

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

# Interfaith center in Oman teaches us about cooperation

**Note:** This column is part of an ongoing effort to build interfaith understanding in Michigan. It is coordinated by Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University.



Kindschi

By Douglas Kindschi

I am traveling in the Middle East in the country of Oman. Located on the southeast coast of the Arabian Peninsula, Oman is about the size of Italy but with a population of less than 5 percent of Italy's. Its 3 million people are primarily Ibadhi Muslims, a

form of Islam distinct from Sunni and Shia. While not as well-known as its neighbors Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates and Yemen, Oman is a modern and progressive Muslim country.

I learned about Oman from Professor David Ford, with whom I worked while a visiting fellow at Cambridge University. He had been invited to give a major address at the Sultan Qaboos Grand Mosque a few years

ago and, while there, became acquainted with then director of the Al Amana Centre, the Rev. Michael Bos. David Ford suggested I contact him, as he now is a pastor at a Reformed Church in New York City.

To my surprise, Bos was from West Michigan and graduated from Grand Valley State before going on to seminary at Western Theological Seminary in Holland. He was very pleased to hear about the interfaith efforts in Michigan and introduced me to the director of the Al Amana Centre, who had just hired Justin Meyers as the new director for education. It

turned out Meyers also was a Grand Valley graduate who went to Western Seminary for his ministerial studies.

I met with the new director and Meyers in Grand Rapids last summer, and they invited me to visit their interfaith center in Muscat, the capital of Oman. It turns out the Reformed Church in America, with national headquarters in Grand Rapids, had established a mission in Oman in the 1800s and had built the first hospital and first school in the country. After modernization under the current sultan, the school and hospital were incorpo-

rated into the national system, so the Reformed Church redirected its efforts to establish the Al Amana interfaith center.

The center sees its mission "to work internationally to build bridges of understanding and cooperation between religions to work for the common good of all." They go on to explain that "Oman's openness, tolerance and hospitality make it an ideal place to introduce international guests to Arab culture and religion."

To accomplish this, the center offers courses for international students and guests and cooperates with Muslim

leaders to support interfaith and intercultural activities that lead to peaceful coexistence. As the group says on its website: "Dialogue and cooperation are no longer a luxury. It is an imperative incumbent upon all of us so that we can live in peace with one another." For more information, visit [alamanacentre.org](http://alamanacentre.org).

With the congregations, communities, colleges and seminaries in the West Michigan area, we are hoping this international collaboration can broaden our efforts for peace in both of our countries and communities.

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