

Religious Leaders Weigh in on Faith and Tolerance

By: David Callahan, Sibille H. Pritchard Global Peace and Security Fellow

The Global Perspectives Office hosted its fifth annual Interfaith Forum, featuring The Three Wise Guys and the Reverend Naomi Tutu as the keynote speaker. With around two hundred attendees from the local community, the speakers discussed the difficult yet rewarding process of interfaith dialogue, with Tutu focusing on religion and tolerance.

The Three Wise Guys consist of the Reverend Bryan G. Fulwider, Imam Muhammad Musri and Rabbi Steven W. Engel, whose stand-in for the event was Ben Friedman of the Jewish Federation. They host “Friends Talking Faith” on 90.7 WMFE in Orlando and use their diverse backgrounds and beliefs to educate, enlighten, and inspire interfaith conversations.

Born in apartheid South Africa, Tutu is the third child of Archbishop Desmond and Nomalizo Leah Tutu. She has been consulted regarding development in West Africa and taught at the University of Hartford, University of Connecticut and Brevard College. Also, Tutu established Nozizwe Consulting, which works to bring together different groups and work to celebrate differences and acknowledge shared humanity.



In their discussion and question and answer, the Three Wise Guys discussed “dismantling the silos”, referring to people’s self-imposed echo chambers. Fulwider brought up his position of

privilege in America and how one can use such privilege to work towards equality. Musri contextualized religion in historic empires, showing that prosperous societies included pluralistic protections for all religions. Friedman used the metaphor of the economic invisible hand, in that what is in one’s own self-interest ought to include everyone’s self-interest.

When asked how they can use their positions as followers of well-known and widespread religions to protect religious minorities, the Wise Guys contextualized their solution within their faith. Musri stated how it was in the heart of Islam to protect and work with religious minorities for greater understanding. Mentioning pluralism, Fulwider proposed an important societal question - “how do we treat those with the *least* power?” Friedman, citing a Jewish saying, said “do not stand idly by” when minorities are targeted.

Tutu discussed much of her personal experiences as a black woman in apartheid South Africa, specifically regarding her faith practices. Questioning why Jesus, God and the apostles were depicted as white men led her to realize that God is what we make of him or her. To Tutu, differences between people must be intentional, as God would not design it such a way

otherwise. Using her mother's love for gardening as an example, she called for noticing and appreciating differences one notices in other people.



Approached by various questions regarding faith and how to counter people who may act or respond negatively, Tutu used her faith and experiences to answer. When asked how hatred between or within faiths can exist, she believed that “insecurity in one’s own faith” led them towards ignorance and hatred. When a student brought up a personal experience in which they were targeted for their race, Tutu suggested safe confrontation mixed with righteous anger.

In addition to the Global Perspectives Office, sponsors for the event included the Global Connections Foundation, the University of Central Florida Office of Diversity and Inclusion, Global Peace and Security Studies Program, Al Ghazali Islamic Studies Program and the Lester N. Mandell Endowed Distinguished Lecture Series.