

Summary of Basic Beliefs of Various Religious Faiths

With people from at least 62 different nationalities currently living in Cleveland and Bradley County, you are going to find a great diversity of cultures and of religions in our community. It is important for you and your team to be aware of the different faiths you will encounter among those whom you will be trying to reach with the Gospel. This section gives a brief background and explanation of the some prominent belief systems you may encounter.

Always remember that, as Christians, **our responsibility is to represent Christ first and foremost**. When you meet people, always be considerate and friendly, asks questions and *listen* to the answers to try to know everything you can about the person and his/her beliefs BEFORE you try to witness to them. And allow them to ask questions. When you answer, try to refer them to Scripture and to focus their attention on Jesus Christ and His work. Avoid confrontations or controversies of any kind. And please concentrate on *planting the seeds* of the Gospel; do not worry about the harvest. That will come in time.

Tips for Relating with Persons from Any Religious Faith

1. **Ask questions and listen to answers** before you speak. Try to understand and work to **befriend** people before you try to present the Gospel.
2. Remember that just as in Christianity, each individual practices his or her religion differently. Very few people practice the pure unadulterated ideal of a specific religion. When talking to people who claim to be Buddhist, Hindu, etc., **do not attack** the principles you may know of the religion. Ask questions to discover where that person is on their spiritual journey. Did they *choose* their religion, or is it primarily a *cultural* identifier? What aspects of their religion helped them choose to practice it and what does Christ have to offer them? (i.e., if a Mormon says they practice Mormonism because of an emphasis on family values, point out that Christ offers ultimate adoption as a child of God.)
3. Keep it personal. Sliding into a theoretical debate will rarely change anyone's perspective. **Your story** of how Christ has changed your life is your most valuable tool.
4. Do not laugh at or criticize another viewpoint. People are misled, and some cults and religions may strike you as ridiculous. But people place their *eternal souls* in the care of these beliefs. Laughing them off will not touch anyone's life. The devil prowls like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour — by making cults and false teachings seem reasonable and redemptive.

Religious Faiths

Buddhism

Founded by Siddhartha Gautama, a prince from northern India, near modern Nepal, who lived from 536 - 483 BC. Buddhism was founded as **a form of atheism**: rejecting the belief in a permanent, personal, creator god (Ishvara) who controlled the eternal destiny of human souls. This is an **impersonal religion of self-perfection** where the ultimate end is death and is closely related to the New Age Movement. The goal is eventual assimilation into a great whole of spirituality, losing your "self."

There are three main schools within Buddhism: Theravada (doctrine of the Elders), Mahayana (Greater Vehicle), and Vajrayana (Tantrism or Lamaism). The Buddhist belief system is founded on four Noble Truths, The Noble Eightfold Path, and several additional key doctrines. The four Noble Truths are: 1) Life is full of suffering, 2) Suffering is caused by craving, 3) Suffering only ceases when cravings cease, and 4) This can be achieved by following the Noble Eightfold Path. The Noble Eightfold Path refers to: right views, right aspirations, right speech, right livelihood, right conduct, right effort, right contemplation, right mindfulness.

Other key doctrines:

- **Eternal Life**: Believe nothing in life is permanent.
- **Souls**: Individual selves do not truly exist, but in relation to others. We are all related to a greater whole of consciousness.
- **Karma**: An impersonal law of moral causation (karma) determines all. "What goes around comes around."
- **Reincarnation**: Souls continue on an endless cycle of human suffering, being reborn until they are able to live a perfect life. The goal of life is to break out of this cycle by finally extinguishing the flame of life and entering the permanent state of pure nonexistence: Nirvana. (Many believe Nirvana is achieved when perfect life is accomplished.)
- **Buddha**: Buddha was the only man believed to have achieved nirvana. He is not a god/deity, but a role model.

Key question: Ask *how* one is supposed to achieve the perfection of the noble 8-fold path? (We, as people, are *imperfect*, and can only improve with the help of Christ.)

When Witnessing To Buddhists

1. Avoid terms such as “new birth,” “rebirth,” “regeneration,” or “born again.” Use alternatives such as “endless freedom from suffering, guilt, and sin,” “new power for living a holy life,” “promise of eternal good life without suffering,” or “gift of unlimited merit.”
2. Emphasize the uniqueness of Christ.
3. Focus on the gospel message and do not get distracted by details of Buddhist doctrine.
4. Understand Buddhist beliefs enough to discern weaknesses that can be used to make the gospel appealing (see “Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists” and “Jesus and the Eightfold Path”)
5. While using bridge concepts (see “Bridges for Evangelizing Buddhists”) be careful not to reduce Christian truth to a form of Buddhism. Buddhism has been good at accommodating other religions. **Do not** say “Buddhism is good, but Christianity is easier.”
6. Share your own testimony, especially your freedom from guilt, assurance of heaven (no more pain), and personal relationship with Christ.
7. Prepare with prayer. Do not witness in your own strength.

Eastern Orthodox Church

The Eastern Orthodox Church is not a single church but rather a family of 13 self-governing bodies, denominated by the nation in which they are located (e.g., the Greek Orthodox, Russian Orthodox, etc.). They are united in their understanding of the sacraments, doctrine, liturgy, and church government, but each administers its own affairs. The five largest Orthodox bodies in the world are: Russian (70 to 100 million), Romanian (over 15 million), Greek (over 13 million), Serbian (over 8 million), and Bulgarian (over 7 million). There are over 6 million Orthodox people in the United States.

The head of each Orthodox church is called a “patriarch” or “metropolitan.” The patriarch of Constantinople (Istanbul, Turkey) is considered the “ecumenical” or universal patriarch. He is the closest thing to the Pope in the Roman Catholic Church, however, while the Pope is known as “the vicar of the Son of God”, the bishop of Constantinople is known as “the first amongst equals”. He enjoys special honor, but he has no power to interfere with the 12 other Orthodox communions.

Basic Beliefs:

- Like the Roman Catholic Church, the Orthodox Church claims to be the one true church of Christ, and seeks to trace its origin back to the original apostles through an unbroken chain of apostolic succession.
- Trinity
- The Bible as the Word of God
- Jesus as God the Son,
- No justification by faith

- *Theosis* (literally, “divinization”), the gradual process by which Christians become more and more like Christ.
- Equal authority of Church Tradition and Scripture
- Discouragement of individuals interpreting the Bible apart from tradition
- The perpetual virginity of Mary
- Prayer for the dead
- Baptism of infants without reference to individual responsibility and faith
- The possibility of salvation after death
- The possibility of losing salvation

Witnessing to members of Eastern Orthodox churches:

Most Orthodox beliefs are in agreement with Roman Catholic beliefs—and many are in direct conflict with the Bible—. Similarly, when witnessing to members of the Eastern Orthodox churches you may follow the same principles as when witnessing to Roman Catholics:

1. Remember that salvation does not depend on church membership, but comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8-9).
2. Pray and trust in the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of those who are lost.
3. Share a testimony of your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your testimony of what Jesus has accomplished in your life can have a great impact on them. Keep your testimony short. Avoid using terms that are unfamiliar to Eastern Orthodox, such as: “walked the aisle,” “got saved,” and “born again.”
4. Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you. Make sure that you communicate that your assurance is derived from trusting Jesus and not from your good works or your ability to remain faithful (1 John 5:13).
5. Give them a Bible and point them to the New Testament. Point out texts that explain salvation. (Rom. 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9, 13; John 3:16; Eph. 2:8-9.)
6. Avoid getting bogged down with secondary issues that are not central to salvation.
7. Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.
8. Be patient. As with Catholics, they need to be lead to salvation through Bible study and that takes time.

Hinduism

Originated in India around 1500 BC - 2500 BC. An estimated 1.5 - 2 million Hindus practice in the US. In Hinduism, no single creed or final truth exists. Hinduism originates from a pagan background in which forces of nature and human heroes are personified as gods and goddesses. These gods and goddesses are commonly worshiped with prayers and offerings.

There are two types of Hinduism: *Popular Hinduism*, characterized by the worship of gods through offerings, rituals, and prayers, and *Philosophical Hinduism*,

characterized by a complex belief system practiced by those who study ancient texts, meditate, and practice yoga.

Basic Concepts:

- **God:** Impersonal, ultimate but unknowable spiritual reality. They claim 330 million gods and also believe in astrology, evil spirits, and curses. Every person is God, but most are unaware.
- **Creation:** Everything is an illusion. Brahman (creator god) is the only thing that really exists. There is no beginning or ending of creation, only endless cycles of creation and destruction. Therefore, history has no value since it is based on an illusion.
- **Man:** Destiny and life are determined by karma (the actions, words, and thoughts from former lives)
- **Soul:** The spark of Brahman that is trapped in a physical body, which is an illusion and therefore of little worth. At death, the soul goes to an intermediate state of punishment or reward before rebirth in another body. Rebirths are experienced until karma is removed and the soul can then be reabsorbed into Brahman.
- **Sin:** There is no concept of rebellion against a Holy God, but reincarnation includes suffering for bad deeds in former lives.
- **Salvation:** Moksha (freedom from infinite being and self-hood and final self-realization of the truth) is the goal of existence. The ways to achieve Moksha are doing yoga, through works, knowledge or love, and devotion. The hope is to get off the cycle of reincarnation to become one with the impersonal God.
- **Worship:** Varies, but consists of color symbolism, offerings, fasting, and dance. Most Hindus daily worship the image of their chosen deity with chants (mantras), flowers, and incense. Worship tends to be more individualistic rather than congregational.

Witnessing to Hindus

1. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of your Hindu friend.
2. Share your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Keep your testimony short.
3. Stress the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as God's revelation of Himself.
4. Stress the necessity of following Jesus to the exclusion of all other deities.
5. Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.
6. Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you and about your hope in the resurrection. Make sure that you communicate that your assurance is derived from God's grace and not from your good works or your ability to be spiritual (1 John 5:13).
7. Give a copy of the New Testament. If a Hindu desires to study the Bible, begin the Gospel of John. Point out passages that explain salvation.

Islam

Muhammad established Islam in Mecca in 622 A.D. Islam claims to supersede Judaism and Christianity. It stresses submission to Allah (the Arabic word for God) and conformity to the five (5) pillars for salvation. God is thought to be unknowable personally, but His will is revealed within the Qur'an, the holy book of Islam, which was dictated to Muhammad by Allah and therefore gives Muhammad the supreme place among the seers of God. Muhammad is considered to be the last of the great prophets. Islam respects the Torah (books of Moses), the psalms of David, and the four gospels, but according to Islamic thought, the Qur'an stands alone in authority and absoluteness. In order for the Qur'an to be perfectly understood, one must read it and quote it in Arabic, making the learning of Arabic a religious duty.

The five Pillars of Islam are:

1. **Confession of faith (Shahada):** "There is no God but Allah and Muhammad is His prophet." This belief must be held until death. If you repudiate this, then there is no hope for salvation.
2. **Prayer of Salat:** A Muslim must pray five times a day facing Mecca on his knees while reciting certain parts of the Qur'an. Ceremonial washing precedes this. The five times a day are: before sunrise, noon, mid-afternoon, sunset, and prior to sleep.
3. **Almsgiving (Zakat):** A Muslim must give 2 ½ percent of one's capital wealth to the poor and/or for the spread of Islam.
4. **Fasting (Sawm):** During the lunar month of Ramadan, Muslims fast from sunrise to sunset. The daylight hours are for self-purification. The month is to remember the giving of the Qur'an to Muhammad.
5. **Pilgrimage (Hajj):** All Muslims who are economically and physically able, are required to journey to Mecca at least once in their life. On this journey they must dress very simply to stress the notion of equality before God and it is mandatory to walk around the kaabah seven times. The kaabah is the shrine of the black rock, which is where Muhammad taught and believed to be the place of worship for Abraham and Adam.

Basic Concepts:

- **God:** There is only one, but He is beyond man's understanding. Not personal or loving.
- **Jesus:** a sinless son of God (one of 124,000 prophets sent to various cultures), born of a virgin, but not God. Ascended to heaven without being crucified.
- **Sin:** The most serious sin is considering God as more than one. Humans are considered weak and forgetful, but not "fallen."
- **Angels:** They exist as messengers and agents of God. Evil spirits also exist.
- **Salvation/Final Judgment:** a person's good deeds and obedience to the 5 Pillars and the Qur'an determine their eternal outcome.
- **Marriage:** This is an honorable thing and adultery is condemned.

- **War:** Paradise is offered to those who die fighting for the causes of Islam (jihad). According to the Qur'an, the enemies of Islam can be slain wherever you find them.

Witnessing to Muslims:

1. Be courteous and loving.
2. Reflect interest in their beliefs. Allow them time to articulate their views.
3. Be acquainted with their basic beliefs.
4. Be willing to examine passages of the Qur'an concerning their beliefs.
5. Stick to the cardinal doctrines of the Christian faith but also take time to respond to all sincere questions.
6. Point out the centrality of the person and work of Jesus Christ for salvation.
7. Stress that because of Jesus, His cross, and resurrection, one may have the full assurance of salvation, both now and for eternity (see 1 John 5:13)
8. Share the plan of salvation with the Muslim. Point out that salvation is a gift and not to be earned.
9. Pray for the fullness of the Holy Spirit. Trust Him to provide wisdom and grace.
10. Be willing to become a friend and a personal evangelist to Muslims.

Jehovah's Witnesses

Official Name: *Watchtower Bible and Tract Society* (WBTS). The Jehovah's Witnesses was begun by Charles Taze Russell in 1872. He had great difficulty in dealing with the doctrine of eternal hell fire and in his studies came to deny not only eternal punishment, but also the Trinity, the deity of Christ and the Holy Spirit. Russell claimed that the Bible could be understood only according to his interpretations.

The Jehovah's Witnesses have several "book studies" each week. The members are not required to attend, but there is a level of expectation that gently urges converts to participate. It is during these "book studies" that the Jehovah's Witness is constantly exposed to counter Christian teachings. The average Jehovah's Witness, with his constant Watchtower indoctrination, could easily defeat the average Christian when it comes to defending his beliefs. A good knowledge of the Scriptures is required for anyone trying to reach a Jehovah's Witness with the Gospel.

The Jehovah's Witnesses vehemently portray the doctrine of the Trinity as pagan in origin and say that Christendom, as a whole, has bought the lie of the devil. There is also an equally strong denial of the deity of Christ, the deity of the Holy Spirit, the belief in hell, and of eternal conscious punishment in hell. They focus their "Bible study" on the Second Coming of Christ—the book of Revelation—and Biblical chronology.

Basic Concepts:

- **Bible:** Considered divinely inspired and infallible word of God, but only in *their own translation* which is biased against the Trinity and the deity of

Jesus Christ. Their version of the Bible is called the New World Translation (NWT).

- **Governing Body:** Called the "faithful and discreet slave" and regarded as Jehovah God's only channel of accurate Biblical interpretation in the world today. To be saved, according to their beliefs, is to be associated with God's channel (i.e. His organization: Jehovah's Witnesses).
- **God's Name:** The true God has a name – Jehovah, whose principal attributes are love, wisdom, justice, and power. He is not omnipresent and not a part of a trinity.
- **Jesus Christ:** Jehovah's first created being. Jesus had three periods of existence: pre-human as Michael the archangel, when Jehovah created him and he spent ages with God in heaven; as Jesus in life here on earth, where he was born of a virgin, became Messiah at baptism, executed on a torture stake, and rose again spiritually (not in body); and his spiritual existence after his resurrection. Jesus paid a ransom sacrifice. He was a perfect man, but not divine.
- **Holy Spirit:** Simply the active force of God, not a personal, divine being.
- **Sin:** Mankind's sin brought death. The spirit that God gave us at birth leaves at death. The dead go to the common grave of mankind where they are not conscious of anything and are not suffering.
- **Salvation:** Gained by faith in Jesus' ransom sacrifice; baptism into the WBTS by immersion; active association in WBTS; righteous conduct; and absolute loyalty to Jehovah. There is no assurance of salvation, only the hope for resurrection. If you do not live up to these requirements or are *disfellowshipped* with the WBTS, then there is no hope for salvation.
- **Armageddon:** Coming soon. It will mark God's destruction of the present evil system (including apostate Christendom) and the binding of Satan. After this, Jehovah's surviving people will rebuild the world in a perfect environment under His rule for 1000 years in the Millennium. After the Millennium, Satan will be released for a short time to test those resurrected or born during the Millennium. After this, Satan and his allies will be destroyed.

Jehovah's Witnesses see two classes of saved people: Only 144,000 faithful elect Jehovah's Witnesses (the "Anointed Class") will go to heaven to rule with Jesus at death. Most Jehovah's Witnesses hope to be a part of the other sheep/great crowd who will not go to heaven, but live forever in Paradise on earth after Armageddon and the Millennium.

Witnessing To Jehovah's Witnesses:

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and knowledge of the Bible.
2. Acquire a basic knowledge of Jehovah's Witnesses beliefs and practices.

3. Make a definite plan for the witnessing encounter and keep the initiative.
4. Initially talk about personal concerns to establish a friendly, courteous, and sincere relationship with the Jehovah's Witness. Gradually move on to a discussion of theological issues.
5. Be prepared to **cite and explain specific biblical passages** supporting Christian doctrines.
6. Define your terms clearly and ask the Jehovah's Witness to do so also.
7. Focus the discussion on the primary issue of the person and work of **Christ**. Stress the need for a personal relationship with Him.
8. Share your personal testimony of God's grace and your faith in Jesus as Savior and Lord.
9. Present the basic plan of salvation and encourage the Jehovah's Witness to make a decision.
10. Pray and trust the Holy Spirit to lead you.

peace and prosperity, and will eventually rule the modern state of Israel and the world.

5. **Jesus** is seen as an extremist false Messiah, or as a good but martyred rabbi.

Jews Believe in Three Ways to Atonement for Sin

1. Prayer, repentance, and good deeds
2. Because of all of the suffering of the Jewish race, they do not need to atone for sin.
3. Atonement comes from the very fact of being Jewish

Effects of Holocaust

In WWII, Hitler killed 6 million Jews in his attempt to have the perfect human race. This caused a significant number of Jews to lose their faith in God. The Holocaust made the Jews ask the question, "Where was God?" instead of "How could man do this?" Their belief in the goodness of man is so strong that they would rather lay the blame on God.

Witness To The Jewish People

1. The claims that the New Testament makes regarding Jesus stand as the central issue between traditional Judaism and Christianity. They are denied by the former and affirmed by the latter. Some charge that Christianity's claim that Jesus is the only way of salvation is a denigration of Judaism. However, Christianity's affirmation is no more a denigration of Judaism than Judaism's denial is a denigration of Christianity. We should all be seeking God's truth regarding atonement for sin and a lifestyle that is pleasing to Him.
2. Most Jewish people view Christianity as a Gentile religion that has no relevance to them. When a Jewish person places his trust in Jesus for salvation and is baptized, the Jewish community considers that he has turned his back on his people and has become a Gentile. It is therefore important to communicate that our desire is not that our Jewish friend would become a Gentile, but that, as a Jew, he or she would find atonement for sin and discover a personal relationship with the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.
3. Humility, prayer, and genuine compassion must characterize Christian witness. Far too often Jewish impressions of Christianity have been characterized by arrogance, superiority, and a disregard for Jewish culture. Paul warns us against this kind of Gentile pride in Romans 11:13-32.
4. Use terminology that emphasizes the Jewishness of our faith. For example, instead of "Christ", which is based on the Greek word for "the Anointed One", use "Messiah", which is based on the Hebrew. Instead of the "Old Testament", refer to the "Hebrew Scriptures".
5. Use verses from their Bible in discussing topics like: Sin (see Ps. 14:2-3, 51:5; Eccl. 7:20; and Isa. 59:1-2); Atonement (see Lev. 17:11 and Isa. 53:5-6), Messiah [see Isa. 53; Dan. 9:16, and Mic. 5:1(v.2 in

Judaism

There are over 16 million Jews worldwide. The Jewish race is descended from Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Jesus came as the Messiah for the Jews, but then as now, many Jews do not believe in Jesus. There are some Messianic Jews, however, who do believe that Jesus is their Messiah. Many Jews today are involved with the New Age movement and are aligned with liberal social agendas.

There are three main Jewish denominations:

1. **Orthodox:** Two categories – Modern Orthodox and Hasidism. Modern Orthodox is more academic and holds the Scriptures in very high esteem. They believe that the Tanakh (Old Testament) has different levels of importance. Hasidism is more mystical in beliefs. In both groups, the men wear black or dark suits and always wear skullcaps.
2. **Reform:** More modern and liberal. They maintain a more inclusive position regarding feminism, homosexuality, and agnosticism. They see the Scriptures as folklore or collective wisdom.
3. **Conservative:** The largest denomination in the US. This group strives to conserve traditional Jewish customs while allowing some modern culture. Their belief in scripture falls somewhere between that of Orthodox and Reform Judaism.

Common Beliefs of All Three Denominations:

1. **Scripture** is not complete without the "Second (Oral) Law" which comes from writings of the Talmud (a set of books composed of several commentaries that sets guidelines for Jews).
2. **God** is one without the Trinity. This ultimately makes God very impersonal.
3. **Man** is inherently good and to overcome sin, one must reach out to God. Sin, then, is not a major concern for the average Jew. Judaism is very optimistic about the ability of man to do God's will.
4. **Messiah** has not yet come. When he does, as a politician or military leader, he will usher in a Golden Age of

our Bible)], and Faith (see Gen. 15:6; Num. 21:7-9, and Joel 2:32).

Mormonism

Founded by Joseph Smith, Jr. in 1830. According to Smith, the angel Moroni revealed the location of gold plates bearing a message from God in ancient script. The angel revealed the translation to Smith, the basis of the Book of Mormon, and took the plates back to heaven. No historical evidence remains, making a second opinion on translation impossible. Portions of the Book of Mormon are direct copies from the King James version of the bible (an assessment denied by the church.)

Basic Beliefs:

1. Everyone will experience salvation in some way.
2. There is a hell, Perdition (which is reserved for murderers and people who leave the Later Day Saints Church), the Devil, and his angels.
3. Mormons also believe in three heavens: celestial, terrestrial, and telestial kingdoms. The celestial kingdom, the place of eternal life, is the highest order where Mormons will achieve exaltation or godhood.
4. To achieve salvation, there are twelve steps for Mormon males, some of which are included here.

Beliefs on basic concepts:

- **God:** Was once a man, but became God. He has a physical body, as does his wife (Heavenly Mother). No trinity. The Father, Son and Holy Ghost are three separate gods. Worthy men/women may one day become gods themselves, and inherit a celestial kingdom in which spirit children will worship and pray to them.
- **Jesus:** Is a spiritual brother from heaven who was first born as a spirit child of God and Heavenly Mother. He was then conceived physically through intercourse between God and the Virgin Mary. Jesus progressed to godhood and is a brother of Lucifer. Faith is the response to whatever Christ commands, not trusting in His complete ability to save.
- **Redemption:** This involves confessing and abandoning sin as well as restoring or resolving all damage done by one's sin. A repentant person must spend the balance of their life trying to live the commandments of the Lord so that He can eventually pardon you and cleanse you. This includes participation in temple rituals, and strict adherence to the Book of Mormon.
- **Baptism by immersion in Mormon Church:** Mormon churches are considered the only real churches, so a baptism within another church is false. (Mormons also believe that baptism of the dead can improve their spiritual status.)
- **Laying on of hands:** Performed by a member of the church's priestly class to receive the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is believed to come only when this happens.

- **Celestial marriage:** This is a marriage within the Mormon Temple where spouses are married for time and eternity to their spouses. This is essential so that once worthy Mormons are resurrected and possibly progress toward godhood, they can have their spouse with them to produce and procreate children for their world and universe.
- **Obedience:** A Mormon must obey the Church, its teachings, and the prophet to get into the celestial kingdom. There is no salvation apart from total obedience to all of the laws and ordinances of the Church.

Witnessing to Mormons:

1. Know clearly the Christian faith and the gospel.
2. Be aware of the unique Mormon doctrines as presented in this belief bulletin.
3. Remember, Mormons use Christian vocabulary (gospel, atonement, god) but radically redefine their meanings. Define clearly what you mean when you use biblical words.
4. Present a clear testimony of your faith in Christ alone for your salvation.
5. Show your Mormon friend that the Bible teaches salvation alone through the cross of Christ (John 3:16; Rom. 10:4,10-13; Eph. 2:8-9).
6. Warn the Mormon about trusting in feelings (i.e., the burning in the bosom) for a validation of Mormonism's truth claim. Without historical, objective verification, feelings are useless.
7. When Mormons use a Bible verse, read carefully the verses before and afterward to make clear the exact meaning and purpose of the passage. Don't let them take Bible verses out of context. Read carefully the full reference in the Bible before deciding what any one verse means.
8. Keep the central doctrines of the faith as the focus of your discussion.
9. Do the basics: pray, trust the Holy Spirit, and be loving, patient, and steadfast.

Nation of Islam

Founded in 1978; Current leader: Louis Farrakhan. There are an estimated 25,000 – 100,000 members. Nation of Islam started as a reaction to Christianity as the “slave-master's religion.”

Beliefs:

- **God:** God is a man. W.D. Fard (the founder of the Nation of Islam) was Allah in human forms. They claim that Christians worship an “invisible spook somewhere in space.”
- **Creation/Supremacy:** Black people are gods and white people are demons. Blacks are of the same race as God. The gods and scientists of the Black Nation created the white race and even the moon. Christianity is the devil's religion, which was created to mislead black people.

- **Scripture:** Bible and the Qur'an are referred to, but they are both corrupt because white people have tampered with them.
- **Resurrection:** The Nation of Islam denies the physical resurrection of the dead. They only accept a mental resurrection.
- **Judgment:** A giant spaceship called the Mother Plane will carry out the Last Judgment. At judgment, the white race and Christianity will be destroyed.
- **Jesus:** The Nation of Islam also claims that Jesus was a Muslim.

Witnessing To People In The Nation of Islam:

1. Learn the primary Christian truths about God, Christ, the Scripture, and salvation. Know what you believe and why you believe it.
2. Acquaint yourself with the teachings and arguments of the N.O.I. and be ready to give a Christian response (see 1 Pet. 3:15).
3. Listen to those in the N.O.I. and discover why they joined.
4. Explain why you believe the Bible. If they claim that the Bible has been changed, ask them, "When did this happen?" and "What evidence causes you to believe the Bible has been corrupted?"
5. Define your words. Remember that the N.O.I. redefines many terms. For example, when the N.O.I. talks about God, they mean something very different from the God of the Bible.
6. Tell how to become a Christian. Share your testimony about how Jesus has saved you, and the difference He makes in your life. Center your witness on Christ and how to have a personal relationship with Him. Many N.O.I. followers know about Christianity, but they do not know Christ.
7. Witnessing to those in the N.O.I. may be frustrating. They often need to hear the gospel several times before trusting in Christ.
8. Trust God's Spirit to guide you and to convict the lost.

New Age

There is not a single organization representing this movement, but rather it is formed from various individuals and groups. New Age is a westernized form of Eastern religious beliefs and occultist practices, self-help, holistic medicines, and forms of astrology. It is often depicted not as religious, but as secular, scientific, or self-help philosophy. The New Age movement started in the 1800s but gained popularity in the mid-1960s and early 1970s. It is hard to get a firm number of members because of the lack of structure to the movement; however, according to religious surveys, 20% of Americans accept at least some New Age beliefs without defining themselves as New Agers. (Roots in Hinduism.)

Basic Ideas Common among New Agers

- **Pantheism:** God (goddess/god) is all and all is God (goddess/god).

- **Impersonal/Personal:** The impersonal must be greater than (or at least equal to) the personal. This is not usually lived out. (i.e. families are valued more than plants)
- **All is one:** So distinctions, even your sense of being distinct and unique from everyone else, is an illusion
- **Reincarnation:** Cycles of birth, life and death are necessary to lose the illusion of separateness from the All. We progress toward oneness by acquiring positive karma, which is determined by our actions from previous lives.
- **People are divine:** The sensation of existing as finite creatures is an illusion. We've just forgotten that we are divine, so people need to be enlightened about their true divinity to become one with the All. To attain this enlightenment, you can do exercises to transform your consciousness such as yoga, meditation, past-life regression, soul travel, and channeling spiritual guides.
- **Morality is relative:** Since all is one, there is no difference between good and evil. There is no right or wrong, things simply are. Some New Agers would go so far as to say that evil comes from God.
- **Jesus:** Jesus is not the only Christ. He was a great teacher who obtained the Christ spirit, which is a self-actualization of one's deity. Some believe that Jesus traveled to India before he started his public ministry and studied Hinduism. So Jesus was rejected and crucified because of his Hindu teachings.
- **The New Age of Enlightenment is coming:** The universe is evolving. The human consciousness will shift toward New Age paradigms.

Sharing Jesus With New Agers

1. Share about the personal relationship you have with God through faith in Jesus Christ. Tell about the difference that God makes in your life.
2. There is a lot of diversity in the New Age Movement. Not all New Agers believe the same things. Ask the New Ager what he or she believes about God and Jesus Christ. Listen to their answers. Start your witness from where they are.
3. Lovingly share with New Agers some of the implications of their belief system. For example, many New Agers do not realize that one implication of pantheism is that God is impersonal. Also, one of the implications of their belief in karma and reincarnation is that there are no innocent sufferers.
4. Since the New Age belief system denies our experience of reality, it is hard for New Agers to live as if what they believe is true. Gently point out the inconsistencies between what they claim to believe and how they actually live. For example, many New Agers take offense with the gospel message that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way of salvation. They claim that there is no right or wrong way to God and that we are wrong to claim that there is. Ask: "If there is no right or wrong way to God then

how can you claim that our gospel is wrong?" Lovingly point out that their position is illogical because it contradicts itself.

5. Be loving and kind toward those in the New Age Movement. Remember that God loves them and wants them to place their faith in Jesus Christ.
6. Trust in the Holy Spirit to convict New Agers of their need for Jesus.
7. Do not get frustrated if you do not see immediate results. Most New Agers have to hear the gospel more than once before they trust in Jesus.
8. Encourage them to read the Bible, particularly the Gospels, and to make a study of the life of Christ, Faith comes by hearing and hearing by the Word of God (see Rom. 10:17).

Reincarnation

According to recent surveys, 60% of Americans believe in reincarnation. This belief has been prompted and reinforced by "testimonies" of celebrities, prominent people, and the tabloids. In the late 1960s and 1970s books were written that planted seeds of Hindu and occult philosophy from which reincarnation originated. Many Christians have come to believe in reincarnation, or at the very least do not rule it out as a possibility.

Beliefs on basic concepts:

- **God:** Reincarnationists reject the notion of God, but believe they will find rest and peace in their new life. Reincarnation is a pantheistic belief: "God is everything and everything is God."
- **Soul:** Souls move from body to body in a birth-death-rebirth cycle, developed from the Hindu-Buddhist teaching of transmigration.
- **Transmigration:** The possibility of the soul being born into the body of an animal. Whether you are reborn into a slug or a prominent person depends on how good you were in your previous life. Western reincarnationists have excluded animals from the cycle.

The most common defense of reincarnationism is "past-life recall." This is where a person can remember parts of his former life. Another explanation called the "Bridey Murphy Effect" occurs when a person is under hypnosis and is able to tell of their past lives. This explanation is doubtful because the person gives up complete control of his mind. *Déjà vu* then becomes the final explanation for reincarnation.

Reincarnationists sometimes use scripture to support their belief. Most often used are John 3:3, Matthew 11:14, Hebrews 7:2-3, and John 9:2. However, upon further reading, you will find that none of these verses support reincarnation, but rather the Bible combats the idea in Hebrews 9:27, James 4:14, Psalms 39:5, 103:15, and 144:4. The Bible is also clear about contacting spirits such as in Leviticus 20:6, 27; Deuteronomy 18:11; Isaiah 8:19; 1 Samuel 28; and 1 Chronicles 10:13. These verses make clear that God does not want His people engaged in such activities. Reincarnationists admit their involvement in such activities (contacting spirits).

Roman Catholicism

According to 1996 statistics, there are 60,190,605 Catholics in the US.

[For a more detailed explanation of Catholic beliefs and how to witness to Catholics please refer to a separate handout titled, "Understanding Catholic Concepts".]

Basic Beliefs

1. **Belief in the Trinity.** Belief that God is good and loving, all-powerful, and all knowing. He is the creator who sustains and transcends the universe.
2. **Jesus is the second person of the Trinity.** Jesus is fully God and fully human, born of a virgin, lived a sinless life, died on a cross, buried, resurrected, returned to heaven, and seated at the right hand of the father.
3. **Three Sources of Authority:** Catholic doctrine accepts three sources of authority.
 - a. The Holy Bible
 - b. Church Tradition
 - c. Teaching ministry of the Church (only bishops and priests have been given the task of authentically interpreting the Bible and traditions).Not one of these can stand without the others, and when the Bible and the Church Tradition are in conflict, you are to put away the Bible and trust the Tradition.
4. **Scripture:** The Catholic Church accepts the 66 books of the Protestant Bible plus several apocryphal books not accepted by most Protestants.
5. **Mary:** The Catholic Church states that Mary was free of original sin, stayed pure from sin all her life, remained a virgin forever, was taken up to heaven body and soul, was exalted by the Lord as Queen over all and Mother of God, was viewed as co-mediator of God's grace and collaborator with the salvation of Jesus, her son.
6. **Sin:** Sin is classified in two ways within Catholic doctrine:
 - a. *Mortal sin* causes exclusion from heaven, destroys the sanctifying grace of God within the individual & necessitates forgiveness through the sacrament of reconciliation [penance].
 - b. *Venial sin* doesn't destroy God's saving grace and is not taken into consideration for the eternal destiny of the soul.
7. **Salvation:** In addition to Christ's sacrifice, seven sacraments are believed to be necessary for salvation. They are signs and instruments by which the Holy Spirit spreads the grace of Christ through the Church.

The Seven Sacraments:

1. **Baptism:** forgives all sins, including original sin

2. Confirmation: completes baptismal grace by increasing the gifts and strengths of the Holy Spirit in recipient
3. Eucharist: communion; when you take the bread and the wine they really become Jesus' body and blood
4. Penance: confession; sacrament of reconciliation; confess mortal sins to a priest who imposes acts of penance and offers forgiveness of sin
5. Anointing of sick; given by priests and bishops using oil blessed by a bishop; given when a Catholic is in danger of death because of illness or old age
6. Holy Orders: belief that this sacrament confers a sacred power for service; 3 degrees: bishop, priest, deacon (Pope is the bishop of Rome and has full, supreme, and universal power over the whole church)
7. Matrimony: gives spouses grace to love each other with the love with which Christ has loved His Church

When Witnessing To Catholics

1. Remember that salvation does not depend on church membership, but comes through faith in Jesus Christ (Ephesians 2:8-9).
2. Pray and trust in the Holy Spirit to use the gospel message to reach the hearts and minds of those who are lost.
3. Share a testimony of your personal faith in Jesus Christ as your Lord and Savior. Your testimony of what Jesus has accomplished in your life can have a great impact on them. Keep your testimony short. Avoid using terms that are unfamiliar to Catholics, such as: "walked the aisle," "got saved," and "born again."
4. Share the assurance of salvation that God's grace gives you. Make sure that you communicate that your assurance is derived from trusting Jesus and not from your good works or your ability to remain faithful (1 John 5:13).
5. Give them a Bible and point them to the New Testament. Point out texts that explain salvation. (Romans 3:23, 5:8, 6:23, 10:9, 13; John 3:16; Ephesians 2:8-9.)
6. Avoid getting bogged down with secondary issues that are not central to salvation. Do not engage in controversies over side issues such as Mary's place or the Saints. A simple explanation such as, "I believe everything the Bible says about Mary" should be sufficient. Keep the conversation focus on Christ.
7. **Keep the gospel presentation Christ-centered.**
8. Be patient. Catholics are best lead to salvation through long-term Bible study, and that takes time.

Scientology

Founded by L. Ron Hubbard in 1954. Key publication: *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Modern Health*. Hubbard incorporated the Church of Scientology to promote his ideas using a religious façade.

Basic Beliefs:

- **Holy Writings.** Hubbard's writings and speeches are considered absolutely authoritative.
- **Man.** People are immortal, divine beings composed of 3 dimensions: soul, mind, & body.
- **God.** There is no clear definition of God. In Hubbard's writings it is rare to find references to the Supreme Being, but these are usually termed the "eight dynamic" or "infinity" and defined in vague pantheistic terms such as embracing the "*allness* [sic] of all."
- **Divinity.** There are unconscious mental images recorded in the subconscious that have negative effects on a person's life which prevent an individual from realizing their innate divinity and experiencing a happy and fulfilled life and using their rational mind.
- **Redemption.** Auditing: this is the solution to these negative images. Auditing is the expensive process of using an e-meter to indicate when a person has discovered one of these mental images and helps the client expunge it from the subconscious to achieve the state of "Clear." A person who has attained "clear" may need further auditing to remove these negative mental images held over from past lives. These auditing sessions may cost as much as \$1000 per hour.
- **After-life.** The ultimate goal is liberation from MEST: MEST stands for matter, energy, space, and time. A person experiences many soul reincarnations in many lives over thousands of years. Eventually the soul can liberate itself completely from MEST and attain total spiritual awareness and become one with infinity.

Witnessing To Scientologists

1. Have a clear understanding of your faith and the Bible.
2. Ask appropriate questions to determine the person's level of involvement in Scientology and/or Dianetics. Many people involved do not understand its philosophical, spiritual, and scientific problems, nor its incompatibility with historic Christianity. In some cases, you may need to provide documentation to show the Scientologist that L. Ron Hubbard was not what Scientologists believe him to be and expose the controversial history of the Scientology movement. (see: Brent Corydon; L. Ron Hubbard: Messiah or Madman [Barracade Books, 1994] and Russell Miller; Bare-Faced Messiah: A Biography of L. Ron Hubbard [H. Holt & Co., 1988].)
3. Seek to establish a personal, friendly relationship with the Scientologist.

4. Establish the sole authority of the Bible. You may need to give the Scientologist a marked Bible to highlight basic Christian doctrines.
5. Define clearly all terms of Scientology and historic Christianity.
6. Show the Scientologist how Christian doctrines are incompatible with Scientology. Focus especially on contrasting ideas about God, sin, salvation, and life after death.
7. Share your personal testimony of faith in Jesus Christ and the benefits you derive from knowing Him as Savior and Lord.
8. Share the plan of salvation and sensitively seek to lead the person to faith in Jesus.

Sikhism

Founded by Nanak in the 15th century and currently with approximately 250,000 followers in the US. Nanak believed God commissioned him to spread a new redemptive revelation to humanity that all should believe in the true God. Based on the repetition of God's name, charity to all, meditation, worship, and ritual purity through ablution. Sikhism does accept other religious traditions as valid.

Basic Beliefs:

- **God:** God is one. There is no Trinity. God is an abstract principle of truth and has never known an incarnation. God cannot be defined, but can be loved and honored.
- **Human condition:** Humans are the highest order of creation, but separated from God because of self-centeredness and willful ignorance of God. This separation causes all human misery and unhappiness. As a result, people are bound up in the process called transmigration of the soul. (See "Transmigration" on Reincarnation page.) One's position in life depends on karma (the actions of a

past life). The goal of Sikhism is to break this cycle, much like Buddhism.

- **Salvation:** ending the cycles of reincarnation. This is done by renouncing one's self and becoming devoted to God. Salvation is achieved through the grace of God who reveals Himself and allows humans to meditate on His name and nature.
- **Grace:** This is God's kind recognition of a person. To receive grace, a person must fully surrender to God's will. Grace comes when people eliminate self from their minds.

Witnessing To Sikhs

1. Establish positive and cordial relationships with Sikhs. Let them see Christ's love in you. Give your new friends New Testaments so that they may inquire further about your faith. Help them understand what they read.
2. Be aware of aspects of the Sikh religion that are similar to Christianity. For example: monotheism, need for relationship with God, and good works resulting from religious values. Lead them to God's teachings about the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as Savior.
3. Be prepared to share your faith and God's Word concerning the human predicament and God's desire for humanity. The "Here's Hope Roman Road" tract (see Rom. 3:23; 5:8; 6:23; 10:9,13; 12:1-2) is one witnessing tool that has been used effectively by many Christians.
4. Invite Sikhs to attend a Christian worship service, and explain what each part of the service signifies in relation to Christian theology. Clarify such terms as salvation, faith, new birth, and conversion.
5. Underscore the uniqueness of Jesus Christ as humanity's Savior and as God's perfect revelation of Himself.

For More Information on Any of These Religions Please Visit
www.namb.net/root/resources/beliefbulletins/religions/