

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Abraham's children divided in his homeland

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

After another week in Israel, I continue to be inspired and challenged. Hebron, in the southern part of the country, is the place where the patriarchs were buried. We visited the tomb of Abraham, considered by Jews, Christians and Muslims as the common ancestor of our faiths.



Kindschi

It should be a place of coming together and celebrating this commonality. Unfortunately, that is not the case today. Depending on your religion and nationality, the tomb has to be approached from two different entrances. One entrance is a part of a mosque, and the tomb can be viewed through a window, but Jews cannot enter here, only Muslims and Christians. The other entrance is for Jews, but Muslims are not allowed to enter, and neither are Christians if they are not of the right nationality. Here, Abraham's tomb is viewed through a window on the other side of the memorial. You can even see the barrier inside the tomb area that clearly divides this sacred space.

How sad that the tomb of this person that our various religions have

in common cannot even be viewed in common. In fact, the city of Hebron also is divided, and there is not free movement between sectors. Abraham is divided. Hebron is divided. The Holy Land is divided. Christians in America are divided regarding the issues of Israel and Palestine. The sad reality is that our world is divided, politically and religiously.

It is the task of the interfaith effort to seek healing of some of these divisions. While the political divisions might seem insurmountable, the religious divisions can be addressed as we seek to recognize the image of God in someone who might not look like me, have the same color skin as me, dress like me or worship like me.

We are all children of God, made in God's image. We may not think alike or understand God in the same way, yet we are called to love each other. That is the core of interfaith understanding.

I have been travelling with a class from McCormick Theological Seminary, where I am on the board of trustees, and they are students studying to enter Christian ministry. It is a very diverse group from many different denominations and countries.

On Sunday, we were on a boat together on the Sea of Galilee, and the students had prepared a worship service. In the meditation, all of the differences were reviewed, including differences in how we approach our religious practices and understanding. But the theme was: "We are in the boat together."

What a wonderful way to understand not only our experience of that day, but also an image of how we need to look at diversity in our world. We are indeed in this boat together. We must learn to respect each other and indeed love each other and strive for the flourishing of every child of God.

Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu