

Universal Toolkit for Making Friends across Religions

Thank you for downloading this document.

We hope it helps you to make friends across religions as promoted by the religious leaders (youtube.com/makefriends). We look forward to hearing from you and to staying in touch.

In friendship,
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1. Principles of Interreligious Friendship

The basic principles of interreligious friendship include the following:

- Interreligious friendship recognizes fundamental similarities between religions. These include the search for living in goodness and harmony and living an ethical life. Fundamental to interreligious friendship is awareness that the different religions seek to transcend ordinary life through aspiration and orientation of life toward a higher spiritual understanding of reality, or a supreme reality called by most believers “God”.
- Interreligious friendship is characterized by a higher common interest, beyond self interest.
- Interreligious friendship is characterized by reciprocity and engages both sides to a relationship. Friendship is based on a mutual give and take.

2. Approaching Difference

Interreligious friendship is not friendship that casts aside religious difference, overlooking it in the interest of perceived commonality. Rather, it is friendship that keeps us mindful of religious difference and approaches this difference as a means of learning, growth and transformation that occur within the friendship. Religious difference can be approached as a source of blessing.

3. Upholding Identity

Maintaining the identity of our religious community is a primary concern of the teachings of our religions. The practice of interreligious friendship should not be a means of weakening or diluting identity. Rather, it should be a means of strengthening and deepening it.

4. Practicing Speech

Practicing interreligious friendship is closely related to how we speak. Questioning is fundamental to interreligious friendship. Friends must be willing to question and to be questioned. Hard questions are part of honest speech, but must be clearly distinguished from attack or criticism. In interreligious friendships, the face of our friend is always before us. We learn to speak the same in the absence as in the presence of the friend.

5. Friendship in Action

Action is a primary arena for the manifestation of friendship. We expect support, collaboration and solidarity from our friends if issues pertaining to our well-being arise. Interreligious friendship can be based on common dedication to ideals or causes such as social justice, fighting hatred, poverty and illness. The commonality shared by friends finds expression through shared commitment and collaboration for the well-being of society and the world.

6. Friendship as Spiritual Gift

As we move from ignoring differences to recognizing, understanding and respecting our differences, we are also called to discover a deeper unity that transcends our differences. Love finds its fullest expression in a friendship that is consciously grounded in God, or in the ultimate reality.

Practical suggestions

Although the interreligious friendships we advocate are one-on-one human relationships, it is helpful to nurture them in the context of a supportive environment. If you would like to foster interreligious friendship for yourself, it would be wise to identify organizations or activities which already exist in your community for the purpose of dialogue and/or interreligious encounter. Some of the suggestions below can be implemented more easily within an existing organizational context.

Here are some practical suggestions, for how friendship may be practiced, many of which grow out of the discussions of the Elijah Board of World Religious Leaders. If you have additional recommendations, please share them with us. We can add them to the list.

Sharing Friendship

1. **Share a Meal:** Invite a family from another religion to join your family at a home meal. This can be arranged as an 'exchange' program between two congregations, whereby everyone has a chance at being a host and everyone can be a guest. And/or organise communal meals. The advantage of this will be that if there are (religious) dietary restrictions for practitioners of one religion, there is no embarrassment or inequality. There is nothing like eating together to create bonds of friendship.
2. **Organise a 'friendship walk'.** One possibility is to walk together from one place of worship to another. When you talk, you are face-to-face but when you walk, you are shoulder-to-shoulder. There is no antagonism and no competition. You are facing in the same direction. Walk together as an instrument in addressing common challenges – walks can be used to make a public statement about issues that the interreligious community seeks to address, such as showing respect for sacred spaces. Variations could include creating human chains or being present when sites of other faiths are under threat
3. **Jointly taking social action, responding to societal challenges.** While this can be practiced independently of friendship, it enhances friendship, by providing common focus and common goal in healing society. Sharing insights into the local scene – spreading the importance of awareness of others in your community; increasing awareness of the local community's economic and social divide
4. **Share culture – create opportunities to share music, art, story-telling and other cultural activities.** This can take the form of interreligious festivals or reciprocal events at each other's venues. Music breaks down all barriers. Art is a window into the heart of another.
5. **Sharing narratives - creating space for sharing of suffering and sharing of achievements.**