INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT IN WEST MICHIGAN:

A Brief History and Analysis

THE ASPEN INSTITUTE
JUSTICE & SOCIETY
PROGRAM

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Since 2012, the Justice & Society Program has explored religious diversity and pluralism through its Inclusive America Project. For more information, please visit *www.aspeninstitute.org/jsp*.

We would like to express our appreciation to Sylvia and Richard Kaufman, longtime advocates of interfaith dialogue in West Michigan and members of the Aspen Institute Society of Fellows, for helping to fund this study.

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PREFACE

Since 2012, the Aspen Institute Justice & Society Program has examined religious diversity and pluralism through its Inclusive America Project (IAP). With former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright and Harvard Kennedy School professor David Gergen serving as co-chairs, IAP convened a Distinguished Task Force to develop constructive approaches to America's increasing religious diversity. After several months of collaboration, including full-day meetings in December 2012 and April 2013, the task force published *Principled Pluralism: Report of the Inclusive America Project* in June 2013.

The Inclusive America Project recognizes the importance of managing religious differences in ways that contribute to social solidarity and cohesion. During the early and mid-20th century, when roughly 90% of the US population was Christian, efforts to bridge religious differences were mostly ecumenical Christian and Judeo-Christian in nature. Since the late 20th century, however, in response to growing diversity, such efforts have increasingly sought to engage people of every religion and no religion. This new phase of the interfaith movement includes national organizations such as the Interfaith Alliance (est. 1994), Interfaith Worker Justice (est. 1996), and Interfaith Youth Core (est. 2002), as well as regional and local associations.

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University has been documenting America's increasing religious diversity and the growth of the interfaith movement since the mid-1990s. In 2011, the Pluralism Project launched a pilot project examining interfaith activities in twenty mid-sized US cities. The result was *America's Interfaith Infrastructure: An Emerging Landscape* (www.pluralism.org/interfaith), an online resource contain-

ing directories of interfaith organizations, lists of promising practices, leadership profiles, and case studies. In its final report, the Interfaith Infrastructure pilot called for further study of interfaith efforts in US cities, for the dual purposes of documenting and resourcing the emerging movement.

This study is the Inclusive America Project's contribution to the *Interfaith Infrastructure* initiative. It contains an introduction to the contemporary interfaith movement in the United States, a brief history of interfaith engagement in West Michigan, and an analysis containing insights about interfaith organizing gleaned from West Michigan. It is our hope that this study will inspire others like it, creating a series of detailed reports on interfaith efforts in US cities and equipping the interfaith movement to have a greater social impact.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Overview

This study by the Aspen Institute Inclusive America Project has three main sections. Section I provides an introduction to the contemporary American interfaith movement. Section II gives a brief history of interfaith efforts in West Michigan over the past three decades, with a focus on the cities of Muskegon and Grand Rapids. Section III analyzes West Michigan's recent history of interfaith engagement, observing several stages through which the region's interfaith movement has progressed; identifying promising practices for engaging religiously unaffiliated adults and conservative Christians in interfaith efforts; and discussing the strengths, weaknesses, and integral features of the yearlong, citywide model of interfaith engagement that has been used in both Muskegon and Grand Rapids.

Section I- The Contemporary American Interfaith Movement

Two trends – increased immigration by religious minorities such as Buddhists, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs; and widespread disaffiliation from organized religion, especially among the Millennial generation – have significantly increased America's religious diversity in recent decades. The September 11 terrorist attacks and the proliferation of global media coverage of religion, especially religious violence, have increased public awareness of religious difference and made it a frequent topic of public discourse. These developments are linked to three forms of social tension: negative feelings toward religious minorities; antipathy between the highly religious and the highly secular; and friction between

religious conservatives and religious progressives. Social science research has shown that having accurate knowledge about other religions and personal friendships with people who do not share one's own beliefs can mitigate these interfaith tensions. On both local and national levels, a growing movement of interfaith advocates seeks to make interfaith understanding a social norm.

Section II- A Brief History of Interfaith Engagement in West Michigan

In the late 1980s, Muskegon, Michigan held a citywide celebration recognizing the 100th anniversary of its Jewish community. During the 1988-1989 academic year, Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Committee partnered with local religious, academic, and civil institutions to present 70 programs about Jewish life, history, and culture. After the Centennial Celebration, a group of local clergy established the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue. From 1991 to 2003, this committee brought prominent Jewish and Christian scholars to Muskegon for a conference once every three years, with smaller dialogue events in the interim. Inspired by one of the triennial dialogues, a Lutheran pastor partnered with the local rabbi to create an interfaith Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony, which has been held annually since 1995.

Independently, interfaith efforts also took root in the nearby city of Grand Rapids during the late 1980s. Three women – a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim – began organizing small interfaith conversations in private homes in 1988 and established the city's Interfaith Dialogue Association (IDA) in 1990. The IDA partnered with area universities to hold interfaith conferences throughout the 1990s, and today works to educate the Grand Rapids community about religious differences through a speakers bureau, radio show, and periodic interfaith events. In 2001, the West Michigan Academic Consortium was established. A group of five Christian colleges, two seminaries, and one state university, the Consortium presents academic conferences on topics related to religious diversity and pluralism. In 2007, Grand Valley State University established the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, which assumed

administrative responsibility for the triennial dialogues (formerly held in Muskegon) and the Academic Consortium. In 2012, Grand Rapids declared a citywide Year of Interfaith Understanding, organized by the Kaufman Institute. The initiative comprised more than 300 interfaith events, involved a wide array of the area's cultural and educational institutions, and engaged an estimated 20,000 participants.[1]

Section III- Analysis: Insights from West Michigan

Over the course of two and a half decades, the interfaith movement in Grand Rapids evolved from monthly dialogue groups involving a few dozen highly interested individuals to a yearlong, citywide initiative involving thousands. Although early interfaith efforts – e.g., small-group dialogues, academic conferences, and congregation-based gatherings – appeared to have a rather limited impact on the broader community, they allowed the city's core group of interfaith advocates to develop the knowledge, skills, and networks upon which the citywide Year of Interfaith Understanding relied.

During the early and intermediate stages of its development, Grand Rapids' interfaith movement primarily involved progressive Christians and religious minorities – two groups that are generally amenable to interfaith engagement. Now that the movement is well established, however, there is a need to broaden the conversation. Interfaith understanding will not become a social norm if it does not gain the support of conservatives as well as progressives, and the nonreligious as well as the religious.

Three promising practices for engaging religiously unaffiliated adults have emerged in West Michigan:

- *Partnering with Public Institutions*- Nonreligious individuals are extremely unlikely to attend events held in houses of worship. Both the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding addressed this by integrating interfaith themes into a variety of public institutions, such as the museum, library, theater, university, symphony, and social club.

- *Partnering with Local Media-* The media industry's current shift toward community-contributed content provides new opportunities for interfaith leaders to publicize their programs and promote their message. Interfaith advocates in Grand Rapids and Muskegon have reached large, diverse audiences by delivering interfaith content through local media.

- *Community Service Projects-* Interfaith service projects have shown strong potential to attract religiously unaffiliated adults – especially Millennials – who do not attend congregation-based interfaith events or academic conferences.

Three promising practices for engaging conservative Christians also have emerged in West Michigan:

- *A "Thick Dialogue" Approach-* Conservative Christians are often reluctant to participate in interfaith efforts because they perceive them as syncretistic (combining elements of several religious traditions) or universalistic. In response, interfaith leaders in West Michigan use an approach called "thick dialogue." This method tells people not to water down their religious convictions, but to bring the full "thickness" of their beliefs to interfaith encounters. It makes clear that the goal of interfaith engagement is not to reach doctrinal agreement or to convince participants that all religions are equally valid, but rather to develop mutual understanding, respect, and a stronger sense of community.

- *Dealing with the Issue of Evangelization-* Evangelization is sometimes described as the "third rail" of interfaith dialogue. Many non-Christians – especially members of minority belief systems that historically have been subjected to coercive missionary activity – are offended by, and even fearful of, what they term "proselytization." On the other hand, many evangelical Christians view "winning souls for Christ" as an act of love stemming from a sincere concern for others' salvation. Interfaith leaders in West Michigan recognize that truly inclusive interfaith dialogue must be able to include people who believe they have a religious calling, or even a duty, to evangelize. Inclusion does not demand, however, that other participants approve of that belief. Rather, it seeks to walk the delicate line of wel-

coming the participation of evangelicals, but not allowing preaching that undermines the goal of mutual understanding.

- *Involving Evangelical Colleges and Universities*- Evangelical institutions of higher learning are increasingly recognizing that, in a global society, their graduates must be knowledgeable about non-Christian belief systems and equipped to have respectful, productive interactions with people from diverse religions and cultures. In West Michigan, partnerships with evangelical Christian colleges and seminaries appear to be a promising avenue for bringing conservative Christians into the interfaith conversation.

The yearlong, citywide model of interfaith engagement represented by Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Celebration and Grand Rapids' Year of Interfaith Understanding is a cost-effective means of raising awareness about interfaith issues and creating a large number of interfaith events in a small to mid-sized city. The method of partnering with local institutions relieves interfaith leaders of significant planning and funding responsibilities. However, it limits organizers' ability to determine programmatic content, as the responsibility for designing and implementing programs is spread out among various partner organizations. Working with academic and cultural institutions enables the interfaith message to reach a broader audience than does partnering with religious congregations alone, but it does not fully solve the problem of underparticipation by conservative Christians and the religiously unaffiliated. Holding a large number of events in a single year provides high visibility, but tends to place disproportionate demands on small religious minority communities.

To work well, the yearlong, citywide model of interfaith engagement used in Muskegon and Grand Rapids requires at least seven things: 1) skillful, dedicated leadership; 2) an established presence of religious minority communities; 3) support from respected, religiously neutral institutions; 4) a strong media presence; 5) funding; 6) vibrant civic, cultural, and educational institutions; and 7) a planning period of several months. With these elements in place, the West Michigan model holds promise for other cities that seek to promote mutual understanding and friendly relations among their varied religious – and nonreligious – communities.

I) THE CONTEMPORARY AMERICAN INTERFAITH MOVEMENT

Religious Diversity

America's religious diversity has increased dramatically over the past 60 years. In 1955, Protestants (70%), Catholics (22%), and Jews (4%) made up nearly the entire US population.[2] That same year, Will Herberg, a prominent commentator on religion in mid-twentieth century America, remarked, "Not to be – that is, not to identify oneself and be identified as – either a Protestant, a Catholic, or a Jew is somehow not be an American… even when one's Americanness is otherwise beyond question."[3] Fast forward to 2015. Today, Herberg's statement would sound outrageous; about one quarter of Americans do not consider themselves Protestant, Catholic, or Jewish, and this proportion continues to grow.[4] Although roughly three quarters of the population remains at least nominally Christian, Americans' affiliations with Christian institutions have weakened significantly in recent decades. How did the Judeo-Christian country described by Herberg transform into what Harvard scholar Diana Eck calls "the most religiously diverse nation on earth"?[5]

One major driver of change has been immigration. Ten years after Herberg published *Protestant-Catholic-Jew*, the Immigration and Nationality Act of 1965 did away with a quota system that had severely restricted immigration from Africa and Asia, opening the door to a new wave of immigrants representing the full range of the world's religions.[6] America is now home to Buddhists, Hindus, Jains, Muslims, Sikhs, and myriad others. Although these communities represent a very small proportion of the population, they are growing in size and making their

presence felt. For example, the US Muslim community, barely a footnote in Herberg's analysis, numbered 1 million by 1992, grew to 2.75 million in 2011, and is projected to reach 6.2 million by 2030.[7] Today, more than one quarter of new immigrants to the US identify with non-Christian faiths: 10% are Muslim, 7% are Hindu, 6% are Buddhist, and 4% come from other non-Christian religions.[8]

The other key trend in American religion over the last twenty years has been disaffiliation from organized religion. In the mid-1950s, when strong anti-communist sentiment led the US Congress to insert the words "under God" into the Pledge of Allegiance and adopt "In God We Trust" as the national motto, Herberg reported an "all-time high in religious identification."[9] Atheism and agnosticism were more unpopular than ever, and less than 2% of the US population openly claimed no religious affiliation.[10] The proportion of religiously unaffiliated Americans increased gradually in the 1960s and 1970s but remained below 10% until the mid-1990s, at which point it began to rise rapidly. Today, roughly 20% of Americans and over 30% of the millennial generation (adults born after 1980) profess no religious affiliation, and very few of them are searching for one.[11]

In addition to these demographic changes, the proliferation of the global news media has greatly increased Americans' exposure to religious diversity. To quote Princeton sociologist Robert Wuthnow, "News coverage from around the world includes images of religious leaders, adherents, and their places of worship. The nation's expansive economic and military activities render these images more newsworthy than they would have been in the past."[12] With a few exceptions, such as the widespread attention generated by Pope Francis, religious conflict is usually the focus. Recent examples include the coverage of the *Charlie Hebdo* attacks; US negotiations with Iran's Islamic government over its nuclear program; the Israeli-Palestinian conflict; and the rise of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq. Domestically, a series of sex abuse cases involving priests placed the Catholic Church under the microscope in the early 2000s, and Mitt Romney's 2012 presidential run drew unprecedented public attention to Mormonism. Thus, in the age of round-the-clock media coverage, religious diversity has become a frequent topic of public discourse and a highly visible issue, even for many who rarely encounter it firsthand.

More than any other news item, the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center towers altered the way Americans view religious differences.[13] For one thing, the attacks thrust Islam into the national spotlight. Since 9/11, Islam has regularly appeared in headlines, been extensively portrayed in television and film, and been the frequent subject of heated political debates. More generally, the World Trade Center attacks drew increased national attention to religious diversity and strategies for managing difference. The Equal Employment Opportunity Commission issued a special alert urging religious tolerance in the workplace shortly after 9/11, and reported a 250% increase in the number of religion-based discrimination charges involving Muslims in the months following the attack.[14] The New York Police Department launched a secret surveillance program in the city's Muslim neighborhoods in the wake of 9/11, sparking a public conversation about the legality and usefulness of religious profiling.[15] A decade after the attacks, the Obama administration launched the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, billed as "an important way to build understanding between different communities and contribute to the common good."[16] During its first four years, more than 400 institutions of higher education have participated.[17] These are but a few examples of the increased attention paid to religious diversity in the post-9/11 United States.

Interfaith Tensions

America's increasing – and increasingly visible – religious diversity is linked to significant social tensions. One type of tension exists among different faiths, often taking the form of suspicion, hostility and prejudice against members of religious minority communities. Negative attitudes toward Muslims are especially pronounced, and worsening. According to a July 2014 poll by the Arab-American Institute, just 27% of Americans have a favorable opinion of Muslims, down from 37% in 2010 and 47% in October 2001.[18] While most Americans report favorable impressions of Jews, anti-Semitic hate crimes remain a persistent problem, accounting for 59% of all religiously-motivated crimes in the FBI's most recent annual report.[19] A 2014 study by the Sikh American Coalition reports that just over half of Sikh school children, and two-

thirds of those who wear the traditional Sikh turban, endure bullying in school. By comparison, slightly less than one-third of American schoolchildren nationwide report being bullied.[20] Buddhists, Hindus, Mormons, and other religious minorities similarly encounter bigotry and discrimination in various forms.

Studies consistently demonstrate that many Americans are ignorant or misinformed about world religions. In a 2007 poll, 58% of Americans admitted to having little or no knowledge about Islam and its practices, and 51% said the same about Mormonism.[21] In a 2010 study of religious knowledge, only 45% of Americans knew that the Jewish Sabbath begins on Friday, 54% knew the Qur'an to be the Islamic holy book, and 52% knew Ramadan as the Islamic holy month. Just 47% of Americans correctly identified the Dalai Lama as Buddhist and only 51% correctly identified Joseph Smith as Mormon.[22] Seventy percent of Americans say that they seldom or never visit websites or read books about religions other than their own, compared with just 6% who report doing so on a weekly basis.[23]

A second type of tension exists between the religiously devout and the religiously unaffiliated. In *American Grace: How Religion Divides and Unites Us* (2010), Harvard sociologist Robert Putnam and Notre Dame political scientist David Campbell observe that the primary religious split in the United States is no longer interdenominational or interreligious, but rather between religious and secular: "Americans are increasingly concentrated at opposite ends of the religious spectrum – the highly religious at one pole, and the avowedly secular at the other. The moderate religious middle is shrinking."[24]

In a 2014 study by the Pew Research Center (Fig. 1), respondents were asked to describe their feelings toward various religious groups on a "feeling thermometer" ranging from 0 to 100, with 50 being neutral.[25] The lowest recorded rating was white evangelical Protestants' rating of atheists, and the second lowest was atheists' rating of evangelical

Christians.[a] At one end of the spectrum, the so-called "culture warriors" of the Christian right, such as Pat Robertson and Mike Huckabee, claim that Americans' religious freedoms and values are under attack, and warn that disaster awaits if the nation turns its back on God. In a June 2011 survey by Pew, 92% of evangelical Christian leaders in the United States described the "influence of secularism" as "a major threat" to their faith community.[26] At the other end of the spectrum, the confrontational "New Atheist" movement, led by Richard Dawkins, Sam Harris, and the late Christopher Hitchens, proclaims that religion "poisons everything"[27] and "should be countered, criticized and exposed by rational argument wherever its influence arises."[28]

Figure 1

Religious Groups' Ratings of Each Other

MOST NEGATIVE — 0 to 33 — 34 to 66 — 67 to 100 — MOST POSITIVE

Mean thermometer ratings given to ...

Ratings given by...	Jews	Catholics	Evangelical Christians	Buddhists	Hindus	Mormons	Atheists	Muslims
Total	**63°**	**62°**	**61°**	**53°**	**50°**	**48°**	**41°**	**40°**
Protestant	64	60	73	45	44	47	32	36
White evangelical	69	63	82	39	38	47	25	30
White mainline	63	62	62	54	50	52	41	37
Black Protestant	59	55	73	41	42	42	30	44
Catholic	61	80	57	55	53	51	38	40
Jewish	89	58	34	61	57	48	55	35
Unaffiliated	58	52	41	64	56	44	60	45
Atheist	61	47	28	69	58	39	82	44
Agnostic	58	49	37	70	60	47	66	47
Nothing in particular	58	54	45	62	54	45	53	44

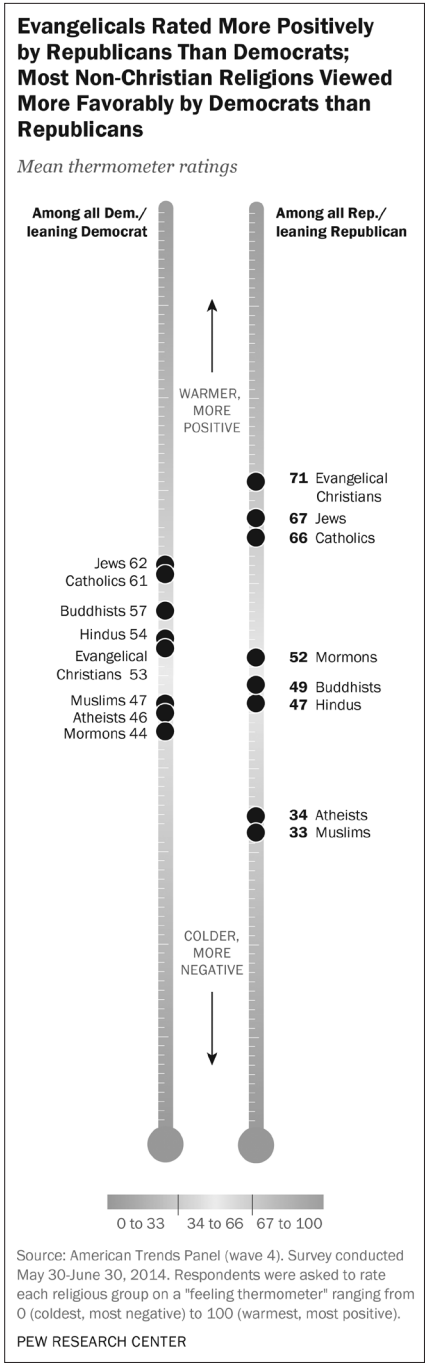
Source: American Trends Panel (wave 4). Survey conducted May 30-June 30, 2014. Respondents were asked to rate each religious group on a "feeling thermometer" ranging from 0 (coldest, most negative) to 100 (warmest, most positive).

Note: Respondents were asked to rate "evangelical Christians" on the feeling thermometer; the question did not ask specifically about white evangelicals or about evangelical Protestants.

PEW RESEARCH CENTER

a Throughout this study, a distinction will be made between evangelical Protestant denominations, which tend to be more conservative, and mainline Protestant denominations, which tend to be more progressive. The Pew Research Center summarizes this distinction as follows: "Churches within the evangelical Protestant tradition share certain religious beliefs (such as the conviction that personal acceptance of Jesus Christ is the only way to salvation), practices (such as an emphasis on bringing other people to the faith) and origins (including separatist movements against established religious institutions). In contrast, churches in the mainline Protestant tradition share other doctrines (such as a less exclusionary view of salvation), practices (such as a strong emphasis on social reform) and origins (such as long-established religious institutions)." *Pew Research Center*, "U.S. Religious Landscape Survey," February 1, 2008.

Figure 2



A third tension exists between religious conservatives and religious progressives, even within a single religious tradition such as Christianity. In recent decades, religious affiliations have become markedly correlated with political allegiances. At the same time, American political discourse has become more and more hostile and polarized. David Campbell describes the result as "an increasing overlap between religious and political tensions," leading to "religious stereotyping and antipathy on both sides of the political spectrum."[29] This toxic combination of religion and politics pits religious conservatives not only against secularists, but also against religious progressives. Back in the late 1980s, Robert Wuthnow observed Americans dividing themselves into "two opposing camps" with "fundamentalists, evangelicals, and religious conservatives" in one, and "religious liberals, humanists, and secularists" in the other.[30] The divisions between these two camps have deepened over the last 25 years. Today, Campbell calls the mixing of religious and political hostilities "perhaps the biggest challenge facing interreligious harmony."[31]

The political element of interfaith tensions is clearly visible in sur-

vey data (Fig 2).[32] Republicans express coldness toward Muslims and atheists, giving them respective ratings of 33 and 34 on the "feeling thermometer," but they are extremely warm toward evangelical Christians, giving them a 71. In contrast, Democrats are far cooler toward evangelical Christians, giving them a 53, and express much more positive views of atheists, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists than do Republicans.

Diversity: Both Challenge and Asset

These interreligious, religious-secular, and intra-religious tensions reveal that religious diversity poses a significant challenge for American society. Robert Putnam's research has shown that, at least in the short term, diversity tends to foster social isolation. In an essay titled "E Pluribus Unum: Diversity and Community in the Twenty-first Century," Putnam writes, "Inhabitants of diverse communities tend to withdraw from collective life, to distrust their neighbors… to withdraw even from close friends, to expect the worst from their community and its leaders, to volunteer less, to give less to charity… and to huddle unhappily in front of the television."[33] However, Putnam also maintains that, properly managed, diversity is "an important social asset," yielding long-term benefits such as creativity, resiliency, and economic development. The history of the United States is replete with examples of how diversity can enrich and even strengthen society.

In *American Grace*, Putnam and Campbell examine religious diversity more specifically. They find that globally, high levels of religious devotion and high levels of religious diversity are a combustible combination. Examples abound, such as the religious wars that devastated Western Europe during the 16th and 17th centuries, and the religiously motivated violence that currently rages in the Middle East, parts of Africa, and Southeast Asia. However, the United States, which has significant religious diversity and is the most religiously devout nation in the developed world, seems to defy this trend. Putnam and Campbell suggest that the most important reason for this is the prevalence of interfaith relationships in the US.[34]

Putnam and Campbell's research shows that making a single friend from a different religious background tends to make a person re-evaluate neg-

ative feelings or suspicions toward that group. It can even improve his or her opinion about other religious minorities – i.e., making friends with a Muslim may improve an individual's perception about Hindus and Sikhs, even without personal exposure to a member of either group.[35] Survey data support Putnam and Campbell's conclusion. A 2014 survey by the Arab American Institute found that having a favorable view of Muslims is almost twice as common among Americans who know a Muslim as it is among Americans who do not know a Muslim.[36] Pew Research Center polls from 2007 and 2010 showed the same trend.[37] A 2013 study titled *Making Multiculturalism Work*, which examined community organizing efforts in the United Kingdom, contends that "ordinary relationships across religious and cultural difference are the key to addressing the malaise of the public square."[38] In "E Pluribus Unum," Putnam concludes that "the central challenge for modern, diversifying societies is to create a new, broader sense of 'we'."[39]

The Interfaith Movement

The contemporary interfaith movement in the United States seeks to address this challenge. Interfaith advocates recognize that Americans' collective response to religious diversity has critical implications for social harmony and cohesion. They seek to engage religious diversity as an asset, rather than allowing it to be a cause of social discord and fragmentation. Several non-profit organizations are developing tools that combat ignorance by promoting accurate knowledge about the world's belief systems, and that facilitate the interfaith relationships that have been proven to defuse tensions and promote social cohesion. For example, the Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, based in New York City, designs trainings and educational resources for teachers, doctors, employers, and interfaith advocates.[40] Project Interfaith, based in Omaha, Nebraska, has created an online platform called RavelUnravel that equips people to describe and share their religious identities.[b] Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core partners with hundreds of colleges

b Project Interfaith was dissolved as a non-profit organization in February 2015, after nearly a decade of organizing interfaith programs in the Omaha area. The RavelUnravel website and its accompanying resources will be managed by the non-profit organization World Faith (http://worldfaith.org/).

and universities across the United States to promote interfaith service and train students as interfaith leaders.[41]

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) describes its mission as "making interfaith cooperation a social norm." In a 2011 interview, IFYC Founder and President Eboo Patel described what this would look like: "Mosques, churches, and synagogues are regularly engaged in interfaith exchanges, every college campus has an interfaith council, [and] every city has a day of interfaith service. You would expect everyday citizens to have a basic level of interfaith literacy, [and] you could expect religious prejudice to be as out of bounds in a political race as racial prejudice or sexism."[42] This lofty ideal represents what many interfaith advocates see as the long-term goal of the movement.

II) A BRIEF HISTORY OF INTERFAITH ENGAGEMENT IN WEST MICHIGAN

Muskegon, Michigan

Muskegon is a city of about 40,000 people, in a county of about 170,000, located on the eastern shore of Lake Michigan.[43] Like many small Midwestern cities, Muskegon is overwhelmingly Christian, with an array of Baptist, Catholic, Christian Reformed, Episcopal, Lutheran, Methodist, Pentecostal, and Reformed churches. Since the late 19th century, Muskegon has also been home to a small Reform Jewish temple, Congregation B'nai Israel. In the late 1980s, the city was the venue for a series of interfaith programs, when Congregation B'nai Israel partnered with local churches and cultural institutions to celebrate the 100th anniversary of Muskegon's Jewish community.

The Jewish Centennial Celebration (1988-1989)[44]

Origin, Goals, and Structure

The original vision for the Jewish Centennial Celebration was modest: a single exhibit at the Muskegon Art Museum commemorating 100 years of Jewish presence in Muskegon. When Sylvia Kaufman of Congregation B'nai Israel proposed the idea to the museum's director in October 1985, he agreed to host an exhibit on Jewish art and suggested inviting other local institutions to join the initiative. The response was tremendous: Both of the city's museums, two area colleges, the symphony, the civic theater, the performing arts center, the school district, the public library, the community foundation, and several progressive Christian churches decided to take part in what became a citywide celebration of Jewish life, history, and culture.

Leaders from these organizations served on the Jewish Centennial Committee, which was in charge of planning the Celebration. With Ms. Kaufman as its chairperson, the Committee established the Celebration's key objectives:

1) Communicate an understanding of Jewish life, history, and culture.

2) Develop a coordinated, quality educational program that will be a meaningful learning experience for the entire community.

3) Implement a program that will attract people to local institutions from geographic areas including and beyond Muskegon and Grand Rapids.

4) Provide a model for planning and executing a community celebration centered on a particular ethnic or religious group (or another unifying theme).

Rather than tasking the Committee with the entire burden of organizing and funding the Celebration's events, it was decided that each participating organization would incorporate Jewish content into its existing programming during the 1988-1989 academic year. For example, instead of the Jewish Centennial Committee organizing a freestanding event celebrating Jewish music, the West Shore Symphony Orchestra featured pieces by Jewish composers and performances by Jewish guest musicians as part of its regularly scheduled concert series in autumn 1988. The Committee's main responsibilities were to brainstorm ideas for events, provide supplementary funding, conduct a publicity campaign, and ensure that each event met standards for quality and relevance.

Funding

Because Jewish Centennial events were integrated into local organizations' existing programs, they did not require full independent funding. However, as a financial incentive for local organizations to take part, the Committee agreed to cover 28% of the direct costs of all Jewish Centennial programs; participating organizations covered the remaining 72% from their existing budgets. To fund its portion of program costs, the Committee sought the support of the local Jewish community, charitable foundations, and businesses.

Donations from individual members of Muskegon's Jewish community amounted to $43,000 – roughly half of the Centennial Committee's budget. Eight foundations – two national, one state-level, and five local – combined to contribute an additional $40,000. This made it unnecessary to solicit donations from local businesses, although four local banks each contributed $1,000 to a specific project. About 20 local businesses made in-kind contributions, including free space to post the Celebration's schedule of events in the newspaper; design and printing of posters and promotional literature; and filming of a documentary video.

The final projected cost of the Jewish Centennial Celebration was $607,375, including direct costs of $307,375 and an estimated $300,000 of administrative expenses and in-kind contributions. With participating organizations absorbing 72% of direct costs and nearly all indirect costs, the Jewish Centennial Committee was left with responsibility for just $87,850. The actual costs of the Celebration were significantly less than expected, leaving the Committee with a surplus of $24,000 when the Celebration concluded in May 1989.

Publicity

The Jewish Centennial Committee made concerted efforts to obtain publicity in the months leading up to the Celebration. Six thousand posters, 14,000 brochures and 25,000 calendars of events were distributed to schools, universities, museums, libraries, corporations, and religious institutions across the region. The local newspaper, The Muskegon Chronicle, gave the Celebration significant coverage, including an 18-page insert that ran nine days before the Celebration's kickoff weekend. The Jewish Centennial Committee also sent media kits containing press releases and schedules of events to local, regional, and national media, as well as Jewish media sources. By the Celebration's conclusion, it had been covered by *The Detroit Free Press, The Chicago Tribune, The New York Times, USA Today, The Toronto Globe*, various Jewish newspapers, Voice of America, the Religion News Service, and several radio stations.

Programming

From September 1988 to May 1989, the Celebration offered 55 programs for general audiences, plus another 15 specifically for schools and churches. The Celebration's opening weekend, September 24-25, 1988,

was headlined by one of the biggest cultural events in Muskegon's history: a Saturday evening concert by internationally acclaimed Jewish violinist Itzhak Perlman. The 1,800-seat Frauenthal Center for the Performing Arts was sold out well in advance. Before the performance, three hundred of the concertgoers attended a gala kosher dinner, which provided an opportunity for leading members of Muskegon's non-Jewish community to experience Jewish dietary customs firsthand.

The Celebration's kickoff weekend featured three other community events besides the Perlman concert. The first of these, held on the Saturday afternoon before the concert, was the opening of an exhibit on Holocaust victim Anne Frank at the Muskegon County Museum, which included a speech by US Senator Carl Levin (D-Michigan). The second event, held in conjunction with the opening of the exhibit, was the dedication of a book tracing the 100-year history of Muskegon's Jewish community, which had been commissioned by the Jewish Centennial Committee and authored by Dr. Dennis Devlin, a history professor from Grand Valley State University. In the final event of the weekend, held on Sunday after the concert, nine Christian clergymen joined Rabbi Alan Alpert of Congregation B'nai Israel for a public interfaith gathering. US Congressman Guy Vander Jagt (R-Michigan), a graduate of Yale Divinity School, gave a sermon highlighting shared beliefs between Jews and Christians. Vander Jagt noted that the ceremony's closing song, "God Bless America," was written by a Jewish composer, Irving Berlin, and commented that attendees sang not as Jews or Christians, but as "brothers of one nationality" – Americans.

The programs offered through Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Celebration involved nearly all of the city's leading cultural institutions and dealt with an array of subjects, including music, visual arts, religion, history, and politics:

- The local theater produced *Anne Frank: The Diary of a Young Girl* and offered a three-event film festival featuring Jewish themes. More than 1,500 middle school students attended a special matinee performance of the play.

- The art museum and symphony showcased Jewish performers, composers, and works of art.

- The public library featured tales and legends from the Jewish tradition, as well as an exhibit on Jewish involvement in the Civil Rights movement.

- A subcommittee of local churches presented a two-day symposium highlighted by a theological discussion by Dr. Eugene Borowitz, a rabbi, and Dr. Paul van Buren, an Episcopalian minister, on the topic, "Understanding Each Other: Issues which Unite and Divide Jews and Christians." Nearly 200 people attended.

- Temple B'nai Israel held an interfaith Hanukkah celebration, a series of free Jewish cooking classes, and, in partnership with local churches, periodic interfaith discussions using a set curriculum.

- A small group of Christians and Jews met for interfaith dialogues in a private home. Using a structured guide, Interfaith Circles, members got to know one another and progressively moved to deeper discussions about their beliefs as they became more comfortable.

- Teacher guides on cultural and religious pluralism, as well as books and videos about Jewish history and culture, were distributed to area schools.

- Grand Valley State University offered a five-lecture series on the Arab-Israeli conflict, and Muskegon Community College offered a four-lecture series on Jewish history. Both of these were given by visiting experts from the University of Michigan.

The capstone event of the Celebration was an interfaith Seder (Passover meal) held at the Muskegon Harbor Hilton in April 1989. Roughly 400 participants, the majority of them Christian, were seated in groups of 10 with at least two members of the Jewish community at each table. Rabbi Alpert and Rev. Don Mathews of First Presbyterian Church offered opening remarks about the significance of Passover in their respective traditions. Participants then celebrated the ritual meal together, with the Jewish hosts explaining their traditions to their Christian guests.

The West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue

At the conclusion of the Jewish Centennial Celebration, $17,000 in leftover funds was dedicated to continuing Jewish-Christian dialogue in the Muskegon area. Local clergymen who had been involved in the Celebration formed the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue and accepted responsibility for organizing a major dialogue once every three years, with smaller events in the interim.

The West Shore Committee held five full-day Jewish-Christian Dialogues in Muskegon on a triennial basis from 1991 to 2003. Prominent Jewish and Christian scholars took part, including Dr. Krister Stendahl, a leading Lutheran theologian and the former Bishop of Stockholm; Dr. David Hartman, a rabbi and the founder of the Shalom Hartman Institute in Jerusalem; Dr. Martin Marty of the University of Chicago Divinity School; and James Carroll, a novelist, historian, and former Catholic priest. During years in which there was no major dialogue, the West Shore Committee brought a single religious scholar to Muskegon to speak publicly about Jewish-Christian relations.[c] To fund its activities, the Committee charged a nominal registration fee at each Triennial Dialogue, solicited small contributions from the local synagogue and churches, and sought modest grants from area foundations.

The Triennial Dialogues typically attracted 200-300 people. Most attendees were progressive Protestants – e.g., Lutherans, Methodists, Presbyterians, members of the United Church of Christ and a few of the more liberal Reformed churches – as well as Catholic and Jews. One Lutheran pastor who helped organize the dialogues recalls, "It didn't broaden out as much as I had hoped… I would have liked to see more of the conservative churches involved."[45] Although the West Shore Committee always included a Catholic priest and a parishioner, Catholic clergy became less involved in interfaith efforts in Muskegon over time, as a decline in new vocations meant that priests were tasked with additional parishes and responsibilities. The dialogues primarily attracted scholars, clergy, and educated laypeople, especially empty-nesters and recent retirees, with an interest in interfaith relations.

c This annual event was discontinued after the creation of the West Michigan Academic Consortium in 2001. See page 34.

In 2006, recognizing the potential to attract larger audiences, the organizers of the Triennial Dialogue moved it to nearby Grand Rapids. Grand Valley State University (GVSU) agreed to host it. That same year, the Dialogue invited a Muslim theologian to participate for the first time, a fitting addition given Islam's growing presence in West Michigan. In 2007, the newly established Kaufman Interfaith Institute at GVSU took over responsibility for the dialogues. These continue to bring prominent Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars to Grand Rapids for a full-day program once every three years.

Annual Holocaust Remembrance Service

One of the clergy in attendance at the first Jewish-Christian Dialogue in 1991 was Rev. Chris Anderson, who came to Muskegon in the late 1980s to pastor Samuel Lutheran Church. Anderson, who had not been involved in the Jewish Centennial Celebration, recalls appreciating the way in which the speaker, Dr. Krister Stendahl, "helped us broaden our perspective on Jews and Gentiles."[46] After attending the 1994 dialogue, Anderson was inspired to organize an interfaith prayer service with the local Jewish community. He contacted Rabbi Alpert and asked if Temple B'nai Israel would partner with Samuel Lutheran to hold a service honoring and remembering the victims of the Holocaust.

Muskegon's first Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony was held at Samuel Lutheran Church in 1995, the 50th anniversary of the liberation of the Nazi death camps and the 50th anniversary of the death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran theologian who was executed for his opposition to Hitler's regime. The event was not widely publicized, and only 12 people attended. Nevertheless, believing that Christians have a moral responsibility to stand in solidarity with Jews and publicly condemn the long history of Christian anti-Semitism, Anderson continued to work with Alpert to make the Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony an annual event.

The service always consists of two parts: the testimony of someone who experienced the Holocaust and a period of communal reflection and remembrance. Each year, the service focuses on a different aspect of the Holocaust – e.g., survivors, liberators, children, literature, or con-

centration camps – in order to illuminate the different ways in which individuals were affected by the Holocaust and how they responded. The program focuses on learning and reflection, not prayer; the only prayer offered is the Mourner's Kaddish, a traditional Jewish prayer for the dead, which Jews and Christians recite together in both English and Aramaic.

The Holocaust Remembrance Service now attracts audiences of 100-150. In various years, the community college, public and private schools, and local music groups have been involved. The Service's emphasis has shifted over time, moving away from expressing interfaith solidarity and toward educating young people about various aspects of the Holocaust and encouraging them to combat racial and religious discrimination. In 2013, Rev. Anderson's group – formerly called the Shoah Remembrance Committee of Muskegon – changed its name to the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies, and established offices at Muskegon Community College. Anderson and Alpert are currently working to ensure that Muskegon's Holocaust Remembrance Service will continue after they step down as organizers.

Grand Rapids, Michigan

Located about 30 miles inland from Lake Michigan, Grand Rapids is the second-largest city in Michigan and the largest in Kent County. The city's population is about 190,000, the county's just over 600,000.[47] The greater Grand Rapids area stands out for its highly religious culture. Fifty-four percent of the population reports regularly attending religious services, far above the national average of roughly 35%.[48] The prominence of evangelical Christian denominations in the area – notably the Christian Reformed Church in North America, which has its headquarters in Grand Rapids and 80 churches in Kent County – has given the area a reputation for being socially and politically conservative. Over 40% of the religiously affiliated population in Kent County is evangelical Protestant, a category that includes large Reformed and Christian Reformed communities; several nondenominational "mega-churches"; significant numbers of Wesleyans, Baptists, and Pentecostals; and many smaller congregations. Roman Catholics make up 34% of the county's churchgoers, while mainline Protestants – e.g., Episcopalians, Lutherans,

United Methodists, and members of the United Church of Christ – account for another 18%.[49]

Like Muskegon, Grand Rapids has been home to a small Jewish community for well over a century. Temple Emanuel, the local Reform Jewish congregation, was founded in 1857, while Congregation Ahavas Israel, the city's Conservative synagogue, traces its history back to 1892. However, unlike most small cities and towns in West Michigan, such as Holland and Muskegon, Grand Rapids is also home to organized groups from several other belief systems. In 1986, immigrants from South Asia established the Islamic Center and Mosque of Grand Rapids in an old church building. Two more mosques were founded in the mid-1990s, one of them by Bosnian Muslims who came to Grand Rapids as refugees. Today, Grand Rapids' Muslim population is estimated at over 8,000 people – twice as large as the local United Church of Christ presence and nearly four times the size of the local Episcopalian community.[50] The city has five mosques, including Masjid At-Tawheed, a $1.8 million facility that opened in 2010.[51] The Grand Rapids suburb of Ada is home to the West Michigan Hindu Temple, an 8,000 square foot building that was completed in 2008 at a cost of roughly $1 million.[52] Michigan's chapter of the Center for Inquiry, a national secular humanist organization, is headquartered in Grand Rapids. The city also has three small Buddhist centers and a Sikh gurdwara.

Interfaith Dialogue Association[53]

Origin, Goals, and Structure

In the late 1980s, as Muskegon was planning its Jewish Centennial Celebration, interfaith dialogue was developing independently in Grand Rapids. Dr. Phillip Sigal, the rabbi of Congregation Ahavas Israel from 1980 to 1985, was an early leader of interfaith dialogue who dreamed of establishing a center for Jewish-Christian relations. After Rabbi Sigal's death in 1985, his widow, Dr. Lillian Sigal, pursued his vision by collaborating with Rev. Marchiene Rienstra, the first female graduate of Calvin Theological Seminary, and Ghazala Munir, a founding member of the Islamic Center and Mosque of Grand Rapids. The three women brought together a group of local religious and academic leaders for

monthly interfaith dialogues at the Sigal home. Their original plan was to involve the three Abrahamic faiths, but this soon expanded to include members of all faiths and belief systems. In 1990, the Interfaith Dialogue Association (IDA) of Grand Rapids was officially established, with Sigal and Rienstra serving as co-presidents.

The IDA's mission has remained essentially unchanged since the time of its founding:[54]

1. To advance understanding of religions and ideologies by study, dialogue, and sharing about religious experiences.

2. To eliminate prejudice between members of different religious traditions and ideologies.

3. To foster appreciation for the richness of diverse ideologies and religions.

4. To identify commonalities and differences among religions and ideologies to enhance personal growth and transformation.

5. To promote friendship and trust among people of diverse ideologies and religions.

From a religious perspective, the leadership of the IDA has been quite diverse. In addition to Sigal and Rienstra, its Jewish and Christian founding co-presidents, Muslim and Baha'i participants have held the co-president position. The IDA's current president, Fred Stella, who has held the position since Sigal left the Grand Rapids area in 1997, is the ordained *pracharak* (outreach minister) of the West Michigan Hindu Temple. Among the IDA's board members are Catholic and Jewish professors and liberal Protestant clergy.

From an ideological perspective, the IDA leadership has been less diverse. Practically all of the founding members of the organization considered themselves progressives. Sigal relates that when the group invited conservatives to participate, the manner in which they wanted to share their faith caused friction. In her words, "Their interest, when they attended, was not to dialogue and learn about other faiths but to proselytize us to their faith."[55] The IDA's board remains overwhelmingly pro-

gressive today, but in recent years the organization has made a greater effort to engage religious conservatives in West Michigan.

Programming

Initially, the Interfaith Dialogue Association's main project was organizing small interfaith discussion groups of 15-20 people that held monthly meetings in members' homes. Although the Grand Rapids area had relatively little religious diversity at that time, there were Baha'i, Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, and Roman Catholic participants, as well as Protestants from several denominations. At the beginning of each meeting, one member would offer a prayer or ritual blessing from his or her tradition and explain its significance. After this opening, the group would engage in a discussion about a selected text on a particular religious tradition or theological issue. A moderator would attempt to facilitate a balanced discussion according to the ground rules laid out in Dr. Leonard Swidler's "Dialogue Decalogue" (Appendix A).[56]

Although the discussions were small in size, participants remember them as rich in content. Dr. Stephen Rowe, a professor of philosophy at Grand Valley State University and one of the original members of the IDA, describes these early living-room dialogues as "incredible." Rowe recalls, "Many evenings we just talked all night long."[57] Ghazala Munir, who also participated in the IDA from the beginning, reflects, "It was simply amazing. We enjoyed each other's company and made such good friendships and connections."[58] Both Munir and Sigal report learning a great deal by reading and discussing *The World's Religions*, by Dr. Huston Smith.

During its early years, the IDA used to organize an annual conference featuring a scholar who had made a significant contribution to interfaith dialogue. Aquinas College, Calvin College, Grand Valley State University, and the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism provided support. The first conference, held in late 1990, featured Dr. Swidler, founder of the Dialogue Institute at Temple University. Subsequent conferences featured Dr. Smith, a professor of religion at Syracuse University, and Dr. Riffat Hassan, a Muslim feminist thinker from the University of Louisville. Each conference included a keynote address, responses to the keynote by members of an interfaith panel, and small group discussions facilitated by members of the IDA.

In recent years, the IDA has stopped organizing its own conferences, preferring instead to support conferences offered by local universities and the West Michigan Academic Consortium. The IDA continues to organize dialogue groups, and has created a speakers bureau, which is now one of its main projects. According to Stella:

> "The speakers bureau is a really fine group of people of all religions who are 1) devout practitioners; 2) excellent speakers who know how to present their faith tradition to audiences; and 3) represent a mix of different ideological and sectarian views within each of the faiths."[59]

The IDA educates the Grand Rapids community about different religions and belief systems by connecting these speakers with schools, churches, and other community institutions. Just over a decade ago, Stella created "Common Threads," a weekly radio show featuring diverse religious perspectives on timely issues. The IDA also helps organize periodic interfaith events, such as an interfaith Thanksgiving celebration that has been held annually in Grand Rapids since 2000.

The West Michigan Academic Consortium

In 1999, the leaders of the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue undertook to expand their reach beyond Muskegon. Sylvia Kaufman approached the presidents of six institutions of higher learning, two in Holland and four in Grand Rapids, and invited them to participate in an academic conference about Jewish-Christian relations. Five of them – Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Hope College, Grand Valley State University, and Western Theological Seminary – agreed to participate.

The president of each participating school designated a faculty representative to help plan the initial conference. This group organized a day-long conference on Jewish and Christian interpretations of the Bible featuring Dr. James Kugel, a Harvard University professor of Hebrew Literature. The conference was held at Calvin College in December 2001, and attracted 100-150 attendees. Several weeks after the event, the group of faculty representatives reconvened, and all members agreed to continue holding conferences in years when no Triennial Dialogue is held.

By 2005, Aquinas College had joined the Consortium. A few years later, Cornerstone University and Kuyper College joined, bringing the membership in the Consortium to its current total: five Christian colleges, two seminaries, and one state university. The conference's location rotates among the participating schools, and faculty representatives from each school collaboratively determine the content. The presidents of the eight participating institutions join their faculty representatives for a private dinner with the featured speaker and then attend the evening keynote together.

The Consortium has consistently brought prominent Jewish and Christian scholars to Grand Rapids. They include Paula Fredricksen of Boston University, Karen King of Harvard Divinity School, and Margaret Mitchell, Dean of the University of Chicago Divinity School. In 2010, the Consortium had its first Muslim keynote speaker, Omid Safi of Duke University, who attracted the largest audience of any of its conferences to date. Its most recent speaker was Dr. William Schweiker, Professor of Theological Ethics at the University of Chicago Divinity School, whose two-part keynote was titled "Does Religion Have a Future?"

The Kaufman Interfaith Institute

Grand Valley State University has been consistently involved in interfaith dialogue efforts since the late 1980s. GVSU offered a series of public lectures on the Arab-Israeli conflict as part of Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Celebration, and GVSU history professor Dennis Devlin was a member of the main committee that planned the Celebration. Former GVSU President Don Lubbers was an early participant in the Interfaith Dialogue Association, and the university hosted the IDA's first conference in 1990. GVSU was also a founding member of the West Michigan Academic Consortium.

In 2006, the West Shore Committee's Triennial Dialogue, which until then had been held in Muskegon, was hosted by GVSU at its Grand Rapids campus. The conference, which for the first time included a Muslim scholar alongside Jewish and Christian panelists, drew a crowd of more than 250. Afterward, Grand Valley State agreed to take over administrative responsibility for future Academic Consortium confer-

ences and Triennial Dialogues. GVSU President Mark Murray tasked Dr. Douglas Kindschi, the school's former Dean of Science and Mathematics, with helping to coordinate these conferences.

In 2007, with a significant gift from the Kaufman family, GVSU established the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, which is "committed to facilitating mutual respect and greater interfaith understanding in West Michigan and beyond."[60] During its first few years, the primary function of the Kaufman Institute was simply to organize the Academic Consortium's conferences (2007 and 2008), and the Triennial Dialogue (2009). In January 2010, Dr. Kindschi was named the Institute's founding director, and he began to expand its programming.

One of Dr. Kindschi's first actions as Director of the Kaufman Institute was to draw on relationships forged during his 35-year career at GVSU to form a planning committee, the purpose of which was to assist the newly established Institute in determining its strategy for advancing interfaith understanding in Grand Rapids. This committee includes longtime interfaith leaders Ghazala Munir and Fred Stella of the Interfaith Dialogue Association; Rev. Dave Baak, a Presbyterian minister who directed the Grand Rapids Area Center for Ecumenism (GRACE) for more than two decades; Sheldon Kopperl, a professor of biomedical sciences and religious studies at GVSU and instructor at the local Reform Jewish school; Charles Honey, former religion editor of *The Grand Rapids Press*; and representatives of other key educational and cultural institutions. After some deliberation, the group came up with an ambitious idea: to hold a citywide Year of Interfaith Understanding.

2012: Year of Interfaith Understanding[61]

Origin, Goals, and Structure

In late 2010, the Kaufman Institute's planning committee began approaching local leaders to gauge their interest in the Year of Interfaith Understanding concept. The pastors of several Christian churches, as well as local Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and Muslim leaders, agreed to participate. *The Grand Rapids Press* and WGVU Public Media offered to serve as co-sponsors. Mayor George Heartwell agreed to declare 2012 as

the Year of Interfaith Understanding for the City of Grand Rapids, via an official proclamation urging citizens to "devote energy to the thoughtful study of all faiths, engage in respectful conversation with people of other traditions… and seek understanding of the rich diversity in our community and our world."[62] (A copy of the mayor's proclamation can be found in Appendix B. For the sake of brevity, I often refer to this initiative simply as the "Interfaith Year").

The organizers and sponsors of the Interfaith Year had a variety of goals. Religious leaders were eager to share their beliefs and practices with others, counter negative stereotypes, and enrich each other's perspectives through dialogue. Educators and academics saw a valuable learning opportunity for young people and adults alike. Paul Keep, then executive editor of print at *The Grand Rapids Press,* viewed the Interfaith Year as a newsworthy development, especially because of the outsize role that religion plays in Grand Rapids. Moreover, Keep identified an opportunity to combat resurgent anti-Islamic sentiment in the aftermath of the so-called "Ground Zero mosque" controversy of summer 2010.[63] MLive/*Press* editor Julie Hoogland also supported online and print news coverage of Year-related events.

For Mayor Heartwell, the Interfaith Year was an opportunity for the city to become more welcoming toward its religious minorities, especially its growing numbers of Hindu, Muslim, and Sikh immigrants. Just a few months before the Interfaith Year was proposed to him, Heartwell received a call from an executive of a multinational business headquartered in Grand Rapids, complaining that a visiting researcher from India was refused service at a local restaurant because he would not remove his *dastaar*, a turban worn by Sikh men as an article of faith. In the mayor's eyes, this incident was one small example of how increases in religious diversity can cause social tensions; he hoped that greater interfaith understanding would help ease such tensions and foster a greater appreciation of diversity.[64]

In January 2011, with a pledge of support secured from City Hall, three separate planning councils were established for the Interfaith Year:

1) **The Congregations Council** was made up of clergy and lay leaders from 15 local religious communities, including both of the local syn-

agogues, the Hindu temple, two mosques, the Catholic Information Center, a Dominican spirituality center, and several progressive Protestant churches.

2) **The Community Council** consisted of representatives from a variety of major civic institutions, most of them secular, including *The Grand Rapids Press*, WGVU Public Media, two local theaters, the symphony, the public library, the public museum, the intermediate school district, the Economics Club, the World Affairs Council, and 15 others.

3) **The Campus Council** was made up of faculty from the eight member institutions of the West Michigan Academic Consortium: Aquinas College, Calvin College, Calvin Theological Seminary, Cornerstone University, Grand Valley State University, Hope College, Kuyper College, and Western Theological Seminary.

It was agreed that the Kaufman Institute would be responsible for a variety of organizational and administrative tasks connected with the Interfaith Year, such as: promoting the initiative and its major events; ensuring balanced representation of faith traditions found in Grand Rapids; maintaining a website with general information, a calendar of events, and other resources; facilitating partnerships between congregations; and obtaining and disbursing supplementary funding in the form of mini-grants.

The participating organizations assumed responsibility for designing, planning, and executing the various activities that made up the Interfaith Year. Some of them chose to incorporate an interfaith theme into an existing program, while others created something new. The Kaufman Institute only required that every event "promote dialogue and/or cooperative action in a spirit of understanding and learning about other persons and faiths… [and] not proselytize, nor disparage, nor be conducted at the expense of another faith or tradition."[65]

During 2011, the councils held monthly lunchtime meetings at the Kaufman Institute offices. These meetings provided an opportunity for council members to brainstorm about what types of events their organizations might create. The meetings continued throughout 2012, as

participants continued to plan, schedule and announce new events, and reported back to the councils about events that had taken place.

Funding

Participating organizations absorbed the bulk of the costs associated with Interfaith Year events. Local colleges and cultural institutions covered the full cost of their interfaith activities without any supplementary funding from the Kaufman Institute. Religious congregations were eligible to receive mini-grants from the Kaufman Institute to cover items such as catering and speaking fees (the mini-grant application form is provided in Appendix C). This system was chosen due to concerns that some congregations, already struggling financially during a nationwide recession, might be unwilling or unable to allocate existing funds to interfaith events. However, some congregations chose to fund their own events, and many made significant in-kind contributions by, for example, waiving facility fees and janitorial costs associated with interfaith events.

The source of the mini-grants was a $50,000 grant from the Grand Rapids Community Foundation to the Kaufman Interfaith Institute. More than 70 congregation-based events received mini-grant funding, with an average of about $500 per event. No mini-grant requests were denied due to insufficient funds; in fact, the Kaufman Institute had $12,000 in grant funds remaining at the end of 2012, which the Foundation approved for use on additional interfaith activities. The Kaufman Institute also facilitated a $22,000 Intercultural Harmony grant from the Minnesota-based Laura Jane Musser Fund to the Kent Intermediate School District. This grant allowed 24 students from 11 area high schools, representing a diverse range of faith and non-faith commitments, to participate in a yearlong Student Interfaith Leadership Council.

The Kaufman Institute was able to provide additional funding for the Interfaith Year using income from its modest endowment. This covered the salary of a part-time program coordinator, as well as costs associated with monthly lunch meetings for the three councils, website development and maintenance, and the Triennial Dialogue. Donations in support of the Year and the Dialogue were also received from other local foundations and individuals.

Publicity

At the suggestion of *The Grand Rapids Press* print editor Paul Keep, Mayor Heartwell announced the Year of Interfaith Understanding in a press conference on September 12, 2011 as part of the city's response to the 10th anniversary of the deadly attacks on the World Trade Center towers by Islamic extremists. The mayor's announcement received television coverage by local news channels as well as a front-page article in *The Grand Rapids Press.*[66]

Throughout 2012, *The Grand Rapids Press,* its online affiliate MLive.com, WGVU public radio and television, and other local news sources such as *The Rapidian* helped maintain public awareness about the interfaith effort. The *Press*, which reached more than 130,000 readers daily in its print version alone, ran an editorial announcing its support of the Interfaith Year at its outset, published a weekly calendar of interfaith events, and provided regular op-ed pieces on interfaith issues.[67] The Kaufman Institute sent out a weekly interfaith e-newsletter, and its website served as a central hub for everything related to the Interfaith Year, including an explanation of its mission; guidelines for designing and executing interfaith events; mini-grant application forms; and details about the Year's programming.

Participating organizations supported the Interfaith Year's public relations effort through their member newsletters and bulletins. For example, the February 2012 issue of the *Shofar*, the monthly newsletter of the Jewish Federation of Grand Rapids, contained a two-page article by its executive director describing the goals of the Interfaith Year and encouraging members to participate.

Programming

More than 300 events were held in Grand Rapids as part of the Interfaith Year.[68] The majority of these events – perhaps 200 – were organized by religious congregations. Many congregation-based events had the goal of educating attendees about the key beliefs and practices of a religious minority tradition. For example, Eastern Avenue Christian Reformed Church presented a four-part "Understanding Our Neighbors" series featuring representatives from local Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish, and

Muslim communities. St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, Aldersgate United Methodist Church, and the Catholic Information Center presented similar series, which also included presentations from the Baha'i tradition, the Orthodox Christian tradition, and the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Other lectures featured dialogue among panelists of different faiths, discussed the need for interfaith understanding and strategies for promoting it, and offered diverse faith perspectives on a specific topic. Congregations held film and television screenings on relevant topics, often with an accompanying workshop or discussion.

Other congregation-based events aimed to facilitate interpersonal interactions among people of different faiths. For example, the local Dominican Center run by Catholic sisters presented Tuesday Tabletalk, a monthly series of interfaith dinners in which roughly 100 attendees were seated at religiously diverse tables of eight. Each Tabletalk session began with a brief presentation about a topic of mutual interest to most faith traditions, continued with interfaith discussion of that topic over dinner, and concluded with a plenary question and answer session. Interfaith holiday celebrations were another means of facilitating interfaith encounters. For example, Temple Emanuel held an interfaith Seder meal, and the liberal Protestant Fountain Street Church partnered with the local Hindu temple to hold an interfaith Diwali celebration. A number of local faith communities held open houses during which they welcomed visitors to explore their worship spaces and learn about key elements of their traditions.

Many of the leading cultural, civic, and academic institutions in the Grand Rapids community participated in the Year of Interfaith Understanding by incorporating interfaith themes into their public offerings:

- The Grand Rapids Public Museum created "The Rite Stuff," an exhibition of artifacts related to the history of religious diversity in West Michigan: garments used in Native American religious ceremonies; Bibles, Torahs, and Qur'ans brought by immigrants; and other artifacts reflecting the religious life of diverse groups in West Michigan.

- The Grand Rapids symphony presented "We Remember," a musical reflection on the Holocaust and themes of faith, forgiveness, and humanity. One of its concerts brought high school students together for conversations with a Holocaust survivor and small group discussions about interfaith understanding.

- The city's public library offered free copies of *Have a Little Faith,* by Mitch Albom, accompanied by interfaith discussion kits. The library also published a list of recommended books on interfaith understanding.

- The local art museum featured "The Twelve Tribes of Israel," by Salvador Dali, and held an accompanying lecture by a Jewish scholar.

- ArtPrize, Grand Rapids' large annual art competition, included a venue with an interfaith theme.

- WGVU public television screened the PBS series "God in America" in six weekly installments, offered companion study guides and DVDs, and worked with the Kaufman Institute to organize public discussions about the series.

- At a dinner event, three local business leaders – a Jew, a Christian, and a Muslim – spoke about how their religious beliefs and values influence their business practices.

- The Kent Intermediate School District created a Student Interfaith Leadership Council made up of 24 religiously diverse high school students from 11 area schools. These students attended several Interfaith Year events and took part in additional trainings and activities to help them develop leadership, dialogue, and conflict resolution skills.

- The Grand Rapids Economic Club brought former British Prime Minister Tony Blair to speak at its annual benefit dinner. Blair's personal foundation is dedicated to "counter[ing] religious prejudice, conflict and extremism in order to promote open-minded

and stable societies,"[69] and his visit included a special meeting with the Interfaith Student Fellows.

- Aquinas College presented a World Religion Lunchtime Lecture series featuring speakers from diverse religious backgrounds, and selected *Between Allah and Jesus: What Christians Can Learn from Muslims*, by Dr. Peter Kreeft, as its Campus and Community Read for autumn 2012.

- Calvin College invited Iranian-born Muslim professor Reza Aslan to speak on "The future of the new Middle East" at its 2012 January Series.

- Habitat for Humanity of Kent County held an "interfaith build" in which people of different religions helped construct a house for a needy family over the course of a three-day weekend. The effort also included an "interfaith lunch forum," in which representatives of different faiths discussed the importance of serving the poor in their respective traditions.[70]

III) ANALYSIS: INSIGHTS FROM WEST MICHIGAN

Observations

Contextual Differences between Muskegon and Grand Rapids

There are key differences between the context in which interfaith efforts emerged in Muskegon in the late 1980s and the context of more recent efforts in Grand Rapids.

By the late 1980s, Muskegon's Reform Jewish community had been present in the area for nearly a century. During that time, its members had overcome various forms of discrimination and developed wide social and professional networks of non-Jewish friends and colleagues. In the 1930s and 1940s, Muskegon's Jewish community was socially isolated from, and even fearful of, the overwhelmingly Christian community that surrounded it. This began to change in the 1950s and 1960s, but the local Country Club, Century Club, and Rotary Club continued to exclude Jews, and restrictive housing covenants attempted to prevent them from purchasing homes in some neighborhoods. By the 1980s, however, these barriers had been knocked down. Muskegon's Jewish community was well-integrated into the local culture and many of its members were economically and socially influential.[71]

Although Grand Rapids has a similarly long-established Jewish community, it is also home to several religious minority groups that are primarily made up of recent immigrants: Bosnian, Middle Eastern, and Pakistani Muslims; Indian Hindus and Sikhs; and Vietnamese Buddhists. Members of these communities tend to be less assimilated into American culture and more visibly "other." Some face linguistic and cul-

tural barriers to integration. Recent polling by the Pew Research Center shows that Americans are less familiar with these groups than with Jews and tend to view them less favorably. Sixty-one percent of Americans say they know someone who is Jewish, compared to 38% who say they know a Muslim, 23% who say they know a Buddhist, and 22% who say they know a Hindu.[72]

These contextual differences are a key reason why interfaith efforts in Muskegon in the late 1980s took a different form than more recent efforts in Grand Rapids. Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Celebration and annual Holocaust Remembrance Ceremony focused on preserving a single minority community's history, and celebrating its culture and contributions to public life. In contrast, Grand Rapids' Interfaith Dialogue Association and Year of Interfaith Understanding promoted understanding of *all* religious – and nonreligious – traditions, with a focus on welcoming groups that are relative newcomers to the Grand Rapids area.

As described in Section I, the United States was once almost exclusively Judeo-Christian, but is now home to a much wider array of religious and nonreligious belief systems. Muskegon during the 1980s reflected the older Judeo-Christian context, whereas present-day Grand Rapids reflects the newer, more diverse reality. The following analysis focuses more on Grand Rapids than on Muskegon, because Grand Rapids provides a more relevant model for other US cities that are experiencing increased religious diversity.

Interfaith Engagement as a Gradual Process

The interfaith movement in Grand Rapids has progressed through several stages:

- In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the movement involved only a core group of highly committed individuals, many of whom were scholars and clergy. The first meetings of the Interfaith Dialogue Association were intimate gatherings of perhaps a dozen people held in private homes.[73] At this stage, the IDA had essentially no impact on the broader community. It was a venue for a small group of people with a strong interest in interfaith engagement to learn

about each other's faiths, cultivate relationships, and develop interfaith leadership skills, such as the ability to facilitate a dialogue.

- Next, this core group of interfaith advocates began modest efforts to engage others within the Grand Rapids community. During this stage, one common form of outreach was to organize a conference on interfaith relations featuring one or more nationally known scholars. The Interfaith Dialogue Association and the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue held these sorts of conferences during the 1990s, as did the West Michigan Academic Consortium and the Kaufman Interfaith Institute in the early 2000s. These conferences generally attracted 100-300 people, most of whom were already interested in interfaith dialogue, and cultivated their existing interest. Rev. John Jack, a Lutheran pastor who helped organize the triennial dialogues in Muskegon, recalls attendees saying the dialogues helped them better understand a relative from a different faith who married into their family, provided greater knowledge of an unfamiliar religious tradition, or gave them a fuller understanding of their own religious identity in relation to others.[74]

- As the interfaith movement in Grand Rapids grew more established, additional outreach opportunities presented themselves. In the early to mid-1990s, Dr. Lillian Sigal of the Interfaith Dialogue Association began to receive invitations to speak about the relationship between Judaism and Christianity at local churches. Once, she gave a lecture at Western Theological Seminary in nearby Holland; another time, she, Ghazala Munir, and Marchiene Rienstra spoke about their interfaith work at the Evangelical and Ecumenical Women's Caucus, a group of Christian feminists.[75] In 2000, the Interfaith Dialogue Association collaborated with local religious congregations to organize an interfaith Thanksgiving service. The relationships established through this service facilitated a hastily organized interfaith prayer vigil a year later, on the night of the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks. By 2003, the Thanksgiving service was attracting more than 600 attendees.[76] These types of events continued to raise awareness about interfaith engagement in Grand Rapids, especially among its progressive Christian population.

- In 2007, Grand Valley State University agreed to take an active role in promoting interfaith engagement by establishing the Kaufman Interfaith Institute. By 2012, the interfaith movement in Grand Rapids was large and influential enough to launch the yearlong, citywide Year of Interfaith Understanding detailed in Section II. Supported by more than 30 religious congregations and several public institutions, this Interfaith Year had a much larger draw than any of the area's previous interfaith initiatives.[77]

The fact that, over the course of two and a half decades, the interfaith movement in Grand Rapids grew from living room dialogues to a large-scale citywide initiative does not imply that other cities will necessarily follow this pattern. What it does reveal is the importance of the spade-work done by the early leaders of the Interfaith Dialogue Association, the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue, and the West Michigan Academic Consortium. Although their initial efforts engaged relatively few people, they cultivated the interfaith knowledge, leadership skills, and social networks upon which the Interfaith Year relied.

The gradual evolution of the interfaith movement in West Michigan also suggests that it is useful for interfaith leaders to envision their efforts as part of a long-term process. For a community that has not yet developed a core group of interfaith advocates or cultivated awareness about interfaith dialogue, attempting a large-scale, citywide interfaith initiative might be impractical. Conversely, for a community that has these features and has long been holding annual interfaith conferences, dinners, and the like, it might be useful to consider ways to reach new and larger audiences so that the movement does not stagnate.

Expanding the Movement

During the early stages of West Michigan's interfaith movement, it made sense to primarily engage progressives who already had an interest in interfaith dialogue. This was a period of building support for the nascent local movement. Even in its intermediate stages, fostering interfaith dialogue and relationship-building among progressives had significant value. In response to the criticism that the Interfaith Year mainly engaged progressives, and thus amounted to "preaching to the

choir," Dr. Kindschi responds that it was more like "preaching to the people who were interested in the choir – potential recruits." In his view, most of the progressive churches in Grand Rapids weren't resistant to the idea of interfaith engagement, but it simply wasn't on their radar. Dr. Kindschi contends that the Interfaith Year succeeded in bringing their attention to interfaith issues and enlisting their support.

From the Jewish Centennial Celebration through the Interfaith Year, the interfaith movement in West Michigan primarily has involved progressive Christians and members of minority faiths. Evangelical Protestants, who represent more than one quarter of the US population and 40% of regular churchgoers in Kent County, tend not to take part. Religiously unaffiliated adults, who represent about one-fifth of the US population, though somewhat less in Kent County, are similarly under-engaged. Yet, as mentioned in Section I, the strongest interfaith tensions in American society directly involve religious conservatives, especially evangelical Christians, as well as atheists, agnostics, and the nonreligious. As the interfaith movement expands, it is critical for these groups to be involved. Interfaith understanding will not become a social norm if it does not gain the support of conservatives as well as progressives, and the secular as well as the devout. Nationwide, this is a major challenge facing the interfaith movement. Several promising practices for better engaging traditionally underrepresented groups have emerged in West Michigan.

Promising Practices

Engaging the Religiously Unaffiliated

Partnering with Public Institutions

One common interfaith model is to bring together religious congregations – churches, synagogues, mosques, temples, etc. – for dialogue, social events, and the like. One drawback of this approach is that religiously unaffiliated individuals are very unlikely to attend events held in houses of worship. For example, in a survey of nearly 1,200 attendees at 33 Interfaith Year events organized by religious congregations, just 1% self-identified as "secular."[78] Moreover, congregation-based programs generally start from the assumption that participants have a religious

commitment of some kind, which tends to make the religiously unaffiliated feel out of place.

The Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding addressed these problems by bringing interfaith themes into public institutions. In both cases, a wide variety of organizations – the symphony, libraries, museums, and public schools – got involved. This was an effective way of spreading the interfaith message beyond progressive religious congregations.

This strategy could be employed outside of the yearlong, citywide framework of the Jewish Centennial and Interfaith Year. Interfaith leaders could partner with just one or two respected local institutions and help them incorporate an interfaith element into the upcoming year's programs. In fact, doing this on a smaller scale – perhaps just one or two partnerships per year – could allow interfaith advocates to play a greater role in designing programs that address their community's most serious interfaith tensions.

Although most of the major public institutions in West Michigan have been willing to participate in interfaith efforts, some have questioned whether interfaith dialogue has a place in secular settings. Faculty members at Grand Valley State have asked, "What's the state university doing promoting faith?" Dr. Kindschi's response is, "We're not promoting faith. We're not even promoting interfaith. We're promoting understanding."[79] This way of framing the goal of the interfaith movement provides a clear rationale for partnering with public institutions.

Partnering with Local Media

Another way that interfaith leaders in West Michigan have expanded interfaith efforts beyond religious congregations is by partnering with local media. Both the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding had extensive publicity campaigns.

MLive Media Group runs the most visited news website in Michigan and owns eight local newspapers across the state. Paul Keep, the former Executive Editor of Print for MLive, believes that recent changes in the media industry provide new opportunities for interfaith advocates. The proliferation of free online content has led to a lack of subscription and

advertising revenue, forcing media outlets to contract. In the past, local news sources might have employed one or more religion reporters, but today many can no longer afford this. Instead, news outlets are turning to a concept called community-contributed content, which offers people from the community the opportunity to submit periodic columns. For example, in *The Grand Rapids Press*, Dr. Kindschi contributes a weekly "Interfaith Insights" column, and local rabbi David Krishef coordinates a weekly "Ethics and Religion Talk" column featuring diverse religious perspectives. Mr. Keep sees the current movement toward community-contributed content as a means by which interfaith leaders can broadcast their message to a large, diverse readership.[80]

Community Service Projects

Interfaith community service projects are a widely-used means of facilitating interactions between religiously affiliated and unaffiliated students on college campuses. On the national level, the Secular Student Alliance has played an active role in the President's Interfaith and Community Service Campus Challenge, and Interfaith Youth Core chapters regularly include nonreligious students. Service projects attract nonreligious people – especially Millennials – who would not feel comfortable at an interfaith dialogue in a church or be interested in an academic discussion about religious differences. They are also effective at helping religious and nonreligious people to identify common goals and values.

Grand Rapids' Interfaith Year offered a wide array of educational opportunities, interfaith dialogues, and artistic expressions, but community service was not a major component. In its aftermath, however, local interfaith leaders have become increasingly convinced that service initiatives are a critical part of engaging Millennials and bridging the religious-secular divide. In the words of Rev. David Baak, "Until we are working for the common good of the community across faith and non-faith lines, with an awareness of that faith, we're still going to be in silos."[81] In autumn 2014, the Kaufman Interfaith Institute announced that its next major initiative would be a citywide Year of Interfaith Service, to be held in 2015. This effort, as well as other current interfaith efforts in Grand Rapids, is discussed further in the conclusion, below.

Engaging Conservative Christians

A "Thick Dialogue" Approach

Another problem with the congregation-based model of interfaith engagement is that conservative Christian churches, particularly evangelical Protestant congregations, tend not to take part. One of the main reasons for this is that conservative Christians fear that participating in interfaith events could cause them to compromise their beliefs. For example, Kentwood Community Church, a large Wesleyan congregation with two locations in the Grand Rapids area, did not take part in the Interfaith Year. Its pastor, Rev. Kyle Ray, voiced his concerns: "There is great potential for universalism, where we begin to believe that all roads lead to the same place. The reality is… that Jesus makes some exclusive claims."[82]

Similarly, many evangelical Christians have reservations about praying beside people of other faiths. Back in 2003, a Grand Rapids coalition of Christian churches ended its involvement in the city's annual interfaith Thanksgiving service after five evangelical churches registered objections. Rev. Stanley Mast, then pastor of LaGrave Avenue Christian Reformed Church, said that the service raised concerns about "how on earth [Christians] could worship side by side with folks who were worshipping a different God or worshipped no God at all."[83]

Interfaith leaders in West Michigan have learned that conservative Christians are more likely to participate in interfaith activities when it is clear from the outset that the goal is not to reach theological agreement, or to convince participants that all religions are equally valid, but rather to develop mutual understanding, respect, and a stronger sense of community. At the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, Dr. Kindschi calls this approach "thick dialogue."[84] He encourages participants in interfaith dialogue not to attempt to water down their faith to the point where there is nothing to disagree with. He instead challenges them, "Bring the thickness of your faith to the table. Talk about all that you believe… but do it in a spirit of understanding and with willingness for the others to bring the thickness of their faith to it as well."[85] If interfaith understanding is to become a social norm, the interfaith movement must be broad enough to include all points of view – those who hold exclusivist beliefs;

those who hold syncretistic or universalistic beliefs; and those who do not believe in God at all.

Dealing with the Issue of Evangelization

Efforts to attract converts through preaching and missionary activity have a long history in many religious traditions, notably Catholicism, Protestantism, and Islam. One of the defining features of American evangelical Christianity is a belief in sharing the Gospel (*evangelium*) in a manner that seeks to convert others. This can be a very sensitive issue. Many non-Christians – especially members of minority belief systems that have historically been subjected to coercive missionary activity – are offended by, and even fearful of, what they term "proselytization." On the other hand, many evangelical Christians view sharing their faith as a key part of their religious identity, and as an act of love stemming from a sincere concern for others' salvation. When discussing the guidelines for participating in an interfaith event in Grand Rapids, one Christian Reformed pastor balked at the idea that seeking conversion would be off the table, saying, "I can't do anything that doesn't have as its goal winning souls for Christ."[86]

In interfaith settings, it is important to deal with the issue of evangelization in a way that does not make it a barrier to participation for any group. If an underlying assumption of the interfaith movement is that evangelization is unacceptable, religious conservatives may decline to participate rather than deny an important aspect of their identity. However, allowing overt conversion attempts in interfaith settings can undermine effective dialogue; if a person is focused on convincing others to accept his or her own beliefs, it may limit his or her ability to listen to and understand other points of view. This can cause constructive dialogue to devolve into adversarial debate, especially if people feel pressured or coerced.

Interfaith leaders in Grand Rapids have recognized that truly inclusive interfaith engagement must be able to include people who desire to convert others. As Fred Stella puts it, "One of the cardinal rules of interfaith dialogue is, 'Thou shalt not compromise thy faith.' Asking an evangelical or other conservative to speak like a Unitarian is one surefire way to throw out the unwelcome mat."[87] At the same time, an inclusive approach

does not require other participants to agree with or approve of proselytization, nor does it mean that conversion attempts have a place in interfaith dialogue. It welcomes the participation of evangelicals, but does not allow preaching that undermines the goal of mutual understanding.

Involving Evangelical Colleges and Seminaries

Conservative churches often do not participate in congregation-based interfaith initiatives because they do not see interfaith engagement as part of their mission. In general, the primary purpose of evangelical Christian churches is to cultivate and spread their faith. In contrast, evangelical Christian colleges and seminaries have a mission to educate students and prepare them for careers. This difference may explain why interfaith leaders in West Michigan have had much more success engaging evangelical Christian colleges and seminaries than engaging evangelical Christian churches. Through the West Michigan Academic Consortium, Christian colleges and seminaries in Holland and Grand Rapids have sponsored regular interfaith conferences for the past 14 years. What is noteworthy about the Consortium is not the size of its audiences – perhaps 200 people per annual conference – but the fact that six of its eight members are evangelical Christian institutions.

Interfaith dialogue remains somewhat controversial at these schools. Dr. Frans van Liere, Calvin College's faculty representative to the Consortium, remarks, "I think a lot of evangelical Christians would say they are shocked that Calvin is participating in something like this."[88] When the school hosted a Muslim keynote speaker for the Consortium's 2010 conference, some students voiced opposition. Faculty and administrators have expressed concerns that interfaith dialogue could lead students to view all religions as equally valid, or to believe that Christians and non-Christians pray to the same God.[89] Yet the evangelical schools involved in the Academic Consortium increasingly recognize that, in a global society, college graduates must be knowledgeable about non-Christian belief systems and equipped to have respectful, productive interactions with people from diverse religions and cultures. These educational objectives can open the door to engagement between evangelical Christian students and people of other faiths.

The Consortium attracts few students to its conferences; in fact, these conferences are typically scheduled when students are on fall break. Instead, the Consortium engages presidents, provosts, faculty, and alumni. The leaders of the Consortium schools have shown increased openness to promoting interfaith understanding on their campuses in recent years. For example, at an April 2014 panel discussion on religious pluralism co-sponsored by the Aspen Institute, the Kaufman Interfaith Institute, and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, Calvin College President Michael Le Roy remarked that it is problematic when "Christians are talking only with people who agree with them, and not finding ways to build relationships or reach out [to non-Christians]."[90] He went on to say that there is a need for Christians to have more interactions with Jews, Muslims, and the nonreligious in ways that are not adversarial. Rev. Julius Medenblik, President of Calvin Theological Seminary, also took part in the discussion and stated that Christians should strive to see things from others' perspectives and pursue meaningful interfaith relationships.[91]

Kuyper College, located just outside the Grand Rapids city limit, provides a compelling example of the role that Christian college administrators can play in fostering interfaith understanding. Founded in 1939 as Reformed Bible Institute, Kuyper describes itself as "a leading Christian College focused on effectively training students to make a difference in God's world."[92] All Kuyper students are required to take a minimum of 21 Bible & Theology credits, and many go on to serve as pastors and missionaries. Dr. Melvin Flikkema, Kuyper's provost from 2000 to 2012, saw a need for the college's students to better relate to people from different faiths and cultures. A task force of five professors agreed with his assessment, citing examples of students speaking harshly about people from other faith traditions and posting bigoted comments on social media.[93] The task force developed an intercultural immersion requirement that all Kuyper students study another religion or culture, engage in at least 25 hours of direct interaction with people from that tradition, and take part in guided reflection on the experience.

Prof. Lisa Hoogeboom, a lifelong member of the Christian Reformed Church who holds a degree from Calvin Theological Seminary and has spent significant time in Turkey, teaches Kuyper's intercultural course on Islam. Prof. Hoogeboom recognizes that, in order for society to function

well, evangelical Christians need to be able to communicate, collaborate, and live harmoniously with people who do not share their beliefs. Yet she contends that she and her colleagues at Kuyper have a deeper reason for pursuing interfaith understanding: "We need to respect, listen to, and hear people who are 'other' because it's integral to who we are as Christians… We engage in these attempts at understanding not despite our religion, but *because of* our religion."[94] According to Prof. Hoogeboom, the intercultural immersion course on Islam has helped counter students' negative stereotypes and fears about Muslims. In a final reflection, one of her students commented, "Before this class, I felt deep anger and hatred every time I heard the word Muslim. God has completely changed me. I now see individual people, created in the image of God, who are just trying to live their lives. They are a lot like me."[95]

The Academic Consortium cannot take credit for Kuyper's decision to create the intercultural immersion requirement; Dr. Flikkema reports that he was primarily motivated by his personal experiences of interfaith ministry as an Army chaplain.[96] However, the Kaufman Institute did help Prof. Hoogeboom design her class and connected her with the Muslim Students Association at GVSU for the purpose of planning interfaith activities. The involvement of evangelical Christian colleges such as Kuyper in the West Michigan Academic Consortium suggests that there is potential for interfaith advocates in other parts of the country to partner with Christian colleges and seminaries.

The Yearlong, Citywide Model

One of four primary goals set forth in 1985 by the Jewish Centennial Committee was to create a replicable model for planning and executing a community celebration focused on a religious or ethnic minority group, for the twin purposes of educating the public and strengthening intergroup relations.[d] Its organizers "believed that the project could be a model, not only for other Muskegon groups, but nationally."[97] Dr.

d At the conclusion of the Jewish Centennial, the Committee allocated $7,000 of its remaining funds toward a yearlong, citywide celebration of its African-American community, modeled after the Jewish Centennial Celebration. Muskegon's African-American Celebration was held in 1991-1992. It involved many of the same local institutions and offered about 80 public events, including a visit by noted civil rights activist Rosa Parks.

Kindschi has expressed similar ambitions for Grand Rapids' Year of Interfaith Understanding: "If we can make this kind of thing happen in Grand Rapids, then I think that can be a model for it happening in other communities, and really a model for the nation."[98]

Despite the fact that the Jewish Centennial was a celebration of a single minority community that had long been present in the area, while the Interfaith Year promoted the more general ideal of understanding, the Celebration and the Year had striking similarities. Both were yearlong, citywide initiatives that involved local religious, academic, and civic institutions. In both cases, the leaders of these participating organizations served on committees that developed ideas for interfaith events. The organizers of the entire initiative were primarily responsible for defining the initiative's purpose and structure; convening local leaders and supporting their planning efforts; and handling administrative items such as the budget, publicity campaign, and calendar of events. What are strengths, weaknesses, and integral features of this yearlong, citywide model of interfaith engagement?

Strengths

Broad Participation

By offering a large number of events through a variety of formats, the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding both succeeded in reaching a much larger number of people than had previously been involved in local interfaith activities. According to Katie Gordon, Program Manager of the Kaufman Institute, the Interfaith Year "inserted the interfaith conversation into places where it had not been happening and would not have happened otherwise."[99] Interfaith events organized by houses of worship tended to attract people with strong religious commitments.[e] Scholarly discussions held at universities drew people with academic interests. Art exhibits, musical performances, literary events, ritual meals, and service opportunities each appealed to different groups of people.

e Seventy-nine percent of those who attended the 33 congregation-based programs that received mini-grant funding reported having attended a religious service within the past week – an extremely high proportion, even by West Michigan standards – and 90% claimed to be "regularly involved in a personal spiritual practice."

High Visibility

The Jewish Centennial and the Interfaith Year succeeded in generating a good deal of awareness about interfaith issues in their respective communities. One reason for this was their lengthy duration and large number of programs. High-profile kickoff events, such as the Yitzhak Perlman concert in Muskegon and the mayoral proclamation in Grand Rapids, were also useful in this regard. The robust media campaigns that were part of both the Celebration and the Interfaith Year helped raise the profile of interfaith issues even among those who did not participate in any interfaith events. All told, the Celebration and the Year exposed thousands of people to interfaith issues that they might otherwise have never considered.

Cost-Effective

In both the Jewish Centennial and the Interfaith Year, participating organizations covered the bulk of direct costs from their existing budgets (with some supplementary funding made available by interfaith organizers), and covered nearly all indirect costs though in-kind contributions. Thus, the model offers interfaith leaders a means of inspiring a large number of interfaith events for a fraction of what it would cost an interfaith group to plan, organize, and execute them independently.

Enduring Impact

The Jewish Centennial and the Interfaith Year appear to have made a lasting impact on their respective communities. The Jewish Centennial inspired the creation of the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue, which held triennial dialogues in Muskegon from 1991 to 2003, and the legacy of which lives on through the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University. The Jewish-Christian dialogues subsequently inspired Samuel Lutheran Church to team up with Congregation B'nai Israel for an annual Holocaust Remembrance Service, which has now evolved into the Center for Holocaust and Genocide Studies at Muskegon Community College.

In the wake of Grand Rapids' Interfaith Year, *The Grand Rapids Press* has continued to publish two weekly columns, one initiated in 2012 and the other in 2014, which offer interfaith perspectives on timely issues.

Interfaith activities slowed markedly after the close of the Interfaith Year, but some continued even without the direct involvement of the Kaufman Institute. For example, the Kent Intermediate School District placed a renewed emphasis on educating high school students about religious diversity, and the high-profile January Series at Calvin College included an interfaith dialogue between Dr. Richard Mouw, former President of Fuller Theological Seminary, and Dr. Robert Millet, a prolific Mormon author and professor at Brigham Young University.

Mayor Heartwell believes that the positive relationships forged among the leaders of Grand Rapids' different religious groups during the Interfaith Year continue to have a positive impact on the community. Heartwell recalls that when a Sikh gurdwara in suburban Milwaukee was attacked by a gunman in August 2012, "People from all over town went out to our local Sikh temple, gathered with them in solidarity, and came forward to offer prayers. There was a Catholic priest; a Buddhist leader; a few Protestant pastors; a rabbi; it was just unbelievable what happened."[100] Heartwell credits the Interfaith Year with creating "an elevated sense of community" that enabled a prompt and robust response to this act of religiously-motivated violence.

Weaknesses

Underrepresentation of Certain Groups

Although the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding reached large audiences and forged new interfaith partnerships with secular and academic institutions, they still struggled to engage conservative Christians, the religiously unaffiliated, ethnic minorities, and young people. The Jewish Centennial did have two African American clergymen and one white evangelical Christian pastor on its churches subcommittee, along with a Catholic priest and ministers from several progressive Protestant denominations. However, they represented the exception, not the norm. Overall, the Celebration did not generate much participation by the area's large Baptist, Christian Reformed, and Pentecostal communities. Grand Rapids has had similar difficulties. One clergyperson who helped organize Grand Rapids' Interfaith Year remarked,

> "I was disappointed when I would go to these events at different places and would see a lot of the same faces. It made me a little bit sad that the same people, who don't need to be educated on interfaith, were always at everything. We didn't have much involvement from the more conservative churches in town, and it wasn't for lack of trying. We didn't have many people of color in the group, and I think [the organizers] tried to include them. That's an issue."

Several of those who helped to organize the Interfaith Year identified this as an ongoing challenge.

Putting aside religious affiliation or lack thereof, the Millennial generation as a whole was less involved in the Interfaith Year than would have been desirable. It seems that the types of interfaith events that were offered – public lectures, community dinners, museum exhibits, and open houses – were less appealing to Millennials than to their parents and grandparents.

Determining Programmatic Content

Because the yearlong, citywide model involves such a large number of partner organizations and events, it requires organizers to relinquish some control over programmatic content. Participating organizations have a good deal of freedom to plan their own interfaith events. In one sense, this is positive; it spreads out the workload, promotes creativity, and encourages partner organizations to take ownership of their programs. However, it limits the organizers' ability to ensure that all affiliated programs effectively advance interfaith understanding.

About 25% of Interfaith Year activities received mini-grant funding from the Kaufman Institute. In order to receive mini-grants, organizations were required to submit funding applications to the Institute, a process that allowed organizers to review and approve the content of the programs they funded. Mini-grant recipients were also required to collect participant evaluations at their events and submit them to the Kaufman Institute after the fact. Because the Kaufman Institute did not provide supplementary funding for the other 75% of the Interfaith Year's activities, it had limited ability to exercise oversight. Interfaith leaders provided some guidance during the monthly brainstorming sessions held by

the three planning councils, but participating organizations ultimately made final decisions about the format, venue, and content of their programs.

The Jewish Centennial Committee was able to maintain significantly more control over all 70 of its programs, in part because it offered to all participants supplementary funding covering 28% of their direct costs. All proposed programs were discussed by the Committee, which had the ability to recommend revisions to proposals that did not clearly align with the Celebration's goals, as well as the power to reject proposals that did not meet its standards for quality. The main drawback of this method was its cost. Adjusted for inflation, the total expenditures of the Jewish Centennial Celebration – $64,000 – would amount to about $118,500 in 2012 dollars. The Celebration included 70 events, meaning that the organizers' cost per event was $1,700 (in 2012 dollars). By comparison, the Year of Interfaith Understanding included over 300 events, but organizers' total expenditures were about $150,000 – a cost per event of $500. Moreover, the Jewish Centennial Committee had to devote a significant amount of work to discussing and approving the content of all proposed programs.

Disproportionate Demands on Religious Minorities

Both the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding placed significant demands on West Michigan's small religious minority communities. In Muskegon, the roughly 250 members of Congregation B'nai Israel combined to donate $43,000 toward the Jewish Centennial. Because of the tiny size of Muskegon's Jewish population relative to its Christian population, a very high proportion of the Jewish community was obliged to participate in interfaith events in order to avoid a major imbalance. Rabbi Alpert recalls that some members of his community were uncomfortable with the format of the interfaith Seder dinner, at which two Jews sat at a table with eight gentiles and were asked to explain their beliefs and customs; some felt that this placed them too much in the spotlight.[101] While, on the whole, the Jewish Centennial was a great source of pride for Muskegon's Jewish community, it cannot be ignored that it placed disproportionate financial and social demands on a small congregation.

Although the religious minority communities in Grand Rapids are somewhat larger, they still make up a very small proportion of the overall population. Successfully implementing interfaith social events or service projects requires balanced representation of diverse faiths. In a city with hundreds of churches but just five mosques, two synagogues, and Hindu, Sikh, and Buddhist temples, this is difficult to achieve. For example, the Reform Jewish congregation in Grand Rapids has only about a few hundred families, which sometimes makes it difficult to generate attendance at Temple activities. Rabbi Michael Schadick of Temple Emanuel asks, "If there are all of these churches trying to do service work with Jews, that's great, but how many events can we realistically do?"[102] It can be challenging for small congregations to consistently participate in the numerous, frequent activities involved in a yearlong, citywide interfaith initiative.

Integral Features

Leadership

In 1985, when Sylvia Kaufman began planning the Celebration, she and her husband had lived in Muskegon for nearly three decades, owned a respected local manufacturing firm, were active in social and civic organizations, and had relationships with many leading members of the community. In 2010, when Dr. Douglas Kindschi was named director of the Kaufman Institute, he was nearing the end of three decades as a faculty member and administrator at Grand Valley State University, and was well-connected within the local academic community. His friend and colleague Rev. Dave Baak, who chaired the Congregations Council, been a leader of local Christian ecumenical efforts since the early 1980s and had relationships with many progressive clergymen. Kaufman, in Muskegon, and Kindschi and Baak, in Grand Rapids, possessed the connections, credibility, and leadership experience to amass broad community support for interfaith engagement.

Moreover, both Kaufman and Kindschi were able to spend the bulk of their working hours coordinating their respective initiatives. In January 1988, eight months before the kickoff of the Jewish Centennial Celebration, Kaufman took a leave of absence from her marketing career in order to devote her full attention to the Celebration.[103] In 2012,

Kindschi had teaching responsibilities at GVSU, but was able to devote significant professional time to the Interfaith Year, and had a part-time program assistant who helped with planning and administration. Committee members and participants from both the Celebration and the Year agree that these initiatives would never have happened without the dedicated, skillful leadership of Sylvia Kaufman and Douglas Kindschi.

Established Minority Groups

In both Muskegon and Grand Rapids, citywide interfaith initiatives emerged only after religious minority groups had an established presence. The Jewish congregation in Muskegon, while very small in size, had existed for a century and included several influential members of the community. Rev. John Jack, a Lutheran pastor from Muskegon, says that he was inspired to participate in the Celebration because of the way that the Jewish presence enriched Muskegon over the years. He describes the Jewish community as "a gift," adding, "They had businesses and shops, encouraged education, and had wonderful values that brought good things to our community. We wanted to celebrate that."[104]

The situation in Grand Rapids is not a direct parallel. The city has long been home to a small Jewish community, and modest gatherings of area Buddhists and Hindus began in the 1970s and 1980s. But the presence and visibility of Grand Rapids' religious minorities, including Sikhs and especially Muslims, grew markedly during the 1990s and 2000s. By 2012, these groups were all large enough and well organized enough to have established houses of worship, some of which were constructed at significant expense. It would be hard to imagine the Interfaith Year taking place before these communities had become large enough to form congregations and attract public notice.

Legitimacy

Government leaders played a significant role in bestowing legitimacy on the Jewish Centennial Celebration and the Year of Interfaith Understanding. The late US Representative Guy Vander Jagt, a Republican, and US Senator Carl Levin, a Democrat, both spoke as part of the Celebration's opening weekend. US Representative Justin Amash, a Republican, and Mayor George Heartwell, a socially liberal independent, both gave addresses as part of the Interfaith Year.

In Grand Rapids, GVSU's role as a neutral convener has also been critical to interfaith efforts. According to Charles Honey, the former longtime editor of *The Grand Rapids Press* Religion section and a member of the Kaufman Institute's planning committee, "The fact that GVSU is not a religious institution has helped a lot. They hold interfaith events in a non-threatening environment; it's nobody's turf. It's neutral, yet respected, as an institution of learning and service. People don't feel threatened."[105] Similarly, in Muskegon's Jewish Centennial Celebration, Sylvia Kaufman filled the role of neutral organizer because she did not represent any of the participating organizations and could thus mediate between them.

Media Presence

Both the Jewish Centennial and the Interfaith Year maintained a significant media presence. The Jewish Centennial Committee created media kits to send to news outlets, as well as thousands of posters, calendars, and brochures about the Celebration. The Interfaith Year, which took place in the Internet era, replaced print resources with a central website and a weekly e-newsletter. Regular coverage by local news sources – whether in print or online – was essential in both cases.

Funding

The yearlong, citywide model requires some fundraising by interfaith organizers. In Muskegon, the Jewish Centennial Committee raised over $87,000, about half of which came in the form of donations from the local Jewish community, with the remainder coming as grants from charitable foundations. In Grand Rapids, the Interfaith Year received $72,000 in grants from charitable foundations, used funds from the Kaufman Institute's existing budget, and received donations from local individuals. In both cases, participating organizations absorbed the majority of direct costs and nearly all indirect costs, but some degree of supplementary funding was necessary.

Civic Institutions

The model used by the Jewish Centennial Celebration and Year of Interfaith Understanding relies on incorporating interfaith themes into the existing programs of civic, cultural, and educational institutions.

Both Grand Rapids and Muskegon have enough such institutions – libraries, museums, theaters, art galleries, symphonies, etc. – to make this possible. An interfaith initiative modeled after the Jewish Centennial or the Interfaith Year would likely be less successful in an area where these institutions were ineffectual or absent.

Planning Period

Because this model involves integrating interfaith activities into local institutions' annual programming schedules and annual budgets, it requires a fairly lengthy planning period. The planning period for the Jewish Centennial Celebration lasted nearly three years, which allowed it to finalize its entire calendar of events more than a month before its launch. Planning for the Year of Interfaith Understanding began just one year before its launch and continued during the initiative itself, as participating organizations designed new events and added them to the online calendar throughout the year.

CONCLUSION

At the close of the Year of Interfaith Understanding, Dr. Kindschi departed for a seven-month fellowship with the Inter-faith Programme at the University of Cambridge. His absence caused the Kaufman Institute to scale back its efforts somewhat. To maintain local interest during 2013, he began writing the "Interfaith Insights" column that *The Grand Rapids Press* now publishes weekly. Upon his return, the Kaufman Institute's planning committee began work on their next major initiative: a citywide Year of Interfaith Service.

Instead of reviving the three councils (Congregations, Community, and Campus) from 2012, they decided to convene a single Interfaith Service Council made up of leaders from religious congregations, secular organizations, non-profits, universities, and civic institutions. Although many of the participating organizations remain the same, this new structure makes it easier for groups that formerly would have been on different councils, e.g., a social service organization and a liberal arts college, to collaborate directly with one another.

The 2015: Year of Interfaith Service initiative was announced at the Catholic Information Center on September 11, 2014, with Mayor Heartwell endorsing the effort on behalf of City Hall. Shortly afterward, the Year kicked off with an interfaith Habitat for Humanity project in which Christians, Hindus, Jews, Muslims, and secular humanists worked side by side to build a house for a low-income family. Logistically, organizing interfaith service projects has proved more challenging than organizing dialogue events. Planning a worthwhile service project involving multiple organizations is significantly more complicated than inviting a non-Christian speaker to explain his or her faith at a church. Ensuring

balanced participation by varied religious groups at a service project can be challenging, too. But progress is being made. As of March 2015, over a dozen interfaith service projects have been set in motion with the collaboration of local non-profits, religious communities, and nonreligious groups. These include a community clean-up initiative and a partnership between Christian food pantries and a Muslim food pantry.

Part of the reason for the shift from interfaith dialogue toward interfaith service is a desire to move from dialogue to action. Another reason is that service is an effective way of engaging young people in interfaith work, including those who are not affiliated with a religious community. Local interfaith advocates also recognize the need to develop a new generation of community leaders, following Interfaith Youth Core's method of targeting college students who "are writing the next chapter in the story of interfaith cooperation."[106] High school and college students were present at the 2015 Grand Rapids Year of Interfaith Service announcement, and are increasingly playing an active role in developing programs that are meaningful to themselves and their peers through internships at the Kaufman Institute and participation on its planning committee. It is expected that service projects will be a focus for the interfaith movement in West Michigan well beyond calendar year 2015.

Since the Year of Interfaith Understanding (2012), interfaith leaders in West Michigan have continued their efforts to engage the local evangelical Christian community. The two most recent Academic Consortium conferences were hosted by evangelical institutions (Calvin Theological Seminary and Cornerstone University). In September 2014, a Master's student from Calvin Theological Seminary, Jonathan Owens, joined nine other seminary and rabbinical students from across the nation in attending the Islamic Society of North America's national convention. Owens authored an opinion piece in *The Detroit Free Press* in which he decried Islamophobic rhetoric in his own community and encouraged American Christians and Muslims to work together toward common goals.[107] The Kaufman Institute helped coordinate the seminary and rabbinical students' participation in the ISNA convention, and also cooperated with a February 2015 conference on Christian-Muslim relations sponsored by the Christian Reformed Church. Efforts to partner with pastors from local conservative Christian denominations are ongoing. Thus far, it

seems that the interfaith service projects being designed during 2015 not only appeal to young people and the nonreligious, but also seem less threatening than some other forms of interfaith engagement in the eyes of conservative Christians.

Another recent development is the continued consolidation of West Michigan interfaith efforts under the auspices of the Kaufman Interfaith Institute at Grand Valley State University. In 2007, when the Institute was established, it took over the functions of the West Shore Committee for Jewish-Christian Dialogue and accepted responsibility for convening the West Michigan Academic Consortium. In summer 2014, the Interfaith Dialogue Association, which had long collaborated with the Institute, decided to begin the process of giving up its independent nonprofit status and merging with the Kaufman Institute. Its President, Fred Stella, will continue to coordinate the IDA's speakers bureau and will receive a place on the Institute's advisory board.

This consolidation bears witness to the importance of the institutional base provided by GVSU for interfaith efforts. Independent, private initiatives like the West Shore Committee and the Interfaith Dialogue Association are difficult to sustain, especially after their founders retire or move away. GVSU appears to offer a level of institutional support that will give the interfaith movement legitimacy and continuity going forward.

As the modern interfaith movement in West Michigan approaches three decades of existence, its leaders are optimistic that they will be able to engage new audiences and have a broad social impact. Local interfaith efforts have come a long way since the late 1980s, but interfaith understanding is still far from being a social norm. Says Rev. David Baak, "Until it is a majority expectation, like wearing seatbelts is an expectation, we're not there yet."[108] The next chapter in the story of West Michigan's interfaith movement has yet to be written. Much has been accomplished, and much remains to be done.

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APPENDIX A

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The Dialogue Decalogue

FIRST PRINCIPLE
The essential purpose of dialogue is to learn, which entails change. At the very least, to learn that one's dialogue partner views the world differently is to effect a change in oneself. Reciprocally, change happens for one's partner as s/he learns about oneself.

SECOND PRINCIPLE
Dialogue must be a two-sided project: both between religious/ideological groups, and within religious/ideological groups (Inter- and Intra-). Intra-religious/ideological dialogue is vital for moving one's community toward an increasingly perceptive insight into reality.

THIRD PRINCIPLE
It is imperative that each participant comes to the dialogue with complete honesty and sincerity. This means not only describing the major and minor thrusts as well as potential future shifts of one's tradition, but also possible difficulties that s/he has with it.

FOURTH PRINCIPLE
One must compare only her/his ideals with their partner's ideals, and her/his practice with their partner's practice. Not their ideals with their partner's practice.

FIFTH PRINCIPLE
Each participant needs to describe her/himself. For example, only a Muslim can describe what it really means to be an authentic member of the Muslim community. At the same time, when one's partner in dialogue attempts to describe back to them what they have understood of their partner's self-description, then such a description must be recognizable to the described party.

SIXTH PRINCIPLE
Participants must not come to the dialogue with any preconceptions as to where the points of disagreement lie. A process of agreeing with their partner as much as possible, without violating the integrity of their own tradition, will reveal where the real boundaries between the traditions lie: the point where s/he cannot agree without going against the principles of their own tradition.

SEVENTH PRINCIPLE
Dialogue can only take place between equals, which means that partners learn from each other—par cum pari according to the Second Vatican Council—and do not merely seek to teach one another.

EIGHTH PRINCIPLE
Dialogue can only take place on the basis of mutual trust. Because it is persons, and not entire communities, that enter into dialogue, it is essential for personal trust to be established. To encourage this it is important that less controversial matters are discussed before dealing with the more controversial ones.

NINTH PRINCIPLE
Participants in dialogue should have a healthy level of criticism toward their own traditions. A lack of such criticism implies that one's tradition has all the answers, thus making dialogue not only unnecessary, but unfeasible. The primary purpose of dialogue is to learn, which is impossible if one's tradition is seen as having all the answers.

TENTH PRINCIPLE
To truly understand another religion or ideology one must try to experience it from within, which requires a "passing over," even if only momentarily, into another's religious or ideological experience.

APPENDIX B

City of Grand Rapids, Michigan
OFFICE OF THE MAYOR

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, Grand Rapids has a rich history of faith beginning with the spiritual traditions of the Three Fires Native Americans to early Christian settlers, from the generations of immigrants who brought their native faith traditions and vibrant Jewish congregations, to today's rich heritage of Muslim and Hindu people; and

WHEREAS, the Grand Rapids area is fortunate to enjoy a strong tradition of religious-public cooperation where people of faith have played a prominent role in our civic and cultural life and the delivery of vital human services; and

WHEREAS, West Michigan's religious landscape has diversified dramatically, raising the challenges and opportunities of an increasingly interfaith community and creating an ever greater need for understanding and cooperation among all people; and

WHEREAS, to understand and respect other creeds, members of religious congregations, educational institutions, and community organizations are encouraged to devote energy to the thoughtful study of all faiths and engage in respectful conversation with people of other traditions;

NOW THEREFORE, I, George K. Heartwell, Mayor of the City of Grand Rapids, do hereby proclaim the year 2012 as the

YEAR OF INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

in Grand Rapids, and urge all citizens to learn and seek understanding of the rich diversity in our community and the world.

George K. Heartwell

APPENDIX C

2012 Year of Interfaith Understanding

Mini-Grant Application

Please complete this form and email to Whitney Belprez at belprezw@gvsu.edu

Contact Information

Name _____

Email _____

Phone _____

Expression Information

Title _____

Date & Time _____

Location/Address _____

What is the goal and/or expected outcome of this interfaith expression? Please check all that apply ***and*** briefly explain the goal.

___ For others to learn about my/another faith tradition

___ To share discussion and perspectives on a specific topic or faith tradition

___ To share study together in an interfaith setting

___ To work in an interfaith partnership on a service project

___ Other _____

Please categorize this interfaith expression

___ Event (one-time public expression)

___ Speaker (presentation in congregation or public arena)

___ Education (on-going class, presentation, series, or group)

___ Project (service-based with interfaith partner(s))

___ Other

What amount are you requesting for this interfaith expression? Please detail a budget below.

Who is the intended audience of this interfaith expression?

How many do you expect to participate in this expression? Which faith traditions do you expect to be involved?

Participant evaluations and an overall expression evaluation will be due within 30 days of the expression. It is also required that the interfaith expression be registered on the ***2012 Year of Interfaith Understanding*** *website, and the organizers must agree to the Purpose and Protocols statement available at www.2012gr.org. Mini-grants are intended to average $500 and priority will be given to those expressions that involve multiple faith traditions and/or attempt to cross faith lines.*