

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Partnering with the Grand Rapids Community Foundation

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Interfaith efforts begin with understanding.

Learning about another religion or faith tradition is a first step. It helps change attitudes and provides the opportunity to get to know someone on a personal level who has a different culture or faith commitment.

Interfaith understanding was the theme of our first big community-wide project in 2012. The Year of Interfaith Understanding worked through congregations to sponsor events which brought persons of different faiths to share in educational sessions or sometimes in the worship setting. College and seminary campuses had events for students and faculty which focused on interfaith issues. Various community groups, from museums and theater groups to

the Economic Club and Grand Rapids Symphony, included programs that supported this effort. The year also had financial support from the



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Grand Rapids Community Foundation, which enabled us to award mini-grants to congregations who sponsored events promoting understanding.

Understanding was a very important first step, and we were gratified to see over 300 events take place that year. It even attracted national media attention by the PBS program Religion and Ethics NewsWeekly.

While understanding is still an important goal, this year's project is going beyond talk to action.

The Year of Interfaith Service recognizes that nearly all reli-

gious groups — as well as secular communities — share the value of providing service to others in need. By coming together to build houses for Habitat for Humanity or provide help to those who are hungry or homeless, we reinforce our commitment to service while at the same time learn more about our different faith perspectives.

We also discover a common value with respect to how we treat the environment, and some of the interfaith projects have this focus as well.

We have again been blessed with a grant from the Grand Rapids Community Foundation to support the Year of Interfaith Service project.

This grant not only assists in bringing together different groups to do service, but also enables us to involve the student generation.

We are looking forward to

engaging our future leaders on local college campuses through this unique inter-institutional approach.

This grant will also help us fund special upcoming events.

These include Eboo Patel, founder of the Interfaith Youth Core, speaking on Oct. 8, as well as our Triennial Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue Conference on Oct. 29.

Additionally, we will be able to fund student interns from GVSU and other local colleges.

Through their internship experiences, they will have opportunities for personal and professional growth by expanding their interfaith leadership skills and applying it to their own campuses as well as the broader community. Aquinas College and Calvin College will have student interns, and the associated faculty and staff will be a part of our inter-institutional committee.

Since these campuses haven't had student-driven interfaith efforts before, we are excited to see what plans these student leaders will come up with to promote interfaith education and service on their campuses.

One of the core ideas of interfaith dialogue is that we do this because of our respective traditions, not in spite of them.

Among our colleges and universities, we will have meaningful projects that call us all to think about and act upon how our faith commitments lead us to more interfaith understanding and service.

As the year progresses and with the additional support from our partner, the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, we see many opportunities to serve the community and promote understanding in our diverse community.

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