



Winter 2-17-2016

Introduction of Eboo Patel

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Recommended Citation

Green, Jonathan D., "Introduction of Eboo Patel" (2016). *Remarks and Messages*. 14.
https://digitalcommons.iwu.edu/provost_news/14

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Founders' Day 2016
Provost's Remarks
Jonathan D. Green

Shortly after midnight on February 2nd 1943, a U.S. Navy transport ship, the S.S. Dorchester was torpedoed by the German submarine U-233. On board that ship were four chaplains:

Rabbi, Alexander Goode
Reformed Church Minister, Clark Poling
Roman Catholic Priest, John Washington
Methodist Minister, George Fox, Illinois Wesleyan class of 1932.

A number of lifeboats had been damaged when the ship was struck. The chaplains organized the frightened men into the remaining lifeboats and distributed life jackets to those who could not be accommodated. When the life jackets ran out, they gave their own away. When the ship sank 27 minutes later, 672 men were still aboard. Among them were the four chaplains who when last seen by survivors arm-in-arm on the deck of the ship joined in prayer.

The four chaplains were memorialized in a commemorative postage stamp in 1948 upon which is printed, "These immortal chaplains...interfaith in action." Their sacrifice was the epitome of interfaith in action – people doing good together and embracing the best of their respective faith traditions. On the day we celebrate the founding of this university, we should all be proud that one of our own represented the best hopes of the founders in his ecumenical generosity of spirit and self-sacrifice. As our founding inscription states:

From this center, mighty pulsations, for good or evil, must in the future flow, which shall not only affect the fortune of the republic, but reach in their influence other and distant nations of the earth.

This was the aspiration of the members of this community who established our great university. They wished to provide generations of students the opportunity to develop a rich worldview and a richer moral compass. They hoped that like George Fox, the alumni of this institution would dedicate their time, talent, and treasure to something greater than themselves and that in so doing they would come to understand how much the good we all share transcends our differences. For 166 years we have striven to provide students

the knowledge required to appreciate the values we hold in common, and we have kindled the wisdom to turn that understanding into action.

Eboo Patel is the president of Interfaith Youth Core, the Chicago-based organization he founded in 2002 that seeks to foster an environment in which interfaith cooperation is a foundational quality of the community.

Using the Pluralism Project as a model Interfaith Youth Core embraces three core components of interfaith cooperation

- Respect for religious identity
- Mutually inspiring relationships
- Common action for the common good¹

In an era of extremism and fear mongering, Eboo Patel has emerged as an influential voice of reason. He has spearheaded a movement in which college students have become effective leaders promoting religious pluralism and collaboration.

Through the Better Together Campaign, Interfaith Youth Core provides a framework for college campuses to bring together faculty, staff, students, and community members of all faith traditions and worldviews to engage each other in a spirit of mutual respect and support and in the spirit of our founders, to put that faith into action.

As Emerson wrote in his essay, *The American Scholar*: “We will walk on our own feet; we will work with our own hands; we will speak our own minds. The study of letters shall be no longer a name for pity, for doubt, and for sensual indulgence. The dread of man and the love of man shall be a wall of defense and a wreath of joy around all. A nation of men will for the first time exist, because each believes himself inspired by the Divine Soul which also inspires all men.”

Eboo Patel has inspired a generation of students to take mutual inspiration from this same divine soul and to turn that inspiration into action for the common good. Please join me in welcoming Eboo Patel.

¹ “Center Profile: Interfaith Youth Core.” The Pluralism Project.