



Touchstones Project

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Pluralism

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

Horace Kallen, who had emigrated from Germany to the U.S. as a child in 1887, began using *cultural pluralism* in 1906. Due to increasing numbers of immigrants to America and Canada from 1900 to 1914, assimilation, known as the *Americanization Movement* or, in Canada, *Anglo-Conformity*, was gaining influence. Resisting assimilation, Kallen advocated for immigrants to maintain their ethnic traditions for generations. At the time, both countries restricted immigration from “undesirable” countries.

Erika Sunada writes that Kallen’s cultural pluralism “promoted equality among different cultural groups, ... assumed every culture was equally val-

uable, and [asserted] the difference had to be respected.” He believed it “was indispensable to ... a truly democratic society.” Pluralism meant “toleration of diversity within a society or state.”

In our tradition, religious tolerance was a founding principle. On January 28, 1568, King John Sigismund Zápolya of Transylvania decreed the *Edict of Torda* at the request of his court preacher Ferenc Dávid, the founder of Unitarianism. By 16th century standards, this short-lived moment of religious tolerance was remarkable, one that no country would match for another 100 years.

Increasing immigration and diversity in Canada and the U.S. made tolerance critical, yet forced assimilation was inherently intolerant. Notably, immigration patterns in the U.S. shaped regional responses to tolerance. While the North needed immigrants to fuel economic growth, the South relied on slavery. Even after the Civil War, the South resisted immigration, resulting in low ethnic diversity: Jim Crow laws and this

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Different, Same, Different

Diya lived in a small town with her parents and grandparents. She was 8 years old and loved to explore. Diya’s grandparents were from India, and sometimes Diya found it hard to fit in. Diya was playing in the park one day when she saw a new girl. Both girls had long, jet-black hair, but the new girl had braids. Diya said, “Hi. I’m Diya.” The girl smiled and replied, “Ayita. Nice to meet you.” Ayita had just moved to town from a nearby reservation where her grandparents still lived. Diya had so many questions to ask because their backgrounds were so different. Sometimes, they misunderstood each other, yet they each had much to teach and learn.

Diya invited Ayita over for dinner. Diya’s mother had made delicious Indian food. There were potato-filled dough pockets called Samosas, Dal Soup made from lentils, and chicken in a curry sauce. Ayita thought the food was spicy, but she still



enjoyed it. Before dinner, Diya showed Ayita how to make a beautiful mandala on the driveway in front of her house using colored chalk.

Ayita, in return, invited Diya to have an overnight at her grandparent’s home on the reservation. Diya’s grandmother made a wonderful dinner using the *Three Sisters*. Diya loved the food, especially the fry bread. It reminded her of the Naan her

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Pluralism & the Common Good

Because the Common, the public space where we gather, is defined by diversity, we are wise to find ways to live together. Tolerance helps, but it is insufficient. The approach that offers the most promise is pluralism. It is a committed engagement using dialogue to bring our ideas, beliefs, and more into conversation with others who may be quite different from us. The objective is not agreement. It is understanding. This happens through dialogue, but dialogue also creates relationships. Both of these are critical to the common good. Eboo Patel writes, “Religious pluralism ... is the belief that the common good is best served when each community has a chance to make its unique contribution.”

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**
grandmother made.

Diya's grandmother brought out materials the next morning so the girls could make dreamcatchers. Later, her grandmother had the girls help weed the garden, especially around the *Three Sisters*, where corn stalks were the trellis for the bean plants and big squash leaves curled around them on the ground.

The girls learned a lot from each other about their different backgrounds and families. They realized they were both struggling to fit in at school because they were different from the other kids in their class. Sometimes, that made them sad, but as they came to understand, respect, and support each other, the opinions of the others mattered less and less.

Their differences were no longer barriers but gifts that they shared. Diya and Ayita's friendship grew stronger each day. They learned you can always find common ground no matter where you come from. They showed that diversity is a fact, inclusion is valuable, and friendship and love can overcome obstacles.

Diya and Ayita taught each other valuable lessons about acceptance and kindness. They showed the children in their class at school that different backgrounds and cultures can come together to create something beautiful and meaningful.

They thought it was funny that other kids called them both Indian. *Same*. But their heritages were so unique. *Different*. Yet their friendship also helped them learn all of the ways that they were similar. *Same*. That was when they decided to start a club called *Same, Different, Same*. Slowly, other kids with open hearts and minds became their friends and joined the club.

Diya, Ayita, and their new friends, cherished their differences and similarities. They became ambassadors of kindness, spreading love and understanding everywhere they went in their small

2 town.

Source: Touchstones

Dialogue: Weaving Meaning

Dialogue is fundamental to pluralism but challenging. William Isaacs, author of *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*, explains why. Conversation, from *converser* meaning *to turn together*, is a step toward right relationship. When we discuss, we hear, then *deliberate*, i.e., *weigh out* the others' words. We often defend our position, i.e., *to ward off or protect from attack* using a *controlled discussion*, which Isaacs calls *unproductive defensiveness*. This is driven by emotion. It combines advocacy with abstract verbal brawling. It may become debate, which means *to beat down*. The aim is to win, to be right rather than being in right relationship. Isaacs writes, "We stand in a stagnated pond of our own predispositions and certainties and blindly defend what we have as necessary and unalterable." Not listening or thinking is lethal.

A better alternative is *skillful discussion*, which Isaacs calls *productive defensiveness*. Reason and facts are used to defend a position, which may lead to a dialectic. Though it pits one idea against another, it makes space for something new to emerge. While winning is still the goal, new learning can occur.

Isaacs advocates dialogue over discussion. Rather than defending, dialogue requires suspending. For Isaacs, dialogue means, "To listen respectfully to others, to cultivate and speak your own voice, to suspend [i.e., not defend] your opinions about others—these bring out the intelligence that lives at the very center of ourselves—the intelligence that exists when we're alert to possibilities around us and thinking freshly." Michael Jones calls this the "intelligence of the heart."

Suspending puts certainty aside to *access our ignorance* like the Buddhist concept of *not-knowing* or *beginner's mind*. We enter a dialogue by temporarily emptying ourselves of positions, assumptions, prejudices, judgments, etc. Suspending listening without resistance, to let what is said to come inside.

Dialogue is valuable, writes Isaacs, because it "provides a means by which we can learn to maintain equilibrium. It lets us reconnect and revitalize our emotional capacity because it compels us

to suspend our habitual reactions and frozen thoughts. It requires that we include and take into account opinions [and beliefs] different from our own. Dialogue requires that we take responsibility for thinking, not merely reacting, lifting us into a more conscious state." Because of these, dialogue can take the shape of a spiritual practice.



Dialogue occurs in a container that ideally involves the following.

An open and inclusive space that encourages a diversity of perspectives and the comfort of expressing one's thoughts and opinions

Suspending Assumptions to invite new insights and ideas to emerge.

Listening that is active, empathetic, and without judgment.

Trust that grows over time and encourages participants to express their opinions without fear of criticism.

Shared Purpose, which, at a minimum, results in mutual understanding

Respect is necessary to engage others as equals.

Sustained Attention to ensure that individuals stay present in the moment, fully engaged in the dialogue

Exploring Tensions constructively as they arise to promote new insights.

Inquiry, which is the art of asking open-ended questions that deepen awareness and broaden the dialogue.

In addition to the container, the participants experience a relational atmosphere that Isaacs calls a field. This field has a specific "quality of energy and exchange." Dialogue is a dynamic process that, says Isaacs, has four stages.

I. Politeness in the Container: In this first field, participants tend to be guarded due to fear. The starting point is politeness, which eventually becomes frustration. Because *they can't make dialogue happen*, participants arrive at a critical turning point where writes Isaacs, "one must quickly empty oneself of expecta-

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Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: “Pluralism isn’t just diversity; it’s something we create out of this diversity.” Diana L. Eck

Day 2: “Respect, I think, always implies imagination—the ability to see one another, across our inevitable differences, as living souls.” Wendell Berry

Day 3: “Pluralism matters because life is not worth living without new experiences, new people, new places, new challenges.” Tim Harford

Day 4: “I like the pluralism of modernity; it doesn’t threaten me or my faith. And if one’s faith is dependent on being reinforced in every aspect of other people’s lives, then it is a rather insecure faith, don’t you think?” Andrew Sullivan

Day 5: “There should be pluralism—the concept of many religions, many truths. But we must also be careful not to become nihilistic.” Dalai Lama

Day 6: “To see the other side, to defend another people, not despite your tradition but because of it, is the heart of pluralism.” Eboo Patel

Day 7: “Will we ever reach a cultural consensus that will stabilize the shifting sands of pluralism?” R.C. Sproul

Day 8: “Religion is important for humanity, but it should evolve.... The first priority is to establish and develop the principle of pluralism in all religious traditions.” Dalai Lama

Day 9: “It is not a Buddhist approach to say that if everyone practiced Buddhism, the world would be a better place. Wars and oppression begin from this kind of thinking.” Sulak Sivaraksa

Day 10: “I thought about the meaning of pluralism in a world where the forces that seek to divide us are strong. I came to one conclusion: We have to save each other. It’s the only way to save ourselves.” Eboo Patel

Day 11: “Pluralism accepts the moral reality of different kinds of truth, but rejects the idea that they can all be placed on a single scale, measured by a single value.” Timothy Snyder

Day 12: “In badly fractured societies that have lost their appreciation of diversity and their regard for pluralism, opponents will be seen as enemies, politics will become replete with marital metaphors and anyone who thinks and speaks differently will be labeled as a ‘traitor.’” Elif Shafak

Day 13: “Many religious moderates have taken the apparent high road of pluralism, asserting the equal validity of all faiths, but ...they neglect to notice the irredeemably sectarian truth claims of each.” Sam Harris

Day 14: “Tolerance is the price we pay for living in a free, pluralistic society.” Robert Casey

Day 15: “Minorities are always better off in a culture which protects dissent than in a culture which protects us from dissent.” Jonathan Rauch

Day 16: “To respect the opinions of those who stand against you is nothing short of courageous.” Raif Badawi

Day 17: “That Native ...cultures are imperiled is important.... When we lose cultures, we lose ...plurality—the productive and lovely discomfort that true difference brings.” David Treuer

Day 18: “Pluralism is no longer simply an asset or a prerequisite for progress and development; it is vital to our existence.” Aga Khan IV

Day 19: “The desire to control everything is giving way to pluralism, uniformity to diversity, centralization to localism, opacity to transparency, and ...resistance to change to experimentation.” John Micklethwait

Day 20: “Our societies have experienced the magic that occurs when pluralism flourishes and the marginalized assume their proper powers. But loss stalks those victories, as millions revolt against change and supremacies resurface.” Anand Giridharadas

Day 21: “Humility is my table, respect is my garment, empathy is my food and curiosity is my drink.” Tariq Ramadan

Day 22: “In the world that lies ahead, religious pluralism is going to penetrate all

cultures. ...I don’t know whether we can make progress ...without a contemplative practice that alerts us to our own biases, prejudices, and self-centered programs for happiness, especially when they trample on other people....” Thomas Keating



Day 23: “Extremist movements are driven by their inability to tolerate ...pluralism. They refuse to accept the natural cultural and religious diversity of our world, seeking to impose their own beliefs ...as a universal pattern for humanity.” Deeyah Khan

Day 24: “What distinguishes the ‘war on terror’ is that it is a war against a concept, not a nation. And the enemy concept, it seems to me, is pluralism.” Mohsin Hamid

Day 25: “Light and Dark: each was unaware that the other existed.” Ashim Shanker

Day 26: “In the culture of pluralism... the only thing that cannot be tolerated is a claim to exclusivity.” R. C. Sproul

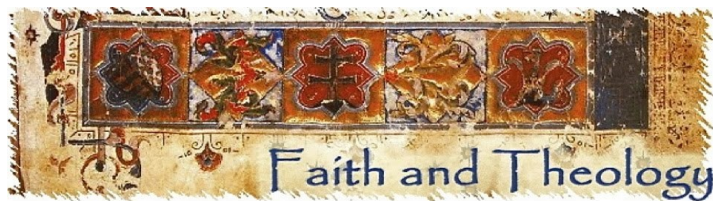
Day 27: “...I hope we are moving toward a time when we don’t just ‘tolerate’ people from different cultures and religions, but ...appreciate ...the ways we are all different, and ...all the same.” Anne Shelby

Day 28: “Pluralism and tolerance are pillars of modern society.” Bassam Tibi

Day 29: “Another way to describe the dilemma for religious faith is that pluralism creates social conditions in which God is no longer an inevitability.” James Davison Hunter

Day 30: “It is an enduring confidence that things can turn out well, if people are ready to practice a politics of compromise and pursue an ethic of pluralism.” Thomas L. Friedman

Day 31: “If pluralism and academic freedom are to be used to defend liberal speakers and ideas, they ought to be equally valid for conservative views.” Bob Beckel



A Theology of Pluralism

The phrase in Matthew 18:20, “where two or three are gathered,” captures the pervasiveness of diversity. Because each of us is unique, we are different from anyone else. However, we soften these differences to belong in one setting or another and gather with those with whom we have similarities, whether like-minded, like-hearted, or both. Diversity involves multiple identities like race, ethnicity, culture, gender identity, sexual orientation, political ideology (see <https://www.pewresearch.org/politics/2021/11/09/beyond-red-vs-blue-the-political-typology-2/>), religious typology (see <https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2018/08/29/the-religious-typology/>), social class, socioeconomic status, age, and many other factors. These identities intersect in many different ways on a power continuum, from privileged to marginalized.

A liberal theology of pluralism values diversity while recognizing the challenges that it presents. Our tradition has promoted “unity in diversity,” but this vision does not articulate what unity requires or must avoid. Critiques of “unity in diversity” include the following.

Tokenism acknowledges unity while ignoring the depth and complexity of identities and experiences.

Identity Marginalization is where people hide parts of their public identity to be included in the unity. This hiding is known as “covering.”

Pressure to Assimilate, in which “unity” means a homogenized identity determined by the dominant culture and mainstream norms.

Stereotyping certain groups reduces them to simplistic or exoticized representations that are acceptable within the scope of unity.

Cultural Appropriation uses representative cultural elements to legitimize unity while erasing cultural identities and traditions represented by those cultural elements.

while excluding others (e.g., excluding transgender people).

Shallow Dialogue ignores the challenges of diversity by

making nice instead of making it real.

Power Imbalances that privilege the few and marginalize the many.

Political Manipulation masks underlying social, economic, and political issues that would undermine the sense of unity.

Hidden Exclusivity disguises a dominant paradigm, e.g., Christian Nationalism / White Supremacy. It infuses unity’s cultural and political expressions and presents the dominant culture as normative.

The weight of this critique undermines the appropriateness of unity in diversity; however, the practice of pluralism must recognize and avoid these pitfalls.

Given the above, a theology of pluralism should consider “**wholeness** in diversity” instead of “**unity** in diversity.” Here, diversity is not just about coexistence. Wholeness recognizes the inherent beauty, worth, and dignity that arise from diversity. Not only is the whole greater

than the sum of its parts, but the diversity of the parts enriches the whole.

Instead of tolerance or accommodation, diversity is an essential and integral part of the whole.

Pluralism is understood and practiced in different ways. Krista Tippett, in her book *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living* offers an instructive perspective. She writes, “Tolerance doesn’t welcome. It allows, endures, indulges. In the medical lexicon, it is about the limits of thriving in an unfavorable environment. Tolerance was a baby step to make pluralism possible, and pluralism, like every ism, holds an illusion of control. It doesn’t ask us to care for the stranger. It doesn’t even invite us to know each other, to be curious, to be open, to be moved or surprised by each other.” Her concerns are legitimate. Still, they are

about how we engage pluralism. We can do it badly as the critique of “unity in diversity” above outlines. Avoiding these is critical. We must also attend to the quality of dialogue with others. The article on page 2, *Dialogue: Weaving Meaning*, discusses William Issacs’ dialogue model. His book, *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together* is a classic in the field.

Pluralism is not about control; it is about engagement. It is not about control because pluralism does not seek to change the other. While agreement here or there might occur, pluralism does not require agreement. In our theology, pluralism is active and, therefore, demands curiosity. While important, beliefs, positions, faith stances, political ideology, convictions, and more aren’t primary. Relationship comes first. It is crucial to understanding.

Pluralism is analogous to the ancient practice of hospitality because both are adept at welcoming the stranger, the other. The symbol is the same for both: the *Welcome Table*, where family, friends, and strangers can gather in welcome and peace. Like the *Seder* with an empty chair for the prophet Elijah, the harbinger of



redemption, the *Welcome Table* always has an empty chair. And when someone sits in that seat, another chair appears.

Pluralism is notable because it is one of the values selected by the *Article II Study Commission*. It also draws on the other six values. Imagine the *Welcome Table* with the following “place settings.”

Pluralism says, “Because we are in this together, let us make meaning of our togetherness.”

Interdependence is what pluralism is all about. Our connections make pluralism necessary, and our diversity makes pluralism beautiful.

Justice is the work of creating a beloved community that is diverse, multicultural,

The Alchemy of Shared Understanding

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction to Theme** promoted intolerance. In Canada, John Murray Gibbon articulated the idea of a *mosaic* in 1938, but the pieces were White-European inside a British frame.

While the history of immigration in both countries was complex and problematic, changes in the last 50 years have fostered conditions that favor pluralism.

In 1971, Prime Minister Trudeau said multiculturalism was to be government policy given the contribution of cultural diversity to Canada's social fabric. The 1988 *Canadian Multiculturalism Act* strengthened this commitment.

The U.S. *Immigration and Naturalization Act of 1965* significantly increased the number of immigrants who varied by ethnicity, religion, language, and culture. Dramatic increases in diversity led to an embrace of multiculturalism.

In 2021, in the U.S., the number of immigrants totaled 13.6% of the population compared to 4.8% in 1965. Notably, 63% of those immigrants resided in just six states: California, Texas, New York, Florida, New Jersey, and Illinois, with concentrations elsewhere primarily in large cities. In Canada it was 23%.

When the children of immigrants are added, the number increases to 27% in the U.S. and 31.5% in Canada. In 2022, the U.S. admitted nearly one million immigrants, and Canada accepted 437,180.

The U.S. is expected to become "minority white" in 2045, with Canada moving in that direction.

The Canadian experiment in multiculturalism, an actual mosaic, has largely been positive. According to the 2020 General Social Survey, 92.0% of the population 15 and older agreed that ethnic or cultural diversity is a Canadian value.

The following polls reveal a positive, yet ambiguous American experiment.

1. A 2021 Pew poll surveying opinions about the declining number of Americans who identify as White revealed that 61% of respondents saw it as neither good nor bad for society, while 22% saw it as bad.

2. A 2022 Gallup poll showed that 35% of Americans wanted a decrease in

immigration. General attitudes about immigration are influenced by the waves of asylum seekers at the U.S. southern border and differing perspectives toward Dreamers, the children that immigrants brought to the U.S.

3. A 2022 Pew poll asking whether or not America is or should be a Christian nation revealed that 30% of all Christians thought it was, while 62% thought it should be. By contrast, 40% of non-Christians thought it was, while 84% thought it should not be. The context for pluralism in Canada and the U.S. differs significantly, but the need is the same. Opposition to pluralism in Canada appears to be about 8%, while opposition in the U.S. may be more than 30%.

Pluralism is not just a response to the diversity created by immigration and the resulting *xenomisia*, i.e., hatred or an embrace of multiculturalism. It is also a tool to engage oppression, marginalization, and power-over dynamics that also exist in racism, sexism, ageism, ableism, homophobia, classism, etc. (The Greek word *misia* means hatred and replaces "phobia.") We committed to the tasks of multiculturalism in a 1997 GA Resolution. This *Journey to Wholeness* envisioned an anti-oppressive and anti-racist multiculturalism. The intersectionality of oppression is powerful and painful.

Opposition to diversity, multiculturalism, and pluralism lies in different places, including the intersectionality of privilege: white, European ancestry, native-born, heterosexual male (and female), English speaking, Christian nationalist, far-right ideology, and able-bodied. The purpose of this straw man (or woman) is to ask if this constellation of characteristics represents diversity worthy of principled, pluralism-based engagement? The difficult answer is yes. This is con-

gruent with the covenant for pluralism by the UUA's *Article II Study Commission*: *We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities with Love, curiosity, and respect.* While this is our internal covenant within the UUA, it also needs to be our external covenant with the world.

While pluralism is sometimes used as a synonym for diversity, even in a thesaurus, significant distinctions exist between the two terms. Diversity is the fact of multiculturalism, while pluralism honors, protects, and engages diversity. Tolerance is a critical aspect of pluralism,

but tolerance is often an attitude of live and let live. Diana Eck writes, "Tolerance is a necessary public virtue, but it ... is too thin a foundation for a world of difference and proximity." Pluralism goes beyond tolerance by its invitation to explore diversity, build bridges across differences, and, agree to disagree.



Pluralism

- ◆ does not require mutual agreement; its goal is mutual understanding,
- ◆ is not a recipe for relativism; it does not simplistically imply that all perspectives are equally true,
- ◆ is not the abandonment of reason or critical thinking; both are necessary,
- ◆ does not make shared values and a common identity impossible; it insists on dialogue to arrive at shared values that transcend cultural, religious, and ideological differences &
- ◆ does not require friendship; but seeks to reduce tension and hostility.

The power of pluralism is the alchemy of shared understanding. No one can know the fruits of this tree, but we may trust that the effort will be worthwhile.

Kid-Friendly Pluralism

Teaching children about pluralism prepares them for a complex, diverse world. The word pluralism is abstract, but its concrete elements promote tolerance, understanding, and acceptance.

Diversity is a fact of life. We see it everywhere. Helping children understand and value diversity is the first step in pluralism. *What Makes Us Unique? Our First Talk About Diversity* by Dr. Jillian Roberts, author, and Cindy Revell, illustrator, offers a thoughtful overview of diversity. See https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6Z1YU_dWXxM (4:31).

Respect is crucial for pluralism. Teach children to appreciate and respect differences in appearance, culture, language, and beliefs. While we usually focus on how others are different, turn the tables by considering that we are the ones who are different. Then, ask, "Why should others respect us?" A children's book about respect is *A Little Respectful SPOT: A Story About Respecting People, Places, and Things* by Diane Alber. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yN4gY7ekIT0> (5:05)

Being Aware of other Cultures helps children understand how cultures are different. Culture includes language, religion, dress, festivals, celebrations, customs, etc. One way to do this is through food: Italian, Chinese, Mexican, Indian, Greek, Vietnamese cuisine, etc. A book about this is *My Food, Your Food* by Lisa Bullard, author, and Christine M. Schneider, illustrator. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8s7sgF8Wufg> (5:12). Lisa Bullard has written six *Alike and Different* children's books on food, family, clothes, religion, language & home.

Including Others in activities, games, discussions, and interactions is important. *Fitting In* by Haruka Aoki & John Olson is about feeling excluded only to learn others feel the same, which leads to inclusion for all. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4iY6AbEHG58> (6:54).

Listening is essential to pluralism. Many people talk too much, and even when they aren't talking, they are not listening. Listening allows us to be

affected by another person, even changed by their words. The book *Quiet Please, Owen McPhee!* by Trudy Ludwig, author, and Patrice Barton, illustrator, shows the difference between talking too much and listening. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=p1X-4OX8NCY> (6:41). There are discussion questions at the end.

Empathy and Understanding can change our view of another person. Without empathy, we only see the world through our experience, uninformed by the experience and feelings of another. The book *Chocolate Milk, Por Favor: Celebrating Diversity with Empathy* by Maria Dismody, author & Donna Farrell, illustrator, shows how empathy leads to understanding. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ZnIGNmpaBOQ> (9:36) and an interview with the real Gabe at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9kRivAFH2R8> (11:31)

The above are essential because they help children engage diversity with pluralism. Source: Touchstones

Family Activity: Tell / Retell



Read or tell a story, and then have your child retell it in their own words. If they struggle

in some parts, gently prompt them so they can continue. This literacy strategy has many benefits, beginning with listening. It can promote critical thinking, communication skills, imagination, empathy, emotional intelligence, and confidence.

Family Activity: Talking Stick

Have your child make a talking stick to help with talking/listening. The video by Jenny Barnett Rohrs offers clear information about the materials needed and the steps involved. See <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vBSwNZjRSjg> (3:56). Whoever has the talking stick gets to talk. No stick, just listening. Use a timer to limit how long a person has the stick if necessary. The talking stick works well at dinnertime, on car trips, or anytime children and parents talk over each other.

(Continued from page 2) **Dialogue: Weaving** tions if anything new is to happen." Participants realize that dialogue is a collective responsibility.

II. Breakdown in the Container: Empowering results in participants getting real and saying what they really think and feel, which can be painful. This requires finding a way to cool down the energies and intensities of exchanges. Isaacs explains the shift, writing, "Though my positions may be right and well thought out, they are still not *who I am*. I can make space for other positions without jeopardizing my own stability." This suspension of "me" invites movement into a zone of reflection about "you and me" and then "we."

III. Flowering of Reflective Dialogue: This field involves curiosity. Reflective dialogue invites exploration of underlying issues, causes, and assumptions to get to more profound questions and new understandings. As Isaacs writes, "People who generally have very different points of view ...begin to talk and listen in ways that enable them to connect to people who are very different from them." They "loosen their preconceptions about who they think they are and what they think they are doing together ...[to] see a much wider set of possibilities."

IV. Generative Dialogue: Isaac writes, "In this fourth space, traditionally held positions are sufficiently loosened that very new possibilities can come into existence." The process often forces people inward by connecting the dialogue to things happening within themselves. This can become so intense that participants lack words to describe the experience. Dialogue seldom reaches this stage, but when it does, it is transformative.

Dialogue is powerful and complex. In terms of spiritual practice, Isaacs suggests four essential elements: listening, respect, suspending, and voice.

Listening: We listen best from a place of stillness, patience, openness, empathy, wonder, and ignorance. Isaacs reminds us, "To listen is to realize that much of our reaction to others comes from memory; it is stored reaction, not fresh

(Continued on page 7)

One More Step

(Continued from page 4) **Faith and Theology** inclusive, anti-racist, and anti-oppressive.

Transformation is the goal of dialogue, a process that changes us because we have seen the “other” at a deep level.

Generosity is necessary because the *Welcome Table* is a banquet of *Stone Soup* and so much more.

Equity for the *Study Commission* is the affirmation of everyone’s worth and dignity. It calls us to make the *Welcome Table* “fully accessible and inclusive.”

Love, as the purpose and power of our faith, means we are accountable to our neighbor, the stranger, and our enemy.

Pluralism must contend with two approaches to diversity: *exclusivism and inclusivism*.

Exclusivism is the belief that only one religion or ideology is true and all others are false, as illustrated by Christian Nationalism and White Supremacy. According to Cynthia Miller-Idriss, “Far Right ideologies, individuals, and groups espouse beliefs that are anti-democratic, anti-egalitarian, ...and are embedded in solutions like authoritarianism....”

Inclusivism asserts that while one religion, culture, political faction, etc., is true, others may contain partial truths or provide stepping stones toward the ultimate truth. The Bahá’í religion is an example of this. Bahá’ís believe their faith is the latest and best chapter in the ongoing process of divine revelation. They acknowledge that other faiths have some value to the extent that they align with Bahá’í beliefs.

It is worth asking if Unitarian Universalism has ever had tendencies toward exclusivism in our view of evangelical Christianity or toward inclusivism in our view of Islam. The cure for exclusivism or inclusivism is to sit at the *Welcome Table* and participate in pluralism’s demanding yet transforming work. As Diana Eck warns, “Dialogue does not mean we will like what everyone at the table says. The process of public discussion will inevitably reveal much that various participants do not like. But it is a commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.” Whenever we choose to be at the *Welcome Table*, we take one more step toward Beloved Community.

Source: Touchstones

Worthy of Respect

(Continued from page 6) **Dialogue: Weaving response.**” It is necessary to listen to what is said and left unsaid, not only for ourselves but to attend to others to witness how they are taking things in.

Respect: The word respect comes from a Latin root that means “to look again.” Without respect, genuine dialogue is impossible. Grounded in inherent worth and dignity, respect is pragmatic because everyone can be our teacher.

Suspending: Suspending means walking away from our certainty to open to new possibilities, questions, and answers. Isaacs writes, “Instead of good answers, we need good questions. The power of dialogue emerges in the cultivation ...of questions for which we do not have answers.”

Finding Your Voice: The final practice is finding your voice and having the courage to speak. It is to know that what you have to say matters. It means asking, “What needs to be expressed now?” Ironically, once we have found our voice, we may choose silence to make room for others or ask a question for which our answers could be enriched by other answers that will challenge us.

Dialogue is the work of heart and mind that answers the question, “Who is my neighbor?”

Source: Touchstones

Humanist Samaritan?

In the Eyes of God, We’re All Minorities

Barbara Brown Taylor

The following comes from Barbara Brown Taylor’s book, Holy Envy: Finding God in the Faith of Others.

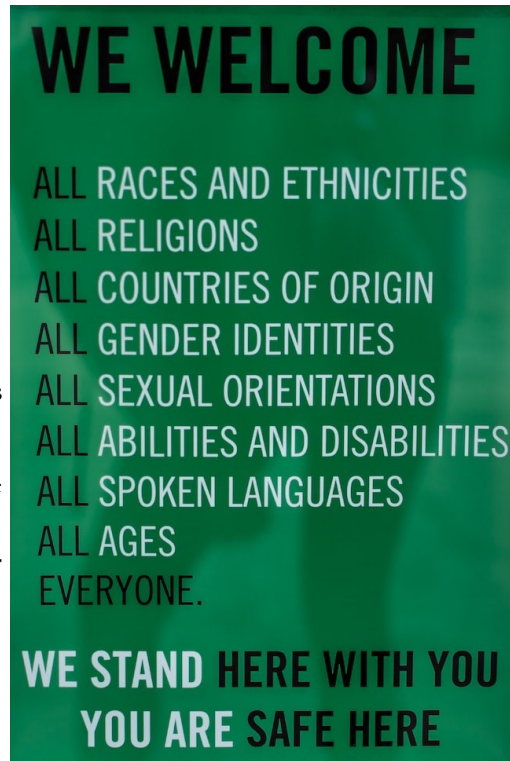
Krister Stendahl, former dean of Harvard Divinity school, told a reporter shortly before his death in 2008, “In the eyes of God, we are all minorities. That’s a rude awakening for many, who have never come to grips with the pluralism of the world.”

From my limited perspective in a small college classroom, I believe that increasing numbers of [youth] are coming to grips with pluralism—embracing it, even—though they are getting very little help from their elders as they think through what it means to be a person of faith in community with people of other (and no) faiths. No preacher has suggested to them that today’s Good Samaritan might be a Good Muslim or a Good Humanist. ...Come to think of it, I do know one preacher who tried something like that—from the pulpit of a cathedral in a major city, no less. I do not remember what the subject of her sermon was, only the response to it. She must have suggested that the Christian way was one among

many ways to God (a wave and not the ocean), because afterward a man ...said, “If God isn’t partial to Christianity, then what am I doing here?”

I wish ordinary Christians took exams, so I could put that question on the final. As natural as it may be to want to play on the winning team, the wish to secure divine favoritism strikes me as the worst possible reason to practice any religion. If the man who asked that question could not think of a dozen better reasons to be a Christian than that, then what, indeed, was he doing there?

Source: <https://www.awakin.org/v2/read/view.php?tid=2403>



Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion:

Pluralism

Preparation: (Read the *Journal*)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "In the world that lies ahead, ...pluralism is going to penetrate all cultures. How we live together with different points of view is going to become more ...important. I don't know whether we can make progress in such a project without a contemplative practice that alerts us to our own biases, prejudices, and self-centered programs for happiness [that] ...trample on other people's rights...." *Thomas Keating*

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake)
(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "A society in which pluralism is not undergirded by ...shared values and held together by some ...mutual trust simply cannot survive. Pluralism that reflects no commitments ...to the common good is pluralism gone berserk...." *John W. Gardner*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next

1. What are the benefits of diversity and multiculturalism? The challenges? Why do some people oppose both?
2. What are the pros and cons of tolerance in addressing diversity?
3. How can societies address conflicts arising from diverse perspectives?
4. Why is dialogue important? What challenge does it pose?
5. How do you regard exclusivism, the idea that one religion is true and all others are false? How can you dialogue with people with this view?
6. Is inclusivism, the belief that there is one superior religion, but other faiths have potential value, better than exclusivism? Why or why not?
7. Do you feel that you are sufficiently grounded in Unitarian Universalism so that you could participate in an interfaith dialogue? If yes, what helped you gain this grounding? If not, what can your congregation do to help?
8. Can a commitment to pluralism and dialogue make it possible to engage those who disagree with you politically? Why or why not?
9. How can we be aware of our hidden assumptions, biases, and prejudices?
10. How are exclusivism and inclusivism expressed in the political arena? What challenges do each present? How can meaningful engagement occur?
11. Have you developed a meaningful relationship with someone quite different from you, religiously, politically, etc.? How did that happen?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: A sentence about where you are as a result of the time spent together.

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words: (Rev. Philip R. Giles)
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Two-Letter Words

The Language of Relationship

Diana L. Eck

Pluralism ...is not just the enumeration of difference, and pluralism is certainly not premised upon the celebration of diversity in a spirit of good will. Pluralism is the engagement of difference in ...often-difficult yet creative ways....



...When I say that the "language" of pluralism is dialogue, this means the expression of critique and counter-critique, the mutuality of voices that count and have something to say. It is a language of give and take, and the bridges of understanding created by dialogue are also bridges snarled with traffic. Dialogue is not always the language of agreement or "common ground," but the language of relationship. But as in any relationship, it is strongest in its mutuality, and it is weakest when one incorporates the other.

The most important of our two-letter words is "we." Who do we mean when we say "we?" ...In our analysis of what "we" see happening in the world, we need words to describe the range of new initiatives and relationships that are cropping [up] profusely in cities and towns, colleges.... Pluralism is such a word. It is not a doctrine, but a process.

Source: <https://irstudies.org/index.php/jirs/article/view/309/287>



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