

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

Interfaith understanding leads to community service

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The week began with a Grand Rapids Press front-page story headlined "Interfaith works," announcing a new community initiative: the 2015 Year of Interfaith Service.

In 2012, the community came together with more than 300 events during a Year of Interfaith Understanding. This second project seeks to go beyond talk to action. When people with different faith commitments come together to serve the community, they not only live out and strengthen their religious faith but also find commonality with people of other faiths in



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the call to love your neighbor. An important aspect of every faith tradition is the idea that finding purpose bigger than oneself also is the

path to finding meaning in one's life.

By working together in a Habitat for Humanity build, or in a downtown mission, or in preserving the environment, we affirm our humanity and seek to do good, while better understanding what we share outside of religious traditions. It also is important to note this is a commitment we find prevalent

in the younger members of our communities. Service learning is a very important aspect of every campus culture. Students in colleges, seminaries and high schools are interested in and participate in community service.

Today, we recognize the 13th anniversary of the tragic event recognized around the world as 9/11. It is appropriate to look back and honor the victims and heroes of that awful day. But it also is important to look forward to communities of understanding and peace. It is in that light that a group will meet at the Catholic Information Center to discuss ways in which our community can come together in this major effort to focus on interfaith

service. Grand Rapids Mayor George Heartwell will read his proclamation for the Year of Interfaith Service. Participants will hear from religious leaders who support this project and from students committed to this next level of service. Discussions will be held among participants representing organizations that use volunteers as well as those interested in serving. If you are interested in joining us, please email interfaith@gvsu.edu.

Saturday and Sunday will feature the initial service project, at which interfaith teams will be working at two different sites with Habitat for Humanity. An information meeting also will be held at one of the sites starting at

10 a.m. Saturday. If you are interested in learning more about the Habitat program and opportunities for interfaith service, contact us, also at interfaith@gvsu.edu.

Learning about and seeking to understand persons with different faiths, or even those without a specific faith commitment, is an important step. We enhance that understanding by working together on projects that serve the larger community. In both cases, we develop personal relationships that make it hard to fall into the trap of stereotyping groups. All of these efforts help us build stronger communities and see the common humanity that the best of our traditions affirm. Come join the effort!