



Social Work and Religious Diversity: Religion, Spirituality, and Family Life

A continuing education conference for social workers and their colleagues, developed by the Interfaith Center of New York, in partnership with the Jewish Board, and the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute.

May 10, 2017 • 475 Riverside Drive, New York, NY

The Interfaith Center of New York SW CPE is recognized by the New York State Education Department's State Board for Social Work as an approved provider of continuing education for licensed social workers – provider #0163. This conference offers 7 contact hours of continuing education for New York State LMSWs and LCSWs.

8:30 - 9:00 Welcome and Registration

Please plan to arrive by 8:45, as the opening session of the conference will start promptly at 9:00. Coffee, tea, and snacks will be available for conference participants.

9:00 - 11:00 Plenary Panel: The Religious Lives of New York Families

Religion and spirituality are often mistakenly described as strictly personal, interior phenomena – matters of the individual heart, mind, or soul. But in fact, the religious lives of New Yorkers are inextricably tied to our relationships with families, friends, and loved ones. Religious beliefs and values provide the moral foundation of many traditional (and not-so-traditional) family systems, while religious rituals and experiences imbue the daily rhythms of family life with sacred depth and significance. These intimate ties between religion, spirituality, and the family are an empowering source of strength for some New Yorkers, an oppressive hierarchical order for others, and a complex issue for us all, given the increasing diversity of our society and families alike. Our plenary panel will explore these issues through discussions of Jewish, Christian, Hindu, and Muslim family life. The speakers will be:

- **Dr. Henry Goldschmidt**, Director of Programs, Interfaith Center of New York
- **Anindita Chatterjee Bhaumik, LICSW**, Clinician in Private Practice with Boston Evening Therapy Associates; Reiki Master; and Hindu Community Leader

- **Maryum Khwaja, LCSW**, Psychotherapist at the Bleuler Psychotherapy Center; Co-Founder of Nasiha Counseling
- **Rev. Sarah McCaslin, MDiv, LMSW**, Resident Therapist at the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute; Waffle Church Minister at St. Lydia's
- **Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW**, Rabbinic Director, The Jewish Board

11:00 - 11:10 Coffee and Snack Break

11:10 - 12:00 Comparative Reflection on the Sacred Dimensions of Family Life

With guidance from a worksheet, conference participants will reflect on the sacred dimensions of their own family lives. What beliefs and values help to support their family system? What practices and experiences make their home a sacred space? Whether participants are religious, secular, or spiritual – and regardless of how they define the term “family” – they will be asked to compare their own family life with those of the families described by our plenary speakers. Participants will discuss their comparative self-reflection in small groups, highlighting both the similarities and differences in the lives of religious, secular, and spiritual New Yorkers.

12:00 - 1:00 Lunch – No Formal Program, Just Quality Time with Colleagues

A catered lunch will be available for all conference participants, including vegetarian, kosher, and other options.

1:00 - 2:20 Interfaith Families: Religious Diversity at Home

Our first afternoon panel will explore the distinctive issues social service and mental health care providers may face in working with interfaith families. How do interfaith couples negotiate the boundaries between their respective religious traditions? How do their children learn to respect, and sometimes embrace, both sides of their complex heritage? What kinds of support do they receive – and what kinds of resistance do they face – from their faith communities? Our panelists will explore these issues from Jewish, Muslim, and Zoroastrian perspectives, including discussions of families that bridge the differences between faith traditions, as well as families that bridge ethnic or doctrinal differences within a single faith tradition. The speakers will be:

- **Dr. Sheila C. Gordon**, Founder and President of Interfaith Community
- **Sheikh Faiyaz Jaffer, MA**, Assistant Research Scholar at the Islamic Center at New York University; and Associate Chaplain in NYU's Office of Global Spiritual Life
- **Ferzin Patel, MA**, Psychotherapist, Community Leader, and Trustee of the Dar-E-Mehr Zoroastrian Temple

2:20 - 2:30

Coffee/Snack Break

2:30 - 3:50

Faith Families: Religion and Kinship Beyond Biology

Our final panel will explore the ways that faith communities themselves function as families for many New Yorkers – providing mutual support, social identity, and psychologically formative relationships. It is essential for service providers to understand that their religiously diverse clients' family ties may not be limited to the nuclear or extended family. Faith communities often function as what scholars have called "fictive kin," playing important roles in many New Yorkers' lives. Our panelists will explore these issues through discussions of African-American Christian church families, contemporary Zen Buddhist views of sangha and community, and the spiritual lineage systems that help to define African diaspora Orisha communities. The speakers will be:

- **Rev. Dr. Willard W. C. Ashley, Sr.**, Dean and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary; Founder and Senior pastor of the Abundant Joy Community Church
- **Rev. DeShannon Barnes-Bowens, MS** (Iyanifa Iwalewa Fasina Oyetunde), Founder of ILERA Counseling and Education Services; First Year Dean at One Spirit Interfaith Seminary
- **Barbara Joshin O'Hara, Sensei, MA, LCSW**, Co-Founder of the Village Zendo; Psychoanalytically Trained Psychotherapist in Private Practice

3:50 - 4:00

Coffee/Snack Break

4:00 - 5:00

Closing Discussion, Reflection, and Evaluations

Following a brief presentation by a leading social work educator, participants will reflect on the key points of the conference in small group conversations and a facilitated town-hall discussion. What, we will ask, have we learned from today's speakers, and from each other? What can we take back to our practice? How can social workers best support the religiously diverse families they serve? The conversation will be framed and facilitated by:

- **Dr. Mary Ragan, LCSW**, Executive Director of the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute; Adjunct Professor at Columbia University School of Social Work

Some Practical Details to Keep in Mind

Bathrooms are in the basement – down the escalator behind the reception desk in the lobby, then to your left.

If you've ordered a **strictly kosher lunch**, please see ICNY staff at the registration desk at the beginning of the lunch break.

Wifi is available. The network is *guest@interchurch*, the account name is *guest*, and the password is *guest475*.

Please take a moment to fill out your **conference evaluation form** after each session. You will need to submit this form in order to receive a certificate of completion at the end of the day.

Credit-bearing certificates of completion will be available to pick up at the conclusion of the conference, at 5 pm, and not before (as per New York State Education Department regulations).

Don't forget to check out the **resource table**, to learn more about your colleagues' amazing work.

A **photographer** will be documenting the conference. These photos may be used in Interfaith Center program materials, including social media platforms. Please let the photographer know if you would rather not have your picture taken.

If you tweet any of your own photos or reflections on the conference, please tweet at **@ICNY**.



Social Work and Religious Diversity: Religion, Spirituality, and Family Life

Speakers Biographies

Plenary Panel: The Religious Lives of New York Families

Dr. Henry Goldschmidt is a cultural anthropologist, community educator, and scholar of American religious diversity. He is currently the Director of Programs at the Interfaith Center of New York, where he develops education and social action programs for a range of audiences, including secondary school teachers and students, social workers, faith leaders, and the general public. Henry received his Ph.D. in anthropology from the University of California at Santa Cruz in 2000, and has taught religious studies and anthropology at Wesleyan University and elsewhere. Among other publications, he is the author of *Race and Religion among the Chosen Peoples of Crown Heights*, and coeditor of *Race, Nation, and Religion in the Americas*. He is a life-long, fanatic New Yorker, and lives in Brooklyn with his wife and children.

Anindita Chatterjee Bhaumik, LICSW, MSW, is a clinical social worker, Hindu community leader, Reiki Master, and advocate for victims of domestic violence and sexual assault. She is currently a clinician at Boston Evening Therapy Associates, where she provides psychotherapy to individuals, couples, families, and teens. She has also worked with CONNECT, the Domestic Violence Project of the Urban Justice Center, and Sanctuary for Families. Anindita has dedicated her life to raising awareness about the perils of violence and its ramifications on children, women, and families. She has been an active member of the Hindu Temple Society of North America and the Vedanta Society of New York, and is a lifelong adherent of Sanatana Dharma (more popularly known as Hinduism) studying under the guidance of Swami Tathagathananda of the Vedanta Society for over a decade.

Maryum Khwaja, LCSW, graduated from the Silver School of Social Work at New York University in 2001. She works as a psychotherapist at the Bleuler Psychotherapy Center in Forest Hills, Queens, and in a private practice called Nasiha Counseling – a practice that specializes in, but is not restricted to, working with Muslim clients. She also volunteers as a Foster Program Specialist with the New Jersey based organization Smile, and with the Interfaith Center of New York, developing relationships with DYFS and ACS to provide support for Muslim

children and families in foster care. From 2007 to 2013, Maryum was the Coordinator of Social Services at NYU's Islamic Center, working pro bono in conjunction with Imam Khalid Latif to provide short-term counseling for Muslim students. She has had extensive experience working with children, adolescents, parents, and families in the child welfare system, and with emotionally disturbed children and adolescents. In 2010 Maryum was honored by then Manhattan Borough President Scott Stringer for her exemplary service to the borough of Manhattan.

Rev. Sarah McCaslin, MDiv, LMSW, serves as a Resident Therapist at the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute, and as the Waffle Church Minister of St. Lydia's Church in Gowanus, Brooklyn. Sarah is an ordained minister and licensed social worker whose career has been devoted to fostering the human capacity for resilience, growth, and meaning-making, even under the most daunting circumstances. As a pastor and therapist, she bears special witness to the unique stories of everyone she encounters, serving as a companion during difficult times and an advocate during moments of possibility. In her work at the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute, Sarah counsels individuals and couples, as well as leading workshops. She provides premarital counseling and holds a keen interest in working with interfaith couples as they negotiate the gift and challenge of bringing and bridging distinct faith traditions together. In her ministry at St. Lydia's, Sarah leads a monthly, intergenerational service known as Waffle Church. The service employs all of the senses in a liturgy that promotes cross-generational engagement. Waffle Church is not "just" for families with children – in Sarah's words, "we may not all have children, but we have all been children." Sarah graduated with dual MSSW/MDiv degrees from the Columbia University School of Social Work and Union Theological Seminary in 2006, and was ordained in the Presbyterian Church (U.S.A.) in 2007. She is currently training at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, and expects to graduate in 2019.

Rabbi Simkha Y. Weintraub, LCSW, serves as Rabbinic Director of the Jewish Board of Family and Children's Services. Rabbi Weintraub designs and leads workshops on Jewish spiritual resources for living with illness, caregiving, loss, and trauma; develops training seminars for rabbis and health care professionals; creates innovative Jewish healing rituals; and has written and lectured widely on the use of traditional texts and practices for Jewish spiritual healing. Rabbi Weintraub was ordained by the Jewish Theological Seminary in 1982, earned a Master's Degree in Clinical Social Work from Columbia University in 1983, and graduated from the Couples and Family Therapy Program of the Postgraduate Center for Mental Health in New York in 1988. He is an Adjunct Lecturer in Pastoral Skills at JTS, teaching courses related to Jewish healing, spiritual caregiving, loss and bereavement, and behavioral health. He helped to design and teaches in the Post-Master's Certificate Program in Spirituality and Social Work at NYU's Silver School of Social Work. Among other publications, he is the author or editor of *Healing of Soul, Healing of Body* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 1994), *Finding Spiritual Strength in Pain or Illness: Reaching In, Reaching Out, Reaching Up* (Jewish Lights Publishing, 2000), and *Guide Me Along the Way: A Jewish Spiritual Companion for Surgery* (National Center for Jewish Healing, 2002). In addition to his writing, teaching, and work at JBFCS, Simkha maintains a private practice in couples and family therapy in New York City, working with couples and families confronting a wide range of issues, including chronic illness, infertility, interfaith concerns, and more. His passions include the nexus of spirituality and mental health, cross-disciplinary innovation, interfaith exchange and intergroup dialogue, and human rights.

Interfaith Families: Religious Diversity at Home

Dr. Sheila C. Gordon is the founding president of Interfaith Community, an educational and community-building program for Jewish-Christian families who want to respect and support both of their religious heritages. She has overseen the organization's multi-chapter evolution, along with the development of its curricula for children and adults, including workshops for couples and individual counseling. Married to a practicing Episcopalian, Dr. Gordon is a Conservative Jew who has served as co-chair of the interfaith committee of Congregation B'nai Jeshurun, and as a liaison for Interfaith Community with the innovative, post-denominational congregation Romemu. Dr. Gordon brings to Interfaith Community a long career in education, philanthropy, and the not-for profit sector, including 20 years as a dean and professor at LaGuardia Community College/CUNY; administrative and program work at the Ford Foundation; and staffing major public policy studies related to education. She has served as a trustee of Barnard College and the American Red Cross in Greater New York, and in many other volunteer roles. She is the author of numerous articles in professional journals and books, as well as research and policy studies. She holds a B.A. from Barnard College, an M.A. from Harvard University, and a Ph.D. from Columbia University.

Sheikh Faiyaz Jaffer, MA, is an Assistant Research Scholar at the Islamic Center at New York University, and Associate Chaplain in the University's Office of Global Spiritual Life. He attained an MA in Islamic Studies in the UK, following a BA in Political Science and Religious Studies from SUNY Stony Brook. In pursuing his classical Islamic education, he also studied in the prominent Seminary of Karbala, Iraq. His research has been published in a number of academic journals, and he currently continues his fieldwork as part of the Islamic Research Institute in New York. As a faith leader and activist, Faiyaz has lectured at universities, seminars, and workshops across the United States, Canada, Europe, East Africa, and the Middle East.

Ferzin Patel, MA, is a psychotherapist by training, Zoroastrian community leader, and Trustee of the newly rebuilt Dar-E-Mehr Zoroastrian Temple, in Pomona, New York. The original Dar-E-Mehr (Doors of Peace) Temple was the first Zoroastrian center built in North America, 40 years ago. Ferzin holds a Master's degree in Clinical and Developmental Psychology from Columbia University, and spent fifteen years working in the field of autism and developmental disabilities, including nine years as a clinical supervisor and administrator at an outpatient medical and mental health clinic in Manhattan serving developmentally disabled New Yorkers. Her current practice focuses on the advocacy of Conscious Parenting, and the ways we can connect with our children and bridge the world to a more conscious existence. Ferzin also studied comparative religion in college, which began her quest to learn about diverse religious beliefs. Among other projects in the Zoroastrian community, she has served on the Board of the Zoroastrian Association of Greater New York, served as Co-Chair of the 2012 North American Zoroastrian Congress, and is a frequent speaker on Zoroastrian identity in the contemporary world. Ferzin currently facilitates a support group for intermarried Zoroastrian families, and serves as a mentor for intermarried couples in her community. In 2006, she collaborated with colleagues to launch the still-thriving Zoroastrian Intermarried Group, which helps couples and families acclimate to Zoroastrian cultural and religious beliefs and practices.

Faith Families: Religion and Kinship Beyond the Nuclear Family

Rev. Dr. Willard W. C. Ashley, Sr., is the Dean of the Seminary and Associate Professor of Practical Theology at New Brunswick Theological Seminary, as well as the founder and senior pastor of the Abundant Joy Community Church, in Jersey City, NJ. Dr. Ashley is a native of New York City. He is a graduate of the Fashion Institute of Technology, earned his BA from Montclair State University, earned a masters in theology and a doctorate in leadership development from the Andover Newton Theological School, and completed the residency programs in Psychotherapy and Marriage and Family Therapy at the Blanton Peale Institute. Will has a long history of accomplishments as a pastor, teacher, therapist, and community organizer. Among other past positions, he has served as: Project Director for the Care for the Caregivers Interfaith Program, the largest clergy resiliency program in the United States; Director of the Blanton Peale Pastoral Studies Program in East Orange, NJ; Director of Pastoral Care at Barnert Hospital Paterson, NJ; and a staff psychotherapist at both the Riverside Church in New York City and Montclair Counseling Center in Upper Montclair, NJ. Prior to founding the Abundant Joy Community Church in 1996, he served as senior pastor of churches in New Hampshire and New Jersey. Prior to joining the faculty of New Brunswick Theological Seminary, he taught at Drew University, Andover Newton Theological School, and the New York Theological Seminary, and served as the Assistant Dean of Students and Director of Recruitment at Andover Newton. He has hosted a half hour program on Black Entertainment Television, and was on the radio in New York City for six years. Among other publications, he is the editor of *Learning to Lead: Lessons in Leadership for People of Faith*, co-editor (with Rabbi Stephen Roberts) of *Disaster Spiritual Care*, and a contributor to *The Men of Color Study Bible*. He holds associate membership in the American Association of Marriage and Family Therapists, the American Group Psychotherapy Association, and Black Psychiatrists of Greater New York. He is currently a board member of Andover Newton Theological School, a board member of the North Jersey American Red Cross, a member of the Bergen County Human Relations Commission, and a member of the Chief Academic Officer Advisory Board for the Association of Theological Schools. Last but definitely not least, Will is the proud father of an adult son "Chris," and is married to Dr. Tanya Pagan Raggio-Ashley, who is board certified in pediatrics and preventive medicine.

DeShannon Barnes-Bowens, MS, is the founder of ILERA Counseling and Education Services, and works as a psychotherapist, professional development trainer, and spiritual counselor. Through ILERA, she offers workshops and programs on sexuality and spirituality, sexual abuse, and vicarious trauma and wellness. DeShannon received a Bachelor's degree in Psychology from the University of Missouri - St. Louis, and a Master's degree in Counseling from Pace University. She is an initiated priestess in the Yoruba - Ifa spiritual tradition, and a member of Ile Okun Inu temple based in the United States and Nigeria. DeShannon is also an ordained Interfaith - Interspiritual Minister through the One Spirit Interfaith Seminary, where she currently teaches and serves as a Dean to first year seminary students. She is the author of *Hush Hush: An African American Family Breaks their Silence on Sexuality and Sexual Abuse* (2007, 2015). The second edition of her book inspired a full length play of the same title, as well as an arts education program called *Hush Hush the Healing Project*. DeShannon is the first recipient of the Bill T. Jones Award from the American Association of Sexuality Educators, Counselors and Therapists, and an Emeritus Scholar for State of Formation. She has presented

aspects of her work at conferences and programs sponsored by the American Academy of Religion, Harvard University, The Children's Aid Society, Washington University, New York Theological Seminary, the University of Connecticut, and the Values Caucus of the United Nations. For more about DeShannon and her work see www.ilera.com.

Barbara Joshin O'Hara, Sensei, MA, LCSW, is a co-founder of the Village Zendo, along with her life-partner Roshi Enkyo O'Hara. She began her formal Zen training in 1986 with Roshi John Daido Looi, spending three years in residential monastic training. She received Dharma Transmission from Roshi O'Hara in 2006. Sensei Joshin is also a psychotherapist who works at the interface between spirituality and attachment-based psychotherapy, seeking to undo the aloneness at the basis of many dysfunctional behaviors. She believes there is no more important work than investigating what keeps us from being fully present to our own experience.

Closing Discussion and Reflection

Dr. Mary Ragan, LCSW, is the Executive Director of the Psychotherapy and Spirituality Institute, and an Adjunct Assistant Professor at the Columbia University School of Social Work, where she regularly teaches a course on "Spirituality and Social Work." In addition to her work as a clinician, administrator, and educator, Dr. Ragan has served as a consultant to a wide range of faith-based and secular organizations. She has worked for many years for the Maryknoll Fathers & Brothers and Maryknoll Lay Missioners, dealing with cross-cultural adjustment and personnel issues. That consulting work has given her the opportunity to work with missionaries in Bolivia, Guatemala, El Salvador, and Venezuela. She has also served as a consultant to hospital management groups and a hospice staff. Her scholarly research has explored the specific contours of traumatic grief, its differences from general bereavement, and the clinical interventions that proved most effective. She has done trauma work with first-responders and family members after 9/11, and volunteered in New Orleans and Lake Charles after Hurricanes Katrina and Rita in 2005. Dr. Ragan's current interest is in addressing the mental health needs of returning veterans and their families. She serves as a volunteer therapist for Give An Hour, and as project director for PSI's initiative for women veterans, called *IN OUR OWN VOICE: Women Veterans Tell Their Stories*.