



Interfaith Circles

Host Instructions Kit



INTERFAITH PARTNERS
OF SOUTH CAROLINA



Missing the company of others with interesting ideas and warm hearts?

Curious to meet people from different (or no) religions? Join (or hold) an Interfaith Circle.

Meet for potluck in your home, or grab a table at a local eatery or coffee shop. This IPSC host kit makes it all easy!

What's An Interfaith Circle?

- A social occasion in the setting of your choice.
- A shared meal or coffee or drinks.
- Facilitated, respectful discussion of a selected topic.
- With 6-10 people, some you know, and some you want to get to know.

Where to Hold My Interfaith Circle?

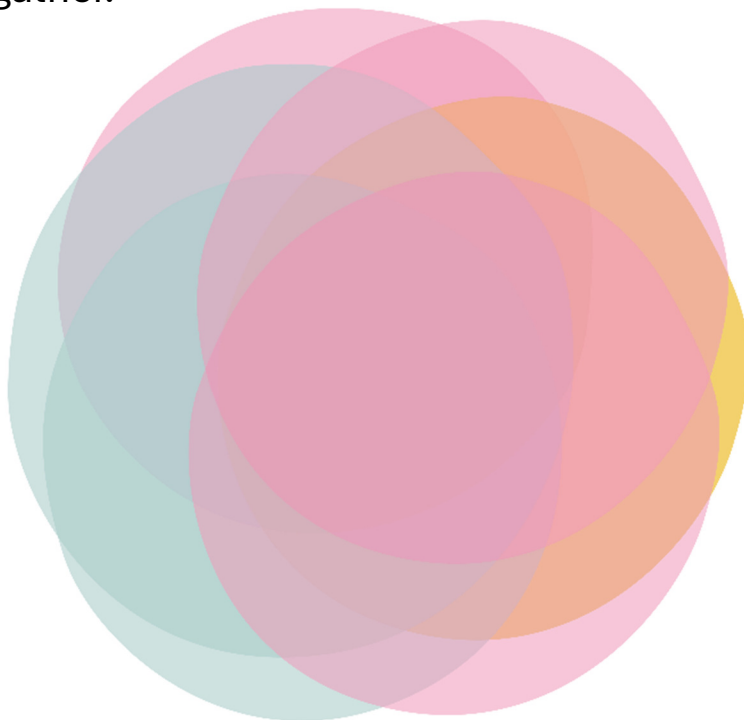
Here are some ideas to get you started:

- Your home (good for potluck, or if you really like to cook for others)
- Restaurant (one table, everyone places & pays for their own)
- Coffee shop (good for morning meetings)
- Park picnic shelter (good for nice weather)
- Library reserved room (most will allow you to bring in light refreshments)
- College space (wherever you think other students will join you)

When to Hold My Interfaith Circle?

Best to last around 90 minutes if you are gathering for a meal. For coffee, stick to an hour to allow working folks to get back to a job.

- Dinner - these are the most common type of interfaith gathering, allowing time for both socializing and discussion, e.g., 6 - 7:30 PM.
- Breakfast - some people love to start their day with an early meeting, say 7 AM.
- Lunch - some people like a break in their weekday, say Noon to 1:15.
- Coffee or a brew - whatever time you think your group would like to gather.



What Else Should I know?

- Don't let your Interfaith Circle get too big. 6-10 people can hold a great discussion, but bigger than that becomes a different sort of event.
- Be aware that many religions include a vegetarian or no-pork and no shellfish diet. Some religions avoid alcohol. Some people have allergies which are not just inconvenient, but can be deadly. Consider who will be part of your group, then locate and serve accordingly.
- How often? As host, it's completely up to you. You may want to do something monthly. We've had former interfaith meetups that lasted for years. Ideally, Interfaith Partners of SC would like to be able to direct interested people to a circle somewhere any month of the year.
- We have lots and lots of potential discussion questions we will share with you. Interfaith Partners of SC may announce a topic around which we suggest all Interfaith Circles have discussions in the same month.
- Do review and use the Conversation Guide. This is not meant to be overly formal or intrusive. It's to help you feel comfortable guiding conversations between people so that everything keeps moving along, everyone is heard, and everyone is respected. You can also ask IPSC to connect you with someone who has done this before, for advice.
- You should call your gathering an Interfaith Circle, part of Interfaith Partners of SC, though you might call it the "Pickens Interfaith Circle Potluck" or the "Claflin Faculty Interfaith Circle Breakfast," for example. If you can, use our logo graphic in your invitations and other communications.
- Register your event at our web site:
<https://interfaithpartnersofsc.org/programs/interfaith-circles/host-meeting-form/>

How Can I Attend An Interfaith Circle

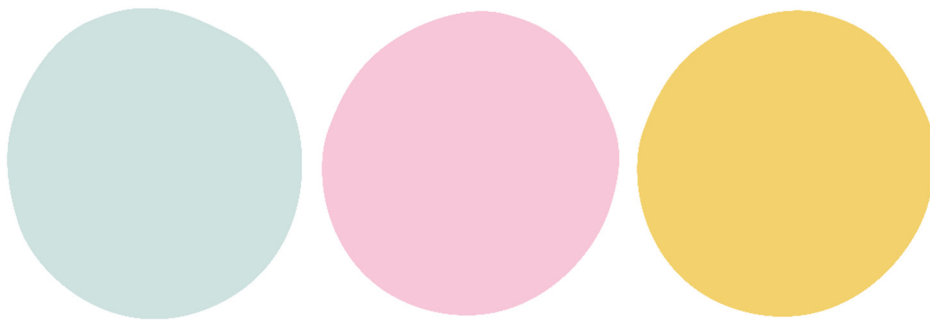
Let us know on the signup form at our web site

<https://interfaithpartnersofsc.org/programs/interfaith-circles/guest-meeting-form/>

We'll need to know where you live or are willing to go, is there something in particular you are interested in discussing, do you have dietary needs or restrictions, and how we can reach you.

When you attend something:

- Enjoy yourself!
- Use "I" statements. That is, stick to saying things like, well, this is how I feel about the subject.
- Remember that when in interfaith circles we never suggest our own religion as being preferred over others, or being the only way (even if that's the way you feel).
- Be curious. Feel free to politely ask others for their ideas, or to explain their spiritual practice if they are willing.



Next Steps For A Host - Home Potluck

- Consider who you will invite, and/or find out who may have signed up to be a guest on our web site.
- After reviewing dietary needs, plan the meal. If a potluck, you can email everyone with a list of dishes you'd like someone to bring. There's a sample message in this host kit.
- Send out the list of who is bringing what, along with a reminder of your address, simple directions, time to be at your door, ending time, and discussion topic. Do this at least 2 weeks in advance.
- Send the same info out as a reminder 3 days in advance.
- Help guests introduce themselves to each other, put out food and invite people to the table about 15 minutes after the official arrival time. Give whatever directions you need to about serving, beverages, etc. Let everyone start their dinner and chat for about 15 minutes before turning the group conversation over to the facilitator.
- The facilitator may be you, or may be one of your guests. Use the Conversation Guide format. We are also happy to talk you through it before your event.
- When time is up, politely announce that the discussion must end now and thank everyone for coming. If you plan for this to be a recurring event, tell your guests when next you will meet.
- Encourage everyone to respond to the email they will receive from IPSC asking for their feedback. We also ask you to provide feedback as a host. This is so we can continue to improve everyone's experience.

Next Steps For A Host - Other Location

- Consider who you will invite, and/or find out who may have signed up to be a guest on our web site.
- After reviewing dietary needs, decide on a location. Be sure to make a reservation as needed. If the location is a little noisy you may want to keep the group smaller. See our restaurant tips below.
- Send out an email invitation to your guests, along with the address, simple directions, time to be there, ending time, and discussion topic. There's a sample message in this host kit. Do this at least 2 weeks in advance.
- Send the same info out as a reminder 3 days in advance.
- Watch for your guests to arrive and be sure they join your group, get introduced around and get comfortable. Wait until everyone has ordered before introducing the facilitator and discussion topic.
- The facilitator may be you, or may be one of your guests. Use the Conversation Guide format. We are also happy to talk you through it before your event.
- If you have ordered food, the facilitator can help smooth the transition while it is served, continuing the discussion.

- When time is up, politely announce that the discussion must end now and thank everyone for coming. If you plan for this to be a recurring event, tell your guests when next you will meet.
- Encourage everyone to respond to the email they will receive from IPSC asking for their feedback. We also ask you to provide feedback as a host. This is so we can continue to improve everyone's experience.

Tips for meeting in a restaurant

- A location with televisions or music playing loudly is probably not a good option. We've even held meetups in a restaurant that didn't tell us our room was reserved on the same night a band would perform. Check it all out in advance.
- Let everyone in your group have their own check. With a group of 6-8 this should not be a problem with the restaurant.
- It's good to check for vegetarian menu options, depending on your guests.
- If you are meeting during Ramadan, your Muslim guests will not be able to eat or drink until sundown (check with them to be sure), so plan accordingly.

Sample Invitation Message

Home Potluck

Dear _____,

I'm so pleased that you will be joining us for the Interfaith Circle potluck dinner and discussion at my house on ___[day and date]___, at ___[time to arrive]___.

My address is _____. Do plan to arrive on time since we have a scheduled discussion over dinner.

Since this is a potluck and a smallish group, would you sign up to bring one of the following?

- Main dish - I'll provide baked chicken
- Vegetable 1
- Vegetable 2
- Starch (like macaroni or potatoes)
- Bread or rolls
- Dessert
- Beverage

Directions:

Thanks for replying as soon as possible and I look forward to seeing you on the ___[date]___.

Sincerely,

__[your first and last name]__

Sample Invitation Message

Other Location

Dear _____,

It's great that you will be joining us for the Interfaith Circle dinner and discussion at __[name of restaurant or other venue]__ on __[day and date]__, at __[time to arrive]__.

The address is _____. Do plan to arrive on time since we have a schedule for discussion over dinner.

Everyone is welcome at these gatherings, but space is limited so be sure you (and any other person you want to bring) register at our web site: _____. This is to make sure we can have a comfortable discussion. If you have a lot of people who want to be part of a group like this, get in touch with Interfaith Partners and they can probably set up something for you.

ipsc@interfaithpartnersofsc.org

Directions: _____

Thanks for replying as soon as possible and I look forward to seeing you on the __[date]__.

Conversation Guide



Introductions

Give each person One Minute to share their name, where they live, what brought them to the group this occasion.

Conversation Agreements

Ask one person to read each of the following agreements. You can also print copies of the agreements – found on

- Be curious and listen to others.
- Notice commonalities; respect differences.
- Be your authentic self and let others do the same.
- Use “I” statements, e.g., “I feel --,” or “In my experience--”
- Don’t present your religion as the best way for everyone.
- Allow each person to finish what they are saying without interrupting (unless you are the timekeeper).

Present the Topic

Facilitator announce the topic for discussion. Ask for a volunteer to keep track of time and hold up an object or small sign as the signal whenever someone’s time is up.

Start Conversing *(getting to know each other)*

Each person shares: What personal purpose, mission, duty guides my life? *(time limit 1-2 minutes per person)*

Continue Talking *(each person shares)*

- When I hear this topic mentioned, I feel _____. *(2 minutes per person)*
- Here's what concerns me _____. *(2 minutes per person)*
- Here's what encourages me _____. *(2 minutes per person)*
- What new thought has come to mind while we've been talking? *(2 minutes per person)*
- Will you change anything or do something new as a result of our conversation? *(2 minutes per person)*

Close the Event

Host thank all for attending.

If you are going to hold another Interfaith Circle with the same group, announce the next date and time.

Invite anyone who wants follow-up to let you know, then be sure to call them the next day.

Note that anyone who wants to hold their own event will find a host instructions kit at <https://interfaithpartnersofsc.org/programs/interfaith-circles/>.

Stand, to indicate that it's time for people to leave.

Later *(and don't forget, because this is important!)*

Send your feedback to us at

https://interfaithpartnersofsc.org/?page_id=4044&preview=true



Discussion Ideas

Interfaith Partners hopes to generate some concurrent conversations in groups which are meeting in the same month, so we may announce a sort of “topic of the month.”

You may also wish to choose one of the topics in the list below. Keep in mind that you probably don't want to expect a brand new group to tackle a controversial subject until they get to know each other.

Eboo Patel points out that the only bad interfaith question is one that immediately generates an argument. The most important thing is that you are building relationships, not that you are resolving the world's problems in your one dinner.

The Conversation Guide can be applied to:

- What is your favorite religious holiday?
- How does your family handle multi-faith family members?
- How could others make you feel welcome in their groups?
- What makes you hesitant to talk about (your religion, your culture, etc.)?
- What kind of daily practice do you have that others might like to know about or even try themselves?
- Where is your personal sacred space?
- What do you wish people understood about your faith?

We will continue to add to this list online as you think of others!

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