

## Detachment from the World

Stressful moments happen in the work environment. When they do, how do you keep perspective? Do you detach? What does that even mean? And if you do detach, how do you do it?

These are some of the things that an esteemed panel of leaders sought to shed a variety of perspectives on, on Tuesday, September 13<sup>th</sup> at BELIEVES when discussing “Detachment from the World.”



Soumaya Khalifa, the founder and Executive Director of the Islamic Speakers Bureau of Atlanta (ISB), started the ISB with a vision to create a world of understanding and cooperation.

“We actually happened to begin the organization three weeks before 9/11 with the objective to create relationships, and build bridges of understanding and collaboration between the metro Atlanta American Muslim community and the wider community,” Khalifa indicated. “This ultimately led to the Interfaith Speakers Bureau.”

Khalifa, who went to a Catholic school run by nuns as a child, indicated that currently the Muslim narrative isn’t told the way it should. Through efforts like the ISB’s “100 Influential Georgia Muslims” which was rolled out in 2014, and the “40 under 40 Georgia Muslims” rolled out this year in 2016, the hope is that this will change.

Gareth Young, advisory board member for Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta, a successful businessman, spiritual leader, father and author, said the Faith Alliance of Metro Atlanta was created for safe spaces for people to come together and get to know one another and go past the surface.

“When I transformed my own life from a traditional corporate career and family life to an integrated life of independent business livelihood, I gained richer personal relationships, and deeper community involvement, all filled with a sense of meaning and purpose,” Young has indicated. “I have found that through all this my business career has become more successful, and I am more peaceful too.”

Pamela Perkins Carn, Executive Director of the Interfaith Children’s Movement (ICM), has responsibility for coordinating ICM programs and committees.

“The ICM works with faith-based and community organizations in supporting the children who live on the margins in our communities,” Perkins stated. “The ICM advocates on behalf of Georgia’s children at the policy and at the services levels.”

Ironically, as Perkins spoke further she shared that ICM also has ties to 9/11.

“ICM was founded on September 11, 2001. Our first prayer breakfast had already been planned that day before the attacks. When the attacks were known, it didn’t scare people away – it brought them together and sealed everyone’s belief of why they were there.”



Maria G. Cressler has served as the Executive Director of Ignatius House Jesuit Retreat Center in Atlanta, Georgia since 2009. Maria’s experience in Pastoral Ministry leading to her role leading Ignatius House included several years in prison ministry, youth ministry, and adult faith formation.

Though she leads Ignatius House overall, Cressler shared her passion for Ignatian spirituality and sharing God’s love has led her to leading days of reflection and mini-retreats too.

So what exactly does ‘detachment from the world’ mean to each of the panelists, and what terminology would they use to describe it?

“When I think of detachment, I think of what am I ‘attached’ to that’s getting in my way, like self or ego,” Cressler explained. “Another word that comes to mind in addition to ‘attached’ is ‘unplugged,’ which relates to finding time in the day – or in a moment – to detach. Again, usually I get hung up on this because of being caught up in ego.”

Cressler also added that when she thinks of ‘detachment from the world,’ the third word that comes to mind is ‘freedom.’

“When I am attached it has a hold on me but I was born free and with life – yet we attach to things in life,” she said.

Khalifa shared that for her, the thought of ‘detachment from the world’ made her reflect on the religious practices of Muslims.

“The concept of detachment is so integrated in Muslim life. We are called to detach physically and mentally when praying five times each day, or during Ramadan for a period of one month, or on the pilgrimage that just got done for many and is something we’re called to do once in our life,” Khalifa said. “What’s interesting for me is in the moments when I am supposed to detach, I find that when I start praying that’s when all great ideas come so that’s challenging.”

In addition to speaking about the Muslim religious practices, Khalifa also indicated there’s a message her mother always told her that she finds meaning in when thinking of ‘detachment from the world.’

“My mother used to always say, ‘Do for your world as if you will live forever and do for the hereafter as if you will die tomorrow,’” Khalifa shared.

Young’s remarks were similar to those of Cressler and Khalifa, but at the same time distinctly unique.

“Detachment brings about awareness that allows great relationships in the world, but what is more common in Buddhism is not detachment but non-attachment,” he stated. “The difference is that where detachment deals with removing, non-attachment is not getting attached or detached, and loving all.”

He further added, “If I am honest, detachment from ‘the world’ is really detachment from ‘my world’ and the judgments I bring to things. Detachment from my ego requires an awareness of those in the first place.”

As for words that came to mind to describe detachment? Young said the words or phrases ‘chill’ and ‘don’t sweat the small stuff’ were front and center.

Perkins began her remarks with a bit of a funny personal reflection on the question.

“It’s funny how the topic today was ‘detachment from the world’ because every day we have to detach. Like today I needed to detach from the traffic when getting here,” Perkins stated with a smile as everyone laughed.

Perkins also mentioned that the topic reminded her of a Meg Ryan film called “Hanging Up” – especially a part in the movie where there’s a phone, and a woman in the movie tells Meg Ryan’s character, “sometimes we need to hang up.”

On perhaps the deepest, most personal level, Perkins said detachment for her came in a moment when she couldn’t do anything else but be quiet and still from her health.

“This is when I heard His voice say – ‘be still’ – and I attached to God.”



The collection of the panelists’ comments sparked reflection among those present, including CTK parishioner, Steve Kelly.

Kelly said, “In listening to what’s been said, I have found the panelists are dead right. I have had ups and downs in life – lots. From my experience, when younger it’s harder to detach. When older, it’s easier, especially when living by one’s self. I suppose my question is how can younger people – especially those with families – get away from the peer pressure?”

Perkins responded, “Peer pressure is real, but for youth what really matters is authentic relationship.”

To illustrate, Perkins recalled a story where she was dealing with kids and there was a poster on the wall where all were present. What one of the children noted about what she was in the poster was poignant.

“The child said, ‘I like that the people are smiling. I wish that people would smile at me like that,’” Perkins shared. “The truth is it is all about relationship. It’s not about stuff. The greatest need we all have is genuine love. If we start with this, we’re less apt to feel we need ‘things’ to be happy.”

The dialogue taking place brought to mind a personal story for Khalifa as well.

“Each person walks their own path and makes choices. For example, I have three kids, and what I’ve learned is if I want them to do something, I better let them find their way,” she said.

She also brought up another story with a particular memory of the compassion that was felt.

“I used to smile at people all the time, but no one smiled back so I just gave up, until one day when I was visiting Chicago,” Khalifa told everyone. “On that day, a young man greeted me with a smile and it brought hope.”

After Khalifa’s story, Young and Cressler weighed in.

“We’ve bought into the 2.1 kids, a dog, and a cat story,” Young said. “It’s non-sense. We can change that story.”

Young said he used to tell this story himself to his kids, but they know it’s not the real story.

“The pressure in all this is from parents. I am blown away by the shift of how millennials view the world – which is a good thing.”



Cressler agreed with Young’s comments about parental pressure.

“It’s ironic that all this is so counter to our Christian faith,” she said. “We are actually seeing younger people coming more on retreats, looking to discern how to live today.”

Khalifa then decided to ask everyone, “Can I pose a challenge? The challenge is that every one of us today says I am going to be compassionate to myself and others.”

Everyone present raised their hands and said ‘yes.’

CTK parishioner, Elaine Szeto, then spoke up to piggy back on the focus on compassion and smiling.

“Smiling is so important and I didn’t realize that until leaving my last job,” Szeto stated. “Where I used to work there was a parking garage, and I used to greet the parking attendant each day. After two years when I was leaving she told me I was the only person to say ‘hi’ and if she had known I was leaving she’d have gotten me a gift.”

“That’s putting it in practice,” Young told Szeto.

Szeto’s fellow CTK parishioner, Michael Kirchner, then asked the panelists, “In the current environment, there’s more political anger that’s dividing. How do we get past that?”

Before any of the panelists answered the question, Khalifa pointed out that when we throw social media in the mix, which exacerbates things.

Cressler responded to Kirchner’s question by saying, “I wonder how we can profess what we do every Sunday, yet act like we do – especially over and over in our own faith communities.”

Perkins identified the root of all that we're experiencing and witnessing in one word – fear.

"It drives all this. Until we understand there's enough for all, we operate from scarcity. We're stewards not owners."

Perkins further commented that this current environment brings up a reminder of the acronym 'WWJD' ("What Would Jesus Do") and the need to follow Jesus.

"There wasn't anyone who encountered more people of all kinds than Jesus," she said. "We can't divide up the world with this is yours, and this is mine. We have to share ... it's in the Preamble of the Constitution and other places."

Young's comment echoed that of Perkins.

"There's a trend around the world of digging into our own worlds. This is not being vulnerable at all. It's nationalism."

The dialogue in the session was so rich, that with just five minutes left, it was noted that the entire discussion had been sparked by just asking one question, and then a half of another. Everyone laughed.

So to close out the session, the panelists were asked: What barriers do you often face when seeking to Detach from the World? What steps have you taken in your work place to try and create an environment for those who work with you to do this? Or have you?



"The barrier is me," Young said bluntly. "First I have to listen. Then there's opportunity."

Khalifa commented, "As a coach, I notice the expats, business leaders, and people I interact with don't see how attached they are. When I engage with them I seek to help people to detach and get self-awareness."

Cressler's thoughts closely paralleled Young's.

"It's about getting past me," she said.

To do this she seeks to start every morning with intentionality, or go through the Ignatian-based Examen practice.

"In the end, it's just me and God. I am grateful for consciousness to get myself out of the way. It's a lifelong journey."

Perkins closed out the session with a reflection that drew back to the moment where she experienced detachment, and then attached to God.

"I grew up in Corporate America, then became ill, and then came back to Corporate America," she said. "Then everyday a voice would say 'this is not where you're supposed to be.' I had a faith leader tell me about ICM amidst all this, but I didn't see it as an opportunity. Once I came to ICM, the voice stopped. We are the barrier. It is about knowing that Spiritual, kind sweet, voice that speaks to us."