



## Dare to Understand Religious Communities

### Guide for Host Communities

The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia advances mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation among faith communities, in order to work together for the common good of the region.

Thank you for being a part of that vision by extending hospitality to a diverse group of visitors.

#### PRE-VISIT / PREPARATION

- Select a religious leader or community member to meet with the group
  - ❖ even if the group is participating in a regularly scheduled community service, it's important to have specific leaders/members identified to greet and interact with the group during specified times during the event
  - ❖ give consideration to members who might best articulate your community's tradition and practice, and answer questions knowledgeably, clearly and respectfully
  - ❖ Confirm logistics with Interfaith Center Associate Executive Director:
    - Rev. Nicole Diroff | [ndd@interfaithcenterpa.org](mailto:ndd@interfaithcenterpa.org) | 215-222-1012
- Once details are confirmed, publicize visit to the larger community

#### VISIT / TIPS FOR HOSTING

##### Overall Considerations & Sensitivities

- Please keep the following suggestions/sensitivities in mind throughout the visit:
  - ❖ think about what would be most helpful to you if you were visiting a community/tradition unfamiliar to you
  - ❖ assume the group as a whole knows little, if anything, about your tradition
  - ❖ don't assume to speak for your whole religious tradition; use "I" language
  - ❖ consider that someone in the group may self-identify as atheist/agnostic or come from a tradition that has a different understanding of the divine
  - ❖ consider that someone in the group may self-identify as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender
  - ❖ consider that the group may be diverse when raising issues that may be "charged" (e.g. gender roles, sexuality, politics)
    - such issues are by no means inappropriate - and may even be useful - for interfaith dialogue, but keep in mind that these are sometimes better addressed in the context of more established, ongoing relationships
    - be prepared to address questions/reactions from visitors in ways that are respectful of their perspectives

## Welcome/Orientation

- Have religious leaders/ members ready to welcome the group as they arrive
  - ❖ make sure whoever is speaking is loud enough for the whole group to hear
  - ❖ clarify how religious leaders should be addressed (e.g. title or first name?)
  - ❖ name tags are recommended; participants will come with name tags as well
  - ❖ point out location of bathrooms and designated prayer space as relevant
- Review any expectations regarding religious practice/norms (e.g. head coverings, prayer posturing) as necessary, and any “courtesy” requests (e.g. photos & note-taking allowed or not)
- Prior to the worship experience (or other program), provide a brief overview of the community (e.g. history, demographics, identity within broader religious tradition, current programming, social engagement, etc.)

## During Visit

- If possible and appropriate, allow time for the group to observe sacred space first
- Review general suggestions for group and individual observation vs. participation (i.e. when it’s appropriate to participate or not)
  - ❖ consider how visitors might observe and not participate
  - ❖ be sure to formally welcome group as part of service
  - ❖ if possible and appropriate during the service, allow time for brief explanation of what’s happening
- Avoid lengthy presentations/lectures and allow plenty of time for questions throughout the visit
- Designate a time after the service to meet with the group again and answer any questions they may have; invite members of the community for discussion if possible.

## Conclusion

- Be sure to thank the group for coming

## **POST-VISIT / EVALUATION**

- Please “collect” responses from religious leader(s) and community member(s) about the visit
  - the Event Coordinator will have a formal evaluation form we’ll ask you to complete
- Event Coordinator will be in touch afterwards to evaluate the visit with you, identifying any areas of concern, suggestions for future visits, etc.