

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Yousafzai represents the next generation of leaders

By Katie Gordon

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The leadership of the next generation looks like Malala Yousafzai: a hopeful, determined young person, embracing pluralism and striving to make her community — locally and globally — more just and equal.

Last week, we saw interfaith in action when the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to Kailash Satyarthi and Malala Yousafzai, “a Hindu and a Muslim, an Indian and a Pakistani, (who are a part of the) common struggle for education and against extremism,” said Thorbjorn Jagland, prize committee chair-



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to contribute to the greater good.

In a world where the media are consumed with stories of violence and conflict, this was refreshing. However, while not adequately recognized and celebrated, this example of leadership can be found in nearly every community, including our own.

For the past two years, Grand Valley State University has sent

man. We saw proof the values that unite us are stronger than the forces that divide us, and we started to see the potential of coming together

several students to Interfaith Youth Core’s Leadership Institute, where students learn about other traditions not through a textbook but through relationships with their peers. Muslims and Jews, atheists and Christians, Hindus and Buddhists develop friendships based in understanding differences and shared values.

Inherent in this coming together is the desire to serve not only our own communities, but all communities. Better Together @ GVSU, a new student group formed out of this conference, embodies this conviction: We can do more than get along; we can work alongside one another.

This is the only model of social change that has any hope of making an impact on a significant scale in the complex issues we face today — from racism and all forms of discrimination to promoting peace in conflict regions. Millennials, those born between 1980 and 2000, are the perfect generation to lead us to embrace such radical acceptance. As the largest and most diverse generation in the U.S., according to Pew Research, which found 43 percent of millennials are non-white, we interact with people who are different from ourselves every day. We can either use that as a barrier to divide, or we can build bridges of cooperation.

This is why I was so encouraged at our luncheon on Sept. 11, which announced our 2015 Year of Interfaith Service. When a college student and high school student shared their insights with a crowd of more than 60 community leaders, the sense of hope was strong.

At that luncheon, local political, business and religious leaders agreed: In order for our 2015 Year of Interfaith Service to have the greatest impact, it must be an intergenerational effort. We must learn from the young people in our communities, our own Malalas, who are leading the way in creating a respectful dialogue.

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