

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

The Golden Rule — an ancient and current responsibility

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

The story is told of a man who came to the famous Jewish rabbi, Hillel, wanting to have the entire Torah explained to him while standing on one foot. Hillel responded: "What is hateful to you, do not do to others. This is the whole of the Torah. The rest is the commentary; go and study."

This form of the Golden Rule is based on a number of passages from the Jewish Scripture, and restated by Jesus a century after Hillel.

In Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, he says, "Do to others what you want them to do to you. This is the meaning of the law of Moses and the teaching of the prophets." (Matthew 7:12)

The Apostle Paul reaffirmed this teaching in his letter to the

Galatians: "For the whole law is fulfilled in one word, you shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Galatians 5:14)

Some form of the Golden Rule is found in nearly every religious tradition and is acknowledged by secularists as well, as a basic principle to living in peace with our fellow humans. The Hindu tradition has a form similar to the Jewish version which says, "This is the sum of duty: do not do to others what would cause pain if done to you." (Mahabharata 5:1517) The Buddhist tradition has a similar version: "A state that is not pleasing or delightful to me, how could I inflict that upon another?" (Samyutta Nikaya v.353) and "Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful." (Udana-Varga 5:18)

In the Quran, we find the positive version of our responsibility: "Do good — to parents, kinsfolk, orphans, those in need, neighbors who are near, neighbors who are strangers." (Quran 4:36)

In the sayings of Muhammad, called the Hadith, the Golden Rule is repeated more than once, for example: "None of you have faith until you love for your neighbor what you love for yourself." (Sahih Muslim)

In Muslim and Christian Scriptures, we also get the further admonition: "Return evil with kindness." (Quran 13:22, 23:96, 28:54, 41:34 and 42:40) In a similar way Jesus said, "Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you." (Luke 6:27)

RESPONSIBILITY GOES BEYOND IMMEDIATE NEIGHBORS

Our responsibility also goes beyond the immediate neighbor and includes all who are in need. Jesus was asked by the lawyer what one must do to inherit eternal life. He responded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as

thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets." (Matthew 22:35-40)

When asked by the lawyer who was his neighbor, Jesus did not give a legal answer but told a story about a person who had been beaten, robbed and left by the side of the road. Two religious leaders passed by but ignored the needy person. But a Samaritan, who was considered by the Jews of the time as of a different ethnic and religious group, stopped and cared for the stranger. Jesus then asked who was neighbor to the person in need, to which the lawyer responded, "the one who showed mercy." This parable of the Good Samaritan sets forth the standard of not only avoiding doing what is hateful, but taking a positive active step in doing good, especially in helping those in need.

In our world today, we are seeing thousands, even millions, now in need, trying to escape violence and war. What is our response to these needs? Do we

IF YOU GO

WELCOMING REFUGEES: DO UNTO OTHERS

A conversation of community engagement about refugee resettlement:

When: 7 p.m. March 8

Where: Catholic Information Center, 360 S. Division Ave., Grand Rapids

More information: interfaithunderstanding.org

act out of fear or do we show mercy?

Let us not run away from what we know is the right course of action. The plight of the refugee is as much an issue for us today as it was for these early faith teachers. We can learn more about this call to respond at an event coming up in Grand Rapids on March 8. See the box for details or go to interfaithunderstanding.org for more information and to sign up for the event.



Kindschi