

Encounter World Religions

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One of the highlights of my 20+ years as an ELCA Air Force chaplain was a week-long temporary duty/trip to Toronto. Given the current hue and cry to build a Muslim-proof wall around the U.S., I highly (and ASAP) recommend that experience for ELCA members of all... ranks.

Hosted by an organization called “Encounter World Religions” (worldreligions.ca), this week was as complete an immersion in a various faith groups as I can imagine. Why is it especially meaningful today? Because:

- 1 Canada is showing the same open arms to Muslim refugees as our “Lady Liberty”... used to show;
- 2 Toronto is a great example of how to live together in community (and, on a more personal note, it is THE “best big city” I’ve ever visited); and
- 3 Although much good can and does come from interaction between our church leaders and the leaders of many world religions, this experience would truly “make it real” for the “average” church member.

Although all the pertinent details are on Encounter’s website, I would add:

- 1 The week involves “classroom” instruction on various world religions followed by visits to their “houses of worship”—all in Toronto—along with a “debriefing” following the visits where participants are encouraged to discuss their experiences.
- 2 There is only ONE of these scheduled “immersion weeks” a year but since I know a number of ELCA pastors—“active” or retired—enjoy being a group/congregational tour guide, it may be possible to schedule a “special group week” or just a few days (that would include visiting at least some sites) at a group’s convenience. Contact Brian Carwana with Encounter for more info on this possibility. (Brian is also available to speak or provide “Diversity Consulting”. I think his statement in regards to the latter is reflective both on his/their approach to diversity AND what “we Lutherans” need to be about. Here’s just a snippet: “Encounter’s approach is to emphasize deep diversity, not just about a list of do’s and don’ts but encouraging a fuller understanding of people’s cultural traditions that fosters genuine understanding and erases boundaries.”)

Having “been there, done that” (including attending Sikh and Wiccan worship), I’d be happy to answer any questions or deliver further “testimony” as to the value of this week. I know not many folks will pack their bags and head to Toronto ASAP, but those who have “visit Toronto” on their bucket list would be blessed to add this experience to their itinerary.