

## McGOVERN NEWSLETTER

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**Dr. Joel Allen**

Director of the  
McGovern Center

### Dear Friends of the McGovern Center,

Spring has been buzzing at the McGovern Center! We've leaned into some big conversations—tackling topics like immigration, deportation, and amnesty—with the hope of building bridges, not walls. Through lively Braver Angels-style debates and thoughtful panel discussions, we've created space for dialogue that's honest, respectful, and—dare we say—hopeful.

Our mission this season? More hope. More listening. More trust. Less noise. Less polarization. Simple goals, but powerful ones. And as always, we're here for the long haul, working toward a future where social capital flourishes and tough conversations make us stronger.

Below, you'll find highlights featured in DWU's campus newsletter, *The Difference*. You might notice we've switched from “we” to “they”—just a sign that the McGovern spirit is spreading far and wide.

Thanks for being part of this journey.

With gratitude,

**Joel Allen**

*Director, The McGovern Center*

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## Augustana Students, Legislator Visit McGovern Center

Dr. Joel Allen, director of the McGovern Center, recently hosted a museum tour for a group of Augustana University student Democrats and their advisor, Sen. Reynold Nesiba. Said Dr. Allen, "We had fun tag-teaming each other as Sen. Nesiba had a much greater bank of personal experience with George McGovern than I, so we each filled in a different set of details."

The group spent about an hour in the museum, then spent some time learning about The Saint John's Bible.



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## **"Courageous Conversation" Events Spark Lively Discussion**

"Courageous Conversation" events attract interest recently the McGovern Center at DWU sponsored two "Courageous Conversations" events centered on Immigration & Amnesty. The events were held March 17 at Asbury United Methodist Church in Sioux Falls, where approximately 80 people attended, and on March 24 at DWU with about 50 in the audience.

Using the Braver Angels debate style, participants were encouraged to speak on the resolution: ""The United States should implement comprehensive immigration reform that includes a pathway to citizenship for undocumented immigrants who meet certain criteria, including residency duration and lack of serious criminal activity."

Speakers and moderators included DWU soccer coach John Hakari, a former immigration attorney, and international student Rachel Kernoghan who compared her perspective of tension in the U.S. versus the European perspective. Communication students from Dr. Krista Belanger's classes also participated. Cari Skoglund Eastham, who has written two books on immigration, also provided a depth of rich insight and nuance to the event.

The third in a series of events providing for presentations and conversations around immigration and deportation was held Monday, April 7. The McGovern Center sponsored the event, a panel discussion featuring several regional representatives involved in these complex issues.

Panel members included former immigration attorney John Hakari, Community Relations Director for US Immigration and Customs Enforcement Mary Hogan, South Dakota Voices for Peace/Voices for Justice CEO Taneeza Islam and Ben Ready, Southeast Regional Director for Senator John Thune.

A crowd of 55 attended to hear some passionate opening speeches. While the tone became a bit strained at time, McGovern Center director Joel Allen said it was overall a very meaningful and worthwhile dialog. Several attending stayed around afterwards for well over a half hour and everyone left with something positive to say about the event and the value in having these conversations.





*"Courageous Conversation" discussion held on March 17th at Asbury United Methodist Church.*



*Panel members at the third series discussion on April 7th.*



*Approximately 80 audience members were present at the discussion in Sioux Falls.*



*Around 50 individuals joined the "Courageous Conversation" discussion at DWU on March 24th.*

## Stories of New Americans at Dakota Wesleyan University

On April 14, the McGovern Center hosted a moving and inspiring event featuring the powerful stories of three individuals who have recently gained American citizenship or permanent legal residency. The evening provided a meaningful glimpse into the diverse and arduous paths that bring people to the United States.

Our speakers included Nico Reinhard from Germany, Esther Garcia from Mexico, and Alex Barahona Ayala from El Salvador. Each shared a personal journey shaped by their unique backgrounds and circumstances.

Nico originally came to the U.S. to play soccer, but his story took a new turn as he transitioned into coaching and eventually made the U.S. his home through marriage. He and his wife recently welcomed a new little one into the world named Leo.

Esther was born in the U.S. to parents who were undocumented at the time. Thanks to a policy in place then that allowed families to pay a fine to access a legal pathway, her parents were eventually able to become permanent residents and later citizens.

Alex fled El Salvador after facing pressure from gangs to join their ranks. After 12 years in the U.S. and marrying an American citizen, he now holds permanent legal status. He spoke with emotion about the dignity he felt when applying for a driver's license and being treated with respect. He also described the peace of mind he now feels when passing a police officer, a moment that once filled him with fear. Today, he and his wife Tessa are raising three young children together.

It was a heartwarming and eye-opening evening that reminded us of the resilience, hope, and humanity behind immigration stories that often go untold.



## A More Perfect Fellowship



Published by the McGovern Center

## Check out the latest episode of our podcast, **A More Perfect Fellowship!**

In this latest episode, I interviewed David Brubaker, author of an excellent new book by Fortress Press called, *When the Center Does Not Hold: Leading in an Age of Polarization*. This book provides practical direction and wisdom for churches and associations dealing with extremism and internal tension.

[\*\*A More Perfect Fellowship Podcast Link\*\*](#)

**A More Perfect Fellowship** is a podcast that explores the crossroads of faith, patriotism, democracy and difficult conversations. In an era when churches have too often become polarizing forces of extremism, this podcast challenges and resources church leaders to serve communities for civic renewal. Host Joel Allen examines how worshiping communities can overcome incivility and build social capital that underlies democratic norms.

The McGovern Center, housed at Dakota Wesleyan University, works to extend the legacy of George and Eleanor McGovern, its most prominent alumni.

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As always, we ask that you help support programs and events like those listed. Please consider making a donation to the McGovern Center [here](#).

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