



**A Student's Guide to Organizing
A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion
Event**

www.differentconversation.org

Fall 2007

If you are looking for a challenge this fall, if you are tired of hearing your religious identity or those of your friends maligned, if you want to be part of building an America that lives up to the amazing power of its values, if you want to put your personal religious or moral conviction into action – bring *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* to your campus this Fall.

During the fall of 2007, the nation will be inspired by the most diverse and extensive campus campaign for religious cooperation and understanding ever- *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion*. This campus campaign will be an outpouring of religiously motivated common action for the common good on university and college campuses across the country.

The purpose of this campaign is as simple as it is profound: to shift the current debate about religion in our society away from the two polarizing camps that currently dominate popular media outlets. The first camp promulgates that one religious group needs to fight to dominate all others. The second camp declares that religion, in its entirety or in particular, is inherently antithetical to human freedom and equality.

Both these arguments neglect the fact that the greatest heroes for social justice and human liberty in the past century, such as Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Dalai Lama, and Mahatma Gandhi, were young people of strong faith who collaborated across ethnic and religious divides. These Faith Heroes, along with the millions of young people around the world who follow in their footsteps, offer the possibility for a different kind of conversation about religion. This conversation is one that respects the beautiful uniqueness of religious identity while pointing out the life-giving shared values that transcend the world's religious and moral traditions.

A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion is a national effort to affirm the American values of religious cooperation and understanding and to rally American students to build the kind of world in which they wish to live.

A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion will include:

- Interfaith dialogue and storytelling on shared values
- Documentary films about the history and possibility for interfaith cooperation in America and abroad
- A discussion of the book *Acts of Faith*, by Dr. Eboo Patel



Developed by the Interfaith Youth Core

- Collaborative interfaith service-learning projects to confront pressing social concerns
- Speakers and trainers who can come and lead discussions and trainings on the vision and "how-to" of interfaith youth work

History has shown time and again that an attack on any one community in a society threatens the safety and well-being of all its constituent communities. Sadly, many in our nation have not yet learned this crucial lesson. Motivated by fear, ignorance, or bigotry, they strive to isolate and divide one American community from another. This isolation and division turns our neighbors into our enemies and sacrifices our common dream of "one nation, indivisible" for the nightmare of mutual suspicion and enmity. On academic campuses, such campaigns of slander and hatred are often propagated in the name of worthy ideals and cloaked in the mantle of free speech. As Americans, and people of good faith, we have a responsibility to affirm and build the vision of America as a country of different religious and ethnic communities proactively cooperating to serve the common good.

If you are looking for a challenge this fall, if you are tired of hearing your religious identity or those of your friends maligned, if you want to be part of building an America that lives up to the amazing power of its values, if you want to put your personal religious or moral conviction into action – bring *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* to your campus this Fall.

Possible Events and Activities for a Different Kind of Conversation about Religion:

A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion will consist of any one or several of the following elements:

- An interfaith dialogue on shared values across different religious and moral communities
- A discussion of the book *Acts of Faith*, which chronicles one young man's journey of faith, identity, and building the interfaith youth movement.
- An interfaith service-learning event
- A showing of *Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam; Cities of Light*; and/or *The Imam and the Pastor*
- A panel discussion on shared values across religious and moral traditions or the history of interfaith cooperation in America or abroad
- A keynote speaker on interfaith cooperation
- A training by the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) staff members on how to organize interfaith service projects on your campus

College schedules can often be hectic and it may be difficult to find space to plan for an event. However, you don't need to plan an event all by yourself. Recruit your friends to help you brainstorm and organize one of the suggested events or an event that is unique to your campus. *A Different Kind of*



Conversation about Religion can also be as simple as inviting a bunch of your friends and classmates to your dorm common room and having a conversation about faith. Whatever your time and resources allow, we encourage you to participate in *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* to the extent that you are able and to use it as an opportunity to generate broader interest and support for year round interfaith programming on campus. To ensure that your participation in *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* has the greatest impact possible, we strongly encourage you to appoint a fellow student who is excited about coordinating campus media, local media, and internet attention around your specific events and projects.

It is important for each student group to notify their campus administrators about their efforts and seek both their symbolic and financial support. Organizers should also request funds from their student activities councils/boards to support *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion*. Although some public and private institutions may be unsure about allocating funds to an event tied to religion, this will provide an opportunity to explain the educational nature of the event as distinct from an individual community's worship or devotional programming.

Connecting to the Movement

To maximize the impact of your project and to connect with other students who are committed to this vision register your event on the *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* website, www.differentconversation.org. On the site you will find discussion guides and curricula to use for your event, posters and post cards to help with advertising, and a blog where you can exchange ideas with other students around the country. In addition, IFYC will be highlighting different projects through this website and through other media outlets. As the hub of the movement, www.differentconversation.org aims to equip, network, and inspire all the students working on the ground to make this movement a reality.

Coalition Building:

The first step to organizing a successful *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* event is building a core of students and campus groups interested in collaborating on the event. In addition to individually inspired students, you should look to contact all relevant campus and off-campus groups, including:

- Student religious groups (while it is less important that every student religious group ends up participating, it is very important that you at least reach out to and contact each of the religious groups present on campus), such as:
 - Any atheist and/or agnostic student associations
 - Buddhist Student Association
 - Campus Crusade for Christ
 - Fellowship of Christian Athletes



- Hillel or Jewish Student Union/Association
- Hindu Student Association
- Humanist Association
- InterVarsity Christian Fellowship
- Muslim Student Association
- Newman Center
- Pagan/Neo-Pagan/Wiccan Student Club
- Secular Students Alliance
- Student interfaith/multi-faith or intercultural/diversity groups
- Student political groups (again, it is important that you reach out to all such groups and stress that the event is non-partisan in nature)
- Student advocacy groups (such as Amnesty International)
- Student government
- Chaplain's office and/or office of religious and spiritual life (or equivalent)
- Diversity and/or multicultural affairs office
- Office of student life
- Interested professors and/or the department of religious studies
- Off-campus religious communities

There are also several other national campaigns* with which you could potentially collaborate to host an event, such as:

- Unity Productions Foundation's (UPF) *20,000 Dialogues* Campaign. See www.20000dialogues.org.
- Americans for an Informed Democracy's (AID) *Hope Not Hate* Campaign. See <http://www.aidemocracy.org/gps/hnh.php>
- Muslim Students Association's (MSA) *Peace... Not Prejudice* campaign. See <http://www.msanational.org/projects/npn/>

After contacting these groups and sharing with them the vision for *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion*, form a coordinating committee to plan the events and their publicity. Remember, you and the students that participate in your event are part of a larger movement across the country inspired by a common vision of religious cooperation and understanding. Please take time to share your unique event with other members of the movement by registering the event at www.differentconversation.org.

While it is perfectly fine for your group or committee to sponsor a dialogue or event related to religious cooperation and understanding under its own auspices – or as part of another national campaign with overlapping goals – it is still important to show your support and share your ideas with other members of the movement by adding your event to those at www.differentconversation.org.

* These organizations and their campaigns are listed to assist *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* participants and are not endorsed by or affiliated with the Interfaith Youth Core.



The Time Frame:

The *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* Campaign will culminate during the week of October 22-26th, however it is not necessary to confine the events strictly to this time frame. Any event taking place during the Fall of 2007 will be considered as part of the current campaign.

Interfaith Dialogue:

One of the best ways to participate in *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* is to actually organize an event that features a different kind of conversation about religion! Too often, even people who appreciate the life-giving power of their religious tradition succumb to patterns of dialogue about faith that focus exclusively on negative or divisive aspects. By engaging your campus community in a conversation about religion, one that is mutually appreciative and affirming, you can help shift the way religion is viewed on your campus and in society.

People of diverse religious and moral backgrounds can best achieve this kind of conversation about religion when they focus on the shared values that transcend all the world's ethical traditions. These are simple yet profound values like service, hospitality, compassion, and stewardship of the environment. These deeply held, widely shared beliefs provide a platform upon which people who hold disparate opinions may come together in agreement. This enables the dialogue to move forward to how each of these values has taken on unique meanings within the diverse traditions represented in the dialogue.

IFYC is pleased to provide organizers with curricular and facilitation guides to help direct the conversation. These guides may be found at www.differentconversation.org. We also encourage you to use and share dialogue curricula and styles that have worked for you and your campus in the past.

Additionally, you can organize a discussion of the book, *Acts of Faith*, which chronicles one young man's journey to embracing his identity as an American Muslim as well as advancing the cause for religious pluralism and interfaith cooperation. Discussion guides for *Acts of Faith*, as well as information on how to order the book, are also available at www.differentconversation.org.

Logistics:

Reserve a room (or find another space) to hold the dialogue and publicize it on campus. Consider hosting it in a dorm common room. Modifiable promotional posters and postcards (you fill in date, time, place, and details) will be provided when you register. Additionally, curricular tools and facilitator guides will be posted at www.differentconversation.org. Co-sponsor the event with as many groups as possible. You can also use the formation of these relationships as a launching pad for future initiatives. So start making contacts now! Also consider



suggesting that a dialogue be followed by a service-learning event to deepen the connection between different groups on campus (see below). Also register your event on www.differentconversation.org to publicize your event on the web and join the national movement of students working for the same goal.

Common Action for the Common Good:

One of the best ways to follow up an interfaith dialogue about the shared values found in the world's religious and moral traditions is to engage its members in common action for the common good. Many of the shared values are "actionable," that is, people can speak of how the value is articulated in their tradition as well as put their convictions into action by serving their communities. For example, after a dialogue about the shared value of service, organize a service-learning project to build low-income housing, volunteer at a soup kitchen, or spend time with young children or the elderly.

While organizing a service-learning project can be more time-consuming, consider partnering with your campus' volunteer, community service, or service-learning office for logistical assistance. It is more than likely that these offices can help you find and secure a service site as well as arrange transportation to and from campus.

Logistics:

Identify and secure a service site (either through your campus' volunteer and community service office or on your own) and determine how many volunteers they need or can accommodate. Secure transportation to and from the site (if necessary). Advertise the service event through your campus' Resident Life, Service Learning, and Chaplin's Offices. Also see if you can advertise over the campus radio station, college news paper, college Facebook group, or other forms of media that will reach a large amount of students. Emphasize that this is an opportunity for different religious and moral traditions to come together to serve their community cooperatively. Modifiable promotional posters and postcards will be provided by IFYC when you register your event on www.differentconversation.org. This will also help to publicize your event on the web and join the national movement of students working for the same goal.

Film Screenings:

Another way to take part in *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* on your campus is to host a screening of a film about the history, current state of, or potential for religious cooperation and understanding in America and abroad. IFYC recommends several films that can be screened during *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* and will also provide you with modifiable promotional posters advertising the screening when you register your event. Talking points on each film will also be provided at www.differentconversation.org.



We encourage you to show more than one of these films on your campus during the Fall Semester. Consider inviting a professor, local religious or interfaith leader, or other local public figure to introduce the film and possibly moderate a discussion on it afterwards. A film screening can be combined with a panel discussion (see below).

Films Recommended for Screenings:

Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

Description:

This ground-breaking documentary compares similarities and differences in the religious beliefs and practices of Islam, Christianity, and Judaism. It also examines how people of goodwill in the Abrahamic faith communities are coming to terms with historical conflicts that impact their lives today, the crisis of the fundamentalist approach to religious pluralism and tearing down barriers to understanding & respect.

Cities of Light: The Rise and Fall of Islamic Spain

Description: *Cities of Light* takes viewers on a journey back into one of the most fascinating and important periods of world history: Islamic Spain. The lemon tree, the water wheel, Aristotle's lost philosophy, algebra, and the beginnings of modern medicine all arrived in Europe through Islamic Spain. *Cities of Light* shows how it was possible for Muslims, Christians, and Jews to co-exist and thrive together while still demonstrating the very real fragility of their relationships.. The history of Islamic Spain demonstrates that when religious diversity is accommodated within a social and political system, while it does not completely eradicate social ills, a society is able to maintain stability and even thrive and flourish.

The Imam and the Pastor: A Documentary from the Heart of Nigeria

Description:

This 43-minute documentary film brings to life the astonishing reconciliation and peace initiatives that occurred between Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye. Both men were leaders of militant groups involved in conflict between Muslims and Christians in Kaduna, northern Nigeria. Both men suffered deep and personal loss at the hands of violence. Now they are taking bold initiatives to promote co-operation and resolve conflicts. The film, narrated by Rageh Omaar, shows that it is possible for the perpetrators of inter-religious violence to become instigators of peace. It is a story of forgiveness and a case study of grassroots initiatives to rebuild communities torn apart by conflict.

IFYC will provide modifiable promotional posters advertising the event (you will fill in date/time/place), a summary of talking points, and contact information for ordering the film at www.differentconversation.org



Logistics:

Reserve a room to show the film and publicize the screening on campus. Also, advertise the film showing through academic departments, particularly those most closely related to the topic (Political Science, Religion, History, Ethics, etc.). Also see if you can advertise over the campus radio station, college news paper, college Facebook group, or other forms of media that will reach a large amount of students. Visit www.differentconversation.org to find out information about ordering the film. Co-sponsor the event with as many groups as possible. You can also use the formation of these relationships as a launching pad for future initiatives. So start making contacts now! You can also suggest that a panel discussion follow the film that will further engage the issues which the film raises. Also register your event on www.differentconversation.org to receive modifiable promotional posters and postcards, publicize your event on the web and join the national movement of students working for the same goal.

Panel Discussions, Speakers, and Trainers:

Organizing a panel discussion, speaker, or trainer on campus is an excellent way to reach out to the broader campus community and deepen the existing interfaith work on campus. IFYC's Outreach, Education, & Training (OET) Program consists of a religiously diverse team of trainers experienced in working with college and university campuses to accomplish this very task. OET trainers can deliver a campus-wide keynote talk on the urgency, history, and potential of interfaith work as well as deliver skill-based trainings for student leaders. Additionally, consider contacting representatives from other national and local faith, interfaith, and diversity programs and organizations to come to speak on your campus.

If you want to bring in non-local speakers or someone prominent who charges a speaking fee, you should first apply to your student government, chaplaincy/office of religious and spiritual life, and office of student life to request funds. Even if you suspect that these bodies might turn down your request for fear of supporting religious activities (this may be more likely at public institutions), you should still take this step as it will provide you with the opportunity to distinguish the educational nature of this event from an individual community's worship or devotional programming.

Consider co-sponsoring a speaker with an academic department or office's lecture series or other student groups who have an interest in this topic. Encourage them to suggest speakers whom they know that could speak on any of the relevant subjects. By pooling funding, you can bring in more prominent speakers and the event will garner greater participation from the campus and off-campus communities.

IFYC and its OET Program will be pleased to provide speakers, trainers, and moderators from within its own staff as well as offer general assistance. Contact



Jenan Mohajir at 312-573-8828 or at jenan@ifyc.org or Noah Silverman at 312-573-8832 or at noah@ifyc.org.

Logistics:

First, consider which local personalities and local organizations you may draw on for help and speakers. Local religious leaders and professors at your university or at neighboring universities are good options. Co-sponsor the event with as many groups as possible. You can also use the formation of these relationships as a launch pad for future initiatives. So start making contacts now! Advertise the event through academic departments, particularly those most closely related to the topic (Political Science, Religion, History, etc.). Also see if you can advertise over the campus radio station, college news paper, college Facebook group, or other forms of media that will reach a large amount of students. Book a room, confirm the time and date with all participants. Also register your event on www.differentconversation.org to publicize your event on the web and join the national movement of students working for the same goal.

Possible Panel Discussion Topics:

- The Shared Value of Service/Hospitality/Compassion/Stewardship of Creation across multiple religious and moral traditions. (Consider inviting leaders from different religious communities to share about how their tradition speaks to the given shared value. Be sure to include at least one non-religious perspective from someone who is Humanist/secular/agnostic/atheistic.)
- The History of Interfaith Cooperation in America and Abroad. (Invite professors or others knowledgeable about the history of interfaith cooperation in Islamic Spain, the Indian Independence Movement, the American Civil Rights Movement, and/or the South African Anti-Apartheid Movement)

Additional panel ideas are welcome and encouraged! Just be sure to share the ideas for your events by posting them at www.differentconversation.org.

Keynote Speakers and Trainers:

Inviting a speaker to deliver a keynote address on the subject of religious cooperation and understanding or to deliver trainings in the "how-to" of campus interfaith work is another excellent way to draw attention to *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion*.

As with hosting a panel discussion, first apply to your student government for funds to bring in a speaker and/or trainer. Be sure to emphasize in your proposal that the nature of the event is to educate the broader community about the need for religious cooperation and understanding and not to promote one religious community's theology or politics over any others. Consider co-sponsoring a speaker with other campus groups that have a stake in these issues,



such as the campus chaplaincy or the office of religious and spiritual life (or equivalent religious life office). If your planned speaker has recently authored a book, see if you can get copies from your campus bookstore and hold a book-signing either before or after the event.

The OET Program would also be delighted to send one of its staff members to deliver a talk or a skill-based training (or trainings) session on the "how-to" of building religious cooperation and understanding on campus. For more information, contact Jenan Mohajir at 312-573-8828 or at jenan@ifyc.org.

Logistics:

Secure funding for a speaker and invite a knowledgeable authority on issues of religious cooperation to speak. Approach other organizations on campus such as the campus chaplaincy or the office of religious and spiritual life about co-sponsoring the event. Book a room, confirm the time and date with all participants, and publicize the event on campus through posters and press releases to campus and local media. Also register your event on www.differentconversation.org to publicize your event on the web and join the national movement of students working for the same goal.

Essay Contest or Juried Art Show:

One of the goals of the *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion* Campaign is to reach as wide an audience as possible. Holding an essay contest or a juried art show is one way to access a wider population of the student body both in terms of participants as well as audience. Both events are great ways to increase discussions about interreligious tolerance on campus, make interfaith work seem more relevant to students, and give a 'voice' and 'face' to the interfaith youth movement.

There are a few key elements to consider as you plan your essay contest or juried art show. Consider important individuals or departments within the school administration with whom it would be beneficial for you to talk. The Dean of Student Activities is a great person to contact to figure out ground rules for the essay contest and how to make it work best on campus. If you do not have a Dean of Student Activities try talking to the head of Resident Life, Diversity Office, Dean of Students, or Campus Leadership or Service Organization to name a few.

Think of a creative essay or visual art topic which relates to religion and will excite students and make them want to participate. Another way to entice students to participate is by offering a more tangible reward than money, such as a gift certificate or iPhone. This can also make it easier to get funding for the event. Finally, think about making the unveiling of the winning entries a social event by holding a symposium or art gallery opening.



Logistics:

First, co-sponsor the event with as many groups as possible. You can also use the formation of these relationships as a launch pad for future initiatives. So start making contacts now! Second, advertise the contests through academic departments, particularly those most closely related to the topic (Political Science, Religion, History, Photography, Sculpture, etc.). Also see if you can advertise over the campus radio station, college news paper, college Facebook group, or other forms of media that will reach a large amount of students. Third, you don't need to spend your own money to provide a great prize. Go to local companies such as electronic stores, restaurants, etc. and ask if they would donate an item or gift certificate for the prize. Finally, talk to the editors of the campus newspaper, alumnae magazine, the head of the Art Department, or the curator for the campus art gallery about obtaining a prominent space to display the top contestants' work.

How to Get Involved:

To Participate in *A Different Kind of Conversation about Religion*, please contact Jenan Mohajir at 312-573-8828 or at jenan@ifyc.org or Noah Silverman at 312-573-8832 or at noah@ifyc.org. Additionally, please visit www.differentconversation.org to see all the events taking place this fall, get resources and information, and register your planned projects and events.

TALK. THINK. DO.
www.differentconversation.org

