



# THE SIMEON INITIATIVE'S YEAR OF ENCOUNTER

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A joint project of Cardus and  
Clal - The National Jewish Center  
for Learning and Leadership

## Session 5 **Courage**

Facilitators' Guide



# SESSION 1: HOSPITALITY FACILITATORS' GUIDE

## INTRODUCTION

This session focuses on courage as the willingness to act publicly on one's commitments, even when doing so carries risk. Courage is not bravado; it is the choice to stand with one's people and with others when silence would be easier or safer. Today, in the context of the Year of Encounter, courage often involves navigating contested language, political pressure, and social consequences—especially around Jewish identity, Zionism, and solidarity with Jewish communities. This session invites participants to reflect honestly on the questions many are already asking: Am I allowed to stand up for my people? Am I allowed to stand with others when it is unpopular? What does faithfulness look like when it costs something?

Rather than keeping courage at the level of discussion, this session asks participants to practice it together. The shared activity centers on visible civic engagement—showing up in public or acting in solidarity. Whether meeting with elected officials, engaging in advocacy, or appearing together in a public forum, Jewish and Christian participants will act side by side, learning what it means to protect one another when standing up invites scrutiny or backlash. This session emphasizes en-courage-ment in its truest sense: giving one another the strength to act with integrity, resist what is merely popular, and take responsibility for shaping the moral climate of our shared civic life.

## PROGRAM GOALS

1. Participants will integrate the relational trust built throughout the Year of Encounter into shared acts of public courage, learning how friendship across differences becomes the foundation for standing together.
2. Participants will understand how courage can have communal manifestations as well as being cultivated personally. For example, in how sustained moral action is strengthened when Jewish and Christian congregations act in partnership rather than isolation.
3. Participants will practice translating faith commitments into civic engagement, discerning when and how to take visible action that confronts antisemitism.
4. Participants will identify concrete next steps for ongoing collaboration beyond the program, shaping how they show up together in moments of risk or need.



## AGENDA

Time	Activity	Description
15 minutes	Opening: Shared Commitments	Setting context and shared commitments for our time together.
20-25 minutes	Spiritual Inspiration	Learn teachings from our two faith traditions about today's program topic, noticing how they are similar and how they are different.
45-60 minutes	Shared Activity: Taking Action Against Antisemitism	Participants from both congregations will join together in a public action against antisemitism.
20 minutes	Closing Reflection: Listening Pairs	Reflect together on our experience today. Learn how today's experience has impacted members of the other faith and consider how it has impacted us. Set goals for how to take this learning into the future.

## FACILITATORS GUIDE

This session is intended to take place in a mutually comfortable space within the church. This session's shared activity will center around the Christian congregation serving as host and the Jewish congregation as guest. The goal is to practice hospitality with a focus on the guest's needs, and to learn more about ways in which Jews can feel comfortable and uncomfortable in Christian spaces and society at large. Much of the learning will occur before the gathering itself, as the church members determine how to best welcome the Jewish guests and to think in advance about what elements of the space might feel comfortable, unfamiliar, or challenging for Jewish participants. See "Shared Activity" facilitator notes below for more information.

## OPENING: SHARED COMMITMENTS (15 MINUTES)

1. Gather in a suitable room for the group discussion. Set the chairs in a circle if possible, so that participants can see each other.
2. Welcome everyone to the program. (5 min)
  - Facilitator(s) introduce yourselves to the group with your name, which congregation you are from, and briefly why you wanted to be here today.
  - Introduce the Simeon Initiative and the Year of Encounter. You can read the below text aloud or summarize it. (It is also in the participant handout.)

In the last decade, and especially since the horrific attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, Canada has seen a significant rise in antisemitism. In 2024, Father Deacon Andrew Bennett of Cardus launched the [Canadian Christian Declaration on Antisemitism](#), a statement by Christian leaders across denominations committing Christians to stand publicly with the Jewish community against rising anti-Jewish hatred. Within two months, more than 700 clergy and faith leaders had added their names and The Simeon Initiative was born.

In June 2025, more than one hundred Jewish and Christian leaders from across Canada gathered in Toronto for the Simeon Initiative Jewish-Christian Leaders Summit. Rabbis, pastors, and lay leaders had thoughtful and candid conversations about antisemitism and the responsibilities their communities share, as well as both common ground and theological difference. Out of that gathering came a commitment to bring the same spirit of encounter into local communities.

### **What is The Year of Encounter?**

The Year of Encounter invites Christian and Jewish congregations to form partnerships grounded in friendship, learning, and trust. Participating congregations commit to a year of shared experiences designed to deepen understanding and build enduring relationships across differences.

This work is both personal and collective. On the local level, it begins with conversations, meals, and study. On the national level, it reflects a growing recognition among Christian leaders that antisemitism should not be a Jewish problem, but one that Christians have a particular responsibility to confront. By entering into a genuine relationship with Jewish neighbours, Christian congregations can begin to repair what has been broken in our society and model a faith that stands against hatred, with humility and resolve.

3. Depending on the size of the group, go around for introductions. (5-10 minutes)
  - Less than 10 people: Go around one by one and have people introduce themselves, say which congregation they are from, and share (briefly!) why they wanted to be here today.
  - 10 or more people: Put people into pairs or trios to introduce themselves with name, which congregation they are from, and why they wanted to be here today.
  
4. Shared Commitments (5 min)
  - Give everyone a copy of the Session Handout, which includes Shared Commitments.
  - Facilitator introduces the idea that we are here because of shared commitments. "We want to encourage ourselves and each other to have meaningful, real encounters in this group today. These are not always easy things to do, but we believe they will lay the groundwork for authentic and impactful cross-communal learning. We are going to go around and each person please read one of the commitments in the Year of Encounter Shared Commitments handout we've given you."
  - Go around and have a different member of the group read each item on the sheet.
  - Ask: "Is there anything anyone would like to add to this list?"
  - Then: "Do we all feel that we can commit to these principles? Please raise your hands to show your agreement."

## **SPIRITUAL REFLECTION (25 MINUTES)**

1. Facilitators introduce the Spiritual Reflection section of the program. You can read the below or use your own words.

"We will now draw upon some sacred texts from each of our faiths about the topic of Hospitality. The goal is to see both commonalities and differences, to learn about each other, and to inspire ourselves in the work of Jewish-Christian encounter.

We hope you will share from your heart and your own personal experience, and know that you don't need to feel like you are representing your whole faith."
  
2. Facilitators share a little bit about how your faith reads texts – Christian and Jewish traditions read and experience sacred texts quite differently, and it is helpful to the participants to understand a little about this.
  - Judaism: Here are some examples of things the Jewish facilitator might want to share about how Judaism traditionally approaches sacred text:
    - The fullest understanding comes from reading in the original Hebrew or Aramaic.
    - We learn in pairs because better understanding is seen to come from conversation and argumentation.
    - Each word can be considered intentional and sacred and therefore used in interpreting the verse.

- Reading with commentaries from other generations adds to our understanding.
- Each person has the potential to come up with a new and important understanding or interpretation, and interpretation and elaboration is praiseworthy.
- We can learn from the text what God is trying to teach us about how to live our lives.
- The Jewish legal tradition springs from the Hebrew Bible, but is further developed over the centuries through legal compendiums such as the Mishna (circa 200 C.E.), the Talmud (circa 600 C.E.), and other medieval and modern collections of law.
- Christianity: Here are some examples of things the Christian facilitator might want to share about how Christianity traditionally approaches sacred text:
  - Catholics and Orthodox principally engage Biblical texts in a liturgical context where they are organized into a lectionary based around the church year. Additionally, some will read the Holy Scriptures contemplatively as part of their personal prayer through *lectio divina*. Holy Tradition, how the Church has interpreted these texts, is a parallel source of authority.
  - This is less common among the majority of Protestants for whom reading scripture is frequently individual or small-group based, emphasizing personal discernment and spiritual guidance and with the belief that the Holy Spirit guides interpretation. They place little to no emphasis on tradition as authoritative.
  - Scripture is usually engaged in the language of the reader, with the understanding that translation can convey the meaning without knowledge of Aramaic, Hebrew, or Greek.
  - The focus is more often on what the text means about how to live one's life, rather than debate about historical, linguistic, or communal contexts.
  - Christians read Scripture, including the Hebrew Bible ("Tanach"), through the lens of Jesus, understanding earlier texts as part of a larger story that culminates in Christ. The text is read as a unified story in which God's relationship with humanity unfolds over time.

3. Jewish Facilitator teach the Jewish text. Christian Facilitator teach the Christian text.  
Open for discussion.

- Suggested teaching points and discussion questions are below and on the handout.
- Feel free to modify to match your own teaching or community.

## JEWISH TEACHING: THE NEED TO ACT

*Pirkei Avot (The Ethics of the Fathers) is a Jewish wisdom text that is part of the Hebrew Bible, compiled over several centuries. It contains wisdom lessons about how to live one's life and how to behave ethically, often quoting the teachings of rabbis between 200 B.C.E. and 300 C.E. This teaching is often quoted in Jewish communities.*

### **Pirkei Avot (Ethics of the Fathers) 1:14**

[Rabbi Hillel] used to say: "If I am not for myself, who will be for me? And when I am only for myself, what am I? And if not now, when?"

### **Questions about the Jewish teaching**

1. Why do you think this teaching has three parts to it? What does each part add to an understanding of when to take action?
2. Do you ever find it hard to balance acting on your own behalf with acting to benefit someone else? When? How do you resolve that tension in your own life?
3. How might you use the idea of "If not now, when?" to give yourself courage to act for good, even when you are hesitant?

## CHRISTIAN TEACHING: COURAGE UNDER PRESSURE

*In the Beatitudes—in which Jesus says that a variety of groups that usually were considered to be disadvantaged are actually the most blessed—Jesus speaks to people living under Roman rule, where faithfulness to God often put them at odds with what was powerful, popular, or safe. When he blesses those who are "persecuted for righteousness' sake," he is not praising suffering for its own sake, but naming the cost that can come from choosing to act for righteousness.*

### **Matthew 5:1-2; 9-12**

Seeing the crowds, he went up on the mountain, and when he sat down his disciples came to him.

And he opened his mouth and taught them, saying:

...Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.

Blessed are you when men revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account.

Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Questions about the Christian teaching**

1. What might Jesus be trying to teach about courage here?
2. When do you find yourself choosing to do or say what you think is right, even when it's unpopular or potentially will cause you to lose something?
3. How can we protect one another when standing up invites backlash?
4. When are there limits to what a person is able to take on?

### **Questions about both teachings**

1. What might we learn from these teachings about working together against antisemitism? How might we apply them to our work together?

## **SHARED GROUP ACTIVITY:**

### **WELCOMING JEWISH GUESTS (45-60 MINUTES)**

The shared activity for this session centers on civic engagement undertaken together, inviting Jewish and Christian participants to practice courage as a relational and visible act. Rather than remaining within the safety of private conversation, participants are asked to choose an action that moves their shared commitments to the public sphere. This might include meeting jointly with a local MP, MPP, or city councillor; organizing or participating in a demonstration; tabling together at a community event; or, showing up in visible solidarity at a public gathering. The emphasis is not on perfection or unanimity, but on the willingness to be seen—together—standing for the dignity and safety of the Jewish community and against antisemitism, even when doing so feels especially visible or carries social risk.

Facilitators should encourage the group to design an action that reflects both courage and care, grounded in the relationships built throughout the Year of Encounter and attentive to the different risks participants may carry. Christian participants, in particular, are invited to consider what it means to use their public voice, social capital, or institutional standing in ways that visibly support Jewish partners. Jewish participants are invited to articulate what forms of solidarity feel most supportive in this moment. Throughout the activity, facilitators should help participants notice the difference between what might be called “virtue signaling” and faithful courage—between symbolic gestures and sustained commitment—and reflect on how shared public action can be an ongoing expression of the relationships formed throughout this year.

If you would like to discuss ideas for actions to take, you can consult with Father Deacon Andrew Bennett ([abennett@cardus.ca](mailto:abennett@cardus.ca)) or with Dario Chaiquin at the Centre for Israel and Jewish Affairs ([dchaiquin@cija.ca](mailto:dchaiquin@cija.ca)).

## CLOSING REFLECTION: LISTENING PAIRS (20 MINUTES)

Facilitator note: For our closing activity in each program, we'll be going into constructivist listening pairs. This is a practice of listening in which each partner is given time to reflect aloud on the speaking prompts, uninterrupted. When given the chance to speak without interruption, we sometimes are able to go further with our thinking. It is important to stress to the group that when we are the listener, our sole job is to listen supportively. Inspired by the work of [Victor Cary](#).

### 1. Facilitators introduce the Listening Pairs (2 min)

- The purpose of this closing activity is to reflect on our own experience and to hear another participant's reflections – and to let that learning sink in. We will be pairing up – one Jewish and one Christian listening partner – and we'll be practicing generous listening.
- The way this will work is as follows:
  - Each partner will reflect on the prompts for 4 minutes, uninterrupted. Partner B will listen supportively, but not speak. Then Partner B will have a chance to reflect back to Partner A what you heard for 1 minute. The purpose of Partner B's response is not to correct but to echo back, for example: "I heard you say ...." "I'm wondering what that was like for you to..." Then we will switch and do it again with Partner B reflecting. We will keep the time and let you know when it's time to switch.
  - I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information, but for your learning.
- Guidelines to keep in mind
  - Share only what you are comfortable sharing. It's okay to prefer not to share much, and it's okay to be excited to share a lot.
  - Each person is given equal time to talk and be listened to.
  - The listener does not interpret, paraphrase, analyze, give advice, or break in with a personal story.
  - We maintain confidentiality so we can be authentic.
  - We don't use our speaking time to criticize others, but rather to reflect on our own experience.
- In a moment, please pair up with someone from the other faith background and take turns answering one or more of the following prompts:
  - What did you learn about yourself or your own faith or tradition today?
  - What did you learn about the other faith?
  - What is something new you are taking away with you from today's experience?
  - Is there a commitment you want to make, coming out of today?

2. 10 minutes for paired sharing. Facilitators tell people at the switch times:
  - 4 minutes - Partner A speaks
  - 1 minute - Partner B reflects on what they heard
  - 4 minutes - Partner B speaks
  - 1 minute - Partner A reflects on what they heard
  
3. 10 minutes for full group conversation about their paired reflection time.
  - Let's come back together to hear about your reflections. Please share only from your own reflection or your response to what you heard, but not your partner's words or experience in order to maintain their confidentiality.



# SESSION 1: HOSPITALITY HANDOUT

## **What is the Simeon Initiative's Year of Encounter?**

In the last decade, and especially since the horrific attacks in Israel on October 7, 2023, Canada has seen a significant rise in antisemitism. In 2024, Father Deacon Andrew Bennett of Cardus launched the *Canadian Christian Declaration on Antisemitism*, a statement by Christian leaders across denominations committing Christians to stand publicly with the Jewish community against rising anti-Jewish hatred. Within two months, more than 700 clergy and faith leaders had added their names and The Simeon Initiative was born.

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This work is both personal and collective. On the local level, it begins with conversations, meals, and study. On the national level, it reflects a growing recognition among Christian leaders that antisemitism should not be a Jewish problem, but one that Christians have a particular responsibility to confront. By entering into a genuine relationship with Jewish neighbours, Christian congregations can begin to repair what has been broken in our society and model a faith that stands against hatred, with humility and resolve.

## SHARED COMMITMENTS

*We want to encourage ourselves and each other to have meaningful, real encounters in this group today. These are not always easy things to do, but we believe they will lay the groundwork for authentic and impactful cross-communal learning. We hope these shared commitments will give us encouragement in our encounter today.*

### TODAY, I GIVE MYSELF AND MY FELLOW PARTICIPANTS HERE PERMISSION TO:

1. **Not know:** We don't need to know everything about our own faith, our own opinions, or other topics that may come up. We can be honest about not knowing the answer.
2. **Feel upset:** We may be hurt or upset by something someone else says; that's okay. It's part of really hearing each other.
3. **Share how something impacts me:** We are not here to agree on everything. Sharing how we are impacted by what others say and do—even when it upsets us—is a gift we give to each other as we seek greater understanding.
4. **Feel paralyzed:** We don't always have to know exactly what to do next. Sometimes we may feel simply unable to act.
5. **Appreciate someone else's faith tradition:** We can grow through wisdom learned from or about someone else's tradition, without feeling like we're abandoning our own.
6. **Change my mind, potentially multiple times:** We don't need to be absolutely certain about everything, and we can even change our minds during a conversation here.

### TODAY, I COMMIT TO:

1. Asking questions when I don't understand something, rather than guessing.
2. Allowing my heart to soften when I hear something I resonate with.
3. Being courageous and open to changing my heart and mind.
4. Being generous of spirit and assuming my fellow participants have the best intentions.
5. Allowing others to have their own beliefs without trying to change them.
6. Practicing holding ideas that are not my own, with curiosity.
7. Listening in order to understand, rather than to respond or correct.

# COURAGE IN JUDAISM AND CHRISTIANITY

## JEWISH TEACHING: THE NEED TO ACT

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### **Questions**

1. Why do you think this teaching has three parts to it? What does each part add to an understanding of when to take action?
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Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for so men persecuted the prophets who were before you.

### **Questions about the Christian teaching**

1. What might Jesus be trying to teach about courage here? When are times when you have felt most welcomed—not just entertained, but truly received?
2. When do you find yourself choosing to do or say what you think is right, even when it's unpopular or potentially will cause you to lose something?
3. How can we protect one another when standing up invites backlash?
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## LISTENING PAIRS

The purpose of this closing activity is to reflect on our own experience and to hear another participant's reflections – and to let that learning sink in. We will be pairing up – one Jewish and one Christian listening partner – and we'll be practicing generous listening.

### Instructions

1. Each partner will reflect on the prompts for 4 minutes, uninterrupted.
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2. I agree to listen to and think about you for a fixed period of time in exchange for you doing the same for me. I keep in my mind that my listening is for your benefit so I do not ask questions for my information, but for your learning.

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4. We maintain confidentiality so we can be authentic.
5. We don't use our speaking time to criticize others, but rather to reflect on our own experience.

### Reflections Prompts

In a moment, please pair up with someone from the other faith background and take turns answering one or more of the following prompts:

1. What did you learn about yourself or your own faith or tradition today?
2. What did you learn about the other faith?
3. What is something new you are taking away with you from today's experience?
4. Is there a commitment you want to make, coming out of today?

# FOR FURTHER READING

## ON JUDAISM

1. *The Jewish Way* by Rabbi Irving Greenberg
2. *Living a Jewish Life* by Anita Diamant
3. *The Sabbath* by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel
4. *Essential Judaism* by George Robinson
5. *A Living Covenant* by Rabbi David Hartman
6. *A Letter in the Scroll: Understanding Our Jewish Identity and Exploring the Legacy of the World's Oldest Religion* by Rabbi Jonathan Sacks
7. [Pirkei Avot: The Ethics of the Fathers](#)
8. <https://www.myjewishlearning.com/>

## ON CHRISTIANITY

1. *Simply Christian: Why Christianity Makes Sense* by N. T. Wright
2. *Mere Christianity* by C.S. Lewis
3. *The Story of Christianity (Vols. I and II)* by Justo Gonzalez
4. *The Early Church* by Henry Chadwick
5. *Catholicism: A Journey to the Heart of the Faith* by Bishop Robert Barron
6. *The Orthodox Way* by Bishop Kallistos Ware
7. *Christianity's Dangerous Idea: The Protestant Revolution* by Alister E. McGrath
8. The Gospels (in this order): Mark, Matthew, Luke, and John (Revised Standard Version)
9. Epistle to the Hebrews (Revised Standard Version)
10. Epistle of James (Revised Standard Version)

## ON ANTISEMITISM

1. *A Convenient Hatred: A History of Antisemitism* by Phyllis Goldstein
2. *Antisemitism Here and Now* by Debra Lipstadt
3. *People Love Dead Jews: Reports from a Haunted Present* by Dara Horn
4. *Anti-Judaism: The Western Tradition* by David Nirenberg
5. *Why the Jews? The Reason for Antisemitism* by Dennis Prager
6. "What Is Happening Here" podcast series by Canadaland on antisemitism in Canada <https://podcasts.apple.com/ca/podcast/what-is-happening-here-canadaland-investigates/id1438924421>









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