



THE INTERFAITH CENTER OF NEW YORK

Annual Report 2015

CONNECTING RELIGIONS, BUILDING PEACE



Ray Stubblebine/NY Post

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The Interfaith Center of New York worked with the Diocese of Brooklyn to bring diverse religious leaders to join Pope Francis for an interfaith prayer service at the 9/11 Memorial and Museum in New York on September 25, 2015. Left to right: Ishanaa Rambachan, Bhante Hennebunne Kondanna, Archbishop Demetrios (Trakatellis) of America, and Dr. Sarah Sayeed, Senior Adviser-NYC Mayor's Community Affairs Unit & former Interfaith Center Director of Community Partnerships.

A message from the Founder and the Executive Director

THE VERY REV. JAMES PARKS MORTON Founder & Chair Emeritus

Thanks to you, the Interfaith Center of New York has reached tens of thousands of New Yorkers this year. Your support has created breakthrough opportunities for diverse religious communities to learn about one another, work together on community projects, and advocate for justice.

We are enormously grateful to the individuals, foundations, and corporations that fund the vital work outlined in this report. Together, we are overcoming prejudice, violence, and misunderstanding by activating the power of the city's grassroots religious and civic leaders and their communities.

Thanks for your support!



James Parks Morton



Chloe Breyer

THE REV. CHLOE BREYER Executive Director

Throughout this report, you'll see how Interfaith Center programs have affected NYC communities. We also share how the Interfaith Center is advocating for justice and peace.

Two recent events illustrate our work:

- In response to the Paris attacks in November, the Interfaith Center joined with the Islamic Leadership Council of New York, the largest umbrella organization for 80 mosques in the New York City area. We held an interfaith press conference at the Muslim American Society Youth Center in Brooklyn condemning the violence in Paris and elsewhere.
- At the request of the Roman Catholic Diocese of Brooklyn, the Interfaith Center was invited to identify and recommend diverse New York religious leaders to make Pope Francis' 9/11 Museum Interfaith Service the most religiously diverse event of any papal visit to the United States. For the first time during a Papal visit to America, Sikhs in the audience were allowed to keep a Kirpan (a ceremonial knife) on their persons. (See photo on page 1.)

Together with generous people like you, we are making New York (and the world) safe for religious diversity.

Overcoming recidivism by activating religious communities

THE PROBLEM

People re-entering their communities after time in prison face multiple barriers to success. Of those sent home to Harlem, fewer than half are employed or in school a year later, while more than half are re-arrested within 18 months.

OUR SOLUTION

The Interfaith Center of New York partners with the Harlem Community Justice Center, Network Support Services, and religious communities in Harlem to provide formerly incarcerated persons and their families with the support they need to get back on their feet. Reentry Family and Faith Circles of Support reduces recidivism by providing education, job readiness, health and mental health, and community support.



Thanks to our generous supporters, Jeffrey Rivera has turned his life around.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE MADE A DIFFERENCE:

Jeffrey Rivera was barely shaving at 16 years of age when he was sentenced to 19 years in prison. He was raised by a loving family, but it all went downhill when he learned his mother had HIV. He started drinking, taking drugs, and breaking rules. Soon he was caught up with a violent street gang. He was convicted of murder.

In prison, he started to turn his life around. He earned an associate's degree and became active in an arts rehabilitation program.

On his release three years ago, Jeffrey could easily have slipped back to his old ways, as most parolees do. Instead, he found Raising My Voice, a leadership public speaking initiative led by the Harlem Community Justice Center.

Today, Jeffrey has a job. His community gives him the support he was seeking from a gang. Reentry Circles has helped hundreds of young adults like Jeffrey change their trajectories and do something positive with their lives.

OUR ADVOCACY to end mass incarceration in the United States.

- Responding to recommendations from the U.S. Sentencing Commission along with grassroots advocacy efforts by groups like us around the country—including our hosts in Washington, Ecumenical Advocacy Days—President Obama released 6,000 low-level drug offenders, saying that they'd served enough time.
- The Sentencing Reform and Corrections Bill, now in the U.S. Senate, has widespread support. It would end mandatory minimums and "three strikes" life sentences for drug offenders.

Overcoming misunderstanding through professional development

THE PROBLEM

Social workers and public school teachers both work every day with people from diverse religious communities. Yet neither group is trained to understand how religious faith affects their clients' or students' everyday choices and behavior.

The result is a disconnect between some of the highest-need adults and children in the city and the very professionals who are there to help them.

OUR SOLUTION

For social workers, the Interfaith Center developed and delivered a one-day, nine-credit course on the role of religion and spirituality in social work practice, including such issues as child welfare, sexuality, trauma and healing, and end-of-life care.

For high school teachers, the Interfaith Center is preparing to co-sponsor, with Union Theological Institute, our third National Endowment for the Humanities Summer Institute for Teachers. The first two institutes gave 55 teachers practical training in leading discussions about religion while navigating the constitutional separation of religion and state.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE MADE A DIFFERENCE

- 80 social workers with greater cultural and religious sensitivity manage an average of 25 cases apiece. 2,000 New Yorkers get improved counseling and case management.
- 55 teachers have a better understanding of the religious backgrounds of an average of 100 students. 5,500 students benefit from richer, more culturally sensitive instruction.



Interfaith Center professional development helps social workers understand the role of religion in their work.

OUR ENGAGEMENT to improve police community relations.

- To combat the mistrust between immigrant faith communities and the police the Interfaith Center is producing a training video for NYPD in which religious leaders share practical tips for engaging with members of their

communities. Pending approval by NYPD, at least 19,300 police officers in New York City will get a lesson in religiously diverse communities from this video.

Overcoming prejudice through education of New York City's young people

THE PROBLEM

Though schools could play a vital role in fostering interfaith understanding, instruction on religion, particularly in public schools, is often non-existent or is limited to basic dates and doctrines.

Students who don't learn how religions are actually lived are not equipped for citizenship in a pluralistic society.



Learning about other religions helps students overcome prejudice and misunderstanding. Your generous support of the Interfaith Center makes it possible.

OUR SOLUTION

The Interfaith Center provided educational programs for NYC schools and created an innovative writing program for religiously diverse teens.

For the Health, Education and Research Occupation High School in the South Bronx, we facilitated an interfaith panel discussion.

For Grace Church School (Episcopal), we brought together Muslim and Jewish community leaders to discuss the difference between "free speech" and "hate speech." We also brought 9th graders to visit an Islamic center and a Hindu temple.

Twelve teens from diverse faiths improved their writing skills while simultaneously learning about one another's religious traditions through six Interfaith Youth Fellowship sessions.

WITH YOUR HELP, WE MADE A DIFFERENCE

These four educational programs moved 432 students toward greater religious tolerance.

OUR ADVOCACY to ensure a cohesive community.

- Children can't learn when they're hungry, cold, or unsafe. In October, the Interfaith Center helped organize the Real Living Wage NYC Campaign, a coalition of religious leaders led by the Micah Table that aims to turn the minimum wage into a living wage of \$20/hr.
- Rallied with Hindu community against hate crimes committed in Queens against Hindu residents.

Connecting religions through interfaith dialogue

Longstanding Interfaith Center programs build peace in our city by establishing connections among religious leaders and their communities.

Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Retreats for Social Justice

The Interfaith Center held two retreats this year, each reaching almost 90 religious leaders. In November 2014, participants learned from legal, medical, and religious experts about “Harnessing Spirituality and Religion in End of Life Care.”

This November, the retreat’s theme was “Coming Home: Faith Communities Supporting Successful Reentry.” Religious, government, and community leaders strategized about ways to help formerly incarcerated individuals come back to full and positive participation in their communities. The retreat featured the Commissioner of the Department of Corrections, Joseph Ponte, and formerly incarcerated citizens who told their stories through the Raising My Voice public speaking program.

Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative

Building on four years of work to connect Muslim and Catholic communities in the Bronx, Manhattan, and Staten Island, in 2015 we focused on a specific area of concern: the needs of Muslim children in foster care.

- We educated 134 child welfare and foster care staff about working with Muslim families.
- We helped 60 Muslim leaders and community members understand the NYC foster care system and recruited Muslim adults to serve as foster parents.
- We continued to facilitate a women’s working group representing women from the Abrahamic tradition.

In every borough, agency staff (many of whom work for Catholic Charities) connected with Muslim social service providers.



The Interfaith Center co-sponsored a Unity Day in the Bronx, providing free breakfast, pantry food, and winter accessories for community residents in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr.

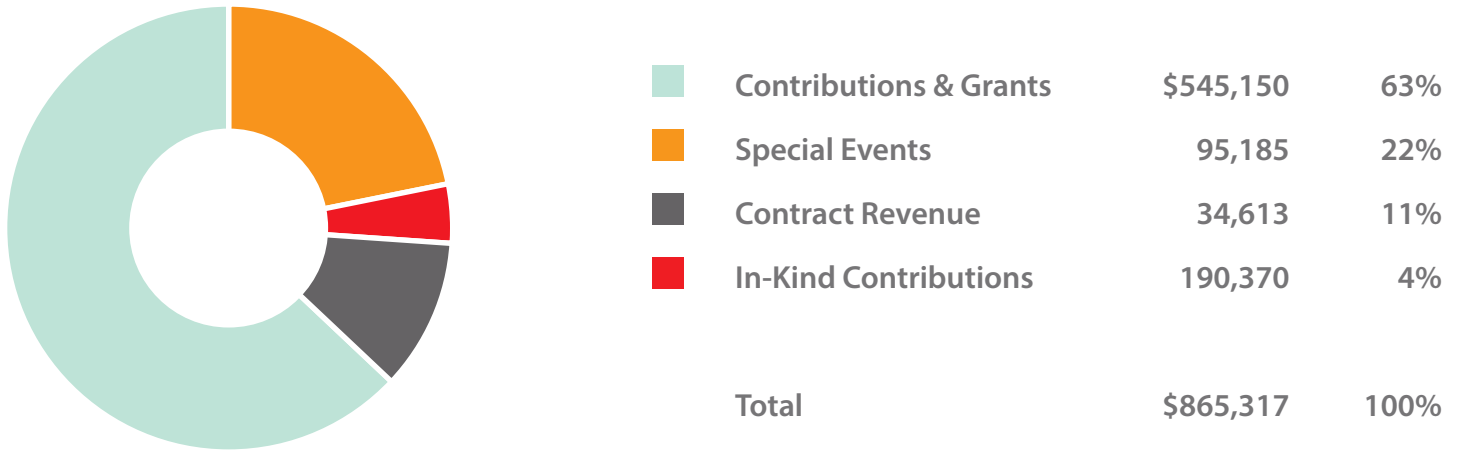
OUR ADVOCACY

for peace and justice responds to current events:

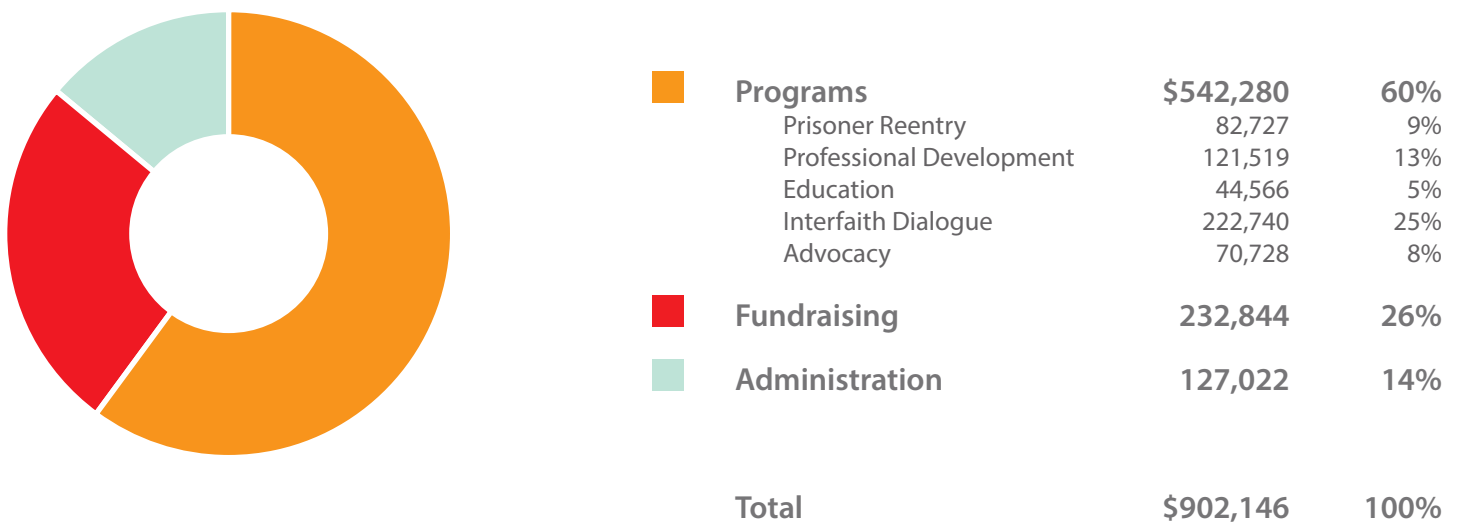
- We partnered with the KAICIID Dialogue Center to launch the Peace Mapping Project, a multi-year effort to map hundreds of local and international organizations dedicated to peace building
- We co-sponsored, with the New York Buddhist Council, the 70th anniversary commemoration of the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki
- We co-sponsored two interfaith Ramadan Iftar dinners with Union Theological Seminary, Riverside Church, and the Peace Islands Institute
- We posted statements on social media and elsewhere condemning violent attacks in North Carolina, South Carolina, Denmark, Paris, and San Bernardino.
- We submitted written testimony to the U.S. Senate Judiciary Committee in support of increasing the number of Syrian refugees allowed to enter the U.S.

How Our Supporters Helped Build Peace in New York City and Beyond

FISCAL YEAR 2015 REVENUE



FISCAL YEAR 2015 EXPENDITURES



FUNDERS

The Interfaith Center of New York is grateful to all who support our vital work of building peace in NYC:

Episcopal Charities • J.C. Flowers Foundation • GHR Foundation • Ada G. and Stanley I. Halbreich Foundation
National Endowment for the Humanities • Open Society Foundations Youth Initiative • Plaza Jewish Community Chapel
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JOIN US!

Be part of our vital project to overcome prejudice, violence, and misunderstanding in NYC and beyond.

- Visit our website at www.interfaithcenter.org to learn more about our work.
- Follow the website links to follow us on Facebook, Twitter, and YouTube.
- Sign up for our monthly email newsletter.
- Make a donation online or by mail.
- Contact the Rev. Chloe Breyer at 212-870-3510, to discuss how you can make a lasting difference through a legacy gift.

We look forward to hearing from you! Please connect with us today.



**THE INTERFAITH
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