



# *Walking the Walk*® Youth Initiative Curriculum

## Engaging With Significant Religious Figures

*45-Minute Activity Guide*

### Curriculum Goals

1. Participants develop increased **pride** in their own religious identities.
2. Participants express **curiosity** in respectful ways.
3. Participants **understand and appreciate commonalities** amongst religious traditions, including the shared values of helping those in need, hospitality, and treating people with honor and dignity.
4. Participants **understand and respect the distinctiveness** of religious traditions.
14. Participants learn and use an array of methods for **processing** their experiences.
15. Participants gain **communication skills** for articulating their identities, passions, and questions.

### Preparation

- Prepare a list of 10 or so significant religious figures from each respective tradition in the group plus a list of contemporary figures that might be considered significant by a range of religious traditions (think: MLK, Gandhi, Mother Teresa).
- Review definition of “holy person” from *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion* edited by J. Z. Smith *et al.* on pages 461-464. Consider it yourself.
- Write an abbreviated definition of “holy person” on flip chart: “Holy Person: one who serves as an exemplar of virtue and an embodiment of sacred power.”
- Do this activity below for yourself and produce some sample individual reflections that are not merely lists.

### Required Materials

- Flip Chart and markers.
- Blank white paper and art supplies (colored pencils, markers, oil pastels, etc.)

### Resources and Key Terms



- *The HarperCollins Dictionary of Religion*, edited by Jonathan Z. Smith and William Scott Green (1996).
- The “holy person” definition written above. If available, please review the full definition in the *Dictionary of Religion*.
  - Note that “significant religious figure” is a much broader category than holy figures, pertaining to whomever a religious person engages with to illuminate, deepen, or maintain their religious practice. For example, a Muslim rapper or Catholic activist may be a significant religious figure but not holy.

## Activity Outline

### Introduction (5 minutes):

- Explain to participants that today we are going to discuss and learn more about significant religious figures and how we can engage with them. They are an integral part of all religious traditions such that learning more about them will help us understand religion in general.
- Note: today will involve group activity and some personal time for reflection. Let's be extra sensitive to the fact that we all have different, equally valid experiences and preferences. Let's celebrate and encourage those differences.
- If preceded by an exploration of a religious tradition, ask participants to identify significant religious figures from that tradition.
- Transition with something like “let's think more about what a significant religious figure is.”

### Introducing Category “Significant Religious Figure” (5 minutes)

- In the large group, note how nearly all religions have a tradition of significant religious figures, be they prophets, holy figures, or exemplary followers.
- Show the definition of “holy people” and note that “significant religious figures” is a broader category than “holy people.”
- Explain the note on significant religious figures above in the “Resources and Key Terms” section
- Present your personal list of significant religious figures.
  - As a personal example, my list would include “Muhammad, Ali, Al-Hallaj, Rumi, Clarence 13X, Malcolm X, Amina Wadud, Farid Esack, Scott Kugle, Kambiz GhaneaBassiri, Vernon Schubel, Amir Sulaiman, MLK, Thomas Merton, and the Buddha.

### Brainstorming SRFs (15-20 minutes)

- Form intra-congregational groups that each receive their own big sheet of paper



- Brainstorm SRFs from their respective religious traditions. Key: no one can negate a suggested SRF—who is “significant” is subjective such that each individual’s SRFs might not be universal.
- Once substantial lists have been compiled (5 minutes or so), have those groups take another five or so minutes to list exemplary qualities of those individuals.
- Each group shares their SRF lists and posts their sheets somewhere visible.

#### Individual Reflection (10-15 minutes)

- Thank everyone for their thoughtful teamwork and open sharing. Let them know we will now be transitioning to individual reflection.
- Split up cliques and groups so that everyone has some personal space. Everyone should receive some blank white paper and art-making supplies. If supplies are limited, then make “art centers” around the room that have some supplies.
- Once everyone is set, ask them to look around the room at the SRF lists noting (1) similarities, (2) differences, and (3) SRFs or exemplary qualities that they admire. They should make a list of (3).
- With their list of exemplary qualities, note symbols, words, emotions, or ideas that correspond with those exemplary qualities. For example, the symbol of an open-hand for charitableness. Encourage them to draw symbols or write short lines of poetry for these lists.
- They should take their time with this activity, but avoid turning to friends for consultation. If participants are lost, encourage them to take an extra minute to think about a corresponding symbol or word or phrase or to move on to another exemplary quality.

#### Wrapping Up (5 minutes)

- In a circle, ask everyone to share one symbol or idea they came up with, noting that they can pass if sharing would be too personal.
- Thanks everyone for the focus and open-mindedness.
- [If using folders for each participant] Ask the participants to deposit their list into their folder.