooperation, like the peaceful coexistence of Jews, Christians, and Muslims in medieval Spain or the way Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. worked with Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel during the Civil Rights Movement; and

- Knowledge of the values - such as mercy, compassion, and hospitality - shared between different religious traditions.

5. What is religious diversity?

Religious diversity is a descriptive term, stating the fact that people of different backgrounds exist within the same society. Interfaith cooperation answers the question of how we should engage this diversity in an interactional world. When the default response to diversity is so often conflict or division, interfaith cooperation offers a constructive way forward.