



The Imam and the Pastor **Discussion Guide** www.differentconversation.org

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.

Introduction

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

An important way to take part in *A Different Kind of Conversation About Religion* on your campus or in your community 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. We encourage you to show more than one of these films. 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.

Description of *The Imam and the Pastor* (40min)

This 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.

Setting Safe Space

It is important, before all else, to set a “safe space” for dialogue, a space where people from all backgrounds can feel comfortable sharing personal parts of who they are with others. This conversation, unlike the dominant conversation about religion, will require a willingness to listen to those whose traditions are different from our own. Regardless of the size of the group, this is an important step to take to encourage honest and open reflection.



To set a safe space:

- Brainstorm about the guidelines participants will need in order to feel comfortable for this unique kind of conversation:
 - Ask the group, "What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel safe having this conversation?"
 - Examples of possible guidelines are: everyone has the right to pass, everything that is said is confidential, seek clarification if you don't understand something that is said, suspend your judgment, use 'I' statements, etc.
 - Someone in the group should take notes on the group's responses and then read the responses aloud to conclude setting the safe space.
 - The guidelines should be ones by which the entire group feels comfortable abiding.

Discussion

The discussion is based on three major ideas from the documentary: identity, community, and common action. These ideas are also the three components of IFYC's understanding of pluralism. Religious pluralism, we believe, goes beyond mere tolerance for diversity and requires that we build positive relationships and work with one another. Pluralism is a state in which we respect one another's religious **identity**, develop mutually enriching relationships which form **community**, and work together in **common action** for the common good.

These questions are meant to guide and not limit the group's conversation. As participants and/or facilitators, you should take the initiative to adjust the questions as appropriate.

- Identity
 - Both Imam Muhammad Ashafa and Pastor James Wuye describe how they came to understand themselves as individuals committed to their faith. What was the event, for each man, which made him realize his particular identity as a person of faith?
 - Reflect upon and share the story of the formation of your identity. How did you come to believe in the faith or moral tradition which you now follow? Was there a pivotal moment in that process and if so share it as part of your story.



- Community
 - Imam Ashafa talks about how he is inspired by Pastor Wuye and vice versa. Give two examples of how each man is inspired by his relationship with the other.
 - Talk about a time when you were inspired by someone of a different faith or moral tradition. This individual could be someone you know personally or a faith hero, like Mohandas Gandhi, that you never met but by whom you are still inspired.
- Common Action
 - During their interviews, both Pastor Wuye and Imam Ashafa give examples of teachings from their respective faith traditions that inspire them to work together for peace and reconciliation. What were some of these teachings?
 - Although we do not face the same level of religious violence as Imam Ashafa and Pastor Wuye do in Nigeria, it is no less important that we come together to work with those of different faith and moral traditions for the common good. What in your faith or moral tradition inspires you to work for the common good?

Concluding the Discussion

Thank everyone for their time and participation. Go around the group and ask for closing reflections, reactions, comments from each person. If you would like, reflect back some ideas or comments that you think are particularly beneficial for the group to remember as your discussion comes to a close. Encourage the group to host a dialogue of their own with friends, classmates, members of their faith communities, interfaith group, etc, as part of encouraging a different kind of conversation about religion in their community. Propose an idea for a service event that you could do together as part of putting the idea of pluralism, which you just demonstrated in your dialogue, into action. If the group is interested, take a few moments to brainstorm what that action might be.

