



**MCGILL OFFICE
OF RELIGIOUS AND
SPIRITUAL LIFE**

Multi-Faith Network Fall 2019

Created: November 20th, 2019
Last updated: November 27th, 2019
Author(s): Anna Stafford
Approved: Carlene Gardner (November 27th 2019)

Contents

Introduction	1
Overview of Winter 2019 Multi-Faith Network	2
Religious Inclusion.....	2
What would you like other students to know about the importance of faith in your life, as a McGill student?	2
1. Diversity in what students define as faith	2
2. Relationship to identity.....	2
3. Challenges on campus.....	2
4. Myth-busting.....	2
How best can other students be supportive allies to students of faith?.....	2
What can MORSL do to help? How can we normalize religious and spiritual life on campus?.....	3
1. Engage the non-religious	3
2. Educational outreach	3
What is your group already doing in this area?.....	3
Potential Interfaith Event.....	3
1. What are some potential themes you might like to address?.....	3
2. Who are our potential partners?.....	4
3. What kind of format would you like to see?.....	4
Discover Spiritual McGill Feedback & Exam Distress.....	4
Discover Spiritual McGill: Time of year + Promotion.....	4
Exam Distress Programming Suggestions	4
Conclusion.....	4

Introduction

The Fall Multi-Faith Network meeting took place on Tuesday November 12th 2019 in the Presbyterian College at 3495 Rue University. The Network meeting included faith volunteers and student club liaisons. Each group or association was invited to send one participant. We had 19 participants, including 5 MORSL staff members. The meeting began with an overview of the previous Multi-faith network meeting and the changes MORSL implemented using the feedback we got from the previous winter semester meeting. The remainder of the meeting was structured around discussion groups on the following two topics: Religious Inclusion and a potential Interfaith Event for second semester. During the informal part of the meeting, our members spoke briefly about Discover Spiritual McGill and exam de-stress programming. The feedback we gathered, as well as general feedback on the success of the meeting, is outlined below.

Overview of Winter 2019 Multi-Faith Network

We began the meeting with a short presentation demonstrating what changes we implemented based on the feedback from the last Network meeting. For example, we held the Discover Spiritual McGill fair in September this year, instead of October, and made it a conference style with panel discussions as well as tabling, instead of just tabling. We also gave our website a more sleek and modern look, adding a directory of clubs and better terms to aid navigation of the website. We received many requests to be more involved in social justice. While direct advocacy action is outside MORSL's scope, we allotted space within the Discover Spiritual McGill fair for student clubs to showcase projects they have been involved with (e.g. disaster relief, education aid, etc.).

Religious Inclusion

This section of discussion questions sought to survey the culture of religious and spiritual life on campus. The responses to each question are paraphrased below.

What would you like other students to know about the importance of faith in your life, as a McGill student?

Several common themes emerged from the discussions at each of the tables.

1. Diversity in what students define as faith
 - Faith is a spectrum.
 - There is internal diversity in virtually all religious traditions, they are not monolithic.
2. Relationship to identity
 - Faith allows you to connect to a long-standing tradition. It adds purpose to your day-to-day life.
 - Spirituality is a key component of self-discovery.
 - Faith is one of the main ways that students connect with a community, and community is often the reason one goes looking for a religious or spiritual group.
 - It is analogous to the importance of art or philosophy.
3. Challenges on campus
 - It is particularly challenging for international students to find a religious home on campus when they came from a place where they were a religious majority.
 - There is a problematic stigma around religion and spirituality around campus that limits how students feel they can express their beliefs, background, and that part of their identity.
 - McGill should be more accommodating of religious needs.
 - Religious freedom is also secular freedom.
4. Myth-busting
 - Faith is not in conflict with modernity. Religion is not the antithesis to science.
 - It's not about rules or asking for favours from a deity, it is more about opening yourself to the deeper meaning of your life.
 - There are a lot of misconceptions about the role religion can play in our culture because of the power previously held in Quebec by the Catholic Church.

How best can other students be supportive allies to students of faith?

We compiled the feedback from all of the discussion groups on this topic. Similar responses have been collapsed into a paraphrased response.

- Be open to it! Confront your assumptions, and go deeper into a faith perspective.

- Have awareness of the different beliefs that exist. Don't judge. Be aware that there is a lot of diversity of religion as well as internal diversity.
- Religions are dynamic by nature. They are not stagnant.
- Show that you support students of faith. Wear an anti-Bill 21 pin. Make people feel welcome, approach them, and ask questions. Learn more about religious holidays.

What can MORSL do to help? How can we normalize religious and spiritual life on campus?

We compiled the feedback from all of the discussion groups on this topic. Similar responses have been collapsed into a paraphrased response.

1. Engage the non-religious
 - Offer space for the people who are not affiliated with a religion.
 - Partner with non-religious groups.
 - Propose a broader definition of religion.
 - Hold events that focus on bridging the gap between culture and faith.
 - Run an event about science and religion.
2. Educational outreach
 - Offer teaching + learning events. Offer workshops on different practices. Promote religious literacy.
 - Do a poetry night and invite people to continue the conversation after each event.
 - Hold more social justice events that address hot button issues.

What is your group already doing in this area?

- We encourage exploration and participating no matter what you do or do not identify as.
- We provide a space for "insiders" and "outsiders".
- We proactively work with other traditions.
- We provide a space for learning and religious ceremony.

Potential Interfaith Event

All the groups expressed an interest in holding an interfaith event next semester. Below we paraphrase their feedback on the theme and format of such a potential event.

1. What are some potential themes you might like to address?
 - Education, social justice, topics addressing the intersection of religion and hot button issues. Some of these hot button issues include mental health, science, sexuality, and law.
 - There was also interest expressed about an event on the intersection of psychedelics and spirituality.
 - There should be a focus on interfaith dialogue, perhaps in light of the recent passing of Bill 21.
 - Address how spirituality can be a tool to further personal development.
 - Address the climate crisis.
 - Focusing on winter holidays and food!
 - Address faith in God and suffering.

2 Who are our potential partners?

In the brainstorming session for this question, the members of the Multi-Faith network listed a large array of potential partners such as:

Student residences, faith communities, academic groups, wellness groups, movie + art clubs, academic departments, political or social justice groups, SUS (Science Undergrads), student wellness hub, McGill professors, and other S2 units.

3. What kind of format would you like to see?

Panels, movie screening, mixer. Bring in religious symbols and share with each other. A potluck, interfaith dialogue. Have it outside a religious space.

Discover Spiritual McGill Feedback & Exam Destress

We spoke briefly about the fair and exam de-stress over dinner, at the end of the meeting. The general feedback from these conversations is summarized below.

Discover Spiritual McGill: Time of year + Promotion

September is too busy for faith clubs to help plan, especially since many clubs are inactive in the summer. It is also too busy for many groups to participate in on the day of the event. A fair in November would get a better turn out. A lot of people are not seeing the promo on campus for the fair.

Exam Destress Programming Suggestions

Students are very busy during this time and lack the capacity to organize programming. Suggestions from students included active listening from faith volunteers or student volunteers, and offering study space that also has an area for meditation and yoga. MORSL will be compiling a list of services our network provides (e.g. study space at the Newman Centre), and will share Student Services programming.

Conclusion

We at MORSL were very happy with the third installment of our Multi-Faith Network meetings. The feedback we gathered on religious inclusion and a new interfaith event were particularly useful and encouraging. We will be starting brainstorming for a new interfaith event in January. We had some new members to our network and it was also refreshing to see these new faces. We will hold another Multi-Faith Network meeting in the Winter 2020 semester where we hope to continue to build the relationships created and fostered through these meetings, so that MORSL can better serve the religious, the spiritual, the non-religious, and everyone in between.