

This document compiles testimonials from student participants on several aspects of the WIHW events held at Loras.

Participant Testimonials on *River Crossing Interfaith Conference*

“The Interfaith Leadership Conference at Loras College was an amazing experience. Being the first conference for interfaith that I had been to, it was great going into a place where everyone who was attending was open minded and open to hearing the experiences of other people. The conference taught me how to show people that their story, no matter what it is, is important and should be heard. Learning someone’s story allowed me to understand that person in a deeper manner and because their stories were connected to faith, something that holds such a great significance for most of us, it helped the other person to share details of their life they would not normally share with strangers. The biggest thing I took from the conference was that when sharing your story with someone do not hold back because the more you share and are comfortable the more the other person reciprocates that willingness to share. The conference made a huge impact in my life and taught me how to better approach interfaith on my campus. It was definitely something that I would do again and would recommend to others.”

Yisset Gonzalez
St. Mary’s University
Winona, Minnesota

“Before I arrived at the River Crossing Interfaith Storytelling and Leadership Conference, I wasn’t really sure what to expect. I had never gone to something like this before, and I certainly didn’t know how storytelling was going to work its way in. What I had stumbled upon was nothing short of extraordinary.

“Throughout the course of the day the other conference attendees and I learned about telling our own stories of faith, life, or what have you. But what was unique about this learning to tell our story, was that we were telling it in a way that opens discussion with those who are different from us. These stories were not only stories of conflict, but of triumph. We became better people. People who could use stories not to divide, but as bridges to connect our communities together.

“My favorite part of the retreat by far was the Emmaus style lunch. Being able to talk to someone that I didn’t know very well from somewhere else was an eye-opening and enriching experience. In my case, having lunch with the girl that I did helped show me that I was not alone in my struggles of trying to figure out what exactly my faith is, and where I wished to belong. My eyes were opened to how while we had all come from different places with different backgrounds, we were facing the same struggles.

“I am so glad I came to this conference since through it I was able to find a new passion for interfaith that I never knew I had. I had known that I wanted to be involved, but it never worked out with my schedule. Thanks to this conference I now know that I want interfaith to be a bigger part of my life. The effort that all the people who made this conference possible put into it will not go unnoticed. I really hope this conference becomes annual so that we can reach out to more people and maybe even change the world.”

Sarah Statz
Loras College

Student Testimonial on Poster Campaign

“The Better Together Poster Campaign on campus is a great piece of passive programming. While events on campus offer exposure to interfaith activities, not all students are able to take part in these events. The poster campaign gives a voice to reach out to those who don’t regularly participate in interfaith activity, while at the same time bring interfaith dialogue into the public forum. From a personal standpoint, I found that these posters not only help me to articulate my faith to others, but also help to clarify misconceptions and dispel preconceptions. It promotes an atmosphere of sharing and prompts many people to ask questions that can lead to fruitful dialogue between faith traditions. By far and away I see that the poster campaign garners the most attention on campus, especially because of the population size of Loras. Most people are at least familiar with those they see on the poster, so even if they aren’t familiar with interfaith dialogue they can become so by asking their friends, roommates, team members, and classmates why they felt they needed to speak up about why their faith calls them to dialogue with others.”

Casey Flack
Loras College

Student Testimonial on Conversation with Alumnus Abroad on Interfaith Dialogue

“Hearing a Loras alumnus talk about his experience with interfaith dialogue was really fascinating. I wasn’t expecting him to speak at such length about how the people of Mozambique are so open with their Muslim faith traditions. It was funny to see how it was so incorporated into Kevin’s daily life as a Peace Corps volunteer even though he was there to work at a medical clinic. He shared reflections on learning from his Muslim neighbors as well as deepened his own Catholic faith. I’m really glad Better Together helped us learn more about the Mozambican people through a faith lens.”

Louisa Pavlik
Loras College

Student Testimonial on Presentation by Syrian Muslim Student Sara Alfayoumi

For World Interfaith Harmony week, our Better Together and Peace & Justice/Du Something Club collaborated to put on an event about Sara’s Alfayoumi’s experience as a Syrian in these extremely difficult times. First, we watched a documentary that was done on Sara’s life and then she spoke to us more about her personal experiences. Her story was very moving. I had heard of the Syrian refugee crisis and Isis before, but I had never met anyone who was personally suffering from these atrocities. It made this issue much more real for me. I was acquainted with Sara, but did not know her very well. I had no idea she was from Syria or the extent of some of the difficulties she has gone through. Sara mentioned that when the Paris attacks happened, even a lot of citizens from Dubuque treated her as subhuman.

She said she was ridiculed and given ominous looks when she went out in public with her hijab. I found this very disheartening—that even people in Dubuque would treat her this way.

Sara also talked about how corrupt the Syrian government is and how they intentionally try to turn Syrian critics against the Muslims that live there. Her own government is against her. Sara's whole talk shocked me and made me realize that even though there are some serious things I do not like about the country that I live in and the government I live under, it could be so much worse. I know I need to be more grateful for the freedom and democracy we enjoy here in the US.

Sara's presentation definitely helped me understand the difficulties Muslims, such as herself, have to face every day in other countries. It also gave me a greater understanding of what it is like to live as a Muslim in America. Sara lives with her Uncle and does not get to see her parents. She has been given a great opportunity to come to the US and attend Loras College with a student visa, but this does not mean that her life is free of hardships. After her presentation, we had a Q and A session/ discussion about Sara's experiences. Overall, Sara's presentation and the dialogue afterward was an extremely moving experience for me. It helped me better sympathize with Sara and her difficulties by helping me to better understand her point of view and challenges. As a Christian, the event definitely promoted interfaith dialogue and gave me a deeper understanding of the Muslim faith and challenges that follow.

Jennifer Andrysczyk
Loras College