

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Our 'kairos' moment: a call to act with social justice

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Each one of you is needed to reteach the world its own loveliness." That was the charge to a group of 39 millennial leaders, ages 21 to 35, as we gathered at Union Theological Seminary in New York earlier this month.

Our week of discussing spirituality and social justice culminated in a conversation on the definition of a "kairos" moment. According to the website of the Kairos Institute, a center at Union for religion, right and social justice, kairos is "an ancient Greek word for a time when conditions are right for the accomplishment of a



Gordon

crucial action; the opportune and decisive moment; also a moment when the eternal breaks into history."

BRINGING IT HOME

I came home considering what West Michigan's kairos moment is for interfaith relations. What are the conditions we live in, and how do they inform the direction of our community?

A few thoughts come to mind:

1. We have a desire to get to know our neighbors, especially those who are different from us. Through both

formal and informal interfaith dialogues and conversations, I've encountered such a sincere curiosity and interest in being a part of a community that consists not just of like-minded individuals, but also those who can teach us all about new ways of viewing life, religion and spirituality.

2. While we have made significant strides, intolerance still persists. Although we have seen much of the respect and interest I just mentioned, we also have remaining issues that divide our communities from one another. Whether it is the current conflicts in the Middle East, or the distrust that lies between religious and non-

religious groups, we have yet to achieve a deeper recognition of our shared humanity.

3. We must recognize the "intersectionality" of interfaith issues. At its core, the interfaith movement is working toward a world in which our religious or nonreligious identities are all respected. In other words, it is working against religious discrimination and oppression. However, this does not occur in a vacuum; it stands alongside all other forms of oppression. In order to meaningfully combat religious discrimination and oppression, we must do so in a way that recognizes we cannot stand up for some rights while ignoring others.

I view my responsibility in this kairos moment as a call, in the words of Union Seminary theologian Dr. John Thatamanil, to "remind people of the loveliness of the world so that they will attend to the repair of the world." This kairos moment cannot be tackled by any one individual or organization alone. As the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly."

Whether in spirit or in action, I look forward to the West Michigan community joining us in this exciting and defining moment.

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