Building Abrahamic Partnerships (DI-650)
Winter/Spring 2006

This eight-day intensive training program offers a practical foundation for mutual understanding and cooperation among Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Participants learn about the tenets and practices of the three faiths, study texts from their respective scriptures together, attend worship at a mosque, synagogue, and church, and acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith ministry. Combining the academic and the experiential, the course includes ample time for socializing over meals and during breaks. Building on Hartford Seminary’s strengths as an interfaith, dialogical school of practical theology, this team-taught program is a resource for religious leaders who are grounded in their own traditions while open to the faith orientations of other communities.

Meeting Day, Time and Dates:
Sunday, January 22 – Sunday, January 29 (intensive schedule, includes some evenings)

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Course Faculty: Prof. Yehezkel Landau, Prof. Kelton Cobb, Prof. Ingrid Mattson, Prof. David Roozen, Rabbi Amy Joy Small, Imam Yahya Hendi, and Rev. Donna Manocchio

Course Assistant: Abdullah Antepli
Artistic facilitator: Hannah Merriman

Course Overview: Hartford Seminary, building on its strengths as an interfaith, dialogical school of practical theology, has designed this innovative program to be a practical resource for Jews, Christians, and Muslims who seek a solid foundation in interfaith ministry. The format is an 8-day intensive training program, beginning with an informal dinner on January 22 and concluding with a dinner on January 29.

Course Rationale and Objectives: Our society needs a new kind of religious leadership, grounded in a particular tradition and, at the same time, able to interact effectively with other faith communities. This is especially true given the prevalence of fear and mutual suspicion, exacerbated by violence committed by religious extremists.

We need to develop educational strategies to overcome the ignorance that leads to prejudice, which in turn leads to dehumanizing contempt, which in turn breeds violence.

The goals of the course are fourfold:

- Educating participants about the beliefs and practices of the three Abrahamic traditions
- Creating a supportive learning community in which clergy, lay ministers, religious educators, and chaplains can forge mutually beneficial relationships across communal boundaries
- Helping participants acquire pastoral skills useful in interfaith ministry
- Developing leadership strategies for promoting interfaith relations in our pluralistic society

Course Content: Topics for discussion and shared experiences will include:

- Presentations clarifying the tenets and practices of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam
- Historical overviews of the three traditions and how they have interacted in history
- Shared text study using source material from all three traditions
- Visits to a mosque, a synagogue, and a church for worship and subsequent discussion of those liturgical experiences
- Demographic and sociological data on Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities in America
- Skills and sensitivities needed to establish and sustain effective interfaith partnerships
- The role of the media in creating images of one another, and strategies to counter negative media stereotypes
- Developing ideas for joint interfaith projects in local communities

Methods of Delivery: Lectures, panel discussions, text study, artistic exercises, videotapes, facilitated conversations, visits to houses of worship, shared meals

Methods of Assessment: For those taking the course for credit, class participation will count for 20% of the course grade; a daily journal of one’s reflections on the experience will count for an additional 30% of the grade; and a final paper approximating 15 double-spaced pages will count for 50% of the grade. The paper and the
Course Schedule and Readings:

Sunday, January 22: Informal opening dinner, 7 p.m., in the Meeting Room.

Preliminary introductions and general overview of the course program; distribution of sacred texts for group study and notebook with supplemental readings. "Before" questionnaires will be handed out for completion by the following morning.

Monday, January 23: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

Welcome by course faculty; explanation of course objectives and requirements; general reflections on the challenges confronting interfaith facilitators, the obstacles or hurdles impeding Abrahamic partnerships, and general principles or guidelines for conducting interreligious conversation


After the break: "Jewish, Christian, and Muslim Congregations in America: A Survey of Current Trends" lecture/discussion facilitated by Prof. David Roozen


Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Interfaith text study (course staff): understanding the ambivalence of sacred texts--the exclusive as well as inclusive dimensions, the peaceful and the intolerant/violent messages--using selected passages from the Hebrew Scriptures, New Testament, and Qur’an and from the oral/post-scriptural traditions (afternoon session devoted to Jewish texts; all texts to be distributed in advance)


Evening session, 7 to 9:30 p.m.

A panel discussion on “What Do We Mean by Spirituality?” co-led by Imam Yahya Hendi, Rabbi Amy Joy Small, and Rev. Donna Manocchio. Topics to be addressed include: language as a medium of spiritual devotion, including gender-specific references to the Divine; silence, meditation, chant, and body movement as alternative modes; liturgical commonalities and differences in styles of prayer; how prayers in one tradition are heard/experienced by adherents of another, especially prayers that refer to the Other


Tuesday, January 24: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon

Continuation of interfaith text study, positive and negative passages from the Christian tradition

Lunch break (food to be provided), 12 noon to 1:30 p.m.: PowerPoint presentation on “Scriptural Commonalities in the Hebrew Bible, New Testament, and Qur’an” by Imam Yahya Hendi

Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.
Continuation of interfaith text study, positive and negative massages from the Islamic tradition.

**Evening Panel Discussion, 7 to 9:30 p.m.**

A conversation on “Religion and the Media” with guest resource people: Anisa Mehdi, TV documentary producer; Frances Grandy Taylor, religion writer for the HARTFORD COURANT; and Mark Silk, director of the Greenberg Center for the Study of Religion in Public Life at Trinity College and editor of the journal RELIGION IN THE NEWS.

**Wednesday, January 25: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**

Introduction to Jewish beliefs and practices, Biblical/Rabbinic tradition, and contemporary Judaism in its different forms (Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Amy Joy Small).


**Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.**

Stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Judaism, including: election/chosenness, Torah as “sacred teaching” rather than legalistic rules; the land and state of Israel, the connection between Zionism and Judaism (Prof. Yehezkel Landau and Rabbi Amy Joy Small)

Video: two reports (from CNN and Israeli television) on the Open House Center for Jewish-Arab Coexistence in Ramle, Israel, with commentary by co-founder Prof. Yehezkel Landau


**Wednesday evening: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST**

**Thursday, January 26: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12 noon**

Introduction to Christian beliefs and practices, including an overview of different Christian denominations (Prof. Kelton Cobb and Rev. Donna Manocchio)


**Afternoon session, 1:30 to 4:30 p.m.**

Stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Christianity, including: the doctrine of the Trinity; the Passion and Crucifixion of Jesus; and the meaning of evangelism (mission or witness?) (Prof. Kelton Cobb and Rev. Donna Manocchio)

**SUGGESTED READINGS:** THE MEANING OF JESUS: TWO VISIONS by Marcus J. Borg and N. T. Wright,
Evening session, 7 to 9:30 p.m.: Sensitivities and Skills for Interfaith Partnerships

What kinds of communications skills are required for establishing and sustaining interfaith relationships? How can we listen more compassionately, suspend judgment, give empathy, and speak with sensitivity to the Other's situation? To what should we give attention in reaching out to, or hosting, someone from another faith community?—e.g., language that honors the Other, sacred calendars, prayer times, dietary restrictions, etc. How do we find common ground, or at least agree to disagree respectfully, on controversial issues such as proselytizing, shared worship, and intermarriage? (facilitated by Imam Yahya Hendi, Rabbi Amy Joy Small, and Rev. Donna Manocchio)

Friday, January 27: Morning session, 9 a.m. to 12:15 p.m.

Introduction to Muslim beliefs and practices (Sunni and Shi'a), with attention given to cultural variety within the Islamic umma (community) (Prof. Ingrid Mattson and Imam Yahya Hendi, with Abdullah Antepli)


Mid-day: Visit to Mosque in Berlin, CT (hosted by Imam Prof. Ali Antar), followed by lunch and discussion; bus trip back to Seminary in time for rest and preparations for Shabbat

Evening: Shabbat dinner at the Seminary, followed by lecture/discussion led by Prof. Ingrid Mattson on stereotypes and misunderstood aspects of Islam, including rights and opportunities for women, Greater and Lesser Jihad, attitudes towards non-Muslims, and concepts of the afterlife.


Saturday, January 28:

Visit to Beth David Synagogue (Modern Orthodox, Rabbi Yitzchak Adler) or Congregation Beth Israel (Reform, Rabbi Stephen Fuchs) for Sabbath morning prayers, followed by kiddush (light meal) and discussion at Beth David Synagogue, facilitated by Rabbi Yitzchok Adler

Rest of Saturday: OFF, OPPORTUNITY FOR SOCIALIZING OR REST

Sunday, January 29:

Visit to Immanuel Congregational Church (Rev. Ed Horstmann) or Trinity Episcopal Church (Rev. Don Hamer) for Sunday worship, followed by lunch and discussion at Hartford Seminary

Late afternoon, 4 to 6 p.m.: Artistic exercise and discussion with representatives from the local Jewish, Christian, and Muslim communities; "After" questionnaires distributed

Evening, 7 to 9:30 p.m.: Closing dinner and farewells...SHALOM, SALAMAT, PEACE