

## Guidelines for Preparing Interfaith Services

**CAVEAT** The following considerations require dialogue among all participants. This will ensure that everyone is in agreement with all of the details and will help avoid last minute surprises which cause difficulty. Written 'draft programs' ought to be circulated and changes made according to the feedback. This can be a very rewarding process of interfaith 'dialogue'.

**VENUE** Many prefer to be in a secular space where there is no connection to any one faith. Setting the right atmosphere is a creative challenge. Attention must be given to the fact that some prefer to sit on the floor, some sit on chairs, some prefer to kneel, others prefer to stand. Having room to move and express devotion in movement is important for some, while others prefer to be still. Some traditions require that their sacred texts are placed on elevated positions, while others do not. Some traditions require facing in a particular geographic direction or in several directions, others don't mind which direction is used.

**DATE and TIME** It is preferable to avoid a day and time when any one of the participating faith communities would be having devotions.

**ORDER and CONTENT** It is very helpful to have the order and content printed for all participants and 'spectators'. Where appropriate, it is very helpful to also include guidance as to what will happen and what participants may be encouraged to do, such as kneel, sit, stand. (The length of time given to each component ought to be agreed upon in advance.)

**LANGUAGE** Whenever readings, prayers or mantras are to be read in their original language, having the printed translation is recommended. Inclusive language is recommended.

**SACRED TEXTS** Care ought to be taken to ensure that all sacred scriptures are only handled by those who are authorized to do so, and are duly revered.

**SYMBOLS and RITUALS** Symbols and rituals in which all of the faith traditions can agree need to be distinguished from those which will limit participation. Agreement needs to be reached on creating a totally inclusive service, or, having components which include only members of one faith and exclude others.

**MUSIC and SINGING** While music is an integral part of worship for many faith communities, it cannot be presumed to suit all faith communities. Consultation among all faiths as to what is appropriate is recommended.

**SILENCE and MEDITATION** Agreement among all participants is recommended. While many traditions use silence and meditation, the placement of such in the order of service and the length of time given to silence needs agreement.

**FOOD and DRINK** For many the sharing of food and drink is a continuation of the fellowship engendered by the prayer service. Dietary regulations need to be considered and catered for. Labels clearly stating the food contents are helpful. Water and juices should be provided for those who do not drink tea, coffee or alcohol.