

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

What we can learn from our nonreligious neighbors

By **Katie Gordon**

Program Director at the Kaufman
Interfaith Institute at GVSU

For the past few years, America has been experiencing a trend dubbed “the rise of the Nones.” According to the Pew Research Center, one-fifth of the U.S. public, and one-third of adults 30 and younger, are religiously unaffiliated, including agnostics, atheists and those who refuse any label at all.

Despite this rise in numbers, there remains a great deal of intolerance and distrust between religious and nonreligious groups. In order to promote understanding across our community, interfaith dialogue



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WHY?

As suggested by the statistics, Nones are becoming a larger part of our national religious and cultural makeup every year. In the past five years, the number of Nones rose from 15 percent to 20 percent of the U.S. popula-

needs to expand beyond the faith groups and include all world views. That is why Nones should be welcomed

into our movement toward understanding and acceptance.

tion, Pew surveys show. We must embrace their perspectives into our conversations. If we do not, we risk more division between religious and nonreligious communities.

Just like many religious groups, numerous negative stereotypes exist against the nonreligious. Being nonreligious is wrongly equated with actively opposing religion. However, secular traditions vary, and these stereotypes lead to misunderstanding and discrimination.

In order to understand this growing community, and to prevent these harmful stereotypes, interfaith dialogues should welcome these perspectives. We will

discover the potential richness of nonreligious traditions.

But what steps do we take?

HOW?

To embrace our secular, atheist, agnostic and nonreligious neighbors into dialogue, we must begin to define the Nones not by the beliefs or identities they lack, but instead define them by the fullness of what they do value and believe in.

In a new weekly column from On Being written by author Courtney E. Martin, “They Call Us the Nones, But We’re So Much More,” Martin writes secular people offer new ways to view the “burden and joy of trying to

understand how to be a good human.” By welcoming nonreligious citizens into interfaith dialogue, we will discover how these traditions view compassion, humility, service, community and the meaning of life.

Interfaith work is about using diversity to teach us about our common humanity. It is about people coming together not to agree, but to respect and learn from one another. The goal is this will permeate into all other aspects of society and culture. But, in order for that to happen, all people — regardless of faith or nonfaith background — must be included in the conversation.

Email: interfaith@gvsu.edu