

Hosting a Speaker of a Religious Faith - Facilitation Guidelines -

The Bridges of Faith Trialogue encourages interfaith learning through conversation and educational forums where a member of one religious faith serves as a guest lecturer or speaker in another house of worship or a civic venue. These exchanges create exposure and breed better understanding of the tenets, practices and culture of all religions in our region and foster interfaith understanding and respect. These forums often, and with good reason, delve into sensitive topics and solicit challenging questions asked in good faith. However, they can also draw the occasional hostile or unruly audience member, who seeks only to disrupt the forum, discredit the speaker, and distract the audience. These best practices for hosts and moderators were compiled to serve as a guide for maintaining a productive atmosphere of learning and mutual respect, and for mitigating any unforeseen inappropriate or offensive disruptions. Thank you.

BEFORE THE PROGRAM:

- Before the program is advertised, the host and/or moderator should talk with the guest speaker so that both parties are clear on the focus of the talk (be specific!) and what topics are off limits or offensive. Also talk through the most productive method for the question and answer session. For large audiences or particularly controversial topics, providing the audience with index cards and allowing the moderator or host to pick the questions may be a more effective format than allowing for an open question and answer session.
- Promotion of the program should be specific, so that only an audience interested in that specific topic attend. (Caution: Using social media and other public outlets to publicize your program creates the risk of attracting unwanted visitors.)
- In the case of a particularly sensitive or controversial topic, the host and/or moderator may want to consider hiring security or consulting with local law enforcement, either of whom could assist in the case that a disruptive individual refuses to leave when asked repeatedly.
- Before the program begins, the host and/or moderator should again speak with the presenter to be sure he or she understands what questions or comments are offensive or off limits. The host and/or moderator and the speaker should develop a plan so that the speaker can, in the moment, nonverbally or verbally communicate with the host or moderator if an offensive question or comment arises. If you see someone in the audience you do not recognize as a member of your organization or congregation, notify security as a precaution.



▪ **Before the guest speaker begins, the host and/or moderator should address the audience in an effort to set clear expectations for the discussion, including:**

▶ **Remind the audience that this discussion is for the purpose of learning and that a respectful environment is essential for effective learning** and that a respectful environment is essential for effective learning and communication and communication. Clearly articulate that anyone who behaves in a way that disrespects the forum or the speaker will be asked to leave the forum.

▶ **Remind the audience that the speaker, whether clergy or laity, does not speak on behalf of an entire religion**, but only as an individual adherent of that faith; likewise, he/she may not be a religious scholar or an authority on doctrine or practice, simply someone with personal experience in living his/her faith. If your speaker is, in fact, a recognized scholar, you may, in your discretion, indicate that religious scholarship allows for diversity of interpretation. Finally, acknowledge the tremendous diversity of theology and practice, ranging widely from liberal/reform to literal/orthodox, within all religious traditions.

▶ **Note that we are here to listen with an open mind and heart**, not to compare, contrast or otherwise evaluate the speaker's faith.

▶ **Similarly, remind the audience that this is not the occasion for debating the merits of our respective religions.** So, when we move into the Q & A session, following the speaker's remarks, it is inappropriate to advocate our faith over the speaker's or pose questions that are argumentative. Our inquiries should be out of a genuine desire to seek a deeper understanding of the speaker's faith.

▶ **Inform (large) audience that index cards are available for jotting down questions and will be collected at the close**

of the speaker's remarks; the host and/or moderator will then pose questions from the cards to the speaker.

DURING THE PROGRAM:

• The host and/or moderator should pay close attention to the speaker and should be on the lookout for the verbal or nonverbal cues indicating inappropriate and disruptive behavior or language from an audience member, established with the speaker prior to the program.

• Should the host and/or moderator see that the speaker indicates such inappropriate or disruptive behavior from a member of the audience, it is the host and/or moderator's duty to step in during the forum and remind the disruptive party that his or her behavior is inappropriate and if it continues, he or she will be asked to leave the forum.

• Should the audience member's disruptive behavior continue, it is the host and/or moderator's duty to interject and to ask the disruptive party to leave the forum.

• During a question and answer session, if microphones are being used, the host and/or moderator should always maintain control of the microphone. The host and/or moderator should not allow audience members to hold the microphone.

BRIDGES OF FAITH



T R I A L O G U E

FOR MORE SUPPORT CONTACT:

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ENDORISING ORGANIZATIONS:

Jewish Community Relations Council-Jewish Federation of Cincinnati
Islamic Center of Greater Cincinnati
Holocaust and Humanity Center
Brueggeman Center for Dialogue, Xavier University
Ecumenical and Interreligious Commission, Diocese of Southern Ohio

Hosting a Speaker of a Religious Faith -Audience Guidelines -

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- **This discussion is for the purpose of learning.** A respectful environment is essential for effective learning and communication. Anyone who behaves in a way that disrespects the forum or the speaker will be asked to leave the forum.
- **Please note that the speaker, whether clergy or laity, does not speak on behalf of an entire religion, but only as an individual adherent of that faith.** Likewise, he/she may not be a religious scholar or an authority on doctrine or practice, simply someone with personal experience in living his/her faith. If the speaker is a religious scholar, understand that religious scholarship allows for diversity of interpretation. Finally, it is important to acknowledge that all religious traditions contain tremendous diversity of theology and practice, ranging widely from liberal/reform to literal/orthodox.
- **Please listen to understand, and not to judge.** We are gathered with open minds and hearts, not to compare, contrast or otherwise evaluate the speaker's faith.
- **Please refrain from engaging in a way that debates the merits of our respective religions.** When we move into the Q & A session, following the speaker's remarks, it is inappropriate to advocate one faith over another or pose questions that are argumentative. Inquiries should be out of a genuine desire to seek a deeper understanding of the speaker's faith.

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