

Ecumenical and Interfaith Glossary

Ecumenism - The word “ecumenism” is a noun derived from two Greek words, *oikoumene* (“the inhabited earth”) and *oikos* (“house”). Put together they could be understood as: “The people of the whole world who live within a common home.” When traced to the teachings and prayers of Christ, ecumenism can be used to describe the worldwide household of those who hold to one Christian faith. It has become a key word for the movement toward greater Christian understanding, appreciation and visible unity. In its modern usage, ecumenism has come to be associated with Christian Unity in general. The word “ecumenical” is an adjective used to describe this 20th century movement and its leadership.

Interreligious - There are several ways this word and the following word are currently used. For the WCC “interreligious” refers to actions between different Christian denominations, much like the word “ecumenical”. It has also been used to refer to holding formal dialogues. The United Methodist Council of Bishops ecumenical staff usually uses “interreligious” to describe interactions among religious institutions or religious organizations, the emphasis being on the institutional relationships among religions, such as Judaism, Buddhist, Christian and Hindu.

Multi-Religious – This term is used by some Christians to refer to religions working together. The Council of Bishops tends to use “Interreligious” instead of “multi-religious.”

Interfaith - For the World Council of Churches “interfaith” refers to interaction between different faith groups such as Muslim, Christian and Jew. It has also been used to refer to the working together of people of faith to combat social justice issues. The Council of Bishops ecumenical staff usually uses to “interfaith” to describe interactions among people of different religions, the emphasis being on the personal, spiritual relationships among human beings.

Intrafaith – Pay attention to the prefix. “Intra” means within, inside or on the inside. So, Intrafaith refers to members of one religion examining just itself in light of their own experiences.

Dialogue and Conversation - Dialogue literally means a word between two parties but is more broadly understood as a term for conversation or listening. Within the Ecumenical Movement it has come to be understood as a formal, official and ongoing conversation on particular issues of unity between or among denominations or groups of faith. A dialogue between two faith groups is called a bi-lateral dialogue. A dialogue among three or more faith groups is called a multi-lateral dialogue.

For more information, visit www.unitedmethodistbishops.org/ecumenical.