

My name is Tim Brauhn and I am a Faiths Act Fellow with the Interfaith Youth Core and Tony Blair Faith Foundation. The Fellows are based in cities across the US, UK, and Canada working to build hubs of multifaith action for the Millennium Development Goals, specifically the eradication of deaths from malaria. I'm based in San Jose with another Fellow at the offices of Islamic Networks Group.

I've been to a few South Bay Interfaith meetings and I am supremely excited about what I've seen. Especially after January's meeting, I feel it necessary to contribute my thoughts (as a meddling outsider).

Three ideas: Action, Education, Devotion

Action - The notion of dialogue through shared service is perhaps one of the most important parts of the Interfaith Youth Core's model. That's probably why I'm partial to it. Putting people, especially young people, together to do good things not only accomplishes those good things, but also has the intended byproduct of forming lasting friendships. By participating in the dialogue of life, and by getting one's hands dirty, interreligious exchange and learning in the context of shared service will help inspire the next generation of interfaith leaders.

1. Arrange for regular (I cannot stress enough the importance of regular opportunities) interfaith service events. This would, of course, likely be in addition to the normal course of service things in our communities, but we can swing it. Options: neighborhood clean-ups, Baylands restoration, malaria/Millennium Development Goals-focused events with Faiths Act, help local nonprofits clean offices/file things, fun fairs for underserved communities, retirement home visits, peace vigils, there is almost no limit to what common action can tackle.

2. Set up a steering council of youth leaders from local congregations. There are lots of these people around. Perhaps a regular meeting of local youth leaders to discuss what's going on? If something is happening with one religious group's youth, the same thing might be happening with yours. Let's talk about it while we organize events.

3. Planning - What if, as we discussed during the meeting, crisis strikes? Let's have a plan ready. Religious communities will likely become frontline service providers in disaster situations. Does CADRE provide training and organizational help?

4. Response - An attack against one religion or house of worship is an attack against all.

Education - We need to work on institutionalizing this for sure. For instance: Islamic Networks Group sends hundreds of speakers out to schools and businesses to teach them about living religion as a Muslim and, for their interfaith speakers bureau, as a number of other traditions.

1. Public exhibitions or lectures might be a good way to go. Let's hold educational events at each others' houses of worship.

2. We're working uphill against a media machine that enjoys showing religious people as one-dimensional medievalists at worst, and blindly-led sheep at best. It runs counter to ingrained religious humility, but we must be vocal about our good works. We can write regular op-eds to the

point where the Mercury-News and other papers create (or bring back) a specific column for "religious victories reporting". We need to change the conversation about religion in America.

3. We know through research and surveys that adherents are woefully ignorant of their own traditions, let alone the traditions of others. Education in this sense builds religious literacy about one's own faith and the other people that we live with in America.

Devotion – Although almost anything we do in the first two spheres can be considered an act of devotion, let's consider how we can best share those devotions with others. Closely related to the Education idea, we can arrange for "pulpit exchanges" where a speaker from one house of worship comes and talks somewhere else. This happens less often than it should, but there are already fun models out there. I'd probably think this a really cool thing to do if I were sitting in the pew/floor/whathaveyou.

We are a pluralistic nation, and Silicon Valley is both microcosm and macrocosm of that plurality. We deserve to be recognized as such, but we have to make these things work before that can happen. Is the Partner City recognition our Obama Nobel Peace Prize? How will we become a model interfaith community?