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From Our Students

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I'm a proud "Interfaither" and a junior at Augustana College in Rock Island, Illinois. I was born in Pakistan and raised in the United States. As a four-year-old, I moved to the United States with an English vocabulary of maybe two words at my disposal. One day my family and I were walking over to my uncle's apartment. As we crossed a nearby park, I greeted a kid on the playground with the customary and respectful Muslim greeting: "As-salaam u alaikum" ("peace be upon you"). It was then—when the boy seemed to ignore me and I heard my mother laughing from behind me—that I learned that the world speaks more than one language. From the very beginning, diversity in race, language, and beliefs has been a source of tension and joy for me.

A lot of that tension can be attributed to lack of understanding through communication barriers—the joy, to moments when those barriers are broken down. On point with what I've learned, there is this verse from the Holy Qur'an:

O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you. Indeed, Allah is Knowing and Acquainted. [49:13]

The more I grow and encounter the complexities of dialogue between differing groups, the more I come to appreciate this passage, in which God says that He has made us into different tribes so that we may speak to, understand, and benefit from one other. Simply put, it is revealed that diversity was created so that our cultures

and our opinions may complement one another's. As I did more research on this verse, I found that the "male and female" mentioned refer not only to our parents, but to the parents of all people, Adam and Eve. It is God's gentle reminder to the reader that no matter what race or color you identify with, no matter what culture you come from, we all come from the same place. We are all family, part of the human race before any other. We are all equal in the sight of God, differing only by our piety and our conduct with each other.

As a Muslim who has grown up alongside kids from all kinds of backgrounds, I have stood by them and they have been with me as we furthered ourselves in our faith journeys. Through being able to have open dialogue with them, I have gained wisdom and perception unattainable by those who shun ideas different from their own. I have learned the value of not just saying you believe something but being able to articulate why.

When hearing about the bloody events of history and today, it's easy to conclude that differences only cause friction and lead people to violence and destruction. So I am grateful to all who don't just stop at that immediate impression but study those conflicts deeper to seek understanding. They help to break down this false presumption that differences are a thing to fear. It is my hope that our world will become one which can foster open and genuine dialogue that dissipates this fear, because it seems that fear is the main barrier that obstructs us from the sight of one another. With fear gone, and understanding in its place, we may see each other clearly as that which each of us is—flawed and relatable fellow human beings.