

Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council Shared Values Statement

Abstract:

The Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council (GKCIC) views our variety of faiths as adding value and beauty to our society and believes that in our world of diverse peoples, we can live together in peace and harmony.

However, recognizing that we fail to achieve this, the GKCIC engaged in dialogues among our councilors, reflecting the wisdom of 20 faith traditions. We found that the values of Unity, Love, Compassion, and Honesty, important to all of our faiths, can help guide us in these challenging times.

We encourage all people to seek ways to strengthen these values in their lives and in society.

The GKCIC invites community members to read our full Shared Values Statement, and to reflect on values important to them, which can help us in times of division and challenge. We also invite people to attend a Shared Faith Values Forum being organized to encourage this reflection.

Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council Shared Values Statement

We, the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council (GKCIC), are committed to fostering a world in which people of all faiths and beliefs can practice their faith in freedom and live their lives with respect and dignity. We view the variety of faiths as adding value and beauty to our society and believe that in our world of diverse peoples we can live together in peace and harmony.

The GKCIC is, however, deeply concerned about the division, enmity, and contempt expressed by some toward differing religious, political, ethnic, and racial groups in our nation and the world. We are also deeply concerned about actions being taken and statements made by some of our leaders, which are divisive, xenophobic, hateful, and scapegoating of marginalized groups in our community.

Instead, our faiths call us, using different metaphors and imagery, to live our lives consistent with the values of God and the wisdom of our faith traditions, to stay on the path, to follow God's Commandments, to live in harmony with all our relations. Sadly, we can see that whatever the metaphor, at this point in time we feel, many have lost their way, lack a moral compass, or have strayed from the path into a frightening wilderness.

In response, the GKCIC asserts that the fundamental shared values, important to most faiths, and society as a whole, can help guide individuals, groups, and our leaders through the challenging times in which we live. We believe that a deeper awareness of and reflection on our shared spiritual values can help us better resolve issues that face our community and society and can help us create a world in which we can live with safety and security, happiness and meaning. This, perhaps, is the only way that these common goods can be achieved.

Recognizing this crisis of values, the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council engaged in discussions and dialogues among our councilors, who reflect the wisdom and perspectives of approximately 20 faith traditions practiced in the KC metro area. Through this dialogue, we found that the values of Unity, Love, Compassion, and Honesty are shared values important to each of our faith traditions. While these values were found to be important shared values of all faiths, they encompass many others, such as forgiveness, justice, inclusion, kindness and service, that could also have been included.

Though the values of Unity, Love, Compassion, and Honesty are important to our diverse faiths, these values are embraced and cherished in different ways.

Many faiths view **Unity** from the standpoint that we are all children of God. We are one human family and should treat all people as brothers and sisters. Native American peoples go further, seeing all beings as their relations and that all beings are interconnected in an interdependent web of life. Krishna, an incarnation of God in Hinduism, taught that the same divine spirit (Atman) exists in everyone and so all share a spiritual unity. And Sufism, like the mystics of many faiths, teach that there is only God, present in all forms and beyond all forms. Thus, our attitudes and actions toward all people and all forms of life and beyond, are actually the manifestation of our attitudes and actions toward God.

Many faiths call believers to **Love**; To love God, the neighbor, and the stranger. Christianity speaks of love in 1 Corinthians 13 as central, attesting that, “...*If I have not love, I am nothing.*” In Judaism the Torah commands to “*Love the stranger, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.*” (Deuteronomy 10:19). And Bahá’í Holy Writings state, “*It is certain that the greatest of instrumentalities for achieving the advancement and the glory of man, the supreme agency for the enlightenment and the redemption of the world, is love and fellowship and unity among all the members of the human family.*”

In Buddhism, **Compassion** is considered more altruistic than love, because it embodies the desire to liberate all beings from suffering. Zen Master Seung Sahn wrote, “*If you can hear the sound of suffering then helping is both possible and necessary.*” In Islam, Muslims begin every action by reciting, “*Bismillah al-Rahman al-Rahim.*” (“We begin in the name of Allah Who is Compassionate and Merciful.”)

Honesty is also important to all of our faiths. One of The Ten Commandments, that is fundamental to Judaism, Christianity, and Islam, states, “*You shall not bear false witness against your neighbor,*” and on a deeper level commands us to be a witness to truth and honesty at all times. One of The Articles of Faith written by Joseph Smith, the basic doctrines and practices of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, states “*We believe in being honest, true, chaste, benevolent, virtuous, and in doing good to all men.*” And, in Sukyo Mahikari’s Yōkoshi Prayer Book, the faithful are guided to “*Practice truth (makoto, 真) as God sees it...*”

Recognizing the great need for humanity to be guided by values-based ideals, we encourage all people to seek ways to strengthen the values of Unity, Love, Compassion, and Honesty in their lives and in society. We urge our leaders to speak and to act in ways that embody these values. It is our responsibility to hold them accountable when they fail to do so. Through our unified dedication to these values, let us realize a nation and world that acts with these values as their foundation at all times.

Additionally, let us always support through our words and actions the First Amendment of the Constitution of the United States, “*Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof.*” This amendment which is often referred to as “the separation of church and state,” is a fundamental

principle allowing all people, regardless of their religion, faith traditions, and religious beliefs to live freely in the practice of their faith.

We, the councilors in the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, and others who embrace the faith values and principles stated above, endorse this statement and offer our pledge as evidence of our commitment to guide, uphold, and support Unity, Love, Compassion, and Honesty in words and actions, always.