On most days, I am a professional listener. On my best days, I listen with my eyes and with my heart. I listen for keys to resilience in stories of joy and challenge, faith and despair. I strive to hear what is felt, what is not spoken, and what is needed.

All of us at the Interfaith Center are tasked with listening and responding, in this very noisy world, to people who are crying out and want to be heard — and understood.

This has been a year of listening: We heard the clarion call of Black Lives Matter and the cries of terror in Charleston, Paris, Aleppo, and Orlando. We also heard the voices of millions welcoming the healing presence of Pope Francis and the curious questions of 141,000 visitors to the new Mormon Temple in Philadelphia.

We at the Interfaith Center read the headlines of the day and dare to listen. We listen not only to the news but also to the voices and questions of young people, adults, and religious leaders of all faiths, day in and day out. And we respond to cries for connectedness and understanding through the sophisticated, collaborative work reflected in this annual report.

Dan Gottleib, the renowned family therapist, says that our basest human instinct – more than being loved – is to be known and understood. The Interfaith Center’s work is grounded in the idea that societal stability depends upon our inter-connectedness. When we listen to and know one another, your problems become my problems and we feel responsible for one another.

As we launched a new Inter-Seminary Initiative this year, we began with a powerful and empowering process of listening sessions with eight area seminaries. One of the seminary faculty we met reminded us of the book title of Story Corps founder Dave Isay, “Listening is an Act of Love.”

Each of us plays a crucial role in this world-changing work, so aptly captured in this title’s cover art, Joe Brenman’s sculpture entitled, Shema – Listen.

With gratitude to our partners, leaders, funders, and fellow listeners,

Abby Stamelman Hocky
EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR
The Walking the Walk Youth Initiative is a nationally-recognized program that provides teenagers with experiences, skills, and resources necessary to live in a diverse world. This program empowers young people to deepen their own identities and break through walls that distance and divide them from people of other religious, cultural, and economic backgrounds. Field-tested in urban and suburban settings with schools and congregations of many faiths, this initiative features an innovative curriculum designed by a multi-faith professional team with expertise in youth development, service-learning, and systems change. Celebrating its 11th year in 2016, the Walking the Walk Youth Initiative was comprised of four networks: Philadelphia, West Chester, Suburban West, and Wissahickon, including 35 congregations and schools, 121 youth participants, and 13 Student Group Leaders from Muslim, Jewish, Protestant, Catholic, and Bahá’í faith backgrounds. Through its community service and community outreach components, over 1,700 Philadelphians were directly or indirectly impacted by the work and advocacy of the Walking the Walk Youth Initiative this year.

“The Walking the Walk Youth Initiative successfully stimulates the courageous conversations that are needed for the betterment of the world. Being a part of this interfaith group has allowed me to be more comfortable to have deeper conversations about religion. This crossing of the religious boundary brings people closer together to work in harmony to help repair the world.”

— Bayan T., Student Group Leader, 2015-16

“At the Walking the Walk Youth Initiative, we intentionally surround ourselves with people from all walks of life and are committed to trying to understand each other.”

— Rachel S., Participant, 2015-16

Walking the Walk Networks and Partners 2015 – 2016

PHILADELPHIA NETWORK (year-long program)

Group Leader: Marilyn Berberich
Student Group Leaders: Julia Kothmann, Bayan Toloubadei, Deanna Thomas, Husnaa Hashim, Denise Thomas, Mary Grace Murray
Service Learning Partner: Inglis House
Congregations and Schools: Academy of Notre Dame de Namur, Baha’i Community of Philadelphia, Congregation Beth Am Israel, Germantown Mennonite Church, Main Line Reform Temple, Masjidullah, Mastery Charter – Shoemaker Campus, Mount Zion Baptist Church of Philadelphia, P’nai Or, West Philadelphia Mennonite Fellowship, White Rock Baptist Church

WEST CHESTER NETWORK (year-long program)

Group Leader: Max Dugan
Student Group Leaders: Arisha Syed, Tara Feldman, Julie Schown
Service Learning Partner: West Chester Food Cupboard
Congregations and Schools: Baha’i Community of West Chester (hosting only), Beth Chaim Reform Congregation, Church of the Loving Shepherd (hosting only), Islamic Society of Chester County, Kesher Israel Congregation, Unionville Presbyterian Church (hosting only), Westtown School

SUBURBAN WEST NETWORK (semester-long program)

Group Leader: Michelle France
Assistant Group Leader: Hanna Elmongy
Student Group Leaders: Joseph Rockford, Sarah Silberg, Shaza Ibrahim
Congregations and Schools: Bryn Mawr Presbyterian Church, Main Line Reform Temple, Main Line Unitarian Church, New Horizons Islamic School

WISSAHICKON NETWORK

“A Day of Walking the Walk”

Group Leader: Andrew Feigenbaum
Student Group Leader: Zoe Moscovic
Service Learning Partner: Inter-Faith Housing Alliance
Congregations and Schools: Ambler Church of the Brethren, Beth Or Synagogue, Bethlehem Baptist Church, Blooming Glen Mennonite Church, Christ Our Saviour United Church of Christ, Congregation Or Hadash, North Penn Mosque, Penn Charter High School, Trinity Episcopal Church of Ambler
Alumni Network
The Walking the Walk alumni network encourages graduates of the program to build upon their experiences and continue to engage in interfaith work. There are more than 570 alumni of the Walking the Walk Youth Initiative, many of whom have taken on leadership roles with the Interfaith Center and/or their high schools, colleges, congregations, and professional communities.

In July 2015, the Interfaith Center offered its first ever college essay writing workshop where Doretta McGinnis and Ned Luce of Admission Logic provided expert advice to help alumni and their families successfully navigate the college admission process and demonstrated how students can incorporate Walking the Walk experiences into their application essays.

In May, we held our second intergenerational, interfaith retreat for female Walking the Walk alumnae. 29 students were joined by their mothers, grandmothers, and, in some cases, both, to share what gives them joy and nourishment in their faith tradition, learn how spiritual practices support or redefine what we name as “well-being practices,” and experience yoga!

The Walking the Walk Distinguished Alumni Award also recognized two alumnae this year, Hanna Elmongy and Anneke Kat, both of whom have done an outstanding job of taking action to advance interfaith cooperation and exemplify the Walking the Walk values and characteristics in their lives.

The Walking the Walk Youth Initiative has allowed me to become more confident in expressing my voice and my point of view. When I started college, I felt confident enough to talk about my religion to peers outside of my interfaith community and lead interfaith discussions among students, staff, and faculty. This program has helped me to discover a central part of my chosen identity.”
— Hanna Elmongy, Former Walking the Walk Participant and 2016 Distinguished Alumni
Offered throughout the year, our *Alternative Break* program is a unique immersion experience, offering students an **opportunity to learn about and engage with diverse faith communities**, attend worship gatherings, meet the leaders and constituents of grassroots community organizations, engage in meaningful service work, participate in structured skill building workshops and reflection, and develop skills to help them thrive and lead in this diverse world. In 2015-2016, students from Rutgers University, Alvernia University, Bryn Mawr and Swarthmore Colleges, and Moorestown Friends School visited Philadelphia and were able to explore nearly a dozen faith communities including Won Buddhist, Ethical Humanist, Jewish, Sikh, Bahá’í, Hindu, Christian, and Muslim. They also **served more than 1,500 Philadelphians through their community service** with seven local non-profit organizations and schools: Inglis House, HMS School for Children with Cerebral Palsy, SHARE Food Program, MANNA, Grace Cafe, Urban Tree Connection, and Depaul House.

“My *Alternative Break* in Philadelphia was a life changing week that I will forever cherish. Learning about various faiths and their beliefs was an experience more college students should receive. The entire week went by so fast that I wish I could do it all over again and make it go by in slow motion. The Interfaith Center’s *Alternative Break* trip was an opportunity of a life time, and I am so thankful that I jumped on board!” — Sydni Gajewski, Alvernia University Alternative Break Participant
Co-convened by Archbishop Charles J. Chaput, Rabbi David Straus, Imam Anwar Muhaimin, and Bishop Claire Schenot Burkat, the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia is the first of its kind in the city, with 32 member communities, representing more than two million people of diverse faith traditions from across the greater Philadelphia region.

Highlights of the Council’s work this year include publication of two official statements (on the Syrian refugee crisis and Islamophobic acts in our region) and the opening of a dialogue with the School District of Philadelphia and Superintendent William Hite on the role of faith leaders in supporting efforts to increase literacy and engagement in the School District. Many members of the Council also participated in public events such as the opening ceremony of the World Meeting of Families and the inspiring visit of Pope Francis to the United States. Attended by over 200 people, the Council also held an interfaith inaugural prayer gathering for incoming Mayor Jim Kenney at The Salvation Army Kroc Center featuring prayers from ten different traditions in six different languages. Finally, the Council continued to be active on a national scale, holding conversations between local religious leadership and the Secretary of the Department of Homeland Security and the National Guard Chaplain Team on duty during the Democratic National Convention.
Zones of Peace

Zones of Peace is a region-wide movement of community-based organizations, schools, churches, synagogues, mosques, and other houses of worship working to address the root causes of violence in order make us safer in the communities where we live, work, and play. Created in 2009 by the Religious Leaders Council of Greater Philadelphia, the Zones of Peace initiative recognizes groups in our region that are pioneering creative responses to violence, helps them network with one another, sponsors public conversations and educational programs, and provides continuing education to help them pursue their missions.

Now consisting of more than 55 communities, this year the initiative recognized seven groups as Zones of Peace through public banner presentations, sponsored an interfaith peace celebration and dialogue, and continued to support and engage its recognized communities. The peace-building work of Zones of Peace touched almost 500 people this year in the greater Philadelphia region.

As I participate in the interviews of congregations and organizations that are nominated to be Zones of Peace, I am “wowed” by what I learn. I am deeply impressed and profoundly moved by the dedication of the people I’ve met and the effectiveness of their efforts to address the root causes of violence and build better communities in our region.”

— Rev. John Hougen, Zones of Peace Coordinator

Inter-Seminary Initiative

Since 2004, the Interfaith Center has been living its mission ‘to advance mutual trust, understanding, and cooperation among faith communities in order to work together for the common good of the region.’ In 2014, we began to envision how we could more fully develop our goals of educating and encouraging more people who seek to bridge differences and work for the common good by working with schools of higher education preparing students for vocations in religious leadership. We know from our research and conversations that there is a need for today’s generation of leaders to be well-equipped to serve in the rich mix of the multicultural, multi-religious world into which they are graduating.

We are delighted that the Carpenter Foundation has awarded the Interfaith Center a three-year grant to explore and advance this “Inter-Seminary Initiative” more fully. Over that period, we will be researching, developing and implementing a plan to create opportunities for interfaith learning among faculties, administrators, and students, preparing them to live and lead faithfully in a religiously diverse world. In June, we held our first inter-seminary retreat where 35 faculty and administration representing a dozen local seminaries gathered for workshops, conversation, panel presentations, and a plenary session led by Rabbi Justus Baird of Auburn Seminary. The Rev. Alison Cornish proudly serves as the Project Manager for this initiative.
Facilitator Trainings

Dare to Understand Facilitator Trainings are one-day workshops designed to empower individuals with increased competence and confidence in facilitating members of their congregation or community to deepen their interfaith encounters. The day is spent skill-building, sharing best practices, and discussing common joys and challenges with fellow interfaith facilitators. Participants receive a book, a workbook, and a facilitator’s guide to use in their own work going forward.

These trainings are part of an interactive education and dialogue series designed to break down stereotypes and explore challenging interfaith issues. Based off the book, *Encountering Other Faiths*, written by former Interfaith Center Director of Adult Education Sr. Maria Hornung, MMS, this series addresses the imperative of inter-religious dialogue within the world and within the United States. Over the last year, more than 40 students, congregational leaders, and business professionals took part in this series and left their trainings better equipped to lead interfaith dialogue in their settings.

“Every participant had the opportunity to learn and spiritually reflect – some took part in a walking meditation through the beautiful garden sanctuary while others chose to find quiet spaces within the church to meditate and reflect. The day was filled with learning, laughter, and tears of joy. Everyone left the event feeling hopeful that they could create change in a climate where the majority is reluctant to do so.” — Jessica Drake, Facilitator Training Participant

Quest Book Group

Quest Book Group is an ongoing dialogue group that meets monthly at the Philadelphia Bahá’í Center. Comprised of Catholic, Jewish, Bahá’í, Protestant, and Agnostic members, this diverse group brought unique questions and perspectives to each and every discussion. Books from the past year included:

- *Faithfully Feminist*, Gina Messina-Dyert, Jennifer Zobair & Amy Levin
- *Palace Walk (The Cairo Trilogy, Volume 1)*, Naguib Mahfouz
- *Breaking Through the Stained Glass Ceiling*, Maureen E. Fielder
- *Destiny Disrupted: A History of the World Through Islamic Eyes*, Tamim Ansary
- *The Man in the Empty Boat*, Mark Salzman
- *Not God’s Type: An Atheist Academic Lays Down Her Arms*, Holly Ordway
Art of Interfaith Understanding
First offered in December 2014, Art of Interfaith Understanding is a series dedicated to exploring the intersection of art and religion. Held at the Philadelphia Museum of Art, tours were designed and led by Rev. John Hougen of the Interfaith Center staff, a trained guide at the Art Museum. In its second year, over 90 people attended one or more of the following tours: “Art from the World’s Religions,” “Prayerful Looking: Art and Spirituality,” “The Christmas Story in Art,” and “The Sacred in Secular Art.” Whether it was beautiful Arabic calligraphy or a depiction of the Black Madonna, participants were exposed to the striking beauty of where art and faith meet.

“Our guide, John, took care to create a diverse tour including art from across the globe. His knowledge and insight into each piece of art was world class, and I learned so much from the fantastic discussion that emerged from the group on our tour.”
— Nicole Kratzer, Participant at “The Sacred in Secular Art” Tour

Religious Diversity Trainings
Each year, the Interfaith Center offers various workshops and trainings to help equip individuals, congregations, and organizations with the skills to navigate our religiously diverse society. These offerings aim to encourage employers and employees to “go beyond accommodation” and create workplaces that don’t just tolerate but celebrate diversity and inclusion. Hosted by PwC in November 2015, a special training workshop for human resource and diversity/inclusion professionals, titled “Beyond Accommodation: Religious Diversity in the Workplace,” was attended by over 50 people from a variety of settings including corporations, social service, and health care agencies.

For the first time, the Center was able to offer SHRM professional education credit and provided interfaith holiday calendar, and other workplace resources to all participants. Attendees gained valuable insight from a selective panel including a legal expert and individuals representing Jewish, Muslim, and Hindu faith communities. After this moderated panel session and open question and answer time, case studies and small group discussion illuminated critical issues and honed important skills for all in attendance.
Concert and Awards Presentation
Since 2012, the Interfaith Center of Greater Philadelphia has held an annual *Dare to Understand* Concert and Awards Presentation. The *Dare to Understand* Award honors individuals of distinction in the field of interfaith work who, through their actions, reflect the Center’s commitment to diversity and challenge barriers to understanding. Our 2016 honorees, The Honorable Michael Nutter and Gity Banan-Etemad, MD, were joined at the Philadelphia Episcopal Cathedral by over 300 people for a night of learning, art, and celebration.

Mayor Nutter faithfully served the City of Philadelphia for eight years as its mayor and partnered with the Interfaith Center and Religious Leaders Council on many issues and occasions including acting as a champion for the Center's city-wide *Dare to Understand* campaign. Dr. Etemad, a fourth generation Bahá’í, is a founding board member of the Interfaith Center, an instrumental force in spreading interfaith understanding in the Philadelphia region, and her generosity and passion for our work has been crucial to the continued growth and success of the Center. The 2016 concert was curated by Andrea Clearfield in the Salon style and featured a number of local musicians and artists, highlighting the breadth of artistry and culture in our region.

Paths of Understanding
Through a collaboration between the Interfaith Center, the Philadelphia Mural Arts Program, and WHYY, the *Paths to Understanding* project hopes to foster a climate of love and understanding by creating a constellation of new public art in Philadelphia's Old City neighborhood. Designed by renowned visual artist JJ Tiziou and inspired by Philadelphia's history as the cradle of American religious freedom, the art will feature portraits and quotes from diverse spiritual communities complemented by immersive audio content, welcoming people of all religious affiliations while emphasizing shared identity and values.

The public art and audio will be accompanied by rich, ongoing educational programs and community events including public photo shoots, open houses at historic local congregations, shared meals, facilitated interfaith conversations, diversity trainings, and more. This is an important and timely initiative given rising tensions around the world and increased incidence of xenophobia, and we believe that through this project, Philadelphia will live up to its name as the City of Brotherly Love and Sisterly Affection as we “Dare to Understand” one another.
Middle East Trip
In October 2015, the Interfaith Center led a group of 25 Philadelphia religious, business, and thought leaders on a tour of Turkey, Israel, and Palestinian Cities. During stops in Istanbul, Jerusalem, and Ramallah, the group met with journalists, religious leaders, peace activists, and elected officials to discuss the urgent need for interfaith dialogue and cooperation in both the Middle East and at home in Philadelphia. Participants also visited museums, explored historic religious sites and communities, and enjoyed the music, food, and culture of the region.

“Yesterday in Abu Gosh I sat mesmerized together with my group listening to the sounds, beautiful sounds of an Israel-American cellist and a Palestinian-American violinist playing the music of East and West, Klezmer and Arab music. The harmonies created by the working together of different tonalities and sound patterns were filled with the possibilities of what we could be over here.” — Julian Resnick, Middle East Trip Tour Guide (on the music of Udi Bar-David and Hanna Khoury)

Ride for Understanding
On June 7th, 22 people, including Board and staff members, participated in the 2015 Ride for Understanding to raise funds and awareness for the Interfaith Center’s vision to build relationships and create communities of hope and reconciliation by cycling 30 miles along the Schuylkill River Trail.

Welcoming International Delegations to the Interfaith Center
The Interfaith Center continues to welcome delegations from around the world to share our work with those curious about improving interfaith relations in their countries and exchange best practices in this area. In 2015 and 2016, the Center engaged with groups and individuals from Germany, Saudi Arabia, the Central African Republic, and Central and South America.
“As a graduate student studying interfaith prejudice and its consequences, I am inspired by the Interfaith Center’s hands-on approach to tackling religious intolerance and fostering a more inclusive society. I give back to the Center because, through its trailblazing mission, it gives back to each of us and our city each and every day.” — Mikey Pasek, Walking the Walk Alumnus
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