

**WTE column of April 11, 2015. Editor's headline: "Finding faith after tragedy." CST of same date: "Exploring faith-based systems of thinking."**

When life hands us a lemon we're supposed to make lemonade. Sometimes, however, that's all but impossible; various exigencies conspire against it. I'll mention two.

First, as the poet says, "We live, as we die, alone." Existential aloneness can make us despair of life. While we may carry on in quiet desperation, some few individuals opt for all-out destruction, often at enormous cost to society. Such was the case with German Airwings pilot Andreas Lubitz who crashed his plane into the Alps, killing all 150 passengers aboard, just so he could put an end to his life. From the plane's voice recorder emanate the screams of passengers realizing they're on a kamikaze course to horrible suffering and dying. Add to that calamity the recent terrorist attack on a Kenyan university that murdered almost as many people as the airline pilot did, and despair deepens as we face these degrading, seemingly senseless acts of violence.

Second, notwithstanding a fundamental aloneness (which shouldn't be confused with loneliness, though it may give rise to the latter), we are involved, sometimes intensely so, with family members, co-workers, and fellow adherents in a faith community. There, we stumble into conflicting systems of thinking and competing loyalties that can render any of us vulnerable like Mr. Lubitz. Can we accept possible rejection by a community of like-minded individuals? We may decide we'd rather live with divided loyalties. When you've been affected, as I have, by a family member's suicide, it's a double whammy. Personal decisions may be based on religious doctrines we fail to recognize as systems of thinking that can, and should, be given critical thought.

The Cheyenne Interfaith Council (CIC) offers annual seminars allowing attendees to explore some of the faith-based systems of thinking that exist in Wyoming. Supported by Laramie County Library in Cheyenne, the venues usually span a month of once-a-week meetings with discussions.

CIC strives to be not just ecumenical but truly interfaith. Its directory of

member organizations includes the Wyoming Association of Churches; the interfaith civil rights organization NAACP of Cheyenne; Davis Hospice; the Mt. Sinai Synagogue, Comea House; Interfaith Family Support Services; a Buddhist meditation group; the Islamic Center of Cheyenne, Catholic Charities with the Archdiocese in Denver; the VA Medical Center's Veterans of All Faiths; the Cheyenne Regional Center's Pastoral Care Department, and many others.

This year's CIC library offerings promise to be especially thought-provoking and fruitful, for they feature all-women panels, presenters, and analysts. "Women in Different Faith Traditions" is slated to begin April 8 at 7 PM in the Cottonwood Room of the above-mentioned library, to continue on consecutive Wednesdays through April 29.

The Reverend Audette Fulbright has been an enthusiastic supporter of the library presentations. She is happy to report that Tanya Salih and her mother Fatima Taha, along with Huda Hussein, will present the April 8 venue on Islam. "Practicing Muslim Women" discuss prominent women in Islam, issues of hijab, the economic and legal status of Muslim women, and what it means to be a practicing American Muslim.

Phyllis Bloomberg and Heather McCloud of the Mt Sinai Congregation tackle the April 15 presentation on Judaism. As the religious cradle of Western civilization, Judaism has seen dynamic changes in women's roles, "from a nomadic desert tribe through the Jews' dispersal across the world to modern-day Cheyenne, Wyoming."

The venue of April 22 covers two faith-based systems, Unitarian Universalist and Latter-Day Saints. The former will be the Reverend Fulbright's subject matter while the latter comprises discussions between Sara Burlingame and Lara Machin Caren. Traditional Christianity will get its say on April 29 via Sister Ruth Ann and the Reverend Sandi Dillon, pastor of Grace United Methodist Church.

"Our talk will focus on our friendship, which developed when we both became members of Ordained Women, an activist group that seeks ordination of women in the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints," says Sarah Burlingame.

Ruth Ann Hehn became a Sister of Charity 54 years ago, "right after high school," she says. For the first 25 years of her ministry, she worked as a teacher. Then, in 1990, she became site manager of Holy Trinity Manor, which provides low-income housing for the elderly and disabled. Sister Ruth Ann resides in Holy Trinity Convent which, in rotation with nine other

churches, offers housing and meals for homeless families. The aim is to assist families trying to get back on their feet, find housing, and help re-integrate everyone into society.

Sister Ruth Ann is aided in her work by the Reverend Sandy Dillon, whose church provides a daycare center for the homeless.

These upcoming seminars are sure to help us recognize and give critical thought to the faith-based thinking that informs our daily decision-making. Kudos to Laramie County Library for hosting the series.