RAISING AWARENESS OF CHRISTIAN HOSPITALITY AND PASTORAL PRACTICES IN A MULTI-FAITH SOCIETY

Equipping Ourselves for A Multi-Faith World

Barbara Sutton
Saint John’s School of Theology - Seminary

Overview of the grant proposal
This grant proposal built on existing activities and resources within the School of Theology and wider University. The proposal committed Saint John’s School of Theology to three specific actions: 1) a sustained dialogue with key stakeholders in the School of Theology and community leaders of other faith tradition; 2) faculty development events to focus on current best practices around this topic and possible new ways of deepening or expanding those practices; and 3) development of resources on multi-faith issues. Programming and meetings related to this grant were structured around the Benedictine value of hospitality, sharing meals and conversation in dialogue about relevant interfaith topics and practices that our students will face in their professions.

Activities funded by the grant
The predominant activity funded by this grant was Table Talk. Over eight months, students, faculty and religious leaders of different faiths gathered for a monthly Table Talk which engaged a conversation around pastoral practices in a multi-faith society. The first Table Talk was dedicated to community building among the dozen or so people who committed to gathering monthly for these discussions. Students shared pastoral experience in multi-faith issues and interests in the topic, faculty shared their background around multi-faith issues and their area of scholarship that could contribute to the conversation and leaders of faith communities shared their perspectives and interest in the topic.
Our second Table Talk involved three chaplains (hospital, jail, and police) from the St. Cloud area who shared multi-faith practices and pastoral concerns that are present in the community.

Among the monthly Table Talk guest were Sharon Stiefl, rabbi and spiritual counselor of Shalom Hospice for the Shalom Community Alliance; Amir Hussain, associate professor in the Department of Theological Studies at Loyola Marymount University; and Jamal Ahemd with members of the Islamic Center of St. Cloud. Each of these guest began the Table Talk by sharing ‘how ministry happens’ in their faith tradition, ways in which they as leader of their faith community participate in interfaith activity, how referrals are made for pastoral care, etc. This 15 minute introduction by our guest provided a platform for dialogue with students, faculty and other faith leaders.

A second, one-time activity was a conversation with the faculty regarding present curriculum content regarding equipping students for ministry in a multi-faith world. Recent competencies approved by the United States Catholic Conference shaped this conversation: The two competencies and corresponding indictors are:

**Core Competency 2.8:** Display openness to ecumenical prayer, work, and practices that promote Christian unity, and acknowledge the gifts afforded the human community from the various world religions. (Spiritual)

*Indicators:*
- Promote and participate in the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity
- Support activities and projects with other Christian communities.
- Participate in opportunities for interreligious dialogue and collaboration.

**Core Competency 3.9:** Ecumenism and inter-religious dialogue. Know and integrate into ministerial practice a respect for other Christian communities and other religious traditions. (Intellectual)

*Indicators:*
- Articulate our common heritage and our shared practices.
- Identify key moments and figures in Church history which precipitated separation and/or supported efforts toward unity.
- Promote opportunities for dialogue, prayer, and action on behalf of social justice with others in ecumenical and interreligious communities.
Discussion around these competencies heightened faculty awareness. The faculty identified three courses where multi-faith issues were incorporated into the curriculum: 1) Liturgical Celebrations, 2) Ministry through the Lifecycle and 3) Integration Seminar. Looking ahead the faculty identified two courses that have been added to upcoming course offerings: 1) The Church in Dialogue, and 2) Christianity and World Religions. The faculty affirmed that adding courses is not an option. Rather they prefer to look at existing curriculum to see where it might be strengthened in this area. It was suggested by our assessment consultant that we include this in our assessment efforts upfront rather than as an afterthought.

The third goal of the grant was the development of resources on multi-faith issues (Appendix I). While a bibliography of resources for ecclesial ministers was developed over the year and made available to our students, faculty and alumna; the wealth of scholarship and other resources located on campus became evident. In addition to our use of the Benedictine culture of hospitality, there were several resources already available to the SOT, from which we drew and incorporated into our various events that work with multi-faith dialogues. The graduate student government, for instance, has a standing committee for ecumenical and interfaith affairs; Saint John’s University and the College of Saint Benedict have sponsored the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning for over twenty years; the Collegeville Institute has been a center for ecumenical and interfaith scholarship since 1968; and Fr. William Skudlarek, OSB, a monk of St. John’s Abbey, is Secretary General of the Monastic Interreligious Dialogue based in Rome.

**Learnings, Challenges and Opportunities**

While Table Talk was a very affirming experience for many, some members of the group still have questions about how to interact in particular interfaith ministerial situations. These questions themselves are a positive outcome of our dialogue, because people were made more aware of issues of which they should be conscious when interacting with people of other faith traditions. It is our hope that this spirit of openness and faith-filled inquiry will continue to grow in the SOT as we continue to explore various opportunities to include interfaith dialogue in our curriculum and overall school programming.

A challenge for the liturgy committee emerged when they were asked if our guest Rabbi could lead an interfaith worship experience for our weekly SOT-Sem prayer. The liturgy committee was resistant to this idea since our practice was ‘Christian prayer’. They felt
they would need considerably more time to educate the worshipping community on this event and to prepare. In the end, there was not an interfaith prayer service.

Another learning opportunity emerged for the all school (undergraduate) lecture when Amir Hussain spoke. Two people in the audience, who were visitors, rather than students, put anti-Muslim propaganda on each chair in the lecture hall and challenge Dr. Hussain during the Q & A. Our graduate students were able to witness the conflict as well as Dr. Hussain gentle response and engagement of the topic. It also added a new dimension to our thinking beyond pastoral care in a multi-faith world to fostering mutual understanding and dialogue.

Immediate Outcomes

- Consciousness raising for students, faculty and administration. This is a pastoral topic we need to be attentive to!
- Informed key stakeholders equipped with resources for building competencies in multi-faith pastoral issues.
- Practical ways to enhance and develop the curriculum
- An accurate map of the interfaith landscape in Minnesota and the resources available to advance relationships and mutual understanding.
- New and deepened relationships with multi-faith partners

Insights

St. John’s University is a university steeped in the Benedictine and Roman Catholic tradition. Ninety percent of the state’s population is Christian, predominantly Catholic or Lutheran. This chart from ARDA (www.thearda.com 2012) describes the religious face of Minnesota.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Religious Body</th>
<th>Congregation</th>
<th>Adherent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Buddhism</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>7755</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Judaism</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>22120</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hindu</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>4039</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Muslim</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>16,796</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
<td>-----</td>
<td>--------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other (Christian)</td>
<td>5840</td>
<td>2,935,740</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Anecdotally, ecclesial leaders would say that they need to do more with ecumenical relationships rather than inter-religious dialogue. For some, they may not know the difference. When alums were surveyed regarding their involvement in inter-religious pastoral care, most responded with their involvement in ecumenical activities. For many already busy ecclesial leaders, inter-religious dialogue is not a priority.

Minnesota has become home to approximately 32,000 Somalia refugees (US Census). When consulting with Muslim faith leaders and chaplains regarding pastoral care to the Somalian population, they shared that Somalians take care of their own. They wouldn’t ask for help from others.

As a committee we never explicitly talked about Christian hospitality in a multi-faith world. This was a limitation of the work we did; however, I think it was implicitly practiced in our Table Talk through respectful dialogue and curiosity. We intentionally had our meals catered with sensitivity to dietary practices of different faiths. A Somolian restaurant catered one meal and provided background music from their homeland.

An additional insight at Table Talk was that as pastoral scenarios emerged in the group, there was a realization that pastoral care among all faith traditions share common challenges and responses and require similar ministerial competencies.

**Recommendations for other schools**
Graduate theological education has its ebb and flow for intensity of studies and activities required for students; as well as commitments for faculty. The Table Talk group affirmed the monthly luncheon meeting as ‘do-able’ as they could have lunch; engage in dialogue and new learning without cutting into other commitments.

**Sustaining our efforts**
Our connections on campus with the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning have been invaluable. I want to maintain that connection and introduce the Center during
new student orientation, as well as keeping students abreast to their lecture series. This yearlong effort has energized the SOT standing committee for Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs. I look to them to sustain some of the activity begun this year. We did not use the full amount of the grant award this year as we were also able to share expenses with the Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning. The remaining funds from the grant will be used for student related activities in the next two years. One of the activities that was not possible this year, but hoped for in the coming year is a visit to a synagogue in the Minneapolis-St. Paul area and a pairing of students with a Jewish families for a meal in their home.

The faculty conversation heightened awareness of equipping the students for ministering in a multi-faith society. The addition of two new courses and a strengthening of present syllabus are in process.
Appendix A

RESOURCES:

- The **Islamic Resource Group of Minnesota (IRG)** provides speakers to educational, health care, church, and other organizations to teach about the Islamic faith. At the Islamic Resource Group, we feel the key to understanding is education and dialogue. To this end, they have created a series of customizable presentations designed to educate the public about the religion of Islam and its 1.5 billion adherents. [http://www.irgmn.org/index.php](http://www.irgmn.org/index.php)

- **Monastic Interreligious Dialogue (MID)** is an organization of Benedictine and Trappist monks and nuns committed to fostering interreligious and intermonastic dialogue at the level of spiritual practice and experience between North American Catholic monastic women and men and contemplative practitioners of diverse religious traditions. [http://monasticdialog.org/index.php](http://monasticdialog.org/index.php) and [http://www.dimmid.org/](http://www.dimmid.org/)

- The **United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (USCCB)** has several resources, including links to papal documents, on interfaith relationships. The Ecumenical and Interreligious Affairs Office of the USCCB is also a useful place to find links and resources. [http://www.usccb.org/about/ecumenical-and-interreligious-affairs/index.cfm](http://www.usccb.org/about/ecumenical-and-interreligious-affairs/index.cfm) and [http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/dialogue-with-others/](http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/dialogue-with-others/)

- The **Collegeville Institute for Ecumenical and Cultural Research** is a meeting place and residential center where a diverse mix of people from various faith communities, including scholars, writers, professionals, artists and corporate leaders, gather to connect faith to the world and its pressing social issues. This group is on the campus of St. John’s University. [http://www.collegevilleinstitute.org/default](http://www.collegevilleinstitute.org/default)

- The **Jay Phillips Center for Interfaith Learning** is a collaborative enterprise of Saint John’s University and the University of St. Thomas in Saint Paul and Minneapolis. After many years of fostering Jewish-Christian relations, the center has expanded its mission to promote interfaith learning and friendship among people of various religions. [http://www.csbsju.edu/Jay-Phillips-Center.htm](http://www.csbsju.edu/Jay-Phillips-Center.htm)

- The **Association of Religious Data Archives (ARDA)** collects quantitative data sets for the study of American religion. The ARDA was established to meet four goals: preservation of data, improved access to data, increased use of data, and comparison of data. Includes surveys of the general population, religious groups, and religious professionals. Files can be downloaded. This is useful for finding statistics on religion in America. [http://www.thearda.com/](http://www.thearda.com/)

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The Pew Forum on Religion and Public Life is part of the Pew Research Center. The Pew Forum conducts surveys, demographic analyses and other social science research on important aspects of religion and public life in the U.S. and around the world. It also provides a neutral venue for discussions of timely issues through roundtables and briefings. [http://pewforum.org/](http://pewforum.org/)

**Interreligious Marriages** This contemporary topic is prevalent in our country as cultures merge. The website For Your Marriage has an article on interfaith marriage with several links to outside sources. The USCCB also has resources for topics relating to interfaith marriages. [http://foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/interfaith-marriages/](http://foryourmarriage.org/catholic-marriage/church-teachings/interfaith-marriages/) [http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/wedding-ceremony/](http://www.usccb.org/issues-and-action/marriage-and-family/marriage/wedding-ceremony/)

**Jewish Family and Children Services** Inspired by the wisdom and values of our tradition, Jewish Family and Children’s Service of Minneapolis supports people of all backgrounds to reach their full potential. On their website, they have many links to resources that are useful for the health care and social services field. [http://www.jfcsmpls.org/index.htm](http://www.jfcsmpls.org/index.htm)

**Jewish Pastoral Care: A Practical Handbook from Traditional and Contemporary Sources** This book is by Rabbi Dayle Friedman and discusses many pastoral care techniques particular to the Jewish tradition, all in an effort to provide the best care for those who are suffering or experiencing dramatic changes in their lives. [http://www.amazon.com/Jewish-Pastoral-Care-Traditional-Contemporary/dp/1580232213](http://www.amazon.com/Jewish-Pastoral-Care-Traditional-Contemporary/dp/1580232213)

**Islam and Islamic Studies Resources** is a website with many useful links to learn more about different aspects of Islam and the various Muslim perspectives around the world. [http://islam.uga.edu/](http://islam.uga.edu/)


**Minnesota Network of Hospice and Palliative Care** works to promote quality of life in communities through advance care planning, palliative care and hospice. The work this network does helps people understand the value of and have access to these three vital components of the healthcare system. They have a resource list of various religions and cultures that are prevalent in the Twin Cities area. [http://mnhpc.org/public/programs-services/opening-doors/multicultural-resources](http://mnhpc.org/public/programs-services/opening-doors/multicultural-resources)

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路德教会社会服务明尼苏达州

路德教会社会服务明尼苏达州表达了基督对所有人的爱，通过服务来传递希望、改变生活，并建立社区。您可以在该网站上通过输入邮政编码来查找特定区域提供的服务。

http://www.lssmn.org/

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http://www.faithtrustinstitute.org/