

Monmouth Center for World Religions and Ethical Thought  
www.interfaithmonmouthcenter.org

## Annual Report 2017

During 2017 the Board moved deeper into understanding one another's faith and practice with interfaith dialogue, public programs, and advocacy. By Laws revisions were made this year and an application for non-profit 501 (c) 3 status was submitted thanks to the efforts of Madhav Phadke, Ari Jain, Kristine Binaco, Mary Carol Day, Joe Ritacco and Liz Congdon. About 350 people attended the six public programs that are included with other advocacy activities.

As an act of solidarity several of the Board members joined other community members and surrounded the *Islamic Society of Monmouth County* mosque on 2/3 while they were in afternoon prayer.

Stevi Lischin and Liz Congdon spoke at the Monmouth Reformed Temple's prayer vigil on 3/13 as part of "*A Gathering for the Sake of Humanity.*"

On 3/26 the UUCMC Social Justice Committee and MCWRET cosponsored the showing of "*To Light A Candle,*" a film about Baha'i persecution in Iran and the triumph of knowledge over intolerance. Panel discussion followed the film.

The Annual meeting was held on 4/6 with 24 in attendance. Elaine Held spoke on "*My Path to Chikai – Ocean Wisdom,*" her path to Buddhism.

Joe Ritacco moderated a multi-faith dialogue on the "*Golden Rule and Beyond*" at Brookdale on 4/20. Speakers included: Fatima Jaffari (Islam), Dr. Sarbmeet Kanwal (Sikhism), Rabbi Marc Kline (Judaism), Rabbi Lawrence Malinger (Judaism), Rev. Terrence K. Porter (Christianity), and Uma Swaminathan (Hinduism).

On 4/26 Esmat Mahmoud was among the panelists discussing "*The Challenge of Being Muslim in America*" at the Red Bank Library.

MOSAIC *Teens Against Intolerance* spoke at the Red Bank library on 6/28 in the "Let's Talk About Race" series. Their presentation was about "*How to Raise Children Without Prejudice.*"

Dr. Mark Lupiesella, NASA Scientist and Engineer, spoke at the Shanti Lecture on 10/8 on "*Science and Ethics: How Modern Science Informs Ethics and Peace.*"

Patty Whyte was a panelist at the Monmouth University's School of Social Work Barbera-Villegas International Social Work Lecture "*Interfaith Discussions on Islamophobia in NJ*" delivered by Amani Al-Khatahtbeh on 11/16. Rev. Gil Caldwell and Rabbi Marc Kline were also panelists.

*United We Sing*, held on Sunday, 11/19 included 13 performers from 9 different faiths. It was attended by 159 persons.

The MCWRET and MOSAIC sponsored an interfaith art exhibit on nonviolence as a part of the National Vigil and Events to End Gun Violence on the five-year mark of the Sandy Hook Tragedy. The art created by the MOSAIC and UUCMC students, will be exhibited at churches, mosques, synagogues and temples involved with MOSAIC and also at Monmouth County public libraries.

Co-sponsored events follow.

A *Unity Vigil and Walk* was held on 3/5 with the Freehold Clergy Association and high school teacher Matt Mopsick.

Patty Whyte spoke representing the Monmouth Center at the *2017 Shore Region Interfaith Prayer Breakfast* sponsored by Pilgrim Baptist Church of Red Bank at Brookdale Community College in Lincroft on 5/17.

The Monmouth Community Climate Coalition sponsored the 11/2 showing of the film "Climate Refugees" at the UUCMC.

Liz Congdon attended the *Coalition for Peace Action* annual conference held in Princeton on 11/12 where Professors Reza Aslan, Elaine Scarry and Suzy Kim, as well as Representative Bonnie Watson Coleman were speakers.

We continue with **MOSAIC** (*Mobilizing Our Students for Action to build Interfaith Community*) for the 5<sup>th</sup> year. The focus of **MOSAIC** is to learn about other faiths, serve the community and enhance student leadership skills. We completed our fourth year on 4/30 having worked with 71 new students as well as 15 alumnae "ambassadors" (alumnae in leadership development). The diversity is encouraging. Students come from many different traditions including Greek Orthodox, Roman Catholic, Reformed, Episcopal, American Baptist, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Atheist, Agnostic, Unitarian Universalist, Humanist, "none" and "undecided." We had two leadership sessions and seven sessions where we visited each other's house of worship and the teens tell us about their faith, traditions, practices, and holidays. In addition, we work together in community service projects. Midnight Run was one of our community service projects when we went to NYC with clothing and food for the homeless. We also served six dinners to homeless families in the Family Promise network in Monmouth County. Many photos in the video and more information can be found on [www.GardenStateMOSAIC.org](http://www.GardenStateMOSAIC.org).

This year we are working with 67 students. We had 2 special session and 8 sessions at each others houses of worship and the teens tell us about their faith, traditions, practices, and holidays. In addition, we work together in community service projects.

Another project the students created was local school *Teens Against Intolerance* chapters where issues of intolerance and/or injustice were discussed in small groups and are presented in school assemblies. **MOSAIC** attempts to equip students with the tools, skills and experience to stand up for the other.

One important outcome was 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 have completed 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. **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