



### **Minutes – Meeting of 2/26/2009**

**Attendance:** Mark Lukens, Chair;; Paul Auerbach; Norma Cohen; Jay Grosmark; Jean Judd; Marty Melkonian, Bob Nuxoll, Elaine Peters; Shirley Romaine; Rich Tibbets.

Mark called the meeting to order at 2:45pm.

**Minutes:** Reading of the minutes was waived and they were accepted as submitted.

**Treasurer's Report:** Dolores reported that we received one membership donation of \$50 this past month. The only expense was a \$5 monthly banking fee. Therefore, the current balance is \$1,512.11.

**Membership and Clergy Luncheon:** We discussed ways we can increase TIA-LI membership, especially among clergy. In addition, we had a brief discussion about a program for the luncheon.

**TIA-LI Banner:** Members voted to modify the recently approved banner by:

- Including both the TIA-LI flame logo as well as the TIA-National circle logo.
- Changing the wording on the banner.

**Community Rights vs. Religious Organization Rights:** Shirley noted that some Great Neck residents were concerned about plans to build a Mikvah (Jewish ritual bath) and other facilities in Great Neck. Concerns included traffic congestion and local property tax revenue (since religious property is exempt from the property tax). Mark noted that similar issues arose in Rockland County as a conservative Jewish community expanded there. There was a discussion of federal laws governing religious exemptions from zoning ordinances.

**Faith-Based Funding:** Welton Gaddy, President of TIA-National, distributed an email update this recently about the Faith-Based office, which will now be known as the Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships office.

**Non-Discrimination:** TIA's main concerns include oversight of the funds distributed and of the hiring practices of religious organizations receiving such funding. If Federal money is distributed to houses of worship, those institutions should be required to create a separate 501(c)(3) organization to manage the money and comply with 501(c)(3) regulations regarding non-discrimination in hiring of staff and provision of services to recipients. Unfortunately, the Obama administration has not committed to such a policy.

**Faith-Based Priorities:** The office's four key priorities will be the economy, supporting women and children and reducing the number of abortions, "encouraging responsible fatherhood" and giving attention to the development of inter-religious dialogue on the international stage. Welton noted that this is a much broader scope than the Bush "faith-based" initiative.

**Pleasant Grove City v. Sumnum:** The Supreme Court ruled against religious freedom in this case, according to TIA President Welton Gaddy. The court ruled that the City of Pleasant Grove could refuse to allow Sumnum followers to erect a granite marker depicting their Seven Aphorisms near a monument of the Ten Commandments in a government-owned park.

Welton agrees that no city government should be forced to erect a religious monument, but argues that the government should not be able to permit one religious group and deny another the same right to display their beliefs.

**Congressman Gary Ackerman:** Shirley reported that the *Jewish Daily Forward* recently published an article about a speech which Congressman Ackerman gave regarding Israel's actions in the Palestinian territories. Ackerman asserted that Israel's violent actions contribute to a downward spiral and the death of the peace process. He was particularly critical of settlers, and likened their recent actions against a Palestinian village to pogroms which Jews in Europe have historically suffered under.

Since Ackerman has been a staunch supporter of Israel, introducing several bills backed by the conservative *American Israel Public Affairs Committee* (AIPAC), Shirley was quite pleased to hear these comments from him. She says that people must realize that we are not helping the peace process when we hesitate to criticize Israel for actions that work against a Mid-East peace.

Shirley recommends that TIA-LI members write to Congressman Ackerman to thank him for his brave comments on this critical topic.

For further information, visit the following websites:

- *The Jewish Daily Forward*, February 18, 2009 article at: <http://www.forward.com/articles/103168/>
- *Newsday*, February 15, 2009 blog post at: [http://weblogs.newsday.com/news/local/longisland/politics/blog/2009/02/ackerman\\_draws\\_fire\\_claiming\\_i.html](http://weblogs.newsday.com/news/local/longisland/politics/blog/2009/02/ackerman_draws_fire_claiming_i.html) (you must type an underscore "\_" where you see a blank space in the Newsday link)
- *JTA*, February 12, 2009 posting at: <http://jta.org/news/article/2009/02/12/1002975/ackerman-slams-settlements-israeli-attitudes>

**Marriage Equality Forum:** Mark spoke about the National Equality Rally, which will be held at Independence Hall, Philadelphia on Sunday, May 3<sup>rd</sup>. The rally is sponsored by Equality Forum 2009. The Equality Forum is a nonprofit organization whose mission is to advance national and international gay civil rights through education. For further information, go to the website [www.equalityforum.com](http://www.equalityforum.com)

In Mark's blog, Mark noted that California's Prop. 8 campaign promoted many half-truths and untruths. The most destructive one claimed that marriage equality would violate the rights of churches to determine who they will or will not marry. However, Mark pointed out, marriage equality concerns only civil marriage, and would grant gay couples legal rights, including tax benefits granted to married heterosexual couples.

You can read Mark's entire essay on this topic by visiting the TIA-LI website at [www.interfaithalliance-li.org](http://www.interfaithalliance-li.org) and clicking on "**Rev. Lukens BLOG**" at the top left of the webpage.

Respectfully submitted,  
Richard Tibbets

<b>NEXT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE MEETING</b>
The next TIA meeting will be <b>Thursday, March 26<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 pm</b> <b>at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR)</b> 48 Shelter Rock Road, Manhasset. Call (516) 627-6560 for directions to UUCSR, or visit the website <a href="http://www.uucsr.org">www.uucsr.org</a>