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Diversity in Action: Beyond Interfaith Dialogue: The Brueggeman Center at Xavier University

James P. Buchanan

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Beyond Interfaith Dialogue

The Brueggeman Center at Xavier University

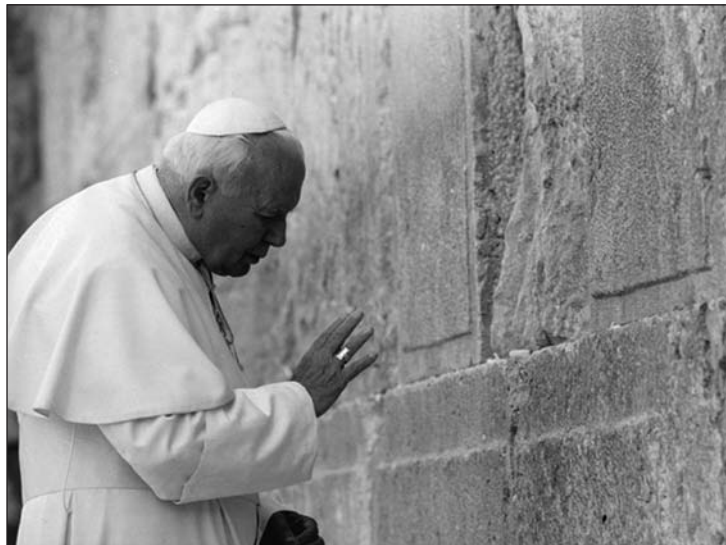
By James P. Buchanan

The idea that drives the Brueggeman Center for Dialogue at Xavier is that in an age of globalization we need to be in conversation with the world. The challenge we set was to frame interfaith dialogue in a much broader and more inclusive context, engaging not only the other academic disciplines but the business community, government, and civil society including the global NGO community. Thus our programming ranges over economics, politics, human rights, the environment, healthcare, gender and diversity, and foreign policy, which bring the religions into conversation with scholars from other disciplines, economists, policy-makers, businessmen, and government officials.

For the religions, this approach poses new challenges and opens new opportunities. The challenges include the demand that, if we want to be relevant to this broader, cross-sectoral discussion, we must retool and begin to learn the language and concepts of economics, foreign policy, science, and so on. We must do this in order to be able to listen and understand the other and to be listened to and understood. The struggle is to find both common concerns and common language so that there is something to talk about and a means to do so. The opportunity is the possibility that the voice and values of the religions might be listened to by the others in new, more powerful ways.

Dialogue and risk

At the center we believe that dialogue entails that we risk our presuppositions in order to experience possible transformation. Dialogue must openly engage the other. Thus we become partners in everything we do. Over the last decade the Brueggeman Center has partnered with over a hundred organizations or groups, in which we have engaged religious scholars and leaders and a range of experts from diverse fields from over 100 countries who have challenged our worldviews and our values.



The Winter-Cohen Brueggeman Student Fellows program has engaged students with a year of research which includes international immersion. We have sent students to over 40 different countries. It is high risk for all involved but transforms their lives and ours.

In 2005, working with Rabbi Abie Ingber and Dr. William Madges, we created "A Blessing to One Another: Pope John Paul II and the Jewish

People." The exhibit hopes to educate, commemorate and inspire those who visit it through photographs, videos, artifacts and text panels that tell the story of the Pope's life from his childhood in Poland to his Papacy. The narrative focuses upon the Pope's relationship with the Jewish people beginning with his childhood in Wadowice through all the historic firsts of his papacy. It also tells the story of his Jewish friendship with Jerzy Kluger from childhood through his papacy. The exhibit concludes with a 20-foot replica of Jerusalem's Western Wall into which visitors are invited to place their own prayers, all of which are delivered to the actual Western Wall. The exhibit has now been visited by over 800,000 people in 17 different venues. We built the exhibit as a tool to be used by communities to strengthen interfaith relations. The exhibit has been in an equal number of Catholic and Jewish institu-

tions. In 2013 it will be the opening exhibit at the new Museum of the History of the Polish Jews in Warsaw and will begin a European tour.

James P. Buchanan is executive director, the Edward B. Brueggeman Center for Dialogue at Xavier University, Cincinnati, OH. For more information about the Center's work visit www.xavier.edu/dialogue