**Interfaith Encounters Alternative Break Program**

**Guide for Host Religious Communities**

*In order to promote social harmony and inter-religious understanding, Interfaith Philadelphia equips individuals and communities for interfaith engagement, builds collaborative relationships, and stands in solidarity with our diverse neighbors.*

**PRE-VISIT / PREPARATION**

* Select religious leaders and community members – especially young adults – to meet with the group
* Even if the group is participating in a regularly scheduled community service/program, it’s important to have specific leaders/members identified to greet and interact with the group and a specific time to do that
* Give consideration to members who might best articulate your community’s tradition and practice to young adults and answer questions knowledgeable, clearly and respectfully
* With Interfaith Philadelphia Trip Coordinator, confirm logistics and timing
* Once details are confirmed, publicize the 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 (they may, but better to assume they don’t)
* Don’t pretend 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 LGBTQ+
* 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 students in ways that are respectful of their perspective

Welcome/Orientation

* Have religious leader(s)/ member(s) ready to welcome the group as they arrive
  + Co-facilitation is standard practice for Interfaith Philadelphia so we recommend having at least two co-hosts (if possible) and encourage a mixture of clergy / lay, intergenerational, different genders, etc. if you are able!
* 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; the group will come with name tags as well
* Point out the 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 allowed or not, 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 – especially if the group will not be participating in a regular service/program
* If group is participating in a regular service/program, review general suggestions for group and individual observation vs. participation (i.e. when it’s appropriate to participate or not)
* Consider how students might observe and not participate
* Be sure to formally welcome group as part of service/program
* If possible and appropriate during the service/program, allow time for a brief explanation of what’s happening
* Avoid lengthy presentations/lectures and allow plenty of time for questions throughout the visit (and/or at a designated time for questions, preferably after any service/program); the more interactive, the better for college students

Conclusion

* Thank the group for coming

**POST-VISIT / EVALUATION**

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