

Going Beyond ~ Redesigning Civility

“Civility is claiming and caring for one’s identity, needs and beliefs without degrading someone else’s in the process. Civility is about more than just politeness, although politeness is a necessary first step. It is about disagreeing without disrespect, seeking common ground as a starting point for dialogue about differences, listening past one’s preconceptions, and teaching others to do the same. Civility is the hard work of staying present even with those with whom we have deep-rooted and fierce disagreements. It is political in the sense that it is a necessary prerequisite for civic action. But it is political, too, in the sense that it is about negotiating interpersonal power such that everyone’s voice is heard, and nobody’s is ignored. And civility begins with us.” (The Institute for Civility in Government)

The phrase “faith-based politics” does not immediately evoke thoughts of *civil* behaviors among most people. More often opposite behaviors – judgmental, unreasonable, dogmatic, self-righteousness and uncompromising -- come to mind. Religions have a lot to answer for in the ways we have conducted intergroup relations through the centuries and in the ways many of us approach civil engagement today. The current bitter antagonisms across our continent almost always are entangled with religious passion and motivation. If sometimes religions are used by the more cynical among us, we have allowed it to happen. We have allowed the less scrupulous to play on our ancient prejudices and turn us against one another.

But the *North American Interfaith Network* (NAIN) believes that people of faith – of *all* faiths – can and will help to turn the tide. As a network of faith communities and interfaith organizations in Canada, the USA and Mexico, and including many individuals who passionately seek common ground, we are historically committed to unity, peacefulness and mutual understanding. We have long stood against all expressions of bigotry, hatred, selfishness and duplicity in private and public life. Collectively we bring years of engaging and honing the fine arts of inter-group dialogue and cooperation. Although we understand the challenges of diversity, we have experienced and we celebrate the blessings it provides. In all this, we have tasted a unique and faith-based form of civility. It is this we need to share with the larger world.

The time is now for everyone in our network to dig deeply within her or his own practice and rediscover values, stories and role models that will contribute to a more just, humane and compassionate social order. The time is now for us to articulate – with humility and respect -- our highest visions of what it means to be human and the world we share together.

Rev. Gilbert (Budd) Friend-Jones
Sarasota, Florida USA