



The Interfaith Alliance
LONG ISLAND CHAPTER
www.interfaithalliance-li.org



Minutes – Meeting of 12/3/2009

Attendance: Mark Lukens, Chair; Hank Arond, Ronnie Arond, Paul Auerbach, Isma Chaudhry, Jean Judd, Margaret Melkonian, Marty Melkonian, Elaine Peters, Richard Tibbets, John Tilton, Christina Vaccarino

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

Minutes: Members noted that Marty, not Mark, chaired the meeting (Mark was absent). Following that correction, members accepted the October 22nd minutes.

Treasurer's Report: For the period 9/10/09 to 12/3/09 we had \$166.99 income and \$635.00 in expenses, leaving us with a balance of \$1,219.93.

Cronkite Award Gala: Several local members attended the 12th annual Walter Cronkite Faith & Freedom Award Gala on November 3. The meeting began with a video of MSNBC's Rachel Maddow introducing TIA President Rev. Dr. Welton Gaddy to the members. The highlight of the evening for local members was when Norma Cohen, a founding member of TIA-LI, was honored with the Interfaith Alliance's President's Award.

Mark noted that Norma's award was most deserved due to her lifelong service. He also reminded us that we must continue our efforts to promote religious liberty and social justice.

Local Activities: Mark spoke briefly about two speeches he made around the Thanksgiving holiday. One was at an interfaith event held at Temple Emanuel of Great Neck, the other at the Islamic Center of Long Island's annual fund raiser.

Federal Hate Crimes Law: Richard Tibbets noted that the *Matthew Shepard and James Byrd, Jr. Hate Crime Prevention Act* was signed by Obama on October 28th. TIA has been working hard for this legislation for many years.

To view Welton Gaddy's statement about this legislation, go to the website www.interfaithalliance.org and then click on "The News" near top of window, then click on "Press Releases."

NYS Government Actions:

- The Marriage Equality Bill was defeated in Albany on December 2nd.
- Mark spoke about how State budget cuts will cause severe problems for health, mental health, and mental retardation services in New York.

Islam in the 21st Century: Richard reported that Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf delivered a lecture on Islam at St. Joseph's College in Patchogue on November 12th. Imam Rauf spoke of the many commonalities among Judaism, Christianity and Islam and discussed how extremists misinterpret these religions in order to further their own political and/or social agendas. The lecture was well attended, and the audience had numerous questions for him following the Imam's presentation.

Obama's Speech on Afghanistan: Members expressed severe disappointment about the President's decision to send an additional 30,000 troops to Afghanistan. Margaret Melkonian noted that she had hoped for more from Obama and called his decision a lost opportunity to shift foreign policy away from the use of military force. She noted that Long Island peace groups will now focus fighting against the funding for this policy.

John Tilton noted that he attended the recent lecture by Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea* and *Stones Into Schools: Promoting Peace with Books, Not Bombs, in Afghanistan and Pakistan*. Mortenson has spent the last 17 years building schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. One central reason for his success is that he does not try to impose a Western model of education, but lets local leaders decide what type of education is most relevant for their children.

Jean Judd reported that a member of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Huntington was also quite active in supporting educational aspirations of the poor in North Africa, where she was responsible for the building of a library.

The efforts which John & Jean highlighted promote social justice while alleviating poverty. Members agreed that we should find ways to support such initiatives in the third world.

Isma Chaudhry noted that many in the Muslim world hear news reports of pro-war sentiment in the U.S. but hear little about Americans who oppose the war and have a positive attitude towards Muslims. Isma noted that we need a strategy to increase our visibility and attract media attention in the Muslim world. She offered to provide contact information for the Muslim media world.

There was discussion about ways to increase visibility for the anti-war effort on Long Island. Possible strategies included teach-ins, web casting, and letters to the editor. Margaret also noted that the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives is planning a town meeting in February. There was discussion of the need to get clergy involved in a press conference.

Prison Reform: Richard noted that following New York State's vote to significantly reform the draconian Rockefeller Drug Laws, the Correctional Association is now expanding its proposals for reform. The new policy platform calls for:

- Repeal of the Rockefeller Drug Laws (which will still send thousands to prison for minor drug offenses).
- Increased use of Work Release
- Decreased rate of incarceration for technical parole violations
- Increased rate at which prisoners are granted parole
- Expanded merit time eligibility.

The TIA-LI membership voted to endorse this expanded policy platform.

For more details about the Correctional Association and its programs, view the website www.correctionalassociation.org

Kairos Dinner: We are pleased to report that TIA-LI Board Member Habeeb Ahmed was honored at the Long Island Alliance for Peaceful Alternatives' annual Kairos Awards Dinner. Habeeb was honored in recognition of his involvement in promoting interfaith understanding and tolerance. Congratulations Habeeb!

Other Kairos honorees included the Long Island Veterans for Peace, Greg Maney of Hofstra, and Megan O'Handley, former Co-Director of the Alliance.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Tibbets

NEXT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE MEETING

The next TIA meeting will be:

Thursday, January 7, 2010 at 7:30 PM
at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR)
48 Shelter Rock Road, Manhasset
Call (516) 627-6560 for directions to UUCSR, or visit the website
www.uucsr.org