



Interfaith Community of Schenectady, Inc.

January 2014

Vol. 42, No. 5

Goal:
Sharing together,
One God —
One Community

Interfaith News

~ Celebrating Forty Years ~ 1971-2011 ~

January Dinner Meeting

Tuesday, January 21, 2013

Dinner 6:30pm

Program 7:30pm

Dominican Retreat and Conference Center
1945 Union Street, Niskayuna, NY

Program by Martin Manley

Martin Manley, of the staff of First United Methodist Church, Schenectady, will provide a first-hand understanding of the actual workings of the alternative sentencing program for youth and young adults within the Schenectady area. Mr. Manley has many years of hands-on experience in coordinating alternative sentencing through the United Methodist Church. A peace advocate and one who affirms transformative justice in the place of punitive justice, Mr. Manley finds himself at home with both the process he coordinates and those with whom he works.

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, by January 15, 2014.

Mark your calendars now for our 2013-2014 Program Year meeting dates

Monthly Gathering dates and places:

- February 11, 2014, Tuesday, Dominican Retreat and Conference Center
- March 4, 2014, Tuesday, Congregation Gates of Heaven, Ashmore and Eastern Parkway, Schenectady
- April 8, 2014, Tuesday, Dominican Retreat and Conference Center
- May 7, 2014, Wednesday, Dominican Retreat and Conference Center.

When you can plan ahead, it is possible to invite friends and neighbors to this aspect of our shared life which you hold significant. Please do so regularly.



From our President

How shall we make ethical and moral decisions in a world of There are those who insist that we conform to their absolutes. Often even they do not conform to their own absolutes, because life is not made of of clear absolutes. Through the years I have tried to follow five guidelines given to me years ago by one of my mentors and friends, Rev. David Giles who was a pastor at Trinity United Methodist Church, Albany. I know that they came to me from him; I do not know whether they were original to him, or something he had learned in this seminary preparation at Boston University. I share them with you for consideration and response.

First, ask: *Does the choice before me, the action I am about to take, cultivate deepest reverence for human life and all that supports it?* Ask of every value you hold: Is this something that lifts and affirms the dignity which God has given to all people and all of creation? In the face of all rationalizing, all hype, all justifying, all spin, all temptation that might be brought upon me, ask: Does this option reflect God's deep and abiding reverence for all human life and creation?

Second, add a further dimension. *Is the choice before me, the action I am about to take, more affirming and uniting than it is harmful and divisive?* Life is not a matter of easy clear-cut good and evil. As you respond to demands for your commitment, seek that which is most uniting and affirming of human life and turn away from that which is more divisive and harmful.

Third, add a still larger dimension. *Is the choice before me, that action about to be taken, more affirming and uniting to the greatest number of people and harmful and divisive to the least number of people?* Our faiths call us to think broadly and not narrowly. They call us to consider and act at one and the same time for the well-being of others and our own well-being. Can we ask anything for ourselves without asking the same for everyone else? To ask only for ourselves is to snatch reverence and life from others. And so, in spite of all the hype of commercials and the core value of society to climb to the top by any means, we surrender our vision to the innermost essence of our faiths, and ask: Is the choice before me, the action that I am about to take, more affirming and uniting of the greatest number of people and harmful and divisive of the least number of people?

Fourth, expand the scope of time. *Ask: Is the choice before me, the action I am about to take, more healing and uniting to the most people over the long haul of time?* Or, does it simply provide a "quick fix" that is expedient and gratifying at the moment, while leaving others with long-term harm? For example, if it is the wish of the affluent [not matter their faith] that everyone have the same affluence as they enjoy today, it has been determined through scientific study, that the earth cannot support [at that level of affluence] even the number of people who are alive at the moment. And so we are led to ask of our values and choices and actions: Is this the most life-affirming for the greatest number of people over the long haul of time?

And last, and perhaps most important, we will want to ask ourselves another kind of question. *Are there, in fact ... or are there conceivably possible ... other options than those we have as yet considered that will more significantly affirm the human dignity of the most people throughout the long haul of time?* Just when the powers and interests who have, through their influence, caused the legal system to protect their specific interests threaten when other more just and compassionate options are considered ... just then is the time to ask about options that are not yet on the table but will more significantly establish the dignity of the most people, provide unity and harmony among the largest numbers, throughout the long haul of time? If so, how can they be brought into reality?!

I am aware that these steps can be unpopular. I leave you with a question: Did those who established out differing faiths call us to reflect society's values, or to challenge society's values so as to help society more clearly express the purpose that the creator had and has for us all?

Shalom, Salaam, Alafia, Shanti, the Peace that passes understanding

Bob Long



Prayers for New Year's - You are invited to use them during the month of December.

At the New Moon, In Solidarity, For Understanding (originally published in A Song Every Day)

Oh God, our God and God of our ancestors, everything we accomplish is but a reflection of Your gifts to us, much as the moon only reflects the light of the sun. At the new moon, only the barest sliver of moon is visible to us, and there is much we cannot see. Today, too, from our separate communities, we see but a sliver of the whole. There is much we cannot see. As the moon waxes, so too may our understanding of the wider world of faith and thought, particularly, those with whom we differ. Renew our lives, we pray, for a life of peaceful co-existence in our belief variety; for a life of goodness, enriched by a widening sense of community; of blessing; of sustenance; of health; marked by piety and fear of sin, as we recognize the image of God in each individual; free from shame and reproach, as we renew our efforts to guard our tongues and our thoughts; of abundance with honor; filled with love of Your word, in all its facets, and reverence for You, in which the worthy desires of our hearts will be fulfilled for good. May the One who has done wonderful things for our ancestors, who redeemed them from slavery to freedom, bring us from the narrow confines of our own philosophies and practices to a wider understanding and love for our people, scattered to the four corners of the world. Bring us together toward a world united, for life, rejoicing, happiness, salvation and consolation. And let us say: AMEN.

Prayer of St. Francis

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace: where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console, to be understood as to understand, to be loved as to love. For it is in giving that we receive, it is in pardoning that we are pardoned, it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.

Blessings at Year's End

I remember with gratitude the fruits of the labors of others, which I have shared as a part of the normal experience of daily living. I remember the beautiful things that I have seen, heard, and felt - some, as a result of definite seeking on my part, and many that came unheralded into my path, warming my heart and rejoicing my spirit. I remember the moments of distress that proved to be groundless and those that taught me profoundly about the evilness of evil and the goodness of good.

I remember the new people I have met, from whom I have caught glimpses of the meaning of my own life and the true character of human dignity. I remember the dreams that haunted me during the year, keeping me ever mindful of goals and hopes which I did not realize but from which I drew inspiration to sustain my life and keep steady my purposes. I remember the awareness of the spirit of God that sought me out in my aloneness and gave to me a sense of assurance that undercut my despair and confirmed my life with new courage and abiding hope. - Howard Thurman

From Pope Francis

Pope Francis set aside his prepared text for a moment on Wednesday, issuing an appeal for an end to conflict around the world.

"What on earth is happening in the hearts of men? What on earth is happening in the heart of humanity," the Argentine pontiff asked. "It's time to stop!" Speaking to several thousand onlookers from a studio window overlooking St. Peter's Square, he called on the world to listen to the "cry for peace" from suffering people. "We are all children of one heavenly father, we belong to the same human family and we share a common destiny," the 78-year-old pontiff said in his first New Year's address. Francis said he hoped the "gospel of brotherhood speaks to every conscience and knocks down the walls that impede enemies from recognizing that they are brothers."



Providing information about regional ecumenical and interfaith groupings

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Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York Last month began a look at Interfaith Organizations in the Capital District which also serve the Schenectady area. This month we focus on the Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York.

What does the Jewish Federation do? The Federation gives continuity to Jewish values:

- Mutual respect and accommodation of diversity within Jewish life (Klal Yisrael)

- The requirement of righteous giving and just behavior that ensures the basic well-being of fellow human beings (tzedakah)

- The obligation to do good works, promote peace and understanding, and help the hungry, homeless and oppressed (tikkun olam)

- Support of Israel, the democratic homeland for the Jewish people

The Federation fulfills its mission by:

- Providing financial resources to help meet community needs, locally, nationally, in Israel, and around the world

- Supplying educational resources for children and adults, educators and families

- Working with the media, policy-makers, and other opinion-shapers on behalf of various community constituencies

- Keeping the community informed about relevant current issues

- Changing lives and giving people the opportunity for new experiences through programs and services

What is its history? For over fifty years the local community has been served by the Federation. United Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York was established in 1986 when the Greater Albany Jewish Federation consolidated with the Schenectady Jewish Federation. The Troy, Saratoga Springs, Clifton Park, and Glens Falls Jewish communities joined thereafter to truly make it a regional service agency. Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York is a voluntary, not-for-profit association of contributors, organizations, synagogues, and agencies. It serves the needs of the Jewish community locally, nationally, and overseas through cooperative action and coordinated fund raising. It blends varying elements in the community into a strong and cohesive Jewish entity. Part of Federation's strength derives from the differing viewpoints that are represented and expressed among the thousands of people who participate. The objective has always been unity, not uniformity.

Today, with your help, Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York will continue to ensure a viable Jewish community in the Capital Region, in Israel, and wherever Jews are in need.

Some of the specific ways the Federation implements its values include:

The Community Relations Department supports the Federation's mission of *Tikkun Olam* – repairing the world through its deep commitment to combat anti-Semitism and discrimination, clarify church/state issues and build bridges to the community, educate and advocate for Israel, heighten consciousness and remembrance of the Holocaust, maintain a harmonious Jewish community, and strengthen the Jewish community's relations with the general community.

Promoting Inter-Religious Understanding & Combating Bigotry

Looking ahead at the Dominican Conference and Retreat Center

Upcoming programs at the DCRC, 1941 Union Street, Niskayuna, NY 12309:

"Introduction to Spiritual Journaling", January 17, 2014, 7-9pm with Maggie Whelan

"Writing the Prayer of Your Life", January 18, 2014, 10am-3pm with Maggie Whelan

"Chicken Soup for Body and Soul", January 28, 2014, 6:30-8:45pm with Sr. Ethel Detz, OP

For more information call the Dominican Retreat and Conference Center at (518) 393-4169.

Jewish New Year of Trees

Tu B'Shvat is a minor Jewish holiday, occurring on the 15th day of the Hebrew month of Shevat. In 2014, Tu B'Shvat will begin at sunset on January 15 and finish at nightfall on January 26. It is also called "Rosh Ha-Shanah La'Ilanot", which literally means "New Year of the Trees". In contemporary Israel the day is celebrated as an ecological awareness day and trees are planted in celebration.

Translators needed...

The Lansingburgh School District is looking for people fluent in the Arabic and Farsi languages to act as translators for required NYS tests later this year.

If you know of anyone who might be interested, the contact is Adel Luciano, Guidance Director, who can be reached by phone at 518-233-6818 or by email at aluciano@lansingburg.org

Received in December

Individual membership renewals: Rev. Larry Phillips, John VanLaak, Dorothy Packard, Alma Blohm

Institutional memberships: Jewish Federation of Northeastern New York

Thank you for your support!

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.

From the Coordinating Council

Membership Contributions Membership contributions have not been increased since the beginning of the Interfaith Community in 1971. Everything else has increased significantly, including Interfaith's costs. At the October Council Meeting it was decided to increase slightly the suggested contribution levels. Beginning January, 2014, contributions will be sought at the following levels [yes, you may do more if you wish]:

- Life Members -\$600 (payable in six annual installments)
- Patron Members - \$100.
- Sustaining Members [Individual] - \$50 Sustaining Members [Household] - \$70
- Contributing Members [Individual] - \$35 Contributing Members [Household]—\$45
- Supporting Members [Individual] - \$25 Supporting Members [Household] - \$35

Institutions/congregations are asked to be as generous as possible as the Interfaith Community provides ministry which individual congregations/institutions cannot easily duplicate and which provides benefits to them.

Yearly contributions Please remember this change – The Interfaith Council now asks that you offer your "gifts of support and encouragement" at the beginning of each new calendar year ... within the months of January and February of each year.

The Council meets on the second *Thursday* at 9:30 am at Faith United Methodist Church, 811 North Brandywine Avenue, Schenectady, 12308. Remaining dates are: [January 9, 2014](#), [February 13](#), [March 13](#), [April 10](#) and [May 8](#). On occasion these may have to be changed.

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.

Interfaith Calendar for January 2014

- 1 Mary, Mother of God -- **Catholic Christian** – A celebration of the mother of Jesus.
Feast of St Basil -- **Orthodox Christian** – Commemoration of St Basil the Great, who wrote a Eucharist Liturgy which bears his name.
Gantan-sai (New Years) – **Shinto** – New Year festival observed with prayers for inner renewal, prosperity and health.
Holy Name of Jesus -- **Orthodox Christian** – Eight days after the birth of Jesus, in accordance with Hebrew tradition, Jesus was circumcised and received his name.
- 5 Twelfth Night – **Christian** – Observance of the close of Christmastide and prelude to Epiphany which begins the next day.
Guru Gobindh Singh birthday -- **Sikh** – Honoring of the birth of the founder of the Khalsa who lived from 1469 -1539 c.e.
- 6 Epiphany -- **Christian** – Commemoration of the manifestations of the divine nature of Jesus Christ. The homage of the magi to the infant Jesus is honored by some. For others the Baptism of Jesus is the remembered event. A season of the Christian year from the close of Christmas to the beginning of Lent.
Feast of the Theophany -- **Orthodox Christian** – Feast to recall the revelation of the Holy Trinity in the baptism of the Lord.
Nativity of Christ -- **Armenian Orthodox Christian** – Birth of Jesus is celebrated in this tradition.
Dia de los Reyes -- **Hispanic Christian** – Hispanic celebration of the visitation to Jesus by the three kings ... also celebrated as the Feast of the nativity.
- 7 Nativity of Christ -- **Orthodox Christian** – Celebration of the birth of Jesus.
- 12 Baptism of the Lord Jesus -- **Christian** – Commemoration of the beginning of the public ministry of Jesus.
- 13 Mawlid an Nabi -- **Islam** – Commemoration of the birthday of Prophet Muhammad, founder of Islam, in about 570 c.e. Not universally observed. The prophet's teachings are read and religious meetings are held. Shia and Sunni on separate days.
Maghi -- **Sikh** – Commemoration of a battle in which forty Sikhs died for Guru Gobindh Singh Ji.
- 16 Tu BiShvat -- Jewish – Celebration of the coming of spring by preparation of foods native to Israel. It is also known as "New Year for Trees" - a method for determining the age of trees for tithing purposes.
- 16-19 Mahayana New Year -- **Buddhist** -- New Year for Mahayana Buddhists celebrated on the first full moon day in January.
- 17 Blessing of the Animals -- **Hispanic Catholic Christian** – Observance of showing respect for the domestic animals that mean much to people. Observed on various dates – especially related to St. Francis.
- 18-25 Week of Prayer for Christian Unity -- **Christian** – Observance with prayer and worship for the restoration of unity between the churches of the faith.
- 19 World Religion Day -- **Baha'i** – Baha'i sponsored day dedicated to the unity and oneness of all world religions.
Timkat -- **Ethiopian Orthodox Christian** – Epiphany celebration of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River.
- 25 Conversion of Saint Paul -- **Christian** – Observance of the experience of Paul when he was confronted by a vision of Jesus while on his way to persecute Christians and became a leading presenter of Jesus.
- 28 Feast of the Holy Family -- **Catholic Christian** – Celebration of the mystery of the Holy Trinity.
- 31 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.



IFC OF SCHENECTADY

811 N. Brandywine Ave
Schenectady, NY 12308

Phone: 518-370-2150

E-mail:
schdyinterfaith@yahoo.com

office hours:
Tuesday 6-7pm
Fridays 7:30-8:30am
Others as needed
Schenectadyinterfaith.weebly.com



Albany District Youth Event at First United Methodist Church, Schenectady.

Youth age 14 and up from differing faiths are invited to be part of this annual event sponsored by the Albany District Ministry Team and held at First United Methodist Church, Schenectady, NY. from Thursday, February 20 through Sunday morning, February 23, 2014. **The theme is: "Caring for God's gift ... earth."** Those present will engage this subject via films, speakers, music, food and a local outreach project. The cost is \$50. per person and that payment is due with a completed registration form no later than February 10, 2014. Any congregation registering three or more youth need to provide a chaperone. You may cut out the following registration form. If you have questions contact: Shirley Readdean at: whirly@earthlink.net.

**Registration Form
Albany District Youth Event
February 20 – 23, 2014, First UMC, Schenectady, NY 605 State Street.**

Name _____
Address _____
E-mail address _____
Emergency contact name _____
available phone number _____
Your congregation _____
Payment method: _____ check (payable to "Youth Seminar"); _____ cash on arrival.

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