

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Repairing a broken world: Does religion help or hinder?

In this year of Interfaith service, conference will focus on making the world a better place

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

Every three years, Grand Rapids hosts a major Jewish/Christian/Muslim dialogue.



Kindschi

It is the continuation of a program created by the Kaufman Institute's founder, Sylvia Kaufman.

This is our Year of Interfaith Service and for the upcoming conference, we are focusing on the theme, "To Repair the World: How Does Religion Help or Hinder?"

The concept of service is common to all religious traditions and it is reflected in Jewish thought by the term, "tikkun olam," which is often translated "to repair the world."

It reflects the idea that our world is broken and we are required to do acts of service and social action that will aid in repairing this broken world.

The Hebrew prophet Amos, in condemning the disregard of the widow, orphan and alien, declared: "Seek good, and not evil, that you may live ... Hate evil, and love good, and establish justice in the gate ... but let justice roll down like waters, and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream!" (Amos 5:14-15, 24)

Christian Scripture also has its theme of caring for those in need.

In Matthew 25, Jesus describes those who will inherit the kingdom as follows: "I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me."

When the righteous respond by wondering when they did all of this. Jesus

responds, "as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me."

One of the five pillars of Islam is giving to the poor, called the "zakah," and it is required of all believers.

The Dalai Lama sums it up with, "Each of us has responsibility for all humankind. It is time for us to think of other people as true brothers and sisters and to be concerned with their welfare, with lessening their suffering."

Every religious tradition, as well as secular humanism, has this call to service and caring for those in need.

Despite this near-universal call to "seek good and not evil," it seems that so much of the violence and evil in the world is perpetrated by persons who claim to be acting out of religious devotion.

There are some who would argue that this is reason enough to give up on religion and we would all be better off without it. But would we be better without the call for justice and love so clearly transmitted in our religious traditions?

Can we ignore the immense amount of good that has come from religious based hospitals, schools, charities, and social programs? Does religion cause the evil or does it help contain the evil propensity that humans seem to have demonstrated throughout history?

The Jewish/Christian/Muslim dialogue on Oct. 29 will address these questions. The task of repairing the world is certainly a worthwhile and a near-universally accepted mission.

It also seems apparent that religion can help as well as hinder this task. Our participants will seek to look carefully at this topic and reflect self-critically on both aspects of this topic.

Keynote speakers include Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, president of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem; Rev. Dr. Cynthia Campbell, former president of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago; and Dr. Ingrid Mattson, chair and professor of Islamic Studies at the University of Western Ontario.

This all-day dialogue is open to the public without charge, but registration is required.

Optional lunch and dinner meals are available for a charge.

Details and registration can be found at interfaithunderstanding.org

IF YOU GO

INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

What: The 2015 Jewish/Christian/Muslim Interfaith Dialogue: To Repair the World: How Does Religion Help or Hinder?

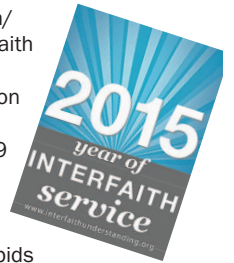
When: Thursday, Oct. 29

Where: Grand Valley State University L.V. Eberhard Center, 301 W. Fulton St., Grand Rapids

Cost: Free. Registration is required.

Go online to interfaithunderstanding.org; or call 616-331-5702

Notable: The conference is hosted by the Sylvia and Richard Kaufman Interfaith Institute at GVSU. ... It is part of a three-year rotation in Grand Rapids... This year's featured speakers include Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman, Dr. Cynthia M. Campbell and Dr. Ingrid Mattson. ... Complimentary parking is available at the Watson and Fulton lots on the Grand Rapids Robert C. Pew campus.



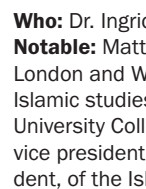
AT A GLANCE

SPEAKER BIOS



Who: Dr. Cynthia M. Campbell

Notable: Campbell is the president emerita of McCormick Theological Seminary in Chicago. She now serves as a pastor at Highland Presbyterian Church in Louisville, Kentucky.



Who: Dr. Ingrid Mattson
Notable: Mattson is the London and Windsor chair of Islamic studies at Huron University College. She served vice president, then president, of the Islamic Society of North America from 2001-10.



Who: Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman
Notable: Hartman is president of Shalom Hartman Institute and director of iEngage Project. He has authored numerous books and is a lecturer on issues of Israeli politics, policy, Judaism and the Jewish community.