

## Session Four: Interfaith Relations

### Objectives:

- *To provide a space for participants to explore the complex dynamics of Christian-Jewish relations*
- *To encourage participants to choose faithful, thoughtful action that takes into account these dynamics, but within a framework of a Christian witness willing to take some risks*
- *To make links between this dynamic and the rise of Islamophobia in the United States*
- *To encourage participants to seek partnerships with Jews and Muslims in this work*

### Preparation:

- *Participants should read the Introduction, Preamble and Section III of Kairos USA as homework, and also pp.5-6 of Steadfast Hope.*
- *Facilitator should print out and make copies of Handout 4.1, enough for each participant to read (perhaps 1 copy per 2 people).*

### Welcome (10 min)

- *Opening Scripture:*
- *Luke 6:20-36 (Blessings and Woes + Love for Enemies)*
  - *[key phrases] “Blessed are you when people hate you, and when they exclude you, revile you, and defame you on account of the Son of Man.” “Woe to you when all speak well of you, for that is what their ancestors did to the false prophets.” “But I say to you that listen, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.” “If you do good to those who do good to you, what credit is that to you?”*
- *Quoting from the Kairos USA document, the facilitator can remind group that:*
  - *“The situation in Israel and Palestine is not a struggle among religions, as some would maintain, in which age-old enmities among Jews, Christians and Muslims fuel unending conflict and violence. It is, rather, about human rights and equality: about land, water and access to work, education and worship. At the same time, however, religious identity plays an important role in the ongoing conversation about Israel and Palestine in the United States, where “interfaith politics” has had a profound effect on political discourse and on the ability of the churches to take positive action.”*
- *Furthermore, the more we become involved in working on this issue, the more we find ourselves engaged in conversations about identity, both in terms of race and ethnicity and in terms of religious tradition.*

- The dynamics are complex, and the goal today is for us to dive into this complexity in an attempt to understand some of the subtle, and not-so-subtle, assumptions and feelings that come into play when people talk about and act on this issue.

What is the “Ecumenical” or “Interfaith Deal”? (45 min)

- Distribute **“Handout 4.1”**, which includes the text to read together and the discussion questions.
- *Facilitator explains:* In the last session, we looked at the impact theology has had on Christian attitudes towards Israel. On page 12 of *Steadfast Hope*, Jewish theologian Marc Ellis describes the “ecumenical deal” as follows: *(read from page 1 of handout)*.

Break (10 min)

*Take a break if appropriate, before you make the transition to the discussion of Christian-Muslim relations, which begins on page 3 of the handout.*

Making the link to Islamophobia (40 min)

- *Returning to the discussion using the handout:* In the final line of the paragraph we just read, mention is made that we must also include Muslims in these conversations. This transitions into the next section.
- *Have participants read the paragraphs in the handout, and continue with discussion questions.*

Reflecting on Scripture (15 min)

- *Lectio Divina on Genesis 12:1-3*
- *Transition to a more meditative set up – gather the group in circle, candle, assign 3 readers.*
- *Reader one reads through once. During this reading of the passage, listeners are instructed to simply listen to what words or images stand out for them or “shine”. After the reading, facilitator allows silence for a moment, then invites participants to simply name (don’t explain) what images or words stood out for them.*
- *After a silence, reader two reads through again. During this reading, participants are asked to listen to the passage for any new insights. What, in light of our discussion, might this passage be saying to you?*
- *After a silence, participants are invited to share (briefly) what insights they have received from this hearing of the word.*
- *Reader three reads through again. This time, participants are instructed to listen to the passage with the question in mind: “In hearing this Word, what am I called to do?”*

- *After a silence, participants are invited to share what they heard.*
- *Questions for further reflection (if they don't come out in previous discussion):*
  - In light of the fact that Jews, Muslims and Christians are all considered “children of Abraham,” how can we re-think what it means to “bless Abraham”?
  - How can we re-think what it means to “curse Abraham”?
  - Thinking back to the Luke 6 passage, how do we bring this into conversation with the call to “bless those that curse you”?

*Closing (1 min)*

- As you continue to ruminate on this passage and what we've discussed, read for next time Section Five, A Church Confession. What does it mean for us to confess and repent in this context?

**Total estimated time = 121 minutes**