



United Religions Initiative

Interfaith Home Gatherings

A Practical Guide

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BACKGROUND

Since 1996, the United Religions Initiative has been promoting enduring daily cooperation among people of different religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions. Thousands of people from every continent are being drawn to this exhilarating vision - that people from different backgrounds and faith beliefs - can work together to stop religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing.

The URI is a locally rooted and globally connected organization. It calls forth people, as Mahatma Gandhi said, "to be the change they want to see in the world." URI calls people to use their creativity and resourcefulness to promote interfaith cooperation, peacebuilding and respect wherever they are.

This guide offers information about how to encourage people to join this vision by inviting them to an Interfaith Home Gathering. (A person's home provides a lovely context of hospitality but Interfaith Home Gatherings can take place just about anywhere.)

PURPOSES OF A URI INTERFAITH HOME GATHERING:

- o To engage people in sharing the vision of the URI in a way that draws upon their own sense of meaning, creativity and commitment.
- o To enjoy getting to know people better from a variety of backgrounds.
- o To invite people to consider joining an expanding community of people from around the world who are committed to making their vision for inter-religious peacemaking and cooperation real.

VARIOUS OUTCOMES OF AN INTERFAITH HOME GATHERING:

People may want just to affirm their commitment to this vision - to reach out to people of different faith backgrounds with respect and acceptance.

People may want to meet again in an informal way to continue getting to know one another better.

People may want to form a URI Cooperation Circle. URI Cooperation Circles are interfaith groups of people who are committed to the URI purpose and want to pursue it in their own unique ways. Pre-existing associations and organizations can also be Cooperation Circles.

HOW TO HOST AN INTERFAITH HOME GATHERING:

- o Invite 8-12 people from different religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds. Ideally, you might invite some people who know about the URI already or who have experience with interfaith activity and others who are hearing about interfaith work for the first time.
- o Become familiar with the Guidelines contained in this packet.
- o If you would like assistance in hosting a gathering, please call the URI office. In addition to the San Francisco office, there are active URI Cooperation Circles in many parts of the world. Contact URI San Francisco office to locate people near you who could help. 1-415-561-2300.

TO PREPARE:

1. Send out letter of invitation (see sample letter).
2. You might prepare simple refreshment - tea, coffee, fruit, cookies
3. Allow three hours for the Interfaith Home Gathering.
4. Write an agenda for the session and place it in view (see sample agenda)
5. Prepare material for people to take as they leave.
6. People will gather in one group and then be asked to split into pairs for interviews. Make sure you have space for people to gather in a circle and also ample space for one to one conversations.

APPRECIATIVE INTERVIEW SET UP

Hand out "Listen to Another- Appreciative Inquiry Questions" sheet to every person.

Invite people to find a partner, preferably someone they do not know very well. When everyone has a partner invite people to find a comfortable place to sit to listen well and take some notes. Take twenty minutes for each interview. When one interview is complete, take twenty minutes for the second interview. When it is your turn to interview read each question aloud to your partner. The notes will help you share highlights of your conversation later. Thank your partner for the interview.

SAMPLE AGENDA:

1. Welcome
 - Purpose for this gathering
 - Brief description of the United Religions Initiative
2. Centering Meditation
3. Brief Self Introductions
4. Appreciative Inquiry
5. Introductions after Inquiry
6. Next Step Discussion - What Can I Do?
7. Closing

MODEL LETTER OF INVITATION

You are invited to a URI Interfaith Home Gathering. You will join a small group of people to imagine a world where people of different faith backgrounds work together for peace, justice and the good of all. I believe that the place to begin building a better world of interfaith cooperation and respect is in our own backyards, in our own living rooms, in our own communities.

This Interfaith Home Gathering will include conversation with people from different faith backgrounds and will explore how people can be the change they want to see in the world.

The United Religions Initiative is a locally rooted and globally connected organization that is dedicated to promoting daily and enduring interfaith cooperation. The URI welcomes young people, elders, men, women, people from all vocations, economic backgrounds, and from all religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions to create a more peaceful world. The URI is not a religion but provides a global community which calls forth people to respect one another and to work together for a better world.

The Interfaith Home Gathering includes centering meditation, listening to one another in conversation, and considering what next steps we might wish to take.

I very much hope you can join us.

Sincerely,

Please come to:

NAME:

ADDRESS:

DATE:

TIME:

DIRECTIONS:



DIRECTIONS FOR INTERFAITH HOME GATHERING

- 5 Minutes WELCOME
Acknowledge guests for taking the time to attend.
Offer a brief history and vision of URI (refer to URI brochure or website www.uri.org for information).
- 5 Minutes CENTERING MEDITATION
Introduce the idea of silence as a time to slow down and become present. Invite people to relax and share this time of centering meditation. You might offer a prayer, a reflection or simply use a bell to signal the open and close of this centering meditation time.
(Using words or prayers from a specific religious tradition is fine but remember to preface your words by saying something like, "I would like to open this meditation time with a prayer from my own faith tradition.")
- 15 Minutes CALL FOR BRIEF SELF-INTRODUCTIONS
Ask participants to introduce themselves - name, faith tradition, what drew them to be here. They will have time for more detailed introductions later.
- 5 Minutes INTRODUCE THE APPRECIATIVE INTERVIEW PROCESS
One way to help people engage with one another and share their feelings and thoughts about experiences with people from different faith backgrounds is to engage people in a process called appreciative inquiry. Appreciative Inquiry gives people a natural and comfortable context for interfaith conversation and offers an opportunity for people to listen to each other and to discover the special experiences, values, perspectives each bring. Appreciative Inquiry involves pairs of people each interviewing one another. *(See Appreciative Interview Set up for directions)*
- 40 Minutes INTERVIEWS, 20 minutes each.
- 30 minutes INTRODUCE PARTNER TO GROUP
Return to circle and have each person introduce his or her partner, sharing one highlight of the interview.
- 30 Minutes INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE
Acknowledge the gift of listening and being listened to. This conversation of the heart often leads to new openings and possibilities. How was this experience? What did we learn? What common themes did we hear? The group might be left with a question. What's next? Where do we go from here? What can I do?
- Invite group to consider the possibility of meeting a second time. Is there interest in meeting again? Is there interest in forming a group that would initiate on-going activities to lift up opportunities for cooperation and peacebuilding among people of different faith backgrounds?
- 5 Minutes CLOSING
Thank everyone for coming.
Go around the circle and ask each person to offer one idea or impression that they will take with them from this experience.

LISTEN TO ANOTHER

Appreciative Inquiry Questions

The gifts needed to create a better world are within us and are within the group assembled here. The purpose of this activity is to welcome and appreciate each other and to discover the special experiences, stories, and values we bring to the unprecedented vision of people from different religions and spiritual traditions living with respect for one another and working together for the good of all.

Engage your partner in the following interview questions. Listen with appreciation.

1. Please tell me your name and why you decided to come here today. What in the URI vision supports something that is important to you?

2. We live in a time of remarkable change, a time when people of diverse backgrounds are often our neighbors. As the world shrinks, most of us experience more and more encounters with people from other backgrounds, spiritual traditions and religions. Would you share a story of an interfaith encounter that was especially meaningful to you? An encounter when you were surprised or humbled? Where there was a genuine experience of respect and friendship?

3. We have all been part of efforts where we have joined with others and brought our dreams of a better world into being. Reflect on a high point in your life experience - a time when you were involved in something meaningful, when visions of a better world were actually brought into being? Please tell me a story about this experience.

4. Imagine people in your community doing things that bring the URI vision to life. Imagine it is ten years from now and significant positive changes have happened. What do you see? What is different? How has interfaith cooperation been instrumental in this change? What part do you see yourself playing?





FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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