

Interfaith News



Feb/Mar/Apr 2010

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Mission: We are growing a sustainable, pervasive culture of knowledge, respect, appreciation, and trust amongst people of all faiths.

Eboo Patel, Interfaith Youth Leader, Keynotes Festival of Faiths

Author and inspirational speaker Eboo Patel spoke on the evening of November 10th at Congregation Beth Shalom, KCMO. Named one of America's "Best Leaders" by U.S. News and World Report, he founded and directs Chicago's Interfaith Youth Core, which brings youth from diverse traditions together to dialogue, understand each others' beliefs, dispel stereotypes, serve the community, and bond in fellowship.



It is a model for similar organizations in cities and universities across the country and around the world, and maintains a website of networking ideas and conference updates: www.ifyc.org. Patel serves on President Obama's Advisory Council of Faith Based Initiatives, on numerous boards and foundations, and is a frequent voice on National Public Radio. He holds a doctorate in the sociology of religion from Oxford. His latest book is *Acts of Faith: The Story of an American Muslim, the Struggle for the Soul of a Generation*.

Patel stated that in America, religion matters because it is the most religiously diverse country in the world. Up to ninety percent of the population says they believe in God, and about half of those attend worship services.

Patel pointed out that in our media dominated society often whoever has the loudest voice is able to establish community and national attitudes. For example, in Jersey City, a public comment following a committed crime, stating, "This looks like something Muslims would do," set off subsequent acts of violence against Muslims, which tore the city apart. It created a segment of people who look like the enemy, when no Muslims had been involved. He offered another example: Harvard scholar Sam Huntington's statement of an earlier era, "The Muslims are coming; sharpen your swords," has become a mantra for anti-Islamic extremists. Pluralism and extremism can create or destroy brotherhood. If religions are not bonding, then they are dividing. Leaders make things happen. They have the power to define perceived reality—to carry the vision. We don't learn what we need to know about religions on the evening news. Each community must ask, "How good are our interfaith leaders?"

Patel's talk, given the same week as the Ft. Hood murders, prompted him to say that the man who committed the murders at Ft. Hood was not a Muslim, he was a murderer. Just because one says he is of a particular faith doesn't mean he is. We shouldn't let murderers teach us about religion. Unfortunately, most people learned about Islam from the 9/11 disaster.

Every religion in its purest form has an element of pluralism, and it is incumbent on every believer to discover this all-embracing element of his/her own faith. Understanding this negates the desire or need to try to convert others. Love is the supreme unifying factor. Patel stated, "I am a Muslim, and do not believe that Jesus is God, despite the many attempts of Christians to persuade me." Mohammed recited the Qur'an to a Christian monk, who was the first person to recognize him as a prophet of God.

Among other notable points, he said that America's founding fathers had a vision of interfaith cooperation, which they protected in their documents of nationhood. Patel asserted that if your religion is not teaching pluralism, it needs to return to its roots in order to prepare its adherents, especially its youth, to function in their world. Religious literacy needs to be a part of school curriculum. Every religion needs its heroes, those willing to be spokesmen and public examples of the faith. We must all ask ourselves, "What am I doing that is worthy of the label, Muslim, Christian, Jew, Hindu, Buddhist, etc?" Reported by Pam Peck

Sister Joan Chittister Inspires Audience to Evolve Spiritually

Speaking to a packed house at Country Club Christian Church on November 7, Joan Chittister, a Benedictine nun and author of over forty books, a number of them best-sellers, encouraged listeners, in their quest for spiritual maturity, to challenge religious concepts, institutions and old hierarchies that don't resonate with their spiritual intuitions. She observed that God created us, and then manipulators of God created a God in man's image, a "dust" God that is unattainably remote, wrathful, indifferent, childish, magical, judgmental, ritualistic, self-loving, partial, unjust, limited, chauvinistic, nationalistic (on our side), a tease, punishing humans for being human, a puppeteer, a cloud-sitter, a theological Santa Claus, a mighty male potentate, a God of guilt

and rigidity, keeping a check-list of dos and don'ts, not a God big enough to really believe in. In her opinion, this God is bogus -- does not exist.

She believes that the kind of God we embrace is foundational in shaping our character and determining the way we treat and minister to others. She abandoned the old God and recounted her years of doubt and void, searching for The God They Never Told Me About, which is the title of her newest book. This was not the God she once thought she knew, but her own private God of pure spirit and light, of fullness of life and hope, which was looking for her and each one of us and is found within, a God she already had and could believe in, though unseen, a nurturing mother-God, the I AM, which would not test Job. We are all a part of this God of ongoing creation who companions with us -- a God of the past, present and the future.

As she became more global in her thinking, Chittister opened up to a free flow of ideas, no longer accepting that four-fifths of the world's

people were godless. She welcomed Vatican II, accepting whatever is true in every faith and recognizing that all life is sacred. In a male-human-centered world she embraced feminism and a genderless God. She believes that the God she discovered within is also the God of the universe. Once she made the discovery, she began to find allusions to this God in the most enlightened ancient and contemporary writings of her own church.

Reported by Pam Peck



Festival of Faiths at The Writers Place

The Writers Place partnered with the Festival of Faiths to host *Voicing the Spiritual Self: The Interfaith Language of Doubt and Belief* on November 19, 2009. It was a vibrant evening featuring a number of creative writers and musicians, each sharing portions of their spiritual journey through their art. About 65 people gathered to hear the music of Stumbling Deer and the voice of Bukeka Shoals. The inspiring poetry and prose of Caryn-Miriam Goldberg, Natasha El-Scari, Karta Purkh S Khalsa (Sikh GKCIC representative), Diane Glancy and Xanath Caraza moved the audience. Lewis Diuguid of the Kansas City Star emceed the event.

Some of the comments from the audience: "The different voices and different beliefs! It was a wonderful and enlightening evening." Alejandro Siqueiros.

"This Festival of Faith event was a literary tsunami ... Each presenter added to the complexity of the spiritual expressions. ... The audience response was acceptance, respect and celebration ..." Jan Winston

"The evening got better and better as we moved from one poet to another ... It was a wonderful learning experience with very talented and creative people." Rusty Fleischer

"Thank you so much for having a reading (by) different faiths. It was very moving. I wish there were more events like it." Diane Glancy

"It was so good to hear such an inspiring spectrum from individuals with varying backgrounds. The music was beautiful as well. Thanks to all who made the event possible." Dianna Dryer

Deborah Shouse, Maril Crabtree, Linda Rodriguez, Jane Wood and Mahnaz Shabbir organized the evening on behalf of The Writers Place collaborating with the Festival of Faiths team, Priscilla Wilson, Sheila Sonnenschein, Donna Ziegenhorn, Marilyn Brewster and Meridee Jordan.



Bukeka Shoals offered a pair of her personal compositions, set to music and elicited powerful reactions from the audience of joy and revelation

Annual Interfaith Dinner Celebrates 25 Years

Dinner to continue in tradition of interfaith cooperation.

The 2009 Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving dinner was held on Sunday, November 22, at the Universal Academy Islamic School in south Kansas City, Missouri. Honorees this year were Cynthia Siebert, founder of the Friends of Chamber Music and Susan Cook who brought the NAIN (North American Interfaith Network) conference to KC this year. CRES headed by Rev. Vern Barnet has hosted this event for 25 years but is now ready to turn it over to the Heartland Chapter of the Alliance of Divine Love. Rev. Mary Gibson McCoy of the Alliance announced that the Heartland Chapter-ADL would be the "point organization" in an interfaith consortium to present future Thanksgiving Sunday dinners, beginning in 2010. Thus, continuation of this tradition in a truly interfaith fashion is ensured.

Rev. Barnet says: "I am grateful to the Islamic School for hosting this year's observance, and to all the other institutions around the metro area who have hosted these 25 years. The good

will of the dinner participants is always an inspiration. With my retirement from leading this dinner, I regret that CRES will no longer have the Thanksgiving opportunity to honor folks in the arts, in politics, in civic life, and in religious leadership, whose service to us all enhances our sense of the sacred. Many in the room Nov. 22, and others, deserve such recognition. That others will carry forward this Thanksgiving Sunday tradition and adapt it to changing circumstances indicates the promise of Kansas City to become ever more fully engaged and deepened by the many faiths of our neighbors."

Any organization or individual who is interested in joining the interfaith consortium to host the 2010 Thanksgiving Sunday Interfaith Dinner should contact Rev. Dr. Kara Hawkins at karahawk@kc.rr.com or Rev Mary Gibson McCoy at mccoy3605@hotmail.com or leave a message with contact information at 816-737-5979.



MLKing Holiday Interfaith Service

Kansas City's annual interfaith service honoring Dr. Martin Luther King took place on Sunday, Jan 10, at the Community Christian Church. It was sponsored by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference of Greater Kansas City and the Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Community. In addition to the beautiful and inspiring music, members of the GKCIC participated by reading from his oration at the Holt Street Baptist Church in Montgomery, AL in 1955, which launched the boycott of the city's segregated bus system.

State Representative Sara Lampe of Springfield MO, was presented with the 2010 Evelyn Wasserstrom Award for her effort against a Neo-Nazi group, the national Socialist Movement's attempts to gain notoriety in her district by cleaning a stretch of state highway.



She countered by having the same stretch of highway renamed for Eli Weisenthal, famed Nazi hunter.

Speaker for the service was the Rev. Zan W. Holmes, Jr., Pastor Emeritus of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church in Dallas TX.

Table of Faiths November 12, 2009



Elizabeth Alex, news anchor on the NBC affiliate station KSHB, once again did a good humored and graceful job as Master of Ceremonies for the luncheon.



The Interfaith Youth Choir directed by Linda Chubbuck performed "We are the Ones" and "You are the Face of Love" to a very appreciative audience. At the right is the glass urn filled with multicolored sands by council members as they offered prayers for youth.



The Baha'i Faith booth also attracted many curious attendees



Questions were the order of the day at many of the Council's booths



Accepting the Table of Faiths Award for All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church was the church's Board President, Terry Cushman, left. He is congratulated by GKCIC Convener Bob Bacic.

Table of Faiths November 12, 2009



Stumbling Deer (American Indian Spirituality) provided music before the luncheon



Audience members enthusiastically participated in the Youth Choir's final song, "The Face of God" not only singing but joining in the American Sign Language gestures. This particular sign means "In my heart."



Bill Tammeus, Kansas City Star columnist, and Prairie Village Mayor Peggy Dunn were two of the three Honorary Co Chairs for this year's Table of Faiths luncheon.



Luncheon Co Chair Alissa Wehmueller and Council member Caroline Baughman (Pagan) shared a brief moment during a busy few hours at Table of Faiths.



Ahmed El-Sherif is congratulated on his 2009 Steve Jeffers Interfaith Leadership Award by former Mayor Pro Tem Alvin Brooks. Alvin was a Table of Faiths awardee in 2007 and an Honorary Co-Chair for the 2009 event

Lama Chuck Named Hero of Humanity

Lama Chuck Stanford, Buddhist representative on the GKCIC, was awarded a Heroes of Humanity Award by the Art of Living Foundation. The award was presented at Kansas City's Heroes of Humanity event at the Matt Ross Community Center on Friday, Nov 6th 2009. This event was part of a national event commemorating the organization's 27th year of providing charitable and educational services around the world furthering the mission of creating a "stress-free, violence-free America".

The Heroes of Humanity recognizes leaders in every community who have demonstrated a strong commitment to improving the lives of others through their dedication and service to humanity. Lama Chuck was recognized for his work with organizations like the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, bringing greater



Left to Right: Sunil Prabhu, President of the Art of Living Foundation, Lama Chuck, and Arvind Khetia

harmony in Kansas City and for his inspiring work at Rime Buddhist Center which embodies the essence of human values.

The Art of Living Foundation and its sister organization, International Association for Human Values (IAHV), is represented in

more than 150 countries, making it amongst the largest of the United Nations' accredited organizations in the world. The programs and service activities have benefited more than 25 million people across the globe from all walks of life including victims of 9/11, Kosovo, Afghanistan, the Asian Tsunami and Hurricane Katrina.

Let The Children Play For Peace

Let The Children Play For Peace is an innovative program aimed at infusing a new sense of peace as a possibility in the Middle East. by focusing on the most important members of the region's population, the children. The program, begun by two men from opposite sides of the Gaza-Israel border, attempts to restore hope to the youngest by giving them back a childhood they have been deprived of by war and conflict. LCPP, with donations from the public has taken on the mission "to help replace the images of violence that children on both sides of the conflict see, with ones of joy, by providing play items." The work of the children is to play, not to have to survive a long-standing conflict between peoples.

Ahmed El-Sheriff, Muslim, right (and winner of this year's Steve Jeffers Interfaith Leadership Award presented by the GKCIC at the Table

6 - Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council



of Faiths Luncheon) and Sam Nachum, left, from Israel are working on this project with the help of Heart to Hear International's Dr Gary Morsch, center.

The program was inaugurated here in Kansas City with a walk (in the rain) from Union Station to the Rime Center; a luncheon at the Rime Center (Food was supplied by Holy Land Cafe in Lenexa, KS) on Oct 22, and by

a Candlelight Vigil at the Sister Cities Bridge on the Country Club Plaza that same evening. There will also be a KC Interfaith Youth Alliance peace walk on May 2, 2010 that will visit a synagogue, a mosque and a church in Johnson County. Heart to Heart International is also assisting the LCPP program.

Donations are being collected. For more information you may contact www.letthechildrenplayforpeace.org.

GKCIC Observes Int'l Human Rights Day

On a wintry evening Members of the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council gathered with participants from the community in Loose Park's Rose Room to honor and remember the enactment of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights by the General Assembly of the United Nations some 40 years ago on Dec 10, 1948.

The event placed special attention on Article 18 of the declaration which emphasized freedom of religion as well as "thought (and) conscience..." The Hon. Alvin Brooks offered remarks and read movingly from a children's book entitled "Freddy the Leaf." His point, of course, being that like each leaf on a tree, we are different but we all stem from one source, the tree. There were also displays by a number of faith groups chronicling the difficulties some religions face around the world.



World Peace Meditation

The 24th annual World Peace Meditation program was held at the Rime Center on December 31, beginning at 5:30 a.m. Faith members of the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council offered prayers for peace. The meditation was coordinated worldwide with participants silently focusing (meditating) on the attainment of world peace.

An important part of the event was the presentation of the annual Bodhisattva Award to Dr. Gary Morsch. In 1992, Dr. Morsch helped to found Heart to Heart International, which works to improve global health through humanitarian initiatives that connect medical people and their resources with those in need. Volunteers work in more than 60 countries around the world every year. He spoke of his work worldwide but also said that much of it would not be possible had he not lived in such a warm, welcoming and compassionate community as Kansas City.

The keynote speaker was Alvin Brooks and greetings were also given by the Honorable Dr. Charles B. Wheeler, former Missouri State Senator and Mayor of Kansas City. Music was provided by (cont.)

(cont.) Raja Govindarajan, and Queen Mother Maxine McFarlane, who engaged the audience in song. The program concluded with Sufi dancing by all present.

GKCIC Offers Three Book Clubs in 2010

The Council is attempting to meet the varied needs of interfaith readers by offering choices:

Interfaith "101" is a core club selecting non-fiction books that teach the basics of global faiths, provide overviews of a number of faiths, or compare faiths. Books are recommended by members of the various faiths. It will meet every other month in 2010, from 7 to 8:30 p.m. on the last Tuesday of the month, starting, February 23, at the Plaza branch of the KCMO library in the large meeting hall. The first book selection is *God is Red: A Native View of Religion*, by Lane Deloria, Jr. It is an introduction to Native American Spirituality.

Interfaith "Lite" covers fiction, light non-fiction, biographies, and poetry. It meets on the last Tuesday of every other month in 2010, from 7 to 8:30, starting January 26, at the Plaza branch of the KCMO library in the large meeting hall. The first selection is *Welcome to the Wisdom of the World and Its Meaning for You*, by Sister Joan Chittister.

Sacred Texts is a more in depth look at one faith per year, reading selected portions of the original texts of the primary global faiths, guided by members of that tradition. In 2010 it will focus on the *Bhagavad-Gita* of the Hindu faith, Swami Nikhilananda translation (available through the Hindu Temple), and will meet at 6:30 every other month on the third Tuesday, starting in January 19, at the Hindu Temple, 6330 Lackman Rd. in Shawnee, KS.

For more information and book selections, see our website: www.kcinterfaith.org. To sign up, email Pam Peck, ppeck99@hotmail.com.

Interfaith Youth Alliance Helps at Harvesters Food Bank



The GKCIC Interfaith Youth Alliance spent a cold and rainy Sunday afternoon working at the Harvesters Food Bank, 3801 Topping, Kansas City MO with other youth groups sorting, consolidating and bagging food prod-

ucts that were distributed over the Thanksgiving holiday. The group picture shows what can be done with a really large box of granola (now empty) when many hands join in to share the work. Students distributed the cereal into some 800 individual plastic bags.

Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council
P.O. Box 415
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CALENDAR OF OBSERVANCES

FEBRUARY

Feb. 2: Paganism: Imbolc.

Feb. 7: Baha'i Faith: Feast of Mulk (Dominion).

Feb. 12: Hinduism and Vedanta: Siva Ratri Night worship devoted to Siva.

Feb. 15: Buddhism: Buddha's Paranirvana (Death) in a state of meditation. Attained final nirvana, a release from cycle of birth and death.

Feb. 16: Vedanta: Birth Anniversary of Ramakrishna (1836-1886) in West Bengal.

Feb 17: Christian-Roman Catholic: Ash Wednesday. The beginning of Lent, the 40-day period of spiritual preparation for Easter.

Feb. 26 – March 1: Baha'i Faith: Ayyam-i-Ha or Intercalary Days.

Feb. 28: Judaism: Purim (begins sundown of Feb 27).

MARCH

March 2: Baha'i Faith: Feast of 'Ala' (Loftiness).

March 2-20: Baha'i Faith: Last month in Baha'i calendar.

March 16: Hinduism: Ugadi – New Year in south Indian states of Karnataka and Andhra Pradesh.

March 20: Spring Equinox, Night and Day balanced

March 21: Paganism: Ostara.

March 21: Baha'i Faith: Naw-Ruz: New Year's Day beginning on the spring equinox.
Also: Feast of Baha (Splendor).

March 24: Hinduism: Ram Navami.

March 28: Christian-Roman Catholic: Palm Sunday.

March 29 sundown to April 6 sundown: Judaism: Pesach (Passover).

March 29: Mahavir Jayanti - Jain

APRIL

April 1: Christian-Roman Catholic: Holy Thursday.

April 2: Christian-Roman Catholic: Good Friday.

April 4: Christian-Roman Catholic: Easter Sunday.

April 6: Judaism: Passover ends at sundown.

April 8: Buddhism: Birth anniversary of Buddha.

April 9: Baha'i Faith: Feast of Jalal (Glory).

April 11: Judaism: Yom HaShoah. .

April 13: Hinduism: Baisakhi – New Year in north India, especially in the Punjab and Haryana.

April 14: Hinduism: Tamil New Year. Vishnu Malayalam New Year.

April 14: Baisakhi Day - Sikh - Birth of the Khalsa

April 18: Sikh - Birthday of Guru Angad (2nd Guru) and Guru Teg Bahadur (9th Guru)

April 21-May 2: Festival of Ridvan

April 28: Baha'i Faith: Feast of Jamal (Beauty).

April 30-May 1: Paganism: May Eve/May Day Beltane.

CALENDAR OF EVENTS

FEBRUARY

Feb. 4: KC Interfaith Youth Alliance (KCIYA) Leadership Council meeting. 4:00 to 5:30 p.m. Place TBA. Sheila, 913-402-8588.

Feb. 10: Vital Conversations. Uncle Tom's Cabin, by Harriet Beecher Stowe. 1:00 p.m., Antioch Branch, Mid-Continent Library, 6060 N. Chestnut.

Feb. 12: Buddhist Meditation Seminar, by B. Alan Wallace, 7:30 p.m. Rime Center, 700 W. Pennway.

Feb. 13: Buddhist Meditation Seminar, by B. Alan Wallace, 10:00 a.m. to Noon and 2:00-4:00 p.m. Rime Center, 700 W. Pennway.

Feb. 14: Buddhist Meditation Seminar: dharma talk by B. Alan Wallace, 10:30 a.m. Rime Center, 700 W. Pennway.

Feb. 23: National Council of Jewish Women interfaith luncheon. "Acting with Civility: May the God in Me Recognize the God in You." Jewish, American Indian, and Baha'i speakers. 11:30 to 1:30. Overland Park Marriott. \$30. 913-648-0747.

Feb. 28: Holi Celebration, 11:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., Hindu Temple and Cultural Center, 6330 Lackman Rd, Shawnee.

Feb. 28: Full Moon Meditation, 7 p.m., 3HO Ashram, 3525 Walnut, KC, MO 661 5337

MARCH

March 4: KC Interfaith Youth Alliance Hospitality House meeting and Leadership Council meeting, 4:30 to 6:00 p.m. Place TBA. Sheila, 913-402-8588.

March 10: Vital Conversations. This Common Secret: My Journey as an Abortion Doctor, by Susan Wicklund. 1:00 p.m., Antioch Branch, Mid-Continent Library, 6060 N. Chestnut.

March 11: Cultural Conversations: "Spring Holidays." Diverse panel will present meaning and history of spring holidays and holy days, including Equinox, Naw Ruz, Passover, and Easter. Plaza Library, 4801 Main, 7:00 to 8:30 p.m. culturalcrossroads@hotmail.com, 816-737-5979.

March 29: Full Moon Meditation, 7 p.m., 3HO Ashram, 3525 Walnut, KC, MO 661 5337.

APRIL

April 14: Vital Conversations. Wisdom Walk: Nine Practices for Creating Peace and Balance from the World's Spiritual Traditions, by Sage Bennet. 1:00 p.m., Antioch Branch, Mid-Continent Library, 6060 N. Chestnut.

April 25: Table Talk, sponsored by the GKCIC in partnership with Cultural Crossroads. 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. informal dinner and engaging conversation in homes around the metro area. Reservations Feb 20 to March 20. No charge. Contact Shannon Clark, at shannon@kcinterfaith.org or 913-548-2973 to sign up as a host, facilitator, or guest.

April 28: Full Moon Meditation, 7 p.m., 3HO Ashram, 3525 Walnut, KC, MO 661 5337.