LOVING OUR INTERFAITH NEIGHBORS

A Study-Action Guide for Wisconsin Congregations
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Before You Begin

Download the “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors” policy statement from the Wisconsin Council of Churches at http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaithneighbors/ and have it handy as you read through this study guide.

Acknowledgements

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Biblical citations: All Biblical citations are from the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible.
Dear friends,

The Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC) is pleased to share with you this groundbreaking resource for Wisconsin congregations, “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors: A Study-Action Guide.” As Executive Director of the Council, I pray that it will be an instrument of healing and hope for you and your congregation.

On the 10th anniversary of September 11th, the WCC and the Islamic Society of Milwaukee co-hosted a remarkable day of dialogue as a powerful witness to the importance of interfaith understanding and cooperation in the aftermath of the terrible tragedy that occurred a decade earlier. On this anniversary, over 250 Christians and Muslims shared in life-giving conversation as they focused on getting to know one another. From the energy of that event grew the idea for this educational resource to help local congregations build relationships with their interfaith neighbors across the state.

According to a recent national poll conducted by the Pew Research Center, only 52 percent of Americans know a Muslim and far fewer can claim any as friends. Since most Muslim communities are in urban areas, many of us who live in small towns and rural communities simply haven’t had the opportunity to build these kinds of interfaith relationships.

And because so many of us don’t really know our interfaith neighbors, it is then no surprise that unfair and inaccurate stereotypes take root, fueled by our divisive politics and the secular media. The Islamic faith, as a primary example, gets painted—unfairly and inaccurately—with the broad brush-strokes of terrorism.

A prior byproduct of the 10th anniversary event in Milwaukee was the WCC’s superb ecumenical statement, composed by our Unity and Relationships Commission, detailing the “why” and “how” of interfaith relationships for Christians, which was adopted by our Board of Directors in 2014 and serves as the theological companion to this study guide. You can download a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor: A Statement of the Wisconsin Council of Church on Interfaith Relations” from the bookmark list on the WCC homepage – www.wichurches.org.
In the “Invitation to Action” at the conclusion of this policy statement, the WCC:

…condemns all forms of intolerance which turn religious differences into excuses for defamations, stereotyping, and violence; to defend their victims; to challenge and to rebut statements about other faith groups or individuals that embody religious stereotyping, prejudice and bigotry…

The “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors” study-action resource for Wisconsin congregations is written with these goals in mind, but our first step on the journey is to actually get to know those of other faith traditions, which is what this resource will help you do.

As you begin to explore this resource, I hope you will join me in giving thanks for the ecumenical, all-volunteer, writing and editing team that has labored for many months to bring this study-action guide to you.

We are also grateful for the financial support of dozens of individual donors, both large and small, along with several of the member denominations of the WCC, which together have made the production and distribution of “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors” possible at no cost to you and your congregation. If you find this resource helpful in your ministry, we invite you to contribute financially to the work of the Wisconsin Council Churches. You can make an on-line, tax deductible contribution by clicking the “Donate” button at www.wichurches.org.

As you and your congregation embark on this journey of “Loving our Interfaith Neighbors,” I pray for God’s richest blessings to be upon you and those of other faiths whom you will encounter. May we all be instruments of God’s grace and healing in the process.

Yours in Christ,

Rev. Scott Anderson
Executive Director
Wisconsin Council of Churches

We pray and work together for the unity and renewal of the church and the healing and reconciliation of the world.
Introduction

➲ Read

Before beginning this study in your congregation, it is best to read this full study guide and the “Loving Our Neighbors” statement. Go to: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/ to download the statement and explore the online resources that accompany this study guide. We also recommend having your church council or other leadership board(s) read the statement together. This is a great way to generate interest and excitement in the study, as well as address any unspoken reservations.

➲ Research

Review the online resources suggested at the start of each lesson, along with the publications listed on the WCC resources website http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/. Your denomination may also have interfaith resources available on their websites. Additionally, if time allows, you may consider reaching out to communities of faith in your area. Do your own visits of other traditions or set up a time to talk to a faith leader from another tradition about their experience of living out their faith in your community. This experience will not only aid you in determining the best option for Lesson 5, but will also allow you to add more of your own experience and community specific detail to future conversations during the study.

➲ Invite

For Lesson 5, you will want to identify a speaker (or a panel of speakers) or plan a visit to another religious center. It is best to decide what you will do for this session as early as possible so that all necessary arrangements can be made.

➲ Plan

There are three recommended formats for this study’s use (p. 6-7). Please review each option and determine which format will best suit your congregation. Then you can schedule the space and time needed for your chosen format.
➲ Publicize

Let your congregation know about the study, and pass out copies of “Loving Our Neighbors.” Be sure you give enough lead time for announcements, newsletter articles, etc.

➲ Pray

Have those who are leading this study gather together for a time of prayer. Pray for all your neighbors, for your congregation, for those of other faiths in your community, and for any interfaith concerns particular to your community.
Three Formats for Congregational Use

➲ Option 1: Six Sessions
This format is intended for weekly meetings of about 45-60 minutes, such as regular Sunday Morning Education. Each lesson is structured in the material to follow the same general pattern as follows:

- Opening Prayer
- Overview of the Session
- Presentation of Material
- Activity
- Bible Study
- Conclusion

The guide is structured for this six session format; however, there are other options available for presenting this material. The same material could easily be adapted to fit one of the following intensive formats:

➲ Option 2: Two Sessions
Plan on meeting for 2-2.5 hours for each of the two sessions. For continuity, it would be best to have the sessions occur no more than one month apart. This format would work well as an evening gathering, or with a lunch after worship. In preparation, we recommend giving participants the “Loving Our Neighbors” statement in advance so that they have time to become familiar with the document ahead of time.

For this format, the following outline is recommended:

First Session: Material in Lessons 1-4
- Gather using material from Lesson 1
- Move straight from religious literacy quiz to Lesson 2 material with Nicene Creed overview and Bible Study reflection
- Break
- Use Lesson 3 material on formal and informal dialogue, focus on the conversation questions about informal dialogue
- Discuss Lesson 4 material on the dialogical virtues and use one exercise if there is time.
- Close with prayer

Second Session: Material in Lessons 5-6
- Gather with review of previous session, offer time for questions
- Introduce the guest speaker(s) using the Lesson 5 material
- Have speaker or panel present (potentially with meal time)
- Break
- Conclude with Lesson 6 on discerning next actions to be taken
- Close with prayer
Option 3: Half-Day Retreat

This is the format for those who prefer to cover this material in a single session. For this format, 4-5 hours are recommended, and it is important that participants have read “Loving Our Neighbors” ahead of time. This way, you will spend less time reading the document and more time unpacking the various sections.

Please do not skip Lesson 5; this should be your primary focus.

Here is an outline of how this material might work in a 4-5 hour format:

- Opening Prayer and Introductions (Lesson 1)
- Religious Literacy Quiz (Lesson 1)
- Read/Discuss Nicene Creed and Matt. 22:34-40 in small groups (Lesson 2)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Read dialogical virtues section and discuss the three virtues (Lesson 4)
- If you have time, include a dialogical virtues exercise (Lesson 4)
- Break (15 minutes) or Meal (if eating a meal, have speaker start while everyone is finishing)
- Speaker/Activity (Lesson 5)
- Break (5 minutes)
- Develop next steps and/or an action plan (Lesson 6)
- Closing Prayer

Resources

Links to the resources referenced in this study guide can be found in the “Preparation” section of each lesson. These are the best links available at the time of printing. We recommend checking the Wisconsin Council of Churches online resources page for the most up-to-date selection of resources for this study guide: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/
LESSON 1:

Religious Literacy

TEACHER’S PREVIEW

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is for all participants to be aware of the statement “Loving Our Neighbors,” the concept of religious literacy, and the need for interfaith engagement and understanding in Wisconsin.

Preparation
• Read through the lesson guide.
• Print copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for each participant.
• Print copies of the Religious Literacy Quiz for each participant, and one copy with answers for yourself.
• Look for articles on religion or faith from your county or region and select a few to print as resources for the group. Or, use suggested articles from the “Lesson 1 Resources” section below.

Materials Needed
• Copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for each participant
• Copies of the Religious Literacy Quiz for each participant
• One copy of the Religious Literacy Quiz answer key
• Articles on religion and faith in Wisconsin
• A timer
• Pens for each participant

Lesson 1 Resources:
Religious Literacy Quiz (answers for teachers are also provided here): http://www.pewforum.org/files/2007/12/protheroquiz.pdf

Season of Civility Project of the WCC: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/season-of-civility/

Suggested Articles on Religion/Faith in Wisconsin:
WITH THE CLASS

Welcome
Welcome everyone to the study. Give an overview of what will be covered throughout the entire study and pass out a schedule based on the format you have chosen for presenting the study. Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Have one person read the Introduction of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Highlight the three questions asked at the end of the paragraph. In this study we will seek to explore these questions with more depth.

Opening Litany or Prayer
The following litany is provided for use in each lesson. The litany is a reading of Psalm 78:1-4, CEB version. You can use this litany or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

Opening Litany—Psalm 78: 1-4

One: Listen, my people, to my teaching;

All: Tilt your ears toward the words of my mouth.

One: I will open my mouth with a proverb.

All: I’ll declare riddles from days long gone—

One: Ones that we’ve heard and learned about,

All: Ones that our ancestors told us.

One: We won’t hide them from their descendants;

All: We’ll tell the next generation

One: All about the praise due the LORD and his strength—

All: The wondrous works God has done.

Prayer: O God of all people, be with us in our study this day, that we may follow the leading of your presence and show love to all your people. Amen.

Introductions
Invite participants to introduce themselves and share one of the following questions. If you are in a group of more than 10, have people divide into groups of 4-5 and do introductions within their groups only. If possible, get groups where you don’t know everyone—or at least not as well.

Possible Introduction Questions (choose one):
• When was the first time you met a person of another faith?
• When did you first become aware that there were other faiths?
• What have you learned from someone of another faith?
• What is one question you have for someone of another faith?
Religious Literacy
As the study begins, it is helpful to have everyone check in on how much we really know about our own tradition and the other major traditions. A helpful and fun tool is the “Religious Literacy Quiz” developed by Prof. Stephen Prothero for use in his classes at Boston University. (This quiz is also found in Prothero’s book Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know and Doesn’t.) The quiz is available online using the link in the “Lesson 1 Resources” on page 8.

Have everyone divide into teams of 2-3 to work on the quiz together. Be sure to emphasize that no one is expected to answer everything correctly.

Once everyone has had a chance to read through the quiz and offer their best answers, pull the group back together and go over the answers quickly in a large group.

Reflection Questions:
• Where did you struggle in this exercise? What did you find easy?
• Do you know where or how you learned some of these answers (Sunday School, news, public school, college courses, friends, etc.)?
• Are there faiths you would like to learn more about? How do you think you would go about doing that?
• When you hear about other traditions on the news, do you feel like you learn something about that tradition? Why or why not?

Current Context in Wisconsin
Ask how religious traditions are portrayed in the news in Wisconsin. Give the group a moment to think about events or situations that have highlighted a faith group in Wisconsin (this can be from any time period). Then invite participants to share those events and situations as a group. If you feel it will be necessary to curb this segment, set a timer for 90 seconds, and see how many things are named in that time.

Pause for a moment of silent reflection. Have everyone reflect on the presence of faith in our lives and communities and the ways in which it can shape both conflicts and solutions.

Ask everyone to pull out their copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Have one person read the section “Wisconsin’s Interfaith Context.” Present a list of religious communities or faith-based organizations in your neighborhood/city/county (pick the level that makes the most sense for your community).

Reflection Questions:
• Were you surprised by any of this?
• How does our own area reflect this diversity?
• How does our context as Wisconsin residents call us to love our neighbors?

Before moving to the conclusion for this lesson, encourage participants to pay extra attention as they listen to future news stories or read news this week. Invite everyone to bring in an article for the next session that includes a religious or faith element tied to Wisconsin. This can be anything from a faith-based group doing community service, to an announcement of an event at a local house of worship, to an article with a Wisconsin connection on international conflicts.
Closing

Thank everyone for coming. Highlight what will be included in the next session. Highlight the Nicene Creed in the endnote of “Loving Our Neighbor” and ask everyone to read it before the next session.

As a class, read Matthew 22:34-40

34 When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35 and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 “Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37 He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38 This is the greatest and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40 On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Close with prayer. You can use your own prayer or the following:

God, we thank you for bringing us together today for this opportunity to reflect on our state and the variety of people who dwell here. We are grateful for your Word which comes to us through the Bible. We ask for your help as we seek to understand your Spirit’s calling upon us as we study what it means to love our neighbors. Have mercy on us in our struggles, and help us to accept your love and show that love to others. Be with us this day as we go out to love and serve you in our world. Amen.
Lesson 2:

Nicene Creed & Great Commandment

Teacher’s Preview

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is for all participants to become familiar with the Nicene Creed and the Great Commandment from the Gospel of Matthew, and how these two texts in particular inform the statement, “Loving Our Neighbors.”

Preparation
- Read through the lesson guide.
- Print a few extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for anyone who forgets to bring their copy from the previous session.
- Look for any additional resources from your denomination on the Nicene Creed. You can check with your denomination, or check: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/

Materials Needed
- Extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors”
- Opening Litany from Lesson 1, or alternate opening prayer
- Articles on religion and faith in Wisconsin (from Lesson 1)
- Copies of resources from your denomination on the Nicene Creed
- Copies of Wikipedia Nostra Aetate article

Lesson 2 Resources:
Full text of Nostra Aetate:

Summary of Nostra Aetate:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Nostra_aetate
WITH THE CLASS

**Opening Litany or Prayer**
You may use the litany and prayer provided in Lesson 1 or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

**Welcome**
Welcome everyone to the study. You may need to include a quick round of introductions if there are several new participants in the room.

Give a quick review of the previous lesson. Offer an opportunity to gather in groups of 2-3 to share the news articles that participants brought with them. There are also links to articles in the “Lesson 1 Resources” section. In the small groups, have participants share their article and reflect on the following:

- Where is the religious description of the situation in your article helpful? Where is it hurtful?
- When you read this article, do you feel the religion is represented fairly? Do you feel you know the faith well enough to make that judgment?

Come back to the large group and allow time for small groups to share highlights if they wish. If time allows (or you don't have articles), you may want to open the floor to those who were present for the previous lesson to add their own reflections.

Next, give an overview of this session, which will focus on the Nicene Creed and the Great Commandment (Matt. 22:24-40). Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.”

**Nicene Creed**
The Nicene Creed was initially adopted in 325 C.E. at the Council of Nicaea, in present-day Turkey. An amended form of the creed was adopted in 381 C.E. at the Council of Constantinople. The Nicene Creed is the most widely held of the ecumenical Christian creeds, accepted by the Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Anglican, and major Protestant traditions. Many churches say the Nicene Creed in worship regularly, sometimes weekly, or in conjunction with a baptism or new membership. Even if your tradition does not regularly recite the Nicene Creed together, the theology it outlines is foundational to ecumenical discourse among Christians in: the identification of the Trinity as one God, yet three distinct Persons; the affirmation of Jesus Christ as one person with two natures, divine and human; the understanding of salvation through Christ's birth, death, and resurrection; and the beliefs in the universal church, baptism, and eternal life.

This creed expresses foundational beliefs and practices that the Ecumenical Movement regards as essential in its definition of a Christian Church. Of course, over the course of more than 1500 years of church history, Christians who profess the basic teachings of the Nicene Creed came to differ on other matters. The continued recitation of the creed does not mean to deny that history; it only seeks to highlight the distinctive teachings that Christians still hold in common. For further information on the Nicene Creed and for resources from dialogues between Catholics and non-creedal traditions check the resources webpage: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/
One of the greatest gifts of interfaith interactions is the way it causes Christians to go back to the foundations of what Christianity means for us. We cannot explain our faith to others if we do not first understand our own tradition. As a group, spend some time in reflection on the Nicene Creed. How much time your group needs to spend here may depend on how often you recite this creed as a congregation. If this is a familiar creed for your congregation, you may not need to pause for reflection at all, but you should still note the importance of understanding your own faith.

After giving a brief introduction to the creed and sharing any particular highlights about its use in your tradition, read the Nicene Creed aloud as a group. Then reflect with the following questions.

**Reflection Questions:**
- What part of the Creed do you whole-heartedly affirm?
- What do you question or are curious about in the creed?
- Is anything missing you feel should be added?
- Is there anything in the Creed that you feel should not be?

**The Great Commandment (Mt. 22:34-40)**

The second foundational text highlighted in “Loving our Neighbors” is the passage from the Gospel of Matthew where Jesus answers the question, “Which commandment in the law is the greatest?” His answer is a two-part statement of love. Read the passage below as a group:

> 34When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.” 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’

Take some time to reflect as a group on this Bible passage.

**Reflection Questions:**
- How are commandments ranked or prioritized? And should they be?
- How do you understand “commandments” to be used generally throughout scripture? And how do you understand Jesus’ use of these two commandments in particular?
- How do we apply these two commandments to our own lives?

**Read “Loving Our Neighbors”**

Take turns reading aloud (switch off each paragraph) the “Biblical and Theological Foundations: Loving of God and Love of Neighbor” section from “Loving Our Neighbors.” Reflect together on this section in light of your own study and today’s discussion of the Nicene Creed and the Bible passage.
Reflection Questions:
- What common theme(s) do you notice between the Nicene Creed and the Great Commandment? How does each theme shape your own faith?
- In “Loving Our Neighbors,” engaging in interfaith work is called for as an important part of living out our Christian faith. Do you agree? Why or why not?

Closing
Thank everyone for coming. Highlight what will be covered in the next session. Hand out the summary sheet on Nostra Aetate, and/or any other documents from your denomination encouraging interfaith engagement for everyone to read in preparation for the next session. See the resources section for further resources you may find helpful.

Take time for a closing prayer that highlights the universal nature of the Christian church. Invite participants to lift up prayers for Christians worldwide—whether in your own tradition or in another’s traditions. If you have time, put up a world map and invite people to write their prayers for the world on sticky notes and then place them on the related part of the world map.

Close with prayer. You can use your own or the following (adapted from Eucharistic Prayer A of the 1979 American Book of Common Prayer, Pg. 362)

Almighty God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit: In your infinite love you made us for yourself; and, when we had fallen into sin and become subject to evil and death, you, in your mercy, sent Jesus Christ, your only and eternal Son, to share our human nature, to live and die as one of us, to reconcile us to you, the God and Father of all. Send your Holy Spirit into our hearts that we might love you, O God, above all else and our neighbors as ourselves. We ask this through the merits of Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you, the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever. Amen.
Lesson 3:

Formal & Informal Dialogue

Teacher's Preview

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is for all participants to become familiar with the distinction between formal and informal dialogue, in order to encourage informal dialogue throughout this study.

Preparation
- Read through the lesson guide.
- Print a few extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for anyone who forgets to bring their copy from the previous session.
- Look for any additional resources from your denomination on formal dialogues that your denomination has participated in. Some dialogues are included in the “Lesson 3 Resources” section below, or you can check with your denominational staff, or check: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/

Materials Needed
- Extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” and the Nostra Aetate Wikipedia article
- Opening Litany from Lesson 1 or an alternate opening prayer
- Copies of resources from your denomination on formal dialogues, or one of the example resources below
- A large poster board, or poster paper on an easel (Keep for Lesson 4.)
- Poster marker(s)

Lesson 3 Resources:
Examples of Formal Dialogues:
Formula of Agreement (ELCA, PCUSA, UCC, RCA):
http://oga.pcusa.org/section/mid-council-ministries/ministers/orderly-exchange-formula-partner-churches/
WITH THE CLASS

Opening Litany or Prayer
You may use the litany and prayer provided in Lesson 1 or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

Welcome
Welcome everyone to the study. Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” As a review of the previous lesson, re-read the “Biblical and Theological Foundations: Loving of God and Love of Neighbor” section of “Loving Our Neighbors.” Explain that in this lesson you will continue to unpack this material and look specifically at the difference between formal and informal dialogue.

Understanding Formal and Informal Dialogue
The last paragraph in the section read today alerted us to the fact that there are two kinds of dialogue: formal and informal.

Formal dialogue refers to dialogue that is organized on an official level between official representatives of the religious traditions involved. Over the past 50 years, many Christian churches have invested resources and energy into formal bilateral and multilateral dialogues in the hope of realizing “full communion.” While much more work remains to be done, the ecumenical achievements of those dialogues are considerable: many churches have overcome long existing stereotypes of one another, others have made major breakthroughs on matters of doctrine and Eucharistic sharing, and still others have actually entered into full communion agreements, including the interchangeability of ministries. In more recent years, many churches have also begun formal dialogues with other Religious Traditions, not only to get to know and understand one another better as neighbors, but to find ways to be a constructive presence in society on a local and global scale.

Informal dialogue refers to dialogue that happens in the context of our daily activity. It might be planned, as when a parish or congregation sponsors an event with members of another faith tradition, or it might be quite spontaneous, as when we serendipitously encounter people from other faith traditions. While both kinds of dialogue are important, the primary focus of “Loving Our Neighbor” is to support informal dialogue. For resources on formal dialogues your denomination is currently involved in, contact the national offices of your denomination.

Reflection activity:
Get a large poster board and draw a line down the middle. Write formal and informal at the top on either side of the middle line. Ask the group to think for a few moments on the following questions, and write responses on the “formal” side of the sheet:
- What do you know about your denomination’s “formal” dialogue with other religious traditions?
- Who would you expect to be involved?
- What topics are (or might be) covered?
- What might come out of this type of dialogue?

Next, switch to the “informal” side of the sheet. Ask the following questions and record responses:
- Have you ever had an encounter with an individual or group from another faith tradition (whether planned or spontaneous), that might be described as “informal” dialogue?
• Who was involved?
• What topics were discussed?
• Did anything further come from the encounter?

(Keep the poster board for Lesson 4.)

If you know of any formal dialogues your denomination is involved in (or has published) that you would like to address, this would be a good time to do so.

Discussion of Informal Dialogue

While studying of formal dialogues is helpful, it is not what is required in a congregation. We are interested in informal dialogue. Have the group read the first two paragraphs of the “Dialogical Virtues” section in “Loving our Neighbor.” These opening paragraphs of the section on “Dialogical Virtues” speak about both the difficulty and the purpose of respectful informal dialogue. First, concerning the difficulty in establishing respectful dialogue, the document describes the need for “creating space” for dialogue, meaning: the opportunity for dialogue does not often happen by accident but requires some intentionality on our part. Second, concerning the purpose of respectful dialogue, the document focuses on one thing: “greater understanding of the faith of our neighbor.” As noted in the previous section, to understand another person does not necessarily mean to agree with them, but it does mean that you have so place yourself in the shoes of the other and that you can understand where they are coming from.

Reflection questions for group discussion:
• How might you “create space” for respectful dialogue in the community where you live, worship, work, recreate? What kind of resources would help?
• Even if you do not have people of other faith traditions in your community, might there, nevertheless, be places and circumstances to engage in respectful conversation about them? What kind of “place” might that be?
• Can you identify ways your present understanding of other religious traditions might benefit from hearing from them?
• Are there terms or concepts they use that you would like to ask about or understand better?

Closing

Thank everyone for coming. Look back at the large poster board highlighting the differences between formal and informal dialogue. Encourage everyone to think of one way/space to engage in informal dialogue before your next session. Have everyone pray and reflect on creating that space as part of their preparation for the next session when you will be discussing the tools that are needed for respectful informal dialogue.

If you have not already lined up a speaker or visit activity for Lesson 5, this would be a good point for the group to reflect on what type of conversation or interaction they would like to do. Even if you have already identified your speaker/activity, you can use the reflections on informal dialogue in this session to refine some questions or clarify part of the activity.

Close with a prayer that lifts up the opportunities for the engagements you have in your community. Also pray for those involved in any formal dialogues that you highlighted in today’s lesson.
Dialogical Virtues

TEACHER’S PREVIEW

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is for all participants to become familiar with the dialogical virtues highlighted in “Loving Our Neighbors” and practice at least one of the virtues in conversation.

Preparation
- Read through the lesson guide, pay particular attention to the various exercises suggested and the amount of time you have. Decide which virtue(s) you will focus on, and which exercises you will use. This lesson can be expanded into two sessions if you have time and would like to give more time to the exercises.
- If you will use the Prophetic Witness exercise, make handouts with the two quotes provided (one for each group of 3-4 participants).
- Print a few extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for anyone who forgets to bring their copy from the previous session.

Materials Needed
- Extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors”
- Opening Litany from Lesson 1 or an alternate opening prayer
- Handouts with “Prophetic Witness” quotes (if using)

Lesson 4 Resources:
There are no additional resource links for this lesson.
WITH THE CLASS

Opening Litany or Prayer
You may use the litany and prayer provided in Lesson 1 or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

Welcome
Welcome everyone to the study. Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Briefly review the previous lesson and the distinction between formal and informal dialogue. (If you still have it available, pull out the large poster board from Lesson 3 to look at that again.) Then read the “Dialogical Virtues” section of “Loving Our Neighbor.”

Dialogical Virtue 1: Humble Listening
The second paragraph of “Dialogical Virtues” identified three dialogical virtues that are essential to respectful dialogue. Remembering that a “virtue” is considered a “personal strength,” the document suggests that the first dialogical virtue is “humble listening.” The personal strength that humble listening calls forth is twofold. First, it calls for the ability “to set aside previous misconceptions or prejudices” that can interfere with “listening attentively” to what the other person is saying. Nothing interferes with attentive listening more than preconceived notions and objections that arise in our minds before we have listened completely to what the other is saying. Second, humble listening means that we recognize the limitations of our knowledge, not only about the other person with whom we are speaking, but also the topics about which we speak, including God. Listening is the act of being fully in the presence of another, quieting the inner places of one’s own agendas, resentments, pre-conceived notions, and biases; it is being silent in the presence of the other, suppressing the urge to tell your own story or disagree, speaking only when wanting to know more about what the other is saying as in stating, “Please tell me more about...”, or “help me to understand what you said when...”

Divide into groups of three or four and reflect briefly on the virtue of Humble Listening:
• Can you think of a time when your “previous misconceptions or prejudices” clouded your understanding about someone or something?
• Can you identify a time in history when you think previous misconceptions and prejudices clouded our society? What do you think happened that those misconceptions or prejudices were eventually able to be “set aside”?

Exercise in Humble Listening
In this exercise everyone gets an opportunity to listen and to be listened to. Have the whole group reflect in silence for a minute on a time they felt like a stranger or out of place. Then everyone should divide into partners and select one person as “A” and the other as “B”. One person must listen to their partner’s story without interrupting or asking questions. Person “A” gets to talk for two minutes. Then, reverse roles so that person “B” has the opportunity to share for two minutes without interruption.

Reflection questions for group discussion:
• Was it hard to be silent and listen?
• Did you want to interrupt? Would your interruption be a question for more explanation, or to comment on something similar you experienced?
• How did you find speaking without interruption?
**Dialogical Virtue 2: Prophetic Witness**

The document describes the second dialogical virtue as “prophetic witness.” Dialogue is always a two-way street. Not only are we to listen attentively to the other, but we are also called to “share our understanding of the truth;” that’s the significance of the word “witness.” And, for Christians, to share the truth is “to share our own experience of God and the hope we know through Christ;” that is the significance of the word “prophetic.” Still, “two cautions” are in order. The first has to do with a distinction between “conversion” and “witness.” Because the purpose of dialogue is mutual understanding, its goal is not “to convert” the other to our side, but “to witness” to our convictions in a way that is understandable to the other. Therefore, respectful dialogue is not a negotiation but a friendly exchange. The second caution has to do with the distinction between formal and informal dialogue. In informal dialogue, we must remember that “we are not necessarily called to speak for our full tradition, denomination, or even congregation, but only for ourselves.” In that regard it is also very important to be clear about our limited knowledge of our own tradition. In respectful dialogue, not only is there nothing wrong with acknowledging your limited understanding of your own tradition, but you owe it to your dialogue partner to do so. Indeed, part of the value of respectful dialogue between different traditions is that it invites us to think about our own tradition in new ways and from alternative points of view that may take time to wrap our heads around.

In groups of three or four, reflect on the meaning of Prophetic Witness:

- How comfortable are you in sharing your faith?
- What factors in your background contribute to your comfort level in sharing your faith? What factors in your background contribute to your discomfort level in sharing your faith?
- What experiences and educational opportunities have impacted your understanding of your faith and faith tradition the most?
- Can you identify faith questions or concerns that you would like to learn more about, either from your Church or from dialogue with people of other religions?

**Exercise in Prophetic Witness**

Prophetic Witness is identifying who among us, because of their faith or religious background, are marginalized, excluded, even subjected to hostility or worse, but then being willing to put our own faith on the line in moving beyond talking about the problem to doing something about it by seeing them as neighbor, by serving as their advocate, and by standing with them in adversity.

In groups of three to four, share the quotes below and then identify together a list of situations in your community that are in need of Prophetic Witness.

*Quote from Walter Brueggeman, in The Prophetic Imagination*

“Prophetic witness [is] to nurture, nourish, and evoke a consciousness and perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us. Thus I suggest that prophetic ministry has to do not primarily with addressing specific public crises but with addressing, in season and out of season, the dominant crisis that is enduring and resilient, of having our alternative vocation co-opted and domesticated.”

*Quote from Urban T. Holmes III, in What is Anglicanism?*

“There is no doubt that the biblical concept of the Kingdom calls for a ministry to the suffering, the imprisoned, the oppressed, the hungry and whomever is dehumanized by an unjust society. In abstract, almost all of us can affirm this with enthusiasm. When it is the vocation, however, of one
of our number to make this Gospel imperative, a matter demanding and requiring us to change our comfortable ways, then many of us fall away. The prophet has never been popular among his other contemporaries. He has been stoned, beheaded, crucified and shot. If not killed, we have been all too ready to vilify him or her in the name of God, little realizing that it may well be God who sent the prophet to challenge our complacency.”

**Dialogical Virtue 3: Compassionate Collaboration**

The dictionary defines “compassion” as a feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering. “Collaboration” is the experience of finding and gathering with others who have mutual perceptions of their needs, who are willing to implement strategies that lead to understanding, acceptance, and support for the marginalized, the excluded, and those whose rights and dignity have been trampled upon because of their religion and/or faith.

The document “Loving Our Neighbors” identifies the third dialogical virtue as “compassionate collaboration.” This virtue tells us that understanding is not only the result of thought (the coming together of minds) but also of action (the living together in community). The word “compassion” means “to suffer with” or to “feel for” another; the word “collaborate” means “to work together.” Put together they mean that dialogue partners will work together to alleviate suffering in the world. The idea of compassionate collaboration assumes that dialogue partners share a common concern to “respond to suffering in the world.” Although the document does not say this explicitly, this virtue refers to more than collaborative efforts on the part of dialogue partners with regard to third parties who are suffering. It means that when one party in the dialogue suffers, the others will work with them to alleviate that suffering. In essence, this is what “loving our neighbor” is all about.

In groups of three or four, reflect on the meaning of Compassionate Collaboration:
Identify ways in which you and/or your faith community exercises the dialogical virtue of compassionate collaboration. Identify the various spheres of community life (political, economic, religious, educational, etc.) where these examples in compassionate collaboration touch.

- What are some of the religious, social and cultural factors and attitudes that may inhibit compassionate collaboration?
- What are some of the religious, social and cultural factors and attitudes that might encourage compassionate collaboration? Do you think those factors and attitudes should be discussed in interfaith dialogue? Why or why not?

**Closing**

Thank everyone for coming. Encourage everyone to continue to work on practicing the skills of the three dialogical virtues as they go out into the world. Highlight that the next session will involve a speaker or other special presentation/location (whatever you have identified). Encourage participants to bring friends for the presentation. You may also encourage participants to prepare questions for a speaker, keeping the dialogical virtues in mind.

Close with a prayer that lifts up the skills discussed and practiced today.
 Invite a Speaker

TEACHER’S PREVIEW

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is for all participants to participate in interfaith dialogue or interaction.

Preparation
• You will need to figure out what you are doing for this lesson as early in the process of this course as possible (hopefully, before the first session).
• If you will not be bringing in a speaker, look through the resources below and select a video to show. Or, you can check for additional resources at: http://www.wichurches.org/programs-and-ministries/loving-our-interfaith-neighbors/
• Print a few extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for anyone who forgets to bring their copy from the previous session and for any guests who will be joining you.
• Select an interfaith prayer for the closing (and potentially opening as well). Recommended prayers can be found at: http://www.worldprayers.org/

Materials Needed
• Extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors”
• Opening Litany from Lesson 1 or an alternate opening prayer
• Any AV equipment needed to show video (if using)
• Print outs of interfaith prayers (if using)

Lesson 5 Resources:
Suggested videos if a speaker is not available:
• 1-hour British television video, “Interfaith Dialogue” with a panel that includes Christian, Jewish, Buddhist, Muslim and Atheist perspectives. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0_IQ2XjWtC0
• Entertaining 11-minute TED talk: Three Amigos and Breaking the Taboos of Interfaith Dialogue: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tPnZArtsG_c&list=PLJOYQ8_6xnpM_mrtk1xcOlwGTRU5h1pWt&index=2
• “30 Good Minutes” video with Eboo Patel (Muslim) and Skye Jethani (Christian) on Interfaith Dialogue. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jiatHzkKymw&index=17&list=PLJOYQ8_6xnpM_mrtk1xcOlwGTRU5h1pWt
• 5-minute video: “An Interfaith Dialogue with Students at American University” https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5jAolpdGjwc

Interfaith prayer resource: http://www.worldprayers.org/
WITH THE CLASS

Opening Litany or Prayer
You may use the litany and prayer provided in Lesson 1 or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

Welcome
Welcome everyone to the study. Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Briefly review the previous lesson on the dialogical virtues. This lesson will provide an opportunity to practice them with our interfaith neighbors. Introduce your speaker or other form of special presentation.

There are several options for this lesson:

OPTION 1: Invite a speaker
Identify the other faith traditions in your community.
- Invite either an identified/ordained religious leader (such as a Rabbi or Imam) or a lay leader to come to your class as a guest speaker. Ask that individual to share briefly about their religious tradition, which might include:
  - What is the story of their personal faith journey?
  - What are the major beliefs or doctrines? What distinguishes them from other faith communities?
  - How do participants in this tradition “practice” their beliefs?
  - What do they want Christians to know about their tradition?
- In advance of this session, ask class participants to prepare questions for the speaker based on the dialogical virtues.

Think about whom else to invite within your congregation to share in this dialogue. The youth group? Your church board or council? The women’s association?

Structure the session to leave plenty of time for questions and discussion. As class facilitator, you should be prepared to ask the first question of the speaker in order to model the kind of dialogue you envision for this session.

OPTION 2: Invite a panel of speakers
If there are multiple faith traditions in your community, consider finding several speakers to be a part of a panel discussion.
- Give the speakers several structured questions to address. You can use a list similar to that in the “Option 1: Invite a Speaker” section above.
- Encourage the panelists to be in conversation with each other as well as with class participants during the session.
- If you decide to host a panel discussion, consider offering this opportunity to the entire congregation at a time which will maximize participation.
OPTION 3: Visit another faith community
One important way to deepen our understanding of other religious traditions is to visit with them “on their own turf.” Consider organizing a fieldtrip to interact with another community.
- The visit might include a worship opportunity, or another appropriate gathering of that community, as well as a chance for structured dialogue, utilizing subjects such as those listed in the “Option 1: Invite a Speaker” section above.
- Invite your whole congregation to participate, and ask if others from the hosting faith community will be present too.

OPTION 4: Watch and Discuss a Video
If there are no other faith communities present in your local area, consider watching a video about interfaith dialogue. Be ready for follow-up discussion and questions among your participants if using one of the shorter videos. Check the “Lesson 5: Resources” section above for a selection of possible videos.

Closing
Thank everyone for coming. Particularly thank any speakers, panelists, or other guests. Highlight that the next session will be the final one. The focus in the final lesson will be on what you want to do next in your congregation and/or community. Encourage everyone to be thinking and praying about this in the meantime. You may want to invite your guests or give your email address to them if they wish to send in their own suggestions for future steps.

Close with a prayer that lifts up the variety of voices heard in class this day. See the “Lesson 5 Resources” section if you need help locating a prayer for an interfaith context.
Action Planning

TEACHER’S PREVIEW

Lesson Goal
The goal of this lesson is to encourage the participants, by reflecting on how your congregation can move forward in interfaith engagement.

Preparation
- Read through the lesson guide.
- Print a few extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors” for anyone who forgets to bring their copy from the previous session.

Materials Needed
- Extra copies of “Loving Our Neighbors”
- Opening Litany from Lesson 1 or an alternate opening prayer
- Sticky Notes (2 different colors)
- Pens
- Sheets of paper attached to the wall—one labeled “short term” and one labeled “long term” (or you can just put sticky notes straight on the walls and tell your participants which wall is for long term and which wall is for short term)
- Foil star stickers

Lesson 6 Resources:
There are no additional resource links for this lesson.
WITH THE CLASS

Opening Litany or Prayer
You may use the litany and prayer provided in Lesson 1 or select another appropriate litany/prayer from your own tradition.

Welcome
Welcome everyone to the study. Make sure everyone has a copy of “Loving Our Neighbor.” Briefly review the previous five lessons. Highlight that this lesson will be the final one, but that our focus is on how we will carry this work forward from here.

Discussion and Reflection on the Series
Divide into small groups (or stay in large group depending on your class size) and reflect on the series as a whole.

Reflection questions for group discussion:
• What surprised you about this study? What surprised you about the guest speaker(s)?
• What was something you heard before, but came to understand with more clarity?
• What was challenging for you?
• What was affirming for you?
• What do you want to know more about? How will you investigate this inquiry further?

Invitation to Action
Read the “Invitation to Action” from the “Love Our Neighbors” statement. You may want to circle around the room and have a different person read each invitation.

Take a moment for silent reflection. Have one person read the Great Commandment from Matthew 22: 34-40:

34When the Pharisees heard that he had silenced the Sadducees, they gathered together, 35and one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36“Teacher, which commandment in the law is the greatest?” 37He said to him, “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind.’ 38This is the greatest and first commandment. 39And a second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’ 40On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets.”

Take another moment for silent reflection. Invite the Holy Spirit to be part of the group as you reflect on where God is calling you to go from here.

Pass out a few sticky notes of the same color to the whole group. Invite the group to take a few minutes and think of what they would like your congregation or group to do in the next year (“short term”) to show more love for our neighbors. Give some quiet reflection time for everyone (2-3 minutes). Collect the sticky notes.
Next, pass out sticky notes of another color to everyone. Invite the group to take a few minutes and think of what they would like your congregation or group to do in the next 1-5 years (“long term”) to show more love for our neighbors. Give more quiet reflection time for everyone (2-3 minutes). Collect the sticky notes.

Put the sticky notes up (divided by color) on different walls or sheets of paper. Allow the group to get up and move about to read the ideas of their fellow participants. Encourage people to move sticky notes that say generally the same thing together, so the similar ideas are grouped. When everyone has had time to look around, call the group to attention (keep this to about 3-4 minutes).

Give everyone two foil star stickers and ask them to put one on their favorite “short term” goal (or group of similar “short term” goals) on one star on their favorite “long term” goal (or group of “long term” goals). Encourage people to go with a quick decision.

Gather the group back together and pull the most heavily star-covered ideas from the “short term” wall. Read the top 3 or 4. Then pull the mostly heavily star-covered ideas from the “long term” wall and read the top 3 or 4 of those.

Lead the group in a discussion about what to do next. Discuss:
- What are you most excited about? Why?
- Is there a short or long term goal that scares you? Why?
- Are there any short term goals that might grow into the long term goals?

**Action Plan**

After this discussion, have the group select at least one short and one long term goal that they will commit to working on going forward. Consensus through discussion would be the best method. You can also go with a hand vote.

Assign at least two people (or a committee) who will be sure to follow up on this commitment.

**Closing**

Conclude by thanking everyone for their participation. For a closing prayer, invite participants to lift up their prayers of thanksgiving for the experience of this study series. Then, have participants lift up their prayers for moving forward. Conclude by giving thanks for our neighbors and the opportunity to gather for study and conversation. Ask for God’s blessing on this group as you end your time together.
Additional Resources

This listing is intended as a source for further reading to understand a variety of perspectives on Interfaith engagement.

ROUTE TO:

- Pastor
- Christian Education Committee
- Youth Group Leaders

LOVING OUR INTERFAITH NEIGHBORS

A Study-Action Guide for Wisconsin Congregations