



# Faith Leaders Breakfast Harvest 2/2026

47 clergy members, lay leaders and neighbors of 16 diverse faith traditions came together to explore religious pluralism in northwest Ohio. Using the World Cafe model we shared our vision for a community rich with religious diversity, we identified current threats to our freedom of conscience and religion, and we laid the foundation for protecting religious pluralism.

## **What Religious Pluralism and Freedom Of Conscience Look Like Here**

Participants described pluralism as the freedom to believe, practice, and share one's faith openly—without fear or coercion—while respecting the same freedom for others. It shows up most clearly through relationships, shared experiences, and ongoing dialogue rather than formal agreement.

- “It looks like freedom to believe what we want and to carry those faith traditions into our families, communities, work, etc. and share openly.”
- “Pluralism [is] appreciating every flower in the garden.”

## **Examples of religious pluralism in NW Ohio:**

- The MultiFaith Council of Northwest Ohio
- Race Amity gatherings and Toledo Repair Cafe hosted by the Baha'i
- Bible studies open to people of all faiths
- Multicultural Community Day hosted by the Islamic Society of Northwest Ohio
- Interfaith Seders hosted by the Jewish Federation
- Equality Toledo Faith Leaders Committee
- Maumee Valley Habitat for Humanity Faith Build
- Better Together: Faith Community united for Pride
- First Unitarian Church of Toledo
- Hospital Chaplains

## **When Pluralism and Freedom of Conscience Are Under Threat**

Participants noted that threats emerge when one belief system is enforced, incentivized, or normalized at the expense of others, especially when backed by political power or institutional authority.

- “The shift of entitlement to believe what we want to an entitlement to *push* our beliefs has been more noticeable in the last few years,”



### **Warning signs include:**

- Government-sanctioned religion or erosion of church-state separation
- Silencing, fear, or loss of safety—especially for Jews, Muslims, immigrants, and other vulnerable communities
- Christian nationalism and “our way or the highway” thinking
- Elimination of choice in schools and public institutions
- Cultural stigma, name erasure, job loss, or dismissal of nuance and questioning
- Weaponization of religion, fear of violence, and normalization of constant danger

Several participants noted that threats often build slowly and quietly, like “the frog in boiling water,” until people hesitate to name who they are or what they believe.

Despite this, there was strong guarded optimism: even in times of crisis, people repeatedly come together, and the desire for connection and justice remains strong.

### **Protecting Religious Pluralism – What We Can Build On**

There was broad agreement that Northwest Ohio already has strong assets to build from, especially relationships, community infrastructure, and a history of cooperation.

### **Key strategies included:**

- Strengthening and expanding multifaith relationships and programs
- Developing education and curricula on religious pluralism and listening
- Sharing accurate, unifying information and resisting division
- Advocating for policies and legislation that protect religious freedom
- Practicing curiosity, humility, and deep listening
- Showing up together—in service, protest, and public life
- Moving from dialogue to action: “*pray with your feet*”

Participants emphasized that pluralism is protected not just through policy, but through presence—friendships, shared meals, learning together, and collective action grounded in shared values like compassion, kindness, and dignity. Some of this already exists because of organizations like MFC and other faith communities committed to interfaith relationship building.

- “Affirm the unity of this moment so that moving forward we remember the power of our combined voices and speak together for the dignity of all.”
- “If the MFC did not exist we would need to invent it. MFC = great example of pluralism’s respect.”



## What We Want to Carry Forward

As we look ahead, participants named a shared desire to carry forward curiosity, humility, and creativity as guiding postures for our work. These qualities make it possible to remain open—to one another, to learning, and to new ways of being in community across differences. This is the practice of “multifaith-ing.”

There was strong support for expanding our network by widening the invitation, ensuring that more people, traditions, and voices feel welcomed into multifaith spaces. Participants emphasized the importance of messaging that centers what we share in common, paired with deeper listening practices that help us truly learn about our neighbors rather than make assumptions about them.

## Balancing Justice and Unity

A defining strength of the MultiFaith Council is its commitment to non-proselytizing, a principle that has allowed people of many faiths to gather in shared space with trust and mutual respect. This commitment has shaped MFC's focus on harmony and relationship-building rather than political division. At the same time, many participants expressed concern about growing threats to religious minorities, immigrants, and unhoused neighbors, and named a collective responsibility to place social justice and love at the forefront of our work.

Participants recognized that we are as diverse in political thought and action as we are in religious belief and practice. Surely if common ground is possible across faith traditions, it is also possible across political differences, especially when grounded in shared values such as compassion, dignity, and care for the most vulnerable.

## Looking forward, there was energy around:

- Prioritizing relationship-building and promoting harmony
- Building micro-communities rooted in trust and mutual accountability
- Supporting mutual aid and shared action
- Inventorying and sharing collective resources, inspired by models of communal learning and exchange
- Continuing to extend the invitation so others can join and shape this multifaith community



## Questions That Guide Our Work

Rather than rushing to answers, participants named important questions to hold:

- How do power and control show up in our communities? How do our existing structures hinder our ability to love and lift up?
- How do potential political differences challenge unity within the MultiFaith Council? How do we find common ground despite our differences and show up authentically?

These questions are not obstacles to our work – they are the work. Being in community across our differences requires us to be both attentive, reflective, and willing to grow. Let us lean into the discomfort and stretch toward our neighbors, wherever they may be.