World Interfaith Harmony Week, February 1-7, 2015

# Background to Common Ground Project

We are a Roman Catholic missionary religious order that focuses particularly in interfaith and intercultural dialogue. To that end we created a program called COMMON GROUND. The Common Ground Project is a way of bringing together atheists, humanists, and religious believers in pursuit to have common ground between and to explore how we can shape our communities together through this common effort to make the world a better place.

This began in an international conference we organized in Coatbridge, Scotland on November 2013 inviting the British and Scottish Humanist Societies along with representatives of various faiths to begin this conversation. We are planning another conference at Rutgers University in New Brunswick, NJ, working together with the American Humanist Association, the Humanist Department of Rutgers University, and other faith representatives. This conference will take place October 8, 2015. We are exploring the idea of developing network for secular and religious activism in the future.

Along these lines, we also began a COMMON GROUND group of about 41 people in the northern New Jersey/New York metro area for more than a year now. A portion of this group meetings monthly, exploring our common ground through the help of authors such as Chris Stedman, Sam Harris, and Krista Tippet. We met in the first week of February in celebration of World Interfaith Harmony Week.

# February 1st Gathering of Common Ground

[Our Common Ground Meetup](http://www.meetup.com/Conversations-Among-Humanists-and-Religious-Believers/events/219000237/) met Sunday, February 1, 3pm - 5 pm and viewed the TED Talk of Alain de Botton entitled [**Atheism 2.0**](http://www.ted.com/talks/alain_de_botton_atheism_2_0?language=en). In it he considers what aspects of religion should atheists (respectfully) adopt. Alain de Botton suggests a "religion for atheists" — call it Atheism 2.0 — that incorporates religious forms and traditions to satisfy our human need for connection, ritual and transcendence.

This twenty minute talked engendered much discuss among our atheist and religious friends. As we considered how we all viewed this idea where Alain indicates the "holes" of secularity and what can be learned. At the same time, the question was reversed and we also discussed what religion could learn from humanists and atheists. We saw these things through certain elements of common ground between us we are discovering: community and family, ethics and morality, a fulfilled life, and activism for the good.