

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

The politics of division and personal acts of acceptance

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute,
GVSU

Are we becoming societies of fear and hate, or is there still hope? Having been in England during the Brexit vote to leave the European Union, it was frustrating to hear the xenophobia and fear of immigrants and refugees play out in the political discussions.

I thought I was putting that aside when we left for a two-month stay at Cambridge University.

In a recent news report, I read how a national police hot line in the U.K. had received more than five times the number of reports of hate crime incidents in the week following the Brexit vote than on a normal week. The organization MAMA (Measuring Anti-Muslim Attacks) made the following statement in its recent report: "We are in a period



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where, post Brexit, some feel that their hatred and prejudice has been legitimized."

In America, it seems we are entering a period where national leaders are giving support for division and prejudice as well.

This is not limited to anti-Muslim and anti-Hispanic rhetoric. The Anti-Defamation League reports a 50 percent increase in anti-Jewish incidents, including verbal and physical acts, as well as vandalism in synagogues. Also reported is a significant "rise in anti-Semitism at American colleges and universities," which has been blamed on the divisive controversies around the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions Movement, which seeks to boycott and sanction all dealings with Israel. A number of church denominations and communities also have been divided on this issue.

NO POLITICAL SOLUTION?

The Israel/Palestine issue has become very divisive, and it seems impossible to find a politi-

cal solution. Yet there are examples of individuals who refuse to follow the path of division and hatred.

In the current issue of Christian Century magazine, where I read about the reports cited above, there was another story about medical workers in Israel supporting each other's religious observances. The head nurse at the Hadassah Medical Center reports on the religious diversity of the staff and how they support each other, especially during times of religious holidays and observances. "During Ramadan ... Jewish nurses work evening shifts to allow Muslim nurses to break their fasts at home. Non-Jewish nurses reciprocate by working on Jewish holidays."

At their bone marrow transplant unit, Muslim nurses turn on and off lights and appliances during the Sabbath for Orthodox Jewish patients whose beliefs prohibit them from doing so. They also write orders and prescriptions for Jewish staff who

are not permitted to do so on the Sabbath. One of them said: "Our department is the last resort for patients: many will not survive. ... We understand how fragile life is. ... We bleed the same blood. We cry the same tears."

In another organization in Israel, United Hatzalah, a national emergency medical response organization, "Jewish and Muslim coworkers make a point of not eating in front of one another on their respective fast days. ... Muslims work on the Jewish Sabbath and holidays to allow some of their Jewish coworkers to take off, while their Jewish coworkers work overtime on the evening shift so their Muslim coworkers can break their Ramadan fasts and celebrate festivals."

In this part of the world so dominated by tension, political division, oppression and violence, there is a bit of hope when people at the personal and professional level take these small but significant steps to accept each other and support

peaceful interaction.

RABBI-IMAM DIALOGUE

In September, we will have the opportunity to engage with another attempt to seek understanding when the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, together with the Hauenstein Center at GVSU, will sponsor a dialogue between an Orthodox Jewish rabbi from Jerusalem and a Muslim imam and chief representative for Muslim affairs at Duke University.

On Sept. 8, they will present on the topic, "Can We Find Common Ground in Israel and Palestine?"

Join us at Loosemore Auditorium on the GVSU Grand Rapids campus at 7 p.m. for a screening of their interaction.

There is limited seating so reservation is required.

More on this will be published in future Insight columns. For further information and registration, visit interfaithunderstanding.org.

— Contact: interfaith@gvsu.edu