

# Faith & Values

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**SATURDAY**  
April 13, 2002

## Interfaith Dialogue Group looks for common ground



Patricia Miklik/Huntsville Times

**Basye Holland leads a panel discussion at a recent Interfaith Dialogue Group meeting at Compass Bank.**

*Meeting participants look beyond own faiths to explore other traditions*

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For The Times  
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**I**ra Smith brought three things to a recent meeting of the Huntsville-Madison County Interfaith Dialogue Group. Her husband, Charles, for company. An open mind. And a question.

Do we all have the same God?

"I'm open to what other faiths are all about," said Smith, a Christian Scientist and a retired government employee. "Understanding is the best thing in the world."

On April 4, the Smiths joined about 50 other people willing to look beyond their own faiths to explore other traditions. The Dialogue Group, which is meeting each Thursday night this month, aims to bring the area's many religions, races and cultures together. But the 7-year-old group hopes to do more than foster tolerance.

"That's not far enough," said the Rev. Frank Broyles, coordinator for the National Conference for Community and Justice, which co-sponsors the group with the Interfaith Mission Service. "Beyond that is understanding and respect. Then there is common ground. Where there is common

### The details

**What:** Huntsville-Madison County Interfaith Dialogue Group

**Topic:** East Meets West: Living Your Faith, with representatives from American Indian and indigenous traditions (Thursday), and Judaism and Hinduism (April 25)

**When:** 6:30-8:30 p.m.

**Where:** Compass Bank community room, 114 Governors Drive Cost: Free

**For more information:** 880-2074

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## Interfaith Dialogue Group members learn about other faiths

### Common

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ground we can do common work together."

The first meeting featured presentations by members of the Baha'i and New Thought faiths. They discussed a number of topics, including how their traditions teach their members to relate to other religions and how they motivate their members to live out their beliefs daily. (In the last two sessions, representatives from Judaism, Hinduism and American Indian and indigenous traditions will address similar topics.)

Darren Hiebert, chair of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Madison, and Carolyn Wolfe, chair of the Local Spiritual Assembly of the Baha'is of Huntsville, talked about their faith, which boasts 5 million members worldwide.

Baha'i members believe in the unity of God, that only one race exists — the human race — and that all the world's religions have been stages for the revelation of God's will and purpose. There is no clergy in the Baha'i faith, but some members are elected to serve in administrative positions.

Members of the New Thought panel included the Rev. David Leonard of the Center for Conscious Living, the Rev. Donell Coch of the Light of Christ Center for Applied Knowledge, and Wanda Gail Campbell, a ministerial student of New Thought. They explained that Divine Science, Religious Science and Unity are branches of New Thought. According to [web-syte.com/alan/](http://web-syte.com/alan/), New Thought is a popular application of philosophical idealism, optimistic mental discipline and the practice of the presence of God in healing and daily living.

After the presentations, the



Patricia Miklik/Huntsville Times

**People of different faiths gather at a recent meeting of the Huntsville-Madison County Interfaith Dialogue Group.**

panelists fielded questions from the audience.

"Why is New Thought called new if it's been around for 75 years?"

"What is your definition of God, or the nature of God?"

Janice Phillips, an artist and a member of Faith Presbyterian Church, asked, "Where does your religion stand on whether Jesus died on the cross for the sins of the world?"

Leonard responded that New Thought follows the teachings of Jesus. "We don't have a savior, but a great mentor and teacher," he said.

Phillips, who was attending her first interfaith meeting, said she enjoyed the openness and atmosphere of respect.

"I'm tickled that here in Huntsville there's someplace where we can continue to learn," she said.

Smith, the Christian Scientist, said she found common ground among the faiths.

"Basically, I do think we all have the same God," she said. "Although we go about it differently, everybody seems to have the same idea of God."

To learn more about Baha'i and New Thought, check out these Web sites:  
[www.bahai.org](http://www.bahai.org)  
[www.us.bahai.org](http://www.us.bahai.org)  
[www.agnt.org](http://www.agnt.org)

### Guidelines

From the guidelines for the Interfaith Dialogue Group:

■ We acknowledge that ultimate wisdom and truth are larger than the claims of any one faith. To claim to possess all the truth is to play God and leave no room for the insight and revelation that come through tradition and human experience.

■ Interfaith dialogue may involve moments of honest tension and fundamental distinctions between people and faith groups. It seeks and celebrates common elements where there are found, and it cultivates covenants of understanding and co-operation.