



The Interfaith Alliance
LONG ISLAND CHAPTER
<http://www.interfaith-alliance-li.org>

Minutes – Meeting of 9/25/2008

Attendance: Mark Lukens, Chair; Hank Around; Paul Auerbach; Norma Cohen; Joyce Gorycki; Jay Grosmark; Jacqueline Jill Rito; Marty Melkonian; Jeff Schull; Dolores Tibbets; Richard Tibbets; Betty Tilton; John Tilton; Latifa Woodhouse

Mark Lukens called the meeting to order at 7:35.

Minutes: The members waived reading of the minutes from the 8/27/08 meeting and approved them as written.

Treasurer’s Report: Dolores reported that our current balance is \$1,883.96. This includes contributions of \$45 and expenses of \$531.85, \$500 of which was a donation to TIA National. We have received a letter of thanks for this donation.

Iftar at the Islamic Center of Long Island: Several TIA-LI members along with other community guests joined the members the Islamic Center of Long Island (ISLI), for a public Iftar celebration. Iftar is the daily post-sundown meal eaten by Muslims during the month of Ramadan, when no food or drink is consumed during daylight hours. As one of the speakers explained, Muslims believe that humans need food for both body and soul but tend to neglect the soul. Therefore, Ramadan is a time to focus on restoring that balance.

ICLI member Omar Chaudry presented a slide show during dinner to describe Islamic beliefs. His presentation included the Five Pillars of Islam: Profession of Faith, Prayer, Alms Giving, Fasting (During Ramadan), and the Hajj (Pilgrimage to Mecca). Guests at this Iftar were also invited into the worship space to observe Muslim evening prayer. The ICLI has been holding this public Iftar for about eight years. The TIA members in attendance felt both honored and grateful to experience this shared meal and hospitality.

U.S. – Muslim Engagement Project: Richard reported that the Leadership Group on U.S. – Muslim Engagement issued a report titled “Changing Course: A New Direction for U.S. Relations with the Muslim World.” As the flyer states:

This report represents the consensus of an exceptionally diverse, bipartisan and interfaith group of 34 American leaders on a comprehensive strategy to prevent future 9/11s by transforming U.S. relations with the Muslim world.

The Leadership Group includes, among others: Madeleine Albright, Secretary of State from 1997 to 2001 and Richard Armitage, Deputy Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005.

For further information about the group and the report, go to:
www.USMuslimEngagement.org

Anti-Muslim Voting Guide: Richard spoke briefly about a voters guide issued by a group called “Truth For Muslims.” The guide states, in part, that the ideal candidate “readily sees that Islam is incompatible with the United States Constitution, Biblical Christianity, and basic Western democracy.” In addition, the ideal candidate “never tries to convince the American people that Islam is good.”

Rev. Dr. Welton Gaddy, President of the Interfaith Alliance, has issued a press release criticizing this guide. You may read his statement at:

<http://stateofbelief.com/blog/?p=279>

Obsession: Welton Gaddy also issued a press release concerning the anti-Muslim film *Obsession*. Gaddy noted that 28 million copies of this film have been distributed via newspaper inserts in presidential battleground states. You may view Gaddy’s statement by going to www.interfaithalliance.org and clicking on “The News,” then clicking on “Press Releases.” Then scroll down to releases for the date 9/17/2008.

Stop-The-War Mall Tour: Marty announced that the final demonstration will be held at the Smith Haven Mall in Lake Grove on Saturday, September 27th from 1:00 to 2:30pm. Marty urged all who can to attend.

Marty also noted that Congress recently approved another \$68.6 Billion for the war in Iraq. He noted that all Long Island representatives voted “yes” for this bill.

Presidential Debate at Hofstra: The Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives and other groups will line up along Hempstead Turnpike prior to the final Presidential Debate on October 15th to present their agenda to Senators McCain and Obama. The agenda includes ending the war, reallocating war funds to human needs, restoring Constitutional rights, and other vital issues. To see a flyer with more details, go to: www.longislandpeace.org and click on “Join us on October 15, 2008.”

LaOnf: Iraqi Peace Group: At our next TIA-LI meeting on Thursday, October 23, we will host a screening of the DVD *Mesalla: Activists in Iraq*, which is the story of **LaOnf's** 2007 Week of Nonviolent Action. LaOnf (which means "no violence" in Arabic) is a network of Iraqi activists building a nonviolence movement to resist occupation, terrorism and corruption in Iraq.

September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, a group of family members of people killed in the 9/11/01 terrorist attacks, is launching a Solidarity Campaign in support of LaOnf. We hope that many TIA members will be able to join us on October 23rd to learn more about LaOnf.

To view a 10 minutes video about LaOnf:

- 1) Go to the website www.youtube.com
- 2) Then type LAONF in the Search box and click the button.
- 3) Then click on the listing “Peaceful Tomorrows Presentation on LaOnf”

For further information on September Eleventh Families for Peaceful Tomorrows, go to the website www.peacefultomorrows.org

Or you can go to the website www.laonf.net

Be sure to click on the button at top of website

Iran Blockade Resolution: Richard reported that House Congressional Resolution 362 now has 275 co-sponsors after 17 were added in September. The companion Senate Resolution #580 has 50 co-sponsors, with one co-sponsor added in September. We are concerned about this resolution since it promotes hostile activities towards Iran.

Ghosts of Abu Ghraib: Paul reported that he has delivered copies of the National Religious Campaign Against Torture's DVD *Ghosts of Abu Ghraib* to six college campuses in Nassau and Suffolk to promote discussion about torture in U.S. detention centers. He plans to obtain additional copies for distribution to colleges in the five boroughs. Marty suggested he next try to distribute copies to church and synagogue groups, perhaps using the LI Council of Churches as a resource.

For info about the DVD or about the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, go to www.nrcat.org

Military Recruiting: Richard reminded members that the No Child Left Behind Act requires schools to release students private information to military recruiters unless they "opt out" in writing. In order to help protect students' privacy, the ACLU is contacting schools to ask about their procedures for notifying students about this law and about their right to opt-out. In addition, they plan to publicize this information in minority neighborhoods, where recruiters seem to concentrate their efforts.

In addition to this database of personal information on students, the military has also compiled another database, JAMRS, (Joint Advertising Marketing & Research Services), of 16 to 25 year olds.

To opt-out of these two databases, go to the website www.leavemychildalone.org and complete the two opt-out forms. The deadline for the high school opt-out is October. There is no deadline listed for the JAMRS database.

Clergy Pledge on the Separation of Church and State: Mark advised us that the Interfaith Alliance has launched a nation-wide campaign urging clergy to protect the boundaries between religion and government and to refrain from endorsing any candidates for political office. Gaddy and others signed a six point pledge to uphold certain standards during the election season. Gaddy told his congregation: "*I cannot stress strongly enough my objections to turning houses of worship into pseudo-precinct nominating conventions.*" In addition, the Rev. Dr. Joel Hunter, Senior Pastor of Northland Church and a leader in the evangelical movement, another signer of the pledge, said: "*To somehow subjugate this transcendent God into one political party or another or one candidate or another is, I think, insulting toward God.*"

Mark also noted that both political parties have violated the separation of church and state during this Presidential Campaign by their efforts to recruit direct religious support for their campaigns.

Clergy who wish to view or sign the pledge may go to:
www.interfaithalliance.org/clergypledge

To read the full press release about the pledge, go to www.interfaithalliance.org Click on “The News,” then click on “Press Releases.” Scroll down to the 9/18 press release “Religious Leaders Pledge to Keep Endorsements Out of Houses of Worship.”

Empowerment Day / Drop the Rock: The Drop the Rock Campaign’s voter registration drive planned for Saturday, 9/27 has been moved to Saturday, 10/4 due to inclement weather. Drop the Rock plans to register voters for this fall’s election as well as collect signatures for its petition to repeal the draconian Rockefeller Drug Laws which were originally designed as a way to catch drug kingpins, but have instead resulted in the long term imprisonment of thousands of drug users and low level dealers, who need treatment, not imprisonment. For information on the Drop-the-Rock campaign, go to www.droptherock.org

Amy Goodman Speaks at Shelter Rock Forum: The Shelter Rock Forum reported that approximately 600 people attended last week’s presentation by Amy Goodman, host of the radio program *Democracy Now*.

TIA National’s Financial Crisis: Norma advised us that the national Interfaith Alliance office is experiencing severe financial stress. Their direct mail campaign is not bringing in the anticipated revenue (a common problem for non-profits as the national economy stumbles through the mortgage and financial crises). TIA-LI values the work which the national office performs on behalf of protecting politics from undue religious interference and protecting religion from governmental interference. We also value the work that TIA does in promoting religion as a healing and constructive force in public life. **We urge all our local TIA-LI members to send a donation to the national office using their secure online server at www.interfaithalliance.org (click on the “Donate” button). You may also send a check by mail to:**

The Interfaith Alliance, 1212 New York Ave, NW, 7th Floor, Washington, DC 20005

- Checks made to The Interfaith Alliance are NOT tax deductible,
- But Checks made to The Interfaith Alliance Foundation ARE tax deductible.

(Checks to either organization can be mailed to the same address).

Microstamping Legislation: Joyce Gorycki distributed a newsletter from Assemblywoman Michelle Schimel containing information regarding Microstamping Legislation. The State Assembly passed landmark Microstamping legislation this session (A.9819A), but the companion bill (S08541) has never come to a vote in the State Senate. Joyce urged members to contact State Senate Majority Leader Dean Skelos to urge him to bring this important bill to a vote. His contact information is:

Albany Office:

Dean G. Skelos, Majority Leader
Room 503, State Capitol
Albany, NY 12247
(518) 455-3171

District Office

55 Front Street
Rockville Centre, NY 11570
(516) 766-8383

NEXT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE MEETING

The next TIA meeting will be

Thursday, October 23rd at 7:30pm

at the **Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR)**
48 Shelter Rock Road, Manhasset.

There will be a screening of the DVD *Mesalla: Activists in Iraq*, which is the story of LaOnf's 2007 Week of Nonviolent Action. Look above in the section "Iraqi Peace Group" for more information on this DVD.

Call (516) 627-6560 for directions to UUCSR, or visit the website www.uucsr.org

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Tibbets

UPCOMING EVENTS

Presidential Debate (final debate): Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives and other groups are planning to present the Peoples Agenda to presidential candidates or their aides when the candidates hold their final debate

Date: Wednesday, October 15,

Location: Hofstra University

To see a flyer with more details, go to: www.longislandpeace.org and click on "Join us on October 15, 2008."

Religion and Politics in the Media

On its website, the national **Interfaith Alliance** describes itself in part as follows:

The Interfaith Alliance is equally committed to protecting the integrity of both religion and democracy in America. We champion religious freedom by respecting individual rights, promoting policies that protect both religion and democracy and uniting diverse voices to challenge extremism and build common ground.

The Interfaith Alliance promotes this cause via its website at www.interfaithalliance.org as well as through its radio program, **State of Belief**, which you can listen to online at www.stateofbelief.com

You may also listen to the live broadcast of **State of Belief** on WWRL-AM 1600 Sundays 7-8pm (New York City)

Another radio program which discusses matters of faith and culture is public radio's **Speaking of Faith**, hosted by Krista Tippett. Two recent broadcasts have focused on religion's role in the current presidential election. I am highlighting them here as you may find the programs worth listening to.

Speaking of Faith, 10/2/08: The Faith Life of the Party — Part I — The Left

The webpage for the 10/2/08 broadcast, which focuses on how the political parties deal with religion, reads in part:

The Religious Right has gotten a fair amount of coverage in recent years, while the political Left has rarely been represented with a religious sensibility. Our guest, a national correspondent for Time magazine is a political liberal and an Evangelical Christian who has been observing the Democratic Party's complex relationship with faith and the little-told story of its response to the rise of the Religious Right.

To read the entire webpage, or to listen to the broadcast online, go to:

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/2008/sullivan/>

Speaking of Faith, 9/18/08: The Origins and Impact of Pentecostalism

The webpage for the 9/18/08 broadcast, which focuses on Pentecostalism, with a special focus on Sarah Palin, reads in part:

Pentecostalism is sometimes confused with Fundamentalist Christianity, but it is historically distinct and spiritually different. In Africa, Asia, and Latin America, where it is growing most rapidly, Pentecostal Christianity is often associated with emancipation for women, the poor, and the disenfranchised. This is "main street mysticism," as one sociologist puts it. And it began on the American frontier, with an African-American son of slaves a century ago.

It felt right to retrace this history in light of all the scrutiny of churches Sarah Palin has attended, and remarks she has made in them. I will state more plainly what I noted above: these churches and Palin's experiences are minor reflections of a major, far-flung phenomenon that is literally changing the face of Christianity and culture.

To read the entire webpage, or to listen to the broadcast online, go to:

<http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/2008/azusarevival/kristasjournal.shtml>

You may also listen to **Speaking of Faith**: Saturdays at 7AM on 93.9FM and at 3PM and 10PM on AM 820