



The Interfaith
Peace Project

2015 PARLIAMENT OF WORLD RELIGIONS

Salt Lake City, Utah

A NEW MODEL OF INTERFAITH PEACE

Rev. Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P.

Rev. Andrea Goodman

PRESENTERS' BIOGRAPHIES AND CONTACT

Rev. Thomas P. Bonacci, C.P., an ordained Passionist Priest, established the Interfaith Center at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA in 2001. He co-founded and is **the Executive Director of The Interfaith Peace Project**, Antioch, CA in 2007. He is a popular speaker and retreat leader of interfaith seminars at the School of Applied Theology, Oakland, CA, the Interfaith Chaplaincy Institute, Berkeley, CA, and throughout the United States. Tom established a home-based program probing religiously motivated violence. He is a Board member of the Interreligious and Ecumenical Commission, Catholic Diocese of Oakland, CA; and the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, CA.

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Rev. Andrea Goodman is an ordained interfaith minister and co-founded The Interfaith Peace Project in 2007. Her leadership role as the **President of the Board of Directors** is part of her active interfaith ministry that includes Sacred Visits to various faith centers; interfaith spiritual direction; officiant of life events, retreat leader; keynote speaker; and volunteer chaplain. She is a meditation teacher in training. Andrea has a long career in employee relations and diversity, bringing spirituality to corporate work places. Her interfaith spirituality is founded in a Buddhist practice and Catholic social justice teachings.

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AGENDA

- ∞ Introduction
- ∞ The Interfaith Peace Project as Part of a New Model of Interfaith Peace
- ∞ Small Break-Out Discussion Groups
 - Dialogue
 - Understanding
 - Cooperation
 - Peace
- ∞ Share Small Group Wisdom with Large Group
- ∞ Closing Peace Ritual

*May the Ones with no boundaries grant us courage.
Courage to face our biases,
Courage to notice when our Hearts close,
Courage to feel our Hearts break when we see how some Beings live,
how some Beings are treated,
how most have so little while a few have so much.*

*May the Ones with no boundaries grant us peace that shines into
our Hearts and reflects back to this great Earth
and to all magnificent Beings of this great Earth,
above her and below her.*

May we be Peace to all we meet.

THE INTERFAITH PEACE PROJECT

The Interfaith Peace Project was founded in 2007 as part of a new grass roots model of interfaith peace. We join individuals, nonprofits, nongovernment organizations, and faith and government leaders who dedicate their actions and vision to promoting and attaining peace. This begins with cultivating peace within ourselves and within organizations. Next we promote respectful dialogue and listen attentively to learn from one another. And lastly, we accept responsibility to do our part to speak up against injustice, regardless of who is the victim or the aggressor, or without taking sides.

TIMELINE

1999	Tom Bonacci has a major breakthrough prior to the 9-11 tragedy and establishes the Interfaith Center at Carlow University, Pittsburgh, PA on September 8, 2001 in an abandoned church with a Circle of Women painted in its basilica and the words, "Behold I shall build my temple in the midst of all people"
2002	The Interfaith Center celebrates the International Day of Peace with interfaith leaders and people who are homeless
2006	The idea of an interfaith nonprofit is born out of a meeting of mourning between Tom Bonacci and Andrea Goodman at the Crepevine Restaurant in San Francisco, CA
2007	The Interfaith Education Project of Contra Costa County is incorporated as a nonprofit in the State of California
	Our Interfaith Center and Library in Antioch, CA is established
2008	We change the name of our nonprofit to The Interfaith Peace Project to reflect that our educational programs lead to interfaith peace and because we find ourselves involved in more than educational programs
2009	The Interfaith Peace Project's Board of Directors asks a new question: Do we want to make our Work a part of The Interfaith Peace Project and do we want The Interfaith Peace Project to be a part of our Work? The Board unequivocally accepts!
	Andrea Goodman is ordained an Interfaith Minister
2015	The Interfaith Peace Project celebrates International Women's Day
By 2017	Establish an Interfaith Retreat Center in Northern California

DIALOGUE

Many people wish to follow their passion and have dynamic conversations with people from other faith traditions. We, however, encourage first gaining personal insights as a preparation for engaging in those conversations.

Through The InterFaith Connections Program, we design introductory programs to help participants cope with inherited stereotypes, innocent misunderstanding, embarrassing questions or general knowledge and appreciation of the many faith traditions of humankind.

We also offer the Intrafaith Peace Project. Over a series of meetings through conversations, projects and experiments, we explore the reality and possibility for the practice and study of Interfaith Spirituality and Peace. We start with the question, “What do I truly believe?” This question invites us to move away from an objectifying set of beliefs to a radical openness to self and others. This is an on-going and life-long process.

Sometimes what we truly believe is similar to what we have been taught by trusted faith leaders and family elders. Others find that what they truly believe is different from what they have been taught. Either way, self-examination of our beliefs clarifies whether what we believe leads us toward or away from compassion and peace. This interior Work primes us to interact more consciously and respectfully with each precious individual we meet who uniquely reflects her or his faith tradition.

PEACE PRINCIPLES OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE: We often find that the following principles lead us to transform the “other” into our spiritual companion.

1. Dialogue with others is a matter of mutual blessing of all participants.
2. Participants treasure the opportunity to learn from one another.
3. Honesty about issues must take into account the well-being, emotions and dignity of all participants.
4. Listening must be active. We hear what is said with focused attention on who is speaking. We let go of the temptation to defend or offend.
5. Forgiveness and healing must be the order of the day.
6. Participants summarize by revealing what they have heard, realizing that something else may have been said or meant. This gives participants the opportunity to clarify and explain their various positions.
7. Gratitude, graciousness, good humor, honesty and openness are the virtues of any dialogue in which dissenting parties seek to forge justice and peace through mutual understanding.

UNDERSTANDING

Continuing in our quest for self-understanding, we consider our personal biases and stereotypes of other faith traditions and cultures. This takes courage because we wince or balk at believing that we have outdated or ugly beliefs about a whole group of people. When this work is done with trusted advisors, we accept our humanity and the uniqueness of the individuals that make up groups. We can see parts of ourselves in others we avoid. Once we have come face-to-face with our own challenges to peace and understanding, we are better able to embark on interfaith understanding and cooperation.

One avenue that The Interfaith Peace Project offers in order to better understand people of other faith traditions is our Sacred Visits Program, guided experiences to locally diverse places of worship reflecting the beauty and sacredness of the world faith traditions. As we meet and interact with people from other faith traditions, we open our hearts toward all. As we open our hearts, we deepen our own faith and act in service of all.

COOPERATION

The Interfaith Peace Project claims the religious traditions of any particular community as part of the collective wisdom of the worldwide human community. This claim is respectful in nature, recognizing the sacredness of each tradition. The “claiming” is done with utmost respect and reverence. There is no attempt at harmonization, reductionism or syncretism.

We offer our Sharing and Working with Interfaith Leaders Program as a means of building a better, more peaceful world. This program influences our educational programs for interfaith understanding at the grassroots level. All of us cope with birth, life, illness, hurts and sorrows, anxiety, joys and visions, aging and wisdom, death and hope. These are discussed in light of the various faith traditions.

PEACE

Creating peace means championing peace inside ourselves, our families, our communities, our nations, our world. Creating peace means taking a stand, speaking up in the face of hatred, atrocities and crimes against human and other life forms of our life-giving Mother Earth.

An example: In 2007, the Islamic Center of the East Bay in Antioch, CA lost their mosque through arson. The first responders were the Jewish leaders in that community who led other faith leaders to march and raise funds for the mosque. The mosque was rebuilt and the interfaith ties continue to this day.

We also celebrate Interfaith Harmony Week during the first week of February, the International Women’s Day on March 8th, the International Day of Peace on September 21st, and the planting of numerous peace poles at civic sites and places of faith.

CONSIDERATIONS WHEN MAKING A PUBLIC STATEMENT

The Interfaith Peace Project regularly writes blogs calling on the interfaith community and religious leaders to respond to various current events. We use the following principles and statement template. We invite you to consider them for yourself and for your organizations.

Public Statement Principles

1. Encourage dialogue by accepting responsibility to speak up against injustice, regardless of who is the victim or the aggressor, without taking sides.
2. Inspire respect for human life, especially the lives of the innocent children, women and the elderly – the very people world religions and faith traditions command us to protect.
3. Maintain an honest assessment of the situation by discovering the facts as they are known and unfolding within the context of the history of the issue / event.
4. Be attentive to and appreciate the cultures, languages and perceptions of all sides involved in the issue / event.
5. Commit to fostering honest and respectful dialogue.
6. Recognize that freedom, self-determination, common good, peace-making and social well-being are dependent on justice and the pursuit of fairness.
7. Place a priority on our concern and attention for the poor, afflicted and marginalized.
8. Hold ourselves and our faith communities as models of how we might speak about issues of conflict even when no consensus is presently possible.
9. Believe that how we speak to and about one another is a justice issue.
10. Public statements and witnesses are part of our practice of interfaith peace.

Public Statement Template

- A. To whom are we speaking? (General public, political / religious leaders, etc.)
- B. Write a Statement of Concern:
 - ✓ Describe the situation in a fair and balanced way so as to encourage insightful analysis in a time of biased reporting and ideological interpretations.
 - ✓ Who are we and why are we concerned?
 - ✓ State our solidarity with other organizations and concerned leaders.
 - ✓ By what principles and beliefs are we guided?
 - ✓ What actions do we call for?
 - ✓ What actions will we do?
- C. How shall the statement be signed? (Individually or with others.)

SMALL BREAK-OUT DISCUSSION GROUP QUESTIONS

DIALOGUE

- What does the word “dialogue” mean to you?
- What do you truly believe?
- What have you heard from another that has touched your mind, your heart, your soul of life?

UNDERSTANDING

- What does the word “understanding” mean to you?
- What is a personal bias that you have about another faith or cultural community?
- What is the impact of this bias on your heart, on your life and on your relationships with others?

COOPERATION

- What does the word “cooperation” mean to you?
- How do you interact with people of other faith traditions in your community?
- If you don’t, what is stopping you or how can you expand your interactions with others of different faith traditions?

PEACE

- What does the word “peace” mean to you?
- How do you create peace in yourself?
- How do you create peace in your family, with your friends, your community or the world?

SHARING SMALL GROUP WISDOM WITH LARGE GROUP
Personal Notes

There is a long table of companionship beautifully set and just waiting for us to sit down.
-Rumi, One Song

CLOSING PEACE RITUAL

INVOCATION

Pope Francis, June 2015 Laudato Si', On Care for our Common Home

O Great One, you are present in the whole universe and in the smallest creature. You embrace with your tenderness all that exists. Pour out upon us the power of your love, that we may protect life and beauty.

Fill us with peace, that we may live as sisters and brothers, harming no one.

O Great Heart of the poor, help us to rescue the abandoned and forgotten of this earth, so precious in your eyes.

Bring healing to our lives, that we may protect the world and not prey on it, that we may sow beauty, not pollution and destruction.

Touch the hearts of those who look only for gain at the expense of the poor and the earth.

Teach us to discover the worth of each thing, to be filled with awe and contemplation, to recognize that we are profoundly united with every creature as we journey towards your infinite light.

We thank you for being with us each day. Encourage us, we pray, in our struggle for justice, love and peace.

We invite you now to offer prayers of peace and understanding and cooperation.

As we come to the end of our time together, please share a sign of peace with one another.