

## **How to organize a Peacewalk in your community**

Rabbi Lynn Gottlieb currently serves as coordinator of FOR Peacewalks for Interfaith Solidarity. Communities can invite Rabbi Lynn and one of her faith-based Muslim partners to join her and share the vision and methodology of the Peacewalk in your local community. Local leadership in the Muslim, Jewish, Christian and other faith-based and Indigenous communities are invited to attend a meeting at a time convenient to everyone.

In addition, individual communities can take advantage of the Peacewalk team and invite them to visit local mosques, synagogues and churches for a presentation called: The Pilgrimage to Peace: peacewalks, freedom marches and other liberation journeys on the road to peace. The peacewalk has been used as a method of struggling for human rights and resisting systematic violence to great success throughout the world.

### FIRST MEETING:

#### **An organizers' guide to organizing a Multifaith Peacewalk**

##### Who to invite to the table?

Identify people in your community who are interested in working on a multifaith peacewalk that honors Islam, promotes multifaith civil harmony and stands against militarism and war. Try to create a circle of potential organizers that represents the diversity you seek, and people that can bring out a constituency (people from their communities), We usually meet first at a local Mosque since Muslim participation is extremely important to this work. If you REALLY want to get a good attendance, offer a meal.

FIRST MEETING: Outreach, gather, share personal stories

1) We usually meet in a mosque for the first meeting, or in a private home. Jewish and Christian leadership that has some interfaith experience can be invited to the first meeting as well. In addition, it is important to invite college based campus youth leadership from groups such as Muslim Student

Association. The campus chaplain might have an idea of who is on campus.

2) Make sure your first or second meeting represents the diversity you seek in the walk! Invite two or three students from campus that are progressive and you feel could work with each other. Look for progressive Jewish students who may or may not be part of Hillel on campus. Make sure people of color are involved. Beginnings are important. Focus on women in leadership.

3) Bring about six to ten people together who are Muslim, Jewish and Christian and other local faith groups that might be interested. The Myuhoji Buddhist Peace Pagoda near Troy, New York would be a good supportive partner.

4) Share the history and goals of the peacewalk with slides. Ten minutes.

5) Have each person take ten minutes and share why this project might be of interest according to their personal history.

Here are three example questions that people can respond to in a circular manner. That is, one person speaks at a time without interruption or asking questions.

People go around the circle once. We thank each other for telling part of our stories.

DO NOT INTERRUPT or compare stories...letting each person speak their truth without commentary is important to the process.

Same questions the facilitator can ask to stimulate this process:

My experience with prejudice/war/religious conflict is....

My religious/cultural tradition impacts my feelings and reactions to peacemaking is the following way:

Pass around an object, like a talking stick, to indicate who is speaking. When finished, the person holding the stick passes it to the next person in the circle. A person can pass the first time around, but everyone is invited to speak eventually. If someone cries, we simply sit in silence, hold their hand and wait until they either decide to continue or to pass.

**SECOND MEETING: Guiding Principles-read and reflect**

1) Share some issues that are conflictual for different faith based groups in the community. The Peacewalk is a way to give witness to the possibility of multifaith, multigenerational and multicultural convivencia-living in harmony together. What do we need to do that?

2) **Study the Principles together** and see how they apply and how you

feel about them. Remember to make sure you go around the circle and that everyone gets to speak and share their perspective.

3) Ask people what they heard from each other and to reflect back.

## **Peacewalk Principles taken from Peace Primer II**

Organizing a peacewalk and peacewalk activities brings multifaith communities together in pursuit of living well together and creating a safe public atmosphere for Muslims and faith-based communities in America, and, at the same time opposes militarism, economic injustice and all forms of racism in our communities. The Fellowship of Reconciliation stands for nonviolence, restorative justice and constructive peace building.

Here are some guidelines for creating a multifaith peacewalk:

*However much you study, you cannot know without action.* — Saadi of Shiraz,  
century Persian poet born in the late 12th century

Dear friends of multifaith peacewalks:

We encourage you to read these principles as the first step in multifaith dialogue, study and action. The purpose of reading and sharing these principles is to **establish a common understanding and agreement of how to conduct a peacewalk dialogue and engage in public action.**

The following principles are a suggestion. You can create your own common understanding and agreements, which can be reassessed at any time.

### **WHY START WITH A COMMON UNDERSTANDING?**

It is important to create **an atmosphere of safety and trust** among the people who are gathered to learn about each other's faith traditions. Perhaps, you will also decide to share your personal faith stories before you begin a formal study of the Peace Primer so that your story becomes part of the conversation. We encourage you to **speak as individuals and not feel like you have to represent your entire faith community.**

No doubt, your circle of study will include people from different cultural as well as faith traditions. People have different styles of communication and there is a tendency for some people to speak up and others to remain quiet. **Use a circle format**, which allows each person to speak for a similar amount of time, and helps groups promote the voices of everyone present as equal partners in the

dialogue.

1) Our interfaith work is based on building multi-faith, intergenerational and multi-cultural relationships that contribute to the prevention and dismantling of various forms of structural violence and promoting a culture of interfaith understanding and peace. **We accept a universal application of human rights** that affirms the dignity and well-being of every human being, regardless of their beliefs.

2) In the work of the Peacewalk, we lift up those aspects of Jewish, Christian and Muslim traditions that **promote nonviolent conflict transformation, prophetic witness, restorative justice and community peacemaking**. We cherish our scriptural and oral traditions. We honor the special kinship of the children of Abraham.

3) We support non-cooperation with expressions of state and communally sanctioned violence, and seek to uphold the values of restorative justice and reconciliation in our faith based traditions.

4) We practice the ritual of pilgrimage as a way of peace making.

4) We recognize that healing from trauma by survivors of gender, racial, religious and political violence, whether in the context of their own faith groups, or at the hands of others, must be acknowledged as part of our collective interfaith work. **We are sensitive to the personal experiences of suffering and loss in any given group of people.**

5) As interfaith allies, we are committed to **a truthful examination of attitudes, beliefs and behaviors in our own traditions that may contribute to sustaining structural violence. However, we are not here to challenge the faith of others in negative ways**, but to seek understanding from a place of humility and genuine interest. No one person can represent the whole of their faith community, nor can one person be held responsible for the actions of some members of their faith community. We acknowledge the diversity between faiths and within our faith communities.

6) The people that are here have chosen aspects of their religious tradition that they feel comfortable sharing in this context, but it is not an invitation to take or use other people's traditional ways for one's own purposes. In honoring each other we respect the dignity and right of peoples not to share certain aspects of their tradition and to hold them sacred unto their own community.

7) We work for the well-being and safety of families and communities throughout the world. We are committed to lifting up the voices of women,

nurturing the cultural diversity of our communities and honoring the work of the young.

8) We support those in the Palestinian-Israeli struggle for universal human rights who are dedicated to removing the walls of separation that divide our communities and building a culture of peaceful co-existence so that Muslims, Jews, and Christians can live peacefully together in the holy land.

### THIRD MEETING: Reviewing what you need

It is important for people to be walking in common purpose from mosque, to synagogue to church, or from mosque to a common end point such as a civic center or public monument that stands for peace and justice.

Check the Peacewalk Handbook for sample statements, and how to organize logistics, such as having a Peace van and wearing white, along with media preparation. Copy Pages 31-36 in the Peacewalk Handbook and hand them out to everyone at the end of the first or second meeting so they can see what's coming.

Go over details and begin to assign logistical needs.

### FOURTH MEETING: STUDY TEXT TOGETHER AND CONTINUE PLANNING LOGISTICS

It is important to continue the work of cultivating understanding, to keeping an open and honest process. The Facilitator helps sustain this atmosphere. The texts are pages 1-4 of the Peacewalk handbook.