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## A look at Charlotte's diverse religious scene

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As director of Harvard University's Pluralism Project, Diana Eck is the leading authority on America's changing religious landscape. She'll be in Charlotte next week in connection with "Families of Abraham," a photo exhibit at the Levine Museum of the New South that spotlights local Jewish, Christian and Muslim families.

### **Q. You've said America is the world's most religiously diverse nation. How about the Carolinas?**

The Carolinas are remarkably diverse. More than 30 Buddhist communities. Not only EuroAmerican meditation centers that tend to cluster in the mountains and retreat areas, but (also) places that are Buddhist centers built by immigrants from Asia. A Lao temple, a couple of Vietnamese temples, a Chinese temple right there in Charlotte.

### **Q. How does Charlotte fit into the national picture?**

The "Families of (Abraham)" exhibit is a fairly major civic step forward, to take serious note of Muslim communities in Charlotte and then make that part of a Muslim-Jewish-Christian exhibit that offers an up-close-and-personal look at people of various religious traditions.

### **Q. What can that do for a city?**

**What it does is enable people to see one another face to face. We learn about religious life not so much by reading books but by recognizing the faith of religious neighbors. One of the things the exhibit does is enable that kind of insight, to see deeply into the ways in which these three communities, for example, welcome a new child.**

### **Q. How has your work colored your faith?**

**I grew up a Montana Methodist. So I came upon my religious studies as someone who was a person of faith. The study of Hinduism and Islam and the Sikhs deepened and broadened my own faith. I take the parts of the New Testament and the witness of Jesus to welcome the foreigner among us as an important clue that we don't need to be looking for the divine and God-with-us-in-the-form-of-Christ only within the walls of the church. That's a kind of idolatry, to think that only Christianity can contain the truth of the one we call God. I have a very wide open view of Christianity. But I'm still very much a practitioner of my own tradition. I go to a prayer meeting every morning for 15 minutes, in Harvard Yard. And I don't consider it a difficulty to also open my heart in prayer in a Hindu temple or in an Islamic center. That's the sort of God I believe in.**

### **Q. Your message in Charlotte?**

**At the museum, I'm going to talk about the insight into religious life that we get from the portraits of people. And at Myers Park (Baptist Church), I'm going to talk about the challenges of religious pluralism -- as people of faith and as citizens in the new multi-religious reality of America.**

**FAITH & VALUES**

**Questions for**

**Tim Funk**