

The Rev. Mary Carlin wears many hats. She is Stated Supply Pastor, Forest Park Presbyterian Church; Interfaith Conference of Milwaukee, Executive Board and Cabinet member; and Commission on Ministry, Presbytery of Milwaukee, member. She was instrumental in fostering the Roots dialog coming on November first. Here are her reflections on the event:

What has your involvement been?

One of the hats I wear is serving as a commissioned representative for the Presbytery on the Interfaith Conference of Milwaukee. It has been my privilege to do so. This involvement has provided me the opportunity to make connections and build relationships with faith leaders from a variety of traditions. I believe one of the most powerful statements we make as the Interfaith Conference, in the midst of societal polarization around many things, including religion, is to intentionally come together. We also seek to find points of unity and solidarity for speaking out against hate crimes and acts of intolerance. This is an especially sensitive concern as we recognize the ways in which particular faith traditions are at risk for discrimination. The 'Roots' event on Wednesday, November first, is an opportunity to broaden one's perspective as a way forward for contributing toward a more loving and civilized society.

What does it mean to have interfaith dialogue in our midst?

Good question! As I think about why interfaith dialogue matters, the starting place for me begins with what I believe to be a core principle of our faith. That being, our lives are shaped by a biblical narrative which calls us, mandates us, to have 'Love for God, Love for Neighbor, and Love for Self'. It is a love ethic for guiding our relationships amidst the increasingly diverse religious fabric of our city, our nation and our world. Not only is it a call on our faith lives as Christians, this guiding principle is also a common element of faith, practice and worship shared with many other faith traditions. It is a commonality for building solidarity and a unified voice in a fractured world. I think we can all agree that 'Love for neighbor' can be challenging for any of us, especially when we realize our neighboring faith traditions are often viewed as strangers. That is the story we hear, anyway.

Interfaith relations and dialogue provide sacred space for building bridges of respect and understanding, while allowing for the particularity of religious difference to be valued. It is a way to model intentionality for living one's faith, seeing one's faith, as part of the whole of God's creation which includes a variety of faith expressions. It is the comfort and the challenge of this work, I think, to know it is as simple and complex as 'love' being the core value and purpose for engaging in interfaith actions and relationships.

The Presbytery is sponsoring this conversation. What does that mean for us?

Yes, the Presbytery is participating in sponsorship of this event along with other religious and community organizations. The impetus for our involvement is rooted in the Presbytery of Milwaukee's longstanding commitment to and engagement in Presbyterian-Jewish dialogue. My understanding is this manner of dialogue has manifested in a variety of ways over the years. What has remained consistent is a commitment to maintain a connection across faith differences for bridging understanding. Often these experiences gift those involved not only with an increased capacity for appreciating and valuing a faith tradition different than one's own, but a deepened understanding about one's own faith convictions, as well. There is a richness provided us in our willingness and ability to be curious about these sorts of things in our world and in ourselves.

This particular event offers us an opportunity to hear about and learn from a particular effort modeling a collaborative, grass-roots effort for co-existence between Palestinians and Israelis. Their story is one

slice of a complex story of peoples and their history. One hope, one possibility I can imagine is that in hearing the stories shared we will gain insights for how to foster a sense of mutuality, trust, respect and dignity in our own communities right here at home.

Hope to see you there!