

Understanding Key Terms

This activity is helpful for any new group of students who are starting to organise or engage in inter faith and belief activities, by exploring what different people in the group understand by the following key terms: **faith, religion, belief, religious pluralism, diversity, multi-faith, inter faith and inter-religious**. It can also help new groups, such as your inter faith and belief forum, get to know one another and set the foundations for any future inter faith and belief strategy.

The purpose of this activity is not to reach agreement on a definition – however a group may come to some consensus. Simply to aid discussion we have included some definitions other people have developed which you can photocopy and use with this

In small groups of four to five, ask each group to discuss and jot down their thoughts to the following four questions. Give at least 10 minutes for each question.

1. Is there a difference between the terms **faith, religion** and **belief**?
2. What do you understand by the term **religious pluralism**. Is this different from **diversity**?
3. What do you understand by the terms **multi-faith**, inter faith and **inter-religious**?
4. Is there a difference between the terms **inter faith** and **intercommunal**?

Depending on how much time you have available, you could ask the group to discuss the key points in a plenary session.

Differences between the terms:

(Please note this is not an exhaustive list of definitions but will help as a starting point for you to discuss some of these terms further).

Faith, religion and belief

In recent years, the Churches, other **faith** communities and the Government have tended to use the term **faith** rather than **religion**. That is why 'inter faith' is more common than 'inter religious'. To some degree, these terms can be used interchangeably. However, the emergence of the new equalities strand of 'religion and belief' (see, for example the 2010 Equality Act) means that religion may become more prevalent. Belief is used in the equalities context to signify 'non-religious belief'.

Religious diversity

Religious **diversity** describes the fact of different individuals living in a community. It does not mean there are positive or negative relationships.

Multi-faith, inter faith and inter-religious

"When a society or an event ... is described as '**multi-faith**', it usually means that it includes a variety of religious groups. While the use of 'multi-faith' highlights variety, use of the term '**inter faith**' points to the relationships between religions and the people who belong to them... The term '**inter-religious**' is occasionally used interchangeably with 'inter faith' ... 'interreligious' can sometimes be used in ways that denote the simple state of encounter between different religions in a religiously plural context, whereas 'inter faith' tends to be used in circumstances which involve 'dialogue' between religions and the faiths. [...] '**interfaith**' is found but some prefer to avoid this for fear of giving the impression of a movement that blurs the distinctiveness of the religions involved."

*From 'Faith in Public Realm: Controversies, policies and practices'
Paul Weller, Professor of Inter-religious Relations at University of Derby*

