

Monmouth Center for World Religions and Ethical Thought  
www.interfaith-MCWRET.org

**Annual Report 2016**

During 2016 the Board moved deeper into understanding one another's faith and practice with interfaith dialogue, public programs, and advocacy. Public programs in 2016 included:

Dr. Tonie Malone lectured *On Care for Our Common Home: Laudato Si'* on 1/28 at the Monmouth County Library Headquarters in Manalapan.

Eileen Ellis, MSW spoke from her Mohawk Indian Medicine Woman tradition of *Native American Healing: Inviting Peace, Love and Transformation into Your Life* at the Annual Meeting on 5/14.

Joe Ritacco moderated a panel on lesser known religions and wisdom traditions at Brookdale on 7/14 with Sarbmeet Kanwal representing Sikhism, Calvin Chatlos representing Ethical Culture/Humanism and Naresh Jain and Ari Jain representing Jainism.

Harinder Singh provided a Sikh perspective about achieving lasting peace at the Shanti lecture on 10/9 entitled "Begampura: City Without Sorrow."

The well attended 15<sup>th</sup> *United We Sing*, was held on Sunday, 11/20.

Area clergy were encouraged to include a statement from the UUCMC and the MCWRET commemorating the 4<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the tragic Newtown, Connecticut shooting at the Sandy Hook Elementary School. The MCWRET joined in local vigils for all victims of gun violence to bring to the forefront the epidemic of gun violence plaguing our country.

The Board also participated in a four week course on *Cosmology and Astronomy* offered by Sarbmeet Kanwal during March and the Board learned more about pranayama and yoga with a lecture, poses and opportunity to experience it with teachers Dr. Satish and Mrs. Snehal Tamhankar on 12/10. This session was arranged by Madhav Phadke.

The MCWRET cosponsored the interfaith evening and screening of the documentary "Merchants of Doubt" about climate change on 1/27 at the First Presbyterian Church in Rumson.

Ali Choudry led a panel discussion after the showing of the documentary film: *Inside Islam: What a Billion Muslims Really Think* on 4/14 at Brookdale Community College.

We co-sponsored the Monmouth Community Climate Coalition 6/6 program with Rev. Michael Dowd speaking on *Standing for the Future: Inspiring Science, Evolving Faith, Realistic Hope*. The event was attended by over 150 people and held at First Presbyterian Church of Rumson.

We also cosponsored the *Coalition for Peace Action* annual conference in Princeton.

We believe that what we are doing is critically important especially in this day and age with the Monmouth Center and with **MOSAIC** (*Mobilizing Our Students for Action to build Interfaith Community.*) The focus of **MOSAIC** is to learn about other faiths, serve the community and enhance student leadership skills. Midnight Run is one of our community service projects. We are also serving dinner to the homeless in the Family Promise network in Monmouth County. We are in our fourth year working with 62 new students from 12 different faith traditions as well as alumnae and 12 “ambassadors” (alumnae in leadership development).

The diversity in **MOSAIC** is encouraging. Students come from many different traditions including Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Episcopal, American Baptist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Agnostic, Atheist, Unitarian Universalist, Humanist, and “undecided.” We have 11 sessions planned where we visit each house of worship and the teens tell us about their faith, traditions, practices, and holidays. In addition, we work together in community service projects. Many photos in the video and more information can be found on [www.GardenStateMOSAIC.org](http://www.GardenStateMOSAIC.org).

Another project the students created was local school *Teens Against Intolerance* chapters where issues of intolerance and/or injustice are discussed in small groups and skits presented in school assemblies, as well as at *United We Sing* at the UUCMC, at the *Center for Holocaust, Human Rights, and Genocide Education (CHHANGE)* Annual Colloquium “Survivors Empowering Voices for Tomorrow” at Brookdale Community College on 5/13 and other community settings. **MOSAIC** attempts to equip students with the tools, skills and experience to stand up for the other.

At the Closing Celebration last year, one of the 8<sup>th</sup> grade students said that “**MOSAIC** allowed me to respect other religions as well as understand their background and theology. It has allowed me to express my beliefs and myself in ways that I could never express myself in. **MOSAIC** has given me the opportunities to taste foods that I would have never tasted in my lifetime and explore worlds that I have never been to. Because of **MOSAIC**, I have been able to leave my shell and ask questions to better my understanding. **MOSAIC** has given me the privilege to defend other faiths in other places so that people do not have to deal with the ignorance of others so conceded by their lack of knowledge of these topics.” The guest speaker, Mr. Sami Elmansoury, acknowledged the significance of what we are doing and thought that someday there would be a national **MOSAIC** and then a global **MOSAIC**.

A parent wrote that “Joining **MOSAIC** has helped my daughter tremendously in different ways. She learned about different faiths, made new friends, and participating in community service projects was the highlight of all. She got an opportunity to demonstrate her leadership skills as well. The whole **MOSAIC** experience has made a deep impact on her thinking and maturing.”

One important outcome is the attention we have enjoyed from other groups interested in starting a **MOSAIC** program in other areas. We welcome visitors to the sessions to experience what is happening. We are also working on a manual/guide to help others get started.

**MOSAIC** has been a rewarding experience for all involved – the organizers, the students, and the parents. We have enjoyed a superb interfaith team committed to building and strengthening bridges with love, peace, and cooperation. We did not anticipate and were delighted to be recipients of the **Community Interfaith Trailblazer Award** at the *Inaugural Shore Region Interfaith Prayer Breakfast* on 5/18/16 for fostering interfaith community building amongst youth. The event was attended by over 150 community leaders in Monmouth County.

In addition, on 6/6/16, Dr. Sarbmeet Kanwal, Co-coordinator, received the Earl Thomas Teasley **Humanitarian Award** by the *Monmouth County Human Resources Commission* for his efforts in leading the MOSAIC program.

On 11/16/16, **MOSAIC** Co-coordinator Fatima Jaffari received the *NJ Human Relations Council* **Unity Award for Achievement by a Faith-Based Organization** for “Realizing a vision of engaging youth to understand and respect a diversity of religious beliefs, to create a more unified community by walking a day in each other’s shoes.”

**MOSAIC** was created by *the Monmouth Center for World Religions and Ethical Thought* and the *Monmouth County Human Relations Commission*. It enjoys the support of the various houses of worship where youth are enrolled.

Respectfully submitted,

Co-coordinators

Rev. Elizabeth B. Congdon

Dr. Stevi Lischin