

INTERFAITH INSIGHT

Through tension and feasting: An interfaith Thanksgiving

Kyle Kooyers associate director, Kaufman Interfaith Institute

"It's not a dinner!"

Every year, the planning committee for the Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration jokes that this phrase should be the unofficial tag line for the event. This annual celebration is a service in which various traditions offer gratitude in their own traditional language, customs, songs and scriptures for the beautiful diversity of our community. Light refreshments, in the form of potluck desserts and hors d'oeuvres follow the celebration — but it is not a dinner!



Kyle Kooyers is associate director of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University.

20th annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration

When: 7 p.m. Monday

Where: Cathedral of St. Andrew, 301 Sheldon Blvd. SE, Grand Rapids

Information and free registration at: InterfaithUnderstanding.org

years, diverse religious, spiritual and secular communities have gathered from around our city to tell stories, sing songs, reflect on scriptures, chant mantras and offer words of gratitude for our shared home. On the other hand, Thanksgiving as a holiday is problematic for many in that it represents a history of colonialism, oppression and extermination — which understandably excludes native communities and indigenous spiritualities from the celebration.

In this tension, Patel is wise to point out that "conversation happens, palates widen, fusions emerge."

When we come together to share our stories and different experiences within this city, we begin to see each other in a new way. Our perspectives widen. Connections emerge. We see that we are neighbors in this place. We also see that we are neighbors with vastly different experiences within this place — for some very good, for others very difficult.

In sharing and listening, we begin to see ourselves in the "other" and the "other" in us. As we hear the differing ways each of us experiences Grand Rapids as home, we inevitably find that our very life and well-being is bound up in the lives and well-being of the people living around us. We find that we can have "thick dialogue" about the ways our history and holidays affect those around us. And we find that our stories can in fact intersect with those who at first seemed vastly different.

Certainly, as the Interfaith Thanksgivings of years past have shown, there is tremendous power in sharing gratitude with the many religious, secular and spiritual traditions that call Grand Rapids home. The 20th annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration will take place Monday at the Cathedral of Saint Andrew. Whether you have attended over the past two decades or join us for the very first time, I can promise that you will see and hear some new things. We invite you to join in the spiritual potluck, the tension and the feast, to be filled and changed by the rich experience of community.

.

interfaith@gvsu.edu



The Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration this year will be Monday evening at the Cathedral of St. Andrew, 301 Sheldon Blvd. SE in Grand Rapids. To learn more, go to InterfaithUnderstanding.org. Submitted by Douglas Kindschi



The Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration brings together people of various religious, secular and spiritual traditions. Submitted by Douglas Kindschi

When we come together to share our stories and different experiences, we begin to see each other in a new way.

On one hand, it is wonderful that for 20