

# Kaufman Interfaith Institute

# 2024 2025

Year-In-Review



## Our Mission

To advance equity and belonging for persons of all religious, secular, and spiritual identities by fostering human connection, interfaith understanding, and collective transformation.



**GRAND VALLEY**  
STATE UNIVERSITY®



# ➔ Charting A Course for A Future of Hope

## **What does Interfaith work offer to the world?**

To experience a room full of multifaith and multi-generational leaders from across Michigan grapple with this very question was truly incredible. As the final convening and capstone to our 5-year collaboration with Fetzer Institute, we hosted a gathering centered on the theme of Critical Hope as it pertained to the future of interfaith work. J. Duncan-Andrade sums it up quite well: “Critical hope realistically evaluates one’s environment, context, or field through a lens of equity and justice while also envisioning the possibility of a better future.” This two-day exploration set us on a path for re-igniting the interfaith movement to meet the challenges of our world.

As a result of those state-wide convenings, we have been able to grow and expand our connections and partnerships across Michigan. Specifically, our collaboration with public universities has increased to augment our work with private colleges and universities. We are excited to be able to share resources through this network and have begun planning for a state-wide interfaith leadership conference for university students.

To expand our methods for connection, understanding, and transformation, we are excited to partner with our friends at Interfaith Photovoice. Interfaith Photovoice uses smartphone photography as a mechanism for storytelling that brings us into the lived experiences of our neighbors. This collaboration will build on previous cohorts and exhibitions on campus and in our community.

In a season when toxic polarization is rampant, the Kaufman Interfaith Institute continues to collaborate on Talking Together: Strengthening Our Communities Through Conversation. This initiative, offered collaboratively with the Hauenstein Center for Presidential Studies, Padnos/Sarosik Center for Civil Discourse, and WGUV Public Media, has enhanced our ability to collectively create a culture of dialogue and understanding across the University.

Following a 2-year strategic planning effort, including surveys and conversations with key stakeholders in our community, campus, and youth work, our team developed a visual guide to represent our core mission and values. With a nod to Valarie Kaur’s Revolutionary Love Project, we call it our “Kaufman Compass.”

At the center of everything we do is relationship building. The three points of our mission and our values grow out of a center of knowing and trusting one another, surrounded by critical hope. With this compass as a heading, we are committed to training and empowering the next generation of interfaith leaders to advance that work of critical hope.

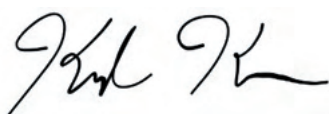
Each of our wisdom and worldview traditions offers us language and a framework for critical hope. We have the capacity to name and critically examine a world fraught with pain, suffering, injustice, and uncertainty. At the same time, we have the capacity to imagine and work towards a future of healing, peace, liberation, and justice that we cannot see. This is what Interfaith work offers to our world - to name our histories and lived realities for what they are, while holding fast to a hope that propels us towards a more pluralistic world where everyone belongs.

**We invite you to join us!**



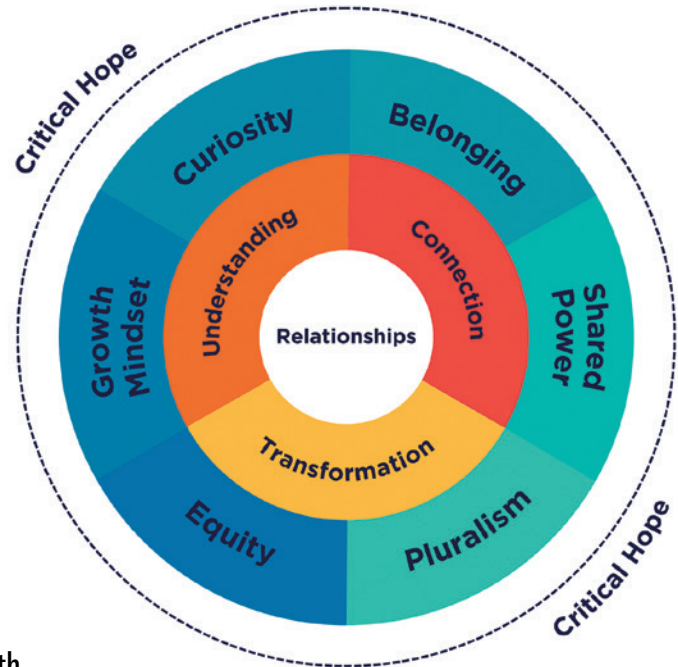
**Doug Kindschi**

Syliva & Richard Kaufman Founding Director



**Kyle Kooyers**

Director of Operations



**This amazing work would not be possible without the collective effort of the incredible Kaufman Staff:**

**Zahabia Ahmed Usmani**

Youth Program Manager

**Chloe Duncan**

Interfaith Campus Intern

**Elamin Gasim Ibrahim Gasim**

Office Coordinator

**Liz English**

Campus Program Manager

**Doug Kindschi**

Syliva & Richard Kaufman Founding Director

**Kyle Kooyers**

Director of Operations

**Phil Oosterhouse**

Technology Specialist

**Rachel Robinson**

Program Assistant & Pamela Kidd MD  
Interfaith Ambassador

**Roman Williams**

Senior Research Fellow

# Interfaith Understanding

*“Interfaith work is foundational to our community thriving. This work has become critical. I am committed to this work because I want to be a part, albeit a small part, of the solution.”*

**Dr. Simin Beg**

Division Chief of Hospice and Palliative Care, Corewell Health West/South

## Sacred Site Visits

Over **100 GVSU students** and **50 community members** participated in **7 sacred site visits** across West Michigan, including trips to a Sikh gurdwara, two masjids, a synagogue, a Buddhist temple, and a Hindu temple.

## How Women Changed American Religion: A Jewish Perspective

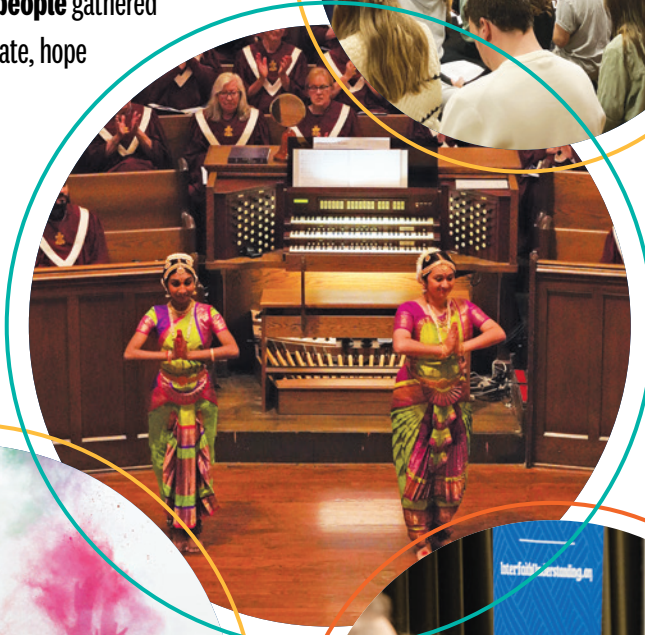
Through our partnership with the **Frankel Center for Judaic Studies** at the University of Michigan, **Dr. Karla Goldman** visited Grand Valley for the 4th Annual Padnos Public Engagement Lecture on Jewish Learning, exploring how American Judaism has been shaped by the engagement of Jewish women in their religious communities.

## The 25th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration

In the 25 years since its inception, the Interfaith Thanksgiving Celebration has consistently served as a place of gathering and appreciation for persons of many religious, secular, and spiritual identities. In a time when violence and division are rampant in our community and around the world, **over 500 people** gathered from vastly different backgrounds, to choose gratitude over hate, hope over despair, while raising **\$1,500 for Kids Food Basket**.

## The Challenge of Power, Morality, and Religion

The 2024 Jewish-Christian-Muslim Dialogue featured **Dr. Elaine Pagels, Rabbi Dr. Donniel Hartman,** and **Mustafa Akyol** for a day-long conference to explore the threat of power to morality, to own power and its challenges, and to name the problem of religion and nationalism.



# Human Connection

## Multifaith Mixer

This Fall 2024 campus kick-off gathering brought together **over 75 new and returning GVSU students** for a chance to enjoy some food together, play games, and create new connections as a part of Grand Valley's Welcome Week.

## Know Your Neighbor: A Multifaith Dinner and Table Talk

This **meal with meaning** highlighted the importance of connecting across our differences in worldview. Over dinner, **30 Lakers** got talking about this crucial and often underexplored aspect of identity.

## Uncovering Our Disconnection & Centering Down In An Uncertain World: The Interfaith Tuesday Table Talk Series

These bi-annual dinner conversations hosted in partnership with the **Dominican Center Marywood at Aquinas College** provided space to navigate spiritual identity in a changing world and to explore spiritual development in community with one another.

## One Small Step Powered by StoryCorps

One Small Step is an effort to remind the country of the humanity in all of us, even those with whom we disagree. During the Fall of 2024, the **Talking Together partnership** collaborated with StoryCorps to bring strangers with different political beliefs together for a 50-minute conversation - not to debate politics, but to get to know each other as people.



*"My time with Kaufman taught me that listening is an act of love, and that understanding someone's worldview doesn't mean losing your own—it means expanding your view of what's possible."*

**Chloe Duncan,**  
Junior at GVSU and  
Kaufman Campus Intern

# Collective Transformation

## The Faith Over Division Tour: A Conversation with Randy Callender

This evening of inspiration and healing, hosted in partnership with **One America Movement**, brought together people of faith to find hope and a shared future in the midst of toxic divisiveness. We heard from **Rev. Randy Callender** as he shared his expertise on addressing societal divides in communities and congregations alike.

## Revolutionary Love Bus Tour with Valarie Kaur & Friends

**Valarie Kaur** returned to GVSU this year with her fellow artists as a part of a national healing odyssey during which she called everyone to rise up in courage, humanity, and revolutionary love. Her evening with Kaufman was an immersive experience of storytelling, music, and ancestral wisdom.

## Writing Religious Wrongs: Breaking Up With Purity Culture & Processing Religious Trauma Through Art

A truly inspirational multi-author event hosted in partnership with **Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.**, this deep listening space showcased **Cait West, Dawn Burns, and Dr. Sara Moslener** as together we explored ways of processing religious/spiritual trauma, abuse, and pain through writing.

## World Peace Is Inevitable: How Do We Get There?

This year's Rabbi Phillip Sigal Interfaith Leadership Lecture featured nonprofit leader and Bahá'í community member **Syda Segovia Taylor** who taught us that, by breaking down religious barriers and unlocking the power of true collaboration, we can transform the way we make decisions and build a more peaceful world.

*"There's a mutual understanding of open-mindedness here. It feels like a safe space. Everyone is coming in ready to learn, wanting to gain a new perspective, and with a growth mindset that is able to adapt and change."*

**Harriet Engbers**  
Graduating Senior at City High School  
and Kaufman Interfaith  
Leadership Scholar



# Leadership Cohorts

## Interfaith Student Council

New to the GVSU campus this year, the Interfaith Student Council set out to build a vibrant and inclusive community where Lakers from all religious, secular, and spiritual backgrounds could come together to learn, share, and grow. Members of the board began the year at the Interfaith America Leadership Summit and brought back a toolkit for interfaith engagement to implement at Grand Valley. Throughout the year, the IFSC built interfaith relationships on campus through spaces of deep dialogue, story-sharing, and mutual respect.



## Kaufman Interfaith Leadership Scholars

Now in its sixth year, the Interfaith Leadership Scholars program continues to train middle and high school students from the greater Grand Rapids area to become activators of the interfaith movement. This year's cohort, representing five school districts and seven worldview traditions, engaged in conversation about the harms of social hierarchies through reading the young adult adaptation of Isabel Wilkerson's book *Caste: The Origins of Our Discontents*. They visited the Native American burial mounds, a Sikh gurdwara, and had the opportunity to learn about Tajikistan from one of our Scholars who is an exchange student. Their end-of-year project brought together community leaders to probe the intersections of faith and mental health.



## Statewide Partnerships & Collaboration

As a capstone to our 5-year collaboration with Fetzer Institute, the Kaufman Institute hosted a convening on "Critical Hope: Envisioning the Future of Interfaith" in June of 2024. This gathering involved 30+ multi-generational interfaith leaders from all around Michigan. Together we explored interfaith spaces that move people towards a pluralistic future. This initiative launched an expanded network of partnerships and collaboration with higher education institutions, youth leadership initiatives, and interfaith organizations across the state.



# Stay Connected

## Join Our Newsletter

[www.gvsu.edu/interfaith/inform](http://www.gvsu.edu/interfaith/inform)

## Mail

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## Phone

616-331-5702

## Online

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## Follow Us On

 [facebook.com/grinterfaith](https://facebook.com/grinterfaith)

 [instagram.com/grinterfaith](https://instagram.com/grinterfaith)

## Giving Opportunities

To support Kaufman programming in the West Michigan community, please visit:  
[www.gvsu.edu/interfaith/giving](http://www.gvsu.edu/interfaith/giving)



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### Wishing Wall

Please feel free to remove a white-side-out piece of paper and write down a hope, a prayer, or a wish. It can be something specific to our GVSU community, well-wishes for a friend, a personal goal - anything! When you're finished, please place the piece of paper back in the structure with the blue-side out.

You may also read the wishes of other participants, but please be sure to return all pieces of paper blue-side out. These are not for you to keep but to read, reflect upon, share, and return for the next passerby. We won't all have the same goals, and at times our wishes may conflict, but we are all part of this community and each voice is valuable.

