One Nation INDIVISIBLE

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Precisely the Patch of Earth

In America's Heartland, Three Faiths Come Together to Share Space, Build Relationships, and Create an International Model of Religious Pluralism

Story by Omar Sacirbey • Photographs by Matt Miller

Augusta National in Georgia. Shoal Creek near Birmingham. Cypress Point in Monterey, California. Oakland Hills in suburban Detroit. Caldwell in Louisiana. The Los Angeles Country Club.

Those are a small sampling of the many country clubs in the United States that just a generation or two ago barred Jews, African Americans, and people of other minority religions, races, and ethnicities from membership. In 1962, the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith inspected 803 country clubs and found that less than 28 percent did not discriminate.

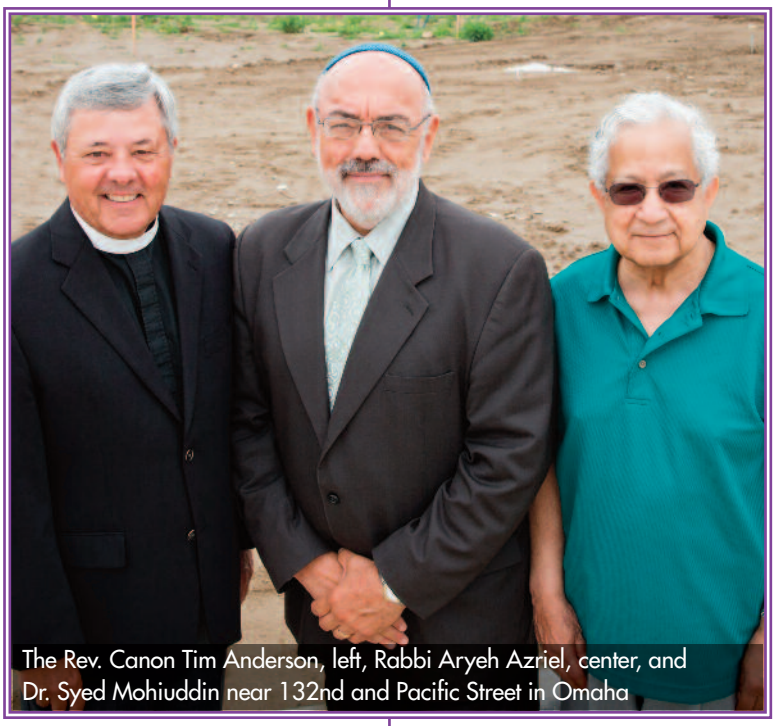
> *"The country clubs…were completely segregated both racially and in terms of religion. My family was complicit in all that."*
>
> —Rt. Rev. Scott Barker

Rt. Rev. Scott Barker, who in 2011 became Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, grew up in Omaha and attended such clubs, to which his parents and grandparents belonged. In those days, the clubs would not have admitted folks like Bob Freeman, a local Jewish business and real estate lawyer whose family has lived in Omaha for four generations.

"The country clubs…were completely segregated both racially and in terms of religion," recalled Barker, who is 49 years old. "My family was complicit in all that."

As for Omaha's Jews, they built their own leisure ground in 1924—the Highland Country Club, at 132nd Street and Pacific Street in West Omaha.

"When the Jews in Omaha, and probably many other cities in the U.S., were originally denied access to local country clubs, they needed a place to socialize and play golf, so they built clubs for themselves," explained Freeman, who is 60 years old. His maternal grandparents belonged to Highland. "Thus, as we often see, an initial exclusion forces a group to become even more insular."



The Rev. Canon Tim Anderson, left, Rabbi Aryeh Azriel, center, and Dr. Syed Mohiuddin near 132nd and Pacific Street in Omaha

By the late 1980s, most of Omaha's country clubs had dropped their barriers. The famous investor and Omaha son Warren Buffet, one of the world's richest people, joined Highland in the mid-1980s. Country club competition in golf-happy Omaha was tough, however, and in an effort to attract new members, Highland in 1999 took out a $10.7 million loan to make improvements and renamed itself Ironwood Country Club. But new members never materialized. The club went bankrupt a decade later.

Highland's demise, however, didn't end Freeman's connection to the land. At the time of the bankruptcy Freeman was a board member of Temple Israel, Omaha's Reform Jewish congregation. He was working closely with Dr. Syed Mohiuddin, a Muslim and prominent cardiologist at Creighton University, and with Reverend Tim Anderson, an Episcopal priest, on something called the Tri-Faith Initiative. The Initiative members aspired to build a synagogue, mosque, and church on common property in an unprecedented experiment in interfaith coexistence. Since 2006, the year the Tri-Faith Initiative idea was conceived, the men had considered at least five or six sites that could have potentially accommodated three houses of worship, a fourth shared building, plus a parking lot. Nothing ever panned out.

The Tri-Faith Initiative members aspired to build a synagogue, mosque, and church on common property in an unprecedented experiment in interfaith coexistence.

Motivated by the vision of bringing Jews, Muslims, and Christians together at a time when religious strife still roils America and much of the world, they kept looking. When the 153-acre former Highland Country Club went up for auction in 2010, Tri-Faith sent a representative over. In 2011, the three faith communities finalized a deal for four parcels of land spanning 35 acres, at about $170,000 per acre. They are now well on their way to transforming a golf course that was once an outgrowth of segregation into what is perhaps the most innovative and most purposeful attempt at collaborative interfaith living in the world.

Substantial hurdles remain, from raising enough money to complete the project, to attracting congregants, coordinating construction logistics, and

coming to consensus on some difficult decisions. But if this group of faith idealists can navigate these challenges, they will become a model for other interfaith communities.

"The four structures are an icon," said the Episcopal priest, Tim Anderson. "This is what we should be able to do. We want to be an example of what can be done."

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In the summer of 1975, a tornado ripped through central Omaha. It destroyed homes and at Temple Israel on Cass Street, shattered several stained-glass windows that commemorated *ner tamid*, the Hebrew expression for "eternal light." Temple members collected hundreds of giant glass shards, and meticulously restored the windows. Those same stained-glass windows will become part of the new synagogue being built on the Tri-Faith site.

"There's no way we could have left those behind, they have an immense amount of meaning," said John Waldbaum, the commercial real estate financier who represented Tri-Faith at the auction of Highland. Waldbaum's family belonged to Highland, and he threw his Bar Mitzvah party there.

Renamed Sterling Ridge, the former country club property will include residential housing, a senior center, and office buildings, in addition to the Tri-Faith campus.

"We're sitting on the fifth hole," Waldbaum said one March afternoon from inside a white trailer serving as the construction project's office, just 75 yards from the new temple. Jewish leaders hope the building will be ready for an official dedication later this fall.

A temple, said Waldbaum, should have three components: worship, community, and education. Accordingly, the new temple, which measures about 59,000 square feet, has a sanctuary that can accommodate about 800 people and a circular chapel that can hold about 125. There are offices for the rabbi, cantor, and other temple officials, classrooms, and a large social hall with floor-to-ceiling windows and a terrace that looks across gently sloping hills to where the future mosque, church, and Tri-Faith Center will be. The property is bisected by Hell Creek, soon to be traversable via a "Heaven's Bridge."

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The Muslims and Episcopalians hope to begin construction in early 2014. The final building to be constructed is the Tri-Faith Center, which will host films, lectures, and other common events, and include conference rooms and a café where people from a variety of faiths can mingle. That building has been designed to resemble a tent like that of Abraham, to whom all three faiths trace their roots. Abraham's tent was kept open on all four sides as a sign of welcome to travelers approaching from any direction.

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It may surprise some people that this is happening in Nebraska, which is not traditionally thought of as a bastion of multiculturalism. But Omaha's past suggests the Tri-Faith project may not be so out of place.

Founded in the mid-1850s, Omaha's first settlers included many Jews, 11 of whom founded Temple Israel in 1871. When U.S. troops arrested Chief Standing Bear of the Ponca Tribe and detained him at Fort Omaha in 1879 for the crime of leaving his reservation, Christian and Jewish clergymen came together to write angry letters to federal government officials demanding his release. Two local prominent attorneys sued the U.S. government for Standing Bear's right to be treated as an equal human being, arguing that he had the right to move around the country as much as anybody else in the United States. They won. Catholic priests founded Boys Town

orphanage in 1917 and quite deliberately cared for children of any faith. In 1977, a historically white and a historically black Episcopal congregation in North Omaha began sharing Lenten services. About a decade later, in 1986, the two congregations merged and became the Episcopal Church of the Resurrection. According to church officials, it is the only parish in the state that is "fully integrated by black and white Episcopalians." Another congregation in North Omaha, New Life Presbyterian, also merged two previously separate churches, one white and one black. Omaha, though, was also the setting for the Academy Award-nominated 1967 documentary *A Time for Burning*, about a white Lutheran minister's attempts to reach out to African American neighbors. The film exposed virulent racism within the white community and within religious groups. It ignited a long-lasting controversy in a changing city.

There is plenty of room for integration in this extremely racially segregated region, but Greater Omaha is certainly more diverse now than it was in the days Barker and Freeman were growing up. As Barker noted, his daughter and Freeman's daughter were "best pals in elementary school." Omaha has attracted immigrants since its founding in the mid-1800s, making cultural and ethnic diversity its hallmark. Latinos are now Omaha's fastest growing immigrant group and have a growing presence in Nebraska's more rural areas, too. Traditionally Catholic, Latinos have increasingly been moving into the Episcopalian faith in recent years. Omaha's public schools enroll

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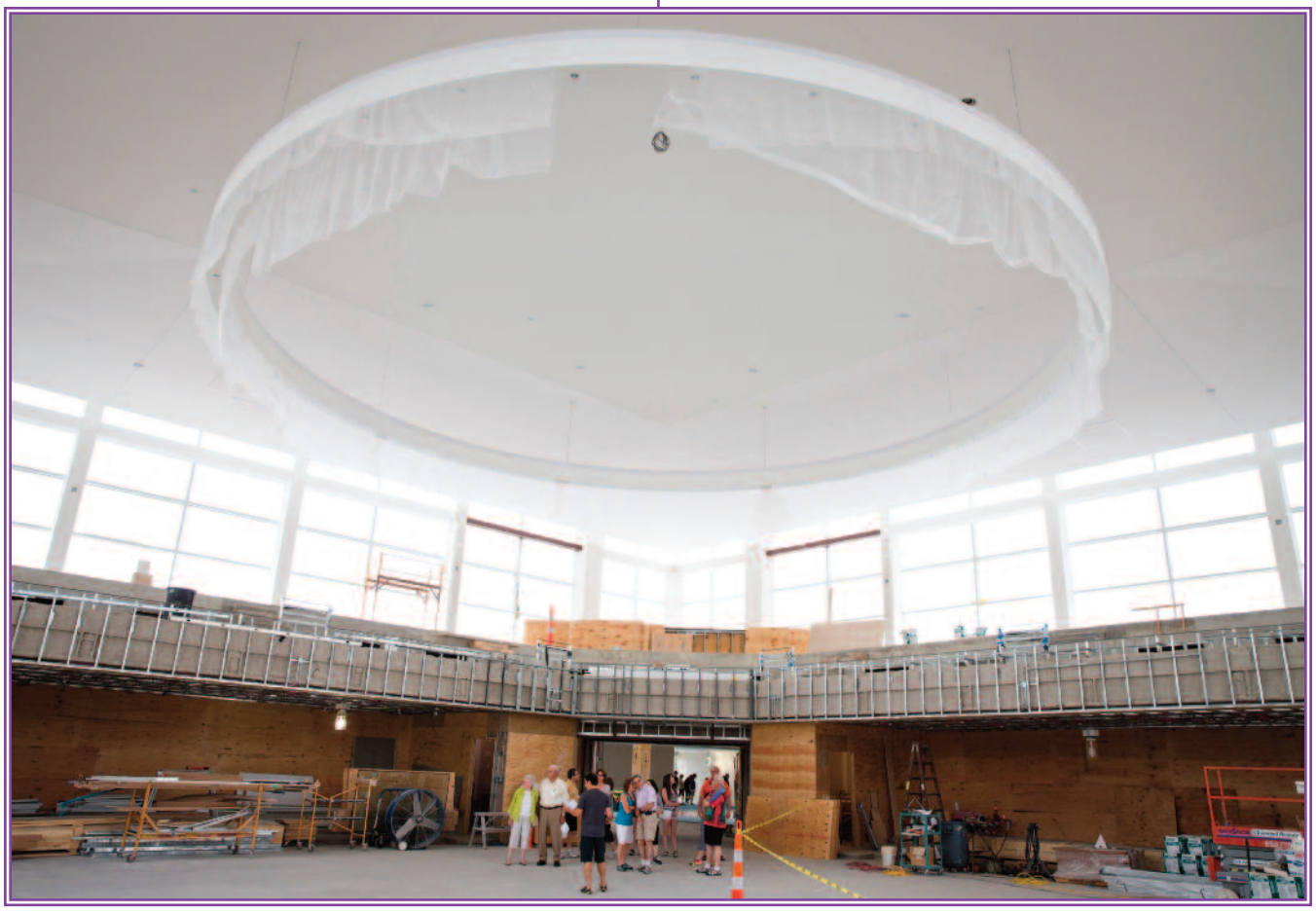

the largest population of Sudanese refugee students in the United States. Omaha is also an active area of resettlement for refugees from Somalia who are mainly Muslims. Swahili is one of the most common of the more than 100 different languages Omaha Public Schools students speak.

"This idea of interfaith cooperation goes to the earliest days of Omaha," said Nancy Kirk, an Episcopalian who has been Tri-Faith's executive director since 2008.

For all its ambition the Tri-Faith idea was in part born from practicality. Temple Israel used to sit next to Omaha's Community Playhouse, where Henry Fonda and Marlon Brando once performed, and across the street from the First United Methodist Church, who were quiet and respectful neighbors. And because their schedules were so different, they could use one another's parking on overflow days.

But Temple Israel's Cass Street synagogue had been built in 1954 for just 300 families. By the early 2000s, some 750 families were worshipping there. It suffered from a leaky roof and other structural maladies. The Temple soon had an opportunity to build on a 30-acre piece of land, but the site was too large for their needs. Freeman wondered if they might be able to find partners to share the land. "If there is this extra acreage around us, let's see if we can self-select our neighbors," Freeman suggested to Temple Israel's rabbi, Aryeh Azriel, who knew exactly who he wanted next door.

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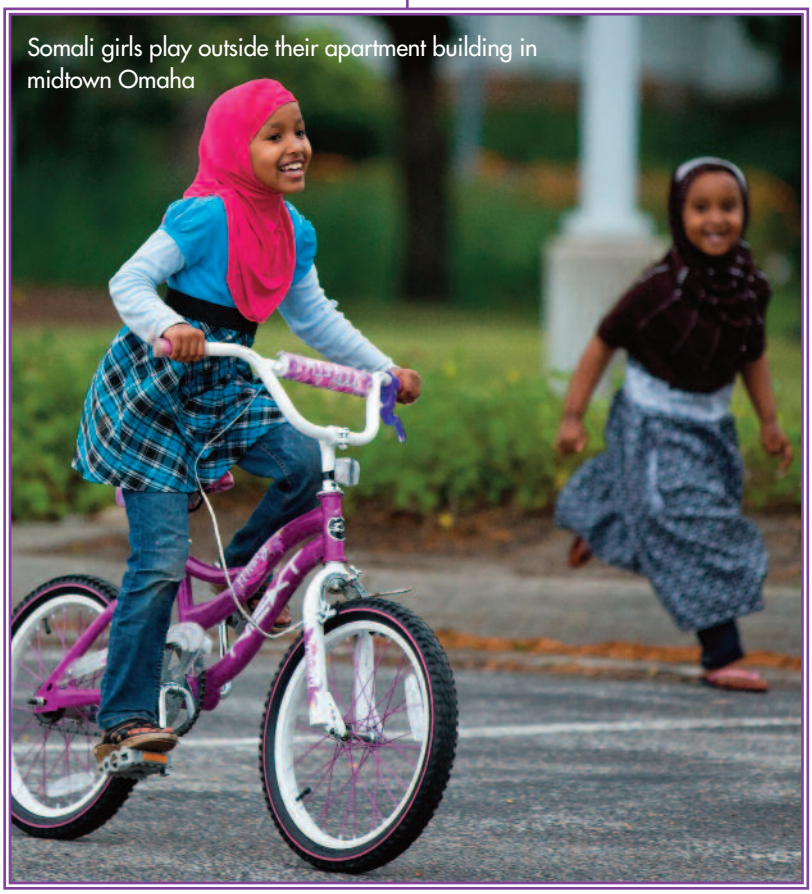

Somali girls play outside their apartment building in midtown Omaha

Azriel was born in Israel in 1950, two years after his parents emigrated from Sofia, Bulgaria. His parents were respectful of major Jewish holidays, Azriel recalled, but there was no ritualistic life. His Bar Mitzvah, for example, had no religious component to it, but was "just a party."

Polio left him with a serious limp. But Azriel was an active youngster. The summer after his last year in high school, in 1967, he traveled with several friends to work at a Reform Jewish summer camp in Wisconsin, and then traveled through the United States with them. The camp proved illuminating for Azriel, whose secular youth left him wanting to know more about the spiritual side of his identity. "I was able to talk to liberal rabbis, and I was shocked, in a good way, to hear what they had to say about religion," said Azriel. "I found

God in America. I saw what the theology of Judaism was all about."

Azriel and his friends returned to Israel and planned to reunite to look at slides from their trip. But their plans were dashed when the Six Day War started a few days later. By the time the war had ended, two of his friends were dead.

"Why is this so important to me? It has to do with the pain of growing up in Israel and the Middle East, and not being able to contribute to a process of peace," said Azriel. "Their death and the wars still affect me today. This has been one of the ways of restoring the souls of my friends."

After time in Israel and Chicago, Azriel attended Hebrew Union College in Cincinnati. Following his graduation in 1983, he became an assistant rabbi in Baltimore. Seeing that Azriel was hungry for greater responsibility, the head rabbi encouraged him to seek a chief rabbi's position, which, in 1988, led him to Temple Israel in Omaha.

He was impressed by what he found in Nebraska. "People were generous, and they really celebrated their identity," said Azriel. "The Midwestern values are important. People still know how to be kind to each other here." Even before he arrived for his interview, Azriel pointed out, the congregation had built a railing to the pulpit that would help him, with his limp, get up the steps. He also liked that the community had a long history of interfaith activity, and opened its services to everyone.

"Almost every Friday and Saturday there is a group of visitors here," Azriel said proudly. He also forged ties with Omaha's Muslims. After 9/11 someone threatened to torch the Islamic Center of Omaha. Azriel led several Jews to the mosque where they stood guard. And so it would make sense that Rabbi Azriel embraced Bob Freeman's idea about choosing neighbors. He suggested that their new partners and neighbors be local Muslims.

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Syed Mohiuddin was born in 1934 in the city of Hyderabad in southeastern India to a strict Muslim family that, through his mother's side, could trace its roots to Syed Abdel Qadir Gilani Al Amoli, a 12th-century preacher who founded the well-known Qadiri Sufi Order of Islam. Relations between Hyderabad's majority Hindus and minority Muslims were generally good, so when Mohiuddin came to Omaha for his residency at Creigton University Medical Center in 1963, he was accustomed to life in peaceful coexistence as a religious minority.

In 1970, Mohiuddin took a teaching post at the Creighton University School of Medicine, and after climbing the ranks, was named chair of the Department of Medicine in 2007. Spending his entire medical career at Creighton, a Jesuit institution, exposed him to Catholicism, and allowed him to introduce his faith to Catholics. "I learned a lot about Catholicism, and people would also ask me questions about Islam," he recalled.

He had less experience with Jews, but a mutual acquaintance of his and Rabbi Azriel's suggested to the rabbi that he contact Mohiuddin about the interfaith idea.

At the time, Mohiuddin and a small group of Muslim professionals had wanted to start a new Islamic center in Omaha that would be a place of worship, and also an educational center that could host discussions and cultural events exploring Islam's various interpretations and practices in the United States and around the world.

Mohiuddin and his colleagues believed that many Americans had negative views of Islam, and despite always having felt at home in Omaha, he still occasionally would hear random remarks equating Muslims with terrorism.

"Which is still very painful to me, because that's not the way I know Islam," he said. "For many

Americans, what they know about Islam comes from what they see on the news, from all the things happening overseas. People needed to get to know Islam in this country."

So when Rabbi Azriel and a small group of Jews presented the idea to Mohiuddin and a few Muslims at a local public library in January 2006, the Muslims saw it as the perfect opportunity for the Islamic center.

"When the invitation came, we thought it would be wonderful," said Mohiuddin. "Whenever Muslims participate in interfaith events and talk with people of other faiths, the results are almost always positive." The American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture (AIISC) was incorporated later that year. Run out of a small office complex in western Omaha, it hosts Friday prayers, meetings, and other events. Its mission is to "promote a better understanding of Islam in the Western world," and its vision is to "create an institution which will affirm the core values of Islam, which are: Acceptance, Compassion, Equality, Justice, and Peace."

"We've always been on the defensive. And here, we're not on the defensive, we're taking part in something big, something that's sending a positive message."

—Karim Khayati, one of Tri-Faith's newer board members

"We've always been on the defensive," said Karim Khayati, who emigrated from Tunisia to Nebraska in 1998, and is one of Tri-Faith's newer board members. "And here, we're not on the defensive, we're taking part in something big, something that's sending a positive message."

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The next step was to reach out to a Christian congregation, and the most obvious choice seemed to be the Catholic Church, the largest Christian denomination in Omaha (and in the United States). But the Catholic Omaha Archdiocese was about $8 million in debt. It struggled with declining membership. Leaders were in no position to finance a new church. Tri-Faith organizers also considered the Lutheran and Methodist churches, but leaders of those faiths faced similar financial uncertainties. Freeman then thought of the denomination his wife, Robyn, belonged to: the Episcopal Church.

At the time, Rev. Tim Anderson was just about two years into his job as assistant to the Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska, Rt. Rev. Joe Burnett, who had tasked Anderson with developing congregations. Burnett, Anderson recalled, told him a bit about the interfaith effort, saying "I don't know what this is about, but check it out."

It was an unusual assignment for Anderson, who was born and raised in Kearney, a small city in central Nebraska where, as far as he knew, there was only one Jewish family. "I didn't come from a diverse background. It was pretty vanilla," he said, speaking before a recent Sunday evening service at St. Augustine of Canterbury Episcopal Church in Elkhorn, a neighborhood on Omaha's western edge.

But Anderson did have what he calls the gift of hospitality, which first took him into the restaurant business and later, in 1981, to seminary. "That gift serves me well. I'm very open to others," said Anderson, whose first parish assignments were in the small cities of Blair and Grand Island, Nebraska, the latter of which has experienced a sharp increase in its Latino population in recent years. In 2003, he was one of the delegates at the Episcopalian national convention who voted in favor of consecrating Rev. Gene Robinson, who is gay and in a same-sex marriage. In 2004, the church posted Anderson to Omaha. The same way some people may look for a home "steps away" from the beach or a subway stop, Anderson, an avid golfer, found a home steps away from the Iron Horse Golf Club in Ashland, about 27 miles southwest of Omaha.

When Anderson first called Freeman to talk, he was told he would have to try later, after Freeman returned from a golfing trip in Scotland. "To me that

was a good sign. Golf is one of my passions," Anderson said. When Freeman returned, in August 2006, he drove to meet Anderson at the Iron Horse Golf Club, where he planned to pitch the Tri-Faith idea to him.

"By the third hole we were so excited we didn't care about the game," Anderson recalled. For him, the Tri-Faith project would mark the start of a personal journey. The project also corresponded with plans the Episcopal Diocese of Nebraska had to build a new congregation and church. Sharing a parking lot with two other faith groups appealed to Episcopal leaders' sense of thrift and ecumenicalism.

"After 9/11 I saw this as an opportunity to do something very unique, and not just benefit our three groups, but all of Omaha," said Anderson, who had not even met any Muslims until 2006, through his involvement in Tri-Faith. Anderson established a quick connection with Muslim community members based on what he called a "mutual desire to serve the community."

"I've passed out dates during Ramadan, and I've been at Temple when the little ones are given the scrolls," said Anderson. "Those are experiences with those faith groups that I will always cherish."

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Once the three pieces had been put in place, those involved knew that, to maintain momentum, they would have to skip a honeymoon period and immediately address a hodgepodge of fears and difficult questions: How ambitious should the project be? Who would own the buildings? How would they govern relations between the communities and handle disagreements between them? What if people start trying to convert each other?

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In response to these worries they developed a "Memorandum of Understanding" in November 2006. It affirmed each group's independence to control its buildings and run its religious affairs, prohibited proselytizing, and stipulated that participants would "completely respect the beliefs and practices" of the other participants.

Tri-Faith leaders also sought ways to build bridges between their followers. They created a series of classes called Tri-Faith 101, where participating Jews, Muslims, and Christians would be introduced to each other's faiths, concentrating in particular upon their commonalities. They have already hosted several interfaith picnics and dinners, including the "Abraham's Tent" fundraiser in 2009 that drew 1,100 people, including national leaders of all three faiths.

A few parents have set up interfaith playgroups and youth groups that meet monthly. They do interject some interfaith-themed games and projects into the time. Mostly, though, they just let the kids play.

"None of these kids will believe the stereotypes when they grow up," said one mom from the playgroup.

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Despite the progress, the work is far from complete. There are of course the routine financial and logistical challenges that aggravate any major construction project, but there are also complications brought about by religious differences. For example, the earliest conceptions of the project envisioned a central kitchen, but once dietary differences were considered—Muslims didn't drink alcohol, Jews didn't eat shellfish or mix dairy and meat products, while pork was consumed only by Christians—it was clear that each group's building would need its own kitchen.

"Raising money is the hardest part. There will always be road blocks, but I'm confident our ability to communicate will ensure our success," said Nancy Kirk, Tri-Faith's executive director. When Kirk turned 60 she wrote a plan for the next four decades of her life, which included learning about religious pluralism. Much of the work of negotiating disagreements, logistical conflicts, schedules, and other challenges falls on her. A gregarious woman, she has equipped her cell phone with an Islamic prayer-time reminder and other apps suggesting her interest in many faiths.

And while Tri-Faith has broad support from different faith communities, not everyone loves the idea. Rabbi Azriel faced the challenge of convincing a well-established congregation that its brand new temple would be on a site a stone's throw away from a mosque and a church. Most people support the project, but a few holdouts remain, important donors among them.

"We are not going to wait for them," Rabbi Azriel said. "We don't have time."

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The Episcopalians and Muslims have the very different challenge of building congregations. While members of their faith communities have been generally supportive, some have raised objections. Fundraising is a slog and the congregations are still modest in size.

"Some family members are not into it," said David Wright of suburban Gretna, just outside Omaha. He'd come with his wife Pam to the Sunday night service led by Anderson at the St. Augustine of Canterbury Church in Elkhorn.

Friday prayers at the American Institute of Islamic Studies and Culture attract about 20 worshippers, although holiday services, which the Muslim group has held at a local hotel, bring in more than 100 people. In contrast, the Islamic Center of Omaha usually gets about 300 people for Friday prayers and about 3,000 people at its holiday services.

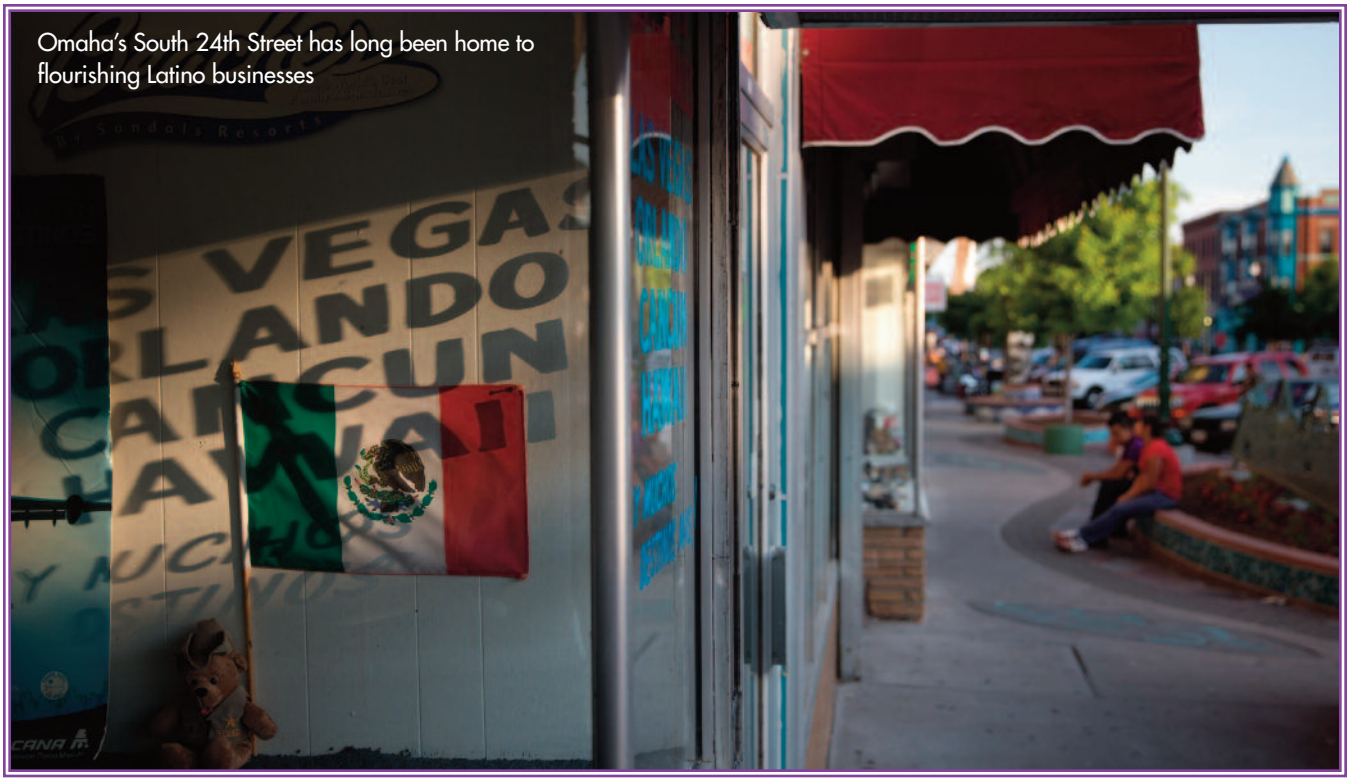
Given the competing pressures, how does the group keep something contentious from sinking the project?

"Yeah, I don't know how we do that, because it's not like we haven't had our conflicts, because we have," said Rev. Ernesto Medina of Saint Martha's Episcopal Church in Papillion, Nebraska. Medina, who is of Mexican heritage, first came to Omaha in 2007 as Dean for Urban Mission at Trinity Cathedral in downtown Omaha where he served a mainly Latino population. He joined the Tri-Faith board in 2010 and became rector at St. Martha's, a predominantly white congregation, in 2012.

Part of the reason conflicts arise, Medina said, is because the governing processes of the three worshipping communities differ so much from one another. For example, in the Episcopal Church, leaders usually have the last say on policy and regulations. Rabbis must answer to a board and Muslims have an even more horizontal leadership structure. Complicating matters are the myriad cultures involved, from American and Israeli Jews to the dozens of nationalities that make up Omaha's Muslim population.

"The Christians, we're always dealing with the fact that we're the dominant culture in this system, so what does that mean for the use of our voice?" said Medina. "But ultimately at some point we figure it out."

It can be a learning process. Consider Scott Barker, Bishop of Nebraska's Episcopal Diocese, who joined the Tri-Faith board in 2013. Growing up without



Omaha's South 24th Street has long been home to flourishing Latino businesses

diversity, Barker said he held his own prejudices that weren't dislodged until he went to college, first to Yale for undergrad, then a year at Boston University Law School, where in the diverse student population he suffered "some awful comeuppance."

He recalls one incident when he was with a young woman and made an offensive remark about Jews, and she replied, "You know, I'm a Jew."

"I was just mortified. And it became so quickly clear to me that I had a ton of learning and ton of growing to do," said Barker. "I just grew up, and discovered we had far more in common than differences….Our shared humanity meant that there was always a possibility for connecting meaningfully, even with people who I might have real disagreements with about religion or politics or other things that might divide us."

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As intended, sharing a common piece of land has compelled cooperation.

"The shared piece of turf is having its way of constantly calling us back into relationships and having to deal in innumerable ways with our preferences and our differences and our prejudices. In some ways, the genius of the project is precisely the patch of earth," said Barker. "It's the fact of the physical proximity that makes this thing special. But because we're still in the process of building it and dreaming together what it's going to be, the difficult work of building relationships happens exactly in that crucible, exactly in these complicated decisions about parking lots and drainage and bathrooms."

Another reason Tri-Faith has gotten this far is the strong personal relationships that developed between the people involved with the effort. Earlier this year, Rev. Medina and Rabbi Azriel threw a baby shower for one of their Muslim board members, Nuzhat Mahmood.

"That's what we do. That's what makes this so radically different; we're friends with each other. I was holding Nuzhat's baby the day after he was born,"

said Medina. "If I have a pastoral challenge, I have no issue calling Rabbi. We trust each other at that level."

Rev. Anderson agreed. "We've been able to build up a level of trust so that we can share things openly," said Anderson. "It's not just 'Muslims' and 'Jews,' but people you care about. We are at that point."

"They are people of such good will, it's never been a problem getting people to come to consensus," said Nancy Kirk, whose work often includes mediating discussions between architects, fundraisers, and the 15 board members themselves—including four from each faith group—who meet monthly.

While the relationships transcend religion, the participants also believe that interfaith relationships make them better believers.

"I'm a better Christian for being involved in this. The people in these faith communities are eager to learn about other faiths. But they also realize they have to understand their own faith to be able to explain it to people," said Anderson.

Rev. Barker emphasized the theological aspect. "A thrust of the teaching of Jesus is to love your enemy, pray for those who persecute you. I really believe Christians are called into relationships particularly with people that they might have prejudices toward or have profound disagreements with….As I've matured in my own faith I also have felt more drawn to the challenge of trying to be in a real relationship with people who would be easy to demonize."

Tri-Faith board member Karim Khayati added, "This project exposed me to aspects I did not know about my religion. We talk about tolerance, and Islam goes a lot more beyond that word. It's about a lot more than just acceptance of others."

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> — Rt. Rev. Scott Barker, Bishop of Nebraska's Episcopal Diocese and Tri-Faith board member

Meanwhile, Rabbi Azriel thinks the Tri-Faith project is ready for new challenges, like exploring controversial texts from one another's scriptures. Consider the Old Testament story in Genesis of Abraham, his Hebrew wife Sarah, and her Egyptian slave girl Hagar. After failing to conceive a child, Sarah allows Abraham to procreate with Hagar, who gives birth to Ishmael. Sarah grows to hate Hagar and after conceiving her own son, Isaac, commands Abraham to expel Hagar and Ishmael, who she sees as a threat to Isaac, from their tribe and into the desert. The Old Testament considers Abraham, Sarah, and Isaac to be the ancestors of Israel and the Jews, while the Quran considers Abraham, Hagar, and Ishmael to be the ancestors of the Arabs, including Islam's founder Prophet Muhammad.

"You can't deal with Muslims and Christians without dealing with the narrative of that story. What do Jewish scholars say about the betrayal of Hagar by Abraham?" asked Azriel. "We may never know the answer, but the issue is that we have to start moving. Every religion has a responsibility to talk about these issues. And if we can move on as a group, that's even better."

Azriel believes it can be done. "I have great hopes. This can be a great place for pilgrims to visit, and to see what we've done here, to be inspired, and take that inspiration back to where they came from."

Omar Sacribey is a Boston-based freelance journalist specializing in religion. Omar's writing has appeared in numerous publications including *Religion News Service*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Washington Post* and the *Huffington Post*. While an Alicia Patterson Foundation Journalism Fellow, he focused his research and writing on Muslims in North America. Before becoming a journalist, Omar was an advisor with the Bosnian Foreign Ministry, serving at the United Nations in New York, in Sarajevo and in The Hague. He has masters degrees from Harvard's Kennedy School of Government and the Columbia University School of Journalism. Omar also writes regularly about business, foreign affairs, politics, and food.

Matt Miller is an award-winning staff photographer for the *Omaha World Herald* newspaper. Previously, he was a staff photographer at newspapers in Minnesota, Kansas, Idaho, and Texas. He has chronicled the life of a young boxer, daily life along northern Nebraska's Highway 20, and a community-rebuilding effort in post-earthquake Haiti. A native of South Dakota, Matt graduated with a degree in journalism from the University of Nebraska. Matt became a journalist, he says, "to meet people you wouldn't get to meet, ask questions that aren't socially acceptable to ask of strangers, and see different parts of the world."

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