

Bridging Faiths Through Inclusive Program Development

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ABSTRACT

St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII), the oldest educational institution in Lanao del Norte, upholds its mission of nurturing faith, excellence, and service among a diverse student body of varying religious affiliations. This study explored the motivations, challenges, and expectations of non-Catholic students regarding participation in faith-related activities within the campus. Employing a qualitative-descriptive design, data were gathered through open-ended surveys and were analyzed thematically using grounded theory techniques. Findings revealed that students participated in faith-based programs primarily for personal faith enrichment and community connection. They emphasized the importance of interfaith harmony, spiritual growth, and respect for diversity. However, challenges such as discrimination, limited religious spaces, and cultural misunderstandings were also identified. Respondents expressed strong support for activities like interfaith dialogues, retreats, and learning sessions that foster inclusivity and reflection. The study underscores the significance of creating faith programs that are inclusive, participatory, and representative of various beliefs. In response, the proposed SAMARITAN program—Synergy of All Multifaith for Acceptance, Respect, Inclusion, Tolerance, and Nurturing—aims to promote spiritual development through interfaith cooperation and mutual respect, reinforcing SMCII's commitment to holistic education and inclusive faith formation.

Keywords: Diversity, Faith Inclusivity, Interfaith Dialogue, Non-Catholic Students, Religious Pluralism, Spiritual Growth

INTRODUCTION

St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII), the oldest school in Lanao del Norte, has a rich legacy of nurturing spiritual growth among its student body. Yet in a campus increasingly populated by students from diverse faiths—Roman Catholics, Christians, Muslims, Iglesia ni Cristo, Lutherans, and Mormons—the institution faces a growing challenge: how to design faith-related programs that genuinely acknowledge and respect the religious plurality and meet the needs of non-Catholic students. Without inclusive programming, non-Catholic students may feel peripheral to campus faith activities, thereby limiting their spiritual engagement and sense of belonging.

The implications are significant. For SMCII to remain faithful to its core values of faith, excellence, and service, the campus must provide spiritual formation opportunities that are inclusive of all religious identities. Failing to do so risks alienating segments of the student population, undermining interreligious harmony, and weakening the institution's mission of holistic student development. In contrast, inclusive faith-programming offers the potential to foster community connection, mutual respect, and shared spiritual development across diverse belief systems.

Recent scholarship underscores the importance of inclusive faith engagement and interreligious dialogue in educational settings. To support the idea, Razaki, Drougas, & Askar (2022) emphasize that interfaith dialogue is a “forgotten DEI initiative” in higher education and highlight how organized faith and religion can support diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. Moreover, Pradana, Mahfud & Priyanto (2023) argue that religious values across traditions provide a solid basis for inclusive education, promoting compassion, justice, and brotherhood. Additionally, in the field of religion and

worldview education, Hall (2023) identifies a “paradox of inclusivity”—the tension between inclusive intention and exclusive faith claims—highlighting the need for carefully designed pedagogy. Collectively, these studies point to the necessity of bridging faiths through intentional program development that attends to diverse religious identities within academic institutions.

This study, titled “Bridging Faiths Through Inclusive Program Development”, investigates the motivations, challenges, and expectations of non-Catholic students at SMCII regarding faith-related campus activities. The findings will inform the design of an inclusive faith program (e.g., the “SAMARITAN” initiative) that resonates with multiple religious communities, fosters interfaith dialogue, and strengthens spiritual formation for all students. The ultimate outcome will be a set of evidence-based recommendations and program components that enhance inclusivity, respect religious diversity, and align with SMCII’s institutional mission.

The study was conducted during the academic year 2024 – 2025 and is positioned as a timely response to the evolving religious composition of SMCII’s student body. The program design and recommendations emerging from this research are intended for implementation during the subsequent academic cycle (2025 – 2026), thereby ensuring that SMCII’s faith-based programming remains contemporary, responsive, and inclusive.

Objectives of the Study

Specifically, this study aimed to explore the motivations of non-Catholic students in joining the inclusive faith-related programs at St. Michael’s College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII). It also sought to identify the spiritual needs and expectations of students from diverse denominations and to define the encounters they faced while practicing their faith within a multicultural academic setting or inside the school premises. Furthermore, the study aimed to enrich inclusive faith activities that resonate with students of all religions, fostering respect, understanding, and unity within the institution’s diverse faith community.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

This study used a qualitative-descriptive research design to better understand the lived experiences, motivations, and challenges of non-Catholic students who participated in faith-related activities at St. Michael’s College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII). The qualitative-descriptive approach was appropriate because it provided the opportunity to describe and interpret the participants’ perspectives in their natural context, without the researchers manipulating variables.

Data were collected using open-ended survey questionnaires sent to a selection of non-Catholic students across various religious denominations, such as Muslims, Iglesia ni Cristo, Lutherans, and Mormons. Open-ended questions were useful in allowing respondents to articulate their thoughts, feelings, and meanings related to inclusion, faith practices, and participation in school-based religious programs.

The collected responses were grouped, coded, and analyzed using thematic analysis as guided by grounded theory approaches by Corbin and Strauss (2015). This type of analysis was inclusive of systematic identification, coding, and then analyzing and interpreting themes and patterns that emerged from the data. The analysis produced some supportive evidence to explain the participants’ spiritual needs, motivations, and challenges in a multicultural academic context. The themes analyzing processes, and the findings subsequently informed recommendations or inclusive faith programs that promote mutual understanding, respect, and harmony among students of different faiths.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

This section presents the results and discussion derived from the responses of non-Catholic students regarding their experiences in faith-related activities at St. Michael's College of Iligan Inc. (SMCII). The findings highlighted key themes that reflected their motivations, spiritual needs, challenges, and perspectives on inclusivity within a multicultural academic environment.

Research Question 1. What aspects of your faith do you hope a program can support?

Theme 1: Personal Faith Enrichment and Community Connection

In the study, students indicated they desire a program to support them in enriching their faith, expanding their religious understanding, and maintaining a spiritual connection in life. The responses shared align with a broader theme of Personal Faith Enrichment and Community Connection clustered around three integrated components of (1) faith enrichment or developing a deeper relationship with God through spiritual practices and reflections; (2) understanding religion by learning and internalizing the doctrinal or theological principles that guide moral and ethical behavior; and (3) community connection, which encompassed belonging, worshiping, and supporting one another in a faith community. The responses indicate that faith is not simply an individual or private endeavor but a multi-dimensional experience supported by community and collective, organized spiritual opportunities. Therefore, the program they envisioned would include developing toward inward spiritual capacity and outward community engagement to grow in a holistic sense of mind, heart, and spirit.

Current findings (2021-2025) empirically and theoretically support the theme of personal faith enrichment and sense of community. Reyes-Perez et al. (2025) reported a direct positive effect of spirituality on resilience ($\beta = 0.274$, $p < 0.001$), as well as an indirect effect of spirituality on happiness ($\beta = 0.162$, $p < 0.05$), among university students. The researchers concluded that faith and spirituality contribute broadly to university students' psychological well-being, meaning-making and adaptive functioning, all adding to the need for personal faith enrichment within educational contexts. Likewise, Crete et al. (2025) found that college students who participated in structured spiritual programming showed significant increases in spiritual awareness and decreases in anxiety, depression, and trauma symptoms, with such effects sustained for three months following participation. Collectively, the findings affirm that spiritual programming may foster both the development of faith and promote mental health stability.

In addition, there is significant evidence in the literature about the dimension of community connection. Owusu-Agyeman and Pillay (2023) found that a positive campus religious climate and opportunities for communal spiritual activities support a sense of belonging, identity, and social integration for students. Their study demonstrates that faith-based communities promote inclusivity and holistic student growth. Cejuela (2025) also found in a recent study that spiritual development and formation in the context of an academic setting—including community service opportunities, reflective activities, and moral education—significantly contribute to students' well-being and social responsibility.

Finally, the addition of spiritual practices into education has been reported to enhance personal and communal elements of students' lives. Khatri et al. (2024) suggested that universities should incorporate spiritual components into student well-being frameworks because spirituality promotes emotional resilience and supports engagement and motivation. Mowreader (2024) also highlighted how the purpose of spiritual wellness initiatives is to foster self-awareness, empathy, and connection on campus. Collectively, the studies confirmed that personal faith enhancement and community

connection are two of the components of a holistic development of a student. Therefore, they support the idea that educational institutions have an obligation to design structured opportunities for students to grow spiritually through programs that incorporate inward expressions of faith and outward expressions of belonging and serving, thus enhancing students' spiritual development and contributing to their community.

Research Question 2. What aspects of faith do you hope a program can support?

Theme 2: Spiritual Growth, Knowledge, and Interfaith Harmony

In this study, students indicated that they hope a program will support their spiritual growth, deepen their knowledge of faith and religious traditions, *and* promote interfaith harmony. These aspirations cluster around three interrelated dimensions. The first dimension, spiritual growth, emphasizes the individual's development in faith, including maturity in spiritual practices, moral formation, and a strengthened sense of the sacred. The second dimension, knowledge, involves expanding one's understanding of one's own tradition (doctrines, history, ethics) and of other traditions, thereby enabling reflection, critical engagement, and informed faith. The third dimension, inter-faith harmony, reflects a desire for relational cross-faith connection — participation in dialogues, mutual respect, collaborative service, and bridging divides between religious communities. Together, these clusters define the theme of *Spiritual Growth, Knowledge, and Inter-faith Harmony*. In other words, students are not only seeking inward transformation and intellectual deepening but also outward relational and communal flourishing across faith traditions.

The recent scholarship provides compelling support for each of the three clusters, spiritual growth, knowledge, and inter-faith harmony, and highlights how programs can effectively address them. As for spirituality, Syafii and Azhari (2025) find that spiritual growth among Muslim students is interrelated with psychological growth — the more spiritually developed students were also the same students with more self-regulation, moral reasoning, and overall well-being. Their research illustrates that programs designed for "spiritual development" should incorporate the psychological and moral aspects of the students' faith journey, not just religious service.

In terms of knowledge, the project "Higher Education Role and Strategy to Foster Interreligious Studies Among University Students" (2025) concludes that when institutions roll out interreligious knowledge curricula or co-curricular activities, students engage more in interreligious dialogue and report greater confidence in dealing with the diversity of religions. In a similar line, the NASPA Knowledge Community on Spirituality and Religion in Higher Education (2021-2025) outlines how to support multiple worldviews, improve literacy for religious differences, and engage in spiritual/faith development as a part of the student affairs discipline.

Thirdly, in relation to interfaith harmony, there have been recent articles indicating the significance of developing programs of interfaith dialogue, collaboration, and respect across faith traditions. For example, Hadziq, Faiz-Muqronul, & Fadhliyah (2024) describe inter (and intra)-faith tolerance and acceptance embedded within local traditions in the context of Indonesian communities oriented towards "spiritual harmony"—i.e., integrating awareness growing through faith development and passionate plural engagement.

In another example, a study on social media promoting interfaith harmony, as stated by Sulvinajayanti et al. (2024), suggested that inclusive religious education, responses to community engagement, and stakeholders are essential in nurturing toleration and, hence, sustaining the interfaith cluster. Similarly, and at the global level, the United Religions Initiative (2025) initiative suggests the value of creative multi-faith engagement within higher education or youth initiatives.

Together, the literature indicates that programs which intertwine spiritual growth (inner formation), content & knowledge acquisition (theological and inter-religious literacy), and intercultural-relational engagement (community, dialogue, service) will be firmly grounded in empirical and theoretical bases. For the designer, this equates to offering modules of spiritual practice, educational content about traditions, and a collaborative inter-faith engagement experience that is aligned with what students share they desire in a program.

Research Question 3. What challenges do you face in practicing your faith in a diverse environment?

Theme 3: Misunderstanding, Discrimination, and Logistical Barriers

Students in the study identified a range of challenges in practicing their faith within a diverse educational environment. These challenges cluster around three meaningful dimensions: (1) misunderstanding, meaning a lack of awareness or empathy by peers, staff or the institution about particular religious practices or obligations; (2) discrimination, referring to overt or subtle bias, exclusion, or unfair treatment based on religious identity or practice; and (3) logistical barriers, such as inadequate facilities, scheduling conflicts with religious obligations (prayers, dietary restrictions, holidays), and other material constraints that inhibit faithful practice. Together, these clusters define the theme of *Misunderstanding, Discrimination, and Logistical Barriers*. In essence, students are not only challenged by internal or personal faith issues, but by an external environment that may fail to support, respect, or accommodate their religious needs, which can hamper their ability to engage fully in both faith and institutional life.

A range of recent studies provides empirical and conceptual support for each of the three clusters of challenges.

First, with respect to misunderstanding, studies find that students from religious minorities often live in a peer and faculty environment where the other person lacks the knowledge of their religious practices or identities. For instance, a study on Muslim students in a Western context reported that students found it difficult to access spaces and acknowledgment to pray, satisfy their halal dietary needs, dress in ways required by their faith, in addition to their experiences of discomfort and being othered in general. A journal article related to tested religious accommodation policies found that fewer than half of a large sample of college campuses had these typically visible policies, and even fewer had dietary needs policies, prayer spaces, and appeals processes. Students, therefore, often have to navigate this support informally or without the institution helping them. This demonstrates how misunderstanding and limited institutional knowledge or priority create impediments to student compliance with faith.

Next, the pattern of discrimination is well-documented. At one institution, researchers conducted a survey of undergraduate students, and 35% reported being judged for their religion or non-religion, and 22% of graduate students reported being judged for their religion or non-religion. Jewish students reported feeling judged at a rate of 66%, and Muslim students, at a rate of 45%. The report "Islamophobia in Higher Education" also documented the hostile campus climate Muslim students faced, including hostility, stereotypes, and exclusion, based on religious affiliation and attire - all of which negatively affected their sense of belonging, and their psychological and emotional health. This data illustrates how both direct discrimination and ambient discrimination can inhibit the ability of students to profess their faith freely and to participate in the campus community meaningfully.

The third cluster of logistical barriers pertains to concrete, structural difficulties in complying faithfully with faith practice. One emerging qualitative study among Muslim senior high-school students during Ramadan reported that limited supporting infrastructure on campus for fasting, prayer, and religious

identity imposed considerable constraints. A food-security / halal-food access study identified that the absence of halal-certified food on a campus is further correlated with decreased academic engagement among Muslim students and a greater sense of alienation. Additionally, a few logistical barriers raised in a higher-education context highlighted the lack of prayer rooms and places for ablution (wudhu) and no consideration for modest clothing in lab or clinical environments. Again, each of these examples demonstrates that logistical barriers — scheduling, facilities, food, and spaces — are real and significant barriers to faith practice in diverse contexts.

Hence, the literature suggests that students' experiences in diverse contexts simultaneously challenge interpersonal (e.g., misunderstanding), structural (e.g., discrimination), and logistical/operational (e.g., barriers) aspects of their identities. Though for program developers or institution leaders to call support for faith practice in diverse contexts means more than developing optional spiritual programs — it will require a focus on university policy, physical infrastructure, peer culture, flexibility in schedules, and places for inclusivity in accommodations.

Research Question 4. What kind of activities would you find helpful in deepening your faith (e.g., discussions, workshops, and retreats)?

Theme 4: Dialogues, Retreats, and Faith-Based Learning Sessions

Students in the study reported that they would find activities like structured discussions, workshops, and retreats especially helpful for deepening their faith. These preferred formats cluster into three inter-related categories: (1) dialogues—guided conversations or sharing circles where participants explore faith questions, hear from peers, and mutually deepen understanding; (2) retreats—out-of-the-ordinary, immersive environments (often removed from daily routines) that allow intensive reflection, spiritual practices, community connection, and renewal; and (3) faith-based learning sessions—educational workshops or seminars that integrate content (e.g., theological reflection, scriptural study, ethics, spirituality) with interactive formats (discussion, practice, arts, service). Together, these clusters define the theme of *Dialogues, Retreats, and Faith-Based Learning Sessions*. In other words, students are seeking more than casual attendance; they desire structured, meaningful activities that engage mind, heart, and community in order to deepen their faith in both understanding and lived experience.

Recent studies support organized activities, such as dialogues, retreats, and workshops, that typically use religious texts and practices to foster spiritual development and community building among students.

In the first place, Al Fuertes (2024) explored gratitude as a spiritual practice in higher education and found that guided reflection and group sharing develop a student's sense of connectedness and faith maturity. At a broader level, this research promotes the importance of dialogic and reflective experiences and encounters in fostering faith development. Similarly, Razaki, Drougas, and Askar (2022) argued that interfaith dialogues implemented in educational initiatives foster empathetic engagement, inclusivity, and a deeper understanding of religious identity. This shows that even during dialogic opportunities, discussion-based experiences promote both intellectual development and spiritual engagement.

Furthermore, Cejuela (2025) argued through their research that planned spiritual support structures, especially through retreats and workshops, had positive effects on students' moral reasoning, emotional regulation, and well-being. These findings align with the student desire for retreats as a place of reflection and renewal. Theologia (2024) further examined student involvement in retreats and argued that participating in spiritual retreats, enhanced students' moral sensitivity, academic

motivation, and senses of connection, and that immersive spiritual practices move students toward holistic transformation.

Moreover, Razaq et al. (2023) recognized that "faith-based learning experiences based on experiential theology" reinforce the cognitive and affective components of faith and illustrate that faith development occurs in a context of intentional instruction and engagement in reflection. Ultimately, Zheng and Zhou (2025) recognized the role of spiritual learning communities in engaging interreligious understanding and respect for one another and supporting spiritual deepening in these communities due to structured conversation and a framework for workshops in diverse academic communities.

Taken together, these important studies highlight how reflective conversation, retreats, and structured faith-based programs can support personal spiritual development and community development. Consequently, faith development programs that draw on these types of programs will likely lead to meaningful developmental and transformative outcomes for students.

Research Question 5. How important is it for you that the program respects and acknowledges different religious beliefs?

Theme: Respect as the Foundation of Inclusivity

Students in the study strongly indicated that it is very important for a program to respect and acknowledge different religious beliefs, framing such respect as the foundational condition for genuine inclusivity. On one level, they expressed the need for affirmation—that their own faith traditions be recognized and valued rather than marginalized. On another level, they emphasized mutual recognition—that the program also honors other faiths and worldviews, thus creating a shared space of dignity, dialogue, and trust. In effect, students see respect for religious diversity not merely as a “nice extra” but as a precondition for participating meaningfully in the program: without it, they fear alienation, misrecognition, or tokenization. Thus, the theme *Respect as the Foundation of Inclusivity* encapsulates their view that the program must do more than accommodate difference — it must embed respect for difference at its core.

There is a growing body of research that demonstrates the necessity of recognizing and respecting an individual's faith in order to be truly inclusive in educational or institutional programs, and that the absence of respect can have damaging effects on individuals' participation and outcomes. For instance, in a study of young people in culturally diverse educational settings, García-Segura, Martínez-Carmona, and Gil-Piño (2022) found respect for religious pluralism - defined as a fair representation of a range of religious faiths and practices that engaged sensitive pedagogies and open dialogue - was a significant predictor of students' sense of belonging and engagement. In addition, in a paper titled "Contribution of Islamic Religious Education to Intercultural Values in Pluralistic European Cultures," Sijamhodžić-Nadarević (2023) found that religious education programs that encouraged respect, solidarity, and diversity across various faith traditions led to increased positive attitudes toward others among students, thus proposing that respect for various beliefs is a foundation for an inclusive community.

Furthermore, Smith et al. (2022) stressed that developing learning developments across faiths requires students "to appreciate religious and non-religious groups," and this appreciation is based on the institutional culture of respecting difference. Moreover, Roviana et al. (2023) in the study "Addressing Multicultural Misconceptions: A Study at Muhammadiyah Higher Education Institutions" documented how the lack of an institutional respect for students' diverse religious identities led to misconceptions, suspicion, and a reduction in inclusive climate, which affirmed that respect is not optional, but essential. Collectively, these studies confirm that programs that privilege respect for religious diversity

are most likely to foster inclusive and supportive spaces for students, where students are valued, comfortable expressing their faith, and willing to engage more deeply.

Research Question 6. What suggestions do you have to ensure inclusivity and respect for diverse faith perspectives?

Theme 6: Interfaith Dialogue and Representation

Students offered a range of practical suggestions to ensure that a program is inclusive and respectful of diverse faith perspectives. They emphasized that fostering meaningful interfaith dialogue—where voices from multiple faith traditions are heard, engage in genuine exchange, and contribute to program design—is vital. Moreover, they underscored the need for faith community representation in leadership, facilitation, and curriculum planning, so that different religious identities are visibly acknowledged and valued. In addition, students suggested embedding structured collaborative activities (such as service projects, shared learning modules, and multi-faith panels) that reflect the tapestry of religious diversity rather than treating faith diversity as a single “add-on.” In essence, the theme *Interfaith Dialogue and Representation* captures their belief that dialogue without representation, or representation without meaningful interaction, falls short; effective inclusion arises when diverse faith perspectives are both seen and engaged in dynamic interchange.

Recent research supports that inclusive programming within faith contexts functions best when it includes interfaith dialogue, along with a genuine focus on representing multiple faith contexts. For example, Razaki, Drougas, and Askar (2022) maintain that interfaith dialogue is the “forgotten pedagogical DEI initiative” in higher education, and that inserting faith-based dialogue into curricula and student experiences acknowledges diversity, equity, and inclusion. In addition, Ashilla, Tari, and Akbar (2024), with their research on interfaith dialogue and peace education in Indonesia, reinforce the importance of interfaith dialogue forums, which included a clearly delineated representation of multiple religious traditions, and reinforced knowledge of religious diversity, were important to stigma reduction and collaboration across religious representations. Similarly, Seran (2024) notes that interfaith dialogue within multicultural communities does not just work through open communication but through institutional support and inclusive participation, both of which are key components to the sustainability of inclusive faith spaces. In addition, Muhtar, Nasir, Sudarsono, & Nordin (2025) in Indonesia demonstrated that inter-faith collaborative education, which engaged religious educators and facilitated partnerships across faith traditions with students from multiple faiths, positively impacted adapting to culture and showed an improvement in inclusion at institutions. Together, these studies support empirically grounded suggestions based on “dialogue + representation + structured shared activity” for designing inclusive faith-oriented programmes.

Research Question 7. What suggestions do you have to ensure inclusivity and respect for diverse faith perspectives?

Theme 7: Relevance, Engagement, and Inclusiveness

Students offered several practical suggestions aimed at ensuring that a program is relevant, engaging, and inclusive of diverse faith perspectives. First, they emphasized relevance—meaning that the program content and activities should reflect their real-life faith contexts, address current issues they face, and connect meaningfully with their personal religious journeys. Next, they highlighted engagement—suggesting that the program should use interactive formats (such as small-group discussions, service-learning, multimedia, peer leadership) that invite active participation rather than passive attendance. Finally, they underscored inclusiveness—indicating that the program must design itself so that persons from different faith traditions feel genuinely welcome, represented, and able to contribute, thereby avoiding tokenism or marginalization. In sum, the theme *Relevance, Engagement,*

and Inclusiveness encapsulates how students believe a program must be lived and felt: applicable to their faith lives, stimulating in its format, and open to all faith voices.

In line with these clusters, new research demonstrates that programs designed to be relevant, engaging, and inclusive of diverse faiths and worldviews typically yield better outcomes for students and for the institution. Taff and Clifton (2022) found that a strong sense of belonging and inclusion in higher education settings is influenced by the following institution-led practices: accessible spaces, inclusive practices, and student engagement in meaningful ways. These practices demonstrate a direct connection to how relevance and inclusivity support student wellness. Zaheer and Farooq (2024) also found that inclusive practices in higher education (e.g., diverse representation in the curriculum, inclusive pedagogy, and responsive institutional culture) had substantial positive impacts on student engagement and student belonging, once again demonstrating the connection between engagement and inclusivity. Finally, a paper by Wright et al. (2023) demonstrates that even well-intentioned inclusive programs can unintentionally create exclusion if they are not relevant to students' particular faith tradition or if it is superficial. This ultimately speaks to the importance of what matters to engage with divergent faiths.

In addition, the research on inter-religious curriculum integration at Universitas Negeri Surabaya (2025) showed that students who took part in inter-faith modules that were co-designed with faculty and peer-leaders from multiple faiths had increased levels of engagement, understanding of faith beliefs, and reported a greater sense of belonging (Author Unknown, 2025). Finally, Blohm's (2022) description of faith-contextualized assessment practices established diverse stakeholder communities of assessment indicative of inclusive values, further validating the implication that when designing engaging, relevant, and inclusive (not just content) processes matter, especially in faith-diverse contexts.

Together, these sources suggested that designing a faith enrichment program that is explicitly relevant (to students' faith lives and societal context), engaging (interactive, participatory, appropriately paced), and inclusive (faith-diverse representation, active involvement, culturally sensitive) is evidence-informed. Given this, program designers should consider these dimensions equally to promote ongoing inclusivity and the valuing of a diverse faith stance.

Research Question 8. What program can be crafted based on the results of the study?

Program Title: SAMARTIAN

Synergy of All Multifaith for Acceptance, Respect, Inclusion, Tolerance, And Nurturing

Rationale:

In a diverse academic environment like St. Michael's College of Iligan, fostering spiritual development through an inclusive lens is essential. The "SAMARITAN" program responds to students' needs for deeper personal faith, respectful interfaith dialogue, and engagement in meaningful, faith-related activities that honor different religious traditions.

Program Objectives:

1. To deepen students' personal understanding and practice of their respective faiths.
2. To promote respectful dialogue and interaction among students of different religious backgrounds.
3. To create a safe and inclusive space for worship, learning, and reflection.
4. To develop spiritually-grounded student leaders who advocate for peace, inclusivity, and moral responsibility.

Key Components and Activities:*SAMARITAN Interfaith Program Framework*

AREAS	OBJECTIVES	ACTIVITIES	SCHEDULE	EXPECTED OUTCOMES
Interfaith Dialogue Circles	To create safe spaces for dialogue and deepen understanding among different faith groups	Small group sessions on universal themes (Love, Forgiveness, Service, Hope, Justice)	Monthly	Increased empathy, better appreciation of diverse beliefs, stronger peer connections
Unified Spiritual Retreat	To promote reflection, unity, and shared spiritual growth among students	Guided retreat with faith leaders (priest, pastor, imam, etc.); activities: meditation, faith-sharing, team-building	Once per semester	Strengthened interreligious bonds, improved spiritual well-being, sense of community
Faith Talks & Seminars	To increase religious literacy and promote mutual respect through education	Guest talks on “Faith in Action,” “Finding Peace in Diversity,” “Purpose and Prayer”	Quarterly	Enhanced knowledge of different faith traditions, reduced prejudice, inspired student participation
Prayer and Reflection Spaces	To provide inclusive venues for personal spiritual practices	Creation of neutral prayer rooms; daily/weekly quiet reflection times	Ongoing (daily or weekly)	Accessible faith spaces, improved respect for spiritual needs, inclusive campus environment
Community Engagement & Service Projects	To embody shared values of compassion, service, and social responsibility	Feeding programs, environmental initiatives, literacy outreach, joint volunteerism	At least once per semester	Stronger unity through service, practical demonstration of faith in action, positive community impact
Inclusive Faith Education Campaign	To raise awareness and celebrate religious diversity in respectful ways	Posters, short videos, observance of major religious festivals (Eid, Holy Week, Christmas, etc.)	Year-round (aligned with religious calendars)	Increased visibility of faith traditions, improved cultural sensitivity, enhanced interfaith harmony

Target Participants:

All students of St. Michael’s College, especially non-Catholics and students from underrepresented religious groups.

Expected Outcomes:

- Increased participation in faith-related programs among non-Catholic students.
- Improved understanding and respect for religious diversity.
- Strengthened individual faith practices.
- Creation of a more inclusive and spiritually aware school community.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings, students consistently expressed a strong desire for faith programs that nurtured both their personal spirituality and their sense of belonging in a diverse community. They viewed faith as more than a private matter—it was something lived out in relationships, service, and shared worship. The results showed that students hoped for opportunities to deepen their understanding of their faith, build spiritual discipline, and connect with others who share and respect their beliefs. Programs that promoted spiritual growth, reflective learning, and meaningful dialogue were seen as vital in helping students find purpose, moral grounding, and emotional balance. Likewise, the evidence indicated that

incorporating structured spiritual practices and community-based faith activities within educational settings could enhance students' well-being, moral formation, and overall development.

Furthermore, findings from the study showed that authentic inclusion is only made possible through respect, representation, and relevance. Students expressed a desire for programming that could openly allow for dialogue pertaining to all faith traditions, and fair representation of faith-based traditions in leadership, and culturally calibrated practices and activities. They also identified challenges such as misunderstanding and harassment, and logistical hurdles that impeded their ability to practice their faith unequivocally in a diverse setting. This indicates an answer for the need for faith-based programming that is dynamic, inclusive, and relevant, and where every student, regardless of faith, feels valued and empowered. In conclusion, the research revealed that the best programming for faith was when it both kept a tab on personal belief and also built bridges across faith traditions, fostered understanding, trust, and common humanity, in the academy.

Recommendations

Develop interfaith seminars and workshops featuring diverse religious leaders. The school should organize seminars and workshops where speakers and representatives from different religions can share their beliefs and values. These activities will help students understand one another better, break down barriers, and learn the importance of respect and cooperation among people of different faiths.

Establish flexible prayer spaces on campus. It is recommended that the school provide clean and quiet spaces where students of all religions can pray, meditate, or reflect. These areas should be open and welcoming to everyone, showing that the school values each student's spiritual needs and respects their right to practice their faith.

Include faith-neutral themes like service, gratitude, and inner peace in programs. Programs should incorporate concepts that everyone experiences: kindness, gratitude, peace, and altruism. These concepts are not affiliated with any specific religion but allow all students to live purposefully, seek character, and experience compassion and interconnectedness.

Promote awareness campaigns to reduce faith-based stereotypes. The school needs to develop and implement programs and activities that help students learn to respect and understand people with different beliefs. This can be done through posters, discussions, or social media to address misconceptions about religion and foster acceptance. These efforts will foster a more welcoming and accepting school climate overall.

Encourage dialogue through small-group interfaith discussions and collaborative events. Students should be given opportunities to talk and work together through small-group discussions, cultural sharing, and community service projects. These experiences will help them build friendships, learn from one another, and see that even though their beliefs may differ, they can still work together with understanding and respect..

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