

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Appreciating my own faith tradition while learning from others

By Allison Garstecki

Interfaith intern at Aquinas College

As I have learned from my experience in interfaith culture, storytelling is the best way to begin a conversation. Stories connect to create a clear reflection of the Year of Interfaith Service, which I had the privilege to participate in as the Interfaith intern at Aquinas College.

I would like to share a story from my Catholic faith about Holy Thursday, a celebration that precedes the Triduum of Good Friday, Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday.

My story of Holy Thursday begins with Jesus pouring water into a basin with the intention of

washing the feet of His disciples. One of his disciples refuses Jesus' service because it makes him feel a sense of extreme discomfort.

Washing the feet of others was seen as a form of humble servitude, and Jesus' disciples are understandably reluctant to let their Lord wash their feet because they don't want him to appear below them or as a servant. But after some dialogue, the disciples realize Jesus is exercising his humility and servant leadership by washing their feet.

At Holy Thursday Mass, Catholics around the world celebrate this exact ceremony, and it is incredibly beautiful.

This year, I attended this Mass with the Dominican Sisters of Marywood, and the service was different from any other I have encountered. After our feet were

washed, we turned to wash the feet of those behind us. This created a beautiful cascade of people serving each other in one of the most humbling ways I have ever seen, and I was moved to tears.

This could have been because of my amazement at worshippers' resilience as they delicately washed my unattractive, calloused skin from years of playing soccer. However, I believe the emotional connection I have to this experience is much more spiritual.

INTERFAITH EXPERIENCE

Reflecting on that emotional experience, my mind shifts to my experience with interfaith.

In this year alone, I have witnessed countless experiences of humility and service, not just from the Catholic tradition but from others.

For example, I was able to visit our local Sikh Gurdwara. There, I participated in langar, which is essentially the meal that is shared with whoever enters through the door. At the Golden Temple in India, more than 1,000 people are fed per day.

As I consumed the traditional Indian food, I was delighted by a sense of cultural difference as our host continually came by and refilled my water glass. Sharing meals and being delighted by difference have been recurrent themes in my interfaith experience, and they are perfect examples of simple service and hospitality.

As I delight in difference, I also experience a sense of pride in my Catholic tradition. I am able to share my personal experiences with others and bring the fullness of my life experience into

conversations with those who are different from me.

In this way, I take ownership of my experiences and of my identity, which include intersections of millennial, woman and Catholic, among others.

I have been able to dialogue with countless people about their experiences, as well. Through these conversations, I have learned how to communicate with a language that welcomes all people to the table, clearly acknowledging all parts of their identity and taking interest in all of their life experiences.

I look forward to carrying these lessons of humility, service, hospitality and interfaith dialogue throughout my next steps in West Michigan as a young professional — and as an individual — in our community.

— Contact interfaith@gvsu.edu



Garstecki