

**SAMPLE SENTENCE STEMS FOR COMMON GROUND ACTIVITY IN A RELIGIOUS OPPRESSION CLASS**  
(ADAPTED FROM TDSJ2 APPENDIX 11K)

Example Sentence Stems for Common Ground Activity in the Religious Oppression class:

- If your family attended a house of worship ...
- If your family worshipped at altars in your own home ...
- If your family traveled to sacred sites for worship ...
- If you or members of your family found it challenging to find an appropriate place to worship
- If you or members of your family had to create or build an appropriate place to worship ...
- If your language of worship was English ...
- If your language of worship was a language other than English ...
- If you have developed your own form of religious faith or mode of worship ...
- If your family was the only member of your religious group in your home community ...
- If you were one of the few members of your religious group in your K-12 schools ...
- If you were part of the majority religious group in your K-12 schools..
- If you had to make special arrangements to eat at school because your religion has requirements about what you eat ...
- If your family had no specific beliefs that they considered religious ...
- If you do not presently identify with any organized religion ....
- If you identify as atheist ...
- If your family members are leaders in your religious community ....
- If you or your family regularly worship once a week
- If you or your family regularly worship more than once a week
- If you or your family do not engage in worship

**DESCRIPTION OF COMMON GROUND ACTIVITY (15 minutes)**

The purpose of this activity is to gain awareness of the different religious experiences and traditions that are represented by the participants in the room, or that are notable by their absence. It builds on the connections among family histories discussed in an earlier activity and begins to establish a more personal framework for discussions of advantaged and targeted religious groups in the U.S. It will also raise questions about meanings that participants hold for words such as “religious” or “worship.”

Ask participants to form a large circle in which they face inwards. Explain that as sentence stems are called out, participants for whom the statement is true will enter the circle, stand there for a moment, look at who has joined them in the inner circle, and turn to look at who remains in the outer circle, before returning to the full group. Prepare in advance statements, drawing from the examples listed above or your own examples -- to emphasize various family and intergenerational religious affiliations held by group members in the class. Also provide statements that identify experiences not represented in the group. Actively encourage participants to call out their own sentence stems to include aspects of “common ground” that you did not include.

When all of the prepared sentence stems have been called out, and participants have had time to offer their own sentence stems, ask the group to remain standing in the circle, to talk about what stood out as “privileges” experienced by Christians as a advantaged religious group, and as “challenges” or “exclusions” experienced by non-Christians as targeted religious groups. Ask them about what else struck them. This discussion is a brief closure for the circle. Ask participants to “hold” their substantive questions until they return to their seats.

After discussion in the circle of privileges and challenges, ask participants to return to their seats and briefly write questions and personal feelings about this activity. After a few minutes, ask participants to join groups of three to four (or pairs) to discuss issues that arose for them personally or that they noticed. If time permits, ask volunteers from the small groups to offer to the whole group some of the insights, issues, or questions that came up for them in this activity and the discussions.