

Monmouth Center for World Religions and Ethical Thought

www.interfaithmonmouthcenter.org (MCWRET)

Facebook Page [Interfaith Monmouth Center](#)

Annual Report 2019

Annual programs and advocacy were a big part of the activities in 2019. *Mobilizing Our Students for Action to build Interfaith Community* (MOSAIC) and the *Civil Discourse Project* (CDP) were other avenues to realize the mission in 2019.

The MCWRET was a cosponsor of the MLK, Jr. weekend of events with the *Pilgrim Baptist Church*. Stevi Lischin, Georgette Thomas, and Patty Whyte participated in the “Community Conversation on the Golden Rule and Police Use of Force Report” on 1/19.

Patty Whyte discussed videos showing successful civil discourse across racial boundaries at the 1/24 *Citizens for a Diverse and Open Society* meeting in Red Bank.

The MCWRET participated in the *African American Read In* at the Quinn Chapel AME Church in Atlantic Highlands on 2/23. Event was coordinated by Georgette Thomas.

The MCWRET co-sponsored La Convivencia’s 2nd annual Social Justice & Interfaith Leadership Conference entitled Social, Justice, Faith, Diversity & Hope *Together We Rise* on 3/24 in Princeton.

Georgette Thomas participated in a panel in the racism series on 3/27 at the *Red Bank Library*.

Civil Discourse was the subject for discussion led by Joe Ritacco on 4/7 at the *First Presbyterian Church* in Matawan with 25 in attendance.

Dr. Saliba Sarsar, Advisor and Professor at Monmouth University was the speaker at the 4/17 Annual Meeting. He read poetry from his book *Jerusalem: The home in Our Hearts*. Over 30 attended the meeting.

The *Central Monmouth Better Angels Alliance* initiative of the *Civil Discourse Project* was launched with workshops on 6/11 and 6/27 for people on opposite ends of the political divide. This civil discourse project is the beginning of the MCWRET’s attempts at depolarizing America. Three other meetings were held in 2019.

Several Board members participated in the *Lights for Liberty* vigil at *Riverside Gardens Park* in Red Bank on 7/12 to protest the inhumane conditions faced by migrants.

Joe Ritacco and John Licitra moderated a panel on Earthcare for retired Catholic Brothers living at Christian Brothers Academy. Panelists included Lynn Dash, Dr. Ari Jain, Rabbi Marc Kline, and Rev Diane Ford.

David Blankenhorn, president and co-founder of *Better Angels*, a citizens' organization uniting Americans in a working alliance to depolarize America, spoke at the 20th *Shanti* event on Sunday, 10/6 in Lincroft to an audience of 81. The title of his talk was “We Are Not Enemies.” A lively time of questions and answers followed.

The MCWRET co-sponsored the *Coalition of Peace Action's* 40th Anniversary Conference and Multifaith Service for Peace in Princeton on 11/10. Over 600 attended this conference, Liz Congdon among them. Keynote speaker Jim Wallis founder and Editor-in-Chief of *Sojourners* was joined by panelists Ray Acheson, US Representative of the Nobel Peace Prize laureate International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons, Dr. Daniel Ellsberg, who released the Pentagon Papers during the Vietnam War, and is a CFPA Sponsor and others.

Joe Ritacco arranged for Ghandikota Aryama to speak on Hinduism on 11/18 at Seabrook Assisted Living residence.

The 19th Annual *United We Sing* celebration of diversity and gratitude was attended by over 140 on Sunday 11/24 at the UUCMC in Lincroft. Twelve performers from 10 different faiths/traditions song, danced, chanted or spoke on this joyful occasion. An intercultural feast followed.

MOSAIC 6 (the 2018-2019 school year) included 62 teenagers (32, 52% male and 30, 48% female). The largest grade represented were 10th graders with 32%. Twelfth graders represented only 10%. 8th, 9th, and 11th grades were 16%, 21% and 21% respectively.

The diversity has been encouraging. Students over the years have come from many different traditions including Greek Orthodox, Reformed, American Baptist, Roman Catholic, Episcopalian, Jewish, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jain, Agnostic, Unitarian Universalist, Humanist, “none” and “undecided.” **MOSAIC 6** distribution was 27% Hindu, 27% Christian, 23% Jewish, 11% none, 10% Muslim, and 2% Jain.

We had 11 sessions which included 8 visiting different houses of worship where the youth there talked about their faith. This year included visits to the Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Reformed, Roman Catholic, Unitarian Universalist, Jain and the Greek Orthodox houses of worship. We also had a kick-off session, a *Rise Against Hunger* meal packing event community service session and a closing ceremony.

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. Many exciting sessions are underway for **MOSAIC 7**.

For example, five **MOSAIC 7** teens delighted an audience of about 25 Applewood Estates residents on 12/4/19 with a panel about holidays in their faiths. Liz Congdon served as convener and moderator. The faiths represented were Jewish, Sikh, Jain, Hindu and Muslim. The talks were sincere, descriptive, informative and very interesting. The students were composed, articulate, sincere, and well informed. Most powerful was the question and answer time when the students responded with not only information about their faith and culture, but reflected on their faith practice, the meaning of prayer to them and knowing or not knowing the presence of God. Many in the audience verbalized how impressed they were with the students in this “excellent” panel. Two folks said it well, “you give us hope.” One woman told us that she loves hearing young people talk of their faith. Two others could not believe how well informed the **MOSAIC** students are and how deep in their knowledge and faith. We were delighted with both an honoraria for **MOSAIC** and an invitation to return.

With sadness we report the loss of two long-time Board members, Antonia Malone and Milton Ziment. Both Tonie and Milt have been committed to interfaith work and justice and served passionately over many years contributing time, talent and resources.