

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

City and faith groups must seek the welfare of everyone

By Douglas Kindschi

Director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at GVSU

Recently, I heard Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell and Kevin Belk, chief of police, talk about the problem of violence and how it is the responsibility of the whole community to reduce such activity in our city. They said it is not enough to follow up after a crime has been committed to find the perpetrators and bring them to justice. The more effective way is prevention, and this is



Kindschi

I found it interesting both speakers quoted the prophet Jeremiah. Since they were speaking in a church setting, I guess their quotes were not all that surprising.

Jeremiah was writing in the midst of the Hebrew captivity

best accomplished when we have an environment where each person can flourish.

in Babylon. The prophet urges the people to build houses, plant gardens and have families:

"Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare, you will find your welfare." (Jeremiah 29:7)

Indeed, it is in the welfare of the city and our communities that we each find our own welfare. A city that supports education and families is a city in which each person also can flourish.

This same passage was quoted by Rabbi Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of Great Britain, in the Erasmus Lecture he gave recently in New York City. He was speaking in the context of our increasingly secularized world, in which our faith communities may become a minority. He urged us to continue our commitments and beliefs and even seek the welfare of those who do not share our faith identity or have no faith. When one has nothing bigger than self to live

for, it leads to a culture of selfishness and, ultimately, one without hope for the future. It is the faithful minorities who maintain the vision and hope for the future.

The challenge for the interfaith community is not to seek to make everyone like oneself. It is to affirm our various visions for the future and seek the particularity of love as expressed by our various religious traditions. We might even feel like a minority within our own faith traditions or denominations, yet

our challenge is to seek the welfare of all, even — or especially — those who do not see things through the same lens we do. Just caring for people we identify with in terms of race, economic status or religious affiliation is not seeking the welfare of the entire community.

We must keep the faith, maintain hope and seek that all may flourish. It is the challenge we face as individuals and as faith communities.

Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu