

Teaching respect for other faiths is vital, says Grawemeyer winner

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – Teaching young people how to appreciate and engage in religious diversity is critical to achieving peace and security in the world, says the winner of the 2010 Louisville Grawemeyer Award in Religion.

Eboo Patel, founder and executive director of Interfaith Youth Core, won the prize for his 2007 autobiography, “Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation.” He was selected from among 67 nominations worldwide.

Patel’s organization, based in Chicago, encourages young people of different religions to perform community service, explore common values and build bridges among diverse faiths. The organization is now active on about 75 college campuses.

“Religious extremists all over the world are harnessing adolescent angst for their own ends,” said Susan Garrett, a religion professor who directs the award. “Patel urges us to take advantage of the short window of time in a young person’s life to teach the universal values of cooperation, compassion and mercy.”

Patel was born in India to a Muslim family and immigrated to Chicago as a child. As a teenager, he struggled with what he saw as a lack of religious pluralism in America. His experiences prompted him to launch a movement to build interfaith cooperation by inspiring college students to champion the cause.

He formed Interfaith Youth Core in 1998.

A Rhodes Scholar, he is now a member of President Obama’s Advisory Council on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships and the Religious Advisory Committee of the Council on Foreign Relations. In October, U.S. News & World Report named him one of America’s Best Leaders in 2009.

Five Grawemeyer Awards are presented annually for outstanding works in music composition, world order, psychology, education and religion. The University of Louisville and Louisville Presbyterian Seminary jointly award the religion prize.

For more details or to download Patel’s photo, see www.grawemeyer.org

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