

## **The Religious Neighborhood Partners Around Hamline University: A Study of Interfaith Collaboration**

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### **Abstract**

With rapid advancements in communication and travel, one's neighbor is not only the person next door, but those around the globe. People are meeting others different than themselves every day. Diana Eck, a Harvard University professor of religion, created the Pluralism Project to map out the diverse religious landscape of the United States and document those engaging positively with other religions. Theologians, like Eck, have identified typologies for classifying these interactions. The most commonly used typology separates people into three categories: Exclusivists, Inclusivists, and Pluralists. Exclusivists believe their religion hold the truth and other religions offer no benefit to them. Inclusivists see merit in other traditions, but view their religion as superior. Pluralists see equal value in all religions. Though these categories appear neat on paper, the on-the-ground reality of applying them tends to be messier. Using the Pluralism Project as a basis, this study focuses on the neighboring places of worship to Hamline University to provide a sample of the reality of interfaith interactions. Through interviews with the leaders of local religious organizations the on-the-ground realities were documented. The interviews focused on three questions. The first question looks at the messiness encountered during interfaith collaboration, what problems those in the field have come across within and outside of their congregations. The second question analyzes their views of pluralism and interfaith, placing them into two categories: pragmatic or doctrinal. Those with pragmatic views approach interfaith collaboration based on the practices of each tradition. While those with doctrinal views look at what writings within each tradition say about interfaith work, truth, and salvation. Last, the effectiveness of the common typology used for classifying interfaith interactions was explored. This study will show the recurring theme of dialogue in literature and on-the-ground, as well as illuminate the effect the raising population of religious nones is having on the places of worship in the Hamline-Midway community. As more people are not identifying with organized religion these religious organizations have to change to remain open. In a fluid reality, the typology used to describe interfaith interactions must be just as loose and ever changing.

**Keywords:** Pluralism, Interfaith, Typology

### **1. Introduction**

Living in a time where technology is advancing faster than ever before, changes in communication and transportation are causing people to rethink who is a part of their community. One's neighbor is not limited to the family next door, but is quickly becoming those in the next town, state, or even country. These constant interactions, experienced as people carry out their daily routines, force society today to meet differences head on. Though it might not be given much thought the routine of daily life brings one in contact with those different from oneself. These interactions can be positive, strained or indifferent. One important difference being encountered today is religious diversity. These encounters often cause people to rethink their ideas about those they once considered different. As Nathan Humphrey, a middle-school religion teacher, observed:

Young people face much more serious theological questions today as a result of religious diversity than was true of previous generations. ‘Within a predominantly Christian culture, it was easier simply to think of the great unwashed who were un-Christian and since they were out of sight and out of mind, one could theologically consign them to hell.’ In contrast, having direct encounters with people from other religions makes that approach more difficult.<sup>1</sup>

Those in the field of religion, like Humphrey, would argue that the United States is no longer a predominantly Christian culture. Many people are emigrating from foreign countries to become Americans, bringing their own cultures and traditions with them; in fact, in 2010 12.9% of those residing in the United States had been born in another country.<sup>2</sup> Diana Eck, Harvard professor and theologian, looks at statistics like these and argues, “Our new religious diversity is not just an idea but a reality, built into our neighborhoods all over America. Religious pluralism is squarely and forever on the American agenda.”<sup>3</sup> Like the rest of the United States, Minnesota – especially the Twin Cities area – is experiencing this new reality. The Hamline-Midway community has experienced growth due to immigration, just like many other United States’ communities. With different ethnic backgrounds come different spiritual practices. The question then is how, in this present age, are Americans who come from around the world living side-by-side as neighbors?

As a student at Hamline University in Saint Paul, Minnesota, I have become a neighbor to the people in the Hamline-Midway community where the college is located. The district spans approximately 3.8 square miles, with an estimated 11,496 people living within its boundaries today.<sup>5</sup> There is an even split of men (49.6%) to women (50.4%) with the largest age group being from ages 25 to 44 (see figure 2) making an average of \$50,052 in yearly income.<sup>6</sup> It was named for being “midway” between the hearts of Minneapolis and Saint Paul, with populations of 392,880 and 290,770 respectively.<sup>6</sup> Because of its location, the area experiences much traffic from cars, public transportation, and those on foot, making it one of the busiest parts of the Twin Cities. In fact, the intersection of Snelling Avenue, which cuts through the Hamline-Midway district and University Avenue, originally named Midway Road, is the busiest intersection in Minnesota.<sup>7,8</sup> A variety of different people contribute to the traffic at this intersection as they travel around the Twin Cities.

In addition to being the busiest, “University Avenue is also one of the most diverse areas in the state. French-Canadians, Germans, Poles, Irish, and Scandinavians came to the area in the nineteenth century.”<sup>9</sup> Mass diversity really emerged “in the late twentieth century, (when) [immigrants from the nineteenth century] were followed by an influx of Hmong, Laotian, Somali, Ethiopian, and Vietnamese immigrants that continues to this day.”<sup>9</sup> The Hamline-Midway community has always been at the forefront of change, a constant bustle of activity, be it from traffic or immigration. “The census of 1910 indicated that the midway was the fastest growing part of Saint Paul.”<sup>10</sup> The area was officially settled in 1854 with 249 residents and originally called Rose Town. The area was mainly used for “farm land and economic enterprise.” Throughout the 1870s and 1880s farmland was slowly replaced with houses as the Minnesota Transfer Railway Company laid track through the area. “Through it all, the Midway kept growing. In 1923 alone, more than \$8 million in new buildings went up.” The community was initially comprised of White working class people. A census in 1970 showed that 98.8 percent of the population at the time, consisting of 14,221 people, was White, 0.6 percent was Black, and 0.6 percent identified as other.<sup>11</sup> Only ten years later, the White population had dropped to 93.5 percent, and the Black population was at 2.5 percent. American Indians, at 0.6 percent, and Asians, at 1.5 percent, were added in addition to the “other” category which, by then, had reached 1.9 percent. The area’s total population dropped to 12,417 in 1980, but the diversity has continued to grow to this day.

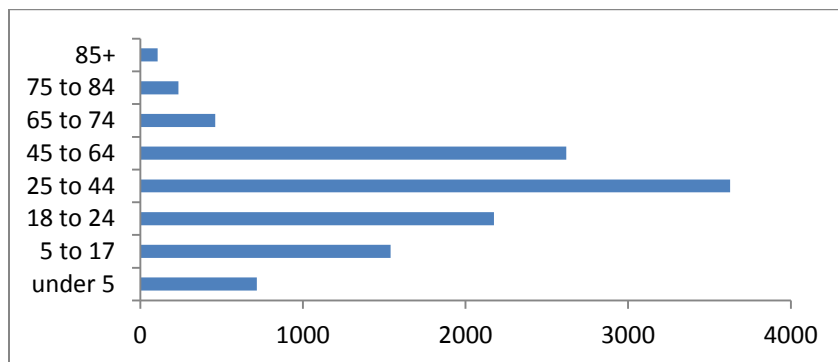


Figure 2. Age distribution for the Hamline-Midway area in 2010<sup>6</sup>

With various ethnicities come various religions and practices. Because of its traffic and immigrant populations, “University Avenue embodies the ethnic and cultural diversity of the modern city and state, more so than any other St. Paul Street.”<sup>9</sup> The Hamline-Midway community, since it includes University Avenue, embodies that diversity, too. Though all sixteen places of worship located in the Hamline-Midway area are Christian, there is still a great deal of diversity among them. Each church is different in the denomination of Christianity it embraces and in average age of the congregants, size, socio economics and ethnicity is different as well. The Hamline-Midway area, though predominately White, also is home to Asians, African Americans, Native Americans, Latinos, and other (see table 1).<sup>5</sup> These differences bring unique perspectives to the community. Being located in the city, the community has a variety of different places of worship just a short distance away and hosts visitors from many different religious traditions and has other diversity in schools and youth groups. With so many unique perspectives, it is important for a community to know who its neighbors are.

Table 1. Racial diversity of the Hamline-Midway area as reported in 2012<sup>5</sup>

<b>Ethnicity</b>	<b>Percentage</b>
White	63.8
Black/African American	15.6
Two or More races and other race	9.0
Latino	5.6
Asian	4.9
American Indian	1.2

Hamline University, located in the Hamline-Midway district, has roots in the Methodist tradition, but also realizes with the changing times the importance of embracing diversity of all kinds. In fact its website states, “Diversity work is among the most important things that we can do at Hamline. Our future success depends on our diversity. Organizations and universities who do not find a way to bring their communities together will simply not succeed.” Hamline University opened its doors in 1854 first at its Red Wing, Minnesota location and then in 1880 at its current location in Saint Paul. Since the beginning, the university has been developing its relationship with the diverse world surrounding it. For example, it was in the 1960s that the university began addressing the “matter of racial diversity of its students and faculty, institutional racism, (and) education of culturally disadvantaged students.” In addition, in 1974, Hamline started a Jewish Studies program. Today, Hamline University is proud to have students from 36 states and 62 countries. Its diversity reflects that of Minnesota (see table 2). The university works on its goal of bringing communities together by putting in over 47,000 hours of community service. In the past, Hamline University has collaborated with some of the surrounding places of worship and continues expanding its connections or partnerships. With Hamline University’s goal of bringing communities together, it is important for Hamline to reach out to its neighbors, including the places of worship in the Midway. This study is highly applicable to those living in the Hamline-Midway area and provides the community with a sample of the perspectives found in this neighborhood. The purpose of this project is to offer important insights into the messy reality of interfaith cooperation that could be applied to the Hamline-Midway community and beyond.

Table 2. Religious affiliation for Minnesota from a survey conducted in 2008<sup>12</sup>

<b>Religion</b>	<b>Percent Affiliated (%)</b>	<b>Religion Continued</b>	<b>Percent Affiliated Continued (%)</b>
Evangelical Protestant	21	Jewish	1
Mainline Protestant	32	Muslim	1
Historically Black Church	1	Buddhist	1
Catholic	28	Hindu	<0.5
Latter Day Saint (Mormon)	<0.5	Other World Religions	<0.5
Jehovah Witness	<0.5	Other Faiths	1
Orthodox	<0.5	Unaffiliated	13
Other Christian	<0.5	Don’t know/ refused	<0.5

Religious scholars have stressed the importance of bringing communities together through interfaith collaboration and suggested ways of talking about these interactions. Each scholar seems to have a different definition for the terms pluralism and interfaith which highlights what they see as key to interfaith interactions. One such scholar is Diana Eck, who says that “pluralism is the dynamic process through which we engage with one another in and through our deepest differences.”<sup>3</sup> Eck believes there are a lot of benefits to be had from learning about traditions different than one’s own. During a discussion with those Christians involved in interfaith interactions, Diana Eck reports that they found themselves, “recognizing a need to move beyond a theology which confines salvation to the explicit personal commitment to Jesus Christ. We spoke with complete honesty and with one voice to affirm unequivocally that God the Holy Spirit has been at work in the life and traditions of peoples of other living faiths.”<sup>13</sup> Dialogue is a key component in Eck’s focus on learning about other traditions. She advocates for intentional and focused conversation between different traditions, specifically on their doctrines and texts.

Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, an organization that encourages interfaith interactions with college students, has a different perspective on pluralism than Diana Eck. In his book, *Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice, and the Promise of America*, Patel defines pluralism as “a society characterized by respect for people’s religious (and other) identities, positive relationships between people of different religious backgrounds, and common action for the common good.”<sup>14</sup> Unlike Eck, Patel believes that one does not have to believe absolutely in the truths of other religions, but instead can focus on common goals or problems. In fact, he tells this story about an interaction he had with a coworker:

“I have the deepest respect for your faith,” I told her. “I sure hope you think it’s true, because otherwise there would be no reason to stay committed to it. I think my religion is true, too. So let’s make a deal. We can both believe our religions are true, we can even privately hope the other converts, and we can work together in this organization to serve others. In that way, an Evangelical Christian and a devoted Muslim, can model what we say this organization (Interfaith Youth Core) is about: people from very different faith backgrounds finding common purpose in helping others.”<sup>15</sup>

While Diana Eck has a belief-based concept of pluralism, Eboo Patel has a more practice-based definition. Though both see the need for pluralism, they emphasize the discussion of different topics. Eck wants a deep theological discussion to occur, getting into the nitty-gritty of what each person believes and why. Patel instead focuses the dialogue on the common aspect of service and volunteerism, conversing about values and writings in each person’s tradition that call them to serve.

Increasing numbers of people encounter others every day who are spiritually different. Given this reality, what problems are faced during interfaith collaboration? Do the typologies hypothesized by theologians stand up to the messy reality of these on-the-ground experiences? And how do religious leaders in the field view these terms that are defined differently by religion scholars? In this project, two neighborhoods around Hamline University were studied to give a representation of how religious leaders on the ground are answering these questions. The conclusion shows that in an ever-evolving world, interfaith collaboration is often unique to each situation. With that in mind, any typology must be flexible and reinterpreted to match the times, and both Eck and Patel have important points to make about the terms pluralism and interfaith.

## 2. Review of Literature

### 2.1 A changing religious landscape of America

Diana Eck has experienced the growing religious diversity in the United States first hand. While teaching a class on World Religions at Harvard University she realized that these world religions were now represented by the students in her class. From this realization came the idea for the Pluralism Project. The project was designed to document the changing religious landscape of the United States. On its website it states, “Our mission is to help Americans engage with the realities of religious diversity through research, outreach, and the active dissemination of resources.”<sup>16</sup> To reach this goal, they interviewed organizations focused on interfaith work, along with places of worship in towns across America. Through these interviews they gained information about places of worship and gathered information about interfaith collaboration happening in these areas. From these accounts they wrote case studies that are being used to help others think creatively about interfaith collaboration and to turn prejudices and hate crimes into opportunities to increase understanding and acceptance. The idea of mapping the changing religious landscape, along with the questions the Pluralism Project asked during its interviews, have been used as a basis for this research project.

In her book, *A New Religious America: How a “Christian Country” has become the World’s Most Religiously Diverse Nation*, Diana Eck argues that the United States is a pluralistic nation. “Historians tell us that America has always been a land of many religions.”<sup>3</sup> Eck goes on to talk about the various spiritual practices of the Native people, long before settlers from Europe arrived and brought their own religious traditions. Some African slaves brought the Islamic faith to the New World. Immigrants from the East brought “Buddhism, Taoist and Confucian traditions,”<sup>3</sup> while those from the South brought Sikhism. Though the people of the United States have come from around the world, they now represent one body. Diana Eck uses a phrase found on American currency, “E Pluribus Unum – ‘From Many, One.’”<sup>3</sup> This simple phrase has represented the United States in the past, as colonies became a nation and many people became one. This idea is still applicable today. At the time Eck wrote *A New Religious America* in 2001, the number of immigrants in the U.S. was about 30 million. That number continues to grow, making it more important than ever to embrace our oneness without giving up what makes us unique. Eck believes we must move past a time when we blocked immigrants from entering the United States or a time where people were required to assimilate to what those in power thought was American in order to embody the idea of one from many. Eck’s hope is that eventually everyone will internalize the idea of pluralism set up by the United States’ founding fathers and embrace one’s neighbors for who they truly are. Even if they are Chinese, Arab, African, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, rich or poor, they are Americans; in fact, that is what makes them Americans.

Eboo Patel agrees with Eck’s idea of the United States being a pluralistic nation. Patel begins his most recent book with a quote from Michael Walzer’s, book *What it Means to be an American*: “One religious communion, it was argued, made one political community...One people made one state. Pluralism – one state with many people – existed under empires.”<sup>14</sup> Walzer is noting that historically, people who have the same background, ethnicity, religion, etc. tend to make up a community. In order for people who are different in background, ethnicity, or religion to live in harmony, a superior power must keep them living in peace together, except in the United States. Walzer argues that there is something different about the United States. People different from each other live side by side, not because they are forced to, but because they choose to. This statement raises the question: What is different about the United States? Patel answers with a quote from the French historian and political thinker, Alexis de Tocqueville, “The greatness of America lies not in being more enlightened than any other nation, but rather in her ability to repair her faults.”<sup>14</sup> Although the nation’s goal, since the beginning, has been to be a place for all kinds, it has not always happened. “Though the U.S. has often crushed minorities they stay and rise up towards what our founders pictured for an ideal America.”<sup>14</sup> What is that ideal? Patel argues, “the idea is simple: people whose nation gives them dignity will build up that society.” The United States has given its people a common goal to work towards. That goal unites the people for a common cause and keeps people coming to and staying in America even when the nation does not live up to its goal. “Pluralism is not a birthright in America, it’s a responsibility.”<sup>14</sup> Essentially, to Patel, the American dream is at its core, a pluralistic vision.

## 2.1 Typologies For Classifying Interfaith Interactions

Diana Eck has also written about a typology to classify interfaith interactions to show where people fall on their support of Eck’s emphasis of “From Many—One” and Patel’s view of the American dream. Though the three-pronged typology Eck uses is not her creation, she has popularized this model.<sup>17</sup> The three categories Eck uses for classifying interfaith interactions include: exclusivism, inclusivism, and pluralism. An exclusivist believes that their religion holds the only truth about God. Because other religious traditions hold no truth, dialogue is seen as unnecessary. Those who fall under the inclusivism category, in contrast, see their religion as having the best developed truth, but acknowledge that there is some truth in other traditions. Inclusivists see a benefit to dialogue in learning about the truth in religions other than their own. Finally, Eck does a good job of explaining what goes along with the last category, pluralism. “A third response is that of the pluralist: Truth and visions of God is not an obstacle for us to overcome, but an opportunity for our energetic engagement and dialogue with one another. It does not mean giving up our commitments, rather, it means opening up those commitments to the give-and-take of mutual discovery, understanding, and, indeed, transformation.”<sup>13</sup>

Though the three-pronged typology is most commonly used, other theologians have come up with other ways of classifying interfaith interactions. Paul Knitter is one such theologian. He has written an entire book on his view of the categories, called *Theologies of Religions*. While Eck’s typology places people into three categories, Knitters depicts four types of thinking. The first is “the total replacement model.”<sup>18</sup> This category, like Eck’s exclusivist definition, is comprised of individuals claiming they have all of the truth and see no need to dialogue with those different from themselves. Those in the second category, “the fulfillment model,” state that the coming of Jesus Christ fulfilled the earlier religions. This means that there is some truth in other religions, so dialogue is encouraged. There is still a sense of superiority held by Christians, however. The third category is called “the

mutuality model.” Instead of focusing on Jesus Christ, who is unique to Christianity, this group instead focuses on the universality of God’s love. They use this commonality as a foundation for conversation between religions, making dialogue highly encouraged. The last model, “the acceptance model” embraces diversity. Practitioners of this approach acknowledge that we are all different and though they are open to dialogue, they have a hard time finding common ground to start the conversation. They hesitate to lay down guidelines for dialogue, since everyone is different, the conversations follow no script. While there is some overlap between Knitter’s and Eck’s typology in the area of exclusivism, Knitter expands on Eck’s terms of inclusivism and pluralism.

Daniel Migliore, professor emeritus of theology at Princeton Theological Seminary, provides a typology with even more division. He proposes a seven-pronged typology.<sup>19</sup> The people in the first category hold that God has only revealed himself through Jesus Christ to Christians. Neither revelation nor salvation is found in other traditions, so there is no point to dialoguing. The second category is comprised of people who still see Jesus Christ as the only savior, but also see God’s presence in other religions, so there is limited dialogue. The third category is similar to Knitter’s “Fulfillment Model.” According to this approach, it is believed that God’s grace is found in other religions which were fulfilled with the coming of Jesus Christ. There is more dialogue and collaboration from members of this group. The fourth group creates a group called “anonymous Christians.” These are people who have not heard the gospel. God is believed to still be present in them, but they just do not know it. This means they can still be saved. Under the category five approach, religions and traditions are very distinct and in their own “bubbles.” In this way, dialogue is limited to only what is similar between religions. Though there is dialogue, one must look back to their own religion for answers and practices, not apply those of other traditions. The sixth category takes each religion out of its bubble, allowing practices from one tradition to be applied to another. This broadens the range of topics for dialogue because knowledge about these practices is discovered through dialogue. Category seven states that there are many paths up the mountain, but that all are heading towards the same mountaintop or goal. Though there is some overlap between all three models, Migliore divides the inclusivist category into more groups. Each of these typologies represents a perspective on the interfaith interactions of people. The review of the literature provides reasoning for why interfaith interactions are important to study in our society today. It also provides the language, through typologies need for discussing the topic.

### 3. Methodology

Keeping the literature in the field in mind, this study focuses on the neighboring places of worship in proximity to Hamline University, located in the Hamline-Midway community, and works to untangle the plethora of views represented within them. The initial group contacted was chosen based on proximity to Hamline University and location within the Hamline-Midway borders, as well as keeping in mind the amount of time available to conduct interviews. By the end of the study, five of the twelve had been interviewed. The places of worship in the area are all from the Christian tradition, so to bring more diversity outside of Christianity to the study a second area, the Summit Avenue area, was added. In order to compare group one in the Hamline-Midway area to group two in the Summit Avenue area, not only were interviews with religious leaders of non-Christian places of worship added but also interviews with leaders of places of worship similar to those found in the Hamline-Midway area in order to see if they are comparable to each other. A total of eight places of worship were interviewed outside of the Hamline-Midway area. Of these eight, four were from traditions other than Christianity and four were Christian to compare to those in the Hamline-Midway area. The nearest Buddhist Temple was outside of these perimeters; It was interviewed to gain a preliminary idea of its views, but more research is needed to fully understand the diversity of views within the tradition.

The information was collected primarily through interviews with a religious leader of each place of worship. The participants were asked to sign a consent form approved by Hamline University’s Institutional Review Board (IRB) department. This form ensured those interviewed understood the study and how the information would be used, along with their right to decline answering any questions. The interview consisted of 15 questions, taking an hour to an hour and a half to complete. Questions one through seven and nine and ten focus on gathering information about the person being interviewed, the place of worship, and the volunteer services they participate in. This helped get a sense of who these leaders and places of worship are in order to put their answers from the interview into context. Question eight focuses on the problems encountered when implementing interfaith collaboration. These answers will be reported as a list. Questions 11 through 14 ask the interviewees to define the words pluralism and interfaith and gauge any feelings good or bad associated with these terms. The definitions were placed in two categories: pragmatic or doctrinal. Pragmatic answers were those focused on actions or practices in their definitions, while doctrinal answers were those defined using beliefs or writings from the tradition. Question 15 explained the

common typology used by theologians in the field and asked if the participants agreed with this typology and found it useful. These answers were reported qualitatively.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1 On-The-Ground Realities To Interfaith Collaboration**

When asked question eight on the interview: “What keeps a place of worship from collaboration and what would help them collaborate more?” interviewees gave a variety of answers unique to each place of worship. Challenges with the congregation came up several times in different ways. The size of the congregation can impede collaboration. If a place of worship does not have a large membership, it is hard for them to sustain themselves let alone look beyond their congregation to collaborate. They also often do not have the money or the man-power they felt to be an asset to interfaith collaboration or have their voices heard. Another interviewee reported that their place of worship was made up of two congregations that had just merged into one because of loss of membership. The leader stated that the congregations needed to become one and the rough feelings from the merge must calm down before he could begin to talk about the topic of interfaith with his congregation.

Depending on the place of worship, sometimes it is the congregation who is not interested in interfaith collaboration and sometimes it is the leaders. One interviewee observed that the older leaders had been trained to sustain the community and not look outside to other places of worship. Leaders are often busy with other tasks for the place of worship and do not have to time to try to contact and plan events with other organizations. Another leader was more focused on the actions that could be done, such as community service, rather than the discussion they could be having with other leaders. Leadership from other places of worship or organizations can also pose an obstacle. One reported that when asked if they would collaborate with another place of worship, said they would not partner with anyone else. A non-Christian leader had also met an obstacle when trying to work with the Saint Paul Council of Churches. Since it was not Christian it could only have observatory status with the organization. This made it hard for them to be involved in collaboration with other involved with the Saint Paul Council of Churches.

On the theological side of things, differences in beliefs can pose a chasm too wide for some to dare to cross. Disagreements on truth seem to end any chance of interfaith collaboration on any level for some. Cultural differences can be just as dividing as theological ones. Each place of worship is unique in demographics creating another challenge to overcome in order to unite. There was much ethnic diversity between those interviewed. One leader stated that in the United States there are still tensions between ethnicities. It is empowering to go to a place of worship where those that are normally a minority get to be the majority. Collaboration with another place of worship of a different ethnicity can take that feeling away. Also, there are differences, just between different neighborhoods that must be overcome as well. There are stigmas surrounding neighborhoods and their socio economics, their safety, and their ethnicity.

### **4.2 Doctrinal Versus Pragmatic Views On Pluralism And Interfaith**

Questions 11 through 14 of the interview asked leaders to define the terms pluralism and interfaith. Many interviewees had trouble putting the feelings behind the words into speech. There were a few religious leaders interviewed who had more recently finished seminary. They had more experience thinking of these terms theologically and had even read some of the books read for this study on typology. Answers were messier than anticipated, so the categories of both: “having an action and belief based answer,” and no answer: “the inability to verbalize the meaning of the terms” were added (see figures 3 and 4). The answers were also reported together to show any trends of the definition of pluralism effecting the definition of interfaith or vice versa (see figure 5).

■ Pragmatic ■ Doctrinal ■ Both ■ No Answer

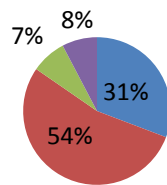


Figure 3. Answers to question 11 of the survey: What is your definition of pluralism?

■ Pragmatic ■ Doctrinal ■ Both ■ No Answer

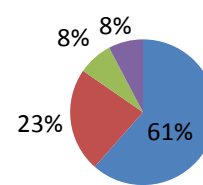


Figure 4. Answers to question 13 of the interview: What is your definition of interfaith?

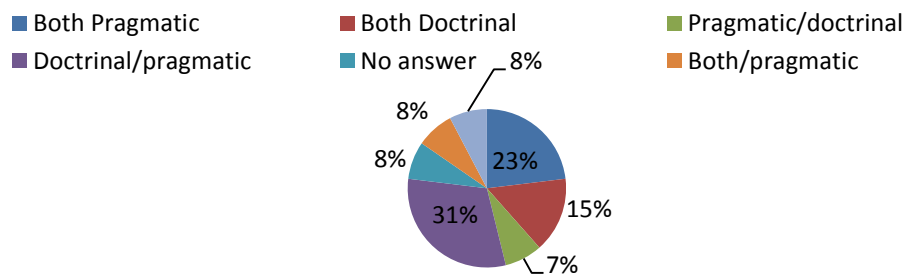


Figure 5. This graph displays how the religious leaders answered both questions 11 and 13 (answers shown in figures 3 and 4). Those combination not listed were not represented in the answers collected.

### 4.3 The On-The-Ground Realities To Applying Interfaith Collaboration Typologies

When asked about Eck's three-pronged typology, the religious leaders interviewed gave a wide array of answers. Some answered that the three categories were sufficient and that they could see how they had been created. Others wanted to make two categories. One religious leader broke it into those we can work with and those we cannot based on what she deemed important for interfaith collaboration. Another defined two categories as those that believe that their religion is right for everyone and try to convert people to their view and those that see religion as personal, so they do not push their beliefs on others. Two leaders wanted to add a fourth category. One wanted a "Narrative Story" category where people share their own personal story and listen to others' personal stories. While the other wanted a category focused less on the truth in each religion, but the common ethical concerns or problems faced by all of humanity. Another saw the categories as more of a range or gradient making it hard to place people into a neat box; in fact more than one interviewee reported that they could see themselves in all three categories.

There were also many perspectives on how to use the typology. There were views on both sides of the spectrum, those who found it helpful to use and those who thought it should be discarded. Those who found it helpful had a couple of reasons for thinking that way. Some thought it was helpful to know where people were coming from when trying to have a discussion with them. One said it was only helpful for clergy not for lay people. It gave leaders a basis for how to talk to and approach topics with people in their congregation. As a new pastor it was helpful to have an idea where people were coming from. Another said that the typology was helpful for a personal use only, a tool for analyzing where one is at personally, but should not be applied to others as it would cause more conflict than help.

A few other interesting comments on typology came up during the interviews. The uniqueness of each place of worship came through during this question. One religious leader mentioned that being a minority had affected his perspective of truth. When one lives in a society of mostly people with different beliefs than oneself, one must adapt to the culture. This could also be seen when interviewing non-Christian leaders. One mentioned that studying and creating typologies was more of a Christian line of thinking. Though she could understand and use the categories, her tradition did not focus on this type of study. One interviewee also emphasized that a congregation does not fall into just one category, neither do people. In a congregation each individual has a different perspective.



A leader must realize that there are different views and address them each in turn in different ways. People even range between the three categories or even span more than one category. Though one might strive for one category, which does not mean one achieves that category in every action they do. A few interviewees could have named times where they fit into each category.

## **5. Discussion**

### **5.1 The Uniqueness Of Each Place Of Worship**

Upon starting this research, we hypothesized that on-the-ground interfaith collaboration would not happen as smoothly as it is portrayed in literature. We suspected there may be some common themes that would arise. It was found to be true that interfaith collaboration does face obstacles, but these obstacles are often unique to each place of worship. Places of worship even see different problems being faced by the same community. The differences between places of worship can be seen just through their leaders interviewed. Their ages ranged from late 20s to late 60s. Ethnicities included: African, African American, Caucasian, Hispanic, Greek, and Vietnamese. 53.8 percent of those interviewed were females and 46.2 percent were males. There was one leader who was also part of the LGBT community. The leaders brought perspectives from the religions of Judaism, Buddhism, Unitarian Universalism, Quakerism, and the Christian denominations of Roman Catholicism, Old Catholicism, Episcopalian, Greek Orthodox, United Methodist, Lutheran, and Non-denominational.

Though some could see the differences between places of worship as a dividing factor, others could also see them as assets. Often places of worship get caught up with what they lack and forget what they have to offer. This is one reason why interfaith collaboration is so important. It often takes an outsider to realize what assets you have to offer, that you could not see yourself. No place of worship is perfect with every resource they need. Through collaboration, places of worship share resources enabling them to work to fix community problems better. This also calls on those involved to think more creatively. This idea of creative problems solving was emphasized by Eck's Pluralism Project. As part of their end results, the team created case studies to get students, the future leaders of the world, to creatively solve interfaith problems.<sup>16</sup> It also showed what places were already doing to solve these problems. Though money is always helpful, there are many things to be done that do not require huge funds as well. Places of worship need to realize that the little things they do can help just as much as one big thing. Having interested congregants, a large space where events can be held or even just your time and imagination can be just as big an asset as money.

Many places of worship saw the challenges their common community was facing differently. They were often unique to the area or the particular goal or mission of the place of worship. There was one common cause that kept coming up during the interviews which united people across faith lines. During the November election of 2012, Minnesota voted on whether or not marriage was strictly between a man and a woman. Places of worship and other Twin Cities organizations united on both sides of the issue. They campaigned, held interfaith dialogues, and put on events to raise awareness on the topic. The Marriage Amendment was able to span across traditions and led to dialogue about beliefs around the topic in each religion.

### **5.2 The Importance Of Dialogue**

The importance of dialogue is a recurring theme found in the definition of the terms pluralism and interfaith by Diana Eck, Eboo Patel and religious leaders of the Twin Cities area and in literature and on-the-ground descriptions of typologies for describing interfaith collaboration. For Diana Eck's it is important during dialogue to engage with the different beliefs of each tradition, to essentially have a deep theological conversation. She focused on the conflicting differences of religions which is why she sees the need for people to have pluralist views. By acknowledging that there is truth in traditions other than one's own, it allows for one to be more open to differences. The majority of religious leaders interviewed answered that pluralism had a more doctrine or belief based definition behind it similar to Eck's definition (see figure 3). The importance Eck gives to dialogue about theological differences comes across in the Pluralism Project which focused on those with pluralistic views engaging across the different theologies of traditions.

Eboo Patel, on the other hand, has titled his work the Interfaith Youth Core. His work emphasizes similar goals or values such as service that can unite people. When asked to define interfaith, the religious leaders tended to be closer to Patel's definition. They used more action words, like service or working together which showed a more

pragmatic approach. Patel's project embodies this difference as they use volunteering to unite people of different faith traditions. Dialogue is encouraged around this shared concern. Patel has a different perspective of pluralism. Instead of focusing on differences, like Eck, he focuses on commonalities. Though Patel's dialogue still draws on theology it is focused around the common theme of volunteering.

Though theologians focus on the beliefs of truth in religions for the typologies, there are also descriptions of use of dialogue by each group. Theologians like Eck gravitate towards the category of pluralism because dialogue occurs most readily between people in this category. This dialogue allows for learning to take place. This does not mean that those in the other categories cannot have dialogue. A more conscientious approach to dialogue must often be taken in order to get these conversations started and continue to happen. Many religious leaders interviewed emphasized that it did not matter what category another place of worship fell under. All they needed to know was if they could work and talk together or not. One interviewee broke this idea down even further: there are going to be places of worship that you can pair with everything on, there will be the places of worship where you can only work on certain topics where you share views, and those you cannot work with at all. This points out that there are multiple levels of interfaith work. Each one is important because they can be used as a starting point for more in-depth dialogue. Surface level conversations, even about the weather, can build a relationship and respect that can lead to dialogues about common shared values which in turn can lead to dialogues on ideas in each tradition that are not shared.

Many places of worship have experienced dropping numbers of members. This has been an obstacle to overcome for participating in volunteering and having interfaith dialogues. It has other interesting implications as well. The question arises, where are the members going? More research is needed to see if members are switching congregations or leaving organized religion all together. The number of religious nones, those not affiliating with organized religion, has been on the rise.<sup>20</sup> This raises the question, where does this group of people come in to the interfaith conversation? Often these people are still interested in social justice and service. Using Patel's definition of pluralism and interfaith the actions of the religious nones can be a good way to start a dialogue between those associated with organized religion. These common actions can then evolve into a relationship that can in turn lead to more in-depth conversations. As their numbers increase the religious nones are an important group to be included in interfaith dialogue.

### 5.3 Typology On Interfaith Collaboration

Though when interviewed, the religious leaders saw many problems and changes that could be made to the three-pronged typology, typologies should not be discarded. This study should be an important reminder that though typologies are simplistic and straight forward in literature, they are connected to the on-the-ground realities and should be reflected upon in that light. Daniel Migliore realized this as he proposed his seven-pronged typology:

The point is that theological inquiry does not arise in a vacuum. It is not built on amorphous religious experiences or on the pious imagination of isolated individuals. On the contrary, the work of theology is inseparably bound to an identifiable faith community that worships God, attends to Scripture and its accounts of God's work and will, and engages in manifold ministries of education, reconciliation, and liberation. In short, theological inquiry requires continuing participation in the common life of a service. Apart from such participation, theology would soon become an empty exercise.<sup>19</sup>

The problem arises when the categories are thought of as rigid boxes. Though naturally we want a neat definition, the world is messier. Migliore admits there is a problem in this thinking, "[the] pigeon holing mentality that ignores the important overlap of positions and obscures significant differences among theologies places in any of the three categories."<sup>19</sup> He goes on to say that this type of thinking causes thoughts to be "polarize[d] between exclusivism and pluralism."<sup>19</sup> The middle category of inclusivism is so broad it over laps with the categories of exclusivism and pluralism, making the ends of the spectrum the focus, while it should be more even between the categories. Paul Knitter also sees the importance of not getting pinned into the categories rigidly. "While they're [models] useful for describing general approaches and attitudes, they almost never perfectly fit an individual theologian; they're fluid and often spill into each other."<sup>18</sup> The problems occur when people get stuck thinking that they and others only fit into one category and that the category sums up everything with no overlapping or "spilling over" of one category into another. Again each place of worship is unique and that uniqueness shows through in their thoughts about truth, dialogue, and collaboration. For example, "the term inclusivism does not itself tell us what it is that one is being included in, what it takes to be included, or who is being included."<sup>21</sup> In each case inclusivism has a different meaning or application. "My preferences is to see these traditional terms (exclusivism and inclusivism) as loose approximations to various ways of combining the various factors that have been discussed – and perhaps other factors too."<sup>21</sup> Typologies can be used as a good tool to know where to start the conversation as many of the

religious leaders interviewed have found. It can give a word to what they are thinking, but one should not use them exclusively or definitively. They should be used as a tool, but discarded once a dialogue is started and one knows what they ideal they are striving for. People should not become confined by them, but instead use them to broaden their thinking and understanding.

## 6. Conclusion

In a shrinking world it is important to get to know one's neighbor, from those next door to those in other countries. Many religious scholars have studied these interaction between one's religious neighbor and proposed definitions of the words pluralism and interfaith, and typologies used to discuss interfaith interaction. It is important to look at these studies in light of the real world messiness. Both the religious scholars and leaders of places of worship emphasized the importance of dialogue when discussing these terms. Dialogue is a vital part of interfaith cooperation. The number of those not affiliated with organized religion is growing. This group of people is a part of the interfaith dialogue. As found in this study, each place of worship is unique. These differences can be seen as an asset. Each place of worship brings something different to the collaboration. Though typologies are not perfect they offer a good tool for beginning the conversation and knowing where people are coming from during a dialogue. Once the conversation is started and one has realized which of the categories they strive for the typologies should be discarded, so the neighborhood can continue moving forward.

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