

Empathizing (Sikhism)

A Sikh Guest Speaker or a Visit to a *Gurdwara*

Sikhs have come to live in most major cities and in many smaller communities in the United States. Thus, it may be possible to invite a Sikh to speak with your classes. There are also *gurdwaras* in many cities, and Sikhs welcome visitors. Also, it would be interesting for the students to be able to dine at a Sikh *langar*, the common kitchen in the *gurdwara* where Sikhs serve food to all visitors free of charge. Most *langars* serve vegetarian food only so that all people will feel welcome, regardless of dietary restrictions. *Langar* is offered to Sikhs and non-Sikhs without distinction, and your class would likely be welcomed warmly.

Worship, Work, and Charity

Sikhs' lives are guided by the three principles of worship, work, and charity. Have the students discuss in groups how they engage in each of these in their own lives. Encourage the students to explore to what extent these commitments arise from their own faith lives, and ask them to consider what role each plays in their lives and what level of importance they place on each.

The Role of Ritual and Liturgy

Sikhs believe that simple worship is quite sufficient. Ask the students to examine the role of ritual in their own faith tradition and to consider how ritual might enhance their experience of worship. If many or most of the students are Catholic, it would be interesting to compare and contrast the Tridentine Mass with the post-Vatican II Masses more common today.

The Five Ks

Sikhs customarily wear the Five Ks, which are physical symbols of their faith. These include: *kesh* (leaving their hair long, tied into a bun, with men and some women covering it with a turban), *kangha* (a small circular comb), *kirpan* (a short dagger or sword), *kara* (a steel bracelet worn on the right wrist), and *kach* (white shorts worn as underwear). Ask the students to reflect on what physical symbols of their religious tradition are significant for them. Do they have a religious symbol that they wear daily? What does doing so mean for them? This can lead to a discussion of the rights of people to wear or carry religious symbols in a society such as ours that upholds freedom of religion. Sikhs have been detained in airports, for example, because the *kirpan* was deemed a violation of TSA restrictions on what can be carried onto an airplane.

