

## INTERFAITH INSIGHTS

# Younger generation is the future of interfaith movement

By Douglas Kindschi

Director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute, GVSU

Division and fear in the world, as well as in our nation, is increasing. It is being fueled by interests that believe promoting fear will advance a particular political ideology.

It is a dangerous development that is pushing people and nations apart rather than bringing them together to support common interests.

It is a frightening concept that also has led to some misappropriation of religion by radical groups in some Muslim as well as Christian communities.

We are committed to countering this narrative as we also become increasingly connected with national and international groups with similar missions.

There is, however, a very

hopeful sign that the younger generation in America has not bought into this narrative and is much less likely to condemn the "other," whether it is seen in terms of those who are different in race, nationality, religious belief (or no belief), sexual identity, etc. It is important that we encourage this openness among the college-age group and provide models and programs to support and develop these attitudes.

Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core, has been a national leader in bringing this message to college campuses.

We now have students at Grand Valley State University as well as at Hope, Calvin and Aquinas colleges actively involved in this national effort.

Patel's presence this past year was inspiring, in speaking engagements at Aquinas and Calvin, as well as at GVSU.

You can watch his GVSU talk at [bit.ly/EbooPatel](http://bit.ly/EbooPatel).

Thanks to a grant from the Grand Rapids Community Foundation, we were able to initiate an internship program for students at Grand Valley and the Grand Rapids colleges.

We have been working with these students to find effective ways to keep more students engaged in this work, reward them for their efforts and build wider projects among the college communities to promote religious understanding.

We also recently received funding to create a Kruizenga Interfaith Ambassador internship at Hope College.

The work of Patel, the Interfaith Youth Core and these internship programs has given me great hope for the future of interfaith understanding as we reach out to the college communities as energetic partners.

At GVSU, the Division of Inclusion and Equity also is expanding its focus to include interfaith inclusion with the appointment of the Kaufman

Interfaith Institute's program manager Katie Gordon to serve as the interfaith services coordinator. She will continue to help guide the institute's programming in the community while taking on this new role on the university's Allendale campus.

Thanks to the efforts of its intern, Allison Garstecki, Aquinas College received the award this year from the Interfaith Youth Core as the "Better Together Rookie of the Year."

## INTERNS TO SHARE INSIGHTS

The interfaith interns from the three colleges will share their experiences and reflections in the Interfaith Insights columns for the next three weeks.

Next week will feature Garstecki, who will graduate this fall with a degree in education. She plans to be a science teacher.

The following week, we will hear from Derek Zuverink, who will graduate this fall from GVSU with a business and marketing

degree. He participated in interfaith activities at the university and also helped the Kaufman Institute with some of its publicity and Internet efforts.

Then, we will read the insight from the Calvin College intern Meghan Bogema, who was featured on the Calvin January Series as a part of the opening of Patel's talk given there in January. See the video at [bit.ly/MeghanBogema](http://bit.ly/MeghanBogema).

Bogema graduated this spring with a degree in social work and international development and is now working at Bethany Christian Services in Grand Rapids.

It has been great this past year to work with these interns, and we look forward to the continuing efforts here as well as with the new program at Hope College.

Yes, the new generation is ready to carry forward the important efforts of interfaith understanding and acceptance.

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



Kindschi