

Asking the Clergy: Finding wisdom in other faith traditions



From left, the Rev. Natalie M. Fenimore of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, the Rev. Vicky L. Eastland of Brookville Reformed Church, and Marie McNair of the Baha'is of Long Island. Credit: UU Congregation at Shelter Rock; Raju A. Eastland; Rebecca McNair

By **Jim Merritt**[Special to Newsday](#) January 12, 2023 5:00 am

World Religion Day, observed on Jan. 15 by members of the Baha'i Faith, is an occasion for interfaith gatherings and celebrating both commonalities and differences among the world's faiths. This week's clergy discuss how teachings from other faiths have informed their experiences as spiritual leaders.

The Rev. Vicky L. Eastland

Pastor, Brookville Church, Glen Head

I grew up in the Midwest as a Christian and had no contact with people of other faiths. Then, when I moved to New York State, my world expanded in ways I never dreamed possible. It started when my husband and I adopted an older child from India who had been raised Hindu with some Christian influences. I learned from my son that God is much more expansive than my Christian upbringing taught me.

When I became the pastor nine years later at Brookville Church, a synagogue and a Muslim community were already sharing space with the church. I began to learn from Muslims and Jews about their faith as I worked to develop what has become a multifaith campus. Exposed to other religious beliefs, I began to discover we have more commonalities than differences.

Sadly, we have often been given the impression that we have all the wisdom we need within our own religious traditions. I have come to believe there is wisdom beyond our inherited boundaries. We need one another and the religious wisdom others have to offer to augment our own faith traditions as much as the species of the Earth need one another to be whole.

The Rev. Natalie M. Fenimore

Lead minister and minister of Lifespan Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock, Manhasset

As a Unitarian Universalist minister, my seminary education included the study of other faith traditions. I came to know and appreciate wisdom and beauty inherent in traditions outside my own. Through study and interfaith relationships, I have experienced the many ways that faith communities seek to make meaning, give comfort, share joy.

In my congregation, we seek to join with other faiths to build a better world. I have learned the wisdom of widening the circle of love and care. I have learned that there are so many ways in which other faith traditions offer insights into our common humanity. I regularly use readings and stories from many faith traditions in worship services and for spiritual reflection.

In the words of the noted theologian, philosopher and civil rights activist Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “No religion is an island. We are all involved with one another. Spiritual betrayal on the part of one of us affects the faith of all of us. Views adopted in one community have an impact on other communities.” All faith traditions can embrace tolerance and diversity. Each human can reflect the glory of the Creator and beauty of creation.

Marie McNair

Secretary, Regional Baha’i Council of the Northeastern States, Bellport

A teaching of the Baha’i Faith is that religions are one. This means that truth is revealed by God through messengers such as Abraham, Moses, Jesus, Muhammad and now Baha’u’llah, the founder of the Baha’i Faith, to advance the spiritual, intellectual and moral capacities of humanity. Coming approximately every thousand years, each revelation suits the needs of humanity at the time and place where it originated but also contains eternal spiritual truths such as love, unity and praiseworthy virtues.

My service on the Valley Stream Religious Council, an interfaith religious organization, has enriched my life in many ways. For example, interactions with my colleagues confirm my understanding that religion is one. When we discuss a topic, I know that the wisdom that they contribute has its foundation in the same wisdom that I see in the teachings of my religion. When we choose readings from our Scriptures, they verify that the same values permeate all our Scriptures. I see how the teachings of Baha’u’llah build on the wisdom of the past and provide what we need in our world today.

Ultimately, I appreciate God’s wisdom in creating this magnificent revelation process in which His guidance always flows to mankind.

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