

FACE TO FACE - FAITH TO FAITH

An Enhancement of the M. Div. Program at The Presbyterian College, Montreal

The Challenge

Five world religions collectively account for roughly three-quarters of the world's seven billion people. To ignore the religious world is to ignore the majority of people who live in the world. If we are to find ways towards tolerance, respect and love of one's neighbour, the involvement and commitment of religious leaders is critical.

But how can we invest in leaders of the future who will help communities of faith embrace compassion and understanding rather than hatred and suspicion? Unless we find a way, and are prepared to invest in such leaders, we will continue to witness conflict, violence, and oppression that are rooted in religious misunderstanding.

The Proposal to Meet the Challenge

We propose to bring young, international Christian leaders, whose communities might be marked by religious intolerance and conflict, to The Presbyterian College where they will be part of a community of faith and learning that will build the kind of attitudes and skills necessary for inter-faith collaboration.

Why Presbyterian College? Our College has had 150 years of experience in equipping leaders within an ecumenical context, and has long been affiliated with McGill University, and its Faculty of Religious Studies. McGill University has partnered with the Tony Blair Foundation, which provides "the practical support required to counter religious prejudice, conflict and extremism in order to promote open-minded and stable societies." This initiative, combined with our experience in forming leaders, positions us in the best possible place to make this contribution to the broader world.

We will fund young Christian leaders from poorer communities around the world to become part of this multi-faith and intercultural environment, where their theological training at the College will focus on inter-faith studies. Upon completion of a three-year program of studies, students must commit to returning to their communities with the goal of providing leadership in inter-faith understanding and cooperation.

This is a grassroots approach to change - encouraging those closest to the challenges to be catalysts for change. The contribution that such international students will make to the effectiveness of our own candidates for ministry in Canada's multicultural society cannot be over-estimated.

How You Can Help

We believe that **Faith to Faith—Face to Face** is an initiative that can lead to new ways of thinking, out of which new communities are born. We are looking for partners who believe such change is critical, and are willing to invest in future leaders. Our goal is to bring five young Christian leaders to the College for three years by raising \$375,000 in our campaign for this ambitious program.

A gift of \$25,000 supports an international student to participate in the program for one full year. Gifts can be pledged over a period of up to five years.





One Story - Elkanah Shekari

Elkanah Shekari is a Nigerian student studying at The Presbyterian College with the ambition of bringing peace and tolerance to his homeland. This is his story.

One night in his Nigerian school, Elkanah was taken from his bed by other students and dragged to the local mosque, where they threatened him if he did not convert. Thinking of his mother's prayer that he would never betray the Christian faith that he had learned at home, he resisted, although this led to him being shunned and bullied by other students. He grew tired of the hatred and prejudice that he witnessed daily between Muslims and Christians, and he determined to help find a better way.

In Nigeria, there is no place where he could learn the skills needed for such a formidable task. McGill University and the Presbyterian College were suggested to him as the ideal place to pursue his goals: McGill for its interfaith and multi-cultural environment, and Presbyterian College for its focus on the best of his Presbyterian tradition. Here is what Elkanah says about his experience at the Presbyterian College.

"The Presbyterian College fits international students perfectly. I feel at home here, in the library, with all the faculty and staff. Coming from a church context, the College is incredibly comforting to a student enrolled at McGill. The weekly chapel services offer so much support, a chance to have discussions with your teachers that you wouldn't have anywhere else. Without chapel, I wouldn't have lasted a month in the Faculty of Religious Studies. It is truly a blessing. The Presbyterian College consistently evolves, accommodating each student's individual needs. As an international student, this has made it much easier for me to find my place here in Montreal.

My goal, after finishing my studies, is to be a minister in Nigeria, to help resolve the conflicts there. I lived in constant fear for myself and my family and fear is not a good way of life, nor is it an acceptable foundation for repairing society. I'm very interested in conflict resolution from a church context, and in pursuing inter-faith dialogue. Faith is the gateway to the culture of the Nigerian people, and the conflict needs a religious response from respected community leaders, the ministers and imams. Ministers understand the communities in which conflict is taking place, and they are best placed to resolve it."

The Broader Impact

Students in the M. Div. Face to Face - Faith to Faith program join more than 300 alumni of the Presbyterian College who, today, lead congregations in communities across Canada and around the world. Together, they have a profound impact on our society, providing spiritual growth, pastoral counselling, food and shelter, preschool and elder care, among many other services and supports for people in need.



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