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# Mapping Interfaith Encounters

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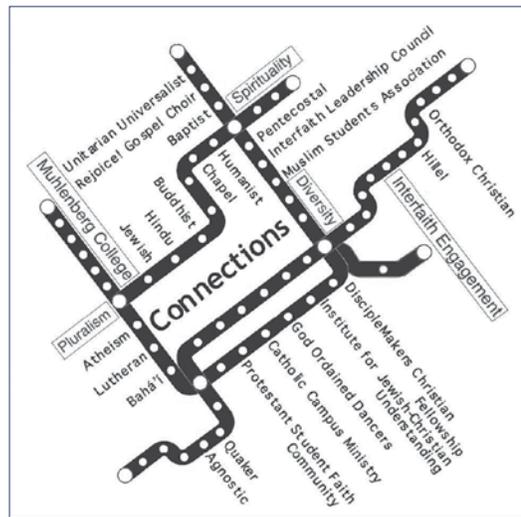
# Mapping Interfaith Encounters

As someone who grew up on an Iowan farm, I find the idea of travel by subway rather intimidating. Will I get on the right train? Will I be able to navigate the chaos of Grand Central Station? Will I find my way back home?

In reality, subways provide opportunities to (quite literally) bump into people of diverse cultures and beliefs. Travel stretches us out of our comfort zones and connects us with new communities.

Rebecca Diamond, a 2015 graduate of Muhlenberg College and a member of our Interfaith Leadership Council, designed this subway map as an image for interfaith engagement here. To a blank map of the Montreal subway system, she added the various religious and spiritual communities of our student body. The map is a powerful image for interfaith engagement. Students often begin at one point, perhaps identifying strongly as Roman Catholic or atheist. Other students start at one of the unnamed stations, which we could label “questioning” or “exploring.”

While many students feel most at home at one point on the map, diverse college environments invite students to “jump on a train” and learn about another point. Lutherans attend Shabbat dinner with their Jewish friends. Muslims celebrate Holi with Hindu classmates. An atheist talks with a Catholic about social justice. Many travel back to their home base communities, of course, to be nurtured in their religious (or non-religious) practices and beliefs. But



once given the opportunity to learn about a peer’s tradition, one’s worldviews has been stretched.

Interfaith encounters enable students to articulate—often for the first time—what they believe and don’t believe. Conversations with new neighbors often lead to a discovery of common ground. But lingering for more than a few minutes at a new subway stop inevitably leads to points of theological disagreement as well. Interfaith dialogue should not only

be kumbaya circles of commonality. It should provide sanctuaries for civil discourse and, at times, respectful disagreement.

Consider the major intersections in the subway map. Where are these intersections on your campus? Muhlenberg students are especially eager to explore the intersections of religion and science, spirituality and the environment, faith and mental health. These topics invite students of any or no religious belief to participate in deep conversation. These intersections also invite collaboration between academic departments and co-curricular partners to co-sponsor speakers, panel conversations, film screenings, and art exhibits.

I invite you and your students to draw an interfaith engagement map for your campus. Where do students call “home” on the map? What intersections and partnerships would you like to explore? The train is about to leave the station. Will you get on board?

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