

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

A public language of faith seeking the flourishing of all in our society

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How do we move beyond the alienation and potential religious violence that we have seen in our country and in many parts of the world?

A big part of the problem, according to Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core, is we have not learned a public language of faith.

He recounts an incident in high school where a Jewish classmate was the target of blatant anti-Semitism. The student felt betrayed by the silence of those whom he had thought were his friends.

Recalling the event, he said, "I wondered if any of you even realized I was Jewish. None of us ever talked about religion."

While our society is increasingly diverse when it comes to anything about religion, we go

to our particular religious communities, churches, synagogues, mosques and temples to speak

our particular religious languages.

Outside of our faith communities, do we know how to talk about faith?

Rabbi

Jonathan Sacks, for many years the chief rabbi of Great Britain, says we need to learn two languages: "There is a first and public language of citizenship that we have to learn if we are to learn to live together. And there is a variety of second languages, which connect us to our local framework of relationships."

Kindschi

These must be brought together so we also can have a public language of faith.

He goes on, "Ideally, what

makes you a more faithful Jew or Muslim or Christian also makes you a better citizen."

Our diverse society is a "community of communities."

Our challenge is to live together with our different traditions and religious languages in a way that doesn't merely tolerate each other, but seeks mutual trust and mutual flourishing.

An important step in our coming together is to learn more about each other and our various religious commitments. That was the focus of the Year of Interfaith Understanding that took place in our community during 2012 and resulted in more than 300 interfaith events.

It is also important to get to know personally people of a different faith. Studies have shown that knowing just one person from a different tradition changes your attitude, not only about that religion, but also about all

other religions.

As long as we keep separate, we will never learn how to develop mutual trust and mutual flourishing.

An important next step is to go beyond talk and understanding to action.

The focus of the current Year of Interfaith Service is to take that next step and work together in the service of others in need, as well as in ways that improve our environment, which we believe to be God's creation.

Nearly every religion has this commitment to be of service to others. Whether we call it "repairing the world" or "loving your neighbor," it is a common theme in our religious traditions. It also can be an important part in learning what we have in common and what it might take to learn a "public language of faith."

This Year of Interfaith Service is finding ways to practice this

type of discourse as we work together on common projects while drawing on our diverse religious traditions.

Eboo Patel has been called to promote these ideas on our college campuses. He was inspired by his faith heroes, such as Martin Luther King, Gandhi and the Dalai Lama, all of whom began their commitments as young people in their 20s.

Combining one's faith commitment with the call to service is the motivating theme behind the Interfaith Youth Core.

We are so pleased and honored that Patel will be in our community and speaking at both Aquinas College and at Grand Valley State University on Oct. 8. He will inspire us all as he helps us find that public language of faith on the path to seeking trust and flourishing for all in our society.

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