

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

# A new year of understanding begins through service

By Douglas Kindschi

Director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

In last week's Interfaith Insight, I referred to the dynamic Muslim leader of the Interfaith Youth Core, Eboo Patel, who talked about pluralism as the "American Project," which goes back to the writings of Jefferson, Washington and the Constitution.

Our country was founded on the separation of church and state, as well as a respect for all citizens and their right to believe and practice their faith as they choose. When religion and government become too

intertwined, the danger exists to deny minority positions and beliefs. When respect for those who believe differently is not present, it can lead to violence.

Patel also believes "the twenty-first century will be shaped by the question of the faith line."

He is not referring to differences between different faith traditions, but between what he calls "religious totalitarians" and "religious pluralists."

Will we be building bombs or



Kindschi

building bridges? The majorities of every faith tradition are tolerant and want to live in peace, but there are those in some cultures, and even in our own country, who see religions as fundamentally in opposition.

Osama bin Laden said Christians were out to destroy Muslims, and some Christians argue loudly Muslims are out to destroy Christians. As Patel put it, "They are right next to each other ... an unlikely pair, two totalitarians working collectively against the dream of a common life together."

Why is it that some people read their scripture and find rea-

son to kill, while others read the same scripture and find reasons to love?

As Desmond Tutu once said, "Religion ... is like a knife. When a knife is used to cut bread, it is good. When it is used to cut someone's throat, it is bad."

We all have a responsibility to bring our communities together, not in uniformity, but in common respect and commitment to understanding and peace.

By what we say and do, by how we treat those who are different, we either move our society toward division and clash or toward understanding and respect.

One important way to express

that desire for peace is to be involved in service.

Our theme for this 2015 "Year of Interfaith Service" is from the Dalai Lama.

"Religions must dialogue, but even more, they must come together to serve others."

Or in the words of Gandhi, "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

We invite you to be a part of this American project, this West Michigan community effort to engage in interfaith service.

For more information or to become involved you can reach us at [interfaith@gvsu.edu](mailto:interfaith@gvsu.edu).