Letter from the Chaplain

In the increasingly globalized and multifaith landscape of the United States, colleges and universities across the country have been trying to learn what this means for effective education and what elements are required to create an interfaith ministry. This issue of the Advocate focuses on the experience of two young women who attended a national conference on interfaith dialogue and what we are learning in our ministry at The College of Wooster.

The conference was hosted by the Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) which is a Chicago-based organization founded by Dr. Eboo Patel. The office of collegiate ministries of the Presbyterian Church (USA) provided generous scholarships for the chaplains of Presbyterian related schools. Wooster was already acquainted with IFYC and Eboo Patel. Eboo Patel had been on campus as our Theologian-in-Residence in the spring of 2010. During his brief stay, he met with groups of faculty, staff, and students, taught a session of my Interfaith Dialogue Course and gave a public lecture as part of the Spring Academy of Religion. All events were very well attended and his presence on campus infused new energy into the interfaith work already present. As a part of Dr. Patel’s residency, a small group of students representing various faith traditions were invited to dinner with Dr. Patel, his staff, and the staff of OICM. Our hope was that the students would imagine new interfaith initiatives for Wooster. Several weeks later IFYC staff returned to Wooster to offer an afternoon and evening of workshops. The students who joined Dr. Patel for dinner hosted the workshops and dinner. More than 70 faculty, staff, students and persons from the community were involved in the workshops on using narrative in interfaith dialogue. After the dinner, a small group of students met with the IFYC staff to dream about new interfaith initiatives at Wooster.

Wooster’s vision for an interfaith ministry began with the establishment of the Henry Copeland Chaplaincy in 1996. Since then the ministry has created a culture of interfaith cooperation among our various student groups and our staff. I regularly teach a course on Interfaith Dialogue and there are several annual interfaith programs including the College’s Baccalaureate service. We were pleasantly surprised at the strength and depth of Wooster’s ministry in comparison with other campuses and with the IFYC. Our students were very articulate in terms of their understanding and skill base for carrying on interfaith dialogue. The new energy that came from the interaction with Eboo Patel led to the establishment of two new efforts and ultimately to Hafsa, Christina, and Celeste traveling with me to Washington DC to participate in the conference this past fall.

You will also find in this issue some initial responses from members of our two new interfaith groups. The Interfaith Scholars are 11 first-years and sophomores who have been meeting with Rabbi Joan to learn about one another’s faith traditions and to travel to various worship sites. The scholars program invites accepted first years to apply in the summer before they arrive. In return for their successful completion of each year, they are awarded a small stipend. Scholars may remain in the program for two years. Interfaith Mondays grew out of my interfaith dialogue class and the dinner group that gathered with Dr. Patel. Meeting weekly, the first semester was spent getting to know one another through the telling of our faith stories. This semester we have been in dialogue around several questions that emerged during the narrative sharing. The plan is for the core group to continue their dialogue and offer regular interfaith programming for the campus. I hope that you are as intrigued and heartened as I have been by the students’ stories, their energy, and their commitment to deepening their own faith and really learning about others’ faiths. As always, we welcome your responses.

Partners in ministry,

Rev. Linda Morgan-Clement
The I Am Campaign

Who are you? What makes OICM a place where you feel welcome? As a part of the OICM community we wanted to showcase the diversity in the staff and students involved with OICM to the greater College of Wooster Community. Through this poster campaign we hope to show that OICM is welcome to everyone, from sorority members to lesbians, from Evangelical Christians to Reconstruction Jews. We hope this shows that OICM is a welcome and safe environment for all to enjoy.

I am a procrastinator. I am a music major.
I am a fan of mountain dew.

“OICM is spectacular.”

I am Co-President of Hillel.
I am Jewish.

I am of Irish descent.

“I love OICM.”

I am a Pennsylvanian.
I am a nerd.

I am wary of those who think they have faith all figured out.

“OICM is a crucial part of Wooster.”

I am President of the College Democrats.
I am Jewish.

I am a Presbyterian.
I am a Kentucky basketball fan.
I am an athlete.

“I think OICM is great.”

I am kindred spirit.
I am a feminist.
I am a dreamer.
I am a lover of deep conversations.

“OICM brings me peace.”

“OICM is totally tubular brah!”
Tadd Pinkston ’13

I am in Alpha Gamma Phi.
I am Jewish.
I am a math major.
I am a college junior.
I am a Coloradan.
I am a Nuggets fan.

feel at home with OICM.”
Hannah Dauber ’12

I am a bassoonist.
I am a woman.
I am from a multi-faith family.
I am Jewish.

“I always feel safe with OICM.”
Celeste Tannenbaum ’13
Reflections on Interfaith Youth Core Conference...

Eating dinner with Eboo Patel was the high point of the entire Interfaith Dialogue class. Our class read a wide range of theologians and other authors, but Eboo’s strong voice really stood out. His autobiography, “Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation,” moved me, as well as everyone else at the dinner. Afterwards, when we heard Eboo speak in Gault Recital Hall, I was captivated, and wanted to keep the ball rolling. Somehow my name ended up, with a number of others’, on a list of students who were interested in shaping some sort of interfaith project on campus. At our first meeting, we made a rough plan to meet once a week, eat dinner together, talk, and to see where that led us. Perhaps second semester we would begin to lead programs on campus, but we were content with just engaging in dialogue for the time being.

A key focus of Eboo’s work is getting people engaged in interfaith service, and he advocates doing this by telling them a story of why you specifically feel called to interfaith service. This was the main essay question for the application to the Interfaith Youth Core’s (IFYC’s) “Intensive Leadership Training” that took place in the autumn of 2010. It is often hard for me to formulate an answer to this question, because it seems as if my entire life is interfaith. My family, itself, is a melding of Judaism, Catholicism and Protestantism, something which I have subconsciously navigated my entire life. Aside from all of this, though, the story I usually tell takes place in the town of Akko in Israel, where I lived for a year before coming to Wooster. In Akko I volunteered both in a Jewish middle school and an afterschool program that served Jews, Christians and Muslims. One day, we did an activity with our students in which they drew images of where they had seen prejudice in their lives. All the students, regardless of their religion, had both acted in ways that were very prejudiced and had been subject to prejudices. This moment really struck me, because I saw how simply not knowing the “other” created so much hate.

With this story in tow, I headed off to the IFYC conference along with two other COW students and our chaplain, Linda Morgan-Clement. The conference drew students and faculty from all 50 states as well as Puerto Rico and took place in two three-day segments. We were divided into groups with schools that were similar in size to ours, so Wooster was paired with other liberal arts schools including Kenyon and Ohio Wesleyan. We spent our time learning about interfaith cooperation, both in the broad sense and about specific examples where it had succeeded. It was so exciting to realize that there are students all over the country who value people of different faiths working together.

Our last day included a call to action from a range of people in an event that took place in the Eisenhower Executive Building (the Vice President’s wing of the White House). We heard from members of the IFYC staff, Joshua DuBois (the head of the White House Office of Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships), and other speakers. The event concluded with Eboo speaking once again, urging all of us to return to our college and university campuses and really strive to change the status quo.

-Celeste Tannebaum
Class of 2013
"Non-Believers" Christina Bowerman, Class of 2013

When going to the conference in D.C. with Celeste, Hafsa, and Linda, I was excited to meet a diverse religious group of college-aged students. As I sat in the classroom at Georgetown University learning about religious pluralism I was pleased to see that people who did not identify with a specific religious tradition were included in the IFYC’s mission to create a world with more religious tolerance and understanding. While some disagree with me, I believe that every single person, regardless of religious tradition, should be a part of interfaith dialogue.
The Importance of Interfaith Values

Wooster’s own Rabbi Joan Friedman talks about her upbringing and the importance of interfaith values at the College of Wooster

When I was a kid I knew that Jews were a very small minority in this country, but I didn’t feel like part of a small minority. A quarter of my home town’s population was Jewish. There were lots of other Jewish kids in my school. Not only were we visible, but our teachers and classmates were familiar with the patterns and rhythms of our existence. We didn’t need to explain that we had major holidays in the fall that would keep us out of school. We didn’t need to explain what matzah was or why we brought sandwiches on it for a week in the spring. The bus that took us to Hebrew school in the afternoons stopped right outside the public school. In short, while we were members of a minority numbering only 2-3% of the US population, we didn’t feel like a tiny minority. We were numerous enough not only to be a community, but to be familiar to the majority as such.

As a rabbi at the College of Wooster I am part of a small minority that is relatively unfamiliar to many in the majority. On the one hand, it’s disconcerting to realize that to some folks here Jews are almost exotic. On the other hand, that strangeness offers a wonderful opportunity to know and be known by others. We value diversity here at Wooster because we know that the world is made up of many different nations, cultures, and religions that need to know each other better and figure out how to get along. Anyone surrounded by people like themselves doesn’t have to do that. I do miss the sense of “at home-ness” of a bigger Jewish community, but I love the ways in which being at Wooster has stretched me and made me grow. What used to be out of my comfort zone has now become a second and different comfort zone.

- Joan S. Friedman, Ph.D. 
Campus Rabbi
Words from other members of interfaith groups on campus

Interfaith Scholars

The purpose of this student group is to create a cadre of students at the College of Wooster who model interfaith activity and understanding.

Goals:
♦ to model interfaith activity and be a positive example of a person of faith
♦ to learn about each other’s traditions
♦ to arrive at a deeper understanding of their relationships to their own traditions
♦ to motivate the group members to a life long commitment to working for the social good through interfaith coalitions.

...Coming from a conservative, small town and being a member of a liberal religion (I am a Unitarian Universalist), I had never really been able to engage in conversation with people from different faiths and I had never met many others who were interested in my faith background. Interfaith Scholars seemed like a perfect opportunity for me, and my inclination has proven correct since my desire to talk and really listen with others about our experiences in our faith traditions has been fulfilled. The Scholars program has urged me to go out of my comfort zone and share parts of my life that I have never told anyone; in turn, it has enabled me to become a better listener and a more confident member of the UU church.

-Annie Jaeb ’14

You truly learn about what religion means to other people, which often informs your own spiritual outlook. But to be a little less deep about it, it’s simply fun to hear other people talk about their lives and to discuss what matters most. You learn so much about your fellow scholars, and you find out what makes these motivated college students tick.

-Wyatt Smith ’14

I love coming to Interfaith Mondays because it is a wonderful opportunity to grow closer to people who have different religious backgrounds from mine. I love hearing about people’s experiences, perspectives, and traditions. Engaging in interfaith dialogue is an expression of my faith because I believe we are all made in the image of God, therefore there are elements of the Sacred in everyone and through the loving process of listening and learning from others. Opening oneself to new experiences is a mode for growth and internal reflection, and I also see this as a practice of peace. As we learn from one another and work through any disagreements or places of conflicts, we learn how to love someone who has a different context than us—but also find places of commonality. If anyone is interested in stretching themselves and experiencing opportunities of beautiful solidarity, they should get involved in interfaith groups, especially if they come from a position of religious privilege, such as Christianity in the U.S., and learn from those who may experience religious marginalization.

-Abbi Heimach ’11

Through interfaith-based activity, OICM encourages spiritual self-awareness and curiosity!

-LaTricia Mitchell ’14
OICM Mission Statement:

Interfaith Campus Ministries fosters religious, spiritual, ethical, and moral growth for students, staff, and faculty at The College. As a community of communities and as seekers after meaning, we wrestle individually and communally with questions of ultimacy. Interfaith Campus Ministries supports and encourages the development of character and commitment required to be agents of just and peaceful transformation in the world.