

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Interfaith and intra-faith: A perspective from England

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

This week's Insight comes from Cambridge University in England, where I have the privilege of spending a couple of months as a visiting fellow at Westminster

College and St. Edmund's College. I was here three years ago with an appointment at the Cambridge Inter-Faith Programme, and

it feels very comfortable returning to this center of learning. This year, I again will work with the interfaith program, as well as with the Faraday Institute for Science and Religion at St. Edmund's. My first week was quite busy, giving a seminar at Faraday and attending a workshop on science and



Kindschi

Scripture in Christianity and Islam. The workshop brought together scientists, as well as religious scholars from around the United Kingdom, from both Christian and Muslim traditions, to examine how their respective Scriptures relate to issues in the science and religion dialogue. A part of our engagement was to read together passages from the Bible and the Quran dealing with creation.

Scriptural Reasoning is a practice that began about 25 years ago. It is based on a Jewish practice of Textual Reasoning that has been expanded to include other religious traditions. The goal is not to reach agreement or to say all religions are alike. Rather, the aim is to have a deeper understanding of one's own Scripture, as well as to better understand people from other faith traditions, by learning through their relationship to the formative texts of that tradition.

It has been enlightening to experience the variety of insights that come from the various traditions and Scriptures. Interfaith engagement is like traveling to another culture. As one develops an appreciation of a different culture, the enrichment also leads to a new awareness and appreciation of one's own culture and traditions. While British culture is not radically different from ours, there are many aspects of my time here that shed light on American culture and practice.

One example is the celebration of Queen Elizabeth's 90th birthday, which dominated the news last week. To have someone who symbolizes the nation to be in that role for more than 60 years, and whose relationship to U.S. presidents goes back to President Harry Truman certainly gives one a different perspective.

Religious practice in university life also is quite different

here. The 32 colleges that make up the university each have their own chapels and have frequent religious services throughout the week. A number have an even-song service every day, often featuring a men and boys choir. This is in a country that has church attendance estimated to be less than 10 percent of the population.

## A REMINDER FROM HOME

While here, I was reminded of the rich religious diversity we have in Michigan communities when I received a letter from St. Nicholas Antiochian Orthodox Church in Grand Rapids.

They reminded me of the diversity within the Christian community, since they are celebrating Holy Week now, according to the Eastern Church calendar leading up to Orthodox Easter on May 1. They point out there are more than a dozen Eastern Orthodox churches in West Michigan, and that it is the

second-largest Christian denomination with almost 300 million adherents worldwide.

I am looking forward, upon my return, to accept their invitation to visit their Byzantine church and attend their sacred services.

While experiencing my short time in another country, I have thus been reminded of the diversity in my own Christian community at home. Interfaith understanding also includes "intra-faith" engagement.

Between faith traditions as well as within faith traditions, we have much to learn from those different from us. Historically and nowadays, there have been major conflicts between Catholics and Protestants, Sunni and Shia in Islam, Orthodox and Reform in Judaism.

Let us commit to true understanding and acceptance within and among our religious traditions. It is the only path to peace.

**Contact:** [interfaith@gvsu.edu](mailto:interfaith@gvsu.edu)