NECHAMA Talking Point Guide for Interfaith Conversations

At NECHAMA, we've seen firsthand how disaster response and recovery work can be a powerful bridge between communities. Service is not just about doing, it's about being present with others. We believe working side-by-side builds the kind of trust that fosters dialogue. For decades, we've worked alongside non-Jewish partners, organizations, and volunteers, and in that time, we've learned what builds trust, understanding, and lasting relationships. This guide is designed to help you foster those same connections through conversation and shared values.

1. Start With Shared Humanity:
Show your values through presence, not preaching.

We don't need to "teach" our values - we can **show** them through how we show up. Instead of leading with explanations, start with experiences. Ask questions. Listen. Invite curiosity.
What's worked well:

- Framing Jewish values not as foreign concepts, but as deeply human ones, including values found across many cultures and religions.
- Letting people see that these values inform *why* we're here and *how* we serve.

Try This:

- "In Jewish tradition, we have this concept called *Tikkun Olam*, or repairing the world. This value is at the heart of NECHAMA and motivates us to provide comfort to victims of disaster. What values guide your approach to service?"
- "At NECHAMA, our goal is to infuse *Chesed*, loving-kindness, into all of our work. Does your tradition have a similar value?"

2. Invite Conversations, Not Just Explanations
Create space for shared exploration, not one-way dialogue.

People connect more when they feel heard, not lectured. Instead of offering answers, create space for curiosity and mutual discovery.

Try This:

- "Have you ever experienced service work that felt sacred or spiritual? What contributed to that feeling? How can we recreate that together?"

- "Are there ways your tradition encourages people to show up during a crisis?"
  Note: Identify future collaboration opportunities. If both communities have similar programs, encourage a joint partnership!

3. Addressing Misunderstandings/Antisemitism with Grace
Start with empathy, not defensiveness.

Sometimes, tough or awkward questions come up — about Judaism, Israel, antisemitism, or Jewish identity. On rare occasions, you may encounter antisemitic rhetoric or attitudes. We have the opportunity - and the responsibility - to respond in ways that challenge harmful ideas while building trust and mutual respect.

What we've learned:

- Most misunderstandings come from assumptions or unfamiliarity, although some may stem from misinformation. Identify the cause of the false belief in your conversation.
- Leading with personal experience softens the conversation.
- These conversations may feel uncomfortable, but leaning into them with honesty and care deepens understanding.

Try This:

- "It sounds like you're curious about this topic. Would you be open to hearing a different perspective/can I share my experience with it?"
- "Certain beliefs about the Jewish community are the result of harmful stereotypes. May I share about how these stereotypes impact us today?"
- "What are some ways we can support one another in responding when negative beliefs arise?"

4. Close With Connection
People remember how you made them feel.

Ending your service day with reflection deepens the emotional impact. It turns a shared task into a shared journey.

Try This:

- "What's something from today you'll take with you?"
- "Was there a moment during our time together that surprised you?"
- "Is there something you'd like to learn more about Judaism or our organization?"

Final Thought
This guide isn't a script. It's a starting point. Use your judgment. Trust your gut. Vulnerability, curiosity, and empathy go further than polished answers. These conversations aren't about being right. They're about showing up with heart.

Tried it out? We'd love to hear what resonated, what surprised you, or what you'd add. Feel free to email Tzlil McDonald (tzlil@nechama.org) with your feedback!