

Open Homes Community Online

Log on to the *Open Homes* community website (www.openhomeslisteninghearts.org) to find ideas and resources. You can share what you are planning with others and learn from their experiences. We have helpful links to other organizations and websites on community building and dialogue as well. After your *Open Homes* event, please send us your stories. We'll post them online to inspire others to take part in this exciting initiative of community-building.



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Photographs are from recent Initiatives of Change events.
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International Day of Open Homes, Listening Hearts™

Everyday we see and read about conflicts and war. Hate and fear dominate the headlines. Around the world, during the first weekend in June, people will again join to counter the violence and injustice. But this is not a global protest against something; it is a united action for something: building community.



Why We Should Open Our Homes	3
What is Open Homes?	3
Hospitality and Storytelling	4
An Encounter of Faith	4
Unexpected Results	5
How Do I Get Started?	6
Guidelines for Great Discussions	7
Involving Children	8
Other Event Ideas	9
Keep the Conversation Going	9
Open Homes Community Online	10
Promoting Open Homes	10

Open Your Home to the World
June 2005

We need your help to make next year's Open Homes, Listening Hearts even better! Please answer these questions and send it to the address on the back. Remember to mark your calendar for the first weekend in June next year!

Please include a photo of your event for the Open Homes website and brochure!

Name: _____

Address (optional): _____

City, State: _____

Email: _____

Phone (optional): _____

Host(s) cultures: _____ Guest(s) culture(s): _____

Activities: _____

How did you hear about *Open Homes*? _____

Did you think this was a worthwhile activity? Why? _____

Did you feel prepared for that day? _____

How Do I Get Started?

Here are three questions to get you started:

1. What will we do?

- a. Ask yourself:
 - (1). What conversations are not taking place in my congregation?
 - (2). Who needs to be at the table in order for those conversations to take place?
 - (3). What conversation do I need to have today? With whom?
- b. Set goals: I want to...
 - (1). Learn more about _____
 - (2). Get to know neighbors/colleagues
 - (3). Build new community partnerships
- c. Decide what kind of event will work best to meet your goals: a dinner at your home, a potluck, or even a community event.

2. How will we do it?

- a. Is there anyone you want to work with on this? Perhaps your family or roommates. Who will help host the event with you?
- b. Share your ideas with the team
- c. Assign responsibilities
 - (1) Invitations
 - (2) Food preparations
 - (3) Transportation
 - (4) Leading discussion
- d. Get in touch with *Open Homes, Listening Hearts* to get support and to share your story with others.
- e. Feel free to tell other people and community organizations about *Open Homes, Listening Hearts*. It's a great way to build new partnerships for building community.

3. Who will come?

- a. From your program ideas, decide whom you want to invite. This may be a specific person or a person from a general cultural group (i.e. someone who is Muslim, someone who is White, or someone who is Hispanic).
- b. If you don't have a specific person(s) in mind, you can contact a local faith or community center in your area or the International Affairs Department of a nearby college. Tell them what you are doing and ask if they would connect you with someone. You can also contact *Initiatives of Change* and we will try to link you with one of our local teams or a partner organization.
- c. Send your guest(s) an invitation or invite them personally.
- d. Be sure to find out any cultural or dietary information that would affect your event. This is an important part of learning about other cultures!
- e. Include your guests in the preparations if they want to be involved.

About Initiatives of Change

Initiatives of Change is an 80-year-old network of individuals, of all faiths and cultures, working to change the world by first seeking change in their own lives. Personal transformations have resulted in various programs in over 40 countries, including *Agenda for Reconciliation*, *Hope in the Cities*, *Caux Initiatives for Business*, the *Caux Scholars Program* and the *International Communications Forum*. A free newsletter, *Breakthroughs*, reports stories of change in the United States and the world (www.us.initiativesofchange.org).

Hope in the Cities is a global initiative fostering honest conversations on race, reconciliation and responsibility with a focus on healing the wounds of history and building community partnerships. "A Call to Community" was launched at the National Press Club in Washington, DC, in 1996 with the support of a diverse network of over 200 prominent individuals, national organizations and government departments (804-358-1764 or www.hopeinthecities.org).

What is Open Homes, Listening Hearts?

In 2002, *Initiatives of Change* established June 1 as a day when individuals around the world could reach out to people with whom they wouldn't normally interact—usually of a different race, ethnicity or religion—and include those people for occasions in their homes or community. This year, *Open Homes* will take place during the first weekend in June. On the first *Open Homes* day, people from America to Australia shared hospitality and storytelling. The events involved hosts and guests from Afghanistan, Albania, Australia, Bangladesh, Bosnia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, Croatia, the Republic of Georgia, India, Iran, Iraq, Korea, Kosovo, Mexico, Turkey, the US and Venezuela; among them were Muslims, Christians, Hindus, Buddhists and people of no particular faith. The goal is for people in our often-disconnected communities to truly hear and be heard without judgment or blame. Deeply held beliefs and attitudes are usually formed by specific personal experiences. *Open Homes* focuses on discovering these experiences through *personal storytelling*. Bishop Desmond Tutu of South Africa once told members of Congress that the most effective way to heal the divisions and wounds of history in the US is to provide opportunities for Americans of all backgrounds to tell their stories.

This annual, international event provides a practical way of building bridges and creating new friendships across cultures, religions and traditions. Although many people already do this sort of thing individually, *Open Homes, Listening Hearts* is a unique opportunity for united action involving a worldwide community.

Why We Should Open Our Homes

On the street, in the news, at the gym. Every day we see people who are very different from us--people whom we don't understand. Maybe we are afraid of them, maybe we are angry at them, maybe we wish they'd go away. But they aren't going away. Today, the whole world is represented in the people of America. And if this great American experiment is to succeed, we each have to learn to live better with "those" people. *Open Homes, Listening Hearts* is an opportunity to break through some of the confusion and misunderstanding through hospitality and storytelling. This task is not the responsibility of any one group. All have a part: liberals and conservatives, young and old, immigrant and native. By connecting the rich resources of our many cultures, we can make America a place of hope, creativity, and opportunity for everyone. Hopefully, we will provide a model for a world torn apart by racial, religious and ethnic hatred and fear.

“ [Open Homes, Listening Hearts day] is a laudable initiative that allows people from all walks of life to contribute to peacebuilding and mutual understanding in our troubled world.”

—Yehezkel Landau
Cofounder of Open House Center for Jewish-Arab Coexistence

Unexpected Results

Ordinary acts of hospitality—like inviting a person of a different race or religion into your home--can have unexpected results. In 1980 Rob and Susan Corcoran, who are Caucasian, arrived in Richmond, Virginia, with an eleven month-old son. Rob recalls, “*The very day that we moved into our home in a racially mixed neighborhood, the doorbell rang and there was an African American woman standing on the front step. She said, “My name is Audrey Burton and I have come to welcome you to the neighborhood.” We talked. Audrey asked about my wife. I said she was upstairs bathing the baby. Without a moment’s hesitation Audrey swept by me and went*

Communicating Across Cultures

- ≈ Be sensitive to different cultural ways of interacting with others. For instance, do they shake hands when they meet or not?
- ≈ It is possible that for some reason that the person invited may not feel able to accept your invitation. However, they no doubt will appreciate having been invited. Just move on to someone else to invite.
- ≈ Be careful not to raise false expectations in those you invite. This could be a one-off invitation, or it may lead to an ongoing friendship.
- ≈ Be conscious of normal safety considerations and have a friend or family member pre sent to share in the visit.
- ≈ Be conscious of not stereotyping visitors, by making sweeping general statements about members of another race or religion.



“ It was a unique opportunity to speak freely, find commonality and express differences without being combative in these otherwise difficult times. [Open Homes, Listening Hearts Day] provided a new understanding and appreciation of each others' hopes, fears, cultures and faiths in a heartfelt spirit of love for one another.”

—Lee Storey
OHLH participant

Event Ideas

- ≈ Share a hosting of a family with a friend for support.
- ≈ Pair up a church, mosque or synagogue to share together on that day
- ≈ Participate and share in the special feast days and festival of different cultures and faiths.
- ≈ Have a multicultural morning coffee break at work.
- ≈ Have a multicultural picnic/BBQ in the local park, sharing a variety of food from different nations.
- ≈ Become a “Twin Family” with a family from another country. Get them to eat your cultural food during the first weekend in June and you eat their cultural food that weekend.

Keep the Conversation Going

If after your first meeting you decide to meet again, you and your new friends may want to begin taking action in your community, perhaps even forming an organized team. To



learn more about building teams to address racial and cultural divisions, contact Hope in the Cities and ask them for the Connecting Communities Handbook. You may also refer to the Open Homes website for suggestions and resources when thinking about next steps.(www.ohlh.org).

Keep the following principles in mind when seeking to heal divisions and build communities:

- ≈ **Listen** carefully and respectfully to each other and to the whole community.
- ≈ **Bring** people together, not in confrontation but in trust, to tackle the most urgent needs of the community.
- ≈ **Search** for solutions, focusing on what is right rather than who is right.
- ≈ **Build** lasting relationships outside our comfort zone.
- ≈ **Honor** each person, appealing to the best qualities in everyone, and refusing to stereotype the other group.
- ≈ **Hold** ourselves, communities and institutions accountable in areas where change is needed.
- ≈ **Recognize** that the energy for fundamental change requires a moral and spiritual transformation in the human spirit.

► **REMEMBER:** Different cultures have different ways of communicating! Unconscious gestures or phrases can have humorous (or embarrassing) results. There are some good resources on the Open Homes website about communicating across cultures that can help you “say what you mean.”

to Audrey to do anything else. It was the start of a great friendship that has led to a wave of unexpected partnership building across the city. We’re still neighbors.” That “partnership building” eventually created the organization “Hope in the Cities,” which brings different sectors of a community together for honest conversations on race, responsibility and reconciliation (see page 10). In 1998, *Hope in the Cities* assisted the White House Initiative on Race in developing a public dialogue guide for use across the United States.

An Encounter of Faith



What happens when we reach out to people who are different from us? Here is the story of two American couples (left to right in photo): Malik and his wife Annette are Muslims; Virginia and her husband Ben are Christians.

Virginia: What happened on 9/11 made me see that we needed to know people whose faith is Islam. I immediately put in an application to join the Interfaith Council. Neither my husband nor I knew any Muslims personally, though we have met some and heard Muslim speakers, but we certainly did not know any from the Richmond area. I sat at the first event, a dinner, and prayed, “Lord, if you want us to get to know some Muslims, please arrange for us to have dinner with some.” And in walked Malik and Annette.

Malik: Annette was in line to register for the dinner when Virginia who was standing nearby asked if she (Annette) was Muslim and if she could sit with us for dinner. Annette had a head covering which she uses for her hijab, which could have indicated she was a Muslim.

Virginia: We had a good conversation and during the meal I showed them a pamphlet entitled “Bridgebuilding between Christian and Muslim” by Harry Almond and Dr. Jamal Badawi. It turns out that Dr. Badawi was one of their good friends! From then on we kept talking and our hearts were open to each other.

Malik: We exchanged some ideas about the heinous crime that was committed on September 11, 2001. Both Annette and I tried to provide perspective from an American Muslim’s point of view. We also tried to explain that Islam does not permit such atrocities against innocent people.

Virginia: It took some courage for me to act on my thought and go meet new people. In my talks with Muslims, I realize they too feel the need to reach out and come out of their seclusion. It has been a superb learning experience for us. We have made new friends. That is the jewel in itself.

Malik: The sincerity and the desire to bridge different cultures exhibited by Virginia and Ben give us a tremendous lift and hope.

Hospitality & Storytelling



The basic format of *Open Homes, Listening Hearts* is a shared meal and conversation. It is important for this to be adapted to your own situation so that your guests can learn about you and your culture while you learn about theirs. The goal is not to argue over differences or point out faults. Nor is it to plan a project for solving community problems. That can come later, if the people involved feel it is a good

idea. Instead, focus on personal storytelling. Each person will be given time to tell a story from his or her own personal experience. This is a great way to learn about others and to share your own view of life. As Bishop Tutu said, storytelling can be a path to healing painful divisions in our country.

To begin, people could share a story of a time when they tried to tell someone something but felt they weren't being heard—this may be a humorous or a serious story. They could also explain why they felt that way. That would help everyone think about good listening skills and about personal or cultural expectations of the group.

Then, starting with the host, each person could tell a story about his or herself related to one topic or each person could decide to choose or be given a different one.

Some possible storytelling topics are:

- ≈ Describe a time you didn't feel properly recognized for something you accomplished
- ≈ Describe a time you felt respected by others of your culture or faith
- ≈ Describe a time you felt powerless to change a situation because of your culture or faith
- ≈ Describe a time you had a vision and made it happen
- ≈ Tell about your favorite cultural or religious celebration and why it is special to you
- ≈ Tell what your name means and why it was given to you
- ≈ Tell something that you feel people don't understand about your culture or faith

“If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being.”

—Alexander Solzhenitsyn

Guidelines for Great Discussions

Great discussions don't just happen. They take work, especially when people are from different backgrounds and cultures. For more resources, check out the links on the *Open Homes* website (www.ohlh.org).

1. **Talking:** You're having an honest conversation when you ...

- ≈ say things you need to say instead of saying things you want to say
- ≈ say things to disclose your own reality instead of saying things to control another person's reality
- ≈ say things that you really believe instead of saying what's expected or stereotypical
- ≈ say things in such a way that indicates an openness to growth and the future instead of speaking only to the past.

by Paige Chargois
Connecting Communities Handbook

2. **Listening:** An honest conversation also means *listening*. It may seem obvious, but listening is a vital tool. Especially when you're with people who are different from you or with whom you disagree! Try to show you are hearing what's being said by your words and actions. Be aware of your own culture's values and ways of doing things, so you can avoid making unfair judgments or reactions about others. It's easy to think our way is always best, but it's more productive to try to see things from the other's perspective.

3. **Responding:** Again, this isn't a time to argue perspectives or decide what to do next. Just listen and encourage your guests to speak from their hearts. Sometimes it is helpful to stop and reflect back to the speaker what you hear them saying, so they know you understand. Don't be afraid of silence! It can be an important part of conversation.

4. **Time Sharing:** Be sure that everyone gets a chance to speak and that no one dominates the time. It may be helpful to state at the beginning how much time is available for each person to talk and to establish a respectful way of reminding people if they go over that time.