

INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

A new year of understanding through service

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It is the beginning of another new year, and our community again will embark on a year-long effort to bring interfaith understanding and acceptance to the forefront of our lives.

It was three years ago that the “Year of Interfaith Understanding” was launched with a proclamation from Mayor George Heartwell and wide participation from congregations, campuses and community organizations.

We announced on Sept. 11 that 2015 would be a “year of interfaith service,” moving beyond talk to action. By joining forces in acts of service, we acknowledge and celebrate what all faith communities hold dear: namely, that



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This year also will see a more focused effort to involve students, both high school and college, in practicing acts of service. Service learning is now a very integral part of college life with almost every campus incorporating this kind of active approach to learning.

By including an interfaith component to our various service efforts, we acknowledge the common human commitment to helping others who are in need.

This year’s effort also will be

we care for others. Whether we call it “repairing the world” or “loving your neighbor,” it is at the heart of the faith commitment.

carried out in cooperation with a national movement initiated by the very dynamic Muslim leader Eboo Patel. His organization, the Interfaith Youth Core, is active on over 400 campuses throughout the country.

Patel calls pluralism the “American project” that goes back to the founding of our nation. It is the commitment to welcome all communities and the contributions that they can make to our mutual wellbeing.

It goes back to Thomas Jefferson and the First Amendment to the Constitution that guarantees freedom of religion.

It also was affirmed by George Washington in his response to a synagogue in Rhode Island which had expressed concern about whether the Jewish people

would be safe in this new nation. Washington wrote, “The government of the United States gives to bigotry no sanction, to persecution no assistance.” He went on to affirm “the government would not interfere with individuals in matters of conscience and belief” and then quoting from the Old Testament, “Every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

In this American project of understanding and acceptance, we go beyond talk to action. In the words of the Dalai Lama, “Religions must dialogue, but even more, they must come together to serve others.”

Let us come together as we embark in this New Year, a year of interfaith service.

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