



Showing Up

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Two annual events occur in December – okay, three, if you count Christmas. Four, if you count my husband’s birthday, which is also on Christmas ... but I digress. Each year, the Wisconsin Council of Churches and Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee hold their annual gatherings. The programming and collegiality draw me in. This year was no exception.

First, let me share some intriguing possibilities out of the Wisconsin Council of Churches. In addition to the multi-day programs, the WCC hosted a judicatory leader morning retreat. Leaders from multiple Christian denominations, with positions similar to mine, came together to discuss what we’re seeing across our churches. We recognized there are pockets of small congregations that are struggling to find pastors in various parts of our state. Because we are in relationship with many of the denominations represented at the WCC, we have the potential for sharing pastors or, even more intriguing, developing new shared ministries. The leaders agreed that we would like set aside intentional time to explore opportunities, and the WCC is willing to facilitate our conversations. As we dream with you about what might be in the new year, I pray the Spirit will inspire and connect us.

The second event was the annual gathering of the Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee. In addition to a powerful panel discussion by faith leaders who have experienced hate and violence in their communities, the ICGM awarded the Frank Ziedler Award to Elana Kahn, former director of the Jewish Community Relations Council of the Milwaukee Jewish Federation and former ICGM chair. She now continues her interfaith work in Chicago as Associate Dean for Outreach at Spertus Institute for Jewish Learning and Leadership. Elana’s acceptance of this award was humble and uplifting.

I scrambled to find pen and paper to capture her remarks. I lucked out (as did you, my readers) when she posted some of her beautiful words on social media. Her primary point was that interfaith work matters because it changes our hearts, it heals our communities, and it's urgently needed now.

“Our communities desperately need us now because everyone else is stuck – arguing their side or their tribe, choosing to see scarcity rather than abundance, competing for attention or dollars or sympathies. Our political discourse isn’t cutting it. Our communities need us to recast for them how to approach issues and how to define community.

“The work of Interfaith is not to play out other conflicts in our interfaith spaces. It is to create a community that is holy, respectful, compassionate, and laser-focused on the shared belief that we are all holy ... and then to bring that spirit out into the public sphere.

“We cannot leave each other behind. We must find the fortitude to continue to show up and show up and keep showing up. When we can’t talk publicly, talk privately. When we can’t address one hot issue, talk about another issue in the meantime.”

Her final plea will continue to challenge me and, I hope, you: “Let’s stick with each other. Show up and show up and show up and keep showing up. If we abandon any of us, we fail.”

