

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Year of Interfaith Service kicks off with mayoral proclamation

By Douglas Kindschi
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Last week, there were hundreds of events remembering and honoring the victims and heroes of the 9/11 terrorist attacks.

Sept. 11 also was the day picked to launch the 2015 Year of Interfaith Service in an event at the Catholic Information Center.

A group of more than 60 people representing Jewish, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, Buddhist,



Kindschi

Baha'i and secular communities also remembered this 13th anniversary, then learned about ways in which our interfaith understanding can move to acts of service.

Following a welcome by our host, the Rev. John Geaney, director of the center and rector of the Cathedral of St. Andrew, Mayor George Heartwell read the proclamation making this coming year a Year of Interfaith Service. He pointed to the strong tradition of religious and secular cooperation in the delivery of vital human services and noted the dramatic diversity in our community "creating an ever greater need for understanding

and cooperation among faith groups."

Two service organizations were highlighted: Guiding Light Mission and Habitat for Humanity. Both welcome interfaith volunteer groups and will continue to do so during the service year. Habitat of Kent County began this past weekend with two interfaith builds with a number of faith traditions and the secular community represented.

We heard from two students who are active interfaith participation and are ready for service. Mohib Azeem, an engineering student at Grand Valley State University, told us how he came to Grand Rapids from Pakistan

with lots of prejudiced ideas about Americans and Jews. He described the turnaround in his mind as well as in his heart. He now loves the freedom and openness in this country, and his best friend is Jewish.

Mohib is the president of the Muslim Student Association at Grand Valley State University. It is planning activities and service projects with the Hillel Center for Jewish Life at GVSU.

Maddie Reeves, a student at Catholic Central High School, told the group how her world expanded when she participated in an interfaith youth council created by the Kent ISD in cooperation with the 2012 Year of

Interfaith Understanding. She said her faith was strengthened as she learned about, understood and respected students who were from different backgrounds. She, too, is inspired and ready to be involved in interfaith service in our community.

The message from these two students was highlighted by the final speaker, Fred Keller, founder of Cascade Engineering, who was inspired by the intergenerational aspect of the service project. He challenged us to make West Michigan a community known for its acceptance of all faith traditions and all races.

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