



Insight

Sharing our Good News stories throughout Toronto Conference

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Exploring our Abrahamic Roots

By Barbara Sheffield

A DISCUSSION ABOUT ABRAHAM, a unique figure whose name means “father of many nations,” led to a January interfaith lecture series and panel discussion by Islington United Church’s Interfaith Circle. More than 160 people attended each evening of the series, where they explored opportunities for building relationships and sharing values in seeking justice and peace.

Presenters Dr. Tom Reynolds, Associate Professor of Theology at Emmanuel College, Dr. Timothy Gianotti, Associate Professor of Islamic Studies at Renison College, and Rabbi Michael Satz of Holy Blossom Temple emphasized that interfaith dialogue is more than words. It includes welcoming the stranger, showing respect, working in collaboration, and demonstrating empathy. It involves not just knowledge, but being in a relationship with others that fosters openness and builds on a shared common heritage.

Dr. Reynolds told attendees interfaith work demonstrates a new way of thinking about mission: discovering where God may already be at work in and through others, and joining in that work through partnerships and collaborative relationships that build peace together in community. “Relationship leads to dialogue,” he said, “and in this, we develop friendships, and get to know one another in mutuality.”

Rabbi Satz sees interfaith relations as a Mitzvah, a commandment from God. “A Mitzvah is a way to



The presenters at Islington United Church’s interfaith panel discussion, from left to right: Tom Reynolds, Michael Satz, Timothy Gianotti.

Peter J. Restivo

connect with God, and in our open society it is a Mitzvah to partner with others in the work of making the world more compassionate.”

Dr. Gianotti suggested that we can promote unity through justice; we have a responsibility to care for each other in this broken world. “We are challenged to become the human beings we are called to be,” he said. “Islam does not dominate or coerce; it is a religion of flourishing and restoration.”

Those who attended the lecture series described it as “amazing, enlightening, and engaging.”

The panel discussants agreed that we are called to be one family and to love one another unconditionally, demonstrate compassion, and pray and work together to heal a broken world. Islington United Church sees interfaith activity as a fulfillment of its mission, “Open Hearts, Open Minds, Open Doors.” To access the lectures, visit islingtonunited.org.

– Barbara Sheffield is co-chair of the Interfaith Circle at Islington United Church.

INSIDE

Bala-Port Carling Becomes Affirming	2	Interview with Laurie-Beth Page	6
Stouffville Shines Spotlight on Mental Health	3	Tech Talk; Calendar	8
Toronto Conference Welcomes Ministry Candidates at Annual Meeting	4		