

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Jerusalem: inspired and confused in the Holy Land

Note: In 2012, MLive.com was a partner in the communitywide "Year of Interfaith Understanding" initiative. The success of that project led to an ongoing effort to build interfaith understanding in West Michigan. This new column, *Interfaith Insights*, is one such effort. It is coordinated by Douglas Kindschi, director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University, and will be written by Kindschi and others in the interfaith community.

By Douglas Kindschi

As of this writing, I have completed three days of inspiration and confusion in what must be the best place in the world to think about interfaith issues. We have visited the Western Wall, which Jews consider the most sacred location in

the world and where thousands come to pray. We visited the Church of the Holy Sepulcher, considered by Christians as the place of the crucifixion and the tomb of Jesus. We have been to the Dome of the Rock and the Al Aqsa Mosque, considered by Muslims as the place where Mohammed took his "night flight" to heaven. All of these sacred sites are within the Old City of Jerusalem and within a half-mile radius. If there is a place where the three Abrahamic traditions come together, this must be it. It has been a most inspiring experience. While our traditions differ in many ways, there is no doubt something special is happening here.



Kindschi

And yet it has been a most confusing time as I consider that while we are all part of the same Abrahamic family, quarrels have continued here throughout history. It is place of conquest and re-conquest, destruction of the temple, persecution, crusades and, today, great controversy of not only who owns this land but who can visit these sites. Political issues in this area of the world are obvious, and our time here will not make a dent in that. However, I am reminded of the theme of the "Year of Interfaith Understanding," which was a quote from theologian Hans Kung: "There can be no peace among the nations without peace among the religions." I believe interfaith understanding can contribute to peaceful solutions here and elsewhere.

Religious faith and religious tradition are important parts of our iden-

tity, and identity comes with boundaries. There is a "we" and a "them," and identity can exclude and even lead to de-humanizing the "other."

I am reminded of the challenge from Professor Avishai Margalit, formerly from Hebrew University here in Jerusalem:

"Can Judaism, Christianity and Islam be pluralistic? The question is not whether they can tolerate one another, but whether they can accept the idea that the other religions have intrinsic value. ... They will not only refrain from persecuting the others but will also encourage the flourishing of their way of life."

This might be the step toward political resolution in this part of the world. Let us seek peace, between nations and between religions. It is our challenge.

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