

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

## America's story interwoven with religious diversity

By Katie Gordon

Program Manager, Kaufman Interfaith Institute at GVSU

Since returning home from a Religious Diversity Leadership Workshop, I have been staring at a red, white and blue bracelet that was a gift to me when I visited a Buddhist temple. I was struck by the symbolism of receiving a bracelet that was not only so patriotic, but coming from a Buddhist nun who had immigrated to the U.S. from Korea. To me, it celebrated the religious freedom she and I share as religious minorities in a pluralistic society, and it commemorated the values our traditions share with our country. To

me, this small bracelet tells the story of America's national narrative of religious pluralism.

Pluralism, outlined by Diana Eck at the Pluralism Project of Harvard University, includes four ideas: Pluralism is not diversity alone but the energetic engagement with diversity, it is not just tolerance but the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference, it is not relativism but the encounter of commitments and finally, it is all based on dialogue.

The book that epitomizes these values is Eboo Patel's "Sacred Ground: Pluralism, Prejudice and the Promise of America." In it, he writes his inspiration



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another better."

Patel said our shared sacred ground is rooted in our national history and ongoing narrative of pluralism. This history starts with a letter written by President George Washington, when he supported the establishment of the first Jewish synagogue on American soil in Newport, Rhode Island, in 1790. The narrative

for American pluralism comes from a verse in the Quran: "We made you different nations and tribes that you may come to know one

then goes to the first Parliament of the World's Religions held in Chicago in 1893, a conference meant to create global dialogue between faiths. Next, our country's story of religious pluralism goes to the civil rights era, in which the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. was inspired by his Christian tradition but also by Gandhi's Hindu nonviolence, by Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel's love of Hebrew prophets and by Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh's belief in peace over war. King didn't simply embody pluralism; it was happening all around him. The March on Washington was not led by King alone, but also by A. Philip

Randolph, a secular humanist.

While we have a history of bridging religious differences through conversation and cooperation, we don't always succeed. In our post-9/11 world, stereotypes against the other have led to misunderstanding, discrimination and violence. However, as citizens of a nation that consists of a patchwork of traditions and religions, it is our duty to overcome assumptions and build understanding.

As Fourth of July celebrations commence this weekend, look for the narrative of tolerance, cooperation and pluralism in your community.

Email: [interfaith@gvsu.edu](mailto:interfaith@gvsu.edu)