

Interfaith Council Meeting

Date: September 25th, 2025

Time: 11:00am-12:00pm

Location: The Thinking Space

Facilitator: Dr. Jeff Lidke

Note Taker: Zoe Seaver

Attendees

Jeffrey Lidke, Will Ashworth, Zoe Seaver, Victoria Mannino, Jack Vespa, Kathryn Heidelberger, Dale McConkey, John Hershey, and Euni Shin

Approval of Minutes

The minutes from April 2024 have been approved.

Reports

- Introductions of members. Describing affiliation and orientation.
- Comments from Dr. Heidelberger as Co-Chair
 - The background of how much interfaith work means to her and what she has done in the past.
 - Wants to empower the students at Berry College more and hopes to offer ideas in promoting student involvement in interfaith dialogue.
- Meeting with President Mazumder regarding work of IFC at Berry
 - Heidelberger and Lidke met with the new president of Berry College.
 - The president is very supportive of interfaith dialogue. He stressed that the work we do can foster civil discourse.
 - He seems willing to appear in an event to talk about his religious journey.
- Interfaith and the challenges of teaching religion in academic contexts.

- Lidke: talks about his experience of Asian religions both personal and academic. Talks about trying to be sympathetic of the insider understanding but also trying to teach religion from an outsider perspective. Role as teachers and interfaith work overlap. Worries about being judged for his religious background in a majority Christian campus.
 - McConkey: Had the struggles of someone practicing as a religious leader in a class and went overboard at times trying to not promote views but still working to teach the course well. Mentions that sometimes his sociology of religion course felt flat because of this.
 - Vespa: the navigation is complex with interfaith dialogue. Felt some students made rude remarks in the early 2000s at Berry College. Now the campus unity of interfaith understanding is better.
 - McConkey: The early 2000s was a very unhealthy time on campus regarding religious life. There was a sharp divide about religious understanding and dialogue among religions.
 - Shin: Grateful for IFC. The differences of state rules regarding talks of religion in universities are vast. Berry does a good job in promoting conversations of religions in academics and religious life.
 - McConkey: There was a consulting group at Berry, and the consultant mentioned how certain things in other colleges are not to be mentioned in both religious and secular universities. At Berry, we allow religion to enter conversations in both academic and non-academic settings. Dale has a podcast talking about different perspectives of faith and how to connect with other faiths in conversations.
 - Heidelberger: Often shares more personal stories in classes to give examples. Works to give the best version of each tradition and does not use “I” or “we” but uses the name of believers in the religion to avoid tying personal beliefs when teaching. You do not have to compromise your faith to be a good neighbor.
 - Students mention their personal experience. Overall, the interfaith dialogue and understanding among students is going strong on campus.
- Past and Potential Programs for 2024-25
 - Solidarity Candlelight Vigil Program, September 17, 2025
 - It went well. Not much turnout, but it was raining.
 - Programming addressing what Martha Berry meant by ‘Christian principles’ from both an inter- and intra-faith perspective.

- Bring outside scholars/theologians to address an important religious topic (religion, politics, and free speech?) that would model and foster civil engagement.
- Program connected to the founders of the Templeton Pluralism Project founders, Shadi Hamid and Matthew Kaemingk.
 - Christian and Muslim dialogue regarding faith and approach to life and democracy
- Student Ideas
 - Being a good neighbor to your LGBTQ neighbor across religions. Maybe partner with Listen. Bringing back a Berry alum of a past CE event about trans clergy people. Talks about how to handle disagreements in a healthy and respectful way.
 - Revisiting music and spirituality from a past event. Vespa will facilitate.
- Partnering with student groups?
 - AAPI and programs regarding Hindu holidays
- Discussion in reading on Religion and AI.
 - Will discuss in October
- Reading for the Year?
 - Having shorter essays, videos, or podcasts, selected by students and faculty to have different themes.