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A Place To Call Home: Refugee Resettlement Program at the Center For New Americans



Refugees are people who have fled their countries from war and persecution. Most refugees would prefer to return home, but it's often too dangerous because of ongoing conflict and unrest, so many languish in refugee camps for a decade or more. Others remain in neighboring countries, often illegally, never knowing if they might be caught and returned to their country, which may not even want them back.

There are 13 million refugees in the world today. Three-fourths of the world's refugees are women and children. Another 22 million people are internally displaced within the borders of their own countries due to civil war or other conflicts. Less than one percent of refugees have the opportunity to resettle in North America, but in 2009, hundreds have been welcomed to Syracuse by the InterFaith Works Refugee Resettlement Program, and they are enriching our community with their spirit and hard work.

Jai Subedi and his wife are two of the nearly 1,000 Bhutanese refugees living in Syracuse. Jai arrived in Syracuse a year ago, in November 2008, and his wife is expecting their first child very soon.

Jai was born in Bhutan and belongs to an ethnic group called the Lhotshampas, who settled in Bhutan in the 1800's. They were originally from Nepal and maintained their own culture and language. When a string of measures were passed discriminating against them, the Lhotshampa organized a series of public demonstrations for which the participants were branded "anti-nationals" by the Bhutanese government. Several thousands of Lhotshampas were imprisoned, and some were tortured, according to reports by the U.S. Department of State. In the wake of this brutality and discrimination, thousands fled to India and Nepal. By the end of 1992, there were

more than 80,000 refugees living in United Nations refugee camps in south eastern Nepal. Jai and his family lived in the Sanichare Refugee Camp with 22,000 other refugees for the next 18 years.

The decision to resettle was an easy one for Jai. Camp life was hard – it's dirty and crowded. Structures were built to house refugees for 5 years, but they have now been used for almost twenty. Schools and health clinics are built with flimsy bamboo, and water is only distributed two or three times a day from centrally located pipes that must serve large numbers of refugees. Food rations are only distributed every two weeks. Rations are distributed to each household in proportion to the number of members in the family. There is no variation in quantity according to age; a full grown man receives the same amount as a toddler.

Refugees receive a 'food basket' containing rice, lentils, vegetable oil, sugar, salt, wheat soya blend and some vegetables. Over recent years the provision of vegetables provided has been gradually reduced forcing people to earn an income to buy food to supplement their rations and to ensure that their diet remains healthy, but they are not legally allowed to work in Nepal, so they are often exploited for extremely low wages and in danger of being jailed if they are caught.

Refugees are also provided with non-food items like soap and kerosene and other fuel for cooking and heating. However, rationing of these basic materials has increased dramatically in recent years. Nepal is a poor country and will not accept refugees as citizens.

Living in Bhutan, Jai thought the United States would be filled with skyscrapers -

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The Legacy Will Continue

Writing my last column as Executive Director of InterFaith Works provides an occasion for ruminating on the seven years I have served in this position. A wise professor in my theological school once advised us never to leave a position in which one is working until it is difficult to do so because of the power of the relationships and sense of importance of the work in which one is engaged just then and just there. Leaving InterFaith Works is bitter-sweet for me for those reasons!

InterFaith Works is an agency that, like many things that are related to faith traditions, moves slowly, sometimes so slowly as to be unnoticed, but it moves! Organizations go through cycles and require gentle husbandry to maintain viability and vitality. One way we have kept InterFaith Works viable and vital during my tenure was through the initiation of a very serious strategic thinking process over a two year period from 2005 through 2007. We focused on, and continue to work on, each of four critical issues:

- Reviewing and revising the organization's mission statement;
- Generating a communications plan, including branding, that effectively tells our story to a broader audience both within the faith communities and the larger community of Central New York;
- Determining what "membership" in the organization means for faith communities, faith based or religious organizations, and individuals;
- Achieving long-term financial sustainability for the agency.

Commentary on each of these issues would warrant a column in itself, but this is not the place for that. Rather, I want to concentrate on the mission statement that emerged in the process. It is a straightforward declaration:

InterFaith Works, through education, service and dialogue, affirms the dignity each person and every faith community, and works to create relationships and understanding among us.

Many theorists of viable organizations de-emphasize the importance of mission statements and decry the time spent in formulating them. I disagree with those critiques, at least for this agency. The process, with the assistance of a consultant, which brought both members of the board of directors and senior staff people into engagement with each other, was creative and highly beneficial. The occasion in 2006 when the mission statement in this precise wording emerged from the chaos of discussion and debate was a "Eureka!" moment. And the continuing process of discovering the meanings and implications of this articulation of our mission has energized and even transformed the work that we do in many respects.

Few of the changes that have come from the adoption of our new mission statement have been more far-reaching than the decision, announced in January 2007, to change the name of the organization from the InterReligious Council of Central New York to InterFaith Works of CNY. The strategic and mission-focused thinking that led to that change continues, and will into the future, I trust.

Socrates declared that the unexamined life is not worth living. The insight borne by that comment is as pertinent for the life of organizations as individuals. InterFaith Works will be fulfilling its mission in the future just to the extent that it continues such deep examinations and reflections.

JAMES B. WIGGINS,

Executive Director
November 2009

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Womens Forum Program A Success



On September 29th, more than 100 people braved blustery, rainy weather to attend the 5th Annual Dorothy F. Rose Women's Forum. This year's event celebrated "Women of the Arts," a conversation with women artists from a variety of disciplines about their creative process and the role of faith and spirituality in the works of art they create.

Our panel for the evening included Susan Roth, an internationally known painter and visual artist whose work is contained in such places as the Museum of Fine Arts in Boston and the Smithsonian in Washington, D.C., Crystal LaPointe, a choral music composer who has created pieces for groups all over the country, including the Syracuse Symphony Orchestra, and Cjala Surratt, formerly of the Community Folk Art Center in Syracuse, who has recently opened her own graphic design business for clients around the nation. Mrs. Charlotte "Chuckie" Holstein once again served as our Mistress of Ceremonies and the incredible panel of artists was moderated by Barbara Croll Fought from the S. I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University. Donna Cross, author of the novel, "Pope Joan" was scheduled to join us, but was called away to attend the premiere of the film made from her book in Rome. Donna did send along her regrets and a special surprise!

Representing unique backgrounds, different faith traditions and different artistic disciplines, these women discussed their own creative process, the way in which they approach a new piece of work, and how spirituality and religious beliefs have and have not influenced their lives and the art they create.

This year was our first "multi-media" event – featuring a live performance of an original Crystal LaPointe composition by the Syracuse Symphony Pops Chorus, original works by Susan Roth, Cjala Surratt, and Crystal LaPointe on display, and as a surprise for our guests, the United States PREMIER of the trailer to the upcoming film, "Pope Joan," based on Donna Cross' book.

Many thanks to our Rose Sponsor, Stickley, Audi and Co., and to our many other sponsors, who you'll see listed below, for making this such a wonderful event and we want to extend our gratitude to our panelists for making the 5th Annual Dorothy Rose Women's Forum such a success!

A Very Special Thank You to Our Women's Forum Sponsors!

ROSE

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Rev. Karen Vickers Budney
Betsy Wiggins,
in honor of Women Transcending Boundaries

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Ellen Taylor Bacon	Janet & Harold Garman
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In Giving, YOU Help Others To Receive



Dear Friend;

Many people who receive this newsletter are familiar with the mission and programs of InterFaith Works, but few realize just how many people in our community are impacted by the service and advocacy that InterFaith Works provides: the Refugee Resettlement Program, Covenant Housing, Senior Companions, Spiritual Care and Community Wide Dialogue to End Racism. Together, these programs touch the lives of thousands of the most vulnerable members of our community who are served and enriched through these programs which provide compassionate care for our elderly, the hospitalized, the institutionalized, the disabled, and refugee and immigrant individuals and families, school-age children, and so many others.

Four times a year, this newsletter shares the details of just a few of those individuals with you - stories about a young man with severe physical disabilities who became a homeowner because of Covenant Housing's work with financing and renovations, an immigrant who survived more than a decade in a refugee camp to come to our community, where he gives back by volunteering, senior citizens who help those who are homebound and lonely by providing a friendly visit or a trip to the grocery store, a dialogue circle that gives new hope to young students - because we want you to know that without you, we could not continue this work. Your support, your interest, and your commitment to InterFaith Works

make the stories that we feature in the newsletter and so many more possible.

Once a year in the newsletter we ask you to make a contribution that will enable us to keep doing the hard work that makes the stories we share with you possible. InterFaith Works relies on the generosity of individuals like you to continue our efforts to create a more diverse, supportive, and enriching community for all of us – something that we certainly need as we strive to move forward together through these difficult days.

Please consider using the envelope in this newsletter to make a contribution to InterFaith Works. By making a gift, no matter how small, you ensure that others will continue to receive the kind of help from InterFaith Works that will fill our newsletters with more remarkable stories of the good things that you make possible.

We hope that you will join the InterFaith Works staff and Board of Directors in continuing to support our important work.

James B. Wiggins, Ph.D.,
Executive Director

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "James B. Wiggins".

Dennis R. Baldwin,
Board President

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Dennis R. Baldwin".

St. John the Baptist

Ukrainian Catholic Church

207 TOMPKINS STREET
SYRACUSE, NY 13204



Established 1890

InterFaith Works, in keeping with our mission to affirm the dignity of each individual and every faith tradition in the community, invites you to participate on Sunday, November 15th, 2009, at 2:00pm, in the third of InterFaith Works inaugural series of Faith Community Visits. This visit will be to the St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church on Tompkins Street in Syracuse, NY.

Ukrainian Catholic settlers in Syracuse arrived in 1890. By 1897 a temporary house of worship was formed on the site of the current building. In 1913 the community built St. John the Baptist Ukrainian Catholic Church on the corner of Wilbur and Tompkins Streets.

These visits to sacred sites are exciting opportunities to learn more about the many faith traditions which add strength and vibrancy to Central New York. These visits are designed to promote a greater understanding of various faith traditions and provide opportunities to learn more about the religious beliefs of each of the faith communities that we visit. To RSVP, or for more information, please contact Sarah Beth Lardie at sblardie@interfaithworkscny.org or 449-3552, ext. 120.

Senior Companion Program Recognizes Volunteers

The Senior Companion Program held their 23rd Annual Recognition Luncheon on September 24, 2009. More than 100 people were in attendance to honor the dedication and generosity of InterFaith Works' sixty-five senior companions. This year, nearly 250 senior citizens from Madison, Onondaga, and Cayuga counties were assisted by the Senior Companion Program.

Companions assist in a variety of helpful tasks including shopping, cooking and household chores. Equally important, they also take the time to socialize with their clients by playing games, sharing stories and providing a listening ear. Companions enable those they serve to remain independent in their own homes. Their volunteer service helps to lower health care costs by keeping people out of hospitals and nursing homes while they



are able to live independently.

Program Director Larry Crinnin served as the Master of Ceremonies for the afternoon, introducing InterFaith Works Executive Director, Dr. Jim Wiggins, who recognized the wisdom and experience that our Senior Companions bring to their work. New York State Assemblywoman

Joan K. Christensen provided her own heartfelt acknowledgement of the work that Senior Companions do to enrich our community, and she presented a citation from the New York State Assembly.

InterFaith Works thanks all the Senior Companion volunteers for their grace, generosity, time and talent,

providing inspiration for these programs that benefit the community through individual attention, engagement and enrichment.

A Place To Call Home

(Continued from Page 1)



so when he came to Syracuse, he was surprised! He was also surprised by the weather – the refugee camp had been located on a desert plain in Nepal – MUCH different from the seasons in Syracuse, especially the snow. His trip to Syracuse wasn't an easy one – he took a bus to a medium sized city in Nepal, a plane to Katmandu, and then flew to Singapore, where he boarded a plane to Bangkok, finally arriving in New York. When he arrived in New York he found out he had accidentally been scheduled to be relocated to Texas, even though his family was already settled in Syracuse. Hope Wallis, Director of the Refugee Resettlement Program, worked to get Jai's placement changed so he could finally join his family.

Jai was one of the fortunate few allowed to leave the camp to attend college. He earned a degree in mathematics and economics and returned to the refugee camp and taught in the camp school. Here in Syracuse, he works full-time for the InterFaith Works Refugee Resettlement

Program. Through the generous support of volunteers and donors, InterFaith Works can help hundreds of people like Jai and his family begin new lives in our community.

Our Refugee Resettlement Program welcomes the stranger as a friend. From the moment of arrival, program staff work to meet basic needs, including shelter, furnishings, food and clothing. The staff also facilitate referrals to other service providers and assist in enrolling refugee children in school. You can provide help and hope to newcomers by providing transportation to necessary appointments, by becoming an English as a Second Language tutor, or by helping the Refugee Resettlement staff collect donations and set up and furnish apartments for new arrivals. You can also help by making monetary and in-kind donations to the Refugee Resettlement Program. Your faith community or civic group can also sponsor a family, call Deb Virgo, Volunteer Coordinator for our Refugee Resettlement Program at 474-1261.

Staying Current - We Need Your Help!

To keep you up to date with InterFaith Works, we need updates to postal mailing addresses, phone numbers and email addresses. To maintain communications, inform you and keep you current with the quarterly newsletter and various mailings throughout the year, please provide us with changes to your contact information.

Some of our constituents are able to enjoy a seasonal escape to warmer climes during the winter months, and we would like to have the ability to contact you, so please let us know of any alternate contact information that may help us keep you informed while you are out of town. Our database is able to track alternate contact information with a date range, so let us know what dates you will be at a particular alternate address. To report any changes to your contact information, please contact the InterFaith Works of CNY administrative offices at (315) 449-3552. We appreciate your help!

Matching Gifts - Share The Care

Let your employer share in your generosity! Matching gifts are a great way to take advantage of your company's donation programs on behalf of InterFaith Works, and double the amount of your donation. You may not realize your employer has a matching gift program in place.

Consult with your employee relations representative or company human resources department to find out if there is indeed an existing program, and they can lead you through the procedural paperwork. The simple process usually consists of you completing a document requiring information about your donation, then sending InterFaith that same document for completion of organizational information. InterFaith Works then returns the document to your company for approval and disbursement of the matching donation funds. You and your company will be recognized as participating donors by InterFaith Works, and both will benefit from the donation tax deduction.

If applicable, check to see if your spouse works for an organization or company with a matching gift program - some companies even match spouse and retiree donations. While most matches are 1:1, dollar to dollar, there are even unknown company matching programs that can match at a rate as high as 3:1! So find out today if there are programs at your organization or company you can participate in to help us continue to enrich the community - with an assist from you and your company.

THE PROGRAMS OF INTERFAITH WORKS

OUR MISSION: InterFaith Works, through education, service, and dialogue, affirms the dignity of each person and every faith community and works to create relationships and understanding among us.

Center for New Americans—Assisting refugee individuals and families in beginning new lives in America and serving as a resource and cultural center.

Community-Wide Dialogue to End Racism—Stimulating dialogue on racism to bring about racial justice and healing.

Covenant Housing Program—Developing housing that is both physically and financially

accessible to people with special needs.

Senior Companion Program—Providing friendship and compassionate care to the home-bound elderly.

Spiritual Care Program—Offering spiritual care for hospital patients, nursing home residents, inmates, and troubled youth.

If you would like to get involved in any of these programs, go to www.interfaithworks.org for more information.

Thursday, November 12, 2009
Amazing Faiths Dinner Dialogues
6:30-9:30pm
Sunday November 15, 2009
Faith Community Visit
St. John the Baptist Church, Syracuse, NY
The InterFaith Works Year-End Appeal
has begun - please consider a donation to
help further our mission!

LOOKING AHEAD



A United Way Agency



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