Dear Friends,  

The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia celebrated its Fifth Anniversary in this year of an historic Presidential election. There seems to be a readiness in our country to truly live into our ideals. There is a force for good that propels our faith communities as we strive for oneness and for wholeness. The Interfaith Center is proud to be one of the new organizations arising to meet the needs of our times.

Our strategic direction has resulted in the following major accomplishments:

- **Serving as a “lab” for launching innovative models of interfaith and cross-cultural work for youth, adults and religious leaders**, based on best practices and multi-disciplinary systems, service learning, youth development, adult learning, community organizing and diversity.

- **Engaging over 55 youth from 18 congregations** in over 1,000 hours of community service to clean parks, send books to prisoners and build bridges of understanding.

- **Uniting religious leaders from 28 faith communities**, representing more than 2.5 million citizens from our region to collaborate on efforts to heal the wounds of violence.

- **Reaching nearly 1,000 adults in diverse communities** who participated in interactive, in-depth learning and dialogue experiences.

- **Strengthening collaborative leadership models** by developing flexible ways to engage the diverse talents of staff and board members, and to address priority issues and concerns.

- **Developing expertise in how to replicate our signature programs** by consulting with outside volunteers in marketing, communications and business planning.

- **Increasing visibility on the local and national scene** through publications in interfaith journals, a *New York Times* feature article on our youth program and a quarterly newsletter, *Sacred Seasons*.

The dynamism of the Interfaith Center is a tribute to the gifts and dedication of our Board, staff, interns and community partners. We look forward to continued strength and vibrancy as we carry out our vision of contributing to the richness and welfare of this great city and region.

In deep gratitude,

Abby Stamelman Hocky  
Executive Director
Mission & Vision

The mission of the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia is to advance mutual trust, understanding and cooperation among faith communities in order to work together for the common good of the region. We hope to enable people of all faiths to share their deepest convictions, shape solutions to common problems, and live out their highest values and aspirations, through transformation, action, learning, and leadership.

Our Programs

The Center has developed several signature initiatives that have been field-tested and evaluated, with demonstrated impact in promoting interfaith understanding and action at the grassroots and leadership levels.

Youth Development, Service and Leadership including Walking the Walk, a year-long service-learning program for high school students seeking interaction with peers from different religious traditions. Dr. Eboo Patel, public radio commentator and founder of the Interfaith Youth Core in Chicago, has called Walking the Walk “the most sophisticated interfaith youth program in the country.” Alternative Spring Break programs offer college and high school students a week-long interfaith service-learning immersion experience. The Youth Leadership Program provides ‘alumni’ with the opportunity to build upon their experiences and take on leadership roles in service projects, interfaith dialogue endeavors and the National Day of Youth Service, in which youth from across Philadelphia unite in direct service to their community.

Interfaith Education, Dialogue and Leadership including Encountering Other Faiths, a workshop series designed to break down stereotypes and explore challenging interfaith issues based upon Sr. Maria Hornung’s book, ‘Encountering Other Faiths’ (Paulist Press, 2007). The Interfaith Women in Religious Leadership Initiative engages a rich diversity of women serving congregations and communities in order to strengthen spiritual connections, enhance understanding, share resources, and affirm their distinctive calls to action. Leadership and Diversity Training is tailored to the needs of different constituencies. Quest, an interfaith book group, meets monthly.

The Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia was founded in 2006 and is coordinated by the Interfaith Center. The Council’s purpose is to build relationships of mutual support among the judicatory heads of major faith communities in the region, offer a moral and spiritual voice and take action on critical issues of concern. This Council, the first of its kind in Philadelphia, is convened by Cardinal Justin Rigali (Archdiocese of Philadelphia), Imam Anwar Muhamin (International Muslim Brotherhood, Inc.), Rabbi David Straus (VAAD: Board of Rabbis), and Bishop Claire Burkat (Evangelical Lutheran Church in America).
The Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia: A Window into our Work

Transformation

“One day at school, I was walking through the cafeteria with my friend Emily. She spotted a penny and picked it up - it was ‘heads’ up.... ‘Jew!’ a voice called out. I looked up and my smile faded. I flashed back to the Walking the Walk meeting the weekend before. I remembered my Jewish friend from Main Line Reform Temple explaining how much it hurt her when her school went through a stage where anti-Semitic comments and many jokes about Jews were going around. I suddenly thought back to when Reverend Nicole, our Group Leader, read excerpts from Eboo Patel’s book on pluralism. The last thing my new friends needed was for people like me to ignore these anti-Semitic remarks. Eboo Patel, the founder of the interfaith youth movement, had a similar experience when he was in high school. Eboo’s words of regret for not ‘speaking up’ flooded me like a wave, and I felt obliged to not let the occasion pass without a response. I approached the boy’s table. He looked surprised as he realized I was serious. As I looked him in the eyes, my only response was, ‘Not funny.’ He cringed as with guilt and remorse. At least I felt glad that he was forced to rethink his actions. Since that day, I feel that it is a matter of honor to defend myself and my friends’ religious identity. For now and in the future, I will never be daunted by such situations; in fact, I look at them as potential opportunities to transform the dialogue.”

– Leena, 9th Grade, Walking the Walk Participant

Action

The volunteers poured in, the sun was shining, and everyone who participated in the day of service felt the energy. The 95 volunteers were composed of members from all types of communities and religious affiliations. They began the day by participating in a service project of their choice- the options ranged from clearing trash from a stream to planting a tree to removing invasive plants from the ground. No matter what each person did, there was a contagious feeling of celebration in the air! Run by the Interfaith Center’s Green Team- a group of religiously diverse teen leaders- the day offered many opportunities to get involved. Besides physically tilling the earth, each volunteer was granted the reward of reflecting upon their day during a myriad of workshops, which included everything from hip hop poetry to creating a collage. The willingness of all who attended to see the common threads between different religions, ages, economic statuses, races and genders was simply phenomenal. This sense of cooperation and acceptance allowed for a day of true beauty and understanding. And as an added bonus, the day was a great opportunity to make new friends!
On April 29, 2009 the Center proudly partnered with PECO/Exelon Corporation in offering a program, "Understanding Religious Diversity in the Workplace". The program was organized by PECO’s Diversity Committee and Employee Networking Groups and was attended by 300 employees - people from all departments and positions. The panel was not intended to promote any particular religion but to share experiences, address stereotypes, and educate about religious practices in our increasingly diverse community to further PECO’s Diversity Committee’s vision: “Exelon strives to create an employee culture of inclusion, respect and understanding. This forum is intended to contribute to that culture by educating employees about the fundamental aspects of some major world religions and their intersection in the workplace.”

Leadership

What happens when religious leaders including Cardinal Rigali and Imam Shehata, Rev. Washington and Imam Miller join hands? They stand united in praying and working fervently for an end to violence in our region. They call on all religious leaders to work for peace as they lead their constituencies into the ways of peace, allying themselves with all who work to eliminate today’s culture of violence, its causes, incidents and tragic consequences. Together, they pledge to be instruments of God’s peace: to make their homes and neighborhoods zones of peace, free from fear, filled with respect and marked by deeds of kindness. (Adapted from the Religious Leaders Council Peace Pledge.) The Religious Leaders Council is creating a ‘Zones of Peace’ Initiative which is inspiring congregations throughout the region to bring this pledge to life. In the coming year, local houses of traditions will become ‘Zones of Peace’ – identified by a common symbol and linked in common action to address the causes of violence and promote peace. Collective, inspired, hope-filled action! That’s what happens when religious leaders join hands.
The Interfaith Center has grown its program, staff and budget each year since its founding in 2004. This has been accomplished through the generosity and vision of many substantial community partnerships and internships, low overhead and careful stewardship of resources.

The Interfaith Center uses a four-part strategy to achieve sustainable funding from: a growing multi-faith individual donor base, foundations and corporations, religious organizations and congregations, and program income.

The Center’s core programs are poised to be replicated throughout our region and beyond on a new fee-for-service basis. Shared funding partnerships from our diverse constituencies will help to stabilize and grow our work in the region.
Funders and Partners

Our work is made possible thanks to the generosity of many individuals, foundations, congregations and organizations.

Funders

Alavi Foundation
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church Outreach Council
Captain Planet Foundation
Chace Granting Group, Philadelphia Yearly Meeting of Friends
Connelly Foundation
Corporation for National and Community Service: Learn and Serve America: Inspired to Serve, a project of Search Institute and the Interfaith Youth Core
Dorothy Monteverde Memorial Fund
Medical Mission Sisters
SHCJ Provincial Ministry Fund
The Philadelphia Foundation
The Samuel S. Fels Fund

Individual Donors

We express gratitude to the nearly 300 individual donors to the Interfaith Center.

Supporting Congregations & Communities

59th Street Baptist Church
Al Aqsa Islamic Society
Baha’i Communities of the Delaware Valley
Bawa Muhaiyaddeen Mosque
Beth Am Israel
Bethlehem Baptist Church
Blair Academy
Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church
Daughters of Abraham
Episcopal Church of the Redeemer
Foundation for Islamic Education
Grace Trinity UCC
Interfaith Peace Walk
JEVS
Lutheran Theological Seminary
Main Line Reform Temple, Beth Elohim
New Jerusalem Now
North Carolina State University
Our Lady of Hope Parish and Cluster 19, Archdiocese of Philadelphia
PECO/Exelon
Penn State University
Philadelphia Baha’i Center
Quba Institute of Arabic and Islamic Studies
Reconstructionist Rabbinical College
Reform Congregation Keneseth Israel
Religious Leaders Council, 28 member communities of Greater Philadelphia
Rodeph Shalom
Saint Isaac Jogues Parish and cluster 53, Archdiocese of Philadelphia
Society Hill Synagogue
Sr. Mary’s Episcopal Church of Ardmore
Tabernacle United Church
Temple University
Villanova
White Rock Baptist Church

Partners

Arts & Spirituality Center
Books through Bars
Cobbs Creek Community Environmental Education Center
Council for a Parliament of the World’s Religions
Interfaith Youth Core
Lower Merion Conservancy
Mayor’s Office on Faith Based Initiatives
Medical Missions Sisters
Philadelphia Cathedral
Religions for Peace (USA)
Search Institute

“We've proven that peace and acceptance among possible.”
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* Sister Gloria Coleman, S.H.C.J.
* Gity Etemad, M.D.
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* Rabbi Carol Harris-Shapiro, Ph.D.
* Reverend Susan Teegen-Case

Staff Team

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Rebecca Rivera
Office Manager

Interns & Volunteers

Rachel Weiss, Reconstructionist Rabbinical College Intern

Sarah Clausen, Lutheran Theological Seminary Intern

Debra Cesario, University of Pennsylvania School of Policy & Practice Intern

Anna Kreiger, Event Coordinator, Alternative Spring Break Intern

Brenda Nangasha Demers
Volunteer

Jessica Baer, J.E.V.S. Ash Intern

Gabi Wachs, Friends’ Central School Intern

Jenna Stern, Penn State University Intern

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*Indicates Founding Board Members

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