

The Emergence of ‘Interfaith’

FIRST – “Interfaith is NOT a movement to create one religion!
*Be the best Christian, Jew, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, etc, you can be,
and share your love of your faith with those
who have a similar passion for their own faith.”*

Rev. Dr. Stephen L. Albert, President, Poway Interfaith Team
Author, *The Interfaith Manual*

There is an exciting movement gaining force in society today, and it is happening all over the world. People are beginning to choose peace and understanding over war and hatred. Those who have spent most of their life believing their religious path was the ONLY right way to worship, are beginning to recognize that others from different religions feel just as deeply about their faith. They are finding that by accepting another’s right to believe his or her way, does not remove the love for their religious practice. In colleges and religious institutions, ‘religious studies’ have taken a major step forward and courses in ‘comparative religion’ are spilling out to churches of all denominations. Books like “***The Faith Club***” are drawing attention to how people of different faiths can live together as friends no matter how different their faith practices might be. In fact, more religions are beginning to accept those from different religions more easily than they accept those who worship in a division of their own faith.

In the new book “***The Interfaith Manual***” which compares the beliefs of 12 faiths about 40 areas of life, Rev. Dr. Stephen Albert explains the problems of *Intra-Faith* in which one division of a religion will not associate with another division of the same religion due to a difference in ritual practices. “It is not unusual for a conservative member of any faith to shun the existence of a reformed person from the same faith. The fact that one Christian church believes baptism happens only with full emersion versus sprinkling holy water on the person’s head, should not be a defining factor which disassociates the two divisions from each other. There is so much beauty in each of the denominations’ rituals and beliefs, by accepting each church, synagogue, mosque, and center for their spiritual understanding causes the richness of their beliefs to spill over to ours. **This is what happens when we study Interfaith.**”

Worldwide, England’s former Prime Minister Tony Blair is devoting the rest of his life to the development of Interfaith and he created a foundation dedicated to peace and understanding. Saudi Arabia's King Abdullah led a religious gathering calling together leaders from the world's major religions — Islam, Christianity, Judaism — “not to debate hot-button religious issues, but to find common ground for confronting humanitarian crises.” The World Conference on Dialogue held in Madrid in July ’08 brought together many leading representatives of different faiths including distinguished members of the Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim and Sikh faiths and the Parliament of the World’s Religions will be hosting their international conference in Melbourne Australia in December of ’09 and is expecting 9,000 to 13,000 people to attend. **There is a thirst for Interfaith understanding everywhere!**

The San Diego area has many Interfaith groups like the *Poway Interfaith Team* which has been offering seven- and eight-week educational programs to the public every summer since 2003 as well as holiday programs like the recent All-Faiths Thanksgiving. ‘***All Faith Fridays***’ which is coordinated by Rev. Steve and his wife Rev. Abigail Albert, sprang out from that group and now meets year-round on Fridays at 6:30 pm at the Community Church of Poway. It is open to everyone who wants to dialog and learn about other faiths. **Call 858-487-8885** for more information. Albert says, “Education has long been the vehicle to overcome ignorance and through Interfaith dialog we can educate each other about our faith and begin increasing the effectiveness of all our relationships.”

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