

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Engaging with, learning from the next generation



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These past few weeks for me have been time away from writing Insights and instead learning from the four college interns and their reflections on interfaith. It has also been a time of connecting with three grandchildren who live in Germany. Our daughter married a German who is a pastor and doing church planting in that country. One of our two granddaughters is studying to be a pediatric nurse at her German university, but has been given the opportunity to study and work at the Helen DeVos Children's Hospital in Grand Rapids. She has been living with us for nearly four months and bringing new energy and perspectives to our lives. Her two brothers completed their secondary education, and before going on to further study have been spending three weeks with us on a "graduation trip," which has included visits to Niagara Falls, New York City and the Grand Canyon, as well as Bryce and Zion canyons. We have also had some time together at our cottage.

The interns at the four area colleges have been sharing their experiences and insights in this column, and it has been encouraging to reflect on their often-fresh understand-

ings of this important topic. In addition, Katie Gordon, who has been the program manager at Kaufman Interfaith Institute these past four years, has written about her plan to take the next step in her interfaith journey by going to Harvard Divinity School to pursue a master's program in theology. Katie joined us right out of her undergraduate program at Alma College. In her time with us, she made so many contacts in the community and helped us see with fresh eyes the perspectives of the college-age and millennial generations.

Her efforts led to the institute now being a part of the Division of Inclusion and Equity at Grand Valley State University, and she has played a major role in our developing the interfaith intern program at area colleges. Her connections to the Interfaith Youth Core, founded and led by Eboo Patel, have given her leadership opportunities with that important organization. It also has given us a national profile with others working on interfaith initiatives at colleges and universities throughout the country. Her impact has been significant in the community and on campus. I have personally learned from her and appreciate all she has done to advance interfaith understanding and acceptance.

These experiences give me new hope for the future when I see the values and energy

of the next generation of leadership exemplified by people like Katie and the college interns. Working these many decades in the university setting, and now seeing my own grandchildren move into this status, gives me new commitment to continue our mission of promoting interfaith understanding, respect and acceptance. As we move forward, I see our mission as continuing the involvement of the whole community as we engage the next generation.

SEEKING MEANINGFUL INVOLVEMENT

I have also been inspired by the writings of Angeles Arrien, who reflects from the perspective of someone closer to my generation. Her book "The Second Half of Life" challenges us to continue the commitment to meaningful activity, service and creativity. While I passed life's "halfway point" some time ago, I have been blessed with opportunities to be meaningfully involved in what I consider to be a "calling" on top of what was a very satisfying career in university administration and teaching.

Arrien, a cultural anthropologist, author and educator, is the president of the Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education and Research. She asks of our generation, "Are we doing work that serves others or generates a meaningful legacy? If not, why not? What do we want to contribute to this

world?" Quoting the Persian poet Rumi, "let the beauty of what we love be what we do," she challenges us to rediscover our interests and passions for work and service. "Without this rediscovery," she adds, "we will be prone to depression, stagnation, and despair."

As we reassess our life callings, she calls us to a new generativity: "To generate is to initiate, to inspire, and to originate something that is meaningful, hopeful, and sustainable for ourselves and others. In generativity, we become mentors and stewards. We give back to our families and communities, sharing our wisdom, experiences and passions, and leaving a legacy." Arrien also warns against the opposite when generative energy is blocked and we face the threats of "stagnation, despair and boredom."

In this stage in life, we need to be inspired by meaning rather than ambition. While the career stage may have been completed, it is never too late to invest in further learning, sharing, and loving. For future generations — as well as for our own sense of well-being — we can still contribute to meaning for ourselves and for our communities. Engaging other generations introduces us to new opportunities for giving and seeking the common good.

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