



KNOW YOUR NEIGHBOR (KYN) SUMMER CAMPAIGN TALKING POINTS FOR A SERMON

Context for Summer Campaign/Relevance to Faith Traditions

- Today we live in a deeply divided country and world. Differences along religious, racial, national, and political lines seem to be growing broader and deeper.
- Our country is increasingly marked—and marred—by growing polarization. People on various sides of an issue often seem to talk right *past* each other rather than *to* each other. Rational and civil conversation often becomes difficult and sometimes impossible under such circumstances.
- Despite the current divisions, the great majority of Americans share similar aspirations and values—those taught by the major religious traditions of the world, as well as by the overwhelming majority of secular humanists. Today’s divisiveness masks this simple fact.
- What is needed, therefore, to move past the present impasse and move forward as a nation and a world, is to re-engage in genuine conversations—conversations which, rather than trying to persuade others of the rightness of our convictions, focus instead on getting to know each other and find common ground with other. Only in the context of such genuine conversations where people are sincerely trying to learn more about each other in a spirit of humility can a discussion of our differences be fruitful. [If you have a personal example of such a conversation you had with someone of a different persuasion, viewpoint or background recently this is a good opportunity to share].
- The common ground is there to be found. All major religions, as well as major secular and humanist traditions, teach similar values, centered on love of God [for those who believe in God] and love of neighbor. As pointed out in the seminal document [A Common Word](#), Christianity and Islam share a foundation in love of God and love of neighbor.
- The Qur’an proclaims *So invoke the Name of your Lord and devote yourself to Him with a complete devotion (73:8)*, while Jesus commends to his followers as the “first commandment”: *You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength (Mark 12:30)*. A Jewish prayer, the V’ahavta says: *You shall love Adonai your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your might*.
- The prophet Muhammad inculcates love of neighbor with the words *None of you has faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself*, while Jesus reminds his hearers that the corollary to love of God is this: *You shall love your neighbor as yourself*.
- Other traditions—whether religious, like Hinduism and Buddhism, or secular, like virtually all varieties of humanism—likewise place love and concern for one’s neighbor at the center of their value system.
- All these traditions also have some form of the Golden Rule. Christianity’s is probably the best known: *Do to others as you would have them do to you (Matt. 7:12)*. Other traditions express the same principle in different words. [The Muslim version has already been cited.] The Jewish sage Hillel, asked to explain the Torah while standing on one leg, replied *What is hateful to you do not do to your neighbor. This is the whole Torah; all the rest is commentary (Shabbat 31a)*.



- Hinduism teaches *This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you* (Mahabharata 5:517), while Buddhism's wording is similar: *Treat not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful* (Udana-varga 5:18). The British Humanist Association takes into account both the positive and negative formulations of the Golden Rule: *Treat other people as you'd want to be treated in their situation; don't do things you wouldn't want to have done to you*.
- From this core commitment to love of neighbor flow all the other values—justice, integrity, mutual respect, support for the poor and oppressed, and so forth—that all religions and secular philosophies seek to nurture.
- Yet beyond these common values, we cannot deny that all religious and other traditions have major differences. Valuing others who are different is a key challenge but can also be a source of strength for our communities and our nation.
- The question is, how can we learn about and engage those with whom we have major differences? How can people from different faiths traditions and backgrounds all work together to make this country we all call home a better and more harmonious place for all its diverse citizens?
- Honest conversation is the key. It is both our similarities as well as our differences that should a reason to encourage dialogue and discussion. Only by getting to know our neighbors in all their diversity and with all their difference from ourselves will we be able to find the common core of ethical values that we share and that make it possible for us to work together for the peaceful and just world that we all long for.
- This does not mean that we gloss over or deny our differences but rather that we seek to learn from rather than fight over them. Openness of mind and heart is a prerequisite of the genuine conversation we need.

Points on KYN Campaign/Calls to Action

- We are excited to inform you about a multi-faith coalition called *Know Your Neighbor* or KYN which focuses exactly on the importance of fostering and enabling such conversations.
- KYN recently launched a summer campaign which aims at building mutual understanding and respect between all Americans utilizing simple yet impactful tools.
- Studies show that all you need is a ten-minute non-confrontational encounter with a person from a different background to dispel stereotyping and prejudice. This open, genuine conversation can highlight commonalities while helping people to understand difference.
- We support the organizers of this campaign in their hope that if enough Americans join this campaign by participating in one or two simple actions of mutual encounter, we can strengthen our communities, foster relations among all Americans, and live up to our national ideal of being one nation, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all.
- We invite you to learn more about KYN and their summer campaign and actually participate by taking part in a couple of simple actions that connect you with someone you don't know who is



different from yourself. There are great resources on the campaign website at <http://www.ing.org/KYN>.

- Some of the simple ideas for getting to know someone new include:
 - Go out for a coffee break with a neighbor or co-worker.
 - Write a letter to someone with a different religious identity than your own, explaining a few of your beliefs and inquiring about theirs. Invite them to return the same to you. You'll learn all sorts of interesting things!
 - Invite your neighbors for dinner. Finally, after all the years of putting it off.
 - Invite friends to your house of worship or community center, or attend an event hosted by a community that you are not familiar with. If you're the inviter, do so not to convert but to educate. It's only polite. If you are the invitee, assume the same positive intentions and do your best to respectfully observe the norms of that community. If you don't know, ask!
- Additionally, we encourage you to spread any positive actions you undertake by sharing your experience on social media. The campaign features a detailed social media campaign which includes tips and samples posts as well as images. Please check out those resources and share them with others.
- Again, the campaign's website is ing.org/KYN
- Today I am challenging you to take a concrete step to connect with someone different from yourself in the coming week by utilizing some of the great ideas and resources through KYN. We look forward to hearing back from you about your experiences! Together we can and we will make our town, our country, and our world a better place!