



Dinner Dialogues Best Practices

The Dinner Dialogues, a program of Interfaith Ministries for Greater Houston (IMGH), provide opportunities for people from many faith traditions to learn about other faiths, share their own faith experiences and listen to the sharing of others, in a safe, respectful, and enjoyable environment.

Introduction:

The Dinner Dialogue is an evening held in a private home where a group of 8-12 people from the Greater Houston area, all from a variety of religious traditions, will gather to learn about one another's faith traditions and to share a vegetarian meal.

The purpose of the dinner is to provide an intimate, enjoyable environment for participants to learn about one another's faith traditions in a respectful format. A look into the headlines of your favorite news source should indicate that these dialogues and forums for understanding are no longer "feel-good" luxuries, if they ever were. Interreligious understanding is a necessity.

Staffing:

For Dinner Dialogues that are in homes, each home should have a host. The host is responsible for providing a meal (we suggest vegetarian or vegetarian-option) and creating an atmosphere of welcome. Host homes should be able to seat 12 people; this can be done in a variety of ways. Most homes don't have enough seating for 12 around a single table; hosts should feel comfortable in creating space at tables, food on laps, etc.

It is a good idea to have a moderator to ensure that the evening remains on schedule, that the dialogue maintains a respectful environment, and to assure that everyone has an opportunity to share during the evening.

Timeline

Here is a general timeline for a Dinner Dialogue. A three hour event is suggested but this schedule can be cut as needed.

15 minutes – Guests arrive, greet each other, make nametags

10 minutes – Guests get seated and dinner begins. Continued introductions.

15 minutes – Moderator explains the conversation guidelines, structure, etc.

60 minutes – Dialogue Session #1

15 minutes – Break/transition

30 minutes – Dialogue Session #2

10 minutes – Conclusion

Purpose and Ground Rules:

1. to create a safe learning environment
2. to provide an opportunity for guests to enjoy the wonderful hospitality of your diverse community
3. to dispel misconceptions about one another's faiths and provide sources of good information
4. to facilitate mutual understanding among people of different faiths
5. to facilitate genuine sharing of faith experiences to promote respect
6. to provide an opportunity for all guests to have an opportunity to speak and participate
7. to foster an atmosphere where new friendships can be made.

Basic Faith Questions:

1. Basics: What faith do you practice? How long have you been part of your faith?
2. What are some of the key religious practices of your faith that you practice?
3. What are the key beliefs of your faith?
4. Important daily/weekly/monthly/yearly rituals?
5. What is the most important part of your faith for you?
6. What is one aspect of your faith that you think is misunderstood, and that you want people to understand?

Dialogue Sessions:

These sessions can be designed according to what your goals are for the evening. Specific questions and instructions for the moderator should be assigned.