

URI February Interfaith Community Call – An Interfaith Exploration: Fasting for the Soul

On February 24th, as part of the WIHW 2025 celebrations, the United Religions Initiative hosted a vibrant interfaith community call centered on the theme “An Interfaith Exploration: Fasting for the Soul.” The call, held from 6:00 to 7:30 am PT, brought together URI’s diverse global network—including CC members, individual members, staff, Trustees, and partners—to engage in a rich dialogue about fasting as both a personal and communal spiritual practice. More than 35 participants from each corner of the World were present at this call.

This call was not only a significant platform for meaningful dialogue and interfaith understanding, but it also provided an opportunity for participants from various faith traditions to explore fasting practices as a shared path to spiritual growth and compassion. The event was structured to encourage deep reflections alongside active interaction across regional and cultural boundaries. During the 90-minute session, participants were encouraged to introduce themselves, share personal stories, and engage in small group discussions.

The session opened with a warm welcome and a brief technical check, setting an inclusive tone for the discussion. Maria Crespo, URI Director of Member Support and Lejla Hasandedic-Dapo, URI Membership Growth Coordinator, introduced the topic by highlighting the significance of fasting across various religious traditions, drawing on examples from Islam, Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, and indigenous practices. This introduction underscored the universal values of discipline, compassion, and renewal that fasting embodies, thus establishing a shared framework for the call.

Participants then engaged in a dynamic check-in session through chat and breakout groups, where they shared personal experiences and insights regarding fasting in their own traditions. These small group discussions fostered an environment of mutual learning and connection, allowing individuals to express how fasting has enriched their spiritual lives and contributed to their personal growth.

It was followed by four inspiring presentations delivered by members of the URI community. Samira Fatma Barucija-Homoras (Islam) from Bosnia and Herzegovina, URI Multiregion Coordinator, Wanda Holsman (Judaism), URI Learning and Data Systems Coordinator, Salette Aquion (Christianity), Former URI Global Council Trustee from Latin America and Bhikkhu Vasu Bandhum (Buddhism) Global Council Trustee from North America. Speakers representing a range of faiths illuminated the transformative power of fasting in their respective religious contexts. The thought-provoking presentations were followed by reflective small group discussion that invited participants to consider how fasting, as a spiritual practice, can help build interfaith bridges and foster understanding.

Following the breakout sessions, a plenary discussion was held, during which several participants shared the highlights of their group conversations. These contributions enriched the dialogue by illustrating the transformative impact of fasting—not only as a ritualistic practice but as a powerful means of fostering interfaith understanding and solidarity. The shared values of empathy, renewal, and discipline were highlighted as universal connection points, which brought a sense of unity among the diverse group in attendance.

The call concluded with closing remarks and an interactive Zoom poll, which reflected high levels of participant satisfaction and engagement. The recording of the session is available for those who could not attend or wish to revisit the discussion (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q9de3ZrzN8>).

This call offered a space for both personal insights and constructive discussions about how communities can support one another in observing and comprehending different fasting practices. The webinar also built momentum for future engagement in URI's larger mission of interfaith cooperation, including providing resources for new members and expanding the global network. As this call embodied both shared spiritual practices and the interfaith values of URI, it promoted peaceful coexistence while enriching everyone's understanding of religious and cultural traditions.

This community call stands as a testament to the power of interfaith dialogue in building bridges across cultures and faiths. It has provided an inspiring space for collective reflection and action, embodying the spirit of unity and resilience that is at the heart of WIHW.

After the call, in the spirit of collaborative dialogue, word cloud was co-created as a visual representation of the essence of the call. This vibrant image highlights key themes from the discussion, such as Fasting, Interfaith, Dialogue, Community, Peace, Compassion, and Unity. We hope it will serve as a creative reminder of the shared insights and the strength of the interfaith connections that were made during the call.

