



The Interfaith Center of New York

**From Dialogue to Action:
Interfaith Social Action Partnerships**

Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative

2010-2015



475 Riverside Drive, Suite 540, New York, NY 10115
Tel 212-870-3510 • Fax 212-870-3499 • www.interfaithcenter.org

About this report:

This report was written by Dr. Sarah Sayeed, Director of Community Partnerships, Interfaith Center of New York, and Program Director for the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative.

On the cover:

Msgr. Kevin Sullivan, Executive Director of Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, donated a portion of the agency's 2012 Feeding Our Neighbors collection to the Highbridge Community Food Pantry, a program of the Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development.

He supervised the transfer of 2,500 pounds of food to the Bronx pantry, which at that point was serving at least 5,000 households a month. The food had been donated by seven Bronx Catholic parishes. Pictured: Msgr. Sullivan with MWIRD's Executive Director Nurah Amatullah.

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Introduction

The Interfaith Center of New York (ICNY) is a nationally recognized not-for-profit organization founded in 1997 by the Very Rev. James Parks Morton, former Dean of the Cathedral of St. John the Divine. ICNY works to overcome prejudice, violence and misunderstanding and to address New York City's most pressing social problems.

The Center's programs are primarily educational, bringing together New York City religious leaders and secular audiences in dialogue with each other at such signature events as the biannual Rabbi Marshall T. Meyer Retreat for Social Justice. Its programs engage religious leaders and members from a broad array of faith and ethnic traditions, along with civic leaders including judges, teachers, social workers and elected officials.

ICNY's long-term goal is to help New York City become a nationally and internationally recognized model for mutual understanding and cooperation among faith traditions.

Although the Interfaith Center had helped nurture informal and formal interfaith networks for social issue advocacy in New York City, including Faith Leaders for Environmental Justice and the New York State Interfaith Network for Immigration Reform, it had not focused on the role of interfaith partnerships in the provision of social services.

The Interfaith Center's Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative (CMJAI) was its first program to strengthen the relationship of faith groups in the provision of social services.

How the Initiative Came to Be

Sometimes it is difficult for diverse faith communities to collaborate effectively in advancing shared goals. The Interfaith Center's undertaking to build Catholic-Muslim social action partnerships grew out of just such a difficult moment.

In 2008, the Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development (MWIRD) was the sole operator of the only two halal food pantries in New York City, with meats and other groceries meeting the dietary requirements of Muslims. One of the pantries was



The Interchurch Center on Manhattan's Upper West Side, where the ICNY has its offices.

serving about 5,000 households a month in Highbridge, the Bronx, among the poorest neighborhoods in New York City and the nation as a whole.



Readying the Highbridge Community Food Pantry for clients to come select their groceries.

The MWIRD's Highbridge Community Food Pantry was a client choice pantry, set up like a small grocery store with food displayed on shelves. Clients of every faith or no faith chose their own fresh meats, fruits and vegetables, breads, cereals and grains, milk and juice.

But in October 2008, the pantry received an eviction notice from its landlord, a Catholic organization in the same neighborhood, which needed the space for its own purposes.

While it was not an interreligious conflict, MWIRD's founder Nurah Amatullah contacted the Interfaith Center to see if it could approach its universe of Catholic contacts to ameliorate the situation. She was worried how thousands of hungry families would continue to be served.

With the help of Fr. James Sheehan, a Bronx Catholic priest, the Center was able to meet with MWIRD and Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York (CC-ARCHNY) to discuss the difficulties the Institute was facing. Although Catholic Charities was unable to help the Institute get the pantry space back from its landlord, this critical incident germinated the ICNY's Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative (CMJAI), which launched in 2010 and continued until 2015 with the support of the GHR Foundation. The Muslim Women's Institute ultimately was able to find a space in a neighborhood church to continue running its client choice pantry, and became a partner in CMJAI.

The Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative was a pioneering, large-scale and sustained interfaith collaboration among Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, Catholic and Muslim social service organizations, and Catholic and Muslim congregations in New York City. The goal was to bring social service providers of each faith together to address commonly shared concerns within a given geographic area.

Envisioned as a pilot program, the Initiative intended to bridge the gap between "education" and "action." Its focus on just two religious traditions was unusual for the ICNY, whose programs typically brought together many faith traditions at one time. It is likely that the Initiative was unique in the American landscape. While faith-based organizations had found themselves collaborating in disaster-affected areas abroad and in the United States, there was no large-scale disaster driving this Initiative.

Over five years, ICNY's Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative brokered relationships among faith-based social service organizations and congregations - relationships that, in turn, germinated several small-scale interfaith community service and development projects. The Initiative started in three boroughs and, in the fourth year, scaled up to a citywide partnership.

This report and accompanying how-to guide focus on the lessons learned in this work and share strategies for building interfaith partnerships for social action.

Background

New York City's religious communities and leaders often live and work in silos. Over the course of ICNY's work previous to the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative, the Center noticed that there were large Muslim and Catholic communities in New York City but little communication between them. The strain of living in New York City in the aftermath of the 9/11 terror attacks had become an additional hurdle in the relationship. While a handful of New York Muslim leaders had participated in sporadic dialogue activities with the Archdiocese of New York over many years, there was no sustained dialogue at the start of the Initiative.



For their part, staff at Catholic Charities admitted they knew little about the New York City Muslim community. They acknowledged their need to engage that community, but said they were unclear how to do so - even a bit fearful. They knew the city's Muslim community was growing with immigration from Africa, the Middle East, South and East Asia, and Europe. (African Americans and Latinos constitute about a third of New York City Muslims). They knew many Muslims were from underserved communities and in need of services.

For their part, Muslims recognized Catholics as an established religious community with whom they needed to build relationships in order to achieve better integration and recognition, particularly in the wake of the misunderstandings and friction precipitated by the now-famous 2006 lecture delivered by Pope Benedict XVI in which he quoted a 14th century emperor's negative views about Islam and Muslims.

Moreover, while Muslim social services had expanded, they had not kept up with the growing demand for services related to immigration, discrimination, family and youth development. As a result, Muslim community members were seeking services in a variety of organizations in other faith communities, including Catholic organizations.

In formative conversations, key leaders in New York's diverse array of Christian and Muslim communities told ICNY there was need for better understanding and real partnership among faith-based social service providers, as illustrated in the story about MWIRD. Both Catholic and Muslim service organizations work with immigrant and underprivileged populations. Both Islam and Christianity have rich traditions of social service, community action and interfaith work. Yet, in New York City, there had been no sustained collaboration among Catholics and Muslims in social services.

Muslim leaders felt that their community social service organizations and congregations would benefit and learn from Catholic organizations, specifically Catholic Charities, an organization with decades of experience addressing the community's needs and relating them to civic and city government structures. Likewise, Catholic Charities and other Catholic faith-based organizations sought to extend their reach to all vulnerable groups in New York City, including to members of Muslim communities. This backdrop led ICNY to develop the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative.

Development of the Initiative, Step by Step

ICNY began the Initiative with outreach to its existing Catholic and Muslim partners. The Center chose CC-ARCHNY, a federation of 91 social service providers, as the initial Catholic partner. ICNY had worked previously with Catholic Charities' Department of Social and Community Development, which helped it to connect with the department's colleagues in immigration and hunger services.

CC-ARCHNY worked in New York City's boroughs of the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island, so ICNY looked for potential Muslim partners in those three boroughs. In the first three months of the Initiative, the Interfaith Center mapped the diverse Muslim and Catholic groups in these three boroughs, and conducted extensive interviews with leaders in both Catholic and Muslim communities. This mapping helped the Center connect with groups and leaders who were interested in interfaith partnerships. Because there is no parallel federation of Muslim social services to CC-ARCHNY, the Initiative worked with individual Muslim community organizations.

For ICNY, programs often begin with *understanding needs of grassroots faith communities* and *identifying a gap* in interfaith relationships. In developing a social action partnership, ICNY wanted stakeholders to identify the community needs they wished to address together. Both groups understood that knowing each other would be mutually beneficial.

The Interfaith Center's initial idea was to partner diverse Muslim communities with Catholic Charities, to facilitate dialogue and discussion about the kind of projects they could do together, and then to help them develop and implement their projects.

Generally, the Center chose partners based on the following criteria:

- previous relationship with ICNY,
- previous interfaith experience and/or prior interaction with one another's faith communities,
- interest in partnership and
- time and staff to engage in projects.

See *Appendix A* for information about the CMJAI's partners and participants.

While each borough partnership developed independently within a unique context, as a whole the Initiative developed in five stages:

Phase 1: RESEARCH. ICNY worked with Catholic Charities and a diversity of Muslim leaders in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island to select three sets of partner organizations or congregations.

Phase 2: DEVELOPMENT. Initial meetings of the partners included trust-building activities such as shared meals and sharing of faith teachings of Catholicism and Islam. Selected Muslim partners, Catholic Charities and ICNY together identified key areas for joint cooperation and chose particular projects for partnerships.

Phase 3: IMPLEMENTATION. Muslim-Catholic social services projects were initiated and executed. The timeline for each project varied by borough, and each borough developed and completed several programs over the course of the Initiative.

Phase 4: DOCUMENTATION AND EVALUATION. Documentation from the projects, along with evaluations and reflections through structured sessions, were incorporated into reports. A conference was held in Year Three to bring together Catholic and Muslim leaders to share lessons learned.

Three independent evaluation reports were also written by LTG Associates, Inc., and are indexed at www.interfaithcenter.org/catholicmuslimpartnership: "Formative Evaluation 2012," "Final Evaluation of Borough Based Partnerships" and "Evaluation Report on 2014 Workshops to Improve Foster Care Services for Muslim Children."

The Initiative had four intended objectives.

First, the joint social service projects would address needs of the communities.

Second, through these projects a new and sustainable, citywide relationship among Muslims and Catholics would be established.

Third, the Catholic and Muslim communities of New York would better understand each other's faith traditions, community needs and response to those needs.

Finally, the Initiative was expected to serve as a model for future projects in New York and nationwide.

Ultimately, ICNY's borough-based partnerships involved social service agencies, mosques and churches. Participants included social service staff, clients, youth, clergy and congregants. The Interfaith Center also held two conferences in 2012, one focused on Catholic-Muslim partnerships and the other on interfaith partnerships for service and advocacy. Over the five years of the Initiative, this interfaith work touched the lives of more than 2,500 people in the three boroughs.

Partnership Experiences in Each Borough

The Bronx

In the Bronx, in 2010, ICNY partnered Muslim Women's Institute with Catholic Charities Food Services and its pantry in the Church of St. Francis of Assisi. The two groups decided to work together on a census education program for their volunteers and staff.

The rationale was that the Bronx received far less federal and state funding for social services than New York City's other boroughs, partly because its census reports historically were inaccurately low. Therefore creating awareness about the census among pantry workers and, in turn, pantry clients with the goal of improving the accuracy of the census count was a way of addressing the structural inequality.



The two groups held a joint training and followed up in their own food pantries by encouraging their clients to fill out the census. In follow-up meetings, they discussed the pros and cons of client choice versus pre-bagged pantry distributions, and also wrote letters to their federal and New York City Council representatives about funding for child nutrition and emergency hunger relief. Their public policy advocacy culminated in a meeting with their local City Councilwoman, Helen Diane Foster (pictured, left), to advocate for funding.

For many of the participants, writing letters and having this meeting with an elected official were their first instances of civic engagement.

Then, in the early part of 2011, the partnership hit a major obstacle: The St. Francis pantry was forced to close due to rodents. Moreover, in the second half of 2011, CC-ARCHNY also experienced cuts in state funding for emergency food programs, which

eventually compromised the reinstatement of the closed pantry and cut CC-ARCHNY's staff time allocated into the Bronx partnership.

Despite these setbacks, involved individuals continued to stay in touch. During the fall of 2011, Catholic volunteers participated in a Day of Dignity community service day at MWIRD. The next month Catholic volunteers returned to MWIRD to help distribute food at Thanksgiving time.



Msgr. Sullivan shelves cereal donated by Bronx Catholic parishes to the Highbridge Community Food Pantry.

Moreover, CC-ARCHNY Executive Director Msgr. Kevin Sullivan determined to donate a portion of the agency's annual Feeding Our Neighbors collection to MWIRD's Highbridge Community Food Pantry. In February 2012, he supervised the transfer of 2,500 pounds of food to the pantry, which at that point was serving at least 5,000 households a month. The food had been donated by seven Bronx Catholic parishes.

In the later months of 2012, MWIRD's Executive Director Nurah Amatullah took a leave of absence due to a car accident, and an interim director was named. ICNY staff met with him to ensure ongoing

involvement, and reached out to additional Catholic and Muslim entities in the Bronx to explore possible new partnership ideas.

ICNY learned that the Sisters of Dominic (identified by O.P., Order of Preachers) had a significant historical presence in the Highbridge neighborhood, having established at least two agencies there: Siena House, a shelter for homeless women, and Highbridge Community Life Center (HCLC), an agency offering a "rainbow of services" including a pantry and English as a Second Language classes.

ICNY selected HCLC as the new partner since it had a pantry. Staffed by Sr. Lauria Fitzgerald, O.P., it was an appropriate parallel to the MWIRD's pantry. To get things started, ICNY helped organize a Thanksgiving luncheon for staff and volunteers of the two pantries and videotaped volunteers' compelling testimonials about what motivated them to work for people in need. See the video *The Call to Serve*: <http://interfaithcenter.org/archives/4215>. MWIRD also supplied extra turkeys for Siena House residents.

Sultana Ocasio was appointed MWIRD's new executive director in February 2013, and ICNY initiated joint meetings across the two agencies to build relationships. During June 2013, the executive director of HCLC retired, and a new executive director was named. The Interfaith Center organized a follow-up meeting with the two agencies'

new heads in the fall of 2013. MWIRD and HCLC signed a Memorandum of Understanding to support relationship-building activities.

During this phase, the organizations actively sought each other's involvement in their own initiatives. MWIRD enlisted HCLC's collaboration in a New York City Council candidates' forum that it was co-sponsoring. The two agencies worked together to come up with questions for the candidates, a process that reinforced their shared commitments to address key issues such as hunger and youth needs.

In turn, HCLC disseminated information to its own clients about MWIRD's annual Eid toy distribution and Day of Dignity, an event paid for by Islamic Relief to distribute food, school supplies, hygiene kits and winter clothing. The event served between 500-525 people in 2015. HCLC also has reached out to MWIRD's clients to enroll in the ESL classes offered by HCLC.

In addition, HCLC involved MWIRD in strengthening interfaith relations among Christians and Muslims in the neighborhood by working together to reinvigorate the Highbridge Clergy Coalition, an independent body managed by HCLC community organizers. The Clergy Coalition had come to a standstill after the death of its director.



Clergy at Yankee Stadium luncheon.

In order to deepen these ties and bring new members to the Clergy Coalition, this group held a high-profile clergy luncheon at Yankee Stadium in November, paid for by the Yankees and attended by 20 neighborhood Christian and Muslim neighborhood clergy.

During this period, MWIRD was asked to vacate the church space where its pantry was housed, because the space was due for construction. For some time, MWIRD operated the pantry on a smaller scale out of its office, distributing only perishable items such as produce.

HCLC organizers helped MWIRD search for possible new locations. Ultimately, none of these alternatives proved suitable, due to the nature of the space as well as the difficulty of finding funds to keep operations going: The MWIRD staff had been working without pay for several months. In the end, MWIRD decided to raise money to remodel its space and run the full-service pantry directly from its own office. See *New York Daily News* article: www.nydailynews.com/new-york/bronx/bronx-food-pantry-reopens-article-1.1845679. The pantry reopened in June, right before Ramadan.

In the meantime, HCLC's organizational funding was faltering due to excessive debt. It was unable to pay for its annual Christmas Day lunch, a more than 30-year-old event that fed between 200-250 people from neighborhood shelters, seniors and pantry clients. The ICNY partnership was able to devote some funds to help this tradition continue.

The partners also worked together on a Christmas Day community lunch that served 239 people with a free hot meal and free winter accessories, including gloves, hats, scarves and earmuffs. Attendees included homeless shelter residents, seniors and families.

As noted, this lunch had been taking place for more than 30 years in the neighborhood, but 2013 was the *first* year it was co-sponsored with an interfaith partner. Muslim volunteers came in large number and were integrated into all aspects of the program. GHR Foundation funding was used to pay for food and winter accessory giveaway items, which usually had been paid for by HCLC and in-kind donations from third parties.



Volunteers at HCLC's Christmas Day lunch.

In the fall of 2014, the Initiative faced the unexpected and stunning closing of HCLC, which had served the community for more than three decades. See this article in *The New York Times*: www.nytimes.com/2014/09/15/nyregion/a-vital-center-for-a-bronx-community-closes.html?_r=1. The closure left a significant gap in social services in heavily impoverished Highbridge. ICNY was not able to locate a new Catholic partner for the Muslim Women's Institute. In 2014, there was no neighborhood Christmas luncheon.



Smiles on both sides of the table at Unity Day 2015.

To make up for it, Sr. Lauria and Sultana Ocasio decided independently to host Unity Day on the 2015 Martin Luther King, Jr., holiday, including a joint pantry distribution with free breakfast, free winter accessories and an information fair. This event served nearly 150 people. The partners hoped for some additional funding to continue this tradition into 2016.

Manhattan

Manhattan's Harlem neighborhood has a large concentration of African immigrant and African American Muslim and Catholic communities. But in 2010 there were no active Muslim social service organizations in Manhattan, so ICNY chose to pair up mosques and churches.

First step: three face-to-face meetings among leaders of three mosques and Catholic Charities. The leaders identified hunger and immigration as two possible areas of collaboration. Catholic Charities helped ICNY connect with relevant staff within CC-ARCHNY and to bring in local priests.

The first joint project between imams and priests was a January 2011 interfaith prayer service in honor of Martin Luther King, Jr. While the service had been ecumenical for several years, 2011 was the first year it became interfaith with the participation of Muslim leaders and community members. Muslims were among invited speakers during the service.

In February 2011, Catholic and Muslim leaders convened to hear a presentation from the New York City Coalition Against Hunger as a way to build knowledge and capacity to address hunger in Harlem. As an outcome of the presentation, one of the mosques launched a food drive and donated the collection to one of the church pantries, and two mosque members also volunteered some of their time to help serve pantry clients.



Breaking bread together at Masjid Touba.

Then in June 2011, just as the partnership was starting to gel, the Archdiocese appointed a new group of diocesan priests to neighborhood parishes. During the transition, the partnership leaned more on Catholic Charities to continue the work.

Immigration staff from CC-ARCHNY delivered an informational session on immigration law and services, first to the imams in the partnership and then at Masjid Touba in Harlem. More than 50 people attended the presentation.

The Interfaith Center also continued some joint activities with other faith leaders in the area. In early 2012, Catholic parishes hosted the second annual MLK, Jr., interfaith service. Catholics and Muslims also met several times to discuss ways to make their communities more welcoming for those returning from prison. ICNY supported them by organizing two joint discussions and a summer workshop about interfaith perspectives on prisoner re-entry.



Participants in two of the annual Martin Luther King, Jr., Day interfaith services.

Starting in the middle of 2012, ICNY began holding meetings with the new priests to introduce them to the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative. However, none of the priests had any prior interfaith exposure and all requested time to settle into their new roles. One of the deacons explained that priests sometimes felt conflicted between their parish responsibilities and their social justice ministry responsibilities. Furthermore, the relevance of interfaith work to either of these was less clear to those who had no exposure to interfaith dialogue or partnership.

Early in 2013, the third annual interfaith MLK, Jr., service took place. ICNY held meetings with the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood and Catholic deacons serving in Harlem to continue to explore what issues were of import to the community.

The Center was granted a meeting with the Vicar of the Central Harlem Vicariate of the Archdiocese of New York, one of the Archdiocese's 19 geographic subdivisions, in May 2013. At the meeting, the Vicar suggested that Interfaith Center representatives present the Initiative to the next area meeting for priests, to be held the very next day. At this meeting, the Vicar appointed a priest to act as liaison to the partnership. Deacon Kenneth Radcliffe of the Church of Saint Charles Borromeo offered to assist him and attend the partner meetings.



Participants at the "Movin' With the Spirit" event.

At a subsequent meeting, Catholic and Muslim partners decided to focus on addiction and recovery, specifically for young people in Harlem. They planned "Movin' With the Spirit," an interfaith event addressing spirituality and recovery. About 45 people of various faith backgrounds attended, including members of Alcoholics Anonymous, Narcotics Anonymous, Al-Anon, and Millati Islami (a Muslim recovery group at the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood).

As ICNY sought to hold a follow-up meeting of those who attended, another unexpected obstacle emerged: The priest who was the Vicar's liaison to the partnership asked to be relieved of that responsibility, saying he was overextended. The MOU thus remained under review at the Vicariate until a new representative was identified the following year.

Still, even without a MOU formalized, ICNY maintained its support as Catholics and Muslims continued their work together on recovery. Later in the year, and independently of ICNY involvement, Imam Talib 'Abdur-Rashid from the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood and Deacon Radcliffe jointly participated in a September 2014 Recovery Month prayer service at Memorial Baptist Church in Harlem. This grew out of their previous interfaith engagement on recovery in September 2013. The mosque also participated in additional interfaith recovery month activities in 2014.



At the beginning of 2014, Imam 'Abdur-Rashid (pictured, left) was invited to be among speakers at the fourth annual MLK, Jr., celebration, with the keynote address given by the Rev. Al Sharpton. This annual service reaches between 500-700 people, and exemplifies the ripple effects of interfaith partnerships between leaders upon community members.

ICNY staff member Sarah Sayeed wrote an article in *Huffington Post* about the MLK celebration: "In Harlem, Catholics and Muslims Hold Interfaith Celebration to Remember Dr. King's Non-Violent Resistance." www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-sayeed-phd/in-harlem-catholics-and-m_b_4631726.html

In March 2014, the Young Adult Group (YAG) of the Church of Saint Charles Borromeo became formally involved with the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative by signing an MOU, and YAG representatives held their first formal in-person interfaith dinner meeting with Imam 'Abdur-Rashid in May 2014. This relationship led to a jointly sponsored anti-racism workshop in November, held at the Kennedy Center in Harlem.

The two and one-half day workshop immersed participants in examining the structural and racial inequalities of today, and how everyone can play a role in transforming the underlying relationships. The program was attended by 35 Catholics, Muslims, people of other faith traditions and people of no faith.

In early 2015, the Harlem Vicariate invited Imam 'Abdur-Rashid to present the keynote address at the annual MLK service. It was the first time a Muslim had been invited to give the keynote address at this event.

The Vicariate also invited the imam’s community to join its March and Interfaith Prayer Service to End Violent Loss in Our Community, focused on gun violence in Harlem, and the imam spoke at this event. Finally, partners created and executed another five-hour workshop called “Religion, Racism and Theology,” where participants discussed their experiences of racism *within* their own faith communities. Thirty-five people participated in this event and many expressed hope that similar community education and empowerment activities would held in the future.

Staten Island



Exploratory conversations with Staten Island leaders in 2010 revealed that the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), a CC-ARCHNY affiliate, played in an interfaith sports league with the Miraj Islamic School. However, this did not translate into relationships between youth or families at the grassroots.

As the CYO sought to recruit members of its Teen Federation to join the Miraj Islamic School and Albanian Islamic Cultural Center (AICC) in the Catholic-

Muslim Joint Action Initiative, it initially met resistance, with several Catholic parents anxious about their children’s involvement. Some refused to allow their children to join the activities. The Catholic youth, however, successfully advocated with their parents for their own participation, evoking the idea that “this is what Jesus would have wanted us to do.”

The resistance can be explained because Staten Island is home to a far more politically conservative Catholic constituency than the rest of New York City, and many of the youth belonged to families of first responders to the September 11 attacks. The initial resistance had the positive outcome of educating Catholic Charities about the real fear among their constituents, as well as galvanizing Catholic Charities to work on the Initiative.

In Years One and Two, Miraj Islamic School and CYO Teen Federation brought together 10 high school Muslim and Catholic youth to have dialogue, visit and jointly clean a mosque and a church. At each house of worship, they were given tours by the respective clergy: an imam and priest. Some of the Catholic parents visited the mosque along with their children - their first visit ever to a mosque.



Muslim and Catholic youth visit a church together.



Staten Island Catholic and Muslim youth tour a mosque, then help clean it.

After these visits, they held a joint food drive. They worked together to distribute the food they collected, and served a meal at a soup kitchen at a local church.

Later in Year Two, the Teen Federation program lost its funding and was not able to continue the collaboration. ICNY searched for a new partner for AICC and Miraj Islamic School and forged a new relationship with Our Lady of Good Counsel (OLGC) Roman Catholic Church.

In November 2012, 22 Catholic and Muslim congregants shared a joint meal celebrating Eid ul Adha at the mosque. Most of the OLGC parishioners were visiting a mosque for the first time, and both groups had a chance to learn how each tradition views the Patriarch Abraham. Building on this foundation, in 2013, ICNY brokered four meetings with partners, and each partner signed a MOU for the relationship development phase.

One of the highlights of this borough partnership was the visit of Cardinal Timothy Dolan, Archbishop of New York, to the Miraj Islamic School and AICC, an idea that was initiated and conducted largely by the local partners. ICNY hailed it as an example of a mark of maturity of local interfaith partnerships: when participants come together and work to plan something on their own without the involvement of a facilitating agency.



Cardinal Dolan tours the mosque.

Interestingly, the partners came to this idea at the 2012 joint Eid gathering mentioned above, when Imam Tahir Kukaj

of the AICC expressed his congregation's wish to invite the Cardinal for a visit to its mosque. It was serendipity that OLGC's pastor, Fr. Liam O'Doherty, was going to be seeing the Cardinal at a Staten Island Thanksgiving event in the next few days.

As a result, Cardinal Dolan visited a New York City mosque for the first time, generating some media coverage:
www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/06/cardinal_dolan_visits_first_mo.html.

Participants from OLGC were struck by the practice of removing one's shoes to go into the mosque sanctuary. They followed up on the visit by gifting AICC with beautifully carved shoehorns to help mosque members remove their shoes in preparation for worship!



Tom Dobbins of Catholic Charities removes his shoes before entering the mosque.

At the macro level, one of the very positive outcomes of the event was an opportunity to make connections between ICNY's partnership work and the Catholic hierarchy, since program staff also attended the meeting and its Muslim partners publicly expressed appreciation of the ICNY Catholic-Muslim partnership work.

AICC and OLGC also created a youth project in Years Three and Four, bringing together 10 Catholic and Muslim high school students - some who had participated in the project in Years One and Two, others who were new to the Initiative. The students discussed social justice in each faith tradition, then held a joint cooking event and delivered the food to a Staten Island soup kitchen that served the



Catholic and Muslim youth meeting together in 2011- and cooking together in 2014.

homeless. The food was expected to serve 35 individuals for one meal. Two articles were written about this event in 2013, and the activity was repeated in December 2014:

Catholic New York: Building Bridges Between Neighbors and Faiths
<http://cny.org/stories/Building-Bridges-Between-Neighbors-and-Faiths-on-Staten-Island-,10430>.

Staten Island Advance-SI Live: Muslim and Catholic Youth United to Feed the Homeless
www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/12/muslim_and_roman_catholic_yout.html.

During this phase, they also discussed the significance of Jesus in the two traditions, learned about the Prophet Muhammad, and visited each other's house of worship. In addition to and separately from these activities, Imam Kukaj and the AICC hosted an interfaith celebration of the Prophet Muhammad's birthday, and again, independently of ICNY, invited OLCG's Father O'Doherty to speak at the program. The *Staten Island Advance* covered the event:

Staten Island Muslims play host to interfaith event that honors the Prophet:
www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2014/01/staten_island_muslims_host_int.html.

Other CMJAI Programs

Catholic-Muslim-Jewish Women's Dialogue Group

In 2010, as the Interfaith Center explored partnership options, Center staff met with the wife of one of its partner imams in Harlem. She expressed strong interest in initiating a women's dialogue group.

In January 2011, a small group of five Catholic and five Muslim women met for the first time. In subsequent meetings, they decided that they wanted to have Jewish women in the group. This group continued to meet over the course of the Initiative, with a few members leaving and a few more joining. Meetings were held roughly every other month with breaks for summer and religious holidays.

Catholic sisters in the group belonged to four orders: Sisters of Charity, Franciscan Handmaids, Little Sisters of the Assumption, and Congregation of Notre



Some members of the Catholic-Muslim-Jewish Women's Dialogue Group.

Dame. One lay woman was a member of the Parish Council of the Church of St. Francis Xavier in Lower Manhattan. The Jewish women were from Congregation Beth Emeth in Brooklyn and B'nai Jeshurun in Manhattan. The Muslim women were all members of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood.

At the beginning phase, as women sought to know one another, the meetings focused on explorations of individual spiritual journeys. In later phases, they also read and discussed text bundles that had been developed by Cambridge Interfaith Program (see www.scripturalreasoning.org). The pre-selected texts focus on the same theme from all three traditions (i.e., Encountering God, Wisdom, Creation/Beginnings etc.).



Participants bonded as they shared spiritual journeys, struggles and laughter.

Through these dialogues, the participants developed bonds of trust and deepened their relationships. One of the most telling examples is that the death of a group member who was a Catholic nun left an indelible imprint on the group. A friend of hers reported that this group was extremely important to her and that she continued to talk about it even during her hospitalization with advanced cancer.

Citywide Partnership on Foster Care and Child Welfare

In 2014, ICNY scaled up the partnership activities to a citywide level, focusing on the issue of child welfare and foster care. The Interfaith Center chose this issue based on some concerns within communities that Muslim children placed in foster homes were not receiving culturally and religiously responsive care.

ICNY's plan was to create a citywide partnership of four service providers - two Catholic and two Muslim - which would then be leveraged to plan and deliver educational workshops. The intention was to replicate the just-developed model wherein partners came together to learn about one another's faith teachings and work together on the issue at hand.

ICNY expected that Brooklyn-Queens Catholic Charities (CCBQ) would be structured in a similar way as Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, and therefore serve as a resource and connector to other Catholic agencies in these two boroughs. However, some of these assumptions and strategies were not matched by realities in the field. For example, ICNY learned, Brooklyn-Queens Catholic Charities is a direct service provider, and operates quite differently from CC-ARCHNY, which is a federation of agencies.

Another hurdle to overcome was ICNY's lack of baseline familiarity with the universe of child welfare agencies, the types of programs they run, and how they interface with governmental agencies and with Catholic Charities offices in the two boroughs. Interfaith Center staff began by speaking with staff from the Administration for Children's Services (ACS), a citywide agency. ACS staff connected ICNY with organizations with whom they had contracts.

ICNY also spoke with staff of the Council of Family and Child Caring Agencies, a state-level hub for organizations, who connected the Center with training directors from various large agencies.

Another challenge was the different types of expertise and knowledge regarding child welfare and foster care across the faith communities, which created the potential for a highly unbalanced partnership. No "Muslim" organization worked on foster parent recruitment, home finding or foster care placements, but there were many Catholic agencies with foster care placement programs.

Faith and Culture Wellness, one of ICNY's Muslim partners, provided family counseling services, but not parent recruitment or home finder services. Smile Charity, another of the Center's Muslim partners, was beginning to explore Muslim foster parent recruitment, but had no developed program to date.



Foster care workshop in Manhattan.

Two additional organizations serving a large Muslim client base had ACS contracts. Arab American Family Support Center (AAFSC) and Sauti Yetu Center for African Women and Families (Sauti Yetu) ran ACS-funded "preventive" programs to service families who had been investigated for child abuse, usually before children were removed to foster care. They did not interact with families in which children were going through removal proceedings; these were handled through agencies that had home-finding programs.

Most Muslim families facing child removal were interacting with agencies that were not rooted within Muslim communities. In addition, many new immigrants did not understand the regulations regarding child abuse, and when they faced investigation and removal, the quality of service could be adversely impacted by lack of cultural awareness on the part of providers. Educating community leaders was an important step to bridging the gap between community members and governmental agencies.

A third obstacle was the ways in which individual organizations identified themselves as secular rather than faith-based, even when they were working with particular faith communities. AAFSC and Sauti Yetu did not identify as faith-based organizations,

partly because Muslim-identified faith-based social services faced a credibility gap in applying for government contracts, particularly post-9/11.

Even some of the historically Catholic agencies did not identify as "Catholic," most likely due to the diversity of their client bases. This secular self-identification by organizations made it difficult to foster a conversation about how faith informed their work on child welfare and foster care, which had been a critical dimension of ICNY's partnership work in past years.

To address these limitations, the Interfaith Center created workshop opportunities for Catholic, other Christian, Jewish and secular agency staff - a three-hour workshop in each of New York's five boroughs - to interact with Muslim professionals from organizations with large bases of Muslim clients. The focus: cultural responsiveness to Muslim families.



Participants in a foster care workshop in Brooklyn.

While it was not part of the Initiative's original plan, ICNY believes this approach strengthened interfaith awareness of borough-based Muslim resources that will ultimately help agency staff serve their clients in their own geographic area with greater sensitivity.

In other words, in every borough, Catholic and other agency staff who came to ICNY workshops connected with at least one "Muslim" social service provider with proficiency working with the cultural populations (e.g. Arab, African, South Asian) that are heavily represented in a given borough.

This may in fact be a better outcome because service delivery occurs at the borough level and ICNY's workshops brought together organizations with complementary programs and expertise. For example, child abuse prevention programs for Muslims came together with other faith-based organizations that had home-finder and parent recruitment initiatives.

The workshops reached a total of 134 staff members at child welfare agencies across the five boroughs. Catholic agencies represented included Catholic Guardian, St. Christopher-Ottolie Family of Services, New York Foundling, Heartshare St. Vincent's, Mercy First, Cardinal McCloskey and Good Shepherd Services.

See *Appendix B* for a list of agencies represented in the workshops.

Staff of these agencies had opportunities to learn about Islam generally, and about parenting and foster care in Islam in particular, and to connect with service providers who were currently working with Muslim clients. ICNY also hosted an additional

workshop on cultural responsiveness for program leadership and management staff at Brooklyn-Queens Catholic Charities.

Another five workshops - again, one in each borough - were held for Muslim community leaders and members. These workshops focused on explaining how child abuse cases were identified and processed, on sharing information about existing service providers, and on recruiting of Muslim foster parents.

Sixty Muslims attended these workshops. ICNY felt that number could have been even higher if it had called people to follow up on email invitations and confirm their attendance.

In each borough, community members heard presentations from staff of the Administration for Children's Services (ACS) and of organizations providing support to families facing child abuse investigations.

In every workshop, participants were given a pre-workshop and post-workshop survey that ICNY developed in consultation with LTG Associates, Inc.

LTG analyzed the data and synthesized findings into its Evaluation Report on 2014 Workshops to Improve Foster Care Services for Muslim Children:
www.interfaithcenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/10/ICNY-Foster-Care-Workshop-Eval-Report-FINAL-004.pdf .

An unexpected but related activity to which ICNY contributed some staff time was the planning and execution of the first-ever Eid party for Muslim foster children and foster families.

The Eid party took place after Ramadan, in August, and it was organized by Smile Charity, which had begun to work in the area of foster care. ICNY introduced the organization to ACS and facilitated ongoing planning meetings with ACS leaders, who were very excited about this opportunity and paid for the event. ACS said it would like to see the event continue each year.

A second unanticipated but useful product of the Center's work was a short video clip about Islam, parenting and foster care. Consulting with its partner Smile Charity, the Interfaith Center decided it would be more efficient to develop a brief video clip rather than have to find presenters for each of the 10 workshops.

The video was shown in all workshops, and it received wonderful feedback. It is available online at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mSBNvZ2WsLc> as a resource for future initiatives to recruit Muslim foster parents or for other similar cultural sensitivity workshops.

Additional Programmatic Activities

Throughout the life of the Initiative, ICNY also created and participated in many related programs. Examples include conferences related to interfaith joint action partnerships and child welfare and foster care; national meetings related to Catholic-Muslim dialogue, such as through the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops, the Islamic Society of North America, and the Islamic Circle of North America, and international meetings in 2012 and 2014 of high-level Jewish, Christian and Muslim leaders.

In 2012, ICNY's Executive Director the Rev. Chloe Breyer joined an Episcopal-Anglican delegation attending the Second Christian-Muslim Peace Summit organized by the Washington National Cathedral and hosted by the Mufti of Tripoli and North Lebanon, Sheikh Malek Shaar of Beirut, Lebanon. Breyer spoke about ICNY's Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative to other delegates including the Anglican Bishop in Jerusalem and four Iranian Shia' Muslims, two holding the rank of Ayatollah.

In addition, she had the opportunity to present at the Third Christian-Muslim Summit in Rome in 2014 with Anglican, Roman Catholic, Sunni and Shia' delegations led by His Eminence Jean-Louis Cardinal Tauran, HRH Prince El Hassan bin Talal of Jordan, The Right Rev. John Bryson Chane of Washington, D.C., and Ayatollah Professor Sayyed Mostafa Mohaghegh Damad from Iran.

ICNY's Dr. Sarah Sayeed participated in the 50th anniversary celebration of *Nostra Aetate*, held by the U.S. Conference of Catholic Bishops in 2015 in Washington, D.C.

These opportunities enabled ICNY to share and amplify its work.

The Initiative's Key Accomplishments

The accomplishments of the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative exceeded ICNY's expectations.

Across the boroughs, Catholics and Muslims enjoyed learning about each other's faith traditions. In some cases, they expressed surprise at the similarities. All the partners were quite aware that they were operating in a world in which there was religious strife; they saw their work as an alternative approach that would bring people together and diminish violence.



First CMJAI meeting in Staten Island, in April 2010.

This sense was particularly acute in Staten Island, where tensions between Catholics and Muslims had emerged as a result of the tragedy of 9/11 and the concentration of first responders of Catholic background whose families were based in Staten Island.

In each borough, partners also became more anchored in the positive teachings of their own faith traditions, especially the teachings related to caring for others who are in need. They also grew in their understanding of what their neighbors needed, and developed an even greater appreciation for and investment in addressing these needs by working together.

Partners were able to successfully use the tenets of their faith to challenge those who may not have been open to these partnerships, as in the example of Staten Island youth challenging their parents to permit their involvement, or an imam explaining the value of interfaith work to his community.

A Range of Concerns Addressed

The borough-based and citywide partnerships addressed many issues of common concern to New York's religious leaders and faith communities. In Harlem, they held programs related to hunger, immigration, prisoner re-entry, addiction and recovery, and racism. In the Bronx and Staten Island, programs focused primarily on hunger. The citywide partnership dealt with child welfare and foster care. The range of concerns addressed showed that it is possible to form interfaith social action partnerships on a variety of issues.

Institutional Collaborations

The program built relationships among ICNY, Muslim partners and Catholic partners, forging new relationships where none had previously existed. Various departments of

Catholic Charities and its affiliates, branches of the Archdiocese and Catholic entities not within Catholic Charities connected to this project.

For instance, ICNY had worked with the Catholic Charities Department of Social and Community Development before this partnership, but now also had built a relationship with the agency's Immigration Services Department, Department of Emergency Food Services and Catholic Youth Organization (CYO), and with the Archdiocese's Office of Black Ministry (OBM).

In addition, ICNY developed relationships with various female and male religious orders through its outreach efforts. By bringing together diverse structures and entities, ICNY learned how structure impacts capacity for service as well as for partnerships. ICNY also expanded its understanding of the diverse structures that make up each faith community.

Some ICNY partners already were engaged in interfaith work, and the Initiative strengthened and broadened what they were already doing. In some cases, their previous interfaith work had engaged other faiths, but not each other's.

The program also connected with significant ethnic pockets within the Muslim and Catholic communities of New York City, including Africans, African Americans, Albanians, Arabs and South Asians. The Initiative brought African American Muslims and African American Catholics into dialogue with each other. Organizations included mosques as well as social service agencies. Muslim partners may not yet fully understand the different branches and variety of institutions within the Catholic community, and Catholic partners may not fully understand the variety of organizations across the Muslim community, but the relationships have been initiated.

Women's Interfaith Relationship and Youth Leadership Building

In every borough and citywide, the Initiative strengthened the capacity of women leaders to do interfaith work, and in some cases exposed them to interfaith work for the first time.

In the Bronx, for instance, Jeanne McGettigan, Coordinator of the Emergency Food Program, Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York, had not previously participated in interfaith dialogue or interfaith action partnerships, while Nurah Amatullah had done so. In Harlem, women of three orders (Sisters of Charity, Little Sisters of the Assumption and Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary) met African American Muslim women for the first time.

In addition, the two African immigrant imams of Harlem involved women leaders from their community in project meetings. In Staten Island, Gayle Murphy, Teen Federation administrator at the Catholic Youth Organization, worked along interfaith lines for the first time, developing a project with Imam Kukaj.

The Staten Island initiative provided opportunities to develop the next generation of youth interfaith leaders. Bringing young people together as faith actors in the arena of social services enhanced their civic engagement and exposed them to collaborative team projects across faith lines. In addition, in their first round of programs, each youth group appointed female leaders to keep in touch with the other group. These two young women took the initiative to keep in touch long after their project finished, and their friendship grew to the point that when the young Muslim woman got married a few years later, she invited her new Catholic friend to the wedding.

Reinforcing Social and Interfaith Cohesion

A fourth outcome has been that partners have sought to connect their new social service relationships to the broader matrix of interfaith relations, which are crucial for a diverse city, nation and world.

For example, in the Bronx, when Nurah Amatullah worked with Intersections International to develop a community workshop on creative expression and also to collect Ribbons of Hope for the 9/11 Battery Park public art project, she invited Catholic pantry volunteers to participate. In Harlem, one of the pantries also participated in the Ribbons of Hope project.



Dr. Sarah Sayeed adds a "Ribbon of Hope" at Battery Park.

Imam Talib 'Abdur-Rashid invited Catholic leaders in the partnership and other faith leaders to a special screening and discussion of the movie *Kinyarwanda*, a film about Rwanda and the theme of forgiveness. The Catholic-Muslim women's group expanded itself by adding Jewish women. The youth partnership in Staten Island also has discussed the possibility of adding youth of other faiths to the partnership.

Catholic Charities was very instrumental in brokering relationships with parishes to bring them into Prepare New York, a special initiative of the Interfaith Center promoting grassroots dialogues in anticipation of the 10th anniversary of 9/11.

Finally, the partnership as a whole connected to institutions and individuals who are involved in interfaith dialogue and Catholic-Muslim relations through a major conference that brought together local as well as some state and national actors.

Lessons Learned

- *Relationship building takes time.*

Effective partnerships depend upon a basic level of trust and mutual respect. Although some of the participating organizations already had met each other prior to the launch of the Muslim-Christian Joint Action Initiative, they benefited greatly from at least two or three meetings that focused on learning about one another's communities. ICNY's goal at the initial stage was to build a dialogue that in turn became the foundation for actionable projects. This dialogue also further strengthened individuals' commitments to their own faith teachings about social justice.

- *Allow partners to set the agenda for their programs and activities.*



GSR-funded food drop-off in Harlem.

For example, immigration services were of less concern to African American participants but they were essential for African communities. The African community was a ready audience for a presentation by Catholic Charities Immigration Services. On the other hand, the Initiative's African American partners were more ready to work on the issue of hunger because they were thinking about opening a pantry at their mosque in the future. Thus, allowing the partners to set the agenda for issues important to them has meant that more than one concern can be addressed.

- *Pay attention to and respond to programmatic cues that may stretch the project outside preconceived boundaries, as they may enhance the project at the aggregate level.*

For example, as a result of the collaboration on immigration, Catholic Charities requested a staff development workshop focused on working with Muslim clients. A Staten Island priest responded to the imam's request to broker a meeting with Cardinal Dolan. An imam's wife had a vision of a women's dialogue group. Each of these new ideas, when implemented, offered the opportunity to forge new relationships and thicken the web of interactions among Catholics and Muslims in New York City.

- *Develop interfaith capacity at the grassroots level.*

ICNY's success in the partnership was partly due to the Center's re-granting process, which built capacity of grassroots interfaith initiatives. In addition, each borough-based partnership used the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to formalize the working relationship. While these grants were small in amount, the formalization of relationships and the funding incentivized people to go deeper, invest time into partnerships, and activate and translate into action their interest and desire for interfaith collaboration.

Moreover, funding enabled various departments and sub-structures within the Archdiocese to become involved in interfaith work, many for the first time. Interestingly, the partnerships happened in a generative fashion, without the involvement of the Archdiocese's official interfaith officer.

The Initiative did something new by bridging social service providers. It allowed for a stronger and shared faith-based response to issues that the individual partners were already addressing. Both Catholics and Muslims learned about the social service sector within each other's faith community. In addition, the partnerships facilitated visiting each other's houses of worship, particularly in Manhattan and Staten Island, and, for some, it was the first time.

New immigrant communities are unfamiliar with interfaith work and congregants are more hesitant to build interfaith relations across organizational lines, even when their leaders are open. Furthermore, while they seek out social services for themselves, their connections to their home countries dampen the initiative to donate to local social services that serve a broader constituency than their own communities. Extra money, when they have it, is often sent to their families and communities back home.

This Initiative offered two West African immigrant communities an inroad into interfaith social service, and through that also expanded their public and civic engagement.

The Initiative also provided women new opportunities for interfaith involvement and leadership. One example is that a female employee of Toubia Mosque had largely played an administrative support role in the project, but when male leaders were not available, she ended up representing the community in a conference due to necessity.

She was initially very resistant and said she wanted to have another mosque leader write her speech. After the conference, she revealed it was the first time she had ever spoken in a public forum, and that she planned to be more proactively engaged in the Initiative and didn't think she needed to ask permission of the male leaders every time.

- *Be flexible in implementation and be prepared for systemic changes that have unintended consequences for the partnership.*

Building interfaith relationships across individuals and institutions, each in turn embedded in different faith systems, is a complex process. Challenges can be internal or external.

Challenges internal to the Initiative included differences in commitment to interfaith work, difficulties gaining buy-in from appropriate stakeholders on each side (such as parents), differences across institutions in their capacity and structure, variances in levels of prior interfaith engagement, and coordination of schedules across multiple actors.

ICNY addressed these concerns through explicit discussion with partners about potential obstacles, feasibility of project ideas and strategies to address challenges.

In Staten Island, for example, one concern was that Muslims had not been through a “Safe Environment” training mandatory for Catholics running youth programs. ICNY worked out that the Initiative’s Catholic-Muslim youth programs would be able to proceed as long as there were at least two Catholic individuals who had the training. Thus, partners and the facilitating agency must be able to honestly discuss potential barriers and engage in creative problem solving.



June 2011 Catholic-Muslim youth meeting in Staten Island.

Another internal challenge was the closing of organizations and staffing changes mid-way through the partnership.

External factors are harder to address, but ICNY learned to anticipate these kinds of challenges and work proactively to build relationships with more than one person within institutions, and also multiple actors and institutions within each borough.

For example, in the second cycle of the program, ICNY articulated a new prerequisite within the MOU that each agency must assign at least one “understudy” representative to the partnership. This added step also helped in situations when the key partner was temporarily unavailable for an event or a meeting. So when, say, a religious leader faced an illness or death in the family, the substitute was available.

- *Where possible, attend to diversity within each faith tradition.*

From the outset, ICNY decided that it wanted the project to introduce Catholics to the diversity of Muslims in New York City. Thus, Muslim participants included two West African immigrant imams and one African American imam in Harlem, an Albanian imam in Staten Island and a Trinidadian woman leader in the Bronx.

On the Catholic side, initially, participating priests in Harlem and Staten Island were Caucasian; in Harlem, the deacons and other officials were African Americans. In Year Two, many of the Caucasian priests in Harlem were transferred and replaced by African Americans. In Year One, the key partners in Staten Island and Bronx were both female.

ICNY learned that these differences in culture, race, gender and religion intersect and can shape interfaith work and choice of projects. In order to build relationships and an interfaith conviviality, partners have evoked not only the commonalities between Catholicism and Islam, but also shared cultural values, experiences and histories.

For example, during the visit by Cardinal Dolan to AICC and during exchanges between Fr. O'Doherty and Imam Kukaj, the dialogue was informed by the frame of immigrant community experiences in the United States, and the overlap of religion with the American cultural identity. See, for example, this article in the *Staten Island Advance*:

www.silive.com/news/index.ssf/2013/06/cardinal_dolan_visits_first_mo.html#/0

As the immigrant identity was evoked, participants could relate to one another through the struggle of becoming and being American without losing their religious identity. In addition, Mother Teresa was mentioned as a Catholic of Albanian background, which illustrates the overlap of religion with the Albanian cultural identity.

When situated in Harlem, compared to Staten Island, the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative drew its shape from a shared story of African American experiences as a racial minority with the experience of institutionalized racism. Partners evoked a shared vocabulary of religion as a force for personal and collective transformation, rather than religion being something that is being taken away or threatened by the larger secular culture. The annual interfaith Martin Luther King, Jr., service drew attention to this shared story in a compelling way.

In addition, as participants deepened their relationship, they went further and drew upon both Malcolm X's and Martin Luther King, Jr.'s respective commitments to justice. See this *Huffington Post* blogpost: www.huffingtonpost.com/sarah-sayeed-phd/in-harlem-catholics-and-m_b_4631726.html

ICNY believes that these nuances and interactions between culture and religion can also shape the kinds of projects that might be relevant for different communities. In Harlem, participants chose to focus on prison re-entry and recovery from addiction, as

their congregants had direct experience of these problems. There was very much a sense of “this is about us, and we are the community.” In Staten Island, ICNY’s general impression was that people saw the “community to be helped” as outside the congregations - though not outsiders per se, since the focus was on the shared humanity of people in need.

- *Be aware that faith communities engage in interfaith work in different ways, and for different reasons.*

Over time, it seemed that Muslims were relatively more eager and more able to engage in interfaith work compared to Catholics. Across all boroughs, and over time, Muslim partners had fewer organizational obstacles, and were quicker to commit personnel and expeditiously return MOUs with signatures.

One possible explanation is that Muslims seem to have a different value for interfaith engagement than their Catholic partners. While both faiths share the imperative of loving God and loving your neighbor, for Muslim institutions interfaith work offers social capital, civic cohesion and credibility. This is less the case for Catholic entities, whose credibility, capital and civic connectivity have been long established.

For Catholics, the entry point into interfaith work seems either through the doorway of building neighborly relations via dialogue or of developing culturally competent social services, both of which tend to be viewed as more optional than necessary. An additional issue seems to be dwindling church attendance. Priests in Harlem spoke of a “new evangelization” to draw more Catholics into the church, which could possibly compete with their interest in or commitment to interfaith work with Muslims.



Catholic, Muslim clergy in conversation before a Martin Luther King, Jr., observance interfaith service.

Partnerships where the commitment is different will progress at a slower rate. It is thus doubly important that interfaith work is not only publicly endorsed by leaders of the participants’ hierarchies, but also modeled through ongoing, visible interfaith exchanges.

- *Organizations facilitating partnerships can play a variety of roles to help partners build relations and execute their projects.*

Through this work, ICNY has been able to identify several roles that an interfaith organization can play in furthering inter-religious collaboration. One is as a convener that holds programs and invites diverse religious leaders to attend. Another is as a facilitator that others approach with an idea for interfaith programming and/or partnered projects. The organization facilitates the execution of their idea by providing the necessary inputs.

ICNY believes that this Catholic-Muslim partnership has helped identify a third role, which is that of a broker-facilitator, akin to a community organizer.

Broker-facilitators negotiate new relationships and strengthen existing relationships, sometimes in contexts where Catholic-Muslim interfaith work is less well-known or appreciated. Broker-facilitators help partners initiate, execute and evaluate projects.

Being a broker and facilitator is the least centralized way of delivering interfaith programs, and thus, places most of the responsibility on the partners. This method is ideal for building sustainable interfaith capacity at the grassroots, but could ultimately slow down achieving large-scale service delivery outcomes in non-disaster situations, when partners are likely to work more slowly. It is possible that brokered-facilitated partnerships would function differently in disaster-response contexts, where organizations are likely to mobilize rapidly and in a coordinated manner.

- *Evaluation is an essential tool in monitoring and developing a project that is responsive to realities on the ground.*

A systematic evaluation of ICNY's borough-based partnerships and child welfare workshops helped not only to document the range of existing programmatic activities but also to adjust the program to better match the needs and capacity of partners.

ICNY conducted both a formative and a post-program evaluation for borough-based partnerships. In addition, workshop participants filled out pre-test and post-test questionnaires.

By working closely with its evaluation consultants, ICNY developed a capacity to think about interfaith relationship building as measurable. In addition, evaluation helped the Center to assess the program's development, design and management and to develop recommendations to help those interested in replicating this work.

Further details about the logic models, evaluation design, methodologies and instruments that were developed, along with the evaluation findings, are available directly through the three evaluation reports written by LTG consultants, indexed on <http://interfaithcenter.org/catholicmuslimpartnership>. ICNY hope these reports will be useful for other colleagues in the sector of interfaith work.

In Conclusion

Contemporary interfaith engagement is set in the heart of a larger meta-narrative that seeks to take religion out of the public square, defines religion as antithetical to the secular, and holds religion responsible for violence.

In bringing together Catholics and Muslims for joint social action, ICNY worked to enable religious actors to offer their own counter-narrative that would ultimately help transform the cycle of misunderstanding and clash of narrative. ICNY's partners in all three boroughs have harnessed the power of their own unique stories to craft a new narrative of interfaith cooperation.

ICNY's goal was to develop neighborhood or borough-based projects carried out in partnership by Muslim and Catholic social service groups and projects in the Bronx, Manhattan and Staten Island. While the projects differed from each other, they all incorporated dialogue on Catholic and Muslim teachings and community life, and they all built collaboration around specific social service needs in each borough.

Given that the social services sector is relatively under-developed within the Muslim community, Muslim social service organizations and congregations benefited from interacting more experienced Catholic partners. Likewise, Catholic Charities developed a better understanding of Muslim communities in New York City. Partnerships between these faith-based social service providers has been mutually beneficial and enhanced reach and assistance provided to New Yorkers in need.

Appendices

Appendix A

Participating Organizations in the Catholic-Muslim Joint Action Initiative

New York City's Roman Catholic Community

There were 2,634,624 Roman Catholics in the Archdiocese of New York in 2014. (Source: www.catholic-hierarchy.org/diocese/dnewy.html). They were served by 932 archdiocesan priests and 913 priests of religious orders. Also laboring in the diocese were 359 permanent deacons, 1,493 religious brothers and 3,153 nuns.

Catholic Partners

Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York - www.catholiccharitiesny.org

A federation of 91 administered, sponsored and affiliated agencies that are diverse in administration and funding, but united by a common vision of human dignity and service. Catholic Charities works in five program areas: Protecting and Nurturing Children and Youth, Strengthening Families and Resolving Crises, Supporting the Physically and Emotionally Challenged, Feeding the Hungry and Sheltering the Homeless.

ICNY partners came from Catholic Charities Community Services, including the Immigration Services Office, the Emergency of Food Services, and the Social and Community Development Office.

Teen Federation of Staten Island

Initially a part of the Catholic Youth Organization (CYO) of Staten Island, the Teen Federation helps young people to develop leadership skills, grow in their faith, and serve the community.

Central Harlem Vicariate of the Archdiocese of New York

The Archdiocese of New York is broken down into 19 different geographic regions, called vicariates, each with a local vicar. The Central Harlem Vicariate consists of the following parishes: St. Aloysius, Church of Saint Charles Borromeo, St. Joseph of the Holy Family, St. Mark the Evangelist, Holy Family.

New York City's Muslim Community

The NYC Muslim population is estimated to be between 600,000 and 850,000 with Muslim children making up 10 percent of students in city public schools.

Muslim Partners

Muslim Women's Institute for Research and Development (MWRID) - www.mwird.org

Founded in 1997, MWIRD is a faith-based community service organization, committed to working in the areas of hunger relief, health education, interfaith work and the transitional needs of new immigrants. MWIRD is located in a community where the ethnic composition is now approximately 59 percent Hispanic, 37 percent African-American, 3 percent Asian-American, 1 percent Other, and where approximately 46 percent of the families with children under eighteen live below the poverty level.

To provide effective services, MWIRD works collaboratively with city, borough and state agencies, as well as with nonprofit and grassroots organizations.

Miraj Islamic School - www.mirajschool.org

The mission of Miraj Islamic School is to provide excellent all-around education in a pleasant and stimulating Islamic environment. The school strives for an excellent standard of education, and tries its best to inculcate Islamic manners in its students to become exemplary citizens. The school curriculum provides young learners with a solid educational foundation in language arts, mathematics, science, social studies, Islam and Qur'anic studies.

Albanian Islamic Cultural Center - www.aicc-ny.org

The first Islamic center in Staten Island was established in 1973, and named Islamic Mesjid of Staten Island. On September 16, 1990, the Islamic Mesjid relocated and changed its name to Albanian Islamic Cultural Center.

Murid Islamic Community in America, Inc. - www.toubamica.org

("MICA" or the "organization") is a 501 c (3) non-profit organization founded in 1989 under the leadership of the Venerated Sheikh Mouhamadou Mourtalla Mbacke. The organization's main goals are to promote, deliver and explain the true message Allah (s.a.t.) sent to humanity through His Messenger and Servant Muhammad (s.a.w.) through the teachings and guidance of Sheikh Ahmadou Bamba (r.a.).

MICA seeks to link the Murid Communities throughout the United States by the rope of unity, brotherhood and helping one other in the path of Islam and in each other's enterprises. MICA is also active in helping the needy regardless of race or orientation.

Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood and the Sisterhood of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood - www.mosqueofislamicbrotherhoodinc.org

The Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood (MIB) and the School of Islamic and Arabic Studies were founded in 1964 and incorporated in 1967. The MIB is the lineal descendant of the Muslim Mosque, Inc. (MMI), founded by the late El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz (Malcolm X) in 1964 after his departure from the organization known as the Nation of Islam. The founders of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood had been members of the M.M.I.

The Sisterhood of the Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood is an organization of women from MIB.

Masjid al-Aqsa

Masjid al-Aqsa is a mosque in Harlem. Most of the members of the mosque are West African immigrants. The mosque is led by Imam Souleimane Konaté. Originally from the Ivory Coast, Imam Konaté has been the spiritual leader of the Masjid al-Aqsa Mosque for over 12 years. He is also General Secretary of the Council of African Imams, Inc., and the Vice-President of Harlem Islamic Leadership, Inc. Deeply involved in the West African community, Imam Konaté has been profiled by many news organizations including *The New York Times*, *NPR*, and the *Daily News*.

Members of the Following Organizations Participated in Partnership Activities

Catholic

All Saints Church
Catholic Charities of Brooklyn and Queens
Catholic Charities of the Archdiocese of New York
Church of Saint Charles Borromeo and Resurrection Chapel
Congregation of Notre Dame
Franciscan Handmaids of the Most Pure Heart of Mary
Highbridge Community Life Center
Kennedy Center
Our Lady of Good Counsel Parish
Sisters of Charity
Sisters of St. Dominic Blauvelt
St. Aloysious
St. Francis of Assisi Pantry
Teen Federation, Catholic Youth Organization

Muslim

Albanian Islamic Cultural Center
Masjid Aqsa
Masjid Touba- Murid Islamic Community of America

Miraj Islamic School
Mosque of Islamic Brotherhood
Muslim Women's Institute

Appendix B

Agencies Participating in Workshops on Working with Muslim Families, By Borough

Manhattan: 28 Participants

Presentation by Sanctuary for Families

Catholic Guardian Services
Children's Aid Society
East Harlem Community Partnership Program
Grandparent Resource Center
Leake and Watts
Lower East Side Community Partnership Program
New Alternatives for Children
New York State Office of Family Services
N.Y. Foundling
NYC Family Justice Center
St. Christopher-Otilie Family of Services

Brooklyn: 45 participants

Presentation by Arab American Family Support Center

Administration for Children's Services
Catholic Charities, Archdiocese of Brooklyn and Queens
Community Counseling and Mediation
Early Learn NYC
Graham Windham
Heartshare St. Vincent's
Jewish Child Care Association
Mercy First
N.Y. Foundling
Poison Control Center Hunter College
Seamen's Society for Children and Families
Urban Strategies

Bronx: 20 participants

Presentation by Bridge Builders

Abbot House
Administration for Children's Services
Bronxworks
Cardinal McCloskey
Children's Village
Coalition for Asian American Children
Good Shepherd Services
Highbridge Community Partnership Program
Jewish Child Care Association of N.Y.
Jewish Community Relations Council-N.Y.
Leake and Watts
Lutheran Health Initiative
N.Y. Foundling
NYC Office of Mental Health
Sauti Yetu Center
Sharon Baptist Head Start

Staten Island: 20 participants

Presentation by Sauti Yetu Center for African Women

Administration for Children's Services
Beacon Center
Children's Aid Society
Early Childhood Direction
Healthy Families Staten Island
Sauti Yetu
Seamen's Society for Children

Queens: 21 participants

Presentation by Catholic Charities

Administration for Children's Services
Forestdale, Inc.
N.Y. Foundling
St. Christopher-Ottillie Family of Services

Total Agency Participants: 134

Tally of Muslim Community/Organization Participants

Manhattan: 12 participants [Masjid Toubia; Muslim Consultative Network; Youth & Young Adults Organization, Binghamton, N.Y., and individual community members]

Bronx: 16 participants [Masjid Hafez, an African foster father, a large group of African immigrant women]

Staten Island: 6 participants [Muslim Ummah of North America, Sauti Yetu, Islamic Civic Association]

Brooklyn: 14 participants [Brooklyn Arts Incubator, Masjid Farooq, Al Noor School, individual community members]

Queens: 12 participants [Muslim American Society, large group of Arab immigrant women]

Total Muslim Community Participants: 60