



**The Interfaith Alliance**  
**LONG ISLAND CHAPTER**  
[www.interfaithalliance-li.org](http://www.interfaithalliance-li.org)



### **Minutes – Meeting of April 7, 2011**

**Attendance:** Mark Lukens, Chair; Saeed Ahmed; Hank Arond; Paul Auerbach; Syed Karamath; Marty Melkonian; Ehab Mobarak; Habeebuddin Mohammed; Robert Nuxoll; Mohammad Rashid; Dolores Tibbets; Richard Tibbets; M. Yosef.

Marty Melkonian called the meeting to order at 7:15 PM.

**Minutes:** Members waived reading of the Feb. 10<sup>th</sup> minutes and accepted the minutes as submitted.

**Treasurer's Report:** Dolores Tibbets reported that for the period 3/10/11 to 4/7/11, we received \$115 in dues payments plus a \$25 donation. We also paid bank fees of \$5, leaving us with a balance of \$822.47. **\*\* Annual Membership Renewal form is attached. \*\***

**Board Nominations:** Rich Tibbets reported that TIA-LI By-Laws specify that an "Annual Meeting" be held in the spring of each year. The principal actions to take place at the Annual Meeting are the presentation of the Annual Financial Report to the members and the election of Board members for the upcoming year. Over the next few weeks, the current Board will seek members willing to serve effective June of this year. We also invite members to nominate candidates, including the nomination of themselves as Board Members. We will announce the candidates at our May 12<sup>th</sup> Chapter meeting and hold elections at our June meeting.

**\*\* Nomination form is attached. \*\***

All dues paying members are eligible to vote for Board members at June's Annual Meeting.  
(A copy of the Chapter's By-Laws will be posted on our website, [www.interfaithalliance-li.org](http://www.interfaithalliance-li.org) )

**New York State Senate Homeland Security Hearings:** On Friday, April 8<sup>th</sup>, the State Senate Committee on Veterans, Homeland Security and Military Affairs will hold hearings in Manhattan. The announced purpose of these hearings, according to the Senate website, is: *"To consider opportunities to improved New York State's Homeland Security Operations and how far we have come since September 11<sup>th</sup>."*)

Oral testimony is by invitation only. Witnesses invited to testify include Rep. Peter King of Long Island, who is holding similar hearings in Congress. A coalition of civil rights, immigrant rights, Muslim and interfaith organizations has issued a press release opposing the hearings. The press release notes that:

*"On Wednesday April 5, 2011 the coalition will issue a letter to the State Senate Committee from over 75 organizations and community leaders deploring the inappropriate addition of "Sharia Law" discussion into routine Homeland Security discussion; the virulently anti-immigrant agenda of some of the speakers; the exclusion*

*of balancing perspectives from the community and from mainstream academic sources; and the overall politicization of disaster preparedness policy making.”*

TIA-LI has joined a coalition of civil and immigrant rights, Muslim and interfaith organizations in New York by endorsing a statement opposing these hearings. A group of eleven NYS Senators wrote statements sharing the coalition’s concerns. (Links will be posted on the TIA-LI website.)

**Pax Christi Peacemaker Award to Habeeb & Seemi Ahmed:** On Sunday, March 13<sup>th</sup>, Pax Christi honored TIA-LI members, Habeeb & Seemi Ahmed, with their annual Peacemaker Award. Habeeb is Chairman of the Board of the Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI). Seemi, co-chair of the Muslim Peace Coalition, is very active in speaking about Islam to schools and community groups working to promote peace and non-violence. The award ceremony was held at ICLI in Westbury. Numerous speakers praised Habeeb & Seemi’s efforts to promote peace, justice and interfaith harmony.

- Rabbi Michael White of Temple Sinai, Roslyn Heights, speaking of the hearings which Rep. Peter King is holding on “Islamic Radicalism” said, “my people know something about being castigated in this way” and called the hearings an “abomination.” He also told us that Habeeb & Seemi represent the highest values that every faith teaches.
- Dr. Sawyer of SUNY Old Westbury, teacher of Islamic Studies, told us how generous and hospitable Seemi was when Prof. Sawyer brought students from her Islamic Studies class to ICLI to gain greater insight into Islam.
- TIA-LI Chair Rev. Mark Lukens gave a warm and rousing talk praising Habeeb & Seemi.
- Speakers also included Msgr. Beekman for the Diocese of Rockville Center, Westbury Mayor Peter Cavallaro, and many others.

**Imam Feisal Abdul Rauf at Shelter Rock:** On Thursday, March 24<sup>th</sup>, Shelter Rock Forum hosted Imam Feisal to speak about Islam and answer questions from the audience.

Paul Auerbach noted that Imam Feisal spoke in a conciliatory manner when responding to questions about Islam from the audience. Bob Nuxoll praised Imam Feisal’s manner and dignity, such as his thanking questioners for raising the difficult questions about Islam and for getting to the heart of the non-Muslims’ concerns. He also noted that Imam Feisal seemed to fully understand the concerns expressed by questioners.

Imam Feisal stressed the commonalities among Judaism, Christianity and Islam. For instance, Islam honors all the prophets found in the Hebrew Scriptures and also reveres Jesus although they consider him a prophet, not the Son of God as Christians do. He said that Muslims also consider Muhammad to be God’s final prophet. Imam Feisal also told us that all three faiths believe that we must (1) love God with our whole heart and mind and (2) love our neighbor as our self. He said all the commandments are based on those two.

When asked about Jewish-Christian-Muslim strife, Imam Feisal told us that the enemy isn’t religion, but ideology. He said that the conflict is between moderates and extremists of our faiths. Extremists feed each other in a downward cycle. Western media presents images of Muslim attacks on innocent Westerners, while citizens in predominantly Muslim countries view images of women and children

injured or killed in drone attacks. Each side mourns its losses but not the losses on the other side. In light of all this mutual fear and distrust, Imam Feisal noted that the image of a Jewish NYC mayor promoting the right of Muslims to build a community center/mosque near the fallen World Trade Center left a very positive impression on the Muslim world.

The audience also asked about criminal law and harsh punishment in Islam. Imam Feisal pointed out that while Islam promotes peace and brotherhood, some groups pervert Islam in order to promote their violent political goals or to support ancient cultural practices. He compared the repressive form of fundamentalist Islam to the Inquisitional Christianity practiced in 15<sup>th</sup> century Europe. Similarly, when asked about women's rights in Islam, Imam Feisal noted that Muhammad was a promoter of women's rights, as was Jesus, but cultural practices led many societies to ignore their teaching and to continue to deny women equality. Imam Feisal noted that just as Jewish and Catholic immigrants adapted their European based religion and culture to 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century America, and just as Arab Muslims adapted to Turkish, Persian and Indian culture in previous centuries, so American Muslims must adjust to 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

Imam Feisal is author of several books, including *Islam: A New Vision for Muslims and the West*, which Christian Science Monitor rated among its five best books for 2004.

**Sharia Law – Imam Shamsi Ali:** On Sunday, April 3<sup>rd</sup>, Imam Shamsi Ali presented a talk titled *Sharia Law: Fears, Myths, Misconceptions – An Introduction to Sharia Law*. The Islamic Center of Long Island (ICLI) hosted this event.

Mark noted that education about other religions, such as that provided by Imam Ali at the April 3<sup>rd</sup> gathering, is vital in today's world. He repeated Imam Ali's remarks that Sharia is not a draconian penal code from ancient times but a set of rules for Muslims to follow in order to live a holy life.

Mark stressed that civil and human rights are non-negotiable. He also pointed out that these rights are not subject to majority opinion and that fear on the part of non-Muslims is not a reason for abrogating these rights. Mark praised the Muslim community for their outreach to educate non-Muslims about their religion, but he noted that no religious group should have to repeatedly justify itself.

Syed Karamath noted that American non-Muslims are afraid of Islam because they don't know what the religion preaches. All they know is that some extremists support the stoning of women for adultery and other violent acts, which are so often reported by American media. There is a great need for education about Islam in this country.

Marty remarked that non-Muslim Americans have many stereotypes about Muslims and urged us to challenge the media (e.g., with a "Letter to the Editor") when we hear such stereotypes repeated in the media.

## Imam Ali's Discussion of Sharia Law: A Brief Summary

In his April 3<sup>rd</sup> presentation, Imam Ali said that religion has three principal components: (1) faith - a belief system (e.g., the oneness of God); (2) ritual – which tells how to relate to God (such as praying five times a day or fasting during Ramadan; and (3) Law (Sharia) which tells Muslims how to relate to others.

Many non-Muslims think of Sharia Law as a legal or criminal code (with harsh punishment for wrongdoing). However, just as Halakhah (Jewish Law) is a set of rules and practices affecting every aspect of Jewish life, Sharia is a set of rules and practices telling Muslims how to live a holy life.

Imam Ali said that the sources of Sharia Law include the Quran, Sunnah, Consensus, Analogy, Preference, and Public Interest.

- The **Quran** is the ultimate authority, as it is the word of God revealed directly to the Prophet Muhammad. This is similar to the Jewish reliance on the Torah and Christian reliance on the Gospels.
- **Sunnah**: A collections of sayings of the Prophet, including his interpretation of the Quran for his followers.
- **Consensus**: For questions not answered in either the Quran or the Sunnah, Muslims rely on a consensus of religious scholars.
- **Analogy**: For a new case not mentioned in above sources. For instance, drug use is not mentioned in the Quran, but alcohol use is mentioned. Therefore, scholars refer to rules about alcohol when reaching a ruling on drug use.
- **Preference**: A method of exercising personal opinion in order to avoid any rigidity and unfairness that might result from literal application of law (similar to the Western concept of equity). e.g., Muslims may relax rules on head covering for women if this serves a greater good.
- **Public Interest**: Following Muhammad's death, some Muslims objected to recording the Quran in writing since the Prophet never did. Public interest determined that it was acceptable because otherwise his words would not be remembered after all those who knew him died.

Also, Imam Ali said that after 9/11 some Muslims felt that they should not report suspicious activities by Muslims to police. Some, like Rep. Peter King, use such fears on the part of some Muslims to say that Muslims are not trustworthy. However, Imam Ali spoke to Rep. King and told him that, according to the principle of "Public Interest," Muslims would be violating Islam by NOT reporting suspicious activities to the police. And indeed, Muslim leaders have urged their members to cooperate with law enforcement.

**Jihad**: Jihad is a very misunderstood principle and a flash point in dialogue between Muslims and non-Muslims. Many non-Muslims think of Jihad as Al-Qaida attacks on Western individuals and institutions. However, Imam Ali pointed out that there are three forms of Jihad:

- Jihad as spiritual struggle – Each Muslim must struggle to live his life according to the five pillars of Islam: (1) Submission to God; (2) Prayer – Muslims pray to God five times/day; (3) Zakat – which primarily includes charitable giving, but also includes working to help the needy and urging others to help as well; (4) Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan; and (5) Pilgrimage – each Muslim must (if physically and financially able) travel to Mecca at least once during his/her life to visit sacred places and participate in sacred rituals.

- Jihad as an intellectual struggle – God wants all humans to seek knowledge and to use their knowledge wisely. There is a saying that struggling intellectually and finally getting the right answer gives you two blessings. But if you struggle and still get the wrong answer, you still get one blessing because you did struggle for the truth.
- Jihad through physical activities – Muslims must preserve life, such as feeding their families and protecting them from violence. If physically attacked, try to avoid the confrontation. But if you can't avoid confrontation and your life is endangered, then you are allowed to fight back. (Editor's note: This is consistent with the Christian principle of "Just War.")

**Summary:** Sharia is the foundation of Islamic Law. However, you need a deep understanding in order to implement Sharia Law. Some individuals have a limited understanding of Sharia Law and misapply it. Those practicing terrorism in the name of Islam surely fall into this category.

**Global Day of Listening:** Dolores reported that Jackie Jill-Rito has been active with "Global Day of Listening," which was inspired by the Afghan Youth Peace Volunteers, Afghans for Peace, and Iraqi & American Reconciliation Project. This event was held on March 23 and involved Americans listening and speaking directly to Afghan Youth living in the war zone. Jackie, a high school teacher in Nassau County, had also participated in a similar event with her students last fall.

Bob Nuxoll commented that listening to children and young people is tremendously compelling. He emphasized that interfaith awareness is vital to building bridges for future generations.

For more information, you may visit the websites <http://globaldayoflistening.org> and <http://livewithoutwars.org>

**Anti-War Rally:** Marty reminded us of the rally scheduled for Saturday, April 9<sup>th</sup>. The rally will call for an end to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, withdrawal of troops, moving money from fighting overseas war to funding domestic needs, speaking out against Islamophobia and anti-immigrant activities, and other social issues. You may find more information about the rally at the website <https://nationalpeaceconference.org>

**Rev. Mark Lukens to Speak to Leadership Group:** Mark informed us that he has been invited to give the Keynote Address at a meeting of the Nassau County Leadership Group on Sunday, April 10<sup>th</sup>. The Leadership Group is composed of political, business and religious leaders in Nassau County. The topic is "Human Rights in Nassau County." What an appropriate topic for him. Congratulations, Mark!

Respectfully submitted,  
Richard Tibbets

*(See next page for next TIA meeting as well as an April 17<sup>th</sup> Interfaith Event in Queens)*

## **Next TIA meeting:**

**Thursday, May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2:00pm**

Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock (UUCSR)  
48 Shelter Rock Road  
Manhasset, NY 11030

For directions, visit the UUCSR website at  
[www.uucsr.org/find.asp](http://www.uucsr.org/find.asp)

## **OTHER UPCOMING EVENTS:**

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community of Hollis, Queens has invited TIA members to attend a panel on the rising tide of religious extremism around the world. The speakers will discuss:

- How extremist ideology has shattered the social, political and religious fabric of society
- What is the source of religious extremism
- Why the west should care
- How can we promote global "Freedom of Religion and Expression"
- Comments from leading Political, Civic and Community Leaders

**When:** April 17, 2010

**Where:** Bait-uz-Zafar

188-15 McLaughlin Avenue, Hollis, NY 11423

**Time:** 2:00 PM

Refreshments will be served.

Tel: (718)-479-3345, (718)-216-6617, (718)-263-0717

Speakers:

- Rabbi Joseph Potasnik - Executive Vice President, New York Board of Rabbi's
- Ari L. Goldman - Dean of Students, Columbia University
- Imam Daud A. Hanif - Vice President, Ahmadiyya Muslim Community USA
- Rev. N.J.L'Heureux, Jr. - Executive Director, Queens Federation of Churches
- And other Scholars

## **The Interfaith Alliance – Long Island Chapter 2011 Nomination of Board Members**

As stipulated in the By-Laws of TIA-LI, it is time for the election of members to serve on the Board of our Chapter. Therefore, we are seeking nominations for persons to serve on the Board. Those nominated must be committed to the mission and goals of TIA-LI:

*“...promoting the positive role of religion as a healing and constructive force in public life, encouraging the renewal of values within our families and communities, and providing people of faith with an alternative voice to that of the radical religious right.”*

The responsibilities of TIA Board Members include making decisions which reflect the mission of TIA and designating individuals to function as TIA officers. Decisions are typically made at our monthly meetings in conjunction with the membership present.

Please take a few moments to consider whether you would be interested in serving on our Board. Also, consider other individuals whom you think would be good candidates. Please inform anyone whom you nominate that you have done so.

Nominations will be announced at our May 12<sup>th</sup> meeting, and election of Board Members will be held at our June meeting (date to be announced).

Thank you for your interest in keeping TIA-LI a vital and relevant organization during these challenging times!

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**I would like to nominate the following individual(s) to the TIA-LI Board:**

(Self-nominations are also encouraged!)

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Nominated by:**

Name(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Phone #: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

Mail nominations to Dolores Tibbets, 86-34 261<sup>st</sup> Street, Floral Park, NY 11001  
or via email to [richard.tibbets@verizon.net](mailto:richard.tibbets@verizon.net)

**➔ See reverse side for Annual Membership Renewal Form ←**



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## 2011 Membership Dues

Make Your Faith More Than Weekend Words!  
*Stop Political Extremists From  
 Using Religion as a Political Tool.*  
 Join The Interfaith Alliance-Long Island Chapter.

YES! I/We want the mainstream community of faith to be heard! My annual membership dues are:

- \$25 for regular (or more) \_\_\_\_\_
- \$20 for Senior
- \$15 for Student

**Today's Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Name:** \_\_\_\_\_  
 As you wish it to appear in our membership records

**Address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**City:** \_\_\_\_\_ **State** \_\_\_\_\_ **Zip** \_\_\_\_\_

**Home Phone** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_ **Business** (\_\_\_\_) \_\_\_\_\_

**Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to **The Interfaith Alliance of LI** and return to:

Dolores Tibbets  
 86-34 261<sup>st</sup> Street  
 Floral Park, NY 11001

For information call Richard Tibbets at (718) 343-6823

*TIA-LI is a 501(c)(4) Non-Profit Organization.  
 Membership dues are NOT deductible for Income Tax purposes*

**➔ See reverse side for Board Member Nominations (Optional) ←**