

## **Emory University**

### **Interfaith Strategic Engagement Process**

Interfaith Youth Core -- Executive Summary  
January 2021-June 2022

In January 2021, the Emory University Office of Spiritual and Religious Life (OSRL) engaged Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC), the leading national consultants for higher education religious diversity and interfaith work, to facilitate a strategic engagement and planning process for spiritual life and Emory for the next five years.

Since the hiring of the Dean of Religious Life, The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, in August 2019 and the development of a multifaith chaplaincy team in Emory OSRL, the time was right for reaching out broadly across the Emory community through a collaborative process to identify areas of strength and areas for growth in spiritual life at Emory and to develop goals for the future and initiatives to meet those goals.

Broad engagement was conducted including 21 interviews with university leaders and key stakeholders including members of the board of trustees, the president, the provost, deans and other important constituents; a year of monthly meetings with an 18-member interfaith strategic planning committee that included stakeholders from across the university; several tradition-specific working groups to analyze the experiences of particular communities that had not been staffed by the office; meetings with the OSRL staff and religious life affiliates and the student Inter-Religious Council (IRC); as well as open engagement sessions and an online survey for the campus at large. In all, more than 150 people were engaged in this process, many of whom were leaders in or representatives of larger departments and communities within Emory. This wide-reaching year-long process co-led by Dean McGonigle and Emory's chief diversity officer Dr. Carol Henderson surfaced important strengths and challenges as well as desired goals and potential initiatives that the Emory community believes will respond to them. This report presents that data as well as a sequence for how the identified initiatives could be rolled out.

Emory OSRL will lead the implementation process for the identified strategic initiatives with the support of a continuing interfaith liaison network as well as

connections with other partners with whom we look forward to sharing this work. For more information, please contact the Dean at [religiouslife@emory.edu](mailto:religiouslife@emory.edu).

We look forward to the development of spiritual life at Emory over the next five years through these initiatives, while we also intend to remain flexible and nimble to new opportunities that may arise and the needs of each particular moment in changing times.

### **Strategic Engagement Process:**

- 21 interviews with university leadership and key stakeholders
- 18-member Interfaith Strategic Planning Steering Committee
- OSRL staff meetings
- OSRL Religious Life Affiliates meetings
- Tradition-specific Working Group meetings (for previously unstaffed groups)
- Inter-Religious Council meetings
- Open campus engagement session
- Online survey

### **Campus Assessment Feedback Themes:**

#### **Emory Assets**

1. Emory has a history of active religious life
2. Emory has a history of interfaith activity with programs such as Journeys of Reconciliation and the Inter-Religious Council
3. Emory's location in Atlanta offers a strong context for faith and social justice connections
4. Emory has recently invested in strong efforts to build up its diverse spiritual life, through new OSRL staff, space, communications, and programs

#### **Emory Challenges**

1. Interfaith/spirituality work is strong at Emory but is not yet scaled to all undergraduates, graduate/professional students, and employees
2. Some stakeholders express there are continuing climate issues – such as uneven support around religious accommodations in some cases
3. Students expressed a feeling that there is a of lack of language, literacy, training, and comfort in engaging religious diversity and interfaith work
4. There are currently few programs for the Spiritual but Not Religious (SBNR), which is a large and growing demographic on campus and beyond

5. There are currently few formal offerings in interfaith studies

### **Major Goals Identified:**

- Goal 1: Create an environment where people of all religious, spiritual, and philosophical identities are welcomed, supported, and feel they belong at Emory.
- Goal 2: Build student, faculty, and staff confidence and skills to engage religious diversity at Emory in a positive and meaningful way.
- Goal 3: Unite around a shared vision for interfaith engagement at Emory that connects Emory's Methodist heritage and its diverse multifaith reality today.

### **Initiatives to Implement (3-5 years):**

#### **First Phase Priorities**

- Continue an interfaith committee or network and tradition-specific working groups as advisable
- Develop a vision statement for Emory's commitment to interfaith engagement that incorporates its Methodist heritage and its multifaith diversity and interfaith commitments today
- Develop trainings on religious diversity and interfaith engagement for students and employees

#### **Second Phase Priorities**

- Develop more interfaith programming for graduate/professional students
- Develop religious diversity Employee Resource Groups for faculty and staff
- Study effective programming for the SBNRs and begin to offer more
- Develop more offerings for previously unsupported traditions as needed
- Develop more programs that connect to the history of faith, Civil Rights, and social justice in Atlanta and the Southern U.S.
- Develop more programs that connect religion and ecology

#### **Third Phase Priorities**

- Develop an Emory Charter Day program on Methodism and interfaith work
- Develop a religious diversity faculty speaker series on faith and values
- Develop more alumni, parent, and donor religious diversity/interfaith programming

- Work toward developing interfaith studies, connected with OSRL through course presentations, workshops, and potential course offerings

### **Other Recommendations:**

Develop the program of the new Emory Interfaith Center, opening in March 2023

Hire staff to help lead forward the newer strategic priorities and increased scope

Stay nimble to emerging opportunities such as new graduate/professional school partnerships, examples including:

- Religious diversity in the business world
- Religious diversity and public health

Build funding around OSRL's new chaplaincies: Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, and Muslim

Build endowments for OSRL's signature programs: Journeys of Reconciliation, Voices of Inner Strength Gospel Choir, and the Inter-Religious Council

Partner with the Provost's Office on the student flourishing initiative to support all students and as a special outreach to the Spiritual But Not Religious (SBNR)

Partner with ODEI on its strategic report to support social justice and healing

Partner with the Tam Institute to address Antisemitism and other religious biases

### **Conclusion**

A vibrant spiritual life, religious and philosophical diversity, and interfaith engagement is essential to Emory University. Emory was founded out of a religious motivation to seek truth and to teach knowledge, and that shapes our core mission of education in service to humanity. As our religious diversity has grown, nurturing the spiritual and ethical lives of all students, faculty, and staff has become vital to creating a diverse, equitable, and inclusive community that welcomes, respects, and values the identities of everyone at Emory so that we can all flourish. And in a country and world in which religious beliefs, values, and communities play a significant role in our common life, promoting religious literacy, pluralism, and interfaith engagement is crucial to advancing the common good in every area.

From all the stakeholders engaged, there was great enthusiasm for the current momentum of spiritual life at Emory with recent enhancements and future potential opportunities. Emory OSRL looks forward to leading the Emory community in collaboratively implementing the goals and initiatives identified by the community through this process toward a vision of flourishing spiritual life.

## Acknowledgements

We are grateful for all those contributed to the development of this strategic plan:

### Leadership Interviews (Spring/Summer 2021)

|                             |  |
|-----------------------------|--|
| Christopher Augustini       | Executive Vice President for Business and Administration and Chief Financial Officer |
| Mary Anne Bobinski          | Dean, School of Law  |
| Lynell Cadray               | University Ombuds and Adviser to the President                                       |
| Yolanda Cooper              | Dean and University Librarian  |
| James Curran                | Dean, Rollins School of Public Health  |
| Allison Dykes               | Vice President and Secretary of the University                                       |
| Gregory L. Fennes           | University President   |
| Bishop David Graves         | Board of Trustees  |
| Bishop Sue Hauptert-Johnson | Board of Trustees  |
| Bishop Jonathan Holston     | Board of Trustees  |
| The Rev. Brent Huckaby      | Associate Pastor, Glenn Memorial Church  |
| Jan Love                    | Dean, Candler School of Theology and Interim Provost                                 |
| Deborah Marlowe             | Board of Trustees  |
| Bishop William McAlilly     | Vice Chair, Board of Trustees  |
| Linda McCauley              | Dean, Nell Hodgson Woodruff School of Nursing  |
| The Rev. Susan Pinson       | Senior Associate Pastor, Glenn Memorial Church                                       |
| Teresa Rivero               | Board of Trustees  |
| Leanne Rubenstein           | Co-Director, Compassionate Atlanta   |
| Karen Sedatole              | Interim Dean, Goizueta Business School   |
| Lisa Tedesco                | Dean, Laney Graduate School and Vice Provost for Academic Affairs - Graduate Studies |
| The Rev. Mark Westmoreland  | Senior Pastor, Glenn Memorial Church   |

Interfaith Strategic Planning Steering Committee

The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, Dean of Religious Life, co-chair

Carol Henderson, Vice Provost, Chief Diversity Officer and Adviser to the President, co-chair

*Faculty*

Michael Elliott, Dean, Emory College of Arts and Sciences

Eric Goldstein, 92C, Associate Professor of History and Director, Tam Institute of Jewish Studies

The Rev. Dr. Khalia Williams, Assistant Dean for Worship, Candler School of Theology

*Students*

Jason Cabitac, Graduate Student Representative

Afsha Hussein, 22C, Undergraduate Student Representative

*Staff*

David Clark, Associate Vice President of Campus Life

Wanda Collins (Spring 2021), Assistant Vice President for Counseling and Psychological Services

Laura Douglas-Brown, 95C, Executive Director of Communications and Editor in Chief

Sister Mary Priniski (Spring 2021), Executive Director, Aquinas Center for Theology, Candler School of Theology

Gautham Reddy, South Asian Studies Librarian

Anya Reid, Associate Vice President, Advancement

Malcolm Robinson, 15C, Assistant Director, Office for Racial and Cultural Engagement

James Roland, 18L, 21T, Senior Director of Civic and Community Engagement

Anjulet Tucker, 00C, 09G Director of Presidential Initiatives and Special Projects, Office of the President

*Alumni*

Munir Meghjani, 08OX, 10C, President, Emory Alumni Board

*Board of Trustees*

Deborah Marlowe, 80C, Member of the Board of Trustees

OSRL Chaplains and Staff

The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, Dean of Religious Life

Brahmacharini Shweta Chaitanya, Hindu Chaplain

The Ven. Priya Rakkhit Sraman, Buddhist Chaplain

Rabbi Jordan Braunig, Jewish Chaplain

Maddie Henderson, Christian Chaplain

Isam Vaid, Muslim Religious Life Scholar

Maury Allums, Music Director

Zachary Cole, Chief of Staff

Lakishia Hines, Executive Administrative Assistant  
 Katie Rappold, Program Coordinator (Fall 2021, Spring 2022)  
 Linh Le, Chaplaincy Resident  
 Liz Martin, Chaplaincy Resident

#### Affiliated Staff

The Rev. Dr. Lyn Pace, Oxford College Chaplain  
 Sara McKlin, Cannon Chapel Site Operations Manager  
 The Rev. Alex Miller-Knaack, Oxford College Assistant Chaplain (Fall 2021, Spring 2022)

#### OSRL Religious Life Affiliates

Margot Bagley, Adventist Christian Fellowship  
 Austin Prince, Baptist Campus Ministry  
 Alicia Marshall, Bread Coffeehouse  
 Kyle Marshall, Bread Coffeehouse  
 Father John Boll, Catholic Center  
 Victoria Schwartz, Catholic Center  
 Michael Zauche, Catholic Center  
 Rabbi Zalman Lipskier, Chabad at Emory  
 Olivia Crum, Fellowship of Christian Athletes  
 Lauren Blazofsky, Hillel at Emory (Spring 2021)  
 Rabbi Ilan Schwartz, Hillel at Emory (Fall 2021, Spring 2022)  
 Melody Falter, InterVarsity  
 LoAnn Nguyen, InterVarsity  
 The Rev. Glenn Goldsmith, InterVarsity  
 The Rev. Andrew Rickel, Lutheran Campus Ministry  
 Rabbi Yaakov Fleshel, MEOR at Emory  
 The Rev. Sarah Hooker, Ukirk  
 The Rev. Stephen Maginas, Reformed University Fellowship (Spring 2021)  
 The Rev. George Hamm, Reformed University Fellowship (Fall 2021, Spring 2022)  
 The Rev. Brent Huckabee, Glenn Memorial Church (Spring 2021)  
 Jordan Grassi, United Methodist Campus Ministry (Spring 2022)

#### Hindu Life Working Group

Brahmacharini Shweta Chaitanya, Hindu Chaplain, co-chair  
 The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, Dean of Religious Life, co-chair  
 Ellen Gough, Assistant Professor of Religion  
 Harshita Kamath, Associate Professor in Telugu Culture, Literature and History  
 Brajesh Samarth, Senior Lecturer and Coordinator in Hindi-Urdu  
 Gautham Reddy, South Asian Studies Librarian  
 Rishab Bhatt, undergraduate student  
 Snehaa Krishnan, graduate student, alumni  
 Aalekhya Malladi, graduate student



Uma Obalapuram, undergraduate student  
 Tanu Pendharkar, undergraduate student  
 Shreyas Rajagopalan, undergraduate student  
 Akshar Patel, alumni

#### Buddhist Life Working Group

The Venerable Priya Rakkhit Sraman, Buddhist Chaplain, co-chair  
 The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, Dean of Religious Life, co-chair  
 Tara Doyle, Professor of Religion Emeritus  
 William Eley, Executive Associate Dean, Emory School of Medicine  
 Wei Wu, Assistant Professor of Religion  
 Sara McClintock, Associate Professor of Religion  
 Elizabeth Hornor, Director of Education, Michael C. Carlos Museum  
 Marianne Florian, graduate student, alumni  
 The Venerable Upali Sraman, graduate student  
 Meha Srivastava, undergraduate student  
 Albert Terc, undergraduate student  
 Zhouxin Zuo, undergraduate student  
 Emory Hsu, alumni

#### Jewish Life Working Group

Rabbi Jordan Braunig, Jewish Chaplain, co-chair  
 The Rev. Dr. Gregory W. McGonigle, Dean of Religious Life, co-chair  
 Paul Entis, Executive Director, Tam Institute for Jewish Studies  
 Suzanne Onorato, Campus Life (2021)  
 Sharon Rabinovitz, Director, Student Health Services  
 Dona Yarborough, Campus Life (Spring 2022)  
 Lauren Blazofsky, Hillel at Emory (Spring 2021)  
 Rabbi Yaakov Fleshel, MEOR at Emory  
 Rabbi Zalman Lipskier, Chabad at Emory  
 Rabbi Ilan Schwartz, Hillel at Emory  
 Leah Bader, undergraduate student  
 Jake Busch, undergraduate student  
 Karyn Lisker, undergraduate student  
 Payton Malone, undergraduate student  
 Noah Marchuck, undergraduate student  
 Hannah Marcus, undergraduate student  
 Eli Mars, undergraduate student

#### Inter-Religious Council (Atlanta campus undergraduates)

Amar Bellevue, Adventist Christian Fellowship  
 Sandra Bourdon, Beloved Community/Voices of Inner Strength  
 Justin Burnett, Bread Coffeehouse

Noah Lee, Chabad  
 Meha Srivastava, Emory Buddhist Club  
 Albert Terc, Emory Buddhist Club  
 Ulia Ahn, Emory In Via  
 Claire Yohann, Fellowship of Christian Athletes (Spring 2022)  
 Alexia Marriott, Greek Orthodox At Large Representative (Fall 2021)  
 Noah Marchuck, Hillel  
 Rishab Bhatt, Hindu Students Association  
 Sanjana Karamcheti, Hindu Students Association  
 Ema Perez, InterVarsity  
 Adina Peck, MEOR  
 Naji Algaal, Muslim Students Association (Spring 2022)  
 Afsha Hossain, Muslim Students Association  
 Sultan Minhas, Muslim Students Association  
 Nadia Saadein, Muslim Students Association  
 MJ Brown, Pagan At Large Representative (Fall 2021)  
 Noorie Dhingra, Sikh At Large Representative (Fall 2021)  
 Chloe Wegrzynowicz, Ukirk  
 Ella Morgan, Unitarian Universalist At Large Representative (Fall 2021)

(Spring 2021)

Joshua MacLean, Bread Coffeehouse  
 Briana Delvasto, Catholic Student Union  
 Rohini Guinn, Hindu Students Association  
 Himani Shetti, Hindu Students Association  
 Isabella Cantor, Jewish At Large Representative  
 Olivia Dietzel, Jewish At Large Representative  
 Ariella Farchi, Jewish At Large Representative  
 Dani Farchi, Jewish At Large Representative  
 Josh Millin, Jewish At large Representative  
 Raheel Rahim, Muslim Students Association  
 Stephen Mackey, Reformed University Fellowship  
 Sahaj Anand, Sikh At Large Representative

Interfaith Youth Core/Interfaith America

Megan Johnson, Senior Consultant for Strategic Initiatives  
 Jenan Mohajir, Senior Director of Special Projects  
 Shauna Morin, Strategic Initiatives Consultant  
 Eboo Patel, Founder and President  
 Morgan Visser, Program Assistant  
 Langston Ward, Program Assistant

Many thanks as well to the participants in the open campus session and the online survey.

## IFYC Nine Leadership Practices of Interfaith Excellence

IFYC has found these to be the most influential factors in advancing interfaith cooperation on campus.<sup>1</sup>

1. **Identity and Mission.** The campus links interfaith cooperation directly and deeply to its grounding and publicly articulated vision and values. This anchors a long-term strategic commitment and signals to campus constituents that interfaith cooperation is a central value to the campus community.
2. **Campus-Wide Strategy.** Stakeholders from all levels of the campus are engaged in creating, implementing and sustaining a holistic curricular and co-curricular strategy for advancing interfaith cooperation. There is a written plan or clear approach in place that holds stakeholders accountable and provides a roadmap for success.
3. **Public Identity.** The campus proudly shares its deeply held commitment to interfaith cooperation by articulating it through public communications efforts, including marketing to prospective students, alumni and trustees as well as signature public events.
4. **Respect and Accommodations for Religious Identity.** Policies that ensure a respectful level of accommodation for religious diversity are foundational to creating a basic sense of trust across campus communities. Campuses must not only develop these policies, provide sufficient resources, and implement them with authenticity, but also take strides to ensure the full campus is aware of them.
5. **Academic Priority.** Any institution that is serious about sustaining its commitment to interfaith cooperation must engage its faculty and its curriculum. Faculty members from a variety of disciplines are developing courses, course sequences, and minors in interfaith studies. This anchors students' experiences in academic reflection and positions the campus for leadership in the growing academic field of interfaith studies.
6. **Staff and Faculty Competence and Capacity.** Given the influence that staff and faculty have on campus climate, efforts to hire and develop individuals who have the knowledge, skill, and capacity to advance positive interfaith climates are essential.
7. **Student Leadership.** Explicitly student-led interfaith efforts infuse the campus with genuine energy and student buy in. They also provide students with the space to develop as passionate and lifelong interfaith leaders.
8. **Campus-Community Partnerships.** Intentional service and educational partnerships with community institutions provide opportunities for students to deepen their interfaith learning through practice.
9. **Assessment Cycle.** Regular assessment of the campus climate and interfaith initiatives ensures that the campus has clear goals and guides ongoing improvement and planning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Patel, E., Baxter, K.B., & Silverman, N. (2015). Leadership Practices for Interfaith Excellence in Higher Education, *Liberal Education* 101(1/2).