

Faith Matters: An Interfaith Peace Dialogue

How is peace achievable through interfaith dialogue? How does it construct a shared truth beyond human differences?

By Mariko Siegert

September 4, 2016 - An Interfaith Peace Dialogue will again be a Peace Day Philly program. This year, it takes place on **September 18 at 2:00pm** with the theme “Welcoming Each Other Across Diverse Cultures & Faiths.” It has become easier to have international experiences--over the Internet, through international travel, personal interactions with international tourists, students, and workers. This is exciting--or *terrifying*. In this brief blog post, I would like to first introduce some findings on how we perceive cultural difference, moving onto the importance of faiths, and finally, how interfaith dialogue can be useful in creating peace.

Cultural Difference (Thatcher, 2013)

Each of us carries a blend of cultures, or worldviews. How are our different cultures interact with each other when we experience ‘cultural diversity’? This depends on the situation. For example, in workplace, diversity in knowledge can lead to positive outcomes, but racial or gender diversity often has negative outcomes. While this type of ‘easily visible’ demographic diversity is typically a factor based on which separation/group is formed, this separation may quickly be overcome through collaboration. Diversity in value can often be a strong underlying motivation of group formation, but not as strong as visible diversities. This line of research is called ‘demographic faultline research’, of which the purpose is typically to use the knowledge about our perception of human difference, group dynamics, and social categorization to enhance the quality of organizational collaboration and performance.

The Importance of Faith

So, difference in value can strongly motivate us to either exclude or include others. Faith is a component of the value, on which we often subconsciously develop expectation for others, and moral frameworks and standards. This can, in turn, legitimize retaliation or animosity toward the different others, while helping us form solidarity and a sense of belonging with the similar others. Numerous studies in social psychology have found that we tend to think the similarities are larger among the members of the same group than they actually are, and feel less ‘connected/relatable’ to the members of other groups (Tajfel & Turner, 1986). In addition to the value differences, on which people may not want to compromise, different group membership and social identity could hinder us from seeking intergroup understanding.

Why Interfaith Dialogue?

Interfaith dialogue, however, can result in openness, interpretation, understanding, and truth because it is a conscious effort to go outside of one’s own comfort zone to talk and listen to the differing others. When we listen to others, we interpret what they say through our own lens (e.g., experiences, values, beliefs, etc.), and create a new understanding of others and ourselves. This, then, becomes a shared ‘truth.’ Interfaith dialogue is easier to be said than done, and it will require deep identification with the others to create compassion and empathy. To quote Michaelides (2016), in a way, this is a practice of faith--‘faith in others’--that can be practiced by anyone. If some of the conflict around us is caused by divisiveness and lack of intergroup

understanding, then we may get closer to the resolution of conflict through our conscious effort to practice our faith in others; interfaith peace dialogue.

An Interfaith Peace Dialogue: Welcoming Each Other Across Diverse Cultures & Faiths - Sept. 18, 2pm, Philadelphia Ethical Society. co-presented by Philadelphia Ethical Society, Dialogue Institute, Interfaith Walk for Peace & Reconciliation and Peace Day Philly.

All faiths and practices welcome! Refreshments and networking after the program at 4pm.

References

Michaelides, P. E. (2016). Cultural interdependence and the ethical other: Hermeneutical openness in interreligious dialogue and the common effort to address pressing global issues. *International Journal of Arts & Sciences*, 9(1), 279-296.

Tajfel, H., & Turner, J. C. (1986). The social identity theory of intergroup behavior. In S. Worchel, & W. G. Austin (Eds.), *Psychology of intergroup relations* (pp. 7–24). Chicago, IL: Nelson-Hall.

Thatcher, S. M. B. (2013). Moving beyond a categorical approach to diversity: The role of demographic faultline. In Q. M. Robertson, *The Oxford handbook of diversity and work* (pp. 52-72). New York, NY: Oxford University Press.