

## INTERFAITH INSIGHT

# Welcoming refugees promotes communities' safety, security

**By Douglas Kindschi**

*Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU*

In a recent column by David Brooks, columnist for The New York Times, he calls for "A Little Reality on Immigration." Not only are the number of illegal immigrants declining; there actually are more Mexicans leaving the United States than coming in. He reports "a net outflow of 140,000 from 2009 to 2014."

He also cites statistics on crimes committed by immigrants that are at one-half or even less than those committed by native-born U.S. residents. He concludes: "Immigrants make American streets safer."

In Michigan, there are further facts and statistics that put the immigration picture in focus.

According to the organization Welcoming Michigan, foreign-born Michigan residents were more than three times as likely

as U.S.-born to start a business, and one-third of the high-tech startups in the state had an immigrant founder.

These facts are not surprising when you think about the characteristics of entrepreneurs. They are people who are not satisfied with the status quo; they have a vision for something better; they are willing to take risks and work hard to achieve their dreams.

You could say the same thing about immigrants. They take the initiative to leave their home country because they see a vision for something better and will take the risks to make that vision reality.

Consider the large number of refugees who risk their very lives to get to a better place for themselves and their families. These are the people we want to become productive members of our communities.

Refugees are fleeing discrimination, violence and threats to their families. They come to America to build better lives, to live in safety, to escape from the threats of extremists.

They have powerful reasons to distrust the violent acts of the very people we are seeking to defeat in our actions overseas and in our homeland.

## ALLIES IN FIGHT AGAINST EXTREMISM

They are allies in the efforts to defeat extremism and provide security for all. They come here to escape the horrors, not to perpetuate them. We need to welcome them to our communities.

That is the message of Welcoming Michigan and its affiliate communities, which in Michigan include several Detroit-area communities, East Lansing, Grand Rapids and Kalamazoo.

While it is important to see the

## 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](http://interfaithunderstanding.org)

economic and safety reasons to accept refugees into our communities, we also must affirm our own values as people of compassion, who believe the basic principles upon which our country was founded. Equality and dignity for all has been the promise of America and, while we do not always fulfill this promise, we must never lose sight of it.

As faith communities, we must affirm our belief that all people are created in God's image and deserve the respect this entails.

Tolerance is only the beginning. If we are to be true to our faith traditions, we must go beyond that to hospitality, understanding and respect.

Last year, when Pope Francis visited America, he addressed Congress with the words, "If we want security, let us give security; if we want life, let us give life; if we want opportunities, let us provide opportunities."

Refugees are that opportunity — for us as well as for them.

Their presence brings security and life to us as well as to themselves and their families. We can learn more and be a part of this by joining the March 8 event in Grand Rapids, "Welcoming Refugees: Do Unto Others."

See the box for details, or go to [interfaithunderstanding.org](http://interfaithunderstanding.org).