

## Why learning about other faiths can make West Michigan a better place (editorial)

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By **The Grand Rapids Press Editorial Board**

Can you list the Ten Commandments or recite the Beatitudes? Detail the Five Pillars of Islam? Enumerate Buddhism's Four Noble truths? Name the third largest religion in the world after Christianity and Islam?

Few will know the answers to all those questions. The answers that come most readily to mind are more likely to apply to one's own faith than to somebody else's.

That might be one of the reasons religion remains a key point of misunderstanding and friction in our world. Learning about other faiths can only eliminate misconceptions and promote mutual respect.

That's the point of the **2012 Year of Interfaith Understanding**, being sponsored by Grand Valley State University, The Press and other groups. The year will include tours of sacred spaces, study groups, speakers, interfaith services and other events.

The point of the exercise is not some sort of soft-headed homogenization of West Michigan's distinct and historic traditions. There are real differences among them. Those should be respected, indeed illuminated by this project.

No, the point is in the title: understanding. Meet an earnest Christian and it's a lot tougher to indulge in negative stereotypes about that group. Same with a person who is Jewish, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist. This is an effort worth the community's support and understanding.