Students from Marist School and Davis Academy

On April 19, 2013, seventh graders from Marist School, an independent Catholic School in Atlanta, GA, visited seventh and eighth graders at the Davis Academy, an Atlanta Jewish day school. The middle schoolers took part in an interfaith program designed by teachers from both schools and began a journey of discovery about one another and their faiths.

The day commenced with an interfaith bingo game. Students were given questions to ask their peers in order to highlight similarities and differences and learn more about one another. The activity was designed to show the children how similar their backgrounds are in spite of the differences they perceived going into the event. This was followed by an image comparison activity to help students of both faiths learn about symbols and rituals in Judaism and Christianity. Students were able to ask one another questions in a small-group setting facilitated by teachers from both schools. The morning concluded with a Jewish Sabbath service known as Kabbalat Shabbat, a weekly tradition at Davis Academy. During the ceremony, students celebrating birthdays that week were invited to come forward and receive a shared blessing offered by Father Ralph Olek, S.M. and Davis Academy's Rabbi Micah Lapidus. Snacks of pretzels, challah bread, and juice were offered and students were given the opportunity to socialize with their new friends.

The day of interfaith sharing and learning was the result of a two-year collaboration between teachers of Marist School and Davis Academy. It was an absolute joy to help oversee and prepare this program along with my colleague Kathie Calabrese of Marist School and wonderful friends Rabbi Micah Lapidus and Sarah Beth Berman of Davis Academy. I am beginning my fifth year of teaching Hebrew Scriptures and Sacraments at Marist School, and am inspired by Marist's commitment to forming the whole person in the image of Christ. That means educating the mind, body, and soul with a well-rounded experience of the world around us. Learning from and growing with "the other" and engaging in interfaith dialogue is an integral part of this process.

The inspiration for this collaborative project started taking shape when I was a student in Boston College's Theology program. I was lucky enough to take several of Professor Ruth Langer's courses about Jewish History, the Holocaust, and the history of Jewish-Christian Relations. These seminars helped me to see the importance of interfaith dialogue and its crucial role in education. Throughout my time at Boston College, I had the opportunity to engage in healthy dialogue, inquire about religious traditions other than my own, and see my own faith in a whole new light. I also began to understand the importance of fostering an environment where students feel free to ask questions. As the child of a Catholic mother and a Jewish father, interfaith dialogue was something I grappled with from a young age. Helping to plan and facilitate this meeting of Marist School and Davis Academy was the realization of a dream, and a cause very close to my heart. It is my hope that this event is the first of many such meetings between Marist School and the students of many other such religious institutions.

The courses I took at Boston College through the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning helped me to think critically and thoughtfully while developing and planning for this special day. The event turned out to be one of enrichment and discovery, and the two schools plan to continue their partnership in joint service-learning during the 2013-2014 school year and well into the future. This fruitful and fulfilling endeavor would not have been possible without the formation I received through my time spent at Boston College. When I witnessed Jewish students at Davis Academy sharing with our Marist students about everything from their tallit to the Hebrew Alphabet, it made me more fully appreciate the great work done by the Center for Christian-Jewish Learning. I am enormously grateful to Professor Ruth Langer and all the professors who illuminated for me the importance of Jewish-Christian relations in today's world. Boston College's commitment to interfaith dialogue is truly a blessing, and it is an honor to assist in carrying that tradition forward to the next generation.