



Interfaith
Scotland

So You Want to Start an Interfaith Book Club

A Guide

Why Start an Interfaith Book Club?

CONNECTION

A welcoming space for people from different faiths, cultures, and worldviews to explore stories, ideas, and lived experiences. The aim is not to debate theology but to build understanding, empathy, and connection.

A GATEWAY

Books act as a medium to open doors to conversation. Reading, from a rich variety of genres such as fiction, history, poetry, philosophy, self-help, science, as well as religion naturally pushes readers outside their usual genres, enriching their understanding of the world.

OPEN CONVERSATION

Book clubs turn reading, which is usually a solo activity, into something that is social, thought provoking and sparks open, meaningful conversation. When everyone brings their own reactions, interpretations, and emotional responses it can create rich, lively discussion, deepening not only understanding of the book itself but a warm openness to others.



Choosing Your Books



BOOK SELECTION

Select books across a wide range of genres, include for example fiction, memoir, poetry, folktales, and contemporary voices:

- Memoirs exploring personal faith journeys
- Novels set within specific religious communities
- Poetry from spiritual or contemplative traditions
- Books about universal human experiences such as grief, joy, migration, or family

A few suggested book titles that could work well:

- *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer
- *Don't Forget We're Here Forever*, Lamorna Ash
- *Man's Search for Meaning*, Viktor E Frankyl
- *Women Without Men*, Shahrnush Parsipur
- *Sonorous Desert*, Kim Haines-Eitzen
- *Siddhartha*, Hermann Hess

**BOOK
SELECTION**

Favour lived-experience perspectives over abstract theology to allow more inclusivity and diversity to your group.

Perhaps theme your book choices around key dates to inspire timely themes: International Women's Day, Holocaust Memorial Day or Scottish Interfaith Week as examples. Or perhaps rotate themes such as compassion, justice, ritual, or identity, religious or cultural traditions.

Consider including authors from communities represented in the group and inviting members to nominate books to ensure shared ownership.

Be sure to check also that books you select are available in other formats, such as audiobook.



Things to Consider



LOCATION

Decide whether your group will meet in-person, online, or hybrid. If meeting in person, choose a welcoming, quiet, accessible space and venue, such as a community centre, library or café.

NUMBERS

Smaller groups (6–8) allow deeper, often more meaningful conversation, while larger groups offers a much broader perspective.

DURATION

A book club meeting typically works best at about 60–90 minutes, long enough for meaningful discussion but short enough to keep everyone engaged.

HOW OFTEN SHOULD WE MEET

Decide whether you would like to make your book club a monthly meet-up or perhaps every 2 months or even seasonal. Give everyone enough time to read your chosen book, allowing also for longer books, while considering the nature of people's busy schedules.

WILL THERE BE CAKE

Offering refreshments helps to create a warm, welcoming atmosphere, although not particularly required at at your meet-ups.



FORMAT

A meaningful discussion flourishes when the prompts invite curiosity, reflection, and a willingness to hear how others interpret the same story. It is helpful to prepare your discussion prompts ahead of time. Although each book will inspire questions for discussion, to begin the session and to keep the conversation flowing, consider using open-ended conversation starters.

Some questions you could use:

- Which character's perspective resonated with you most, and why?
- Which moment in the book challenged your assumptions or made you rethink something?
- What questions would you ask the author if you had the chance?
- Would you recommend this book to others?

RESPECTFUL DIALOGUE

Despite the potential for enriching dialogue, book clubs may face challenges, particularly around differing beliefs. Particular topics such as gender and sexuality and discussions during your time together may provoke emotional reactions.

To navigate challenges you could have a number of strategies in place such as:

- Establishing clear ground rules at the outset to ensure respectful discourse
- Designating a facilitator to mediate discussions should disagreements arise





LET PEOPLE KNOW

Effective channels for outreach:

- Sharing flyers at your local library and community boards
- Through interfaith networks such as Interfaith Scotland, social media groups, and faith-community newsletters
- Personal invitations
- Post your event on platforms such as 'Eventbrite' to manage (free) ticket sales
- Take photographs (with permission) to use for future flyers and social media posts

Using a blend of these approaches helps you reach a broad audience and encourages participation from people who might not otherwise engage. The goal is to ensure representation from multiple traditions, including non-religious worldviews, so the gathering reflects the full diversity of the community.