This resource was developed by the Interfaith Youth Core to equip campus leaders to address issues prompted by the controversy around the Park 51 community center and the associated rising anti-Muslim bigotry. By taking appropriate action to promote inclusion, America’s college and universities can help illustrate how the arc of the United States bends towards justice and reveal that as a nation, we are better together.
As students return to campus this fall, a divisive debate on religion continues to dominate the national conversation. While the site of the proposed community center in lower Manhattan may seem distant from most of our campuses, the controversy surrounding Park 51 has affected communities from California to Tennessee, Florida to Wisconsin.

In the face of the anti-Muslim bigotry sweeping the country, we are all called to act. For campus leaders – administrators, students, staff and faculty – the questions of intolerance versus inclusion are inextricable from the charge to shape and educate global citizens.

Campus leaders must consider how these events will impact the student body.

In the face of intolerance, the arc of American history has bent toward freedom and inclusion of all – but this arc isn’t inevitable.

To realize this arc, we must:
1. GET INFORMED about what’s at stake.
2. SPEAK OUT, transforming prejudice into pluralism.
3. MOBILIZE people, knowledge and resources toward building interfaith cooperation.

---

**THE HEADLINES SPEAK FOR THEMSELVES ...**

**Washington Post**

“Hostility around U.S. Jars Muslim College Students.”

**New York Times**

“Student Arraigned in Anti-Muslim Stabbing of Cabdriver”

“Across Nation, Mosque Projects Meet Opposition”

“Tennessee Official Says Islam May be a Cult”

**Time Magazine**

“Islamophobia: Does America Have a Muslim Problem?”

**CNN**

“Five Teens Charged with Disrupting Muslim Services”

“Preacher Wants to Burn Qurans”

---

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**GET INFORMED**

a. Inclusion and Intolerance
b. Getting the “Us vs Them” Right
c. Pluralism: Our Common History
d. Understanding our Shared Values
e. Voices of Inclusion: Past and Present

**SPEAK OUT AND MOBILIZE**

a. Taking action: Administrators, Faculty, and Staff
b. Taking action: Student Leaders
c. Building the Movement

Appendix: Key Resources
July 26, Bob Roberts, Dr. Joel Hunter and other evangelical leaders write Washington Post blogs asserting the commitment to religious pluralism and supporting the Muslim community.

Aug. 3, New York City’s Landmark Preservation Committee unanimously votes that Park 51 is not a landmark and building can proceed.

Aug. 21, Over 70 interfaith leaders in Southern California sign a statement against “hate speech” targeting Muslim Americans and supporting “a more perfect pluralism.”

Aug. 26, Dozens Gainesville, FL faith leaders sign a statement against “Burn a Quran Day”

“The act of burning the sacred scripture of Islam has no place in our faith, our religious communities, our town, or in our nation.”

Aug. 25, Cab driver in NYC is repeatedly stabbed in the throat after his passenger asks “Are you Muslim?”

Aug. 23, A non-Muslim man is mobbed by Park51 protesters, who assume he is Muslim based on his clothing.

Aug. 21, Over 70 interfaith leaders in Southern California sign a statement against “hate speech” targeting Muslim Americans and supporting “a more perfect pluralism.”

Aug. 20, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 19, Anti-mosque protesters in Temecula, CA bring dogs to offend Muslim beliefs.

Aug. 9, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 3, Newt Gingrich: “Nazis don’t have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington ... There is no reason for us to accept a mosque next to the World Trade Center.”

Aug. 3, New York City, Mayor Bloomberg: “Of all our precious freedoms, the most important is the freedom to worship as we wish ... The nation was founded on the principle that government must never choose between religions.”

Aug. 2, Pastor Terry Jones, in Gainsville, FL promotes “Burn a Quran Day” in mainstream media.

Aug. 30, Arson occurs at the site of a planned mosque in Murfreesboro, TN.

Aug. 26, Dozens Gainesville, FL faith leaders sign a statement against “Burn a Quran Day”

“The act of burning the sacred scripture of Islam has no place in our faith, our religious communities, our town, or in our nation.”

Aug. 25, Cab driver in NYC is repeatedly stabbed in the throat after his passenger asks “Are you Muslim?”

Aug. 23, A non-Muslim man is mobbed by Park51 protesters, who assume he is Muslim based on his clothing.

Aug. 21, Over 70 interfaith leaders in Southern California sign a statement against “hate speech” targeting Muslim Americans and supporting “a more perfect pluralism.”

Aug. 20, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 19, Anti-mosque protesters in Temecula, CA bring dogs to offend Muslim beliefs.

Aug. 9, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 3, Newt Gingrich: “Nazis don’t have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington ... There is no reason for us to accept a mosque next to the World Trade Center.”

Aug. 3, New York City, Mayor Bloomberg: “Of all our precious freedoms, the most important is the freedom to worship as we wish ... The nation was founded on the principle that government must never choose between religions.”

Aug. 2, Pastor Terry Jones, in Gainsville, FL promotes “Burn a Quran Day” in mainstream media.

Aug. 30, Arson occurs at the site of a planned mosque in Murfreesboro, TN.

Aug. 26, Dozens Gainesville, FL faith leaders sign a statement against “Burn a Quran Day”

“The act of burning the sacred scripture of Islam has no place in our faith, our religious communities, our town, or in our nation.”

Aug. 25, Cab driver in NYC is repeatedly stabbed in the throat after his passenger asks “Are you Muslim?”

Aug. 23, A non-Muslim man is mobbed by Park51 protesters, who assume he is Muslim based on his clothing.

Aug. 21, Over 70 interfaith leaders in Southern California sign a statement against “hate speech” targeting Muslim Americans and supporting “a more perfect pluralism.”

Aug. 20, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 19, Anti-mosque protesters in Temecula, CA bring dogs to offend Muslim beliefs.

Aug. 9, Mosque picketed in Bridgeport, CT.

Aug. 3, Newt Gingrich: “Nazis don’t have the right to put up a sign next to the Holocaust Museum in Washington ... There is no reason for us to accept a mosque next to the World Trade Center.”

Aug. 3, New York City, Mayor Bloomberg: “Of all our precious freedoms, the most important is the freedom to worship as we wish ... The nation was founded on the principle that government must never choose between religions.”

Aug. 2, Pastor Terry Jones, in Gainsville, FL promotes “Burn a Quran Day” in mainstream media.

Aug. 30, Arson occurs at the site of a planned mosque in Murfreesboro, TN.

Aug. 26, Dozens Gainesville, FL faith leaders sign a statement against “Burn a Quran Day”

“The act of burning the sacred scripture of Islam has no place in our faith, our religious communities, our town, or in our nation.”

Aug. 25, Cab driver in NYC is repeatedly stabbed in the throat after his passenger asks “Are you Muslim?”

Aug. 23, A non-Muslim man is mobbed by Park51 protesters, who assume he is Muslim based on his clothing.
GETTING THE “US VS. THEM” RIGHT

The forces of intolerance in America are adept at spreading messages of division, which have centered on marginalizing the American Muslim community. The forces of inclusion must respond with messages of pluralism and spread a vision of interfaith cooperation.

The “Us vs. Them” is not Americans versus Muslims. It is Americans of all religious, non-religious and philosophical traditions united against violent extremism.

Here are some messages of division we’ve seen recently being used to divide our communities – but they don’t reflect the values of pluralism, inclusion and cooperation that define our nation.

We must advance alternative messages that spread the vision of unity and promote our values.

1. America is under attack; our religious diversity is a threat.
2. Islam is infiltrating America.
3. Muslims cannot be Americans. Islam and the West are fated to fight.
4. There is no such thing as a moderate Muslim. All Muslims could be terrorists.
5. 9/11 stands for Islam.
6. It is insensitive of those who were brutally killed on 9/11 to build a mosque so close to Ground Zero.
7. The dream of America is people from different backgrounds living together in equal dignity and mutual loyalty. We must realize this dream together.
8. Today, Muslims contribute to the civic fabric of America as other new Americans have in the past. (Compare this to the integration of Catholic and Jewish communities in the 19th-20th centuries. See Eboo Patel’s USA Today op-ed in the Appendix for more).
9. Islam and America hold shared values, such as pluralism and cooperation.
10. Muslim Americans are peaceful, hardworking citizens. The actions of a radical few extremists have hijacked the religion for their ends.
11. 9/11 was an act of terrorism by extremists. Extremists of all traditions belong to the same tradition: the tradition of extremism.
12. Muslim Americans were among those who perished and who lost loved ones on 9/11, and our Muslim American neighbors have no relation to the terrorists who attacked our nation on 9/11. We honor the sacrifice of those who died by keeping alive the values that the terrorists sought to attack – freedom, pluralism and equality.

IN AMERICA, WE DON’T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE OF ANY RELIGION.
IN AMERICA, WE WILL NOT BE DIVIDED BY FAITH.
IN AMERICA, EVERYONE HAS A PLACE.
IN AMERICA, WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER.

DIVIDE

UNITE
GEORGE WASHINGTON, addressing the Hebrew Congregation in 1790, spoke:

“May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the good will of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig-tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid.”

BENJAMIN FRANKLIN, in his 1793 autobiography, said it was vital that, “Even if the Mufti [Islamic scholar of the law] of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammedanism [Islam] to us, he would find a pulpit at his service.”

REV. MARTIN LUTHER KING JR., in a speech before the Nobel Peace Prize Commission in 1964:

“We have inherited a large house, a great ‘world house’ in which we have to live together — black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Moslem and Hindu — a family unduly separated in ideas, culture and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”

FORMER PRESIDENT GEORGE W. BUSH, speaking at the Islamic Center in Washington, DC in the wake of September 11, 2001:

“The face of terror is not the true faith of Islam. That’s not what Islam is all about. Islam is peace.”

PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA, at the Inaugural Address on January 21, 2009, asserts:

“For we know that our patchwork heritage is a strength, not a weakness. We are a nation of Christians and Muslims, Jews and Hindus, and nonbelievers. And because we have tasted the bitter swill of civil war and segregation and emerged from that dark chapter stronger and more united, we cannot help but believe that as the world grows smaller, our common humanity shall reveal itself; and that America must play its role in ushering in a new era of peace.”
Identifying our common values—across religious and philosophical traditions—allows us to critically redefine “us” and work toward inclusion.

All religious and philosophical traditions hold values in common. By acting on shared values such as compassion, mercy, hospitality and justice together, people from diverse religious or non-religious traditions can build meaningful relationships with each other and work together to effectively address social problems.

**EXPLORING THE SHARED VALUE OF HOSPITALITY ...**

**BUDDHIST**

Garland Sutra 21

“Enlightening beings are magnanimous givers, bestowing whatever they have with equanimity, without regret, without hoping for reward, without seeking honor, without coveting material benefits, but only to rescue and safeguard all living beings.”

**CHRISTIAN**

Luke 14:12-14

“When you give a luncheon or a dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.”

**HINDU**

Taittiriya Upanishad, Shiksha Valli: 11th Anuvaka

“One should worship Mother, Father, Teacher and Guests as God.”

**HUMANIST**

Humanist Manifesto of the American Humanist Association

“We assert that humanism will: (a) affirm life rather than deny it; (b) seek to elicit the possibilities of life, not flee from them; and (c) endeavor to establish the conditions of a satisfactory life for all, not merely for the few.”

**JAIN**

Kundakunda, Pancastikaya 137

“Charity—to be moved at the sight of the thirsty, the hungry, and the miserable and to offer relief to them out of pity—is the spring of virtue.”

**SIKH**

Shri Guru Granth Sahib, Section 7 - Raag Gauree

“Those who remember God generously help others.”

**JEWISH**

Vayikra (Leviticus) 19:33 – 34

“And if a stranger sojourns with you in your land, you shall not wrong him. But the stranger who dwells with you shall be to you as one born among you, and you shall love him as yourself; for you were strangers in the land of Egypt; I am the Lord your God.”

**MUSLIM**

Surah 4:36

“Pay homage to God, and make none His compeer, and be good to your parents and relatives, the orphans and the needy and the neighbors who are your relatives, and the neighbors who are strangers, and the friend by your side, the traveler and your servants and subordinates. God does not surely love those who are arrogant and boastful.”

**KUNDAKUNDA, PANCASTIKAYA 137**

“Charity—to be moved at the sight of the thirsty, the hungry, and the miserable and to offer relief to them out of pity—is the spring of virtue.”

**SURAH 4:36**

Garland Sutra 21

“Enlightening beings are magnanimous givers, bestowing whatever they have with equanimity, without regret, without hoping for reward, without seeking honor, without coveting material benefits, but only to rescue and safeguard all living beings.”

Though different religious and philosophical traditions have shared values, that does not mean they do not have strong differences. While we may disagree on theological or political issues, we can agree on our common call to serve humanity, interfaith action is rooted in our shared values while respecting our many differences.
MOVED TO ACT
Badshah Khan was a Pashtun (Afghan) political and spiritual leader who led the Khudai Khidmatgar, a non-violent opposition group standing against British rule on the Indian subcontinent. In his teachings of Khan drew from both the Quran and Gandhi’s teaching of satyagraha, a form of non-violence that has inspired many others to combat injustice through civil disobedience.

CALLED TO SERVE
As a young man practicing law in South Africa, Mohandas Gandhi became fascinated by the teachings in the Bible. While strongly entrenched in his Hindu faith, he often used Biblical teachings in his writings and speeches. Gandhi then reached into his own Hindu tradition, and pulled from it the teaching of satyagraha, a form of non-violence that has inspired many others to combat injustice through civil disobedience.

INSPIRED BY FAITH
In February and March of 1959, on his tour of India, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. saw the parallels between the treatment of Black people in the United States and Dalits in India. He also learned about satyagraha, which means "soul force", and felt a profound calling towards the teachings of Gandhi. Dr. King took this lesson of non-violence back with him to the United States, and connected it with his own Christian faith.

UNITED BY CAUSE
Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel invited Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. in 1965 to speak at the National Conference of Jews and Christians on Religion and Race. Together, Heschel and King had marched from Selma to Montgomery to protest the racism that poisoned America. Citing his own religion as the reason for this, Heschel stated, “The soul of Judaism is at stake in the Civil Rights Movement.” Heschel was also inspired by Dr. King, saying of him, “Martin Luther King is a sign that God has not forsaken America. God has sent him to us.”
TODAY’S EXAMPLES:

In summer 2010, Frank Fredericks, a Born Again Christian, and Josh Stanton, a rabbinical student, created Religious Freedom USA, a new campaign to safeguard religious pluralism. In response to Park 51, Fredericks and Stanton circulated a national petition to protect the religious freedoms of all faith traditions in the United States. Both of them cite their own religious beliefs and their national pride as a basis for mobilizing young people for interfaith cooperation. Stanton writes in The Huffington Post:

“Some may wonder why a Born Again Christian and a future rabbi, both under the age of 25, are working to build support for a Muslim community center. To us it seems natural: this is not simply a Muslim issue, a Jewish issue, or a Christian issue. This is an American issue, and members of all religious communities are affected by a threat to religious freedom.”

BRINGING TRUTH TO LIGHT

An Evangelical Christian pastor, Jim Wallis has led dozens of social justice actions from the civil rights era to the present. As a Christian, Wallis is deeply passionate about the importance of interfaith cooperation and has publically supported the Park 51 community center. Citing scripture and Dr. King, he draws from his faith tradition to speak out for religious pluralism. In The Washington Post’s “The Faith Divide” Aug. 3, he wrote:

“Does our initial judgment of our neighbors come from their religious labels or the content of their character? I do not advocate a religious pluralism that blurs the distinctions and significant differences between religions, but I do believe that my religious tradition calls me to be a peacemaker and to love my neighbors, especially when I do not agree with them.”

As we act together to improve our world, we provide an alternative story to the divisive discourse that is plaguing our nation. To counter anti-Muslim sentiment and religious bigotry, student leaders need to unite across religious and philosophical traditions and act on their shared values. It is a movement of interfaith cooperation that will quell forces of intolerance and prevent future incidents of discrimination.
TAKING ACTION AS CAMPUS LEADERS

As we have seen, religion can be a source of division or an opportunity for inclusion. At the Interfaith Youth Core we believe colleges and universities can model and lead the way for cooperation. Unless we act now, anti-Muslim sentiment and religious bigotry will continue to permeate our communities and campuses.

THE TIME IS NOW TO ...

1. SPEAK OUT by reframing the conversation on religion on your campus.

2. MOBILIZE your campus community to make interfaith cooperation an active part of campus life.

SPEAK OUT!

- Print out and post the “In America…” poster found in the appendix of this resource [page 21].
- Circulate this resource to your network of peers.
- Incorporate messages of interfaith cooperation into upcoming speeches on campus. For talking points see the “Division versus Pluralism” chart and “In America” values outlined on page [page 5].
- Write an op-ed in your local or campus newspaper condemning anti-Muslim sentiment and highlighting the power of interfaith cooperation.

MOBILIZE!

- Invite a panel of religiously diverse students to participate in an public event on campus.
- Discuss Eboo Patel’s USA Today op-ed “Division versus Unity” at your next staff meeting. A copy of the article can be found in the appendix [page 21].
- Add articles found in the appendix of this resource as optional classroom readings.
- Host a dialogue with students, faculty and staff on the history of interfaith cooperation and the shared values across religious and philosophical traditions. See appendix for a dialogue guide.
- Invite leaders from the local Muslim community to campus to speak about Islam and the significance of interfaith cooperation. For information on speakers in your community, see One Nation and the Organization of Islamic Speakers.
STUDENTS

TAKING ACTION AS CAMPUS LEADERS

As the heart of college and university campuses, students can influence and transform campus. Young people have been at the forefront of social change movements in the United States; the interfaith movement is no different. It is critical that students take a leading role in transforming the discourse of religion in America from conflict to cooperation.

STUDENT LEADERS MUST...

1. SPEAK OUT about the importance of religious pluralism.
2. MOBILIZE your campus to build community where others would seek to divide us.

SPEAK OUT!

- Share this resource with fellow students, faculty and staff.
- Tweet “In America, we are better together” with a link to one of the articles found in the appendix of this resource [page 21]. Use the hashtag #BetterTogether to connect to interfaith student leaders from around the country. Follow IFYC on Twitter at @IFYC & @EbooPatel.
- Update your Facebook status with links to one of the articles in the appendix [page 21]. Become a fan of IFYC to stay up to date about issues related to Park 51 and ways to combat anti-Muslim sentiment on your campus.
- Personalize and distribute the “In America…” values for your campus [appendix, page 21].
- Write an op-ed for your school newspaper, post your thoughts on your blog, your Facebook page, or any other social media you might frequent. For talking points see the “Divide vs Unite” chart and “In America” values [page 5].

MOBILIZE!

- Invite religious and non-religious leaders from the local community to speak about interfaith cooperation to your student organization or residence hall.
- Organize trips for student organizations to visit local houses of worship including churches, synagogues and mosques to increase religious literacy about different faith and philosophical traditions.
- Hold an interfaith service event highlighting the shared values of hospitality or service with members of the Muslim Student Association and other religious groups on campus. For information about organizing an interfaith dialogue on shared values for your event, see the IFYC toolkit [page 21].
- Sign up to run IFYC’s Better Together Campaign to take part in movement to spread message of interfaith cooperation and service to campuses nationwide! Email bettertogether@ifyc.org for more info.
A CAMPUS-WIDE PRIORITY

The mission of higher education is to prepare the next generation of leaders for responsible global citizenship in a diverse world. Colleges and universities have the opportunity to significantly influence how American society engages religious diversity. Rather than waiting for religious intolerance to take center stage, we must proactively sustain interfaith engagement on campus by:

- Incorporating religious and philosophical traditions into the standard framework for engaging diversity issues on campus.
- Equipping a broad range of campus leaders with basic religious literacy and an understanding of the value of religious pluralism in student life.

Together, we can lay the foundation for an interfaith movement and bring to life a vision of global citizenship. Thank you for your time and your actions to foster inclusion and understanding on your campus.

PARTNERING WITH IFYC

Working primarily with colleges and universities, IFYC seeks to make interfaith cooperation a social norm by building bridges of cooperation, strengthening our civil society, and promoting common action for a common good. IFYC is ready to serve as a resource to build religious pluralism on your campus. For more information on engaging religious diversity in your institution, please feel free to contact us by email (maryellen@ifyc.org) or by phone (312-573-8825).

BUILDING THE MOVEMENT

STAY CONNECTED

There are several ways to stay up to date on the national conversation concerning interfaith issues:

- For the latest information, follow us on Twitter: @IFYC & @EbooPatel
- Read Eboo Patel’s blog, The Faith Divide, on WashingtonPost.com
- Subscribe for IFYC’s newsletter by visiting: www.ifyc.org

Together, we can lay the foundation for an interfaith movement and bring to life a vision of global citizenship. Thank you for your time and your actions to foster inclusion and understanding on your campus.

IN AMERICA, WE DON’T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE OF ANY RELIGION

IN AMERICA, WE WILL NOT BE DIVIDED BY FAITH

IN AMERICA, EVERYONE HAS A PLACE

IN AMERICA, WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER
Appendix: Tools and Resources!

Tools for Action:

Interfaith Youth Core: About Us.

Better Together Print-and-Post Sheet. Interfaith Youth Core.


Key Resources:

Division vs. Unity. Eboo Patel (August 30, 2010). USA Today

Discussion Guide for “Division vs. Unity” by Eboo Patel. Interfaith Youth Core

The Washington Post’s The Faith Divide column: Evangelical Heroes Series


'Un-Christ-like' Intolerance of Cordoba House. Skye Jethani. (July 29, 2010)

Why I Support the Mosque in Manhattan. Brian McLaren. (July 30, 2010)


Cordoba House: When Fear and Freedom Meet. Dr. Joel C. Hunter. (August 6, 2010)
http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo_patel/2010/08/cordoba_house_project_when_fea.html

God’s plan, America’s Promise. Melissa Rogers. (August 9, 2010)

Appendix: Tools and Resources! (Continued)

For Further Reading on the Events Described in the “Inclusion vs. Intolerance” Timeline, go to:


**DOJ Investigating at Least 5 Anti-Muslim Acts.** Mark Sherman. (September 8, 2010) Associated Press. [http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hy6lROX5CbySP025oWWyRZ7YPfAD9j3BSC80](http://www.google.com/hostednews/ap/article/ALeqM5hy6lROX5CbySP025oWWyRZ7YPfAD9j3BSC80)


INTERFAITH YOUTH CORE
www.ifyc.org

Overview

Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) seeks to make interfaith cooperation a social norm. Too often, religion is seen as a barrier of division. IFYC believes faith can be a bridge of cooperation, strengthening our civil society and promoting the common good for all. Just as civil rights leaders and environmentalists built transformative movements in the 20th century, IFYC believes that interfaith leaders will build the movement for interfaith cooperation in the 21st century.

Since 2002, Interfaith Youth Core has worked on five continents and with over 150 college and university campuses, training thousands in the principles of interfaith leadership, and reaching millions through the media. IFYC has worked with partners including the White House and Her Majesty Queen Rania of Jordan.

IFYC is leading a movement of bridge builders who are changing the conversation about religious pluralism and transforming their campuses and communities.

We do this by focusing on three distinct programmatic areas:

Strategy

Interfaith Youth Core’s primary objectives are to:

- Change the public discourse about religion from one of inevitable conflict to one of cooperation and religious pluralism;
- Nurture and network a critical mass of emerging interfaith leaders; and
- Partner with college campuses to become models of interfaith cooperation.

Approach

Interfaith Youth Core focuses its efforts through three distinct programmatic areas:

- Communications & Policy gives voice to the interfaith youth movement through a wide range of media platforms and by advising on issues of interfaith cooperation in policy circles.
- Leadership mobilizes young people, both nationally and internationally, to become interfaith leaders and foster interfaith cooperation on their campuses and in their communities.
- Campus Partnerships engages institutions of higher learning to build interfaith cooperation by committing to religious diversity as they have to issues like racial diversity and sustainability.
IN AMERICA, WE DON’T DISCRIMINATE AGAINST PEOPLE OF ANY RELIGION.

IN AMERICA, WE WILL NOT BE DIVIDED BY FAITH.

IN AMERICA, EVERYONE HAS A PLACE.

IN AMERICA, WE ARE BETTER TOGETHER.
FACILITATOR’S TOOLS:
INTERFAITH DIALOGUE ON THE SHARED VALUE OF SERVICE
Facilitator’s Guidelines
Dialogue on the Shared Values of Service

Goals of the dialogue
- To help participants discover the shared value of service across different religious traditions through text, story-telling and action.
- To encourage participants to grow in their own faith identities, learning how to talk about what they believe, even as they learning to listen to others.
- To build a sense of cooperation and collaboration amongst religiously diverse young people on campus and in the community.

Setting a safe space for dialogue (see attached guidelines) — 10 minutes

Texts on the shared value of service — 15 minutes
- Ask your group to go around the circle and read the texts on service aloud. Make it clear that no one has to read if they feel uncomfortable doing so.
- Ask the group to reflect on what they’ve read: “Did any of these - either from your own faith tradition or not - particularly resonate with you?” “Did you hear anything that you found challenging or helped you to think about service in a new way?”
- Explain that these texts offer us a chance to think about how we interact with people who are different from us in light of our shared values, and that this will be the framing for the discussion.

Story-telling as a means of dialogue — 20 minutes
- Ask the group to tell a story about a meaningful service experience. Emphasize that this need not be a religious story. If they get stuck, model the story that you worked on earlier.
- Now push the story further by asking participants to reflect on what inspired them to do this work, “What inspired you to do that act of service? Was it something from your faith tradition or moral perspective?”

Returning to the texts — 15 minutes
- Ask the group to read the texts aloud again. Encourage participants to see if they think about things differently after they’ve listened to stories about inspiration from different traditions.
- Ask, “Is there anything new that sticks out to you as you read through these texts a second time?” “How did you see the themes of these texts playing out in the stories we just told?”
Facilitator’s Guidelines
Setting a Safe Space for Dialogue

Introduce the kind of discussion we will be having today:

- Tell the students, “you will be asked to talk about your faith and your values today with others who don’t necessarily share your beliefs and ways of life.”

Brainstorm the guidelines for this unique discussion:

- What do you need from yourself and others in order to feel safe having this conversation?
- Take notes on your group’s responses, and then read the responses aloud to conclude the discussion.

Here’s a list of key safe space guidelines. When your group is done brainstorming, add to the list anything you might have missed:

- Everyone has the right to pass
- Everything said is confidential
- Seek clarification if you don’t understand something someone else is saying
- Make sure to listen to others without interrupting
- Suspend your judgment
- Use “I” statements
- Remember the importance of the other person’s faith or moral tradition in his or her own life
- Don’t expect others to know everything about your own tradition
- No question is stupid
Texts on the Shared Value of Service

Baha’i Tradition on Service (from Abdu’l-Baha, Selections from the Writings of Abdu’l-Baha)
One amongst His Teachings is this, that love and good faith must so dominate the human heart that men will regard the stranger as a familiar friend, the malefactor as one of their own, the alien even as a loved one, the enemy as a companion dear and close.

Buddhist Tradition of Service (from Itivuttaka 18)
If beings knew, as I know, the fruit of sharing gifts, they would not enjoy their use without sharing them, nor would the taint of stinginess obsess the heart and stay there. Even if it were their last bit, their last morsel of food, they would not enjoy its use without sharing it, if there were anyone to receive it.

Christian Tradition of Service (Matthew 25:35)
“For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, I was naked and you gave me clothing, I was sick and you took care of me, I was in prison and you visited me.” Then the righteous will answer him, “Lord, when was it that we saw you hungry and gave you food, or thirsty and gave you something to drink? And when was it that we saw you a stranger and welcomed you, or naked and gave you clothing? And when was it that we saw you sick or in prison and visited you?” And the king will answer them, “Truly I tell you, just as you did it to one of the least of these who are members of my family, you did it to me.”

Hindu Tradition of Service (from Bhagavad Gita 3.10)
At the beginning, mankind and the obligation of selfless service were created together. “Through selfless service, you will always be fruitful and find the fulfillment of your desires”: this is the promise of the Creator....

Jain Tradition of Service (from Tattvarthasutra 5.21)
Rendering help to another is the function of all human beings.

Jewish Tradition of Service (Deuteronomy 10:17)
For the LORD your G-d is G-d supreme and Lord supreme, the great, the mighty, and the awesome G-d, who shows no favor and takes no bribe, but upholds the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and befriends the stranger, providing him with food and clothing. You too must befriend the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.

Muslim Tradition of Service (Surah 93:1-11)
I call to witness the early hours of morning, and the night when dark and still, your Lord has neither left you, nor despises you. What is to come is better for you than what has gone before; for your Lord will certainly give you, and you will be content. Did He not find you an orphan and take care of you? Did He not find you perplexed, and show you the way? Did He not find you poor and enrich you? So do not oppress the orphan, and do not drive the beggar away, and keep recounting the favors of your Lord.

Secular Humanism Tradition of Service (from the writings of Pablo Neruda)
To feel the intimacy of brothers is a marvelous thing in life. To feel the love of people whom we love is a fire that feeds our life. But to feel the affection that comes from those whom we do not know, from those unknown to us, who are watching over our sleep and solitude, over our dangers and our weaknesses - that is something still greater and more beautiful because it widens out the boundaries of our being and unites all living things.

Sikh Tradition of Service (from Guru Granth Sahib)
The individual who performs selfless service without thought of reward shall attain God’s salvation.
In the late 19th century, the forces of religious division in America targeted Catholics. Josiah Strong's book *Our Country: Its Possible Future and Present Crisis* referred to Catholics as "the alien Romanist" who swore allegiance to the pope instead of the country and rejected core American values such as freedom of the press and religious liberty. The book remained in print for decades and sold nearly 200,000 copies.

In the early 20th century, the forces of religious division in America targeted Jews. Harvard scholar Diana Eck writes, "In the 1930s and early 1940s, hate organizations grew and conspiracy theories about Jewish influence spread like wildfire." In 1939, Father Charles Coughlin's Christian Front filled Madison Square Garden with 20,000 people at a vitriolic anti-Semitic event complete with banners that read: "Stop Jewish Domination of America."

Today, the forces of religious division demonize Muslims. Tennessee's lieutenant governor, Ron Ramsey, says Islam — a faith of 1.5 billion people founded 1,400 years ago — could well be a cult and not a religion. Therefore, he continues, constitutional religious liberty guarantees might not apply to Muslims.

Mosques and Muslim community centers are being vociferously opposed from New York to Tennessee to California. A church in Florida proudly posts a roadside sign that reads, "Islam is of the Devil," and is planning an event called "International Burn a Quran Day."

The same arguments marshaled against Jews and Catholics in previous eras are being advanced against Muslims today. You've heard the charges:

• The tenets of Islam are opposed to the values of America.

• Muslims have undue influence with American elites.

• Muslim integration into America is a veiled Islamic invasion.

It is easy to imagine Strong's book written today with "the alien Islamic" replacing "the alien Romanist," or a Father Coughlin-style rally at Madison Square Garden with tens of thousands chanting, "Muslim go home."

The forces of religious division have always been alive in America, but they have never defined America. The core principle of our nation is that a diverse people can live together in unity. Our motto, placed on the seal of the United States in 1776 when we became a country, is *E Pluribus Unum*: out of many, one.
Our Founding Fathers fought for this ethic. Addressing the Hebrew Congregation of Newport, R.I., as America's first president, George Washington expressed this hope: "May the children of the stock of Abraham who dwell in this land continue to merit and enjoy the goodwill of the other inhabitants, while every one shall sit in safety under his own vine and fig tree, and there shall be none to make him afraid."

But unity in America is not to be taken for granted. Every generation must both preserve and protect our nation's core principle, and extend and expand it.

What we need today is a force advancing this value of unity and returning the voices of division to the margins. I think this force is going to come from an interfaith movement.

Here's what that could look like: Civic groups could organize interfaith service projects, such as those fostered by Habitat for Humanity, bringing a community's Jews, Muslims, Christians, Buddhists, Hindus, Humanists and others together for an afternoon of volunteering and interfaith dialogue.

Pastors, rabbis and imams could preach about how the teachings of their respective religions inspire cooperation with those of different faiths. These faith leaders could then hold up things they admire about other faith groups.

'Any religious persuasion'

Universities could offer courses that emphasize the history of cooperation between religious groups instead of focusing just on the stories of conflict.

Political leaders could give speeches about shared values such as mercy, compassion and hospitality that serve as common ground between religions.

Ben Franklin—like his fellow Founders Washington, Madison and Jefferson—would recognize such a nation. Franklin helped set in motion our traditions of openness, unity and cooperation. In the 18th century, he helped build a public hall in Philadelphia with the express purpose that it embody the true American spirit. He said that the hall exists "expressly for the use of any preacher of any religious persuasion who might desire to say something to the people at Philadelphia ... so that even if the mufti of Constantinople were to send a missionary to preach Mohammadanism (Islam) to us, he would find a pulpit at his service."

The forces of religious division targeting Muslims seek to take America off course. We must not forfeit the territory to them. In America, we don't discriminate against people of any religion. In America, we will not be divided by faith. In America, everyone has a place. In America, we are better together.

Eboo Patel is the founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core and was a member of President Obama's Inaugural Faith Council.

Available at: http://www.usatoday.com/news/opinion/forum/2010-08-30-column30_ST_N.htm
“Division vs. Unity” (Dr. Eboo Patel in USA Today) Discussion Guide

Background on the Author:

This article was written by Eboo Patel, founder and president of the Interfaith Youth Core, a nationally-recognized organization that seeks to make interfaith cooperation a social norm. Towards this end, IFYC works primarily with colleges and universities to build bridges of cooperation, strengthen our civil society, and promote common action for the common good.

Named by US News & World Report as one of America’s Best Leaders of 2009, Dr. Patel is the author of the award-winning book Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation, Eboo is also a regular contributor to the Washington Post, National Public Radio, USA Today and CNN. He served on President Obama’s Inaugural Advisory Council of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, and holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford University, where he studied on a Rhodes scholarship.

Questions:

Initial Discussion

What spoke to you in this article? Do you feel this article is relevant to your work on campus?

Division

What historical examples does the author use to demonstrate the role of “the forces of religious division” in the U.S.?

Can you think of other examples throughout U.S. history where communities have been subject to intolerance and exclusion?

What arguments or narratives/stories have you heard voiced on the campus, in the media, or in your personal experience that create religious division?

Unity

What are your thoughts on the quotes from Benjamin Franklin and George Washington? What value do you think they add to today’s conversation on religion?

What does the author suggest we do to advance the value of unity and create “an interfaith movement”?

What ways have you seen the power of an interfaith movement on our campus?

What ways can you think of to “preserve and protect our nation’s core principle, and extend and expand it” on our campus?
An evangelical supports mosque near Ground Zero

POSTED JULY 26, 2010; 5:57 PM ET

Today's guest blogger is Bob Roberts, Jr., the founding and Senior Pastor of NorthWood Church in Keller, Texas. NorthWood has started 130+ churches in the United States and trains young pastors here and around the world. He has led numerous development projects through a volunteer movement of mobilizing people to serve from one part of the world to another. He is active in multi-faith activities, as well as as an author. His most recent book is Realtime Connections.

Next week I will be in Hanoi, Vietnam with a dozen or more teachers from NorthWood Church where I pastor in Dallas, Texas as they will be working on education projects at the National University of Vietnam. I love Hanoi: the sights, smells, everything about it. I'll hang out with lots of my Vietnamese friends: painters, educators, businessmen, humanitarians, and even government leaders.

Last week I was invited to celebrate the 15 year anniversary of diplomatic relations between the U.S. and Vietnam. President Clinton, Senator McCain, Senator Kerry, and Ambassador Le Cong Phung all spoke. I got a funny response from the 200 or so people there.

"Who are you with?" "I'm a pastor from Dallas." "Why did you come?" "Our church works in Vietnam with the government." "Really! They have religious freedom there?"

"I would say yes and that it's growing, not without its challenges - but they are making some bold steps, and it's better than other parts of the world that I've been to by a long shot!" I even gave Long, the political advisor, and Ambassador Le a Texas Belt buckle - and they loved it! Vietnam had been on a list with our government as one of the countries with the worst violations of religious freedom in the past - they are now off that list.

This week I followed in the news all the articles (pro and con) on the Muslim Community Center being built two blocks from Ground Zero. I followed links and read about Muslim institutions being challenged in Murfreesboro, Tennessee, and other protests against Muslims and Muslim institutions in America. I wondered, "What would my Vietnamese friends think about this?" I'll ask them next week.

It's as if the shoe is on the other foot now. The reality is, Vietnam feared Christians like Christian Americans fear Islam - we don't want our society destabilized. I heard of one man who's going to build a Christian Center at Ground Zero in response to the Islamic Center - that's the Jesus I've come to know and love! Right.

I also heard one of our top political leaders said, "When they allow churches to be built in Saudi Arabia, then they can build a mosque there". Well, this isn't Saudi Arabia - it's the United States of America - and thank
God we have rule of law and freedom of religion will prevail!

You might think I'm a liberal or mainline Christian. Not at all. I'm an Evangelical, a conservative Evangelical at that, and an Evangelistic Evangelical to top it all off - that means I tell everyone I can in a polite way about Jesus. I believe Jesus really is the only way to God - but that doesn't mean I'm better than anyone else or gives me a right to be arrogant. If anything I should be humble and broken. I also believe in something called the Great Commission - simply stated that everyone should get to see and hear the Gospel at work so they can make their own call about Jesus. It's similar to the Dawa that Muslims also believe in their message getting out. Why in the world then would I be OK with mosques being built in America?

Here's why: I don't believe in "Us" against "Them". I learned the following in my experiences with Vietnam (I used to fear Vietnamese too), and I'm re-learning it with regard to Muslims.

First, theologically, I believe that God is in control and nothing happens without his approval and notice. If God is sovereign and in control, I need not fear.

Second, personally, I believe Jesus is God and is orchestrating things where the whole world can at least hear about who Jesus is. By the way, did you know the Koran talks more about Jesus than it does about the Prophet Mohammed? Did you know that the Prophet Mohammed told his followers they should learn from the Christian and Jewish books and ask Christians what they believe?

Third, morally: What we do here impacts what we are allowed to do around the globe. Everything is glocal. I can't tell you how many Islamic leaders I've visited around the world who believe that religious freedom should exist in every country - even theirs. For them to say so publicly would have negative consequences for them. Now is not the time for us to reverse over 200 years of America's tradition of religious freedom - the consequences not just for us, but the world, would be dire.

Fourth, practically, what an incredible opportunity as Americans for us to show the rest of the world how to get along with religious diversity! We have to model what we ask of others.

Fifth, philosophically, I believe my faith has the strongest case. I don't believe the best way to keep Christians "Christian" is to isolate them from other religions. If I can't make my case with another faith - maybe my faith isn't a faith after all.

Sixth, relationally - I've come to love a lot of Muslims. Yep, most of them know I want to see them follow Jesus and baptize them (I descended from the Baptist tribe) - but not a single one of them has disrespected me or condemned me for my view. I don't like people disrespecting my friends, whether they're Muslims, Jews, Evangelicals or other. When are we going to learn to stop disrespecting people? Didn't the civil rights movement teach us anything?

I don't know the details of the Muslim Community Center in Manhattan - there may be some hanky panky I don't know about. For me, it isn't about that institution in particular. It's about something America's founders got - the best way to preserve religious freedom for any of us is to make sure it is extended to all of us.

_The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core._

'Un-Christ-like' intolerance of Cordoba House

POSTED ON JULY 29, 2010; 2:08 PM ET

Today's guest blogger is Skye Jethani: an ordained pastor, the managing editor of Leadership Journal (a publication of Christianity Today), and the author of The Divine Commodity: Discovering a Faith Beyond Consumer Christianity. He blogs at SkyeJethani.com.

Governmental, religious, and cultural leaders on all sides have already spoken, written, or tweeted about the proposed Islamic cultural center near the World Trade Center site in Manhattan. So when my friend Eboo Patel asked me to add my voice to the noise, I wasn't sure what new perspective I could offer.

An expert in constitutional law might see the Cordoba House controversy as a First Amendment issue and demand that the Muslim-Americans organizing the project be allowed to proceed without impediment. A politico might see the matter as an opportunity to score easy points with constituents (right or left) by supporting or denouncing the "Ground Zero mosque." And a member of the media might see the issue as a powder keg guaranteed to draw an audience and therefore pursue whatever means to keep the controversy alive. But I'm not a lawyer, a politician, or a journalist. I'm a pastor. And when I look at the matter it isn't the legal or political arguments that get my attention--it's the fear.

Some with objections about the Cordoba House say it would be disrespectful to the 9/11 victim's families and stand as an insensitive reminder of the religious intolerance that motivated the attacks. Certainly no one wishes to add any burden to the unimaginable pain already carried by these families. And although I do not know the organizers of the Cordoba House, I trust they share this sentiment as numerous Muslims were among the innocent victims on 9/11.

But objections to the Islamic center in Lower Manhattan have gone far beyond sensitivity to victims' families and stand as an insensitive reminder of the religious intolerance that motivated the attacks. Certainly no one wishes to add any burden to the unimaginable pain already carried by these families. And although I do not know the organizers of the Cordoba House, I trust they share this sentiment as numerous Muslims were among the innocent victims on 9/11.

Some with objections about the Cordoba House say it would be disrespectful to the 9/11 victim's families and stand as an insensitive reminder of the religious intolerance that motivated the attacks. Certainly no one wishes to add any burden to the unimaginable pain already carried by these families. And although I do not know the organizers of the Cordoba House, I trust they share this sentiment as numerous Muslims were among the innocent victims on 9/11.

But objections to the Islamic center in Lower Manhattan have gone far beyond sensitivity to victims' families. Some are saying the Cordoba House represents a "beachhead for Shariah" in the United States. In his article opposing the project, Newt Gingrich wrote, "America is experiencing an Islamist cultural-political offensive designed to undermine and destroy our civilization." And a self-identified "Christian" website has been launched to fight the project. It calls upon other concerned Christians to take a "stand against evil" by donating to the site.

These examples, and there are many others, reveal how fear is being used to foment anger and political zealotry. Somehow we are to believe that the construction of a 15-story Islamic community center in New York City will be a tipping point leading to the decline of American civilization, the dissolution of Christian faith, and the reversal of hundreds of years of western legal precedent. Amid the panic, opponents of the Cordoba House might be shocked to discover that a mosque has been meeting in the same neighborhood, two blocks from the proposed Cordoba House and four blocks from Ground Zero, for the last 30 years. One wonders how our republic has survived? (Pardon my sarcasm, but sometimes humor is the best way to defuse irrational fears.)
Sadly the fear-mongering demonstrated by some opponents of the Cordoba House has become commonplace in our partisan society. Fear has proven to be a very effective political tactic for both conservatives and liberals, and it's also a guaranteed way for Christian ministries and non-profit groups to grow their lists and fill their coffers. This is what concerns me most about the present controversy—not the possibility of a Muslim community center near Ground Zero, but how many within my evangelical community are responding from the most un-Christian of motives: fear.

Jesus' teachings in the Sermon on the Mount are some of the most familiar, beautiful, and radical ideas found in the Bible (Matthew chapters 5, 6, and 7). He calls his followers to give generously, put aside anger, vengeance, and greed, live without worry, and even love their enemies. Many read Jesus' instructions and admire their beauty but scoff at their impracticality. "In this world it makes no sense to love your enemies," is what I hear from Christians and non-Christians alike. And they are right. In a dangerous, chaotic, and threatening world where self-preservation is the highest goal, these teachings defy logic. This is why Henri Nouwen wrote, "Fear engenders fear. It never gives birth to love."

As long as we primarily view the world is a dangerous place, we will never find the power to obey Jesus' teachings. This is why he begins his Sermon on the Mount with a new vision of the world as a perfectly safe place for those who entrust themselves to Christ. He presents a world in which the poor, the forgotten, the mourning, and the meek are blessed by God; and a world where death itself is overcome. Only when we see this as a God-with-us world in which our lives and wellbeing are eternally in his care can we abandon fear and answer, by faith, the dangerous and irrational call to love. Perhaps this is why one of the most common commands in the Bible is "do not be afraid." Fear, not doubt, is the great enemy of faith.

So when I see leaders, both political and religious, stoking the fears of Christians regarding the Cordoba House project, it strikes me as profoundly un-Christ-like. Despite their stated intentions, those seeking to inflame your fears about the presence of Islam in America are not inspiring you to be more Christian, but less. They are not leading us toward faith in Christ, but away from him. Because where the raging fires of fear and anger are fed, the inviting glow of Christ-centered faith and love cannot long endure. And such provocations are not leading us to love our Muslim neighbors as ourselves, but instead causing us to believe that our wellbeing necessitates their misfortune. And such "us versus them" conceptions are antithetical to everything Jesus taught and modeled. It is not Christian faith.

Rather than seeing the growing visibility of Islam in the United States, whether through the construction of the Cordoba House or any number of mosques around the country, as a threat to Christianity and reacting out of fear, we can choose to seize this as a new opportunity to reaffirm our trust in Jesus Christ, love our Muslim neighbors, and seek what is good for them as a true incarnation of Christian faith.

I do hope the organizers of the Cordoba House project will proceed with great sensitivity to the victims' families, and will seek to increase their efforts to communicate how the facility and the programming it contains will honor the memory and sacrifices of those lost on 9/11. And whether or not the Islamic community center is built near Ground Zero, I can offer my Christian sisters and brothers this good word: Be not afraid.

_The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core._

I don't really like proof-texting - pulling a verse out of context to try to prove a point. I'm not even a big fan of the fact that the Bible is divided up into chapters and verses. It wasn't always that way - our modern schema of chapters and verses is a relatively late addition to the Bible, having evolved since the 13th Century. Chapter-and-versification allows people to kidnap a quote out of its context in a longer narrative and apply it in potentially irresponsible and harmful ways, as if the Bible were a legal constitution and its verses were articles, sections, subsections, and amendments in a legal code.

But I'm about to engage in chapter-and-versing, consciously and intentionally - and with regard to context, because in this case, the ancient text applies powerfully to our own situation in America today. Consider Exodus 23:9:

"Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt."

The command was originally for the Jewish people. After a famine, they became refugees in Egypt and eventually were enslaved for generations by Pharaoh's regime. But according to the Bible, God isn't on the side of the oppressors; God sides with the oppressed, and so God liberated them from slavery. God then led them through the wilderness and ultimately provided them a place to live. The oppressed became the blessed.

But being blessed by God gave them no excuse to oppress others, so they were commanded to never forget - never forget what it's like to be oppressed, so you never become complicit in the oppression of others. The command is repeated often, and even strengthened, as in Leviticus 19:33-34:

When an alien lives with you in your land, do not mistreat him. The alien living with you must be treated as one of your native-born. Love him as yourself, for you were aliens in Egypt. I am the LORD your God.

You find a similar strengthening of the command in Deuteronomy (10:19):
[The LORD] defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the alien, giving him food and clothing. And you are to love those who are aliens, for you yourselves were aliens in Egypt.

Lately I've been thinking about Exodus 23:9 and its companion verses in relation to the current controversy about a group of Muslim citizens - full American citizens in a democracy, not even aliens! - seeking to build a mosque in Manhattan. Among others, Sarah Palin has called for peace-loving Muslims to "refudiate" the mosque, calling it a provocation and saying that it stabs the hearts of people in the heartland. But I wonder if people in the heartland have forgotten that they are only a few generations away from ancestors who were also immigrants, who came to the United States in many cases to experience freedom of religion.

Shouldn't it stab the hearts of caring Americans like you and me to imagine forbidding Muslims to experience the same freedom of religion in their new homeland that our own ancestors sought here in the past? Shouldn't we remember how it feels to be seen as aliens, and shouldn't we love our Muslim neighbors as ourselves, wanting the same religious freedom for them that we cherish?

That's why I think it's valid to bring Exodus 23:9 and its companion verses into the equation at times like these. We Christians - and Jews too - should enthusiastically support Muslims in their desire to build a center devoted to peaceful religion near the site of an atrocity committed in the name of violent religion. We are not called to mistreatment, prejudice, oppression, or even to mere tolerance - we are called to something far higher: to empathy, to generosity, to hospitality, and to love, fueled by empathy and memory. To violate those values should truly stab the heart of all Christians everywhere.

Knowing that Sarah Palin respects the Scriptures, I think if she gives it a second and prayerful thought, she couldn't help but change her mind.

The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core.

Available at: http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo_patel/2010/07/why_i_support_the_mosque_in_ma.html
Who wins when the U.S. restricts religious freedom?

POSTED AUGUST 3, 2010; 4:14 PM ET

Today's guest blogger is Jim Wallis, the author of Rediscovering Values: On Wall Street, Main Street, and Your Street -- A Moral Compass for the New Economy, and CEO of Sojourners. He blogs at www.godspolitics.com.

There is one thing the opponents of the Cordoba Initiative (that plans to build an Islamic cultural center near Ground Zero) have in common with the Cordoba Initiative's leadership: their clear condemnation and denunciation of terrorism. They are united in this belief because every time a terrorist tries to claim the mantle of Islam and commits an act of violence, everyone loses.

(For Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf's statement about the mission of the Cordoba Initiative and condemnation of terrorism, you can go to the front page of their website.)

If everyone seems to be united on this crucial issue, where is the controversy? If the planners and opponents of this initiative all agree that terrorism must be defeated and that Muslim leaders have a special responsibility to ensure that their communities of worship in no way support terrorism and actively work as a force against it, where is the problem? I believe there are a few key questions that get to the heart of the issue. The way we answer them says a lot about ourselves, our own faith, and the collective character of our country.

The first question is this: Does our initial judgment of our neighbors come from their religious labels or the content of their character? I do not advocate a religious pluralism that blurs the distinctions and significant differences between religions, but I do believe that my religious tradition calls me to be a peacemaker and to love my neighbors, especially when I do not agree with them. It is a good thing when you get along with a neighbor with whom you have much in common, but it speaks highly of your character when you build peace between yourself and a neighbor with whom you have differences.

When Muslim leaders step up to lead an initiative to reduce tensions and promote respect and understanding, do we first judge those leaders by the actions of terrorists (whom they have condemned), or do we judge them by their integrity and character? This does not mean I then have to agree with them on everything or pretend differences do not exist, but I will love and respect them and work with them to be peacemakers. Feisal Rauf and his wife Daisy Khan are friends of mine, and I can testify that they are indeed peacemakers.

The second question asks: Do we believe in freedom for my religion or freedom of religion? The "Establishment" and "Free Exercise" clauses of the First Amendment were nothing less than revolutionary
statements. They ignited across the globe a new level of religious freedom and protection. As with many parts of our Constitution, they represent ideals to which we aspire but have not always lived up to. Anti-Catholic sentiment barred Catholics from holding many public offices for years. Anti-Semitism and other forms of religious bigotry have reared their ugly head over and over in our history.

But ultimately, many minority groups have flourished in this country, and those who are persecuted in other areas of the world seek asylum here because of our strong history of religious liberty, protection, and freedom. In 2008, our country distinguished itself globally by electing someone of a racial minority as president. We have resisted restrictions on religious expressions targeted at Islam that are appearing in other countries across the world. This speaks greatly to our ability to live up to the ideals in our founding documents.

Finally, we must ask a third question: In the face of global terrorism, who wins when the U.S. restricts religious freedom? The opponents of the Cordoba Initiative seem to be saying that Americans win if we restrict the free expression of religion of some Americans. Religious sensitivities, especially around Ground Zero, are understandable. 9/11 was a crime against humanity, and tragically, it was the first significant encounter many Americans had with radical Islam or Islam of any sort. But this is why the mission of the Cordoba Initiative as a cultural and community center is so important. The goal of the center is to run programs that reduce tensions and build understanding between Muslims and the West. In order for our country to continue healing, more Americans need to meet and build trust and respect with other Americans who are different than they are -- especially with the many Muslims who love this country and the freedoms it affords.

If terrorists are able to not only attack us physically but get us to judge our neighbors by labels rather than the content of their character, turn our back on the Constitution and disregard its ideals, and then restrict the religious freedom of other Americans, we all lose.

This is a very important moment. Whether we allow religious freedom for Americans of Islamic faith -- near Ground Zero or anywhere else -- will determine our own character, the integrity of our faith, and our real commitment to the ideals that have distinguished our nation. Let's not let fear and bigotry force us to make the wrong decision here.

The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core.

Available at:
Cordoba House: When Fear and Freedom Meet

POSTED AUGUST 6, 2010; 8:58 AM ET

Today's guest blogger is Dr. Joel C. Hunter, Senior Pastor at Northland Church in Longwood, FL. Dr. Hunter is the author of several books, including A New Kind of Conservative, and served in the inaugural year on the President's Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships.

As a conservative evangelical Christian leader, every week I get emails or verbal warnings about the spread of Islam in America. The bad news is that people are afraid. The good news is that we have a chance to change that.

There are dynamics afoot here that have less to do with being Christian or Muslim - they are common in most of humanity:

1. We tend to fear what we do not know
2. We do not like to give up majority positions of preference, or even share them
3. We link all subsequent responses closely to the emotions of an originating traumatic event
4. We have an initial tendency to see differences in terms of competition rather than possible cooperation

These dynamics, and others, may partly explain why this building project near Ground Zero is more sensitive than most.

From one evangelical Christian's perspective, though, two iron-clad principles end the debate:

1. We are citizens, and therefore "subject to the governing authorities" (Romans 13:1), of a country whose Constitution guarantees no prohibition on the free exercise of religion.
2. Jesus commanded us to "love your neighbor as yourself" (Matthew 22:39).

In other words, both from civil, and more importantly divine authority, anywhere a church can be built, a mosque or Islamic teaching center ought to be able to be built. End of debate.

Yet the primary problem remains. How do we address the fear? How do we make this country truly E Pluribus Unum? And how do we honor God in the way we deal with differences?

The answer starts by gaining truth about each other, and that best comes from relationships - and those are best formed by working together in ways that help other people.

The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core.
http://newsweek.washingtonpost.com/onfaith/eboo_patel/2010/08/cordoba_house_project_when_fea.html
God's plan, America's promise

POSTED ON AUGUST 9, 2010; 11:30 AM ET

Today's guest blogger is Melissa Rogers, who directs the Center for Religion and Public Affairs at the Wake Forest University Divinity School.

Is there a Christian case for defending the free exercise rights of Muslims? With anti-mosque protests flaring in some communities across America, it's a timely topic. As a Christian, and more specifically, as a Baptist, my answer to this question is an emphatic "yes."

Jesus said: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind. This is the great and first commandment. And a second is like it. You shall love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-39) Part of loving our neighbors as we would like to be loved is protecting our neighbors’ ability to practice their faith. If we lived in a Muslim-majority country, wouldn't we ask the government to respect our rights to practice the Christian faith and be deeply grateful when Muslim neighbors came to our aid? Then we should do likewise here. And wouldn't we insist on equal rights to religious exercise, not some kind of second-class status or mere toleration by government? What we would demand for ourselves, we must demand for others.

The Bible also tells us that God's design is for each person to have the freedom to make decisions about faith. God did not create robots but rather individuals who are capable of thinking, feeling, and responding. It is this freedom to choose that makes religious commitments meaningful. Attempts to coerce people on matters of faith interfere with God's plan and with the formation of authentic decisions.

Government meddling in this sphere is particularly noxious. The state has enormous coercive power. And one of its chief responsibilities is to safeguard our freedoms. So when the government interferes with religious exercise, whether by clamping down on free exercise generally or on the exercise of some faiths in particular, Christians should sound the alarm and make it clear that the government has overstepped its bounds.

There is no contradiction between calling on the government to protect the free exercise rights of all people and sharing the gospel. Both are essential, and both may be practiced simultaneously. Indeed, defending free exercise rights for everyone sends a powerful message of love and confidence in one's faith. Likewise, calling for equality in religious liberty certainly is not the same as saying that all religions are equally true. Instead, it's a call for government to leave theological judgments and other religious matters in the hands of people of faith and their communities.

Does this kind of robust protection for free exercise undermine compelling interests like security and safety? No. The law recognizes that these are interests the government must protect, even when it must burden
religious exercise in order to do so. Thus, the government can and should act on specific and credible threats of violence, wherever they arise.

To cite a recent example, in March 2010 a federal grand jury indicted members of a Michigan militia group for plotting to attack police and use weapons of mass destruction. The group was known as "Hutaree," and its members described themselves as Christian soldiers preparing to battle the anti-Christ. That certainly did not stop the government from taking action, and properly so.

It is a serious mistake, however, to assume that Muslims advocate or condone violence. Some, most notably the 9/11 hijackers, have claimed the name of Islam when they murdered innocents. But the overwhelming majority of Muslims condemn terrorism, and they have said these acts are a perversion of their faith.

Indeed, in a two-year study of American Muslims and terrorism, Duke University scholar David Schanzer and his colleagues found that "Muslim-American organizations and the vast majority of individuals who we interviewed firmly reject the radical extremist ideology that justifies the use of violence to achieve political ends." When we are tempted to be fearful and to close our minds to the evidence, let us remember that the Bible says, "God has not given us a spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind." (II Timothy 1:7).

As a Baptist, I feel a special responsibility to step forward on this issue. During the American founding era, Baptists were often a persecuted minority. Some were jailed and whipped for preaching, and at times mobs attacked them for their beliefs and manner of worship. Nevertheless, Baptists waged a persistent battle for religious freedom, not simply for their own flock, but for all people. In time, they found peace and freedom in America. In 1790, Baptist preacher John Leland reflected on these events, drawing on the powerful promise of the prophet Micah. Leland wrote: "Heaven has restrained the wrath of man, and brought auspicious days at last. We now sit under our vines and fig trees, and there is none to make us afraid."

(Learn more about what Baptists believe at Patheos.com)

It is God's plan, and America's promise, that people of all faiths and none be able to sit under their vines and fig trees and be unafraid. It is God's plan, and America's promise, that all have freedom in matters of faith. May we Christians be a part of making it so.

The content of this blog reflects the views of its author and does not necessarily reflect the views of either Eboo Patel or the Interfaith Youth Core.

Available at:
My Evangelical heroes

POSTED AUGUST 13, 2010; 9:32 AM ET

One of my favorite faith stories is about an American Christian minister stationed in Europe during World War II. His congregation sends him money so that he can come home for Christmas, and he uses that money to help a group of European Jews flee from Hitler’s death camps to safety. One of his congregants writes him an angry letter, scolds him for not using the money for its intended purpose, and ends with the exasperated line: “The people you saved weren’t even Christian.”

"Yes," wrote back the minister, "but I am."

I thought of that story as I read the posts on the Faith Divide these past couple of weeks - Evangelicals writing about why the Christian community should welcome the growing Muslim presence in America. Nothing inspires me more than when people of faith connect their tradition to a contemporary issue in a way that humanizes everybody involved. That's exactly what these Evangelical leaders did, with no small risk to their own reputations.

I loved Skye Jethani's humble, pastoral approach to Christians concerned about Muslims building mosques and community centers in America: "Be not afraid," he writes. "Where the raging fires of fear and anger are fed, the inviting glow of Christ-centered faith and love cannot long endure."

I loved how Brian McLaren gently invited Sarah Palin to rethink her position on the Cordoba House in light of Biblical scripture she may not be considering, namely Exodus 23:9, "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt."

I loved Joel Hunter's clarity: "Both from a civil, and more importantly divine authority, anywhere a church can be built, a mosque or Islamic teaching center ought to be able to be built. End of debate."

I loved how Melissa Rogers brought her Baptist faith into the debate, by recalling how Baptists were persecuted in the past, and how they took the high road by waging "a persistent battle for religious freedom, not simply for their own flock, but for all people." Melissa carried on that tradition in this post by stating, "It is God's plan, and America's promise, that all have freedom in matters of faith. May we Christians be a part of making it so."

I loved Jim Wallis's interpretation of how Christians should view diversity: "It is a good thing when you get along with a neighbor with whom you have much in common, but it speaks highly of your character when you build peace between yourself and a neighbor with whom you have difference."
And I loved Bob Roberts’ down-home, straightforward wisdom, which I read with a smile as I thought of him saying it with that Texas twang I've come to love: "I don't like people disrespecting my friends, whether they're Muslims, Jews, Evangelicals or other. When are we going to learn to stop disrespecting people?"

I think the most heroic thing anybody can do is to stand up for someone different than them - at great risk to their own person or reputation - because they feel their tradition calls them to do that. That's what Bonhoeffer did for Jews in 1930s Germany, that's what Heschel did for African-Americans in 1960s America. That's what a growing community of Evangelicals (along with courageous Jews, Catholics, Hindus, humanists, and many others) are doing for Muslims in America in 2010.

May we American Muslims live up to the same heroic principles in our faith when the time comes that others need us as we now need them.

Available at: