



Dialogue Training Manual

Levels of Understanding: How to build understanding through dialogue

- 1. Shared Values:** This is a typical starting point for most dialogues, and for many, often the ending point as well. This is helpful for building the framework for future conversations. IFYC's particular curriculum focuses on shared values of service, which is key, but exploration into other shared values can still be beneficial.
- 2. Shared Experiences:** Despite varied history, culture, up-bringing, and other factors, everyone can find a similar thematical experience in their life with at least one person, as you engage the group as a whole you may find a web of connections.
- 3. Identifying and Celebrating Differences:** At many dialogue events, I found that the facilitators or panelists identified and explored the common values but failed to engage the complexities of the faith traditions. Stopping at such a superficial level denies the participants of the dialogue from accurately reckoning with the depth and complexity of each religion, in their dynamic manifestations of observance. Identifying the differences that exist in religious traditions not only opens the conversation to allowing people to engage themselves in understanding the concepts outside their own. Furthermore, the language and concepts present should not only instruct them on one particular faith tradition, but in fact inform them on a greater level of comprehension of their own faith. It is in this context that the participants will ask questions that they were too embarrassed to ask (e.g. "*so is communion cannibalism?*"). It is only after these questions are addressed that truth growth and understanding can take hold in a great scale.
- 4. Expression of Frustrations:** Even with understanding can be frustration. This often time comes in the schism that occurs with dogma, and interpretations of such dogmas used and abused to serve political ends and the like. This definitely won't be a conversation for the first encounter, but perhaps one after the previous steps have been confronted properly.
- 5. What now?** In the highest level, after recognizing similarities in both tradition and experience, identifying and celebrating differences, and reckoning such traditions with our own principles, can the opportunity for change. Not solely for the participants, but what change is needed in our communities, our faiths, our world. *What should be the way of the world? How can we get there?*

The First Encounter:

This session is designed for a small group of participants meeting for the first time. The instructions are for a facilitator. A facilitator guides the conversation through these steps, and does so naturally by segue ways, as an equal to the participants.

- Goals:**
1. Create “Safe Space” for participants to feel open enough to share
 2. Identify shared values across religious identities
 3. Begin the process for understanding and celebrating differences
 4. Allow each participant to share their “story”
 5. Encourage personal development for each participant in their own faith tradition
 6. Create a sense interfaith community, with a focus on how to take the experience beyond the group for collaborative action

Step 1: Create the “Safe Space” (10 minutes)

It is important for all participants to feel that they can share personal part of their identity without judgement or harassment. The group should brainstorm as a team what the guidelines are, as one participant documents these guidelines for necessary reference. The group should agree on the finalized list.

Frame the question: *“What do you expect from yourself and others in order to feel safe to share honestly in this conversation?”*

- Potential responses:
1. Anyone can pass a question or activity
 2. Use “I” instead of “we” to refer to identities (as each religious identity is dynamic, with different forms)
 3. Everything said in group is confidential
 4. Refrain from judgment
 5. Ask for clarification if something is not clear
 6. Avoid assuming people know your traditions

Step 2: Engage Scripture on Shared Values of Service (10 minutes)

Hand out provided scriptures from various faith traditions regarding service, allow a few minutes for participants to read. Afterwards go around the room asking each participant to read a scripture out loud (not necessarily from their own faith tradition). Using the previously standards, participants have the right to pass.

Pose the following questions:

1. Did one of these passages resonate with you? Which one?
2. If the passage isn’t from your own tradition, are you surprised?
3. Was part of one of the passages challenging? Why?
4. Did these passage change your perspective on service?

Follow up this conversation with a brief discussion on how the understanding of other faith traditions’ call to service can be utilized to mobilize people to collaborate for a common cause under similar calls to service of different religions.

Step 3: Dialogue Through Experience: What's Your Story? (30 minutes)

By sharing personal stories, the participants are able to create a community amongst each other. In contexts where participants will be living together, traveling together, or working together over an extended period of time, the creation of community is elemental to the experience of the project. Furthermore, these connections will certainly create a greater impact on participants than the-service work itself.

Frame the question: *“What is the story of your religious journey? How has your faith informed your call to service?”*

Break down into groups if there are more than ten participants

Step 4: Closing and Meta-Critique: What Now? (10 minutes)

Facilitate a critique of the each step, with a reflection. Were the “safe space” sufficient? All necessary? Beneficial? Reflect back on the scriptural readings, how have they informed the conversation at large, especially in context to people’s individual stories? Do people have similar stories, despite different faith traditions? Review goals and see if and how they were met.

Now ask how the participants see the experience being useful. Will they use a similar process when entering into a situation with religious diverse groups? How has this changed their view of service? Has it changed how they will do service? Thank participants for taking part in the dialogue, and allow some time for small conversations to occur before commencing the next activity.

This curriculum was developed by Frank Fredericks of World Faith, with help from Megan Hughes and Jenan Mohajir of the Interfaith Youth Core.

BACKGROUND

World Faith: an interfaith community service and development organization

Mission Statement: **World Faith** is an interfaith community service organization, which seeks to facilitate the mobilization of the youth of various religious identities to tackle local community service needs, engage in interfaith dialogue in a proselytizing-free environment, and improve the image religious communities through such work.

History: **World Faith** is an interfaith community service organization, which mobilizes religiously-diverse young adults to participate in service-learning projects, engage in interfaith dialogue through action in a proselytizing-free environment, and utilize the media to counter religious extremism and demonstrate how religion can inform work for unity and peace, rather than hate, war, and division. World Faith currently has local chapters in the US and Lebanon, international exchanges between the US, Lebanon, and India, and other programs in development.

www.worldfaith.org

email: frank@worldfaith.org