



Public Media
Issues & Voices that Matter

**Commentary
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The National Association of Evangelicals has a great motto: "Cooperation without Compromise." We need not compromise our values, but we must understand that progress is made incrementally and it isn't made only when "our side" wins. Cooperation builds relationships. There is little hope, understanding or communication without cooperation. Unfortunately, and ironically, many individuals who are the most intense about their faith are the least cooperative.

We need to be clear about our aspirations. Evangelical Christians want to introduce the entire world to Jesus. We will not settle for anything less. My Muslim friends want to introduce the entire world to the Koran. They will not settle for anything less. Other religions and traditions would desire for the world to see the benefits of their philosophies and works.

So, we can either accept our differences and work together to make the world better, or blow it apart. Will fear and anger create the paths we follow, or can we be mature enough to inspire others with our very lives and attitudes?

It begins here in Seminole County. We must build dialogue and cooperation that builds relationships. And we must go about this in a respectful manner.

For example, not long ago, students at Northland worked side-by-side with Muslim and Jewish and Hindu and secular students to feed the homeless in downtown Orlando. This ad hoc cooperation between differing groups resulted in benefits for our community but also in the beginning of relationships.

Now to be sure, competition of ideas is not bad. It has been beneficial in improving performance in some areas, it is part of our country's DNA. But competition as the main dynamic turns the focus to issue debate ... whereas cooperation turns the focus to people.

Cooperation respects others and sharpens thinking. It has power to cultivate the hallmarks of both discipleship, as Christians like to use that term, and patriotism. And one more thing, indifference is not tolerance. It can't be disguised as tolerance it is not productive. The word "whatever" never built anything. We cannot hang our acceptance of other people's opinions over shrugged shoulders. Cooperation requires caring and participating with those who are seen by most as the opposition. It involves healing by hearing without retreat from our basic beliefs. It involves healing by offering our partnership in helping others without having to feel uncomfortable for what we believe.

When we mature to the point that our intensity and inclusiveness combine, we will be a healing presence in politics and everywhere else. There will be a freedom in our ability to understand and a discipline in our thinking. Cooperation will be more joy than challenge.

I'm Dr. Joel C. Hunter senior pastor of Northland, A Church Distributed ... and interfaith cooperation matters.