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# EXPLORING THE ROLE AND IMPORTANCE OF INTERFAITH IN THE YEAR 2020

A SPECIAL REPORT BY

The President's Committee On Interfaith Action at Claremont Lincoln University

In July 2015, Claremont Lincoln University brought several prominent thought-leaders from around the world together to establish the President's Committee on Interfaith Action (PCIA). The principal objective of this committee is to explore the changing nature of global interfaith relations and how interfaith leaders should address key issues that will be of importance in the year 2020. During the July roundtable, the PCIA set out to answer the following questions:

- What does **interfaith** mean and what should it look like in 2020?
- What are the most significant issues that interfaith leaders will likely address in 2020?
- What skills will interfaith leaders need to address these issues?

By taking an interdisciplinary approach to explore these questions, the PCIA examined why interfaith action is a viable resource for interfaith leaders already working in faith-based organizations, religious communities and other public arenas such as government agencies and NGOs. The committee suggested that many of the issues that will be of key importance to interfaith communities will require leaders to be knowledgeable of how to approach religion, implement action plans, and engage diverse audiences to promote social change.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

- Acknowledge **interfaith** as a diverse integration of faith, religious, and secular traditions that warrants dignity and respect.
- Commit to personal development.
- Establish non-religious alliances to promote peace and social justice.
- Address historical pain and moral conflict.





## LOOKING FORWARD

2020 will be an exciting period, marking the onset of a shift in global relations. Social innovators will complement 2020 with new advancements in medicine and science that will include data driven healthcare, widespread solar power, and campaigns to bring wireless internet access to underdeveloped countries and remote communities. As globalization reaches an all-time high, the global economy is set to expand with cyclical ups and downs and occasional market disruptions. It is projected the world economy will be considerably larger than 2015. With this growth, China and India are poised to become emerging leaders in the global market by leveraging their natural resources and increasing workforce.

2020 will also usher in a shift in the global religious landscape. According to the Pew Templeton Global Religious Forum Project, three decades later we will see the number of Muslims nearly equaling the number of Christians, Buddhist generally remaining the same in number, Jewish and Hindu populations becoming larger than they are today, and non-theist decline in parts of the world while increasing in some Western countries (as the United States and France).

As markets expand, nation states will continue to experience considerable security challenges, especially in South Asia, the Middle East, and throughout Africa's Sahel region as terrorist networks (with ties to Al-Qaeda) expand recruitment efforts. Among the many trends, we will see a continued world-wide resurgence of religious activity in the global public sphere that will demand interfaith leaders serve as multi-cultural and faith-based liaisons to analyze, inform, and implement new measures to promote peace and social justice.

## KEY ISSUES

The following issues were identified by the PCIA as having great importance and likely to demand the attention of interfaith leaders in 2020. They include:

- Armed Conflict and Religious Extremism
- Climate Change
- Fair Trade
- Global Civility
- Hate Crimes
- Human Rights
- Infectious Diseases
- Poverty, Hunger, and Clean Water
- Racism
- Religious Freedom
- Worker Rights

**Interfaith Action** is an emerging specialty that demands critical skills and perspectives from beyond the religious and/or theological disciplines in order to be effective in post-secular contexts. These contexts point to the increasing presence of religion-based conflict and tension between sacred and secular opinion-formers in the public sphere.

## ACTION STEPS

The President's Committee on Interfaith Action recommends the following actions steps be implemented by interfaith leaders in order to address these key issues:

**Firstly**, it will be important for interfaith leaders to observe that interfaith engagement is a diverse integration of individuals and beliefs that warrant dignity and respect. While the three Abrahamic faiths are represented to a great extent in interfaith activity, in the years ahead, leaders must expand their thinking on interfaith engagement as being a process that seeks to integrate actors from various belief systems that include theist, secular humanist, indigenous traditions, and non-theist who wish to put wisdom to work for good in the world.

**Secondly**, committing to training and professional development will be instrumental to foster engagement with diverse audiences. Several soft-skills will require training in: cultural competence, mindfulness, self-awareness, religious pluralism, inter-cultural communication, public deliberation, and conflict resolution. Practitioners will also need to consider the value of the new emerging specialty, interfaith action, which focuses on training leaders to explore and interpret religion in relation to structures of power and privilege and in the context of cultural, political, and economic histories; demonstrate a literacy of major religious traditions and cultural identities; resolve moral-based conflicts; and develop the interpersonal and engagement skills necessary for effective leadership in global contexts.

**Interfaith Leaders** are defined as transformative action-oriented figures who are able to identify a social problem, craft a vision that incorporates key opinion-formers, and organize for social change. Transformational leadership is a skill that requires a nuanced understanding of social phenomena, self-awareness, and an interdisciplinary skill-set to implement cultural competence to organize and lead diverse teams.

**Thirdly**, interfaith leaders will need to establish non-religious alliances to promote peace and social justice. Reimagining boundaries will offer leaders an ability to think expansively and consider exercising a "systems approach" when addressing key issues. They will need to consider incorporating broader themes and aligning diverse coalitions to work together. Moving forward, several actions will include partnering with: unions, healthcare systems, foreign affairs professionals, intergovernmental organizations, and international emergency relief agencies.

**Lastly**, with a rise in violent conflicts, practitioners will be required to work across lines of difference to promote healing from trauma and mutual understanding. Historical pain is widespread and deeply entrenched, transferred between generations, and it is often a precursor of moral-based conflicts. These are often intractable and incommensurate disputes that cannot be resolved by traditional dialogue or diplomacy. New measures will be required to incorporate the aspirations and perspectives of both violator and victim into dialogue to promote truth and reconciliation.

In sum, interfaith leaders will experience a new set of challenges introduced by a world in transition. This new era will require leaders and practitioners expand their context to promote diverse forms of engagement, which will require comprehending interfaith, committing to training and personal development, establishing non-religious alliances, and working to heal historical pain.

Over the next five years, Claremont Lincoln University will work to facilitate and implement these recommendations through its academic course development and research in the Center for the Study of Religion, Culture and Foreign Affairs. The university will develop national and international partnerships by enlisting the support of advisory council members that will include academic and nongovernmental experts, faith leaders, social entrepreneurs, and former government officials.

## President's Committee on Interfaith Action Members

**Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell**  
*Chair, President's Committee on Interfaith Action*

**Dr. Eileen Aranda**  
*President, Claremont Lincoln University*

**Dr. Darrell Ezell**  
*Director, M.A. in Interfaith Action Program & Center for the Study of Religion, Culture and Foreign Affairs*

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*Co-Founder, Claremont Lincoln University*

**Rabbi Mel Gottlieb**  
*Co-Founder, Claremont Lincoln University*

**Mr. Paul Chavez**  
*President & Chairman, Cesar Chavez Foundation*

**Rev. Dr. Robert Franklin, Jr.**  
*Former President, Morehouse College, Emory University Professor*

**Ms. Daisy Khan**  
*Executive Director, American Society for Muslim Advancement*

**Sr. Margaret Carney**  
*President, St. Bonaventure University*

**Dr. Gregory Hall**  
*Professor, Morehouse College*

**Dr. Lee Barker**  
*President, Meadville Lombard Theological School*

**Dr. Vasudha Narayanan**  
*Distinguished Professor, University of Florida*

**Dr. John Esposito**  
*Professor, Georgetown University*

**Rev. Dr. William J. Barber II**  
*President, North Carolina NAACP*

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*Theravada Buddhist Monk Leader*

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*Professor, Seminario Evangélico de Teología, Cuba*

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**Ms. Jyotswaroop Kaur**  
*Education Director, Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund*



### July 16, 2015 PCIA Roundtable Meeting Attendees

From L to R: Dr. Jerry Campbell, Rev. Dr. Johnny Ray Youngblood, Imam Mahmoud Harmoush, Rabbi Mel Gottlieb, Dr. Eileen Aranda, Mr. George Villalobos, Ms. Kim Bobo, Rabbi Marc Diamond, Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell, Dr. Gregory Hall, Ms. Susan Katz Miller, Dr. Lee Barker, Mr. Paul Chavez, Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, Dr. Vasudha Narayanan, Dr. Darrell Ezell, Dr. Laura Burgis

## PCIA SPECIAL REPORT — 2015

This report is based on the roundtable meeting of the Claremont Lincoln University President's Committee on Interfaith Action held on July 16, 2015 in Claremont, California.

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