



Finding Common Ground

*A PVUMC Initiative, in Association with the Salaam Chai Paradise Interfaith Forum
for Finding, Embracing and Sharing Common Ground*

Lectures: October 12 and 26, November 9, 2017

Round Table Discussions: October 19, November 2 and 16, 2017

More so than at any other time in recent decades, Americans are experiencing social upheaval characterized by a seemingly intractable and profound polarization. It's not just that we can't seem to agree, but rather that we can't seem to begin to understand the positions of others, suggesting that there are fundamental, substantive differences in how we view reality. Confronted with this situation, we are proposing that initially, we step back, call "time out" and explore how it happens that we come to have our worldviews, belief structures and cultural orientations, and how our prejudices and exclusionary tendencies form and become such powerful forces.

*"Finding Common Ground" is a series of three scholarly lectures on Thursdays, **October 12 and 26, and November 9**. The week following each lecture, we will hold round table discussions for the purpose of delving deeper into and sharing our reactions to the ideas set forth by our scholars. We are blessed that Dr. Adam Cohen and Dr. Steven Neuberg from Arizona State University, and Dr. Stephanie Varnon-Hughes from Claremont Lincoln University, will be giving these presentations and answering questions following their lectures.*

The purpose of this series is not to solve personal or societal conflict over such issues as immigration, inter-religious conflict, LGBT inclusion, political polarization, general misunderstanding, or even trends toward incivility. Our exploration is to prepare us for thoughtful consideration of these issues by learning about ourselves and the groups or "tribes" in which we find ourselves; by gathering insight as to how and why others hold positions that conflict with ours; by identifying pathways to understanding needed so desperately in our world; and by discerning ways to find meaning, purpose and joy in collaborative action, consistent with the messages and principles of our respective faith traditions.



Paradise Valley United Methodist Church

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Series Schedule

October 12, 2017, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Chapel

Know Thyself: Why and How Do We Believe What We Do?:

The Foundations of Our Worldviews and Belief Structures

Lecturer: Dr. Adam Cohen, ASU, Psychology Department

How similar or different are the beliefs, morals, and worldviews of members of different faith communities? Do these have to be essentially the same for us to trust one another? Dr. Adam Cohen, Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University and an international award winning researcher in the psychology of religion, will first discuss theories about the ancient origins and functions of ethical worldviews and belief systems, then summarize his research on how and why members of different religions have similar and different beliefs and morals, both important components of worldviews. He will then summarize his research that, although members of different religions can have both overlapping and different beliefs and morals, there can still, reassuringly, be high levels of trust between persons with differing belief structures and worldviews.

Adam Cohen, Associate Professor, in the ASU Department of Psychology, earned his PhD from the University of Pennsylvania in 2000. His main research interests fuse cultural, social, and personality psychology. He is interested in how religious differences function as cultural differences, affecting domains including religious identity and motivation, well-being, moral judgment, forgiveness, and the like. Cohen is also interested in applying evolutionary theory to religion. He is associate editor of *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, and on the editorial boards of several other leading journals.

October 19, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Room H-1

Roundtable Discussions concerning Dr. Cohen's presentation

Leaders: Common Ground Facilitators

October 26, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Chapel

Why and How Do We See Others as "Different"?:

The Ubiquity and Anatomy of Prejudice and Exclusion

Lecturer: Dr. Steven Neuberg, ASU, Psychology Department

Prejudices infiltrate all societies, shaping institutions and coloring much of everyday social interaction, often with extremely harmful consequences. Why are prejudices so ubiquitous, so "normal," and so readily engaged? Why are our likes and dislikes, hopes and fears, senses of security and vulnerability, so apparently contingent upon others' nations of origin, ethnicity, race, gender, religious beliefs, sexual preferences, and political affiliations? Dr. Steven Neuberg—Foundation Professor and Chair of the Department of Psychology at Arizona State University—will trace the ancestral and contemporary origins of stereotypes and prejudices, explore how they serve a wide range of fundamental motives, discuss why they are both so difficult (and sometimes so easy) to inhibit and change, and suggest both traditional and unconventional approaches for reducing their impact.

Steven Neuberg received his A.B. from Cornell University and an M.S. and Ph.D. from Carnegie Mellon University. He is Chair of the Psychology Department, and Foundation Professor of Psychology at Arizona State University. Dr. Neuberg integrates social-cognitive and evolutionary approaches in his research exploring the origins, nature, and nuances of prejudices and stereotypes, and the ways that fundamental motivations shape cognition and social behavior. He also founded the ASU Global Group Relations Project, a multidisciplinary and global study of factors, including religion, which shape intergroup conflict. Neuberg is a Fellow of multiple

scientific societies and the recipient of several teaching awards, including ASU's 2012 Outstanding Doctoral Mentor Award.

November 2, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Room H-1

Roundtable Discussions concerning Dr. Neuberg's presentation

Leaders: Common Ground Facilitators

November 9, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Chapel

Where Do We Go From Here?:

"True Grit" and Experiential Strategies for Finding Common Ground

Lecturer: Dr. Stephanie Varnon-Hughes, Claremont Lincoln University

*Being human is a messy endeavor. We are made to be in relationship—built for community, craving to be known and seen and heard, better together. And yet, some flaw in us allows us to dwell on difference and allow diversity to become divisiveness. We fear the unknown. We resist the new. We turn strident and hateful when made to change. Why is this? **Leaning into the unknown is a transformative skill.** We can practice becoming okay with difference. We can become virtuosic at embracing the unknown. When we learn that diversity will indeed transform us: body, soul, and nation, we can systematically name, teach, and celebrate the practices that help us persevere in shaky places.*

Dr. Varnon-Hughes will help us understand the idea of "resilience" and why it's an essential ingredient in establishing Common Ground. She will also share examples of tools and techniques you can use immediately in our everyday lives, and in our workplaces, congregations, communities, and families—to help become okay with uncertainty, and allow a posture of openness to deepen our engagement with others, with our own ethical or spiritual traditions, and with humanity.

Stephanie Varnon-Hughes holds a Ph.D. from Claremont Lincoln University, an M.A. and S.T.M. from Union Theological Seminary, and her undergraduate degrees are in English and Education from Webster University. Dr. Varnon-Hughes is the Director of Cross-Cultural & Interfaith Programs at Claremont Lincoln University. She is an award winning teacher and interfaith leader whose research interests include the history, theories, and practices of inter-religious education, mindfulness and compassion practices, public policy and education, and how digital and online resources can make education accessible and learner-focused. Her doctoral dissertation, in inter-religious education, focused on disequilibrium, resilience, and reflective practice as key ingredients for learning.

November 16, 6:30 p.m., PVUMC Room H-1

Roundtable Discussions concerning Dr. Varnon-Hughes' presentation

Leaders: Common Ground Facilitators