



Religion & ETHICS

NEWSWEEKLY

VIEWER'S GUIDE

With Essays, Discussion Questions and Resources on America's Changing Religious & Ethical Landscape

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Dear Reader and Viewer,

This edition of the Viewer's Guide accompanies the fourth season of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*, and its essays and articles examine several of the most compelling social questions facing religious institutions and members of faith communities.

When the Faithful Lose Faith in Marriage: How are religious institutions responding to changing ideas about marriage and family life? In what ways have ministries to families and couples adjusted to the consequences of divorce in America and the debates about remarriage, parenting, and other family issues? Our reporter, Jan Ferris, found that faith communities in America have been slow to respond to the changing shape of marriage and the family. "They knew families were changing but didn't know what the costs were," says Rev. Don Browning, the director of the University of Chicago's Religion, Culture, and Family Project.

Saving Lives While Saving Souls: Faith-Based Health Care in America. What role do communities of faith play when it comes to health care delivery and reform? How might their efforts help to confront the country's growing health care needs? What is the relation between faith, health, and medical care, and how do local programs such as parish nursing bridge the gap between body and soul? Although only ten percent of American churches are involved in health issues, our reporter Michael Kress says there is a growing movement among churches, synagogues, and mosques to integrate health and faith in the lives of their members.

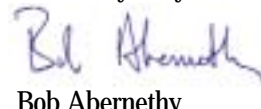
Religion and Public Education: An Emerging Middle Ground. Should religion be taught in public schools, or does America's growing religious diversity make the study of religion impossible in the public school classroom? What is the role of families, teachers, and administrators in this debate? "Not to know about human religious experience is not to be fully educated," according to one California public high school teacher interviewed by our writer, Heidi Schlumpf. What do you think?

We also include in this issue of the Guide a piece by religion reporter Gayle White titled *Who's God? Whose God?* The religions of the world have explored the meaning of God in many and various ways. How do their concepts of God compare? What are the differences and similarities? How do human beings express their understandings of who God is?

All of these pieces are meant to complement the fresh reporting and thoughtful on-air discussions of religion and ethics that a steadily growing audience relies on each week when tuning in to *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*. The Viewer's Guide is used in thousands of classrooms, congregations, and discussion groups around the country to stir up conversation and debate about spiritual life, religion and society, and the ethical issues we face. It is also your invitation to read and think about these ideas and stories, to form a discussion group of your own, and to join in the conversation.

We invite you to visit our *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* Web site at www.thirteen.org/religion to find more resources that will supplement the Guide and program each week. We genuinely welcome your comments and suggestions about all of them and hope to hear from you in the months to come.

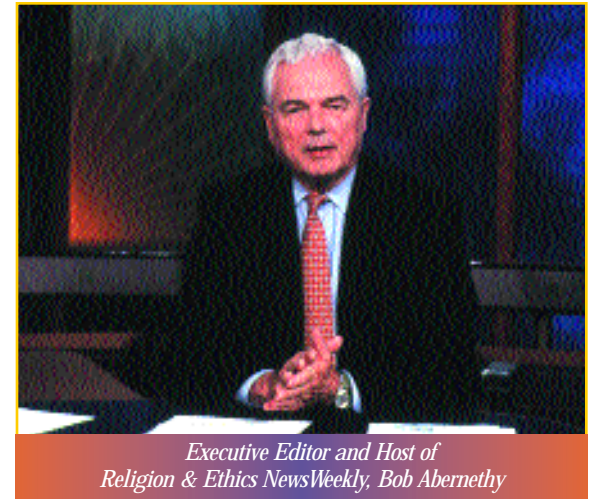
Yours very truly,



Bob Abernethy
Executive Editor



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ABOUT THE TELEVISION PROGRAMS

Hailed as “one of the most thoughtful and satisfying magazine series on the air” (*Minneapolis Star Tribune*) and “the best spot on the television landscape to take in a broad view of the spiritual dimension of American life” (*Christian Science Monitor*), *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* has been breaking ground in news reporting since its national debut on PBS in September 1997. Hosted by veteran journalist Bob Abernethy, the acclaimed series, winner of the prestigious Sigma Delta Chi Award, covers top stories in religion and ethics news – focusing on important and significant events, controversies, people and practices of all religions, all denominations and all expressions of faith. Through live reports from the show’s studios in Washington, D.C., and taped reports from the field, the program seeks out leading spokespersons for the essential ideas of each issue, and – in a regular feature on “Belief and Practice” – explores the different ways people express their faith. Newsmakers, scholars and historians also provide insightful perspectives with additional features offering lively and thoughtful reviews of current books, movies and art.

ABOUT THE VIEWER’S GUIDE

The *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide* is designed to provide material for further thought and discussion about issues related to the series. For suggestions on using the Guide, see *Gathering For Discussion*, on page 19. The guide may be photocopied and distributed to adult education organizations, community groups, teachers, and individual viewers. To request a Viewer’s Guide, please write to *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide*, Thirteen/WNET, P.O. Box 245, Little Falls, NJ 07424-0245.

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WEB SITE

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Online, the Web companion to the television series, has a new look this season. The site now includes full transcripts of each episode’s major segments. In addition, full transcripts of the entire program are available during the week following broadcast, along with other features like weekly polls, a Site of the Month, a Religious Calendar, and more. In the coming months, the Web companion will create a series of structured debates on issues of religious and ethical importance, and will also provide an online version of the *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly Viewer’s Guide* at www.pbs.org/religion or www.thirteen.org/religion.

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PHOTODISC

Family with clergyman.

A generation or two ago, most houses of worship in America teemed with traditional families on the sabbath. Mother and father had their children and perhaps a grandparent or two in tow.

Today – a few decades and several social revolutions later – those same pews are as likely to hold divorced men and women, unwed mothers and their young, gay and lesbian families, and openly cohabiting couples with no immediate intentions of marriage.

Religious institutions have had a long and ongoing interest in fostering the health of stable families and marriages and in offering preparation and education for both. But, for many clerics, ministering to changing flocks has introduced a tricky and sometimes

painful challenge that their predecessors rarely faced: how to uphold the sanctity of marriage and family to congregations for whom the once-standard concepts are increasingly obsolete.

Often, finding the answer means navigating a narrow course. Adjusting the message to the new reality is seen by some as backing off time-tested doctrine and scripture. For others, remaining silent or sticking to traditional sermons and approaches means becoming irrelevant to those they seek to reach – and running the risk of ignoring those souls most in need of ministry.

CAVING IN OR HELPING OUT?

The Rev. Lew Vander Meer of New Community Church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, has wrestled with such dilemmas for many of his 31 years as a pastor. A Dutch Calvinist by birth, he recalls that most of the social teachings of his childhood church were conservative. The official position on divorce, for instance, cited adultery – not abuse, desertion, or lack of love – as the only legitimate grounds.

As the times have changed, so has Vander Meer's philosophy. After studying the New Testament passages on marriage and divorce and examining his own heart, he decided that – in his house of worship, at least – theology would not stand in the way of compassionate ministry.

“Some people might call that ‘caving in,’” said Vander Meer. “But when people find themselves in impossible situations... they have to look at God's grace and forgiveness and the need to violate one area of God's will in order to affirm another,” he continued. “You're caught on the horns of a dilemma.”

The programs at the non-denominational New Community Church reflect the pastor's attempt to balance seemingly divergent missions. On Sunday mornings, Vander Meer often preaches about marriage as a sacred union. But on Friday nights, the church opens its doors for Celebrate Recovery, a cluster of support groups on topics such as divorce and dysfunctional relationships. In the past few years, the church has even contracted with a psychotherapist who is on-call for couples in crisis.

Not all clergy agree with Vander Meer's approach, fearing that it compromises scripture. In some houses of worship, clerics who minister to non-traditional families may discover that their congregants don't necessarily concur. Divorced or unmarried parents in the sanctuary may find more scorn from those in the pew than from the pulpit.

Several members of Vander Meer's church, for instance, were quick to criticize one couple's split as “not biblical,” though the marriage was marked by emotional abuse on the husband's part. “There are all kinds of situations in which we are forced to do something other than the ideal of scripture,” the pastor told those who complained.

PEOPLE IN THE PEWS

Diana Garland, director of the Baylor Center for Family and Community Ministries in Waco, Texas, has studied numerous faith groups over the years. She believes that clergy are often quicker to adapt to once-unorthodox family situations than the laity. Members of one congregation she visited agonized long and hard over whether to throw a baby shower for an unwed woman in the church. Such a celebration might suggest they approved of the fact that the

mother-to-be had had sexual relations outside marriage. Yet many wanted to celebrate new life. The group reached a compromise: a party was held, but not on church grounds.

Garland also believes that congregants need to learn to respond to marriages in crisis, just as they do when someone is ill or in mourning. "People take their vows in front of the community.... The community vows implicitly, by being witness, to support, encourage, and hold them responsible," she said.

Even in congregations where the spirit is willing, well-meaning friends may be at a loss about how to help. That's what happened to Michelle and Joe Williams when they separated for the second time. Friends at the Big Valley Grace Church in Modesto, California "either tried to rescue us or tried to avoid us. They didn't know what to do," Michelle Williams said. "[The church] had divorce care in place, but we weren't divorced. They had pre-marital care, but we were already married. We were in the middle." The Williamses eventually repaired their marriage and, at their pastor's urging, formed a marriage ministry at their non-denominational church. "By and large, churches have been so slow. It's sad," Michelle Williams said.

SLOW TO CATCH ON

Religious and secular researchers agree that, in the main, faith communities have been slow to respond to the changing shape of American families and to minister appropriately. "[They] have only been gradually catching on and for the most part have not caught on," said the Rev. Don Browning, director of the Religion, Culture and Family Project at the University of Chicago. "They knew families were changing, but didn't know what the costs were."

UNMARRIED COUPLES: ONE RABBI'S RESPONSE

Katherine Rowlett and her fiancé met with their rabbi recently for their first premarital counseling session. He asked for both of their home addresses. They had just one between the two.

"We got a little bit of a look, but that was the most there was. It was like, 'OK. Let's get you two married'," recalled Rowlett, a 28-year-old law student from Sacramento, California.

Keeping largely silent on cohabitation may not work for all clergy. But Rabbi Reuven Taff of the Conservative-movement Mosaic Law Congregation believes it's pointless to make much of a fuss.

"There are many rabbis who, for whatever reason, are

afraid to talk publicly about this issue because our society has changed so much," said Taff.

Judaism makes no "accommodation" for couples who live together outside matrimony, believing that the practice is at odds with the Hebrew definition of marriage as holy or "kiddushin."

"If Judaism tolerated and condoned this type of relationship without commitment, we would be denying Judaism's faith in the 'mitzvot' or Commandments," Taff said.

Rowlett knows several other couples at the mid-sized synagogue who lived together before marrying. "There's a big difference between promiscuity... and knowing this would be permanent," she said.

Browning's position is echoed by Maggie Gallagher, director of the Marriage Program at the Institute for American Values. "We get people married with great ceremony, then kind of throw them out the door," she said.

Rabbi Marvin Bash of the Arlington-Fairfax Conservative Jewish Congregation in Virginia notes that his faith's traditions have always emphasized the need for divine participation. In fact, the Hebrew word for marriage, *kiddushin*, also translates as "holiness." And during the wedding ceremony, God is called in as a "partner" to the union. That said, individual faith communities within Judaism have been slow to do much of the heavy lifting when it comes to helping couples keep their marriages strong and healthy, Bash said. "We've neglected this area for too long."

Dean Conger/CORBIS



New forms of family.



PHOTODISC

SHORING UP MARRIAGE

In Browning's view, many clerics found the motivation to change only when confronted with the findings of a few recent high-profile studies that dispelled whatever comforting notions remained about matrimony and the faithful.

First was the discovery that divorce was as common among observant, religious churchgoers – Catholics and Protestants alike – as it was among the population at large, debunking the misconception that such splits chiefly affect the unchurched. Other studies

have highlighted what Browning calls the “big-time social and personal costs” of divorce: poverty, ongoing stress, and a host of other social ills that frequently follow in its wake.

Such findings are slowly helping many clerics understand that marriage is vital to society's well-being, said Browning, who only half-jokingly likens the value of strong unions to that of clean drinking water. And with religious ceremonies accounting for nearly 75 percent of marriages in the U.S., clergy are in a unique position to intervene on the shaky institution's behalf.

The Rev. Dennis Juhl, a Roman Catholic priest in Waterloo, Iowa, estimates that he officiates at 20 wedding ceremonies a year. Ironically, he also processes as many annulments – if not a few more. And while the church requires that couples take part in workshops prior to marriage, Juhl believes

too many couples put more energy into the wedding than into the profound commitment they are sealing. Such attitudes often devalue the institution of marriage, he added.

“To be real honest, I look at myself more as a civil functionary than a sacramental priest. I think that's sad,” said Juhl, pastor of Blessed Sacrament Church and a priest of some 27 years. “I pray for them all,” he said of the couples he marries. “At the same time, I might be scratching my head and saying, Why the heck am I doing this?”

The Vatican maintains strict bans on Communion for divorced and remarried Catholics. Juhl upholds the rules of the church. But, like his fellow clergy in other denominations, he tries not to condemn so much as to “deal with people where they're at with compassion.”

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP* DOMESTIC VIOLENCE (Show #324) Originally broadcast: 2/11/00

“Night was the worst, when he knew everyone was asleep and he knew that I wasn't going to scream. That's when the real abuse would start.” Those chilling words only begin to tell the horrifying tale that millions of women experience each year. At airtime, statistics estimated that 35% of emergency room visits were the direct result of domestic violence – much of it spousal abuse – and that 40% of female homicides were the result of battering. Mary Alice Williams reports on how some in the Christian, Jewish, and Muslim communities have responded to the problem of spousal abuse.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ Why do you think some people feel obligated to stay in abusive relationships?
- ◆ What role might religion play in their decision to stay?
- ◆ How does your congregation address issues of abuse?
- ◆ If a friend or family member were in an abusive situation, to whom in your congregation or community could you refer them for assistance?
- Refer to Gathering for Discussion (p.19) for suggestions on how to incorporate clips and questions into discussions.

*Visit our Web site at www.thirteen.org/religion to see a video clip and read the transcript from this segment.

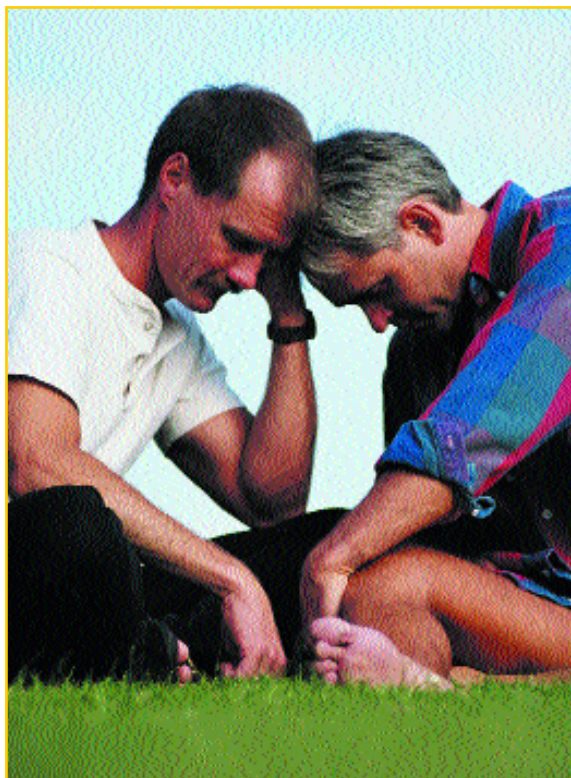
SAME-SEX UNIONS

For gay and lesbian couples, acceptance from their faith communities has come even more slowly than for other types of non-traditional families. Just about every major denomination in the U.S., from Reform Jews to United Methodists, has grappled with the role of same-sex unions. Often, said Debbie East, a lesbian and active member of the Episcopal church in Lander, Wyoming, clergy and laity in individual churches are more welcoming than those at the loftier levels who debate formal changes to sectarian laws and doctrine. East and her partner of 13 years were treated respectfully by the priests as well as by most of their fellow congregants, she said, but full equality was another matter. The two considered having their relationship blessed by the church, but Wyoming's Episcopal bishop would not sanction such ceremonies.

East is of two minds on the issue. She recognizes that it is neither fair nor “evolved” for the denomination to deny gays and lesbians the same sacraments as heterosexuals, but points to the need for what is known in mountaineering circles as “good expedition behavior.” She added: “That means not going faster than your slowest member. If I want my community with me, I have to follow that.”

SEEKING A BALANCE

Many religious communities are increasingly finding benefits in reaching out to broken families, single parents, and other once-marginalized groups. The Rev. Don Browning, for one, said some clergy have seized on marriage intervention as presenting “unbelievable opportunities . . . and church development strategies.”



The Friday night support groups at Vander Meer's New Community Church are an example of what he means. Well attended and followed each week by live music and espresso drinks, the sessions are simply a “different port of entry” into religious life, the Michigan pastor said. “People show up on Friday nights, then wind up in church Sunday professing their faith or getting baptized.” ♦

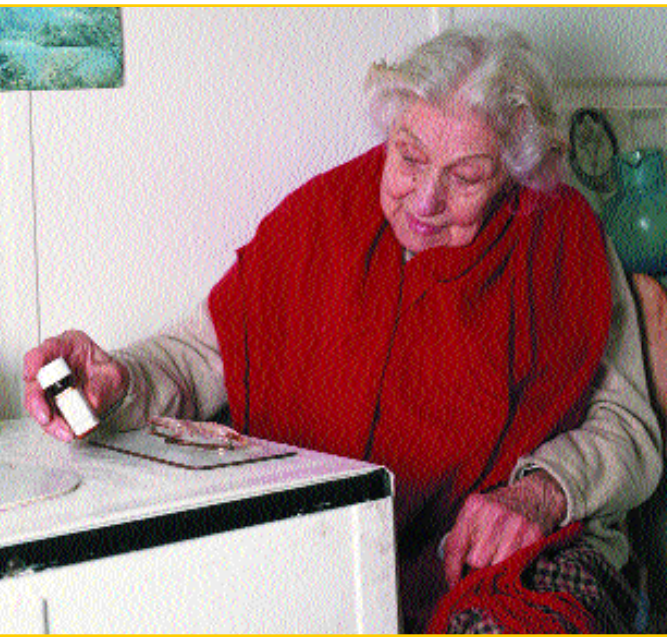
JAN FERRIS, former religion reporter for the *Sacramento Bee*, is a journalist based in Sacramento, California.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is your faith community doing to support couples before they marry, strengthen relationships once couples have wed or — if need be — help them recover if the union should fall apart? What approaches are most effective? Which areas need to be strengthened?
2. To what extent are scriptural teachings about marriage and divorce compatible — or incompatible — with ministering to cohabiting couples, unwed parents, gay families, and divorced men and women? How is it possible to lead such lifestyles while continuing to uphold sacred religious texts and traditions?
3. How have denominational debates over same-sex couples influenced the reception to gays and lesbians in your house of worship? How has the dialogue changed you personally or spiritually? Where do you see these issues going in the future?
4. Some experts say that clergy in many cases have been quicker than congregants to respond to the changing nature of families and relationships. How has that been demonstrated — or disproved — in your own faith community? Should clerics lead the way in ministering to non-traditional families or take their cue from the people in the pews?

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Situated in a poverty-stricken neighborhood of Wichita, Kansas, St. Mark United Methodist Church had 350 members in the mid-1980s. Two congregants – a medical student and his wife, a nurse – started a health clinic for area residents in the basement of the mostly African-American church.

Fifteen years later, the clinic functions two nights a week with multiple doctors and nurses, while the church also runs a counseling center and various health ministry programs. Associate pastor Nathan Stanton said the congregation, now 2,300 members strong, dreams of constructing a separate building for its health projects.

Staffed mainly by volunteers, St. Mark's health programs are largely funded by grants from the United

Methodist Health Ministry Fund, a nonprofit group. Patients are asked to pay – \$5 for flu shots, \$10 for a physical, \$20 for counseling – but no one is turned away for lack of funds.

“It’s Christ’s mandate that we as Christians not just focus on ourselves through Bible study or personal growth, but that we put Christian commitment to work and go to places that need healing,” Stanton said.

SPREADING THE HEALTH CARE GOSPEL

St. Mark is not the only faith community getting involved in health care. In view of an estimated 44 million Americans without medical insurance, widespread distrust of health care professionals among poor and minority populations, and studies showing the physical benefits of a spiritual lifestyle, congregations are opening clinics, sponsoring health-education programs, preaching the spiritual importance of healthy living, and holding healing services, all in an effort to keep their communities fit in body and spirit.

While such achievements are still the exception – experts estimate only about 10 percent of churches today are grappling with health issues – those at the forefront of health care initiatives report steady growth in recent years. They are confident enough to refer to the trend as a “faith and health movement.”

The Jewish Healthcare Foundation of Pittsburgh, for instance, gives grants to faith-based health care projects. Though recipients have included Catholic, Lutheran, and Presbyterian organizations, their programs reflect the foundation’s Jewish values, said senior program officer Nancy Zionts. “We’re responsible for looking out for the vulnerable in the com-

munity,” she said, which often translates to funding programs for the elderly, children, and the poor. The foundation also helps produce literature clarifying religious traditions’ stances on controversial medical topics, such as organ donation. Unlike many foundations, Zionts said, “We have not shied away from values-based grant making.”

A HOLISTIC APPROACH

Leaders of faith-based initiatives see ministering to parishioners’ physical selves as part of the pastor’s mission. “We set up a context of care in church,” said Susan Chase, associate professor of nursing at Boston College, which runs parish nurse training programs. “It’s a place where people learn how to live. You learn how to make choices in your life, and that can include health choices.”

“Jesus’ ministry was about healing,” she added. “Churches often have paid musicians, but Jesus didn’t spend so much time singing.”

Faith-based health care tends to emphasize a holistic approach, which assumes that neither spirit nor body can be whole unless both are healthy. Thus improving one’s lifestyle physically – through exercise, healthy eating, not smoking, and the like – is integral to striving for a better spiritual lifestyle, while prayer can strengthen bodily health.

The movement also draws on holistic aspects of Eastern religions, such as meditation and yoga, powerful physical and spiritual disciplines which are key elements of Buddhism. “As science is exploring more and more the connection between the mind and the body, [researchers are finding that] meditation gets very consistent results in stress



Michael S. Yamashita/CORBIS

St. Francis Xavier Church Kitchen in New York.

reduction,” said Geshe Lobang Tenzin, director of Atlanta’s Drepung Loseling Institute, a Buddhist organization that teaches meditation.

Perhaps the best example of the holistic approach to health care is the parish nurse movement, which integrates registered nurses into the ministry team of local congregations. Conceived by the Rev. Granger Westberg, a Lutheran minister, parish nursing began in 1984 as a partnership between Lutheran General Hospital-Advocate in Park Ridge,

PARISH NURSING UP CLOSE

The problem was chronic pain, and the patient, “suddenly unable to work,” was forced to change his lifestyle accordingly. Increasingly depressed, he focused only on the pain and his losses. A member of St. Luke the Evangelist Church in Westboro, Massachusetts, he asked his parish nurse to visit, and Michelle Parsons gladly obliged.

A registered nurse who once worked in a hospital oncology department, Parsons did pain management procedures with the patient, and listened as he described his mental state. Parsons had an idea.

She recited the Serenity Prayer with him: “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference.” Parsons asked him to recite it often and keep a journal of the things in his life that fell under each category. By doing so, he focused on those aspects of his life he still controlled, eventually bringing him to a sense of peace.

It is a therapy Parsons never could have suggested before she became a parish nurse. And that is exactly why, three years ago, she approached her pastor to

complain of her frustrations with mainstream medicine. As a hospital nurse, she was unable to integrate spirituality into her medical care at all, and later, working in a hospice and as a home-health nurse, she could do so only if and when a patient somehow opened the door to it. But something was lacking.

“I really felt called to my nursing work as my ministry,” Parsons said. Her pastor told her about parish nursing and, despite a pay cut, Parsons was soon employed by St. Luke’s as a full-time nurse.

Parson’s biggest frustration is the fact that standards developed by the American Nurses Association prohibit parish nurses from performing invasive procedures, such as giving injections. She often sees patients who need such services, but whose insurance company refuses to pay for a visiting nurse to do them. Despite her RN degree, Parsons can only advocate on their behalf. “I’ve been in situations where I am capable of doing what’s needed to be done, but can’t,” she said.

But Parsons, like all parish nurses, often can do exactly what’s needed: bring an element of spirituality into medical care. And bring wholeness to her patients.

Illinois, and six area congregations. It has since spread to 46 states and four foreign countries. Three thousand parish nurses have been trained in the past three years alone.

The movement believes health care must contain a spiritual element, “catering to mind, body, and spirit,” in the words of Michelle Parsons, a parish nurse at St. Luke the Evangelist Church in Westboro, Massachusetts. This can take many forms: praying with patients, bringing communion to the home-

bound, teaching meditation, or emphasizing the idea that God wants believers to live healthy lifestyles.

“In medicine and nursing, we became so secularized and specialized,” Parsons said. “We’ve compartmentalized the parts of our body. Parish nursing is a way of drawing that together again.” [See Box, above.]

OVERCOMING ALIENATION

Faith-health initiatives have another goal: to overcome mistrust of the medical establishment that



PHOTODISC

keeps many people – particularly the poor and African-Americans – from seeing a doctor. “By getting involved in health care, congregations can be instrumental in bringing them medical help,” said Hilda Davis, a Ph.D. candidate at Vanderbilt University studying African-American women’s health and spirituality.

Faith communities carry with them a “trust factor” that strongly influences parishioners, said Davis, who is also an ordained United Methodist minister. Pastors have the ability to convince their flock that physical health is a religious priority. If such exhortations are presented in the language of “this is what God wants,” believers will more likely get the blood pressure screening or mammogram that can save their lives.

Amir Al-Islam – an administrator at Medgar Evers College in New York City, who heads an interfaith organization – has dedicated himself to tackling this problem among American Muslims. Muslims, Al-Islam said, often feel alienated from mainstream American life, and may not know – or care – about medical services available to them from the government or nonprofits.

In addition, many feel that the doctors they have dealt with are ignorant of Islam and the unique religious and cultural needs of Muslim patients. Physicians are often unaware, for instance, that subjects like teen pregnancy or AIDS rarely get discussed in Muslim communities, said Al-Islam. He regularly urges Muslim groups to grapple with these topics, albeit through the lens of Muslim values. “What I am advocating is that the kind of counseling needed can take place, but has to be couched in a Muslim vernacular,” Al-Islam said. Al-Islam also

teaches doctors’ groups about Islam and Muslim patients’ needs, and he helps create literature for doctors about these subjects. “We need to build bridges of collaboration, and to reach out to institutions providing health services,” Al-Islam said.

IS IT ENOUGH?

It takes money to hire nurses and open clinics, but today faith communities occasionally get a boost from an unlikely source: the government. Recent legislation known as Charitable Choice has made it easier for faith-based groups that meet its strict criteria to receive federal funding to provide social services like health care. In order to qualify, congregations must deliver social services to all, regardless of religion, and they may not proselytize on the government’s tab. Because of its stringent requirements, Gary Gunderson of Emory University’s Interfaith Health Program believes that Charitable Choice will never represent more than a “small trickle of cash.”

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP* CHURCH HEALTH CENTER (Show #323) Original broadcast: 2/4/00

The city of Memphis, Tennessee – known for its music— has another claim to fame. The Church Health Center, established in 1987, is an ecumenical health care ministry with a mission to reclaim the church’s biblical and historical commitment to care for the poor and the sick. The Center’s founder and director is Scott Morris—full-time physician, part-time pastor. Host Bob Abernethy travels to Memphis to see the center and talk to Morris and others about the contributions it makes to the community. Abernethy also interviews U.S. Surgeon General David Satcher about the Memphis facility and what Satcher feels is needed to achieve a balanced community health system.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ Do all members of your congregation/community have access to necessary care?
- ◆ What emphasis does your faith place on assisting those in need of care?
- ◆ How does/can your congregation aid those in need?
- ◆ How can spiritual support contribute to the healing process?
- Refer to Gathering for Discussion (p.19) for suggestions on how to incorporate clips and questions into discussions.

*Visit our Web site at www.thirteen.org/religion to see a video clip and read the transcript from this segment.



Ed Erskine/CORBIS

Reaching out to the homebound.

While congregations struggle on the local level to keep their parishioners healthy, our national health care crisis deepens. “You see people who choose between prescriptions, food, and fuel,” said parish nurse Parsons. Doctors, nurses, and pastors laboring in the trenches echo her words.

Among major denominational groups, the “predictable religious position is advocating for universal access to health care,” said Gunderson. The problem, he continued, is that with a national health system essentially off the political agenda today, smaller issues – prescription drugs, children’s coverage – have taken its place, and on these issues faith groups are confused. Because faith groups don’t speak with a unified voice, they are less effective than they could be.

Individual congregations are especially quiet when it comes to advocacy. “Congregations tend to focus locally,” said Laurence O’Connell, president of the Park Ridge Center for the Study of Health, Faith and Ethics. “And there isn’t a lot of energy invested by national leadership that would trickle down locally.”

HAVING IT ALL

On both political and clinical fronts, congregations can cite many reasons for avoiding health care issues. But thriving examples like Wichita’s St. Mark UMC’s clinical programs belie any excuse. Maintaining its programs takes time, space, expertise, volunteer efforts, and a desire on the part of the congregation. Despite some rough times, Associate Pastor Stanton said programs have never been endangered by lack of enthusiasm or resources, and should grants ever come up short, the church would most likely step in financially.

“They can have it all,” Hilda Davis insisted, adding that even poorer congregations can rely on volunteer health care professionals, grants, and sheer resourcefulness. For instance, if a church hires an associate minister, part of that new pastor’s duties should be building the congregation’s health programs.

“It is central to the church’s mission or ministry that people have wholeness in their lives,” Davis said. “Health has to be integrated into the life of the church.” ♦

MICHAEL KRESS is an editor at *Beliefnet.com*, a multi-faith Web site. His articles on religion have appeared in *Newsweek*, *The Boston Globe*, *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, *Salon.com*, and *Publisher’s Weekly*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Should houses of worship with limited resources hire nurses and/or run health-related programs? What effect would this have on other services and programs?
2. Should health care professionals integrate faith, religion, and spirituality into their medical work in hospitals, clinics, and doctors’ offices? Are there times it might not be appropriate?
3. Should pastors try to convince congregants to seek medical advice—and follow doctors’ orders—in communities that mistrust the health care establishment, or should the decision be the patients’ alone? Are there better alternatives?
4. Is it more important for faith communities to be involved in providing health services, such as blood-pressure screenings or mammograms, or to get involved in the political side, advocating for universal access to health care and affordable health insurance? Why do you think so?

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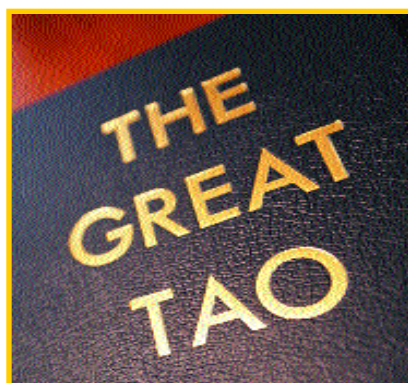
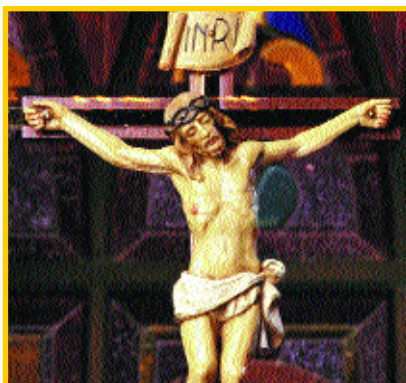
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Sulmasy, Daniel P., M.D. *The Healer’s Calling: A Spirituality for Physicians and Other Health Care Professionals*. Paulist Press, 1997.

The following website has information on Charitable Choice, including a copy of the bill:
www.senate.gov/~ashcroft/charitable.htm



Key to Religious Groups

- (BA) Bah'a'i
- (B) Buddhist
- (C) Christian (general)
- (H) Hindu
- (I) Islamic
- (J) Jewish
- (L) Lutheran
- (M) Mormon
- (O) Eastern Orthodox Christian
- (P) Protestant
- (RC) Roman Catholic
- (S) Sikh

JANUARY

- 1 FEAST OF ST. BASIL (O)
Celebrates the Orthodox liturgy.
- 6 FESTIVAL OF THE THREE KINGS (C)
- 7 EPIPHANY (C)
- 7 NATIVITY OF JESUS CHRIST (O)
Christmas celebration of Orthodox Christians.
- 15 MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.'S BIRTHDAY OBSERVED
- 24 CHINESE, KOREAN AND VIETNAMESE NEW YEAR (YEAR OF THE SNAKE) (B)
A two-week festival, where each year is symbolized by a different animal.

FEBRUARY

- 15 NIRVANA DAY (B)
Commemorates the death of Buddha.
- 19-23 BROTHERHOOD/SISTERHOOD WEEK
Promotes cooperation and justice among all religious, racial, and ethnic groups in U.S., sponsored by The National Conference for Community and Justice.
- 21 MAHA SHIVARATRI (H)
Night Festival in honor of Lord Shiva.

- 26 EASTERN ORTHODOX LENT BEGINS (O)
- 28 ASH WEDNESDAY (RC, P)
Christian Lent begins.

MARCH

- 2-20 MONTH OF FASTING* (BA)
- 9 PURIM* (J)
Celebrates deliverance of Jews of ancient Persia from destruction.
- 9 HOLI* (H)
The Colored-water Spring Festival.
- 11 'ID AL-ADHA (I)
Islamic festival of sacrifice.
- 21 NAW-RUZ* (BA)
Bah'a'i and Iranian New Year.
- 25 THE ANNUNCIATION (C)
- 26 MUHARRAM (I) Islamic New Year.

APRIL

- 4 MAHAVIR JAYANTI (S)
Birthday of Lord Mahavir.
- 8 WESAK (B) The anniversary of Buddha's birthday in Mahayana tradition.
- 8 PALM SUNDAY (RC,P,O)
Opens Christian Holy Week.

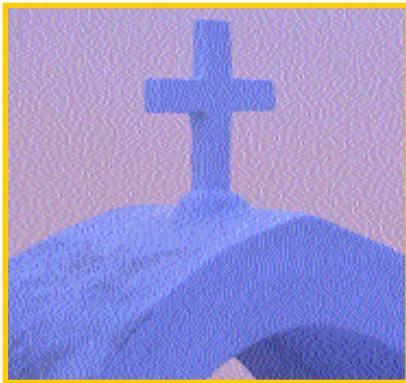
- 8-9 PASSOVER* (J) (FIRST & SECOND DAY—8 DAYS) Celebrates the deliverance of Jews from slavery in Egypt.
- 12 MAUNDY THURSDAY (RC, P)
Commemorates the Last Supper.
- 12 HOLY THURSDAY (O)
- 13 GOOD FRIDAY (RC, P)
The day of Jesus' crucifixion.
- 13 HOLY FRIDAY (O) Eastern Orthodox equivalent of Good Friday.
- 14-16 NEW YEAR (CAMBODIA) (B)
- 15 EASTER (RC, P, O)

MAY

- 24 ASCENSION DAY (RC, P)
Celebrates Jesus' ascent into heaven.
- 28 SHAVUOT* (2 DAYS) (J)
Jewish Festival of Weeks; commemorates the giving of the Torah and Commandments at Mt. Sinai.

JUNE

- 3 PENTECOST (RC, P)
Celebrates the descent of the Holy Spirit upon Christians following the ascension of Jesus.



- 4 MA'ULED AL-NABI (I) Birthday of the Prophet Mohammed, ca 570 C.E.
- 24 NATIVITY OF ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST (RC, P) Celebrates birth of New Testament figure.

JULY

- 9 MARTYRDOM OF THE BAB* (BA) Anniversary of the martyrdom of the Bab.
- 24 PIONEER DAY (M) Mormon observance of arrival of Brigham Young at Salt Lake City, Utah.

AUGUST

- 12 JANMASHTAMI* (H) The Birthday of Lord Krishna.
- 15 FEAST OF THE BLESSED VIRGIN MARY (RC, O) Commemorates assumption of Mary into heaven.
- 22 KHAMAPANA* (S) Day of Forgiveness.

SEPTEMBER

- 18 ROSH HASHANAH* (2 days) (J) Jewish New Year beginning 10 days of penitence concluded on Yom Kippur.



- 27 YOM KIPPUR* (J) Day of atonement, fasting and repentance.

OCTOBER

- 2-3 SUKKOT* (7 DAYS) (J) Festival of the fall harvest.
- 9 SHEMINI 'ATZERET* (J) Eighth and last day of Sukkot.
- 10 SIMCHAT TORAH* (J) Joyous festival in which the reading cycle of the Torah is completed and its first book begun again. Symbolized by singing, dancing, and marching around the Synagogue with Torah scrolls.
- 20 BIRTH OF THE BAB* (BA) Anniversary of the birth of one of the twin Prophet Founders of the Bah'a'i faith.
- 31 REFORMATION DAY (P, L) Commemorates start of the Protestant Reformation in 1517 with the posting of Martin Luther's 95 theses.

NOVEMBER

- 1 ALL SAINTS DAY (RC, P, L) Christian celebration of lives of all the saints.



- 12 BAHA'U'LLAH'S BIRTHDAY* (BA) Commemorates the birth of the founder of the Bah'a'i faith in 1817.
- 14 DIWALI* (H) The Festival of Lights and New Year Celebration.
- 17 RAMADAN (30 days) (I) Approximately 30 days of fasting from dawn till dusk to honor God.

DECEMBER

- 2 FIRST SUNDAY OF ADVENT (C)
- 6 ST. NICHOLAS DAY (C) Named for an ancient Christian bishop, this day is associated in many cultures with gift-giving.
- 8 FEAST OF THE IMMACULATE CONCEPTION (RC) Celebrates the Christian belief that Mary, mother of Jesus, was born without sin.
- 8 BODHI DAY (B) Buddhist celebration of the Enlightenment of Buddha, ca. 596 B.C.E.
- 10 HANUKKAH* (8 days) (J) Jewish festival of lights, 8-day commemoration of the rededication of the Second Temple in 165 B.C.E.



- 12 FESTIVAL OF OUR LADY OF GUADALUPE (RC) Honors the patron saint of Mexico.
- 25 CHRISTMAS (C)
- 26 KWANZAA 7-day celebration of African-American values and traditions.
- 28 'ID AL-FITRE (I) Islamic festival of the breaking of fast, Ramadan.

Notes

*All Jewish and Bah'a'i holidays begin at sunset the previous day. Hindu, Sikh, and Jain holidays are calculated on a lunar calendar and are observed at different times in different regions.



Adapted with permission from the National Conference for Community and Justice.



PHOTODISC

The annual winter program at Fox Valley Montessori School in Aurora, Illinois, is much like any other. Fidgety kids can't wait to take the stage for their performances, and beaming parents are poised to capture it all on videotape. The difference: sprinkled between the many songs about snow and snowmen are "Silent Night," "The Dreidel Song," and "It's Kwanzaa Time." And before each song, a student reads a report about the three religiously based holidays. The Montessori educational philosophy reflects the belief that children should learn about the world around them, and religion is part of that world. That's one reason Amy Manion chose Montessori schools for her children. "I don't like how many public schools, in their zeal to separate church and state, pretend that religion doesn't even exist," said Manion, who is Catholic. "Religion is important to us, and I'm comfortable with my kids learning about other religions." Manion is not alone.

More and more parents are unhappy having their children spending seven hours a day in what many perceive as "a religion-free zone" – this nation's public schools. Some 6 million are opting instead to send their children to private schools or to religious schools that teach about their own faith. And a growing number are choosing to homeschool. But with the majority of elementary and secondary students still in public schools – more than 80 percent, according to the U.S. Department of Education – private and religious schools are not the answer to the problem.

A POLARIZED DEBATE

Meanwhile, the debate about religion and public education persists, too often in a polarized and polarizing way. On the one side are "restorers" who yearn to return to the fictitious "good old days" when public schools taught the four R's – reading,

writing, arithmetic and religion. On the other side are strict separatists who believe that any mention of religion or God in a public school dangerously chips away at the vital wall between church and state.

The issues flare regularly, if not incessantly. In Kansas, creationists and evolutionists argue over what public schoolchildren should be learning in science class. In Texas, "No Pray, No Play" campaigns organize "spontaneous" prayer before football games after the U.S. Supreme Court strikes down school-sponsored prayers. In Kentucky, Indiana, Michigan, and South Dakota, school districts are considering posting the Ten Commandments on school property. In Florida, a less-than-objective Bible history class has parents and educators clashing and, as is often the case, threatening legal action. Vouchers and public funding for private schools have been an issue in several states and in the most recent presidential election.

Church historian Martin M. Marty is not surprised. In our pluralistic society, the intersection of religion and education has become an urgent issue that is destined to create controversy and debate, he said. But he would rather see a "conversation," as he argues in his new book, *Education, Religion and the Common Good*.

Marty also advocates integrating religion into the curriculum at all levels of education – from primary to university. Instead, what currently operates in the minds of many Americans is a cognitive disjunction Marty calls the "Grade Thirteen Principle": public funding of private schools or comparative religion classes is accepted at the college level, but not before. Marty finds that problematic. "In the midst



Benjamin Tree Smith

of global, national, and local change affecting world-views and public action, religion is too widespread and too deep a phenomenon not to be reckoned with in primary or at least secondary schools and thereafter, no matter under what aegis or auspices,” he writes. “If we assume that it is unfair to ‘establish,’ privilege, demean, or minimize particular faiths, then the common good is furthered only by fair-minded, unprejudiced teaching about religion and religions.”

AN EMERGING MIDDLE GROUND

Marty’s vision grew out of a series of conversations sponsored by the Public Religion Project at the University of Chicago. It reflects an emerging middle ground that has been gaining support over the past decade among educators, religious organizations, and parents. One proponent is Charles Haynes, senior scholar at the First Amendment Center/Freedom Forum, who advocates the “civil public school,” one that neither inculcates nor inhibits religion. “A civil public school neither imposes religion through the state, which is unconstitutional and unjust,” he said, “nor does it create a religion-free zone, where public schools are places you leave your religion at the door. That’s also unjust and sometimes unconstitutional.”

The key is to teach “about” religion, rather than teach religion. But even that raises a host of thorny questions for public schools. Can devout believers teach about religion without also proselytizing? How can schools overcome the inevitable tendency to avoid controversy in the community by minimizing any mention of religion? How does a teacher respect the religious beliefs of minorities and at the same time present fairly religion’s role in American history and literature?

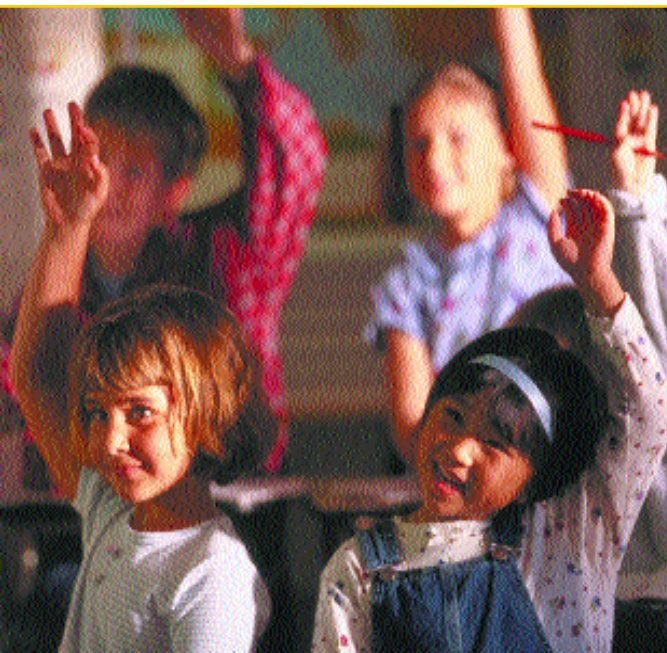
Jim Antenore has taught his World Religions class at a public high school in Irvine, California, for over 20 years. Antenore teaches about the world’s five major religions – Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. His guiding principle is plastered on a poster in his classroom: “To discuss and understand, rather than to argue and win.” “Early on, I had the goal that people would come to

BEGINNER’S BIBLE ENDS UP IN COURT

Zachary Hood almost chose *The Cat in the Hat* when his teacher said students could pick a story to read to their classmates. But his mother, Carol Hood, suggested he select a shorter story. He picked one about Jacob and Esau from *The Beginner’s Bible: Timeless Children’s Stories*, which Carol reads to her son every night before bed. But Zachary’s first-grade teacher at Haines elementary School in Medford, N.J. — like many who are nervous about the confusion on issues surrounding religion and public schools — asked him to read the story privately to her, because she deemed the religious content inappropriate.

When Carol Hood protested and administrators failed to apologize, she sued the teacher, the principal, the school district, and the district superintendent. Last year, a federal court let stand a lower court ruling that the school district did not violate the boy’s free-speech rights, but Hood’s lawyers from the Becket Fund for Religious Liberty are petitioning the Supreme Court to review the case. Hood, who is Catholic, says she believes her son’s choice was in line with current federal guidelines about religious expression in public schools. “We’re religious and God-centered in a personal, quiet way,” she said. “We’re not trying to be evangelical. That’s not my style.”

respect and appreciate each other’s faith,” said Antenore. “But that’s not always possible. There are some people whose faith does not allow that.” In two decades, Antenore remembers only one problem — the daughter of a fundamentalist preacher who resisted learning about other faiths. He credits this lack of controversy to his objective approach. He won’t even disclose his own religious faith or background. “As I present each religion, I do it as best I can as if I’m a member of that community.” Often,



Ellyse Lewis Studio, Inc./IMAGE BANK

students find clarity and make a deeper commitment to their own faith, Antenore said. But even if they don't, they are better educated individuals. "To not know about human religious experience is not to be fully educated," the teacher said.

THE CONSTITUTIONALITY TEST

Haynes agrees. "Religion can be taught objectively and academically," he said, though he admits that an immense amount of teacher training is necessary. But in his view it's worth the effort, since a quality, liberal education must include exposure to the religious diversity of this country. "Public schools represent the public, and this is the most religiously diverse nation in the world," he said. "To have a curriculum that ignores that is wrong."

According to Haynes, this approach also meets the test of constitutionality. "The First Amendment requires the government to be neutral, and neutral means exposing kids to a variety of ways of looking at the world," he said. "Neutrality does not mean ignoring religion. That's hardly neutral." Even those who agree with Haynes admit there is a fine line between teaching about religion in public schools and slipping into proselytizing. "It's almost impossible for people who take the Bible seriously as sacred text to teach without their biases," said Thomas May, president of the National Bible Association. "But it's also hard for people who believe it's a bunch of myths to teach it objectively."

May cites Gallup polls showing that only 8 percent of public schools teach anything about the Bible, while more than 75 percent of Americans would like to see something about the Bible taught in

public schools. His association sponsors workshops around the country to help educate educators about how the Bible can be taught in public schools without violating U.S. Supreme Court rulings.

Although the association and its guide, "The Bible in Public Schools," don't advocate teaching the Bible as God's truth which must be followed, that is May's personal belief, and he does encourage parents and churches to instruct children accordingly. That's what worries Americans United for Separation of Church and State. "I'm concerned," said spokesperson Steve Benen, "because a lot of people, including elected officials, want to bring back the glory days, which I don't believe existed, where religion and government intermix to the detriment of religious minorities and families who want to take the lead role in the religious instruction of their children."

RELATED PROGRAM CLIP* RELIGION AND PUBLIC SCHOOLS (Show #403) Originally broadcast: 9.15.00

Legal actions and intense discussions surround issues of religion and public schools. "Many school districts remain deeply confused, and parents are confused," comments Charles Haynes, senior scholar at The Freedom Forum/First Amendment Center. *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* presents a primer on what teachers can and cannot teach in classrooms and what religious activities are allowed in public schools. Correspondent Kim Lawton talks to educators and religious and constitutional activists about dos and don'ts of religion in public schools and looks at a high school in Raleigh, North Carolina, that developed a religion curriculum they hope can serve as a model for school systems around the country.

QUESTIONS FOR EXPLORATION

- ◆ What is the potential value of the study of religions in schools? What are potential dangers?
- ◆ How familiar are you with the rights guaranteed by the First Amendment?
- ◆ How can your congregation work with schools to address these issues?
- Refer to *Gathering for Discussion* (p.19) for suggestions on how to incorporate clips and questions into discussions.

*Visit our Web site at www.thirteen.org/religion to see a video clip and read the transcript from this segment.



Françoise de Mulder/CORBIS

Muslim students.

IMPLEMENTING FEDERAL GUIDELINES

Benen supports the current federal guidelines that allow objective, academic teaching about religion, but recognizes that objectivity is difficult to attain. “It often creates an environment where one religion is favored over others,” he said. Typically in public schools, Christianity is favored to the detriment of “minority” religions, such as Islam. Sharifa Alkhateeb, president of the Muslim Education Council, is all for teaching about religion in public schools. She just wants her faith to be presented fairly and accurately. “Teachers in general don’t

know much about Islam,” she said. What’s worse are the history textbooks that use negative adjectives to describe Muslims, portraying them in constant conflict with “Christendom” or stereotypically as camel-riding Bedouins.

But it isn’t just misinformation about the faith that drives many American Muslims to choose religious schools for their children, said Alkhateeb. Often public schools do not allow Muslim students to pray during the school day and do not warn them about pork products in the cafeteria. Another problem is cultural insensitivity, such as teachers or counselors who encourage Muslim girls to date. “In Muslim families, respect for parents is extremely important,” explained Alkhateeb. Nor are Muslims alone in feeling that family values often get the short shrift in the classroom.

FAMILY VALUES

In the wake of Littleton, Colorado and other instances of violence in public schools, parents and other concerned citizens wonder whether more mention of religion during the school day might be advisable. The issue seems destined to be decided by the courts. Late last year, a federal judge upheld a Virginia law requiring public school students to observe a daily moment of silence each morning. And the U.S. Supreme court will once again consider the religion/education question this year when it rules on the distinction between religious worship and instruction in the case of a Christian club that was banned from meeting at an upstate New York public school. ♦

HEIDI SCHLUMPF, an editor at *U.S. Catholic* magazine, writes about religion for *Publisher’s Weekly*.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What was your own experience learning about religion in school? What would you want for your children?
2. Have public schools become “religion-free zones”? Would public school students benefit from learning about religion? Should a quality education include some information about world religions, the Bible, and other sacred texts?
3. Is it possible to teach objectively about the Bible, or about one’s own religious faith or other faiths? What are some of the potential problems of bringing religion into public school classrooms? Does it blur the line between church and state?
4. How might teaching about religion help to make young people more ethical or encourage respect for diversity?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Department of Education. [Guidelines on Religion in the Public Schools](http://www.ed.gov/inits/religionandschools).
www.ed.gov/inits/religionandschools

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Haynes, Charles C. and Oliver, Thomas. [Finding Common Ground: A First Amendment Guide to Religion and Public Education](#). Freedom Forum/First Amendment Center, 1998.

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Michael S. Yamashita/CORBIS

A prayer to Buddha.

God is great, God is good. Millions of American children have learned to bless their food with a little poem that begins with that acknowledgment of a higher power, a transcendent God who somehow supplies their needs. As they grow older, they are likely to want to move beyond the simple affirmation, asking questions about who God is, how God relates to them, and how they should relate to God. In pursuing those queries, they are joining the ranks of countless forebears, perhaps going back to the very beginning of time.

GOD AS TRANSCENDENT

The notion of a transcendent God is powerful and enduring, as Jack Miles points out in *God, A Biography*. “Throughout history, men and women have experienced a dimension of the spirit that seems to transcend the mundane world,” he writes.

GRIEVING TOGETHER

The elegant Peachtree Road United Methodist Church in Atlanta’s affluent Buckhead community is in the middle of the Protestant mainline. But on an emotion-filled day in 1999 prayers went up in several forms as the city gathered in the church’s sanctuary to mourn the victims of a random shooting at a day trading firm.

Mark O. Barton, who had already killed his wife and children, could not have known he was sowing seeds of inter-faith understanding with his bullet barrage in two office buildings near the church. But his rampage cut across faith lines, killing several Christians, two Muslims, a Jew, and a Hindu.

In their grief and anger and loss, the families and friends of the victims came together to ask timeless questions about the meaning of life and to draw comfort from their togetherness. How they addressed God and what rituals they performed seemed less important than the understanding that they all drew strength from a greater power and from each other.

Huston Smith, in his introduction to The World’s Religions, considers the many voices of faith from God’s perspective. “How does it all sound from above? Like bedlam, or do the strains blend in strange, ethereal harmony?” On this sad day in Atlanta, there was little doubt that, at least for a few hours, the disparate notes formed a wonderful chorus.

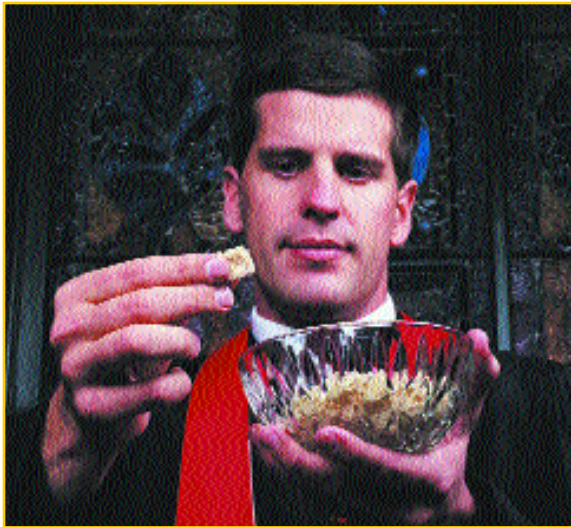
“Indeed it is an arresting characteristic of the human mind to be able to conceive concepts that go beyond it in this way.”

Sensing that there might exist a force beyond them, primitive humans developed personae for the sun and the moon, the storms and the seas. They told stories about the forces of nature and gave them names. Filled with awe and fear of what they could not control, they attempted to impose order in the universe by developing accounts of how the world was created and of how it might end. They constructed moral codes. They invented rituals for marking the passage of time and the milestones of life. They wondered what brought about suffering and joy, and they developed hopes of eternal existence beyond their earthbound mortality. Cultures grew up with art and music and dance to praise the divine.

In those pre-industrial times, men and women were connected to the land and the seasons in ways that are difficult to comprehend in these days of air conditioning and irrigation. Hearing thunder or feeling the wind, they sensed a power that inspired awe. They called it God.

CONNECTING TO THE DIVINE

For early humans, dependence on and worship of God were there constantly as part of daily life. Ordinary acts of living such as bathing and eating were incorporated into worship – ritual cleansing or sharing of communion. Winifred Gallagher, in her book *Working on God*, the story of her personal search, suggests why such rituals may have begun. “Religion starts with a question about meaning,” she writes. “What’s true? What matters? Why is there something instead of nothing? Is this all there is? Who am I? What should I do?”



PHOTODISC

Clergyman administering the Eucharist at Mass.

Various rites and symbolic acts came into being, perhaps, as the answer to the last of the questions: What should I do? The questions, though centered on self, ring with universality – as evidenced by the fact that in different parts of the world at different times, different groups of people have established similar forms of worship.

Even today in our computerized, post-industrial society, we connect to the divine by tapping into the rhythms of the earth. Jews celebrate the harvest festival Sukkot in leafy bowers. Christians meet in great cathedrals for Easter as spring begins to burst forth with new life. Taoists celebrate the harvest under the full moon. Wiccan covens gather in fields to mark the equinoxes and solstices. Ironically, however, the religions that arise out of shared impulses often result in deep division.

THE LANGUAGE OF GOD

“The language of God as King comes from cultures where the notion of God is meaningful. Recently many Christians, particularly women, have found the notion of “King” too hierarchical and have ceased using it. Many have ceased to speak of God as the one whose banner Christian soldiers bear into battle, for this is not what they mean by God. Many have also found that to speak of God as Father is inadequate or distorting, both of God’s reality and of their own. Do we speak of God as monarch or shepherd, as breath or word, as YHWH or Elohim, father or mother, as creator or redeemer? All of this is a language of images which we use more or less frequently depending upon how well they express our sense of God.”

from *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras* by Diana L. Eck (Beacon Press, ©1993 by Diana L. Eck)

DIVISIONS AND COMMONALITIES

Different times and different cultures produced different faiths and different views of the divine as god or goddesses, as one omnipotent ruler of the universe or many aspects, as personal and caring or impersonal and judgmental. Different ethnic groups developed different doctrines, based on their own experiences, needs, and their understanding of the world. When great prophets arrived on the scene – such as Muhammad or Siddhartha Gautama, who came to be called the Buddha – their followers eventually created faith systems around their teachings. Different faiths marked births, coming-of-age, marriage, and death with their own ceremonies. And in many cases, they eventually decided that their beliefs and rituals and ceremonies were superior to any others.

Yet, examined in their most basic structure, the world’s religions have much in common. Judaism, Islam, and Christianity, the world’s three major monotheistic religions, all arose in the Middle East and trace their roots back to Abraham and his descendants. They recognize one God, creator and controller of the universe, who told Moses, accord-

ing to the Torah, “I AM that I am.... This is my name forever; this is my title in every generation.” All believe that it is the duty of humans to live out God’s teachings on earth. And all believe that God punishes evil and rewards those who try to live faithful lives – not surprising, perhaps, given their common beginnings.

But Jehovah or Yahweh or Allah does not seem so different from Ahura Mazda, the god of the Zoroastrians, who also obligates humans to do good deeds in order to be rewarded in heaven, and who created life in six stages, making humans higher than the animals with the capacity to do good or evil. And Ahura Mazda resembles the god of the Bah’ais who, according to their teaching, also created and rules the universe and made people with immortal souls that distinguish them from animals. In fact, the Bah’ais recognize many prophets, from Abraham to Zoroaster. There are similarities even in faiths that seem to be the most disparate in origin. Take Hinduism and Mormonism.

Hinduism began to take shape in northwest India sometime before 1200 B.C.E. Some 3,000 years later an American named Joseph Smith almost



Will & Deid Melnyre/PHOTO RESEARCHERS, INC.

single-handedly founded a new faith, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Yet both recognize a divinity with many facets. Both accept that human beings have a spiritual aspect beyond the physical. Both believe that one's thoughts, words, and deeds determine what happens in the afterlife. And both believe that human beings can eventually achieve a kind of perfection.

Despite all they share, however, each of the world's great faiths, and every sect or denomination within each faith, is distinctive. When asked by a reporter for the St. Louis *Post-Dispatch* whether all religions are just variations of one, world religion scholar Huston Smith answered with a joke about an Irish tailor who said of the trousers he made: They are

one at the top and plural on the bottom. "I think that's true of religions," Smith said. "They all share what I call a 'highest common denominator' . . . but where they place their emphases is different."

CHIPPING AWAY AT WALLS

Periodically, leaders of the world's great faiths come together to attempt to learn from each other at a Parliament of the World's Religions. With great fanfare, in late summer 2000 hundreds of religious leaders attended the Millennium World Peace Summit in New York to celebrate their commonalities and determine how they could work together. Meanwhile, within Christianity, denominations are chipping away at walls that have stood for centuries between Orthodox and Catholic, Catholic and Lutheran.

These are daring goals at a time when faiths and denominations are deeply divided over difficult social and political issues. "Recognizing God is not an easy task," writes Diana Eck in *Encountering God*. "It is not the simple affirmation that all visions of God are the same. They are not." Yet, the more astute and spiritually attuned seem to comprehend that two people who understand each other's view of God are more likely to understand each other.

Recognizing the worth of another's view of God does not diminish one's own, said Benjamin Hubbard, chair of the comparative religion department at California State University at Fullerton. "You see in other religions some aspects of your own," he said. "You appreciate both the other faith and your own – it happens simultaneously." ♦

Gayle White covers religion for the *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*. She is the author of *Believers and Beliefs* (NY: Berkley Publishing, 1997).

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Describe your own view of God. What traits does your divinity have? What feelings if any? Do you think you are making your God in your own image?
2. Are you uncomfortable with views of God that are different from your own? If so, why?
3. Can believers retain their own identity while they respect and understand other people's faiths?
4. Why are so many wars allegedly fought over religion?
5. What concrete steps can lead to greater understanding between individuals? Between faiths? Between cultures?

SUGGESTED READINGS

Eck, Diana L. *Encountering God: A Spiritual Journey from Bozeman to Banaras*. Beacon Press, 1993.

Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred & The Profane: The Nature of Religion*. Harcourt, Inc., 1957, 1987.

Gallagher, Winifred. *Working on God*. Modern Library, 1999.

Miles, Jack. *God: A Biography*. Vintage Books, 1996.

Smith Huston. *The World's Religions*. Harper San Francisco, 1992.

Smith, Huston. *Why Religion Matters: The Fate of the Human Spirit in an Age of Disbelief*. Harper San Francisco, 2000.

FOR CHILDREN:

Osborne, Mary Pope. *One World, Many Religions: The Ways We Worship*. Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1996.

INTRODUCTION

Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly is public television at its best. The series introduces us to important issues in our own faiths as well as to belief systems that may be entirely new to us. This Viewer's Guide has been written to help you look more deeply into themes that emerge in the series. It is appropriate for independent learning, but we think it is particularly useful for group study and discussion. Such discussion might take place in the context of an adult learning circle at a particular place of worship, or discussion might be incorporated as part of an interfaith event. In either case, the following pages will help you incorporate the series and this Guide into your group activities and will provide guidelines for planning and conducting a successful discussion.

PLANNING THE DISCUSSION

The first step in planning a discussion is to determine WHAT will be discussed, and WHO will participate in the discussion. Will the discussion be an ongoing exploration of various topics, or is it intended to provide a single exploration of a specific topic or issue? You might choose to discuss the topics in this Guide, or other segments of *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* may inspire you to develop your own topics and discussion questions.

Will the discussion be intrafaith or interfaith? Will it be open to groups other than faith groups, such as community service organizations? Be mindful of the differing needs of diverse groups. Whether your group is small or large, diversity is key for any fruitful discussion.

How to Get Started

Establish a Planning Committee to schedule your discussion(s), including representatives from each of the groups you would like to have participate. With them, determine the following items:

The specific goal of the discussion:

- ◆ What is the desired result?
 - To increase awareness and understanding of religious and ethical practices; and/or
 - To explore a topic or topics of special interest; and/or
 - To increase understanding of, and participation in, religious and ethical activities and programs.
- ◆ Will there be any follow-up?

The components of the discussion:

- ◆ What topic(s) should be addressed and who should speak?
- ◆ Who can moderate the topic(s) sensitively in open discussion?
- ◆ How can participants take the next step?
- ◆ Are any materials or equipment needed? (i.e., video tape, VCR, copies of Guide, additional questions from Web)

Intrafaith Discussion

Who should come: Exploring and understanding differences is how we learn and grow. Although you may share a faith, there are many other ways to create a diverse group. Be sure to include people of varying races, ages, genders, and special interest groups. Or invite members of another congregation of your faith to join you.

Where to host it: Your own place of worship is a natural choice, but you might also consider rotating

the location of discussion among the homes of participants if your place of worship is not available. If your discussion will include members of another congregation, you might consider a future discussion event at their facility.

When: If you are establishing an ongoing discussion group, plan to hold regular meetings, whether weekly, biweekly or monthly. Some groups may want to watch the program together and then discuss it immediately afterwards. Others might prefer to meet a few days after the broadcast. Depending on the broadcast time in your area, you may want to tape the program for group viewing.

Interfaith/Community Discussion

Who should come: Members of any of the following groups might be included in an interfaith or community discussion:

- ◆ Clergy/Members of various faiths
- ◆ Religion/Ethics Educators
- ◆ Classroom Teachers
- ◆ Civic Leaders
- ◆ Community Service Organizations
- ◆ Issue-oriented Discussion Groups
- ◆ Interfaith Councils
- ◆ Local Affiliates of Outreach Associates (see back cover)

Where to host it: If your discussion will include members of different faiths, try to find neutral ground; a civic building, conference space in a college, museum or library, or local school auditorium works well. Holding it in a religious institution may send mixed signals to a secular or interfaith group.

When: In planning an interfaith or community event, it is important to consider participants'

schedules. For example, if you want K-12 educators to attend, starting at 4:00 p.m. provides that opportunity, but is still within standard business hours for non-educators. Weekends might seem ideal, but if you are including members of various faiths, different days of observance may complicate scheduling.

CONDUCTING THE DISCUSSION

Discussion is a process by which we share our opinions and attitudes in an atmosphere of trust, even when profound differences are expressed. The goal of discussion is to help us understand our own feelings, traditions, and beliefs and to give us the opportunity to understand the feelings, traditions, and beliefs of others. Discussion is not preaching or proselytizing, debate or defense – it is an exploration and exchange of information. It is important when discussing such deeply personal topics as religion and ethics to create a “safe space” – an environment where learning, exchange, and free self-expression can take place without threatening or belittling any of the participants.

When embarking on a discussion event, whether the group consists of members from a single faith or a variety of faiths, it is important to set clear guidelines for respectful communication. Here are some suggestions for establishing a “safe space” in which to learn and grow.

Creating “A Safe Space”

Before any type of dialogue can begin, it’s important to set the tone. How this is done will influence the relationships and interactions participants will have, with each other and with the facilitators. An atmosphere of respect is critical. Three basic ground rules should be established at the beginning of discussion

to allow participants to express themselves and learn from one another.

1. **“One Mike”:** The idea of one microphone insures that only one person speaks at a time. This encourages listening to and learning from one another and allows everyone equal opportunity to speak and be heard. If more than one person is talking, facilitators and/or participants may enforce the One Mike rule by saying, “One Mike!”
2. **Participation:** Facilitators have a responsibility to encourage each person’s participation and to emphasize the premise that everyone contributes to the success of the discussion. Participants should not feel obligated to speak, although their thoughts and feelings are valuable to a well-rounded discussion. However, the listening they grant to other speakers is equally valuable.
3. **“Safe Space”:** This ensures that all participants feel respected and comfortable to express their opinions. The main concepts in creating “Safe Space” are:
 - ♦ Respecting one another’s opinions even when they are different from our own. If someone says something that you don’t agree with, it’s OK to challenge the opinion, but not to attack the person. Exploring different opinions and points of view helps us gain understanding about the complexity of issues and allows us to gain insight into experiences different from our own.
 - ♦ Supporting one another as new ideas and activities are explored. Some participants may be resistant to voicing opinions or engaging in activities. Emphasize that you are all learning together and no one will be ridiculed for trying out a new activity or working through a difficult concept.

If this is violated, facilitators and/or participants should say, “Safe Space!”

The “Safe Space” guidelines were adapted from Global Kids, Inc., a non-profit educational organization dedicated to preparing urban youth to become community leaders and global citizens. For more information, contact: Global Kids, Inc., 561 Broadway, 6th Floor, New York, NY 10012 at (212) 226-0130.

Helpful Hints

- ♦ Organize groups that are diverse in religion, ethnicity, age, gender and/or special interest.
- ♦ Enlist sensitive, knowledgeable discussion leaders. (Contact our Outreach Associates listed on the back – they may have local affiliates in your area that can contribute.)
- ♦ Be open to new viewpoints and ideas.
- ♦ Listen actively when others speak, and encourage all members to do the same.
- ♦ Rotate leadership among group members, with each member choosing a session or two that s/he would like to facilitate.
- ♦ Try to build on comments made by others so that a dialogue develops.
- ♦ Remember that it is important to honor people’s feelings and testimony, even when they differ from your own.
- ♦ When scheduling interfaith events, be sure to consider days of worship or observance that may differ from your own.
- ♦ When serving refreshments, be mindful of traditions and dietary laws.
- ♦ Keep groups small (6-10) to promote full participation and lively exchange. If convening a larger group, consider breaking into smaller groups for at least part of the discussion session, starting and finishing with a general session to set the tone for discussion and to share experiences with the group at large.

USING VIDEO TO INSPIRE AND ENHANCE DISCUSSION

Watching a video can be an interactive rather than a passive experience, and the short, information-packed segments from *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* are ideal for inspiring discussion on spiritual and ethical topics. To involve your discussion group or class more actively in the viewing process, consider using the following techniques:

1. Preview each program to determine its suitability for achieving the objectives of your discussion. You may want to use only one segment from a program, or collect related segments from several shows. Before showing a videotape to a group, first preview the program with an eye toward:

- ◆ What objectives you hope to accomplish with your group;
- ◆ What specific issues you want to explore;
- ◆ What you want your group to take away from this program.

2. Select segments relevant to your discussion topic. Remember that you need not necessarily “agree” with a segment for it to be worthwhile! A segment can be useful to introduce a topic and provide a background for discussion.

3. Provide a “Focus for Viewing” – the participants’ specific responsibility while viewing a segment. Introduce segments with a question to be answered or task to be accomplished while viewing. Because so many issues can arise in a single segment, it is important for the discussion leader to identify the issue or issues most relevant to the planned conversation. Then relate initial discussion to the given focus.

4. Conduct Pre- or Post-Viewing Discussion. Discussion can be held prior to viewing the segment, to gauge the general knowledge of the partici-

pants, provide background information, identify new vocabulary words or concepts, or introduce the topic. Discussion can also be held after viewing to review, reinforce, apply, or extend the information conveyed by the segment.

5. Pause while viewing to check participants’ comprehension, ask questions, have participants take notes, make comments, or analyze what they’ve seen. You may also want to rewind and replay a segment for clarification or review.

Also, depending on the topic you choose, you may want to consider inviting experts from within or outside the congregation to share their experiences and viewpoints.

USING THE GUIDE

Although the Guide is not keyed to specific programs, its four essays address issues that appear frequently in the television series. Additionally, a center spread lists religious observances for many faiths throughout 2001. Each essay includes:

- ◆ a sidebar offering an example or commentary on the article’s main theme;
- ◆ a sidebar featuring a broadcast topic with segment summary and related questions;
- ◆ discussion questions encouraging examination of your own beliefs and exploration of the topic in the world around you; and
- ◆ suggested reading for additional information.

Finally, on its back cover, the Guide includes online resources for various religions and a list of Outreach Associates that can assist you in developing discussions and events related to topics seen on *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly*.

Choose one or more of the topics, and have participants read the essay(s). To explore further the chosen topic(s), you might view a recorded segment from *Religion & Ethics NewsWeekly* that relates to that topic, or visit our Web site for streamed video segments and transcripts. Then, using the discussion questions provided in the Guide, you’re ready to begin! You can also create your own materials by taping the program each week and developing your own discussion questions.

USING THE WEB

For the first time this year, the *Viewer’s Guide* cites specific program segments for discussion, giving the program number and broadcast date. Discussion questions relate to the segment and the essay topic. These segments can be obtained by visiting www.thirteen.org/religionandethics/. However, even without the video clips, the description of the segments are sufficient for discussion purposes. Additional resources feature advance information about each week’s program, including photographs and video clips, as well as a weekly interdenominational calendar, and transcripts of current and past programs. Site visitors can also vote in a weekly poll relating to the current broadcast and search for local broadcast times.

FOLLOW-UP

Perhaps a topic discussed by your group will lead to a desire for further exploration or greater action. How does your congregation interact with or impact your community? As a community member, how could you work with other congregations to affect your community? ◆

OUTREACH ASSOCIATES

The following national organizations have local affiliates across the country that can provide information for and guidance on establishing discussions in your area. Contact them to find out if there is an affiliate group in your town and how you might partner with it.

American Jewish Committee
165 East 56th Street
New York, N.Y. 10022
Contact: Rabbi James Rubin, Senior Interreligious Advisor
T: 212-751-4000 (ext. 260/261), F: 212-751-4018
Web site: www.ajc.org

Congress of National Black Churches
1225 "I" Street NW, Suite 750
Washington, D.C. 20005
Contact: Ms. Sullivan Robinson, Executive Director
T: 202-371-1091, F: 202-371-0908
Web site: www.cnbc.org

Greek Orthodox Archdiocese of America
Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Relations
8-10 East 79th Street,
New York, New York 10021
Contact: His Grace Bishop Dimitrios of Xanthos,
Ecumenical Officer
T: 212-570-3593, F: 212-774-0202
E-mail: ecumenical@goarch.org

Hindu Temple and Cultural Society of USA, Inc.
780 Old Farm Road
Bridgewater, NJ 08807
Contact: Dr. M.G. Prasad,
Chairperson of the Education Committee
T: 201-216-5571 (also 908-725-4477)

Islamic Cultural Center of New York
1711 3rd Avenue,
New York, N.Y. 10029-7303
Contact: Mohamed Younes, Public Relations
T: 212-722-5234, F: 212-722-5936

The National Conference for Community and Justice (NCCJ)
(formerly The National Conference of Christians and Jews)
475 Park Avenue South, 19th Floor
New York, NY 10016
Contact: Chrissie Reyes, Communications Associate
T: 212-545-1300, F: 212-545-8053
E-mail: creyes@nccj.org
Web site: www.nccj.org

National Conference of Catholic Bishops
and US Catholic Conference
3211 Fourth Street, NE
Washington, DC 20017-1194
Contact: Monsignor Francis Maniscalco,
Director of Communications
T: 202-541-3200, F: 202-541-3173

National Council of Churches of Christ in the USA
Office of Interfaith Relations
475 Riverside Drive, Room 868
New York, NY 10115-0050,
Contact: Rev. Dr. Bert Breiner, Co-Director
T: 212-870-2156, F: 212-870-2158
E-mail: bert@nccusa.org

National Spiritual Assembly of Bah'a'is
of the United States
866 United Nations Plaza, Suite 120,
New York, N.Y. 10017-1822
Contact: Ms. Vicky Jones, Director of Public Information
T: 212-803-2500, F: 212-803-2573
E-mail: usopi-ny@bic.org

North American Federation of Temple Brotherhoods
and the Jewish Chautauqua Society
633 3rd Avenue
New York, N.Y. 10017
Contact: Mr. Douglas Barden, Executive Director
T: 212-650-4100 (800-765-6200), F: 212-650-4189
E-mail: nftb@uahc.org

ONLINE RESOURCES

Want to explore religion on the Internet? The following Web sites offer news and information about various religions. Many also provide links to other Web sites, as well as downloadable data.

MULTI-FAITH: <http://www.Beliefnet.com>

BUDDHISM: <http://www.buddhanet.net>

THE CATHOLIC CHURCH: <http://www.cin.org>

COMPARATIVE RELIGION: <http://www.aril.org>

EVANGELICAL CHRISTIANS: <http://www.crosswalk.com>

HINDUISM: <http://www.hindunet.org>

ISLAM: <http://www.al-islam.com>

JUDAISM: <http://www.jewfaq.org>

MAINLINE PROTESTANTS:

Methodist: <http://www.umc.org>

Presbyterian: <http://www.pcanet.org>

Baptist: <http://www.baptistuniverse.com>

Episcopal: <http://www.dfms.org>

ORTHODOX CHRISTIANITY: <http://www.orthodoxinfo.com>

PAGANISM: <http://www.thepaganweb.com>

ETHICAL CULTURE: <http://www.aeu.org>

UNITARIANS: <http://www.seed1.com>

AGNOSTICISM: <http://www.agnostic.com>

ATHEISM: <http://www.atheistalliance.org>

QUAKERS: <http://www.quaker.org>

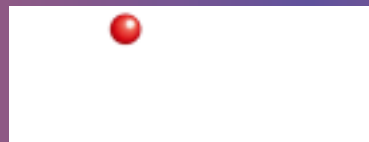
MORMONS: <http://www.lds.org>

THE CHRISTIAN SCIENCE MONITOR: <http://www.csmonitor.com>

THE CHURCH OF CHRIST, SCIENTISTS: <http://www.tfccs.com>

NATIVE AMERICAN MOTHER EARTH PRAYER:
<http://www.indians.org/prayer>

NEW AGE: <http://www.newageinfo.com>



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