



Photo courtesy The Banner

CALGARY, ALBERTA

At the University of Calgary, 16 students from a variety of religious backgrounds spent their February 2016 reading week exploring the faith traditions of Hinduism, Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Judaism, and Islam. For each faith tradition, the group listened to an introductory lecture by a religious leader, visited local sites associated with that community, and had a discussion.

It was “the single most inspiring program that I have ever come across to learn about religious diversity in a safe and immersive environment,” said one student.

“Being in the presence of others who are so curious yet respectful and courageous to ask questions taught me a lot as to how I can do it too,” said another.

CRC campus chaplain Paul Verhoef said, “In my 11 years of working alongside chaplains of other faiths (Buddhist, Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, and other Christian denominations), encountering religious diversity has strengthened my own faith commitment both by highlighting differences like unconditional grace, covenant faithfulness, and God’s sovereignty, and by challenging me to grow in places like faithful prayer and focused attention or meditation on God’s Word.”

GUELPH, ONTARIO

Members of First CRC in Guelph, Ont., have formed a “Bridging Group” with members of a local mosque. The relationship began when the mosque purchased the old Christian school building located across the street from the church.

The church and mosque share a community garden on the church property, where Rev. Ed Den Haan says they “grow vegetables as well as friendship by association.” They also host community barbeques at the mosque site. Their goal is to create understanding and build relationships between Christians and Muslims.

Last summer, representatives from the mosque even attended a worship service at First CRC. They treated the congregation to samosas and baklavas, and then stayed after the service for a lunch of soup and buns.



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INTERFAITH RELATIONS

Engaging the World at Our Doorsteps and Our Family across the Globe

Christian Reformed Church Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee

Cover photo courtesy Robert Massey





Photo courtesy Robert Massey



Photo courtesy Barbara Hampton

Interfaith Relations

The Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee (EIRC) has been appointed by the synod of the Christian Reformed Church in North America to help our denomination engage and participate in the life of the global church and to address issues of an interfaith nature.

Interfaith dialogue refers to our desire to come together with people from other faiths to understand each other better, and to stand together on selected issues that address the “common good” for society. Interfaith engagement starts with recognition that all human beings are created in God’s image. It then strives to build relationships across different faiths for the common good. We encourage local congregations to listen, share, and learn about other faith perspectives in their community. Such dialogue provides an opportunity to explore similarities across religions. It also provides chances for the clear articulation of the Christian faith.

To learn more about the Ecumenical and Interfaith Relations Committee, or for more ideas about interfaith activities for local churches, see

crcna.org/eirc

GRAND RAPIDS, MICHIGAN

On a sunny day, a group of Christian young people take the field alongside a group of North Sudanese Muslim boys. Their soccer game is just one of several settings across the city of Grand Rapids in which Christian Reformed individuals and churches are building relationships with their Muslim neighbors.

The city is home to roughly 20,000 Muslims. Every month a group of people gather at the CRC denominational building in Grand Rapids to pray for the Muslims they love. One church supports a small house group of Muslim-background believers. Another supports a new believer who is reaching into his ethnic enclave. Yet another supports efforts in a blighted housing area with at-risk Muslim youth. Some churches are sponsoring refugee families, and others are teaching English as a second language to refugees.

Some relationships are more formal—between church and mosque, between pastor and imam, between youth groups from a church and a neighboring mosque. Others are simply dinners, movies, or soccer matches. These friendships are being forged amid the everyday cares and concerns of life together. May God bring fruit for his kingdom through these activities!

GRANDVILLE, MICHIGAN

Several Christian Reformed churches in Grandville invited Muslims from a local mosque for dinner last year.

“We said we would provide a *halal* meal for them and hired a local caterer,” said Gerry Koning of Trinity CRC, Grandville. “We were not sure how we would pay for it all, but somebody just came to our church from another church and dropped off a check for \$500 to cover the meal.”

Eighty-five members of a nearby mosque accepted the invitation and joined the churches for dinner. “It was a fabulous time,” said Koning. “We ate good food, had great conversations, and were able to offer a few presentations and prayer. When it was time for the evening prayers for our Muslim guests, we moved some chairs so that they could say their evening prayers. It was a great time, and we are looking forward to doing it again.”

This initial dinner has sparked an ongoing relationship between the churches and their neighbors. They have also started English as a second language classes at Strong Tower Ministries in Wyoming, Mich., which are attended by mostly Muslim community members.