



# Interfaith Community of Schenectady, Inc.

Feb 2013

Vol. 41, No. 5

**Goal:**  
Sharing together,  
One God —  
One Community

## Interfaith News

~ Celebrating Forty Years ~ 1971-2011 ~

### *February Dinner Meeting*

Tuesday, February 19, 2013

Dinner 6:30pm

Program 7:30pm

Bellevue Reformed Church

2000 Broadway, Schenectady, NY 12306

#### **“This is the Hindu Faith”**

Pandit Jai Mizir

Advanced studies students Raj Ishmael, Pandit Jai Prakash, and  
Darshine Ragubar

Dinner is \$12. Program only is free. If you require a vegetarian or kosher meal, please let us know when you make your reservation.

Reservations due to the IFC office, 370-2150 or [schdyinterfaith@yahoo.com](mailto:schdyinterfaith@yahoo.com),  
by February 15.

#### *Coming in March "No Matter What" Parenting*

BJ Rosenfeld, president of the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation, will give a humorous and insightful talk about parents confronted with children who opt for different religious paths from their upbringing.

Thursday, March 14; Dinner 6:30pm, Program 7:30pm

Dominican Retreat & Conference Center

1945 Union Street, Niskayuna, NY



## From your president...

### For Contemplation and Action as we move into Spring of the Year

I offer a lengthy quote from Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., from his work, ***Peace Thinking in a Warring World***, 1983, p. 97-98, for our contemplation as we move toward Spring within our faith traditions.

"We must not let presence at the altar be split apart from the experience of reconciliation. Most liturgies have in them a time when "the peace" is given and when members of the congregation may greet each other, saying, 'Peace be with you.' "This action makes the altar, or whatever equivalent of standing exposed before God is vital in a particular tradition, a very real aspect of peacemaking.

"It is no accident that some of the greatest interest in peace has come from those who, like Thomas Merton [and Abraham Heschel] have been vocationally committed to the contemplative life. The things that we do (and are done for us) in worship are crucial means of becoming prepared to make peace.

"In worship we focus attention on justice, mercy and the empowering grace of God, and thus are helped to see that these are realities beyond naked power and worldly intrigues. In worship we stand in humble awareness of the inadequacies of our resolves and the inherent limitations of our abilities to do the things we must, and thus are helped to see that not everything can depend upon how we push it around.

"In worship our attention is focused upon all the other human beings that are objects of God's care, and thus we are prepared to be reconciled to them. In worship we are given the blessing that is offered to those who will accept it in humility and trust, and thus are helped to face life with equanimity.

"When God is truly worshiped (in any of many moving and significant ways) persons are prepared to live in gratitude to God and in harmony with each other. The word "peace" (or Shalom, Salaam) is said very often in worship, and if the word "Amen" – which has connotations of the proper ordering and resting of things – is understood as an affirmation of peace, the count goes way up.

"Moreover as if to reinforce the reciprocity between the altar and peace, it is also the case that worship will be most meaningful to those who are engaged in the active search for peace. Hence, if the words at the altar have become mere formalisms (or the non-words in private meditation are empty), go and get involved in some reconciling action and peace-making and then come back and hear the words spoke in worship (or in the silent heart) with fresh and newly powerful meaning."

It is my conviction that at the heart of all major faiths, kept within their total context and full message, is the call to be at peace, to live in peace, and to express peace as the means of ushering peace into reality. I believe that this is true of sacred texts as well, which are our primary sources for the "way" of peace in creation.

Beyond this, though they are both some years old, I would offer the following two books as significant in opening the way to "expressing peace." If you have others, please share them and we can make them available to others as well.

***Love and Living***, Thomas Merton, Harcourt Brace, 1979.

***Peace Thinking in a Warring World: An Urgent Call for a New Approach to Peace***, Edward LeRoy Long, Jr., Westminster Press, 1983.

Shalom, Salaam, Santi, the Peace that passes all understanding. *Bob Long*



## From our Immediate Past-President

Dear Friends of Interfaith,

Belated greetings for the New Year. The harsh month of January did bring some warmth to the interfaith scene. The annual Martin Luther King celebration at First Methodist Church in downtown Schenectady had a great turnout in spite of the weather. Interfaith Story Circle's annual Winter Lights program at Temple Israel, Albany, again emphasized the importance of youth involvement in bringing those of all faiths together. The annual Week of Prayer for Christian Unity reminded us once again that divisions still exist and Jesus continues to call us to be "one in the Spirit".

Our last dinner/dialogue gathering at Congregation Agudat Achim, January 22<sup>nd</sup>, united us with members of Schenectady's Sikh community. In a mesmerizing and enlightened talk, Dr. Paul Uppal, executive secretary of the temple, gave us an in-depth understanding of the Sikh faith, its historical background and growth. Like the monotheistic religions, Sikhs (disciples) acknowledge God, called Truth, seek peace and harmony with all creation, equal rights for all and give service to the community.

We invite you and your friends to share in our forthcoming dialogue programs. On Tuesday, February 19<sup>th</sup> at Bellevue Reformed Church, Schenectady, Pandit Jai Mizir and Christine Knowles, who is on our Interfaith Board, will be talking about the Hindu faith.

In March, BJ Rosenfeld, president of the Community Relations Council of the Jewish Federation, will give a humorous and insightful talk about parents confronted with children who opt for different religious paths from their upbringing.

Remember, Interfaith is now accepting new and renewal memberships for 2013. Your support is so essential. Our thanks.

*Audrey Hughes*

## Lenten Study ~ Honest Prayer ~ A Down to Earth study on the Practice of Prayer

"If prayer is an attempt to discover -- to engage -- God, prayer must be an approach to life." So speaks Bishop John Shelby Spong, in his book, ***Honest Prayer***, one of the most helpful books on prayer that I know. He goes on to say, "The life of prayer is thus for me the responsibility to open myself in love to the transcendent in everyone I meet. It is to meet life with all that I have and all that I am." [p. 29]. In the preface to the book, Bishop Spong indicates that "my primary purpose here is simply to remove some road-blocks, some misapprehensions, some of those barriers to prayer that I believe plague the modern mind..."

If you have ever wondered about the power of prayer, its vitality in daily life, its place as the wellspring of faith, as I have, then I invite you to join others in a fellowship of searching focused around the book, ***Honest Prayer***. Bishop Spong examines the meaning and power of prayer, its impact on daily life, and how we might gain insight to this religious practice that has been with us since the dawn of humankind. All of this is placed within the setting of the prayer which Jesus taught.

Sessions be held in the Church Library beginning the third Monday of February [18] and run throughout and two weeks beyond Lent, ending on Monday, April 8. Sessions will be from 7:00 – 8:30 pm. Bob Long and Joe Waring will share leadership. As with other small groups that we facilitate, leadership will be asked of as many participants as wish, and dialogue and engagement will be a place for everyone to contribute.

Pastor Bob Long

## Financial report

The Interfaith Community of Schenectady was fortunate to end the 2012 fiscal year with income exceeding expenses by \$1421.64. At December 31, 2012, the checking balance was at \$2232.27. The Dorothy & Robert Ludwig savings account used for purchasing annual awards had a balance of \$955.94. The portion of the bequest from the Estate of Robert Ludwig that IFC has received has been invested in a Long-term Corporate Grade Bond Fund. This is an endowment fund that IFC can use the income from but cannot use any of the principal.

Gerry Pierce



## God Realization by Pandit Jai N. Mizir

Freedom can be achieved only through God-realization. Hinduism believes in God's presence everywhere and speaks of the existence of God in each human being. At any given point of time, God is equally present in all, not equally visible. The purpose of spiritual practice is to manifest this inborn divinity. When this divinity becomes fully visible, a person turns into a God-realized soul and attains freedom.

The divinity, the God within, forms the foundation of a person's existence. One can give up whatever comes from the outside not that which forms the base of one's being. Sooner or later, this true self or divinity must manifest itself. Eventually, everybody will achieve freedom. Highly developed souls may reach this in this life or after their death while undeveloped souls may need several more reincarnations. However, sincere spiritual practice can help one to accomplish this goal faster. Nevertheless, everybody is unconsciously moving towards this goal.

According to Hinduism, unlimited happiness is one of the main aspects of divinity. Even when a person pursues desire or wealth, he or she tries unconsciously to reach his or her divine *Self*, endless happiness. No matter how much pleasure or money an individual gets, he or she craves for more. The person cannot find happiness through them because the happiness he or she finds from such joy or money happens to be limited. Eventually, the individual realizes that searching for limitless happiness through such limited external means will lead him or her nowhere.

This awareness inspires one to turn around and consciously search for that fountain of endless happiness within one's self. When one arrives at this point of endless happiness, all one's wants and cravings disappear. One then experiences God, the all pervading divinity, within one's self and outside. One experiences God as the essence of everything and every being.

## Youth retreat Opportunity

The Albany District Ministry Team of the Upper New York Conference of the United Methodist Church is inviting youth, age 14 and up, to a four day retreat focusing on "Immigration and the Bible." The retreat will be held Thursday, February 21, through Sunday, February 24, at the First United Methodist Church, 603 State St., Schenectady.

Though the retreat is sponsored by the United Methodist Church it is created to be ecumenical and interfaith appropriate. We of all faiths relate with immigrants, and we all can function more helpfully with an increase in understanding of what is involved and how we can assist. The retreat will feature films, speakers, music and a engagement with a local immigrant assistance project.

The registration fee is \$20 per person and is due with your registration form. Congregations registering three or more youth need to provide an adult chaperone. The registration deadline is Feb. 12. A registration form is found below ... it may be reproduced if more copies are needed. .

Upon receipt of registration a confirmation and health form will be sent. Send Registration Form to: L. David Suits, 5 Willoughby Dr., Albany, NY 12205. For questions contact: Shirley Readdean at: whirly@earthlink.net.

A REGISTRATION (Registration Deadline February 12, 2013):

Name\_\_\_\_\_

Address\_\_\_\_\_

E-Mail Address\_\_\_\_\_

Emergency Contact Number\_\_\_\_\_

Congregation\_\_\_\_\_

Payment:\_\_\_\_\_ Check (Payable to "Youth Seminar") \_\_\_\_\_ Cash

## Phagwah or Holi ~ Its source and Value by Pandit Jai N. Mizir

Phagwah or Holi, the festival of colors, remains a popular [Hindu spring](#) festival. At this time, everybody splashes colored water or powder all over each other's faces and clothes. This reflects exactly what happens in nature with all the gorgeous flowers of different colors blossoming. By celebrating this event, we feel oneness with nature.

This splattering of color was also a well-known pastime in Lord Krishna's life. In [Vrindavan](#) and [Mathura](#), where he grew up, the people celebrate this festival for sixteen days in remembrance of the divine love of [Radha](#) for Lord Krishna. It is believed that he popularized the festival by playing mischief on the [gopis](#) or milk-maids. It is said that Lord Krishna complained to his mother about his dark skin complexion and Radha's energy that drives the world bright skin complexion. His mother decided to apply color to Radha's face which started in spring, the celebrated season of love.

One story describes the beginning of Holi as founded in honor of a female demon or Rakshasi called Dhundas which means "she who would destroy many."

Another version connects the observance with the well-known story of Hiranyakashipu, the golden dressed, and his son Prahlada. Lord [Brahma](#) granted a wish to [Hiranyakashipu](#), the king of demons, which made it almost impossible to kill him. He received this wish because of his long penance. Therefore, he demanded not to be killed "during day or night; inside the home or outside; not on earth or in the sky; neither by a man nor an animal; neither by astra nor by [shastra](#), weaponry." As a result, he grew proud and showed aggression to the heaven and earth. He commanded the people to pray to him instead of [gods](#).

However, Hiranyakashipu's own son, [Prahlada](#), worshipped Lord [Vishnu](#). In spite of terrorization from Hiranyakashipu, Prahlada continued to pray to Lord Vishnu. Given poison, it turned to nectar in his mouth. Trampled by elephants, he remained unharmed. Put in a room with hungry, poisonous snakes, he stayed alive. In all of Hiranyakashipu's efforts to kill his son, he failed. Finally, he ordered Prahlada to sit on a [pyre](#) on the lap of his sister, [Holika](#), who could not die by fire since the shawl would prevent fire from affecting the person wearing it. Prahlada willingly accepted his father's commands and prayed to Lord Vishnu to keep him safe. When the fire began, everyone watched in shock as the shawl flew from Holika, who was burnt to death, while Prahlada continued to live since the shawl changed position to cover him. The burning of Holika is celebrated as Holi. A large fire built outside for burning garbage, as part of a celebration, or as a signal is lit the day before, also known as *Holika Dahan*, burning of [Holika](#), or *Choti Holi*, little Holi. Each year, people light this fire in praise of Prahlada's miraculous escape.

Later, Lord Vishnu came in the form of [Narasimha](#), half-man and half-lion, and killed Hiranyakashipu at dusk, which was neither day nor night, on the steps of the porch of his house, which was neither inside the house nor outside, by restraining him on his lap, which was neither in the sky nor on the earth, and beating him with his claws, which were neither *astra* nor *shastra* or weapons,

Another story identifies Holi with the witch Pootna who attempted to destroy the infant Krishna under the commands of Kamsa by offering the child her poisoned nipples to suck. Another story explains the source of Holi about [Kamadeva](#), a god of love. When Kamadeva shot his weapon at [Lord Shiva](#) in order to disturb his penance and help [Parvati](#) to marry Lord Shiva, Lord Shiva opened his third eye, causing Kama's body to reduce to ashes. For the sake of Kama's wife [Rati](#) or passion, Lord Shiva restored him, but only as a mental picture, symbolizing the spiritual state of love rather than physical lust. The fire is supposed to be observed in memory of this event.

Finally, a story at Haradwar may bring us closer to the source of Holi. They say Holika or Holi was the sister of Sambat or Sanvat, the Hindu years. At the beginning, Sambat died and Holi or Holika in her extreme love for her brother insisted on being burnt on his pyre, and by her dedication, he was restored to life. For Holi, the fire is now burnt each year to remember this tragedy.

The stories connecting Holi may be later formation, but the fire represents the burning of the old year and the birth of the New Year which people pray may be more favorable to the families, cattle, and crops of the worshippers.

With all its fun, Holi like other festivals has its own spiritual worth because it builds love in God when correctly followed. Like other Hindu festivals, Holi detaches the person from material enjoyments to spiritual development and unites the great and the small, the rich and the poor, and equals. Holi teaches us to forget the hatred of others and start the New Year with love.

## Share your news with Interfaith Community...

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**Congratulations** to the First Reformed Church of Glenville which recently celebrated its 200<sup>th</sup> anniversary.

**Congratulations** to Rev. Arnetta Dix-Howard who recently took over leadership of Refreshing Spring COGIC

**Share Your News with Interfaith** Individuals, congregations and community groups are asked to share their news with Interfaith: notices and articles, awards, birthdates, special anniversaries, deaths, hospitalizations or illness. It is wonderful to share good, as well as sad, news – especially because it opens the way for the healing love among us to flow like refreshing streams.

## Received in January

**Individual membership renewals:** Barby & Stan Harris, Phyllis Boyd, Audrey Hughes, John VanLaak, Rev. Carl Urban, Constance Galloway, Alma Blohm, Miranda Rand, Janice & Philip Livingston.

**Institutional membership renewals:** Jewish Federation of Northeastern NY

Thank you for your support!

## Events of interest

**Story Circle at Proctors** is donating \$2 of every ticket sold to their March 3 Word Plays show "unforgettable" to the SICM Summer Lunch program. The Summer Lunch program serves over 35,000 free lunches to the children in Schenectady County each summer. Tickets are \$16 and performances are in The Gallery at Proctors.

**CDPHP Free Noontime Organ Concert Series at Proctors** on their Main Stage on February 19, March, 19, April 23, May 21 and June 11.

### Dominican Retreat and Conference Center:

**March 6, 2013, 10AM – 1PM, Heaven & Earth Series (1 of 3) "Harmonies of Heaven and Earth."**  
**Presenter: Fr. Rich Broderick.**

**March 13, 2013, 10AM – 1PM, Heaven & Earth Series (2 of 3) "Labyrinth Walk: Connecting to Earth and Our Inner Wisdom."** **Presenter: Sr. Ethel Detz, OP,**

**March 20, 2013, 10AM – 1PM, Heaven & Earth Series (3 of 3) "Heart of Earth, Heart of Sky: Maya Cosmology."** **Presenter: Kathy Hatfield** \$20.00 per session/\$55.00 for all 3.

**March 7, 2013, 7-8PM, "Sung Vespers in the Spirit of Taize."** **Presenters: The Dominican Sisters.** Free will offering

**March 9, 2013, 10AM-3PM, Reflective Storytelling Workshop "Playfully Exploring How Our Bodies Carry Tales"** **Guest Director: Marni Gillard.** \$30.00. Info/reservations, call

**March 10, 2013, 1:30-4:30PM, 12 Step Presentation/Workshop "Accepting What We Cannot Change & Surrendering to Win."** **Presenter: Dean E. Hale, CASAC.** \$20.00.

For Information/reservations, call Dominican Retreat & Conference Center, 518-393-4169 Monday through Friday, 8:30 AM-4:30 PM, e-mail [dslcny@nycap.rr.com](mailto:dslcny@nycap.rr.com) or visit [www.dslcny.org](http://www.dslcny.org).



## Interfaith Calendar for February 2013

2 Candlemas – **Christian** -- Celebration of the presentation of young Jesus in the temple to the aged Simeon. New beginnings are recognized. Candles are lighted.

Presentation of Christ in the Temple-- **Anglican Christian** -- Christian remembrance of the infant Jesus being brought to the temple in Jerusalem. His Godly presence was recognized. Celebrate at worship services.

Saint Brigid of Kildare -- **Celtic Christian** -- Recognition of Brigid who displayed unusual compassion. She was brought up as a Druid and became Christian.

Imbolc and Sughnassad -- **Wicca/Pagan Northern and Southern hemispheres** – Reflection on the power of the gods from which physical and spiritual harvest will come.

3 Four Chaplains Sunday – **Interfaith** -- Commemoration of the event in World War II when four Chaplains of Jewish and Christian traditions (Catholic and Protestant) gave their life jackets to others as a troop ship sank in the Atlantic Ocean.

Setsubun-sai – **Shinto** -- Celebration of the change of seasons with the coming of spring with shouts of "Devils out, Good Fortune in." Bean throwing protects against demons.

10 Transfiguration Sunday -- **Christian** -- Commemoration of the experience on Mt. Tabor when Jesus' physical appearance became brilliant as his connection with traditional Jewish holy figures became evident to the disciples.

Chinese New Year -- **Confucian, Daoist, Buddhist** -- Begins a fifteen Day Festival for Chinese people of all religions. Family reunions with thanksgiving and remembrance of departed relatives take place. Traditionally a religious ceremony honors Heaven and Earth.

12 Shrove Tuesday – **Christian** -- Carnival day on the eve of Ash Wednesday which begins Lent, a time of fasting and devotions. Pancakes are often served. It is also known as Fat Tuesday in some places.

13 Ash Wednesday -- Lent begins -- **Christian** -- Observance to begin the 40 day season of Lent. Ashes are marked on worshippers as a sign of penitence.

14 Nirvana Day -- **Buddhist** -- A regional observance of the death of the Buddha.

Valentine's Day – **Christian** -- Celebration of the love of God presented in Jesus and in the lives of Christian believers. St Valentine was a 3rd century martyr. This day is widely observed in the USA as a secular celebration of love.

15 Vasant Panchami - **Hindu** -- Celebration dedicated to Saraswati, goddess of learning.

Nirvana – **Jain** -- A regional observance of the death of the Buddha.

24 Purim -- **Jewish** -- Celebration of the deliverance of the Jewish minority in Persia from genocide. Charity to the poor, sharing food with friends, and vigorous merrymaking mark the observance.

Triodion begins -- **Orthodox Christian** -- Period leading up to Lent. The liturgy involves hymns, odes and scriptures.

26 - March 1 Intercalary Days -- **Baha'I** -- Insertion of days into the calendar in order to maintain their solar calendar.

### All Hindu prayers and rituals end with the following chous chant:

Sarve, Jana Sukhino Bhavantu  
 Samasta Loka Sukhino Bhavantu  
 OM Shanti Shanti Shantihi!  
 [Peace, Peace. Peace, peace on Earth.  
 Peace for all beings  
 Peace for all parts of this world  
 Peace, Peace, peace for the whole universe!]



**IFC OF SCHENECTADY**

811 N. Brandywine Ave  
Schenectady, NY 12308

Phone: 518-370-2150

E-mail:  
schdyinterfaith@yahoo.com

office hours:  
Tuesday 3-4 pm  
Fridays 12:30-2 pm  
Others as needed  
Schenectadyinterfaith.weebly.com

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**Coordinating Council Meetings**

Friday, March 8, 2013  
Friday, April 12, 2013  
Friday, May 10, 2013  
Friday, June 14, 2013

All meetings are held at Faith United Methodist Church, 811 Brandywine Avenue, Schenectady, and begin at 9:30 am.

**You may attend Council Meetings if you are interested.** Members and friends are invited to attend any Council Meeting to observe. If there is an interest that you would like considered, please contact Rev. Bob Long, 372-1083, at least two weeks ahead. Thank you.

**Do we have your email????**

**Please send your email address  
to us at  
schdyinterfaith@yahoo.com!**

**Check us out at  
Schenectadyinterfaith.weebly.com**

**Hindu prayer for peace**

Peace to the earth and to airy spaces!  
Peace be to Heaven, peace to the waters,  
Peace to the plants and peace to the trees!  
May all the Gods grant me peace!  
By this invocation of peace, may peace be diffused!  
By this invocation of peace, may peace bring peace!  
With this peace the dreadful I appease,  
With this peace the cruel I appease,  
With this peace evil I appease,  
So that peace may prevail, happiness prevail!  
May everything for us be peaceful! Atharva Veda 19.9.14