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GWU Professor Joins Caravan to Promote Interfaith Tolerance

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Office of University Communications

September 20, 2011



Watch Video At: <https://youtu.be/-1dNtW33cu8>

BOILING SPRINGS, N.C. – On the 10th anniversary of Sept. 11, a team of Christian, Muslim, and Jewish clergy called Clergy Beyond Borders (CBB) embarked on a national tour to promote interfaith dialogue and resist religious extremism in the United States. Dr. Michael Kuchinsky, a professor of political science at Gardner-Webb University and a member of CBB’s Board of Advisors, recently joined the caravan to “give witness,” as he said, to the power and importance of interfaith tolerance in his own life.

Kuchinsky, a Lutheran clergyperson, was working on Capitol Hill on Sept. 11, 2001, when four planes hijacked by a militant extremist group crashed into the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and a field in Pennsylvania, sparking a decade of interfaith tension and, at times, brutal violence.

“The importance of interfaith activism or interfaith awareness became alive to me that day,” Kuchinsky remembered. “For the last 10 years, I have tried to be more engaged, myself, in interfaith activities and dialogue.”

Two years ago, Kuchinsky joined CBB, a non-profit interfaith organization led by a group of Christian, Muslim, Jewish, and Eastern Traditional religious leaders. “Part of its emphasis,” Kuchinsky explained, “is to encourage interfaith discourse and dialogue in as many ways as possible.”

This year’s “Caravan for Reconciliation” is part of that initiative. The tour features prayer breakfasts with faith leaders, solidarity meetings with religious communities facing persecution, workshops in reconciliation co-hosted by churches, synagogues, and Islamic centers, as well as dialogues in divinity schools, universities, and high schools.

“As Jews, Christians, and Muslims, we believe that our freedom of religion is threatened when any faith is singled out for attack,” said Rabbi Gerald Serotta, CBB’s executive director. “To fight extremism, we need more religious tolerance, not less.”

The tour makes stops in 18 different cities around the country, many of which were chosen because of instances of violence in those areas since 9/11. Kuchinsky has now joined the tour for several stops around the southeast.

“We’ll be discussing how interfaith dialogue can happen, so the presentations have a teaching component. But we’ve intentionally decided that the presentations will themselves be conversations, so we’ll be modeling how interfaith dialogue is done,” Kuchinsky said.

Ultimately, Kuchinsky hopes the tour will help people “better understand the basic rights of religion and religious freedom” upon which our national identity was built. He even plans to take several of his interested students with him to the events.

“There have been too many examples of intolerance and violence against people of other faiths,” Kuchinsky said, “especially as the memory of Sept. 11 began to wane. I think this is an important witness. It is, perhaps, not the most popular. But it needs to be made.

Gardner-Webb University celebrates its Christian, Baptist-related identity, even while it respects the dignity and value of every person, regardless of ethnicity, gender, religious commitment, national origin, or disability. We are unashamedly Christian, and as part of our commitment to serve God and humanity in the love of Christ, we support interfaith initiatives that seek to promote grace, peace, and mutual understanding while addressing the needs of the community.