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## Toward a Framework for Interfaith Leadership

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## TOWARD A FRAMEWORK FOR INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP

Barbara A. McGraw

*Today there is a need for a vision of the world that takes account of religious, spiritual, and non-faith orientations in a way that promotes cooperation and resolves conflict. Educational programs that employ this article's proposed four-dimensional interfaith leadership framework can contribute to that vision. Through dialogue for understanding and compassion, lens bias reflection and cognitive-affective frame-shifting, religious literacy, and leadership theory and practice, students can become socially conscious leaders who effect positive change in religiously diverse environments. This interfaith leadership framework is especially salient for Catholic institutions of higher education, but is readily extendable for use in other institutions.*

Today more than ever, it is easy to recognize the need for a vision of the world that takes account of religious, spiritual, and non-faith orientations in a way that promotes cooperation, rather than fosters conflict. In the past, the West (especially the U.S.) tended to divide along secular and religious lines. We now know that this division presents a false choice where either religion is ignored or there is a tendency for religious actors to promote their own as best. This division at the very least results in misunderstandings and the potential for conflict, but at worst can foster extremist ideologies. In contrast, interfaith leaders are pluralists who build bridges of respect and cooperation, while those at the other end of the spectrum seek to marginalize or even sometimes destroy those who believe differently (Patel, Kunze & Silverman, 2009).

Interfaith engagement and valuing religious pluralism do not involve anyone abandoning his or her own deep religious commitments or collapsing religious traditions into one. Rather, as Diana Eck, founder and director of The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, says: "Pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity"; "pluralism is not just tolerance, but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference"; "pluralism is not relativism, but the encounter of commitments"; "pluralism is based on dialogue" (Pluralism Project). And as Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of the Interfaith Youth Core has said: "To see the other side, to defend another people, not despite your tradition but because of it, is the heart of pluralism" (Patel, 2007, p. 179). Yet for interfaith understanding, cooperation, engagement and dialogue to develop into leadership, even more is needed. This article proposes a four-dimensional framework for interfaith leadership that is especially salient for Catholic institutions of higher education, although the framework is readily extendable to other institutions, as well.

### INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT AND CATHOLIC MISSION

The Roman Catholic Church has been on the forefront of interreligious dialogue and understanding since the Second Vatican Council when *Nostra Aetate* was proclaimed by Pope Paul VI on October 28, 1965. To engage other religions, Pope Paul VI also instituted the Secretariat for Non-Christians. In 1988, under Pope John Paul II, that office was renamed the Pontifical Council for Interreligious Dialogue. The President of the Council is Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, who has participated

in interfaith conferences and events around the world, and is an interfaith leader in his own right (see, e.g., Heneghan, 2011).

Some contend that for interreligious dialogue to be authentic, it must be conducted between theological experts (e.g., Cornille, 2013). Others note that such a requirement would unduly limit the scope of interreligious dialogue and engagement, making it the purview of elites rather than an effective means to cooperation and understanding in service of society. As Cardinal Tauran said in an interview in the *Chicago Tribune*:

[Y]ou have to remember that interreligious dialogue is not dialogue between religions. It's dialogue between believers. It's not a theological, philosophical exercise. First you have to accept that we live in a world that's plural: culture, religion, education, scientific research. Every human being has a religious dimension. Between believers we try first of all to know each other. And the first thing you have to do is to proclaim your faith because you cannot build that dialogue on ambiguity. When we are understood, we have to see what separates us and what unites us and to put those commonalities at the service of society. Dialogue is not for the consumption of the community. It's at the service of society. (quoted in Brachear, 2013)

In other words, it is an activity that is at the service of building a community ethos across boundaries of religious difference, and therefore it is ultimately a civic project (Patel, 2013). And that civic project is one that recognizes and valorizes the important role that religions can play in working toward peaceful relations among the peoples of the world. Again Cardinal Tauran has been especially insightful in his articulation of what is at stake. In December 2014, Vatican Radio recounted an interview with Cardinal Tauran on his discourse entitled "Religion, Society, and Violence":

Though "collective responsibility" for a peaceful society lies "in the hands of political and economic key players," Cardinal Tauran observed, "each one of us must remember that freedom is based on fraternity and equality" and must work towards this goal every day. Religions, he continued, have "an important role to

play in bringing hearts and minds closer together.” (McClure, 2014)

Thus, Catholic educational institutions are charged with a specific responsibility to engage religious others to foster peaceful relations at home and around the world. As Pope Benedict XVI said on April 17, 2008 in his address to representatives of several religions, including, among others, Buddhists, Muslims, Jews, Jains, and Hindus:

By bearing witness to those moral truths which they hold in common with all men and women of goodwill, religious groups will exert a positive influence on the wider culture, and inspire neighbors, co-workers and fellow citizens to join in the task of strengthening the ties of solidarity.

This appreciation for interfaith engagement is reflected in the missions and strategic initiatives of many Catholic colleges and universities in the United States. For example, the University of St. Thomas’s strategic plan states the “the university will recognize its responsibility to sustain interreligious and ecumenical dialogue by supporting and enhancing existing programs while constantly seeking new opportunities to engage people of all faiths on our campuses and in the broader community” (“St. Thomas 2020,” p. 23). DePaul University’s Mission Statement states: “DePaul respects the religiously pluralistic composition of its members and endorses the interplay of diverse value systems beneficial to intellectual inquiry” (DePaul University Mission Statement). And Saint Mary’s College of California’s mission statement reflects these intentions as well, stating that the college, “recognizing that all those who sincerely quest for truth contribute to and enhance its stature as a Catholic institution of higher learning, welcomes members from its own and other traditions, inviting them to collaborate in fulfilling the spiritual mission of the College” (“Our Mission”). It is no surprise, then, that a growing number of Catholic colleges and universities have a sacred interfaith space available for people of all faiths.<sup>1</sup>

If interfaith engagement’s aim is to achieve peace among peoples of different religious orientations, as Cardinal Tauran has suggested – if we are going to be able to put our “commonalities at the service of society” (quoted in Brachear, 2013), then this work will require more than good intentions and being open to engaging with others. And it will take more than the general knowledge that one gains from the standard study of the world religions. It also will require interfaith leadership.

## THE NEED FOR INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP

Today cross-cultural and cross-religious contacts are almost unavoidable, whether one pursues career goals outside of the U.S. or remains in the U.S. Consequently, career professionals are being required to address complex issues in management, education, law, and government to bridge boundaries of religious and spiritual differences in ways that they could not have imagined only a couple of decades ago. This can be seen, for example, in legal cases, workplace challenges and opportunities, educational and curricular matters, organizations, global business encounters, foreign affairs and domestic governmental policy-making, and more. Moreover, professionals can unwittingly contribute to conflict by ignoring their constituents’, colleagues’, clients’, and partners’ religion, spiritual, or non-faith orientations. This, then, can undermine the professionals’ own venture, project or plan – or even undermine society-at-large when the matters involve decision-making with wide effects, such as in judicial or government public policy arenas. Consequently, professionals in various sectors (healthcare, law, business, education, government service and public policy) are beginning to recognize the need to address the religious dimensions of their work. A few scenarios are illustrative:

**The Workplace:** An employee has complained about displays of religious identity—clothing, hair, identifying jewelry, body markings—at a company that employs Christians, Muslims, Jews, Sikhs, and Hindus. Management sets a “fair and equal” policy: No visible religious identifiers will be allowed in the “secular” workplace. Under this policy some employees’ religious needs are suppressed more than others. Muslim women may not wear hijabs; Sikh men may not wear turbans; Jewish men may not wear yamulkes; Hindus may not wear the tika (forehead dot); while the Christians do not have an analogous tradition. A contentious environment erupts among employees and with management. How might the company’s management address the conflict and build mutual respect?

**K-12 Education:** An educator is designing a world history survey course in the U.S. The students who take the course will include children of immigrants from six different regions of the world, each with deep religious roots that shaped each region’s culture in ways that some may find beneficial and others may find detrimental. How might the course be taught to take account of various world regions’ religio-cultural perspectives, while respectfully and equitably engaging the diversity the students represent in the class?

**International Relations and Economic Opportunity:** A U.S. government agency representative is exploring a potential opening for U.S. tech companies to develop and implement petroleum, gas, and petrochemicals software in partnership with the oil and gas industry in Saudi Arabia. How might the U.S. representative approach issues of how U.S. tech companies will operate in Saudi Arabia in light of both religious pluralism and Saudi Arabia’s Islamic heritage?

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<sup>1</sup> See, e.g., Georgetown University, Boston College, Manhattan College, La Salle University, De Paul University, Santa Clara University, Holy Names, Dominican University of California, Creighton University, University of San Diego, University of San Francisco, Fordham University, Villanova University, University of Notre Dame, Loyola University/Chicago, Iona College, Dominican University/Chicago, and Saint Mary’s College of California.

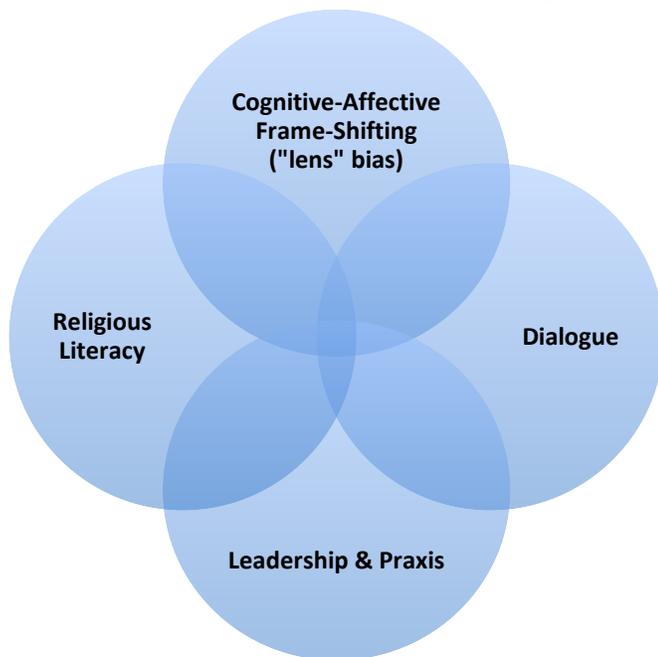
Other examples in brief: A hospice nurse builds trust with an immigrant patient who practices an indigenous religion. A prison chaplain determines the appropriate balance between a Sikh's turban and security. A military commander is called to rescue Yazidis (who practice an ancient indigenous religion) under siege by terrorists (who claim to be Islamists) on a mountaintop in Iraq.

In each situation, interfaith leadership is needed to navigate the dynamic complexity of a religiously diverse environment. Knowing what questions to ask, possessing sufficient understanding to answer them or to get the answers, being able to build an inclusive organizational culture, develop a strategy, implement an appropriate plan, and make religious accommodation policies that effect positive change—*this is the domain of interfaith leadership.*

### FRAMEWORK FOR INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP EDUCATION AND ACTION

In light of the above, it is clear that educational institutions must address the need for students to develop the perspectives and competencies of interfaith leadership for effective participation in the increasingly diverse environments in which their careers will be leading them. The following advances four dimensions of interfaith leadership, which are not distinct, but intersect and extend into each other, as illustrated in the diagram below.

**Four Dimensions of Interfaith Leadership**



#### Cognitive-Affective Frame-Shifting: Overcoming "Lens" Bias

One might assume that the most important or central dimension of interfaith leadership is religious literacy.

Although religious literacy certainly is an important dimension (as discussed below), another dimension of interfaith leadership is more foundational: cognitive-affective frame-shifting.

First, cognitive-affective frame-shifting requires the interfaith leader to identify her own cognitive-affective frame. We are all familiar with the phrase "think outside the box." The "box" is that set of experiences, beliefs, feelings, values, and assumptions that produce a kind of "lens bias" through which one perceives the world. Everyone has a lens bias and some are shared by others in affective relationships and groups – people whom we often refer to as being "like-minded." The comfort and sense of safety one experiences of one's own affective relationships and groups are not feasible when one is confronted with difference in the workplace or the community, or in increasingly common international/intercultural encounters. This is especially so with interfaith encounters because religious/spiritual, atheist/agnostic, and "none" identities often become constructs that are especially reified. Interfaith leadership does not require the leader to abandon her identity's cognitive-affective frame. However, it does require her to investigate and interrogate that frame to discover the lens through which she perceives the world.

Second, cognitive-affective frame-shifting requires of interfaith leaders that, while they do not abandon their own cognitive-affective frame, they acquire the ability to suspend it in an effort to develop an empathic connection with someone outside of their cognitive-affective group (cf. Bennett, 2011, p. 10). Doing so opens them to the possibility of perceiving the world through another's lens. With practice the interfaith leader becomes expert at being able to look through the multiple lenses of the people with whom one necessarily must engage to achieve common goals (cf. Bennett, 2011, p. 10).

*Educational Application.* Controversial cases can help students explore their own lens biases and engage others' perspectives. For example, the instructor could assign the following case:

There is an open a hotel management position in a busy hotel in a city center. That position requires constant interaction with hotel guests. A Sikh man who wears a turban has been an exemplary employee at the hotel in the back office; he has the seniority and expertise for the open management position. However, when he has been in the hotel common area, his turban has unnerved many hotel guests. Consequently, corporate senior management is concerned that promoting the Sikh may negatively affect hotel occupancy and, therefore, revenues. Setting aside whether a law might be involved, should the Sikh man be promoted to the hotel management position?<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In the United States, civil rights laws require religious accommodations unless the accommodation would involve an "undue burden" on the employer. See *EEOC v. Abercrombie & Fitch* (2015).

As the students discuss their perspectives on the case, the instructor can ask questions to help each student identify the underlying assumptions, beliefs, feelings, prior experiences, and values that lead the students' to their conclusions. Why does a student identify more with the unnerved hotel guest than the Sikh employee or vice versa? What does the student's perspective say about the student's priorities and needs? What would the student need to know to change his or her perspective? Then, assuming there are different points of view represented among the students, small group work involving dialogue for understanding (see next section below) can help students develop empathy for others' cognitive-affective frame or lens bias.

This method can be even more effective when the case involves a situation within the educational institution or in a nearby community. After exploration of the issue in the classroom, the actual people involved can be interviewed or a dialogue can be arranged.

### **From Discussion and Debate to Dialogue for Understanding and Compassion**

Developing the skills required for interfaith dialogue is critical for effective interfaith leadership. It goes without saying that communication, whether casual or formal, among those who orient around religion differently is critical to effective interfaith leadership. As Dugan and Komives (2007, p. 17) have found, "Engaging conversations across difference [is] the single-strongest environmental predictor of leadership outcomes."

However, for interfaith leadership to be effective, interfaith communication must be more than discussion, which can result in unreflective debate. That in turn can lead to further reification of each "side's" particular cognitive-affective frame, thus undermining the ability of the participants to develop the cognitive-affective frame-shifting described above. Conversely, dialogue involves "thinking together . . . [it] encourages you to clarify your points, not prove them" (Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 2013, pp. 340-341). And it requires active listening that is inextricably related to overcoming lens bias because it involves "intellectual and emotional participation in another person's experience" (Bennett, 1979, p. 418; see also Colby, et al., p. 158). Dialogue is more likely to be produced when groups are intentional about their dialogic process and establish rules for that process (Komives and Wagner, 2009), for example civility and open-mindedness (Colby, et al., p. 166).

It is also important to note, however, that interfaith dialogue can raise issues that involve deeply held and conflicting moral convictions. Concerns about the potential for acrimony can lead to "moral muteness" (Bird and Waters, 1989). Yet moral convictions are often at the core of religious, spiritual, and non-religious commitments. Avoiding them could undermine the "problem-solving process" that leadership often involves (Komives, Lucas, McMahon, 2013, pp. 264-265). Yet "[m]oral

talk can be used as a type of modeling influence when the dialogue is used to identify problems, consider issues, advocate and criticize policies, and justify and explain decisions" (Komives, Lucas, McMahon 2013, p. 265, citing Bird and Waters, 1989; Pocock, 1989).

The interfaith leader, therefore, must become familiar with the perspectives of those involved in the dialogue and be willing to suspend his or her own cognitive-affective frame—or lens bias—to empathize with others. In other words, interfaith dialogue is all about meeting people where they are with understanding and compassion.

*Educational Application.* As Rashedi, Plante, and Callister (2015) have noted, cultivating self-compassion and compassion for others is correlated with positive personal and societal outcomes and, therefore, compassion development ought to be a goal of higher education. Furthermore, they persuasively argue, cultivating compassion among today's students is important for social justice oriented Catholic higher education, especially if educators hope to counter cultural trends toward "competition, selfishness, and the pursuit of profit, status, and power" (p. 134, quoting Spandler and Stickley, 2011, p. 556).

Marshall B. Rosenberg's method for "non-violent communication" (NVC) encourages understanding and compassion for others and oneself, as well as contributes to effective meetings and aids social change efforts (see, e.g., Rosenberg, 2005A, 2005B, and 2012). NVC avoids the tendency to think in terms of who is right and who is wrong in a disagreement, thus avoiding uncomfortable situations that can lead to angry encounters. Rather, it cultivates communication that allows compassionate giving to take place. NVC is more likely to lead to a mutually agreeable resolution than other approaches, but, significantly, it develops the capacity for compassion among those involved even when resolution is not achieved.

Understanding fully what NVC entails requires more explanation than is possible in this brief article; nevertheless, the following provides a very brief introduction. Students are given an introductory assignment: to think of a situation where they are experiencing conflict or an uncomfortable situation with another person—situation students feel comfortable sharing with others in the class. Successive assignments involve working through the situation hypothetically, using NVC's step-by-step process with the rest of the students in a portion of each class over several weeks. First, the student is asked to "observe" the situation without allowing evaluative thinking or statements—to plainly recount what happened. Second, the student is asked to identify the student's own feelings in the situation. Third, the student is asked to identify the student's own needs not met in the situation.<sup>3</sup> Fourth, the student is asked to imagine making a request of the other

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<sup>3</sup> Feelings and needs literacy development, which also are introduced in the class, is a critical component of NVC.

person in the situation in a way that reflects the student's needs and feelings. Fifth, the student is asked to imagine receiving the other person's response, understanding that the other person also has needs and feelings. Sixth, the student is asked to articulate in the form of a question directed to the other person what needs the other person might be trying to fulfill in the situation. Also, if the student feels comfortable enough to use NVC with the actual person with whom the student is in an uncomfortable situation, the student may also share the process and outcome in class to further master the method.

Once some proficiency in the method is developed, students are encouraged to employ NVC in community engagement activities on campus and in projects with others outside the immediate college environment, particularly in interfaith encounters and for working together across difference in interfaith leadership projects.

### Religious Literacy Understanding

In his 2007 book *Religious Literacy: What Every American Needs to Know – And Doesn't*, Stephen Prothero admonishes Americans for their lack of knowledge about religion, even their own. However, although that work galvanized a conversation about the importance of religious literacy that is ongoing today, it is one of his other books that is even more salient for interfaith leadership: *God Is Not One: The Eight Rival Religions That Run the World--and Why Their Differences Matter* (2010). Because of efforts to find common ground, those participating in interreligious encounters, especially students today, often fail to appreciate how different the perspectives of various religions actually are. The desire to just get along by not exploring what is distinctive about people, and the lenses through which they view the world, often obscures difference that could enrich relationships and expand one's own capacity for self-reflection. Instead, interfaith leadership's cognitive-affective frame-shifting dimension requires the deep investigation that reveals and gives respect for the differences, as well as the commonalities.

For example, Prothero asserts that each religion addresses its own central problem and solution, as well as techniques to achieve the solution. Thus, the central problem in Christianity is sin and its solution is salvation, whereas the central problem in Buddhism is suffering and the solution is nirvana (enlightenment) (Prothero, 2010). Christianity's techniques are some combination of faith and good works; Buddhism's techniques are its Eightfold Path, involving such things as consummate mindfulness and meditation and proper livelihood.<sup>4</sup> Of course no religion can be essentialized so neatly, as Prothero's critics have argued (see, e.g., Heiser, 2012). However, Prothero raises an important point for those

who aspire to interfaith leadership. His model for understanding world religions provides a method for developing cognitive-affective frame-shifting at the macro level. Through his model one can begin to try on the "lenses" through which adherents of major world religions look at the world.

Starting with that perspective, it is of course of great value for an interfaith leader to learn as much as possible about major world religions. Yet it is also important to remember that that approach to study requires one to see with new eyes. In the West, for example, particularly in the United States, there is a tendency to approach the world's religions as first and foremost involving a set of beliefs. An example is Huston Smith's famous book on the world's religions (1991, orig. 1958). Exploring beliefs, while certainly valuable, reveals a perspective captured by an American Christian and secular lens bias, thus resulting in a blind spot: many religions do not center around "beliefs," per se, but rather religious practice forms the center of their lived traditions (Prothero, 2010, p. 21).

The above illustrates how important it is to religious literacy understanding that religion involves several components and that different religions emphasize some of them more than others. Joachim Wach (1944) identified three "expressions" of religion, which he labeled the theoretical expression (what the adherents say, including beliefs, myths, ethics), the practical expression (what the adherents do, including ritual, work in the world, moral action, art, music), and the sociological expression (the adherents' social organization, including leadership and organizational structure). (See also Ellwood and McGraw, 2014, chapter 1.) The interfaith leader will need to gain knowledge and understanding of all of these expressions to lead effectively in religiously diverse environments.

Yet, while gaining such knowledge and understanding might provide the interfaith leader with a window into religious literacy, the interfaith leader will never begin to grasp the diversity of religion in all of its manifestations. There are many variants within each world religion, and beyond those there is a multitude of other religious expressions. The "how many religions" question only for the United States is "an impossible question to answer" (ReligiousTolerance.Org). This is not only because the word "religion" itself is notoriously difficult to define (Usman 2007, p. 126). It is also because the variations of well-known religions and manifestations of smaller, lesser-known religions are too great to count.

Consequently, although it is certainly a worthy endeavor for those aspiring to be interfaith leaders to gain basic knowledge of world religions, that knowledge is not enough. For example, learning the basics of Islam – even of its two main branches, Sunni and Shi'a – is a good start. However, knowing that will not be enough to understand its many variants, including

<sup>4</sup> The modifier word in Pali (*samma*) or in Sanskrit (*samyac*) is often translated as "right," but some Buddhists object that "right" implies "wrong" when what is really meant is something more akin to "summit." See <http://www.buddhanet.net/e-learning/8foldpath.htm>

Hanafi, Maliki, Ismaili, Kharijite, and Sufi.<sup>5</sup> Similarly, learning the basics of world religions will not be enough to comprehend the many variants of Native American spiritualities, Neopagan religions, or New Age spiritualities. The vastness of religious diversity is not, of course, unique to the United States. It is a global phenomenon. For example, India and Africa include much religious diversity, even when one or two religions are dominant.<sup>6</sup>

The topic is so vast that those who aspire to interfaith leadership may conclude that religious literacy is an impossible task. However, it is important to recall that interfaith leaders adopt the dimensions addressed above: cognitive-affective frame-shifting and dialogue for understanding and compassion. And they do so while being knowledgeable about the multitude of religions and being open to recognizing that not only is it important to find common ground, but also to discover the ways in which religions differ. These capacities enable interfaith leaders to develop the openness to difference that leads to an understanding of what questions to ask in a particular situation and what accommodations to make for the particularity of the religion of the person with whom the interfaith leader is engaged—the one “in the room.”

Religious literacy is not about knowing everything about every religion—which is impossible—but being well-informed enough generally about the major world religions to know what one needs to find out to be effectively literate for the situation at hand. One can think of this in terms of the “Other Examples in Brief” in the section above entitled “The Need for Interfaith Leadership.” What would one need to know to address the needs of the Yazidis or the person who is an adherent of an indigenous religion? Knowing to ask such questions and being sensitive to what the answers might be is the realm of religious literacy understanding. Being able to frame-shift enough to go beyond one’s own assumptions about what counts as “authentic” religion is critical to religious literacy understanding, as well.

*Educational Application.* After a basic introduction to religious literacy, perhaps reading and discussing the introductions to the two Prothero books referenced above, an effective approach to engaging students in exploring various religions is to begin with sounds and images, rather than reading about the religion. For example, an exploration of Confucianism<sup>7</sup> could begin with a video that shows one of the highly coordinated Chinese or Korean group dances to lyrical music or synchronized drumming. These artistic expressions reflect the Confucian focus on social order (to address the problem of chaos), exemplified in the practices of harmonious ritual and

formal manners. The opening ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics is a dramatic example.<sup>8</sup> Students could also be invited to listen to chanting, for example Thai Buddhist monks’ evening chant,<sup>9</sup> which provides an example of Buddhism’s focus on consummate mindfulness and proper thought and deed, among other things. In each case, the students would be engaged in a discussion about what they experience, as the instructor draws them to the importance of the practice to the religious orientation and how it reflects aspects of the religion. If possible, the video and discussion could be followed by a “religious site visit,”<sup>10</sup> where students can experience a ceremony and sacred space first hand. For example, the Wat Mongkolratanaram Thai Buddhist Temple in Berkeley, California welcomes visitors to Sunday services.

Only after such questions, discussions, and explorations would the instructor have the students read about the religion. By then, the students would have some context and, hopefully, curiosity to aid understanding. Classroom discussion could then involve the ways that the religion being studied is similar to and different from the students’ religious, spiritual, or non-faith orientation.

#### Leadership and Praxis

The fourth dimension of interfaith leadership is the ability to lead. As leadership guru John Maxwell says, “Good leaders always make things happen. They get results” (Maxwell 2011, p. 133). One may want to get results within an organization, for example in an educational institution or a business. Or one may want to get results for social change, for example an interest group to produce political or social action for a cause or to effect change in the way mass media presents an issue. Producing change may be a goal in one’s personal life, involving family or friends. Whatever the context, those who aspire to interfaith leadership need to learn the skills that result in leadership that is effective in making the change that achieves one’s or one’s group’s or one’s community’s goals.

What makes leadership “interfaith” occurs on two levels. First, it can involve an endeavor, the goal of which does not involve an interfaith outcome. For example, it might involve a business. Let’s posit a manufacturer whose goal is making clothing. The business might include religiously-spirituality diverse employees, suppliers, customers, or partners. And, if so, an interfaith leader would be prepared to address the perspectives and needs of those involved in ways that aid the business’s success. Second, the desired personal, group, or social or political change may involve an interfaith goal. For example, the interfaith leader may want to effect change at one’s educational institution to embrace greater interreligious understanding—in other words, to change the cultural dynamics around religion. Another example is when one seeks

<sup>5</sup> See the chart and discussion at [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic\\_schools\\_and\\_branches](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Islamic_schools_and_branches)

<sup>6</sup> See for example, [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion\\_in\\_India](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Religion_in_India), as well as [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional\\_African\\_religion](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Traditional_African_religion)

<sup>7</sup> Although some prefer to characterize Confucianism as a cultural philosophy, Confucianism is often characterized as a “religion” in world religions books. See, e.g., Ellwood and McGraw, 2014 and Prothero, 2010.

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RUY9OgRRXnw>

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eLZOkD53Dfc>

<sup>10</sup> See Ellwood and McGraw, 2014, Appendix II, p. 416, for a description of the religious site visit and accompanying paper assignment.

to effect change in the law to reflect a broader conception of religious liberty rights. In both of these levels, an interfaith leader needs to have developed the leadership skills to “make things happen.” Importantly, the goal is not agreement on everything, but rather to find the common ground needed to galvanize the participants to achieve common goals.

Numerous books and articles have been written about how to lead (see, e.g., those cited in this article). Reviewing that literature is beyond the scope of this article. Yet anyone who aspires to be an interfaith leader should explore the leadership literature and experiment with approaches to discover the method that best works for him or her. This author teaches and utilizes a collaborative and relational, bottom-up leadership approach that has momentum as a guiding principle.

*Educational Application.* The following is this author’s nine-step leadership method, which can be used for student-led or faculty-led program development.

First, make every effort to ensure the people at the top are in support of the proposed program – if possible even before starting. Then, it is important to keep them in the loop as program development proceeds. Second, have a clear general goal for the project that is easy for others to understand, e.g., “develop and produce an interfaith awareness event.” Also, have a clear timeline for each part of the process. The timeline helps to keep the project on track, but also provides clarity to the participants about the commitment they are making. Also, double-check that all necessary approval steps are included in your timeline (e.g., when oversight committees or approval boards meet).

Third, put together clear, concise presentations on why the program is needed and how it serves the mission of the organization. Take every opportunity to give a presentation to stakeholders to build consensus and momentum. Fourth, invite all stakeholders in the relevant community to all working group meetings. It is especially important make a big “splash” announcement about the first meeting. The most dedicated participants are those who self-select. It is more likely that the right people will be at the table with this method, and they will become your core team. Also, those who do not participate cannot complain later that they were left out. That said, it is also important to make sure that everyone who would be directly affected by the program is engaged in a significant way as the program development process proceeds, even if they do not participate as core team members. Such engagement is not only to avoid them being blindsided by your project, but also so that the team’s efforts will be less likely to experience objections at the end of their process.

Fifth, come to the first meeting with an overall basic framework and vision—that is the main goal, proposed definitions, and a basic framework idea for the program—but not all of the specifics. Setting out some basic program structure choices is also a good idea, however. It is too difficult and time-

consuming for everyone to start from absolute zero. The initial framework and vision provides either a good place to start or a foil for making critical changes—or even for overhauling the whole idea for the program.

Sixth, it is important that the leader is not too attached to the initial idea for the program. Being willing to change even the basic framework idea as discussions ensue is important. Flexibility in the deliberative process means that many voices can be heard. Moreover, everyone will then come to realize that their input really matters—that this is not just an exercise in rubberstamping someone else’s already determined program idea. Also, collaborations always lead to greater insights than any one person can muster.

Seventh, make every meeting count. In other words, it is very important that the leader does not waste people’s time. A meeting that is only a report is worthless unless the information is *used* to further the project right then and there. At every meeting, be prepared to report on the status so far with absolute transparency, and do so in a way that shows progress toward the goal. Then make the rest of the meeting (most of it) about taking the program to the next level. Stay on top of the time, making sure the discussion moves forward and does not lag. Make room for those who tend to be quiet to have a say; often, they have the best insights. Ensure decisions that move the project forward are made in each meeting. Consensus can be a good thing, but when that is not possible, vote and move on. Clearly, returning again and again to the same decision points impedes momentum and is more damaging than a lack of full consensus. End every meeting with a review of “Next Steps” so that everyone involved always has a clear idea of where progress is heading and concrete steps have been achieved.

Eighth, everyone runs into roadblocks. Grousing about them does not help and demoralizes the team. Rather, a roadblock is like a wall that one runs into in a maze, be creative and find a way to take a different turn than the one that originally seemed best. Smile a lot and keep the momentum going. Make sure to project confidence that the team will achieve success. Ninth, thank everyone on the team often and give the team a lot of the credit. They will have earned it.

#### **INTEGRATING THE FOUR DIMENSIONS OF INTERFAITH LEADERSHIP**

Developing interfaith leaders requires “multiple, intersecting opportunities” for learning (Colby et al., 2007, p. 138), which integrates all four dimensions discussed above and involves practical applications, such as in the examples provided. Although Colby et al. discussed integration across an entire institution, it is also possible to approximate integration within a course and, even more effectively across a program of study—for example, an interfaith leadership major, minor, or certificate program that culminates in a project that incorporates all four dimensions.

Catholic educational institutions need to prepare students to be socially conscious and effective interfaith leaders who join dialogue for understanding and compassion, lens bias reflection and cognitive-affective frame-shifting, religious literacy, and leadership theory and practice not only during their education, but also for their future professions. Building appreciation and respect for differences, social trust and personal efficacy, these students will be interfaith leaders who serve the Catholic mission of *Nostra Aetate* proclaimed during the Second Vatican Council and advanced today—to inspire others to strengthen the ties of solidarity by bringing hearts and minds closer together to serve society.

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