

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Tolerance, a message from the Arab country of Oman

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In previous columns, I have urged us to go beyond mere religious tolerance to positions of hospitality, understanding, respect and acceptance. While this still should be our goal, it is an unfortunate reality that there are many places in the world where tolerance would be a significant accomplishment.

In a world of threats from ISIS and the Khorasan Group in Syria, we must hope and pray for tolerance. Where people are killed because of their religious affiliation, tolerance is called for.



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thousands, of Muslims who were Shia and Kurds also have been murdered. Oh that mere tolerance could be practiced in that part of the world.

Unfortunately, beheadings are not new in the history of religious conflict. The Gospels tell of the beheading of John the Baptist by Herod Antipas. The first

ISIS is known for its killing of Christians and members of the Yazidi religion, one of Iraq's oldest minorities.

But hundreds, and perhaps

thousands, of Muslims who were beheaded in the third century. Legend has it St. Denis carried his severed head and walked six miles to his eventual burial site while, on the way, the head was preaching. There are numerous statues in Paris depicting St. Denis holding his head, including one in Notre Dame Cathedral.

When Madame du Deffand, of French nobility and friend of Voltaire, was told of this journey of the decapitated saint, her cynical response was, "In such a journey, it is the first step that is the most difficult." A more serious response is that in many times and places, the step of tolerance

is the most difficult step toward religious understanding, acceptance and peace.

Fortunately, there are communities of tolerance in the Middle East. We have coming to our area a significant exhibit focusing on religious tolerance that was created in the country of Oman. Headed by the progressive Sultan Qaboos Bin Sa'id, Oman is proud of its openness to all religions and its commitment to tolerance. The exhibit has been hosted at many prestigious venues throughout Europe, including the United Nations offices in Vienna and multiple sites in Germany, Spain,

Belgium, Lithuania, Slovenia, The Netherlands and the United Kingdom. We are pleased our community will be the second site in the U.S. to host this exhibit titled "Tolerance, Understanding, Coexistence: Oman's Message of Islam."

The exhibit will be at the Mary Idema Pew Library on Grand Valley State University's Allendale campus, Monday through Oct. 30. The opening reception will be 4-6 p.m. Monday; all are invited. Please let us know if you plan to attend and if you need a parking permit by emailing interfaith@gvsu.edu or by calling 616-331-5702.