



Interfaith Peace Conference: Meeting the Other: Can We Talk?

A Muslim, a Jew and a Christian walked onto the stage ...

What may be mistaken for a stand-up comedian's opening line is actually "Abraham Jam", a trio of internationally-renowned musicians who have teamed up to create art strengthened by diversity. Composed of Billy Jonas, David LaMotte, and Dawud Wharnsby— Abraham Jam features three "brothers" from the three Abrahamic faiths. Each of the men spent significant time digging around inside themselves and exploring traditions until "borrowing from many, (each) located in one. "Harmony is better than unity," says David LaMotte, who helped create Abraham Jam. "We don't have to be singing the same note to cultivate peace, we can sing different notes that are beautiful together."

Abraham Jam helped sum up our experiences on Sunday morning as they led us in singing in three languages about God's perfect love for us as God's children – the English refrain was "What wondrous love is this, O my soul, O my soul, what wondrous love is this, O my soul. What wondrous love is this that caused the God of bliss to send this perfect peace to my soul, to my soul ...



For 9 years Lake Junaluska, NC has gathered people and speakers from across faith traditions to explore and affirm God's dream for Peace here on earth. I joined them this year in singing, dancing and contemplation. The stated premises for the conference were, We are living in a culture of increasing polarization that borders on chaos; we are increasingly not listening to one another. We can agree to disagree with civility and respect while upholding the core values of our various traditions. Can we talk/listen to one another?



Rabbi Nancy Fuchs Kreimer, Juliane Hammer and Rev. T. Anthony Spearman walked onto a stage at University of North Carolina with a diverse audience of conference attendees from 2 countries and 30 states, joined by UNC students who enriched our lives on many levels.

As the main speakers for the conference, these faith leaders led us through brief jampacked keynotes that compelled me to walk around the lake on Friday afternoon with thoughts, prayers and a million ideas swirling in my head and heart. My take-aways were distilled into nuggets:

1. Rabbi Kreimer challenged us to "stand at the place we are most embarrassed/ most vulnerable." Ask, What is my strength that brings me to this place?
2. Dr. Hammer posited, Oppressions are systemic, not the will of God. Humans are not created with an innate sense of justice. Humans are forgetful so we need to be reminded in periodic revelations. She says, if we are to share God with the world we must "act first, then talk."
3. Rev. Spearman called out "forward together" to which we responded "not one step back", the theme of the Moral Mondays Movement. He invited us to live the "Peace the surpasses understanding" and to make a pledge to "stand together from Junaluska" as we go out and live our mountain top experience.

Workshop leader Sajjad, from Pakistan asked a room full of attendees to write the FIRST 5 words that came to mind when he said “Muslim” or “Islam”. He was not surprised in this group to read words like food, culture, music, prayer, Allah... along with guns, hatred, protest, killing ... He led us through a 30 minute condensed history toward understanding the role of European invasions, animosity and mutual hatred between faith adherents in the name of God/Allah. His last words were, Unlearning (racism or bias) is very difficult. The longer the habit, the harder the journey. But it is the only way “we can talk” meaningfully.

Where does experience join the commitment and mission of TMC? We have been and continue on the journey as founding proponents of the interfaith movement in Center City West to bring our congregations into working relationships centered in justice. The goal of the faith leaders is to facilitate members of the congregations meeting, getting to know one another and deciding to address the frailties and injustices around us, together. We intentionally began this journey with Bethesda Project last Thanksgiving time. It is slow going. Our cultural refrain - Everyone is so busy – keeps us from moving faster but also keeps us on an honest track of making time count. Theologian and activist Howard Thurman says, “Justice is what love sounds like when it speaks in public.”

How will we continue to speak in public?

What is your vulnerability and your strength?

What sort of action will TMC make toward our conversations with St. Simon’s, Holy Trinity, the neighborhood?

Forward together ... not one step back!

Let’s have the conversations.

Glory to God whose power, working in us can do infinitely more than we can ask or imagine.

Shalom, Donna+

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