



by **The Very Reverend
James Parks Morton**

Founder and Chair, Emeritus
The Interfaith Center of New York

Celebrating Selfless Sacrifice

Today, the work of The Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY) feels more vital than ever. Global events – from overseas to just down the street in NYC – make us more aware of the deep problems rooted in people’s misunderstanding of cultures and religions different from their own.

Interfaith is basically an appreciation of religious differences. And the word “religion,” at its root, means bringing together (from the Latin *religare*: to join, to bind together). So, on June 5th, ICNY will bring together its friends to celebrate the work that we do and to honor four remarkable people who have done extraordinary things.

Interfaith empowers people from different religious communities to understand and respect each other. This is no easy task. But when it happens, then communities can work on things that everyone needs. We do this because we live in the same civilization, in the same city and at the same time.

Our annual gala gives us the opportunity to pause and reflect on how well ICNY is doing on really insurmountable (and often unpopular) problems. How effective is interfaith itself in NYC? How many people actually know what interfaith means? What truly works? Are we really making any difference? The truth of the matter is that we are not there yet. There is still a lot of fundamental work to do.

Organizations like ours are doing things for spiritual reasons, but keep in mind that true spirituality is also often misunderstood. In the most radical sense, to be spiritual is to be unselfish and, often times, unpopular. At the gala, that is why we honor people who have made really exceptional contributions for the promotion of justice, peace and positive human development. Those whom we have honored, and those we are honoring this year, have put forth great personal effort to strengthen the respect and mutual understanding among people and situations that are different

from each other.

This year we honor four wonderful people. [Mrs. Gaetana Enders](#) (who died very unexpectedly this past May 21 in NYC) was a powerhouse of a humanitarian. The Honorable [Al Gore](#) continues his work on the environment with his new book, [The Future](#). This year, on the one hundredth anniversary of his birth, His Holiness [Sri Swami Satchidananda](#) will receive a posthumous Interfaith Award in honor of his pioneering work for interfaith. Lastly, we will honor respected lawyer [Peter L. Zimroth](#), one of New York City's own "legal eagles" and a most faithful public servant.

These are inspiring men and women because of the very unselfish things they have done in areas of great need throughout the world and in the United States. This year's honorees have worked in areas including the humanitarian imperative, politics, law, spirituality and the environment.

We celebrate people who have done necessary and unselfish things. We honor them because they represent an ideal of what a person can achieve. They are heroic and remarkable people who inspire us. We hope they will inspire you.