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### **PROJECT INTERFAITH: The benefits of dialogue**

Project Interfaith, an Omaha-based organization, is doing thoughtful work in encouraging Omahans to promote religious diversity. That goal can benefit the entire metropolitan area. The fellowship and exchange of information across religious lines can make Omaha an especially welcoming place — a prerequisite for an ambitious regional city in the 21st century. And far from encouraging people to dilute their own religious beliefs, the dialogue is explicitly intended to help deepen people's spiritual understanding of their particular faith tradition.

The nonprofit organization, founded and run by Beth Katz, began in 2005 as an affiliate of the local Anti-Defamation League. Now an independent entity, it educates using workshops, a speakers' bureau, art exhibits and architectural tours. Representatives from a wide variety of faith traditions serve on the organization's board. A good example of the group's efforts can be found in its diversity workshop for professional caregivers, including people employed in nursing homes, home health care, hospitals and similar settings. The event illustrated how such dialogue can yield eminently practical benefits: Understanding the religious beliefs of different patients can help these professionals provide an improved quality of care for patients. For instance, different religions have differing dietary rules and worship practices. And Christian, Islamic, Jewish, Hindu and Buddhist traditions and others may define such common terms as "prayer" and even "religious diversity" quite differently. Understanding such considerations can help health professionals in treating Somali and Sudanese immigrants, for example. Project Interfaith, which also works with educators, will hold its next diversity workshop in May. The organization also holds less intensive, shorter diversity workshops for smaller groups.

This interfaith endeavor is making a major contribution to the awareness that can make Omaha stronger city well-positioned to prosper as a forward thinking community.