

ARTICLE FOR GAZETTE
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By Rev. Carol Mariano
Orting United Methodist Church

Last weekend I spent Friday night and Saturday with a group of 25 youth on a Confirmation field trip. The youth have been meeting together since October to learn what it means to be faithful Christians and church members. The field trip took us to Beth El Synagogue in Tacoma for a Jewish worship service. We went to a Roman Catholic church, Greek Orthodox, and an Episcopalian church to learn about their traditions. A Quaker woman told us what it is like to be a Quaker, and we were welcomed at the Islamic Center in Tacoma where males and females were taken to separate rooms to learn about Islam.

This experience reminded me of a book, *The Faith Club*, that tells the story of three women, a Christian, a Jew, and a Muslim, who, shortly after 9-11, decided to meet together every week for a year to dialogue about their faith. They discovered that by discussing things openly they were challenged to deepen their faith and strengthen their ability to talk about it. They experienced times of great tension but did not give up on their commitment to each other. None of the three was converted by the others. They all came away with a greater appreciation for the three traditions that are all rooted in Abraham. They identified things they believed in common, but they did not abandon the things they believed that were distinct.

This also was the experience of the Confirmation group. They said they felt stronger about their own faith after hearing about the faith of people different from themselves.

In the scriptures Jesus talked about loving those different from ourselves. He reached out to Samaritans, Gentiles, Greeks and Romans knowing that they held very different beliefs. He loved them and healed them and talked with them

about God. Sometimes he even admired their faith, as when the Centurian came to ask for healing for his servant.

Another part of the Confirmation field trip was a visit to the offices of Associate Ministries of Pierce County. This is an organization that brings together people of all faiths who are willing to work together to solve social problems like homelessness, hunger, poverty and AIDS—because there are things we can agree on. Those things are about building a better world where more people come to experience the love of God in their own lives. As Jesus pointed out in the story of the Good Samaritan, anyone who is in need is my neighbor and anyone who helps someone in need is that one's neighbor.