

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Listening to new voices: Hope College Christian student speaks

Alley LoPrete, Kruizinga interfaith intern, Hope College

Editor's note: This is the second in a series of insights from area college students based on talks they gave at this year's Abrahamic Dinner. Alley LoPrete is a senior at Hope College majoring in religion and sociology with a minor in peace and justice. She is an assistant resident director at Hope and serves as Hope's Kruizinga intern for interfaith. She also is the founding vice president of Hope Interfaith Youth Alliance (HIYA), a student organization devoted to bringing interfaith dialogue and new religious perspectives to campus. Last year, Allison spent a semester abroad in Oman, where she studied at the Al Amana Center in Muscat. After graduating in May, Allison hopes to find work as a resident director before heading to graduate school. Her dream is to become an interfaith chaplain.



Alley LoPrete is the Kruizinga interfaith intern at Hope College.

tality and prayer were ever present in Mutrah Souq, a central marketplace near where I lived. Amongst the many shops sits a Kashmiri man named Shah who showed me the message of kindness in Islam. Each time I visited the shop, Shah would leap out of his chair to buy samosas and tea from a stand around the corner and would proceed to ask me about my day. His genuine patience and open heart is a value and quality I seek that he insists is an outcome of his devotion to Allah.

My Christian tradition reminds me to invite the outsider in and search for ways to include a stranger, just as Jesus sat and ate with the tax collectors and held hands with the cast out and diseased. I see Jesus' image of service in the Gospels in the way Shah shows great humility as he sacrifices his time and money for others daily. His sacred task of serving others is one that I seek to embody in my own tradition and life.

While serving as a Christian coordinator for the Abrahamic Program for Young Adults at the Chautauqua Institution, I again experienced holy envy. I am and was deeply jealous of my Muslim counterpart Yousaf, especially his ability to focus and devote himself to prayer. Our meetings revolved around his prayer times, sometimes leaving him with no option but to pray in the sanctuary of a Methodist church or tucked into a corner of a dining hall. When I am struggling to pray I remember the holy envy I have toward Yousaf and his devoted concentration to his prayer practice. At a particularly weak moment of mine, Yousaf texted me, "prayer is a response to God who's already calling out to you, as opposed to you calling out to him." I now try to fit my life around prayer rather than my prayer into my life.

Devotion to prayer is not unfamiliar to the Christian tradition. The Bible boasts of the power of prayer, from the laments and songs of praise in the Psalms, to Mary's song of thankfulness in the Gospel of Luke, to Paul's prayers for those he writes to throughout his ministry. But, it took watching Muslims pray to renew my practice of prayer in my own tradition. I am so grateful for Yousaf helping me to pray. I also know that it was my envy of his ability and the tradition of prayer in Islam that has deeply improved my prayer life.

Finally, the tradition of Shabbat that I learned that same summer from my Jewish friends has also increased a healthy holy envy of my Abrahamic family. Spending every Friday evening to Saturday evening for rest and gathering with family is an incredible commitment. Prior to my invitation to a Shabbat service and meal, I had become frustrated at the lack of participation of my church in the



Hiba Wehbe-Alamah prays at a vigil March 20 at the University of Michigan-Flint's University Center in Flint. MLive.com files

daily lives of their congregants. I wanted my Christian family to be with me on more than just Sunday mornings. I wished for community to flourish after the hymns were sung, rather than only during the service.

Shabbat is a beautiful example of a community coming together devotedly. I am not just jealous of the challah bread they eat every week, but of the hands that work together to make it. I yearn for a family of faith often, and Shabbat ensures the presence of this community with songs and prayers, but also in a meal and conversation outside of the synagogue. Judaism teaches me about the strong community that should come with faith and remain. Witnessing Shabbat reminded me of the church Luke talks about in Acts (2:46): "They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts." My interfaith communities and Christian communities now hold much more weight in my heart and I have greater cause to find them wherever I find myself living.

Holy envy not only adds to our own individual belief and practice, but to our desire to teach and protect others. With the technological innovation that my generation has been brought up with, the world feels smaller than ever. Exposure to religion is at one's fingertips, or simply playing on a screen in a nearby room. The media loves to broadcast religious violence and provides provocative "click bait" for youth that hurts their self-esteem and leads to painful comparisons and distaste with religion. Younger generations can and should be exposed to the beautiful values and stories our traditions have to offer so that they can appreciate the unique ways other beliefs can strengthen their own faith and add to their daily lives.

Child psychologist Dr. Doris Allen once

said, "The ultimate source for peace, long range, lies with the children." As a result, she started an organization called Children's International Summer Villages that has brought youth together from all over the world into "multinational villages" or summer camps since its founding in 1950. The youth participate in fun, active learning and conversation during the summer and return to their home country with new friends and a broadened understanding of cultural differences. Through my participation in these programs, I learned more about myself and others before damaging biases prevented me from seeing difference as negative. Instead, I learned to celebrate unique cultures and emulate the values we practiced at camp such as justice and service when I arrived back home.

My biggest dream is to create an interfaith summer camp for young people of different traditions to learn from one another in a fun, safe environment. I want the campers to have holy envy of and with their neighbors so that their faith is in humanity and in God and not in their fear of the other. This would be a small-scale version of the large-scale pluralistic interfaith community that we seek to create.

I do believe that my generation can continue in interfaith work; I just hope that in our effort we remember there is yet another generation to come. I urge you to share your own stories and friendships with the little ones you have in your home or in your neighborhood. Expose them to what you love about other Abrahamic traditions as you empower them in their own, and one day my generation will thank you as we usher their generation into interfaith action, too.

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I have a deep holy envy of both of my sister Abrahamic traditions. Many of these arose out of my experiences at the Al Amana Center, an interfaith organization run by the Reformed Church in America in the Sultanate of Oman. The Islamic tradition of hospi-