

has its own term for it—*ecumenical*. Examples of intrafaith would be when Sunni Muslims interact with Shiite Muslims or when so-called “engaged” Buddhists interact with “traditional” Buddhists.

- **Interfaith dialogue** is when persons of different faith traditions or broader religious families interact. This happens by accident all the time, in schools and workplaces, for example, whenever people of different cultures and belief systems share their values and views in everyday interactions. We don’t usually think to call such encounters “interfaith dialogues” but that’s what they are. School boards and human resource departments are getting wise and learning new ways to address religious diversity issues creatively and purposively.<sup>1</sup>
- **Interreligious dialogue** has a technical meaning within the field of interfaith relations. It doesn’t refer to the casual interactions between members of different religious communities, but rather to formal encounters between their representatives. The term implicitly recognizes those leaders’ responsibility to represent their respective communities. *Interreligious dialogue* is also used sometimes when the problematic aspects of “interfaith” may be an impediment. Interfaith dialogue is more typically used by the Abrahamic faiths—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—and it is limited in that Buddhism, Jainism, and Advaita Vedanta (a type of Hinduism) do not refer to themselves as “faiths.” Thus, interreligious dialogue can be a worthy term, even when it does not convey either “formal encounters” or “representatives.”
- **Multifaith dialogue** may seem like the same thing as *interfaith*, and the terms are sometimes used interchangeably, but within the interfaith movement, *multifaith* has a unique nuance. It is used when people of different faiths come together but without specific articulation or recognition of their individual faiths as an intentionally or conspicuously public part of the effort. In this sense, most enterprises in life where different people come together are by their very nature multifaith.
- **Multireligious dialogue**, likewise, may seem like the same thing as *interreligious*, but, like *multifaith*, it is in fact used to distinguish those occasions when people of different religions come together without special attention to their individual

religions, particularly when those involved are leaders or formal representatives of their faith traditions. As an example, there is a multireligious effort underway to try to meet the Millennium Development Goals of the United Nations.

People frequently use some of these terms interchangeably, especially in the popular media but also in the academy. So be conscious of the way you hear and use these words with others. I find that an investment in some simple reflective listening—for example, “What I am hearing you say is ...”—usually clears the path to deeper understanding.