



Two women stand outside the Petit Cambodge restaurant, a site of Friday's attacks, in Paris. As France was under attack, social media movements were taken place around the world to open doors to those in need and to stand united in adversity. (AP)

GRAND RAPIDS

Interfaith insight: Creating unity through diversity

'Nous Sommes Unis'

By Katie Gordon

Program Manager of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute

Over this past weekend, we were once again reminded of the extremism that seeks to divide us.

From the terrorist attacks in Paris that killed more than 120 people, to the less-publicized suicide bombings in Beirut that killed more than 40, we saw the power that these acts of violence and hatred have on our communities.

However, at the same time, there was an outpouring of love to cancel out the hatred, and light to drown out the darkness.

In Paris, within hours of the attacks, people started opening their doors to offer safety to those unable to get home or who just needed help.

This was motivated by #PorteOuverte, which translates to Open Door, and Parisians used the hashtag to offer shelter to those in need. Entire Sikh Gurdwaras, the houses of worship in the Sikh religion, opened their doors to anyone who needed assistance or security.

Another hashtag campaign started overnight after the Paris attacks as well: #NousSommesUnis.

Translating to We Are United, it became a way of responding to the hatred and violence in a way to show the terrorists that while they may have succeeded in the attacks, they will not have the last word.

People responded to these acts of extreme violence by saying that they will not become a divided community like the perpetrators want. Instead, Paris and the world at large, will respond with a greater effort toward coexistence, peace and unity.

While the Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for the attacks in Paris and Beirut, let us not fall into the trap of Islamophobia that only hurts us all and furthers the rift between our communities that Islamic State Group is trying to heighten.

Instead, we must continue to respond with open doors and declarations of unity. If we do so, and build this movement

around unity and understanding through diversity, we will overpower these forces of violence and intolerance in our world.

For those of us in West Michigan, what can we do locally to help achieve this?

While we may not experience such extreme violence, we still see intolerance and misunderstanding within our community.



Gordon

As our schools, hospitals, neighborhoods and communities are becoming increasingly diverse, and our differences increasingly visible, we

have to revolutionize our approach to difference.

While we are taught, and often see in the media, difference as something negative or scary, we must overcome these biases and instead seek to find the similarities and the enriching lessons from these moments of diversity.

Dialogue and cooperation are among the best ways to build united communities that embrace diversity instead of shy away from it.

Interfaith involvement, bringing our whole selves into that dialogue and cooperation, is distinctively suited to help us heal and build from experiences of violence like the ones from last weekend.

Through interfaith engagement, we are able to acknowledge the differences that make us unique while also appreciating the shared values and similarities that reveal our common humanity.

If you want to be a part of a movement that believes our differences enrich our community rather than challenge or diminish it, we invite you to attend the annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration.

Under the theme of Unity through Diversity, this year's service is 7 p.m. Monday at Trinity United Methodist Church. More information is available at interfaithunderstanding.org.

In responding to the violence around the world, we must be global citizens as well as local leaders, proving that we can achieve unity through diversity.

WEST MICHIGAN

LOCAL MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS CONDEMN TERRORIST ATTACKS

Leaders from four of the mosques and Islamic centers in Grand Rapids joined groups worldwide condemning the violence of the Paris attacks and misuse of their religion. Here is the statement:

Grand Rapids local Muslim organizations mourn the tragic and senseless loss of innocent lives in the recent terrorist attacks in Paris, France. We categorically and vehemently condemn these attacks and express and share our deepest sympathies with those all over the world and especially those in France in this very difficult time. Not only did these horrific crimes affect the people of France, but they were also inflicted upon every single human being throughout the world. Any act of violence against innocent people is an act of violence against all people.

We reaffirm our belief, as emphasized in the Qur'an that whoever kills one life, it is as if they killed all of humanity, and whoever saves one life, it is as if they have saved all of humanity (Chapter 5: Verse 32).

We have a profound sense of revulsion and stand strongly opposed to learn that these politically motivated extremists claiming responsibility for these heinous crimes are using the name of our faith to justify their evil deeds. This reprehensible act is also similar to other acts by ISIS against an even larger number of Muslims including most recently those in Beirut, Lebanon the day before the Paris massacre. There is absolutely no justification whatsoever in any divine or human value system to justify an act of violence against any innocent life.

We call for a stand by all humanity to show our collective resolve against any act of violence inflicted upon any innocent life by any perverted perpetrator using any justification. We pray for light, guidance, wisdom and hope that God leads us all through this very dark time in our collective history.

- AT-Tawheed Islamic Center
- Islamic Center of West Michigan
- Bosnian Cultural Center
- ICC "Behar"