

May 20, 2020

To the Friends of IFC,

Greetings to you, and peace! I'm writing today to introduce myself to you as the incoming Executive Director of the Interfaith Council. The work of IFC matters more than ever in these days, as we continue to see hatred, prejudice, and division in and beyond our community. I am honored and humbled to have the opportunity to help lead IFC as we work together to both celebrate our common humanity and rejoice in our wonderful diversity.

I've personally witnessed the healing power that interfaith dialogue and understanding can have on a community in crisis. In 2017, the congregation I served experienced a neo-Nazi attack aimed at both the church and the Jewish Community Center of Northern Virginia. We at Little River United Church of Christ were singled out because of our support for our Muslim neighbors and friends. It was Holy Week for those of us at Little River UCC in Annandale, and Passover for our Jewish neighbors down the street in Fairfax. For many in the wider community, it was yet another tragic event in an era of increasing anti-Semitism and continuing Islamophobia.

Yet even amid a hate crime, our interfaith neighbors reached out in solidarity. Within hours of realizing what had happened, the leaders of the Jewish Community Center called the church to see how we were doing (even as they were managing their own crisis). A community vigil later that week saw the church's sanctuary overflowing with concerned community members who hadn't been directly attacked: Native Americans, Sikh leaders, Baha'i speakers, people of many faiths and of no particular faith. It was a profound healing moment for our congregation and for the wider community. I'm proud to say that evening also led to greater friendships and partnerships among interfaith community members.

Even before that crisis happened, I'd embraced a lifelong passion for increasing interfaith dialogue and mutual understanding. As a Protestant Christian growing up in Kentucky and Indiana, I rejoiced in my faith yet also sensed a need for more understanding of the world's many traditions. This need came to a head my freshman year in high school, when the tragic death of a Jewish classmate forced internal reckonings and deep conversations for which most of us as 14-year-olds were simply unprepared (including me). In the months and years to follow, I began to learn about the world's many faith traditions. Along the way, I found a special connection to Tibetan Buddhism, including the joy of hearing the Dalai Lama speak when he visited Indiana for the Kalachakra Ceremonies for World Peace. These transformative experiences in high school and college taught me that it is absolutely critical to include teenagers and young adults in the work of interfaith dialogue.

Since that time, my personal interest in interfaith dialogue has carried over into my professional life. As I moved to the West Coast to attend the Claremont School of Theology, I was blessed to have an interfaith faculty who encouraged our diverse student

body to truly listen to one another. This proved critical, as we had a student body that included Unitarians, Hare Krishna, Wicca, liberal Catholics, conservative Protestants, and many more. My first call after graduation was to a church in Southern California with so many multi-faith families that we had a Reform Rabbi on staff to help minister to them. His guidance was a great help as I embarked on an interfaith Mission trip to Jerusalem, Bethlehem, and other sites holy to the Abrahamic faiths. A year later, I was on a two-week trip to Beijing to learn about the cultural and religious history of China, particularly Confucian, Taoist, and Buddhist traditions.

My second call brought me to a church in Minneapolis, where a growing Somali community brought an increased Islamic presence to an already religiously diverse metropolis. For this reason, I focused a sabbatical in 2013 on interfaith dialogue, especially during the period of Spanish history from 711 to 1492. My travels in Spain and Morocco at that time, as well as my reading and worship experiences, gave me a great appreciation for just how important interfaith understanding can be. Those experiences also informed my most recent sabbatical in 2019, when I focused on how to share your own history and values by writing spiritual memoir. Last year, I was also blessed to travel to Buenos Aires to learn about the joys and struggles of the multi-faith communities of Argentina.

My wife and I have lived inside the Beltway since I began to serve Little River UCC in 2014. Living and working in our delightfully diverse metro area has only reaffirmed my belief in religious pluralism and interfaith dialogue. Now more than ever, in a time of increasing division and hatred, we need to grow the awareness that there is another way. We need to let our neighbors know that there is a faithful path in which we listen first and speak second, in which we can share our own truths while leaving room for one another. Our community needs IFC to step up in this era of prejudice and religiously-based violence, so that an inclusive spiritual renewal may lead to greater peace and understanding.

I am deeply grateful for the many people like you who have long been engaged in such work, including Rabbi Gerry Serotta for his dedicated leadership of IFC these past six years. Even as he looks forward to retirement, I am eager to bend his ear for wisdom in order to create as much continuity as possible in this transition. We may have to use new means to adapt during these times, but IFC's end goal remains the same: creating an inclusive community of diverse faiths in our nation's capital that is focused on the values that unite us and the distinctions that make each faith unique. Over more than four decades, IFC has dedicated itself to this bold mission. I am excited to do my part to carry that mission forward as I begin serving IFC in July. Until then, may contentment grow within you, and may harmony prevail in and among our communities.

With profound gratitude for all that you do,

Rev. Dr. David B. Lindsey