

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Better together: Pledging to move from dialogue to action

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Interfaith activist Chris Stedman, executive director of the Yale Humanist Community, often says he found an identity that affirmed his secular worldview and compassion not from another humanist, but from a Muslim.

During the events of Better Together Day on April 14, the poetic rhythm of Chris's story played out in each connection that was made between students of different religious and philosophical traditions.

The message of Better Together Day, which is celebrated on hundreds of campuses across the country through interfaith events, says that we are better when we come to know those who are different from us.

By participating in activities and signing the Better Together Pledge, students commit to talk



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to a person of another religious or non-religious background about shared values.

As Interfaith Youth Core found, just having one friend from another religious or non-religious community can build understanding and increase cultural competence.

As we move forward from the energy of Better Together Day, how can we take this moment and use it as a catalyst for action?

First, we must recognize that engaging in interfaith activities can be intimidating. Some may feel it will cause tension in

their faith or non-faith identity. However, we continuously find individuals have a deepened connection to their belief as they respectfully engage in dialogue across lines of religious and secular perspectives.

Another common misconception is believing you have to have a firm religious or philosophical conviction to participate in interfaith dialogue. Such dialogue is based on stories, and having a diverse range of stories only enriches the conversation.

We have found that a way to overcome hesitation to participate in interfaith dialogue is to focus on the shared value of service to others, which is found in all religious and non-religious traditions.

As Mahatma Gandhi, Hindu leader of the non-violent liberation of India, illustrated, "The

best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service of others."

Better Together, Grand Valley State University's interfaith student organization, has been doing this as a part of the Year of Interfaith Service. They have partnered with local religious communities, and in March, they visited the At-Tawheed Islamic Center.

During this Community Outreach Week event, students learned about the Muslim faith while helping to organize their Community Food Pantry.

As we witnessed our new friend become engulfed in emotion listening to his favorite prayer, students were able to see the religion from a different vantage point.

During these experiences, the conversation was not always

comfortable. However, students grew from the opportunity because they were present in the moment, focused on shared values, and were not fearful of religious tension commonly portrayed in the media.

The emotion and passion of the people of a tradition cannot be felt in a conversation, but was experienced by the students as they collaborated in service together.

Like Stedman, I have found my identity and world view as a Catholic by venturing out and serving others.

— To learn more on how you can participate in interfaith service, contact the Kaufman Interfaith Institute via email at interfaith@gvsu.edu or follow us on Facebook, Twitter and Instagram: @GRinterfaith