Crossing Boundaries: Multi-faith Leadership in the New America
Summer Intensive: August 8 to August 15, 2015
Chautauqua Institution
Chautauqua, New York

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America’s religious diversity is here to stay, and the most interesting and important phase for nation’s history lies ahead. The very principles on which America was founded will be tested for their strength and vision in the new religious America. And the opportunity to create a positive multi-religious society out of the fabric of a democracy, without the chauvinism and religious triumphalism that have marred human history, is now ours.

Diana L. Eck, U.S. author, educator
A New Religious America (1991)

Theology should only been seen in dialogue with science, culture and art. Culture was “the form of religion” which era, by era, expresses “intimate movement of the soul.”

Paul Tillich, theologian

Overview
By participating in communities of practice, attending lectures and cultural performances that draw on the viewpoints of various faith traditions, being in dialogue with religious leaders who are working in the realm of multi-religious leadership, and conducting discussions with other lay leaders, the participant will build a foundation of knowledge, skills and dispositions that are necessary for emerging leadership in the American multi-religious context.
Course Blueprint

The trend of rapidly increasing religious diversity in the United States continues unabated. According to Eboo Patel who leads the Interfaith Youth Core based in Chicago, and other public intellectuals who spoke at the Aspen Ideas Festival in the summer of 2013, this trend has led to a rise in inter-religious tension and strife, and, if not addressed, will certainly lead to spasms of violence. [http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eboo-patel/principled-pluralism-reli_b_3530332.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/eboo-patel/principled-pluralism-reli_b_3530332.html)

The conventional wisdom among Unitarian Universalists is that ours is a religious movement that is perfectly situated to promote constructive interfaith engagement for increased understanding and enhanced harmony and spiritual growth among those so engaged. After all, we have built our own communities on the foundation of engaging religious diversity, along with the widely held value that we are enhanced by religious difference rather than threatened by it.

But as Patel points out, it is not enough for a nation or its communities to be religiously diverse or pluralistic. He argues for a “principled pluralism” when he writes, “Harvard scholar of religion Diana Eck defines pluralism by contrasting it with diversity. She writes, ‘Diversity is just plurality, plain and simple--splendid, colorful, perhaps threatening. Pluralism is the engagement that creates a common society from all that plurality.’ Principled pluralism encourages that engagement, but respects the desire of some groups to respectfully limit it, in harmony with deeply held views on matters of faith.” In a capsule, Eck’s states that “pluralism is not diversity alone, but the energetic engagement with diversity.”

In his statement, Patel implies that only a nuanced approach to interfaith engagement will serve the current age. *Crossing Boundaries: Interfaith Leadership in the New America* assumes that very same thing. Leading multi-faith engagement requires more than good intentions. It requires religious leaders to possess particular skills, resources and perspectives. This course will allow the participant to begin to acquire those skills, resources and perspectives so that she or he may become a leader in interfaith engagement in his or her own community. Predicated on the Meadville Lombard understanding that we “act our way into new ways of thinking,” the course will provide participants with the opportunity to border cross into various spiritual disciplines of American religion, reflect on those experiences, hear from leaders of various faith traditions who are deeply engaged in multi-faith leadership, and draw on case studies of communities that are working to engage people from a multitude of faith traditions.

The course is offered in a community that will serve as a perfect laboratory for our work. Chautauqua Institution is a summer community on the shores of Chautauqua Lake in southwestern New York State that uniquely provides a mix of fine and performing arts, lectures by nationally and internationally renowned speakers, interfaith worship and programs, and recreational activities. Over the course of a week, approximately 7,500 visitors stay at Chautauqua and participate in these activities.
Based on the four program areas of arts, education, religion and recreation, Chautauqua is dedicated to the exploration of the best in human values and the enrichment of life through a program that explores the important religious, social, and political issues of our times, and stimulates provocative, thoughtful involvement in creative response to those issues.

This course will integrate the programmatic offerings of the Chautauqua Institution into its curriculum. Additionally, Chautauqua will serve as a case study for our work. In recent years the Institution has endeavored to move from being an ecumenical summer community to becoming fully an interfaith community. The endeavor is still underway, and the successes and challenges that it has experienced along the way will help to inform our work.

The Chautauqua Institution in cooperation with Colonial Williamsburg will focus on “Redefining Europe” during the week of the class as part of the “Emerging Citizenship” series. Accordingly, we will explore the issues of religious pluralism in Europe as they relate to the challenges and possibilities of religious pluralism in North America.

Expectations for participation

As you will see from a quick look at the website (ciweb.org), Chautauqua offers dozens of lectures, performances, worship services, lectures, and classes each day. It would be impossible for any one individual to take advantage of all the offerings, and indeed, attendance to only a few will be assigned each day. However, it is expected that during free periods, students will avail themselves of the variety of programmatic offerings. All students will be issued a gate pass that will enable entrance into all programs, other than the occasional opera, theatre performance, or film at the cinema.

Faculty

Dr. Lee Barker and Mr. Roger Doebke will coordinate the course. In addition, you will have the opportunity to hear from a variety of leaders of various faith traditions.

Guests will include:

**Ted and Deborah First** (Quaker) have been intimately involved in the operations of the Friends House in Ramallah as well as Neva Shalom, a community founded by Trappist Monks in Israel as an experiment in pluralism, where the population is 50% Arab and 50% Israeli.

**Rabbi Samuel Stahl** (Rabbi Emeritus of Temple Beth - El in San Antonio, Texas where he served as Senior Rabbi from July 1976 until May of 2002) has extensive experience as a community leader in social justice issues and interfaith relations. He will be joined
by his wife, Lynn Stahl who has spent 23 years conducting workshops and presenting seminars on life changing subjects, including eating disorders, breast cancer, self-esteem and “Mind, Body, Spirit Connection.”

Sheik Mazin Alsahlani is the leader of the Almakarim Islamic Foundation in Erie, Pennsylvania. He has been an important part of interfaith dialogue, working with other religious leaders in his community. He has also been a contributor to interfaith programming at the Chautauqua Institution. A powerful voice for pluralism, he says, “Interfaith is a sample of our freedom, our diversity, our solidarity, our coexistence and our peace.”

Subagh Khalsa is the leader of the Mystic Heart Meditation Program at the Chautauqua Institution and has been extensively involved in interfaith work particularly at Chautauqua. A Sikh, Mr. Khalsa brings a variety of Eastern religious practitioners to Chautauqua each summer to lead programs and engage with the community. He is the author of several books on spiritual meditation.

Rev. Maureen Rovegno serves as the Associate Director of Religion at the Chautauqua Institution. She obtained her M Div from Harvard University. She coordinates many of the programs during the summer season including the Abrahamic Program For Young Adults that brings students representing each of the Abrahamic faiths to the Institution each summer to promote religious understanding across faith lines.

Texts and Media for the Course

The following writings and video have been selected to stimulate your thinking about the place of religion in America as an institution and the consequential cultural implications.


http://www.ted.com/talks/mustafa_akyol_faith_versus_tradition_in_islam


The following articles are furnished to provide you with an overview of the Chautauqua Theme for the Week you will be attending:


The following article by Dr. Sharon Welch, Provost, Professor of Religion and Society at Meadville Lombard Theological School, is offered to direct your thinking toward forming a basis for the work we are attempting to do together.


The following websites are informative about the religious activities at Chautauqua:

http://www.themysticheart.org/ 
http://www.hebrewcongregationchautauqua.org/ 
http://www.cocweb.org
About: To learn more about interfaith work being done by others see:
Interfaith Youth Core [http://www.ifyc.org]
The Pluralism Project at Harvard University [http://pluralism.org]

Assignments

Pre-Course Assignment:

Prior to your arrival at Chautauqua, make arrangements to attend at least one worship service (or its equivalent) that is offered by a faith tradition other than your own. Please stretch yourself with this exercise. Attend a service that is unlike any you have previously attended and perhaps is even outside your comfort zone.

Arrive early enough so that you may introduce yourself to a greeter and/or celebrant. Tell them that you are visiting and ask if there are any practices that you should know about beforehand and if there is any behavior that could be considered offensive. Throughout your visit, observe how others behave; this is a good indicator for how you might form your own behavior. Be sensitive to rituals that might not be appropriate for a person of another faith to perform. Pay attention to how people dress and how people of different genders may or may not be segregated. Leave enough time immediately following your visit so that you can record your thoughts and reflect on your experiences for inclusion in your journal. Capture your thoughts and feelings about your encounter.

In writing your journal entries, address the following questions, as appropriate:

1. What were your expectations before you arrived? Were those expectations met?
2. Did you feel like an outsider?
3. What (if any) forms of hospitality were extended to you and other guests?
4. What were the roles of the official religious leaders and the lay members in the group?
5. What primary lesson did you learn about this tradition through participating in this service?
6. In what ways did your involvement with a different tradition illuminate your own faith journey?
7. What made you uncomfortable? Why?
8. How did you modify your daily behavior to conform to the norms of the group?
9. Are there elements of yourself/behavior you would not be willing to change to adapt?
10. What did you learn about the group’s identity as it relates to gender, race, sexual orientation etc.?
11. If you read sacred texts, did you learn about how the group interprets their texts?
12. How do you think the religious group you visited is representative or unrepresentative of its parent religious tradition?

Bring your journal with you to Chautauqua.

Post-Course Assignments:

The objective of this course is to provide you with skills and knowledge that will lead to an action plan that you lead in your congregation, your community. During our time together we will work on developing strategies that will help you plan and enact a “blueprint for action.” Within thirty days following the class we ask that you submit an outline of your plan that includes specific target objectives and dates.

Logistics

Dates

Students must register early for this course. Registration will close on February 15, 2015 at 5pm central.

Students will schedule their arrival between 2:00 and 4:00pm on Saturday August 8, 2015 and will be required to stay until 10:00am on Saturday August 15, 2015.

Accommodations

Accommodations will be provided in the recently renovated and refurbished Unitarian Universalist House conveniently located on the grounds of the Chautauqua Institution. Most rooms are doubles with shared bathrooms. UU House is ADA accessible. Alternatively some participants may be housed at the Disciples of Christ Denominational House. The cost of housing is included in the fee for the class. Participants may also arrange for their own housing.

Dress

It is summertime and usually warm, but come prepared for some rain and possible cool days and/or evenings. Dress is casual at all functions.

On Grounds Transportation
Automobiles are not permitted on the grounds other than to drop off and pick up passengers and luggage. All locations are accessible by walking or by bicycle (which are available to rent). Disability scooters are available for rent and are widely used.

Dietary Considerations

Meals served in community will be varied enough to take into account consideration of a variety of needs.

Travel

The Chautauqua Institution is located in the southwestern corner of New York State, approximately seventy miles south of Buffalo, New York and 120 miles north of Cleveland, Ohio. If you are traveling by air, Buffalo is the closest large airport. A shuttle from the Buffalo airport will cost approximately $53 each way. Jamestown, New York is just nine miles from Chautauqua, but it is served only by United Airlines out of Cleveland. Erie, Pennsylvania is about 30 miles from Chautauqua and provides a good alternative airport from some points of origin.

Arriving by bus or train: Bus service includes Coach USA (Buffalo to Jamestown 716-665-3076), and Chautauqua Area Rural Transit (Chautauqua County Airport and Chautauqua County; 1-800-388-6534 in Jamestown and 1-800-556-8553 in Dunkirk). Amtrak (Buffalo or Erie, no stops in Chautauqua County) (716) 856-2075.

Arriving by personal automobile: From the New York State Thruway (Interstate 90), take exit 60, turn left onto NY-394/North Portage Street. Continue to follow NY-394. From the Southern Tier Expressway (Interstate 86/Route 17) – if eastbound, take Exit 7 (Panama/Chautauqua Institution), turn left onto CR-33, then right onto West Lake Road/NY-394. Parking is available at the Institution at a cost of about $56.00 per week.

Costs

Other costs:

Parking (if you arrive by automobile) is about $8.00 per day.

Meals

Shuttle to and from Buffalo Airport: $53

TO REGISTER FOR THE COURSE USE THIS LINK
CrossingBoundariesCHQ.eventbrite.com