Loving My Religious Neighbor

Volunteering and Getting Involved with



 **The Challenge of Multi-faith America**

American Christianity is experiencing decline in areas such as mainline Protestantism, and even among conservative evangelicals where losses are seen among Millennials,[[1]](#footnote-1) as well as some of the most committed members of congregations.[[2]](#footnote-2) While Christianity still retains majority status numerically, Christianity has lost its hold as the religiously defining center of America, and the growing multiplicity of religious faiths in America is clearly evident. Various religions are asserting their presence in the public square, and increasingly Christians are encountering their adherents not only on the Internet, but also in workplaces, neighborhoods, and sometimes even families as the number of interfaith marriages continues to rise.[[3]](#footnote-3) This brings evangelicals into daily contact with a multi-faith world. Our neighbors are Muslims, Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, Pagans, Atheists, and more.

Of course, these challenges are not limited to America. Across the world the presence of religious differences cause tension, violence, contribute to terrorism, fuel the international refugee crisis, and pose a threat to religious liberty. A positive evangelical engagement of a multi-faith world is desperately needed.

Yet in the face of this need, evangelical perceptions of other religions are many times negative. In a 2011 Pew Forum on Religion & Public Life global survey of Evangelical leaders,[[4]](#footnote-4) two findings are especially important in this regard. First, evangelical perspectives of other religions were largely unfavorable. Pew states, “Of the evangelical leaders who express opinions on other religious groups, most say they hold generally unfavorable views of Hindus (65%), Buddhists (65%) and Muslims (67%).” Second, and related to this, Pew also considered evangelical assumptions about how other religions act toward us. The world religions are viewed as significantly unfriendly with Hindus at 41%, Buddhists at 39%, Muslims at 69%, and the non-religious at 45%. Perhaps it’s not surprising that evangelical leaders would hold unfavorable views about those in other religious traditions with whom they fundamentally disagree. In one sense “unfavorable” might refer to concerns about the truth claims related to alternative beliefs and practices, or the eternal destinies of adherents of non-Christian religions. However, this lack of favor is also apparent in stereotypical and negative attitudes toward the adherents themselves. It is our conviction that evangelicals must work hard to address such attitudes.

**Evangelicals Engaging Multi-Faith Neighbors**

In order to address the challenges of a multi-faith world, the Evangelical Chapter of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy helps evangelicals practice a neighborhood theology of multi-faith engagement that embraces the Christian practices of love of neighbor and enemy, and hospitality, while maintaining faithfulness to evangelical convictions.

By following our approach to multi-faith engagement evangelicals will better:

* Follow the example of Christ
* Grow in love for multi-faith neighbors
* Grow in the fruit of the Spirit
* Become more persuasive in witness
* Put faith into practice as peacemakers

Our approach is grounded in the teachings and example of Jesus who said his disciples were to love their neighbors (Mark 12:30-31), as well as their enemies (Matthew 5:44). This is the basis for Jesus' teaching in the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), and it was demonstrated in his life as he interacted with Gentiles, such as with the Samaritan woman (John 4:1-26), and his participation in table fellowship and hospitality with outcasts and Gentiles (Luke 15:1-2). Jesus also taught his disciples to be involved in peacemaking (Matthew 5:9; Romans 12:18).

# Areas of Concentration

In pursuing our approach the Evangelical Chapter focuses on five main areas of activity:

**1) Helping Christians utilize positive emotions about people in other religions:** In addition to concern for right doctrine (orthodoxy), we also need to have the [right emotions (orthopathy)](http://www.patheos.com/Evangelical/Generous-Orthopathy-John-Morehead-01-08-2013?offset=1&max=1) toward others.[[5]](#footnote-5) By drawing upon the right emotions in relation toward others allows us to maintain our firm theological commitments, but in a way that opens the door for engagement with people of other religions.

**2) Telling the stories of Christians loving their multi-faith neighbors:** We are discovering the amazing stories of Christians engaging their multi-faith neighbors in love. We share these stories with evangelicals so that they might become an inspiring model for others to emulate and ultimately become the way in which we engage others.

**3) Equipping university students and church congregations:** This facet of our work involves facilitating transformational multi-faith experiences and imparting a new theology to understand and practice this. This involves two components: table fellowship and education. Our chapter helps arrange *Diplomacy Dinners* that bring together evangelicals and adherents of other religious traditions that break down barriers, and also begins relationships and conversations. This is followed by imparting a new theological framework for understanding and relationships with others. This comes by way of the [Loving Our Religious Neighbors](http://www.evangelicalfrd.org/%22%20%5Cl%20%22%21education/c21kz%22%20%5Ct%20%22_blank) educational program. LORN prepares students on university and college campuses, as well as members of churches. It incorporates educational and relational components. The educational component helps Christians discover a new biblical and theological basis for mult-faith encounter. The relational component involves multi-faith trust-building relationships and includes collaborative service activities in local communities.

**4) Raising awareness, changing attitudes, and shaping thought:** The Chapter writes articles and essays, produces podcasts, compiles a collection of suggested resources, and speaks in various venues, each as a way of raising awareness, changing the way we feel about others, and shaping thinking among evangelicals on multi-faith engagement.

**5) Conducting research and producing scholarship:** In addition to work on a popular level, the Evangelical Chapter also conducts research and produces academic scholarship related multi-faith engagement, religious diplomacy, and peacemaking. The venues for this scholarship include research projects, journals and books, as well as academic conferences. The results of the Chapter's academic work are shared with the Evangelical academic community, and also incorporated into our work on a popular level.

# It’s Both/And Not Either/Or

Evangelicals put a lot of emphasis on missions and evangelism, but tend to see multi-faith engagement, particularly in the forms of dialogue and peacemaking, as the activities of liberals. At the Evangelical Chapter of FRD we believe this is a false dichotomy. Evangelicals can and should be just as involved with multi-faith relationships, conversations, and peacemaking as we are evangelism and missions.

# Religious Diplomacy is Different

In order to be clear, we pursue a very different approach to dealing with religious differences and conflict. Our chapter works within the evangelical community as a part of the [Foundation for Religious Diplomacy](http://www.religious-diplomacy.org" \t "_blank). It’s purpose and approach is not like traditional methods of dealing with religious differences. FRD is not focused on dialogue or civility, although we believe in and practice both of these. Neither does it involve tolerance, ecumenism, interfaith, or co-existence ways of dealing with religious conflict that tend to focus on commonality while shying away from discussion of differences. Instead, religious diplomacy involves a new approach that builds trust by honestly facing and working through irresolvable religious or ideological differences in a respectful manner. The Foundation provides the means to replace suspicion and ill will with trust and friendship when people with irreconcilably different beliefs see the wisdom and good will in each other even while disagreeing about ultimate truth. In this way trust is built and religious enemies are transformed into trustworthy rivals.

# Risk-Taking and Rewarding Investment

Some evangelicals have concerns about the possibility of spiritual contamination that comes through multi-faith engagement. Evangelicals and fundamentalists have long debated whether we should stay separate from the world or engage it. While recognizing the risks, we believe that they are low and the rewards are high. Statistics indicate that very few people convert after interacting with someone from another religious tradition. More often than that, our faith is strengthened when looked at in contrast with the faith of another. Beyond that, the New Testament teaches that we are called to critical engagement with the world. Christ called the church to be salt and light, and to carry the gospel to the world. In addition, in the Parable of the Talents (Matthew 25:15-28) it is the disciple who takes risks in the investment and use of the talents who is rewarded most liberally, rather than the one who plays it safe and buries the talents in the ground. The church is called to engage in discerning risk in the use of the talents God has entrusted us with as we engage the world's religions.

## Vision, Mission and Values

**Vision**

The vision of the Evangelical Chapter of FRD is to create a movement of Jesus-shaped multi-faith engagement within Evangelicalism.

**Mission**

The mission of the Evangelical Chapter of FRD is to help evangelicals practice a neighborhood theology of multi-faith engagement that embraces the Christian practices of love of neighbor and enemy, and hospitality, while maintaining faithfulness to evangelical convictions.

**Core Values**

1. Evangelical

The Chapter is evangelical, and is committed to the doctrinal and cultural elements that define this Christian movement. (See the doctrinal statement information below.)

2. Christ’s Example

The Chapter follows the example of Christ in encounters with other religions (John 4:1-26).

3. Love of Neighbor and Enemy

The Chapter practices the love of neighbors and enemy love in the context of other religions (Luke 10:25-37).

4. Truth and Respect

The Chapter maintains a commitment to truth and respect in the way it engages those in other religions (1 Peter 3:15-16).

5. Peacemaking and Persuasion

The Chapter embraces both sharing the gospel persuasively and work toward peacemaking as important Christian activities (Mathew 5:9; Romans 12:18).

**Doctrinal Statement**

The Evangelical Chapter of FRD resonates with statements of faith as expressed in the Cape Town Commitment of the Lausanne Movement.[[6]](#footnote-6)

**Volunteering and Getting Involved**

We need the help of volunteers and others to accomplish this important work. There are two major levels of involvement. Both are important to our success. The first is the local church, and the other is regional and national.

Local church

At the local church level there are the following opportunities to get involved in multi-faith engagement with our chapter.

**Church liaison:** This position helps serve as a point of contact between the local church and its activities, and our organization. All of the activities and needs of the church related to multi-faith engagement would be coordinated and communicated through this position.

**Hospitality facilitator:** One of the key components of multi-faith engagement is building relationships. Hospitality is a great way to help make this happen. Our *Diplomacy Dinners* bring together evangelical Christians and members of other religious communities to share meals and develop relationships over a period of time. This position would work to take care of the various details associated with the dinners, and can also help put together other expressions of hospitality at the church.

**Small group leader:** Another key component of religious diplomacy is education. The *Loving Our Religious Neighbors* course, and other educational opportunities, are led in small groups as an extension of small group ministry in the local church.

**Multi-faith community partnerships facilitator:** As your church builds relationships with members of other religious communities you will have an opportunity to work together for the common good of your community. This position helps build relationships and working partnerships on community service projects while bringing together members of the church and members of other local religious groups.

**College/university/seminary student leader:** Younger evangelicals have an interest in a more positive multi-faith encounter. We would like to take advantage of this, and start student groups that come together to learn about other religions and their own faith by way of contrast, and to build relationships with students of other faiths. These student groups can be started on Christian and secular colleges and universities, as well as Christian seminaries. Our Chapter will work with this position to equip student groups for engaging a multi-faith America.

Regional/national

In addition to volunteers working at a local level, we need others helping us with regional and national activities. At the present time these are volunteer positions, but we hope that as the organization grows we will be able to convert some of these to paid positions.

**Church coordinator/recruiter:** We have identified a number of churches pursuing a religious diplomacy type of approach with other religions in their communities. We need to keep in touch with these churches and provide resources and assistance. We also need to find additional churches doing this kind of ministry, and help persuade other churches about the benefits of diplomatic multi-faith engagement. This position would work to coordinate details related to existing churches in our network, and recruit additional churches to be a part.

**College/university/seminary student group coordinator:** This position works on regional and national levels with the student group coordinators serving at the local church level. The hope is to create a student movement of multi-faith engagement among evangelical college, university, and seminary students.

**Hospitality coordinator:** Hospitality facilitators at a local church level need training and assistance in setting up *Diplomacy Dinners* and other acts of hospitality. This position will work with those in the local church to service these needs.

**Theological education coordinator:** Individuals in this position will work to assist those on the local level in putting together the church’s educational needs related to multi-faith engagement. This includes the Loving Our Religious Neighbors program, certification as a Multi-faith Ambassador, and other aspects of theological education related to our purposes. This position will also work at an academic level on multi-faith theological education with seminaries and organizations like the Association of Theological Schools.

**Marketing:** This position will be responsible for telling the evangelical world, and other Christians open to our approach, about the story of our approach. We need a skilled marketer who can serve as an advocate for us and communicate the benefits of religious diplomacy.

**Social media**: An important aspect of our marketing is the effective use of social media. We need volunteers who can manage our social media and implement strategies and tactics that will grow our followers, engage and retain them, and help them become involved in our work. This includes use of Twitter, Facebook, blog posts, email, and other relevant social media tools.

**Media production:** In a tech-savvy age our organization needs to take advantage of good media production. This includes but is not limited to video, still photography, podcasts, other audio, web design, and interactive media.

**Researchers:** The academic component of our work involves research in theology, as well as other disciplines that have an influence in producing a multi-disciplinary approach to religious diplomacy. This includes cultural studies, religious studies, social science, social psychology, and social neuroscience. We need good researchers who can assist with various projects, and contribute ideas in new research projects.

**Speakers:** From time to time we have opportunities to speak in churches, seminaries, and other venues. We would like to put together a group of speakers who are informed about religious diplomacy and multi-faith engagement, and who can inspire, motivate, and educate listeners. Working with our staff to create engaging, informative, and persuasive presentations is the main responsibility.

**Writers:** We have opportunities to write in different contexts and for different audiences. This can include electronic publications and websites, as well as standard print publications. We need to find individuals who understand what we’re about, and who can communicate this in written form to differing audiences for various formats and media options.

**Podcasters:** Podcasting now rivals professional radio broadcasting for its ability to build and inform an audience. We need to find experienced podcasters who can record and edit podcasts for Internet distribution. This includes interviewing guests, as well as doing news stories and addressing important and timely topics, all in an entertaining fashion.

**Fund development officer:** We are a non-profit organization and need to raise funds in order to accomplish our vision and mission. The fund development officer will work in partnership with the Chapter Custodian in planning income-generating activities. This will include developing a funding strategy, meeting with potential donors, nurturing donor relationships, effective donor communication, and an ability to track and manage organizational fund development records.

**Contact us with your interest and questions**

We hope you will partner with us in engaging adherents of the world’s religions in the way of Christ. If you would like to learn more about the work of the Evangelical Chapter of the Foundation for Religious Diplomacy, or are interested in discussing some of the volunteer opportunities mentioned above, please contact us.

John W. Morehead

John W. Morehead

Chapter Custodian

P.O. Box 160361

Clearfield, UT 84016

johnwmorehead@msn.com

[www.EvangelicalFRD.org](http://www.EvangelicalFRD.org)

1. Daniel Burke, “Millennials leaving church in droves, study finds. “CNN. May 15, 2015. <http://www.cnn.com/2015/05/12/living/pew-religion-study/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Joshua Packard, “Meet the ‘Dones.’” Leadership Journal. Summer 2015. <http://www.christianitytoday.com/le/2015/summer-2015/meet-dones.html>. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Caryle Murphy, “Interfaith marriage is common in U.S., particularly among the recently wed.” Pew Research Center. June 2, 2015. <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2015/06/02/interfaith-marriage/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. These respondents were affiliated with the Lausanne Committee for World Evangelization, and 19% of them came from North America. “Global Survey of Evangelical Protestant Leaders,” Pew Research on Religion & Public Life (June 22, 2011): <http://www.pewforum.org/2011/06/22/global-survey-of-evangelical-protestant-leaders/> [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. “How Americans Feel About Religious Groups.” Pew Research Center. July 16, 2014: <http://www.pewforum.org/2014/07/16/how-americans-feel-about-religious-groups/>. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. <https://www.lausanne.org/content/ctc/ctcommitment#foreword> [↑](#footnote-ref-6)