

# Asking the clergy: How can we reach mutual understanding with people of other faiths?

April 19, 2017 By Jim Merritt Special to Newsday



Ron Garner (Credit: Maurene O'Hagan)

Other religions can seem mysterious, and their ideas may appear difficult to grasp. A lack of mutual understanding can lead to forming stereotypes that lead to prejudice. This week's clergy discuss how to "live and let live" amid America's diverse religious landscape.

**The Rev. Ron Garner**

Wantagh Memorial Congregational Church

"Congress shall make no law respecting an

establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof." Those opening words of the First Amendment of the constitutional Bill of Rights describe the parameters for the practice of religion in the United States. It is a good starting point for citizens of the United States when they reflect not only on the role of religion in our country but also the responsibilities that go with that freedom.

Recently, two Abrahamic religions observed their most important celebrations — the Jewish Passover and the Christian Holy Week. It is just one reminder to us of the diversity of religion in this country. Americans have the freedom to practice the religion of their choosing or to not practice any at all. But this freedom does not preclude some from an inherent prejudice against a particular religion or all religions in general.

The prophet Micah reminds us that we are "to do justice, love kindness, and walk humbly with our God." (Micah 6:8) Those are important guidelines for all of us. Justice is the cornerstone of the First Amendment — each of us is free to practice the religion of our choosing. We are to be kind, which challenges us in our dealings with people of other faiths. And perhaps most importantly, we are to be humble in our practice of our own faith. That is how we best honor not only our religious practice, but recognize the faith of others.

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## **Yousuf U. Syed, M.D.**

Trustee, Islamic Association of Long Island, Selden

The mother of religious prejudice is ignorance. We must eradicate ignorance at its grass-root level. Diversity is the will of God. The Holy Quran (49:13) says: "O' mankind! We have created you from a single pair of male and female and divided you into nation and tribes; so that you may know each other not that you may hate each other. Surely, the most honorable of you in the sight of Allah is the one who is most righteous of you. Verily, Allah is all knowing and is aware of all things."

Unity of mankind is God's consciousness; service to man is the essence of all faiths. War only brings destruction, human suffering, pain and sorrow. It is dialogue that produces understanding and peace. We must stop "otherizing" people. Unconditional love is the fulcrum of the balance. It begins with a spark of good feelings and ends into eternity. Love mends differences, builds bridges of trust and harmony, unites people, brings solace to aching hearts.

Let us uplift humanity with the force of love and kindness, dedicating a century to humanism. Let us live, let live and learn to live in peace. Muslim Sufi saint Rumi said: "I profess the religion of love. My mother is love, my father love, my prophet is love and my God is Love. I come only to speak of love."

## **Rabbi Glenn Jacob**

Chaplain, Adelphi University

The best lesson we have learned is that when people of differing views sit down together, the first impulse is to find common ground. We all want to be understood, and part of that give and take is understanding others.

Often we are all struggling to solve the same issues, but we find ourselves using different language, different concepts and different avenues of approach. The frustrating part for our culture today is that learning about other people — how they think, believe and communicate — is a slow process. It cannot be done in one shot, and finding people who want to take the time, or who have the time, to invest in that learning and cultural experience is the first hurdle.

Finding those who are not intimidated to at least try is a second hurdle. We can all be disturbed by events and words across social media. The best responses are to learn where those words are coming from and how those events developed. That knowledge is not obtained by reading more social media, but only by talking to people who voice those views and understand them.

The last hurdle is trying to open a dialogue and avoid immediately cataloging people, placing them in a box. What Adelphi University does well is compel the students to reach out to different groups and learn about areas they have not encountered. As a university, we push the idea of talking to people you don't know, who are very different from you.

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