Dear Friends,

As a new year begins, we are thankful for our friends old and new. We heard from several of you after you received our first Insights last semester; it was wonderful to hear from you and we look forward to having an ongoing dialogue.

The New Year brought a new president to the Albany Collegiate Interfaith Center Board of Directors. We are excited to have Aine Leader-Nagy at the helm. I knew Aine as an undergraduate and graduate student here at the University and as an active member and officer of Cornerstone Protestant Campus Ministry. We also welcome Dr. Amina Mahmood as President-elect. Amina is also a UAlbany Alum and served as President of the Muslim Student Association as an undergraduate. I look forward to working with them as we continue to strive to promote religious pluralism and understanding on the UAlbany campus and the greater community.

As anyone living in the great Northeast is aware, 2014 has had its share of frigid temperatures creating hardship for many, including us. When staff returned from the New Year’s break, they found the furnaces off and temperatures so low that water pipes had frozen. The subsequent furnace and plumbing repairs, including the replacement of the cracked water meter, were extensive and expensive and have added to our ongoing financial challenges. We are hopeful that fundraising efforts will help offset this cost.

On a brighter note, students have recently returned to campus and the Spring 2014 Semester is now in full swing! We are excited about the many programs that are planned and look forward to seeing many familiar faces and hopefully, many new faces enjoying the benefits of our Interfaith Center.

We are excited to have brought Chris Stedman to the Capital District for his first speaking engagement in the area. We will continue to work Continued on page 2...
2013 Unity Dinner
By Tim Furgal

On December 5th, the Interfaith Student Group hosted the 13th Annual Unity Dinner in the Campus Center Ballroom. The theme was “Peace of Cake.” The event, which was supported by the Interfaith Center, The Interfaith Alliance of New York State, the Office of Intercultural Student Engagement and the University Auxiliary Services of SUNY Albany, was an engaging and festive event to end the semester. The dinner, which promotes religious and cultural pluralism within the campus community, aims to foster the growth and continuation of peaceful dialogue between faith traditions. Students from Hillel, UAlbany Pride, Newman Catholic Association, Muslim Student Association, L’Chaim, Cornerstone Campus Ministry, and the Interfaith Student Group all participated.

The dinner began with blessings from student leaders of several faith traditions, which included Jewish, Pagan, Muslim, and Christian prayers. A moment of silent reflection was offered before the dinner, in memory of the passing of world peace icon Nelson Mandela, encouraging everyone in attendance to ruminate on how to be more understanding and thoughtful in the aftermath of several recent violent national and global events. A diverse and delicious buffet was provided afterwards, and the offerings ranged from lasagna and General Tso’s chicken, to Kosher and Halal dishes. A performance by the Golden Chords and Phenomenal Voices segued nicely into a short video presentation on tolerance.

The event was attended by over 150 people and by the end of the evening, it appeared that the Interfaith Student Group had succeeded in their mission, as laughter and thoughtful conversation with new friends rang out into the building’s atrium. Hopefully, we will see you in attendance next year!
Chris Stedman Comes to UAlbany

By Tim Furgal

On February 3rd, as part of Sexuality Week 2014 at UAlbany, the Interfaith Center brought speaker Chris Stedman to campus for a talk entitled, “Finding Our Common Humanity: Humanizing Atheists, the Religious and the LGBTQ Community.” Stedman was one of two featured speakers for Sexuality Week, which is sponsored by the Middle Earth Peer Assistance Program and the University Counseling Center. The weeklong focus on issues pertaining to sexuality is in its 31st year and our executive director, Donna Crisafulli, was part of the organizing committee. His lecture drew a large and diverse crowd of students, university affiliates, and community members.

This past summer, Stedman was a featured speaker at the Chautauqua Institute during their series, “Spirituality and the Next Generation.” Crisafulli attended the program and she was inspired to bring him to campus to share his message of tolerance, religious pluralism, and community building. His appearance was made possible by a Success Grant from the Division of Student Success at the University.

Chris Stedman is the Coordinator of Humanist Life for the Yale Humanist Community. He also currently serves as the Assistant Humanist Chaplain at Harvard University and the Values In Action Coordinator for the Humanist Community at Harvard. Stedman is the author of Faitheist: How an Atheist Found Common Ground with the Religious (Beacon Press/Random House), “an intimate and deeply affecting portrait... [that] proves [he is] an activist in the truest sense and one to watch” (Booklist, Starred Review). On January 31, 2014, he had an article in the Times Union, Atheists, believers and goals. To stay up to date with Stedman, follow him on Twitter: @ChrisDStedman.

Feeding the Interfaith Spirit

Spring Fundraising Event

Over the past several years, The Interfaith Center has become more than just a place to host faith traditions; it has become a place of vibrant interfaith programming and activities. From the Faith Journey and Religion 101 programs to interfaith movie nights and “field trips”, we have reached out to and incorporated new people in this great conversation.

With increased programming comes increased costs-- and our largest programmatic expense is our food budget. A key characteristic of Interfaith Center events is, well, food! Sharing a meal is a great way to socialize and experience other ethnic traditions and Interfaith alumni remember these meals fondly. When we host meals, we offer hospitality to the students and give them the opportunity to connect with the larger community.

Although we apply for and receive some grants to cover the costs of food at some of our programs, we need to increase our resources to continue this important element of our hospitality. We are currently planning an event--with food-- to try to raise some money to continue to feed participants at our programs. Please look for more information (on our website, in your inbox/mailbox) as we get closer to the date.

If you would like to help us reach our goals or volunteer to be a part of the event, please contact Donna Crisafulli at The Interfaith Center. We look forward to seeing you in April!
Meditation Mondays

By: Nikhil Jain
(PhD Candidate, College of Nanoscale Science and Engineering)

The Meditation Mondays program started at The Interfaith Center last spring and has come a long way. We started with a small group of four people at our first session; now we get approximately 25–30 UAlbany students and staff members each week. It all began with a news article in the Albany Student Press that mentioned a new meditation room at The Interfaith Center. I am a meditation instructor and I immediately set up an appointment to meet Donna Crisafulli to see how we could work together. Meditation Mondays was born out of our conversation.

Since then, we started having weekly meditation sessions at 6 pm on Mondays. Each session includes a small overview of the “whats” and “hows” of meditation and then I lead a guided meditation. This is followed by experience sharing and a small discussion on mindfulness. We were amazed at the kind of response that we got from students to this initiative. It was as if students were waiting for something like this!

We all know that stress is a part of our daily life. We all have our own ways of dealing with it. However, often times we find ourselves realizing that our ways of coping with stress aren’t necessarily helping us in the long-term. Meditation is an effortless way of dealing with stress, anxiety and negative emotions without any side-effects on the body. Most of us are aware of the benefits of meditation but most people I meet tell me that they just don’t know how to meditate! Some of them try YouTube videos or listening to relaxing music, but either they find it too difficult to do it that way, or it has less impact. This is where Meditation Mondays has been helpful by providing students an opportunity to learn and practice meditation in the company of other like-minded people under the guidance of a trained facilitator. All of this at no cost!

The Interfaith Center and the Graduate Student Association (GSA) have been strong supporters for the program by providing space and funds to effectively run these FREE sessions for students. We welcome you all to join us and explore the benefits of meditation yourself! I can assure you that meditation has the power to transform your life! All you need to do is give it a fair chance.

Nikhil Jain

Events

Meditation Monday: Guided Meditation Program
Weekly, 6-7pm

Chris Stedman Lecture
February 3, 7-9pm in CC375

The Healthcare Movie and Discussion
February 11, 7-9pm

Religion 101: Secular Humanism
February 26, 7-9pm

Faith Journey Program
March 12, 6:30-9pm

Religion 101: Albany Friends Meeting (Quakers)
March 26, 7-9pm

Feed the Spirit: Spring Fundraising Dinner
April 2, 6-8pm

Interfaith Field Trip: Buddhist Center
April 9, 5-9pm

Religion 101: Unitarian Universalist
April 23, 7-9pm

Interfaith Cookout
May 7, 5-8pm

Stay up-to-date and learn more about these events on our website: www.albanyinterfaithcenter.org
Interfaith Center Experiences
By: Lu Liu (Class of 2015; International Student from China)
In her own words...

By some chances I found Interfaith Center when I was freshman. I feel so lucky that I have this chance to be an intern here. I learned a lot. At first semester, I came to Suny Albany, everything just so new to me. At beginning, I was very shy, it’s not just because new environment, but also because my language problem. Sometimes it’s taken a while let others understood what I was talking about. After my experiences in Interfaith Center I feel more confidence to talk to people. Interfaith center is more like a big family to me. There are many activities hold here and I got many chances to talk to people. I really do feel that I learned more than I serviced.

At first time my main job was finding fund online for Interfaith Center, organizing file and library. I learned the better way to organized files and found funds online. For this semester, my main job is writing paper about Buddhist cultural, tradition and the different custom between Asian and the United States. During writing papers I learned many thing about different countries Buddhist custom. Meanwhile, writing paper is also helping me about my English writing skill. Because every time my supervisor Donna, she helped me to use better way to explain sentences. On the same time, I got many chance to talk to different background people. That also let me feel more and more comfortable and courage to talk to people.

Opportunities for Support

Giving Form
The Interfaith Center • 1400 Washington Avenue, Albany, New York 12222

Yes, I would like to donate to The Interfaith Center. My donation and selected method of support is checked below. I understand that The Interfaith Center is a 501(c)(3) non-profit and that my contribution is tax deductible.

General Donation for Organization Support and Programs
☐ Specific Project or Program ________________________________
☐ Building Fund
☐

Name __________________________________________________________
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Enclosed please find my support in the amount of $ __________
☐ Check (Please make payable to ACIC)
☐ Credit Card Online (Go to http://bit.ly/15peEin to give online.)

Help Us Get Ready for Spring

Are you a gardener or know someone with a green thumb?

Spring is around the corner and we will need to get our gardens ready for the season.

If you are interested in learning how you can help, please contact Donna by calling (518) 489-8573.