

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Troubled times call for action: Love thy neighbor

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"Powerful things are built in troubled times," Eboo Patel, the founder and director of Interfaith Youth Core, reminded a crowd of hundreds of college students.

I was at a gathering with student interfaith leaders from across the country, and we were hungry for words of inspiration from Patel. The Interfaith Leadership Institute convened in Atlanta in late January, and the tone of the conference and Patel's keynote had a darker, more urgent tone than usual.

The three-day interfaith leadership training took place during a tumultuous weekend. It began on the Friday that the first presidential order banning travel from seven Muslim-majority countries was signed, and it ended on a Sunday when six Muslims were shot and killed in their mosque in Quebec City, Canada.

While these events took place more than a month ago, the trend of violence has continued. On Feb. 22, an Indian-American man was shot and murdered in a bar outside Kansas City, Kansas, after his accused attacker reportedly yelled at him, "Get out of my country." On March 3, a Sikh-American man

was getting out of his car in his driveway outside Seattle when a gunman approached him, saying, "Go back to your own country," then shot him in the arm. On March 10, a man in St. Lucie, Florida, attempted to burn a store in order to "run the Arabs out of our country," presuming the owners of Indian descent to be Muslim.

In all three of these instances, it is clear that not just Muslims, but also those perceived to be Muslim, are experiencing stereotyping, violence and discrimination that reveals the troubled times in our country. For those who are religiously, ethnically or racially marginalized by the hostile rhetoric and policies perpetuated in our public sphere, the threat is significant: safety, well-being and livelihood are on the line.

However, as Patel reminded us, powerful things are built in such troubled times. Both locally and nationally, inspiring coalitions of support and solidarity are popping up, built on interfaith networks and communities that have existed for years.

In Grand Rapids, our college and university campuses are hosting Solidarity Dinners, meant to encourage dialogue and action around principles of solidarity. At Grand Valley State University's dinner, stu-

Rabbi Sigal Memorial Lecture

Who: Dr. Simran Jeet Singh

What: "Islamophobia, Hate Crimes and the Racialization of Religious Identity"

When: March 30, 7 p.m.

Where: Loosemore Auditorium, GVSU's DeVos Center

401 W. Fulton St., Grand Rapids

Register online: sigal2017.eventbrite.com

dents from various world views expressed their shared values and encouraged the 200-plus attendees to write cards of support to local mosques and refugee families. The cards then were hand-delivered to those in our community who have been targets of misunderstanding and hostility.

And across the country, a new campaign was launched by Auburn Seminary, the Groundswell Movement and the Sikh Coalition, saying "when hate targets our neighbors, we stand together in solidarity."

Written as a petition, particularly to "Our Muslim and Jewish Siblings," the letter outlines how faith communities are experiencing increased threats of violence in the streets and in their houses of worship under an administration that targets and marginalizes religious minorities. The petition encourages communities to do what West Michigan students already are doing: display acts of solidarity to those marginalized in one's community through letters of support and showing up for one another.

Locally and nationally, these examples show we can counter the hateful rhetoric and violent incidents through our daily actions in our immediate community.

The strength in these responses comes from the broad-based alliance they inherently create. When violence and discrimination affects multiple faith communities, the response must be in kind. Through a coalition response, Muslims, Sikhs, Jews, Christians, Baha'is, Hindus, and all others unite around the shared concern of loving our neighbors. After all, loving thy neighbor is about more than common ground; it is a way to embrace the life we share in America.

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