



Minutes – Meeting of 4/22/2010

Attendance: Marty Melkonian, Chair; Habeeb Ahmed; Hank Around; Paul Auerbach; Joyce Gorycki; Jay Grosmark; Robert Nuxoll; Ruth Reeves; Richard Tibbets; Christina Vaccarino.

Marty called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm.

Minutes: Members accepted the March 18th minutes.

Treasurer's Report: For the period 3/18 to 4/22/2010, we had income of \$205 in membership dues, and there were expenses for banking fees, as well as for a mailing to inform religious leaders about a press conference speaking out against the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. Therefore, our balance as of 4/22/2010 is \$1,140.76.

Interfaith Alliance – National Office – Conference Call of April 9th.

- In April, National President Rev. Welton Gaddy attended the 2010 Interfaith Understanding Conference, which was billed as “*a groundbreaking moment in the global interfaith movement (combining) the experience and wisdom of one generation with the vitality and hope of the next.*” Speakers included Sr. Joan Chittister, Rabbi Hirschfield, Dr. P. Jayarman, Dr. Eboo Patel, and Sensei M. Treace. For more details, go to <https://interfaith2010.naz.edu/>
- Priorities of the national office of Interfaith Alliance include:
 - Continued attempts to gain a national audience for *State of Belief*, the radio program hosted by Gaddy and currently available online at www.StateOfBelief.com
 - Creation of educational materials for houses of worship and candidates to help them to comply with laws regarding limitations on religious bodies in public elections and monitoring the 2010 election for compliance with these laws.
 - Facilitate civil dialogue on divisive issues such as same gender marriage.
 - Monitor matters related to the recent vote by the Texas State Board of Education to make changes to textbooks based upon Christian religious doctrine.

Interfaith Alliance - recent press release topics

- Texas State Board of Education textbook standards (March 22nd)
- Military chaplains' letter on “Don't Ask, Don't Tell” (April 28th)
- Constitutional problems with “National Day of Prayer” (April 15th and 21st)
- Supreme Court case on religious freedom and religiously exclusive Student Clubs at California Law School (April 20th)

To view these and other press releases, go to www.interfaithalliance.org then click on “The News,” then “Press Releases.”

Parliament of the World's Religions: Habeeb Ahmed invited TIA to an April 28th meeting with Dr. Malik Mujahid, Chair of Parliament of the World's Religions. The Parliament, which is the world's largest interreligious organization, holds gatherings approximately every five years.

Dr. Mujahid is the first Muslim to chair the Parliament. You can learn more about this group by visiting www.parliamentofreligions.org. As their website states, the Parliament's mission is to: *...cultivate harmony among the world's religious and spiritual communities and foster their engagement with the world and its guiding institutions in order to achieve a just, peaceful and sustainable world.*

Notes from the April 28th meeting with Dr. Mujahid are included with these minutes.

Americans United Training: Rich reported that he and several TIA-LI members attended training on grassroots religious outreach. The training was most relevant could assist our effort to spread the message of church-state separation, as well as to promote social justice.

Rethink Afghanistan: David Wildman will be guest speaker for a showing of "Rethink Afghanistan" at the Cinema Arts Theater in Huntington on **Tuesday, June 2nd**. On the Theater's website, Marty Haas reports:

"In the end, the film convincingly argues that the United States must rethink its reliance on military power as a way to combat terrorists and seek developmental, educational and health related solutions."

Following a discussion of the movie and the war, TIA members voted to co-sponsor this event. For more info on this film, go to www.cinemaartscentre.org. Then click on "Calendar" in the left column of webpage and scroll to June 2, then click on "Rethink Afghanistan." Or you can call the theater at 631-423-7611

Afghanistan: Marty noted that there seems to be some movement in Congress towards ending the war in Afghanistan. Sen. Russell Feingold has introduced S3197, a bill to require a plan for the safe, orderly, and expeditious redeployment of United States Armed Forces from Afghanistan. Rep James McGovern of Massachusetts has introduced a companion bill, HR 5015, in the House. The House bill has 84 cosponsors. Unfortunately there are no cosponsors for Feingold's bill in the Senate.

Habeeb called this a terrible war for both the U.S. and for Afghanistan. He said that the U.S. is making enemies among the population by killing children, while U.S. citizens focus on our own economy and not the problem in Afghanistan.

New Yorkers Against Gun Violence: Joyce reported that NYAGV held their annual Lobby Day in Albany on April 27th. More than 200 young people from around the state joined them in urging legislators to enact sensible gun legislation. Students spoke and sang about young people in their communities who have died because of the flood of illegal weapons on New York's streets. For more information, visit the website www.nyagv.org

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Tibbets

<p style="text-align: center;">NEXT INTERFAITH ALLIANCE MEETING:</p>
<p>Thursday, May 27th, 2010 at 7:30PM at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR) 48 Shelter Rock Road, Manhasset → in the Art Gallery</p>
<p>DIRECTIONS to UUCSR: (516) 627-6560 or visit the website www.uucsr.org</p>

Meeting with Imam Abdul Malik Mujahid
Chair, Parliament of the World's Religions
Held at Islamic Center of Long Island, Westbury
Wednesday, April 28, 2010

Attendees: Dr. Malik Mujahid, Habeeb Ahmed, Seemi Ahmed, Joyce Gorycki, Rashid Khan, Tahir Mian, Bert Saplala, Jim Smith, Dolores Tibbets, Richard Tibbets, Joseph Vella

Following introductions, we briefly mentioned some of the existing interfaith organizations which exist in the New York City region. Dr. Mujahid gave us his assessment of the interfaith movement.

- He noted that some interfaith organizations were action-oriented while others focused on dialogue. The Parliament is a dialogue-oriented group.
- He also said that there is a greater interest in interfaith initiatives today than in the past and noted that people seem to “discover” faith through various interfaith activities.
- He noted that interfaith efforts demonstrate an acceptance of diversity in society but also observed that some people saw it as a “sign of enlightenment” to remain distant from any faith tradition.

Parliament of the World's Religions

Dr. Mujahid informed us that the Parliament was formed in 1893 to bring religions together. At that time, it was opposed by Christian churches and included only one Muslim representative.

Today the Parliament is the world's largest interreligious organization, holding gatherings approximately every five years. The last one was held in Melbourne, Australia in 2009. The Parliament is the largest gathering of individuals, as well as the largest gathering of prominent religious leaders, on interfaith matters in the world. Among those in attendance are many prominent Muslim leaders as well as prominent rabbis from both the U.S. and Israel. Christian churches are also well represented.

The Parliament is led by a Board of Trustees, which elects the Chair. Dr. Mujahid, the first Muslim Chair, was elected at the end of 2009. The Board develops the strategic plan for the Parliament and hires staff to implement the plan. It also benefits from the efforts of thousands of volunteers. In addition, the Parliament has created an International Advisory Board to provide input for their efforts.

Dr. Mujahid encouraged all to visit the Parliament's website, which provides opportunity for “a virtual Parliament” to meet online throughout the year.

For more information about the Parliament, visit their website, www.ParliamentOfReligions.org as well as the social networking site www.PeaceNext.org

GROUP CONVERSATION

Dolores told Dr. Mujahid that The Interfaith Alliance (TIA) is a national organization which works to protect the separation of church and state. Rich noted that TIA promotes both faith and freedom.

Habeeb noted that the Long Island Council of Churches is a major organization on Long Island committed to interfaith efforts. He also mentioned the Multi-Faith Forum, which sends members of various faith communities to high schools and libraries to explain religious beliefs and customs to students.

Jim noted how 1800 college students were energized at a recent event at St. John's University as they listened to Greg Mortenson speak of his efforts to build schools in Afghanistan and Pakistan. Dr. Mujahid noted that Muslims in the Chicago area are a generous funder of Mortenson's efforts. He noted that there is also a group, Citizens Foundation, building schools in Pakistan.

Bert noted that all organizations face the problem of organizational competition and interpersonal rivalries and asked how the Parliament deals with such issues. Dr. Mujahid noted that the Parliament works to promote harmony via conversation and common action in order to reduce division. He also recalls the statement in the Koran that God created mankind as one, we humans divided and separated from each other. We need to work to bring humankind back together.

Respectfully submitted,
Richard Tibbets