

## Imagining a New Way

**SOME YEARS AGO**, there was a young community organizer on the South Side of Chicago. He worked to bring together Catholics, Protestants, and Muslims to improve a part of the city that was suffering terribly from deindustrialization.

Indeed, with the guidance of his Jewish mentor, Barack Obama cut his teeth being an interfaith leader. As president, he has brought that spirit to the White House and the global stage. At the National Prayer Breakfast last February, his experiences on the South Side shone through as he said, “The particular faith that motivates each of us can promote a greater good for all of us.” He continued, “Instead of driving us apart, our varied beliefs can bring

“Instead of driving us apart, our varied beliefs can bring us together.”

us together to feed the hungry and comfort the afflicted; to make peace where there is strife and rebuild what has broken; to lift up those who have fallen on hard times.”

Through his re-establishment of the Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, which he formally announced later that same day, Obama took the first steps to encourage faith communities to come together and work to better our nation.

There are other interfaith leaders that I think would interest President Obama—and you.

- *Joshua Stanton* is a rabbinical student at Hebrew Union College. An Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) Fellows alumnus, he graduated from Amherst College, where he founded and chaired the Multifaith Council. Josh grew up attending a conservative synagogue in Bethesda, Maryland, and says his



early inspiration for interfaith work began at home, where his parents went out of their way to show respect for other religious traditions and spoke up against Islamophobia in their suburban community. Last year, Josh founded the *Journal of Inter-Religious Dialogue* to bridge what he saw as a large gap in communication between students and scholars of religion. As the first peer-reviewed interfaith journal for seminary students, faculty, and alumni, it serves as a point of connection and exchange to improve the relationships of diverse religious communities and provide a space where controversial issues can be discussed in a respectful way.

- *Moustafa Moustafa*, a young Muslim, is another IFYC Fellows alumnus and a graduate of the University of Michigan, Ann Arbor. Moustafa moved to the U.S. from Egypt when he was 8 and grew up in Grand Rapids. He became interested in interfaith work in high school and has been involved in interfaith projects ever since. At his university, Moustafa served on the executive board of the Muslim Student Association, was president of his campus interfaith council, and founded United 2 Heal, a global public health initiative. United 2 Heal brings together religiously diverse students to sort surplus medical supplies and ship them to developing nations. So far, students have logged thousands of hours

volunteering with United 2 Heal, and have sent tons of medical supplies to Ghana, Tanzania, and Haiti.

- I'll conclude with another African-American Christian from Chicago—a young woman named *Jennifer Bailey*. A 2008 Truman Scholar, Jen is currently a Bill Emerson National Hunger Fellow at the Congressional Hunger Center, where she is completing a field placement at the Food Security Partners of Middle Tennessee in Nashville. Her work is focused on organizing religious communities to advocate for greater food access in three of Nashville's identified “food deserts”—areas with little or no access to healthy food options. Jen works on an interfaith curriculum to train young people of faith to be effective food justice organizers in their communities.

These young people bring to mind a quote by writer Walter Lippmann: “The way in which the world is imagined determines at any particular moment what [people] will do.” Interfaith leaders imagine a different world and work to make it reality—whether they are in the White House, rabbinical school, or the middle of Tennessee. ■

*Eboo Patel*, winner of the 2010 Grawemeyer Award in Religion, is founder of the Interfaith Youth Core and author of *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*.

