What is Interreligious Dialogue?

By Sandi Fults

Interreligious dialogue is a challenging process by which adherents of differing religious traditions encounter each other in order to break down the walls of division that stand at the center of most wars. The objective of interreligious dialogue is peace.

What does interfaith encounter look like? Interreligious dialogue has many faces. Two people can come together and share the aspects of their respective faiths and struggle to understand that which is foreign. Theologians can write papers, publish in journals, and convene to discuss the finer theological issues related to interreligious dialogue (and there are a multitude of theological issues). Perhaps members of one faith tradition can join with members of another religion to improve a neighborhood. Suppose the world’s political leaders met to investigate the other’s most basic assumptions about the world and what human beings are doing here?

Each of the above examples is a form of interreligious dialogue. What is most crucial in any such encounter is that the participants lay aside attempts to evangelize, which is always accompanied by an attitude of exclusive superiority. That is the spoken or unspoken belief that one’s own religion is to “true” way, the only way in the ultimate sense of the terms.

A commitment to openness is deeply difficult. For example, in Christianity, evangelizing and converting others to that faith system is a central tenet that is rooted in the Christian scriptures. Christians generally believe that one must be saved and that salvation is only possible in Christianity. On the other hand, the Hindu tradition maintains (generally speaking) that there are many paths to the Divine and each religion has similar and relative value to the others. These differing cosmologies can be obstacles that cannot be overcome or opportunities for release from enslaving assumptions.

The following are some guidelines for effective interreligious dialogue: 1. Participants in interreligious dialogue cannot use the encounter as opportunities to defend their own traditions. 2. Neither is interreligious dialogue a means to defend religion in general. 3. There is a risk of conversion. Participants may find themselves transformed by the interfaith encounter. 4. Dialogue participants must reveal the beliefs that they hold closest and that define their religious tradition. 5. Interreligious dialogue is not a philosophical, theological or intellectual exercise. It is an expression of the participants’ lived faith lives. Therefore, interfaith encounters form communities of awareness.

The World Council of Churches, various theologians and many other resources provide guidelines for interfaith dialogue. Those listed above are gleaned from different sources. Many items were omitted and others were expanded, according to this author’s interpretation of the dialogical process.
Finally, since peace is the goal of interreligious dialogue, the process must be peaceful. It is important to realize that peace is not easily achieved and maintained. The process may be peaceful, but it is somewhat like climbing Everest. Peace does not occur in a day and there are obstacles as intrepid travelers struggle up the path to heights where the human spirit may soar.

(Sandi Fults has a Master’s degree in Systematic Theology from St. Mary’s University in San Antonio, Texas. She also attended the graduate Middle Eastern Studies program at the University of Texas at Austin. Her area of specialization is Interreligious Dialogue and the world’s religions, with emphasis on the South Asian Hindu and Buddhist religious traditions.)

Article Source: http://EzineArticles.com/?expert=Sandi_Fults

http://www.coistine.ie/what-is-interreligious-dialogue

Chapter 1:
WHAT IS INTERRELIGIOUS DIALOGUE?
Interreligious dialogue, also referred to as interfaith dialogue, is about people of different faiths coming to a mutual understanding and respect that allows them to live and cooperate with each other in spite of their differences. The term refers to cooperative and positive interaction between people of different religious traditions, (i.e. "faiths") at both the individual and institutional level. Each party remains true to their own beliefs while respecting the right of the other to practise their faith freely.

Interfaith dialogue is not just words or talk. It includes human interaction and relationships. It can take place between individuals and communities and on many levels. For example, between neighbours, in schools and in our places of work - it can take place in both formal and informal settings. In Ireland, Muslims and Christians live on the same streets; use the same shops, buses and schools. Normal life means that we come into daily contact with each other. Dialogue therefore, is not just something that takes place on an official or academic level only – it is part of daily life during which different cultural and religious groups interact with each other directly, and where tensions between them are the most tangible.