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## Meeting our multifaith neighbors

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## Meeting Our Multi-faith Neighbors

Brice H. Balmer

Waterloo, ON: Herald Press, 2006

195 pages. \$15.88 Softcover

In *Meeting Our Multifaith Neighbors*, Brice H. Balmer stresses the importance of respect and communication among people of different faiths in an increasingly post-Christendom culture. Demonstrating the growth of non-Judeo-Christian religions and immigrant communities in North America, he encourages empathy for these new neighbors and suggests concrete ways to build relationships, contending that conversation with neighbors of another faith can break down stereotypes and prejudices, leading to transformation and growth of one's own faith. Balmer draws from experiences as a Mennonite pastor working in different urban areas and with various interfaith groups – most recently Interfaith Grand River (IGR) located in Kitchener-Waterloo, Ontario.

Balmer discusses spirituality and transformation through balancing experiences with reflection and prayer. While offering present day stories, he grounds his discussion biblically by exploring hospitality through the actions of Abraham and the Israelites as well as Jesus and his disciples who reached out not only to strangers but enemies, drawing upon common human needs in creating "... a safe place where all can learn to know each other, rest and eat together" (43-44). He roots hospitality in the nature of God and calls upon Christians to embrace the role of host to recent immigrants of other faiths rather than isolating themselves with attitudes of superiority, hostility and competition. As North American Christians serve as hosts to multi-faith guests, they must address power imbalances that give preference to Judeo-Christians. Balmer cites the increase of non Judeo-Christian religions in North America in recent decades and discusses the challenges faced by immigrants. He describes how North American culture might be experienced by newcomers, addressing the non-inclusive policies and behaviors not only of individuals and smaller groups but of the government – charged with representing the interests of a diverse population. He situates the relationship between Christians and their multi-faith neighbors within Christ's command that we love *all* our neighbors as ourselves. Despite challenges which may arise from fear or frustration, the risk of reaching out to others is an

opportunity to receive God's grace as we see God's image in the lives of others. Balmer suggests concrete ways of connecting to multi-faith immigrants like learning a neighbor's birth name, offering a gift of home-baked goods or produce, and being attentive to needs. Ongoing relationships with multi-faith neighbors entail commitment in learning about other cultures and religions, keeping abreast of current news from a global perspective, and possibly joining an interfaith organization or volunteering with immigrants.

Balmer's book is accessible for seminarians, pastors and laity. Chapters include insights and stories about those of other religions as well as study questions for deepening understanding or generating group discussion. He also includes several appendices of documents from IGR. Balmer's use of scripture and ministry experience strengthen his argument. But as addressed by Stanley W. Green in the "Afterward" his focus on tolerance risks short-changing the uniqueness of Christ. Green's comments offer a balance to Balmer's work, emphasizing the salvific purposes of God demonstrated in Jesus to which Christians are called to witness.

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## **Preaching with All You've Got: Embodying the Word**

David Day

Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2006

186 pages. \$20.99 Softcover

David Day's *Preaching with All You've Got: Embodying the Word* is a preaching workbook filled with practical advice for the pastor caught up in the week to week business of ministry. He addresses "embodiment of the Word" in four parts: the person of the preacher, the use of words and construction of the sermon, ways in which the sermon can incorporate media and objects from everyday life, and the hearers.

Part One explores the connection of the words of the sermon with the life of the preacher. Day acknowledges the fine line preachers walk between manipulation and persuasive proclamation, encouraging