

Interfaith Opportunities Network - ION

MINUTES – November 3, 2010

Next Meeting: Wednesday, December 1

Amherst Survival Center, 1200 N. Pleasant Street, Amherst

Present: Joan Lindeman, First Congregational, Amherst, UCC (convener); Barbara Jenkins, North Congregational, Amherst; Kathy Bame, Wesley United Methodist; Zina Tillona, Grace Episcopal; Mary Beth Seminario, Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst; Naz Mohamed, Hampshire Mosque; Judy Glaser, Jewish Community of Amherst; Harry Seelig, Immanuel Lutheran; Dilyara Celik, Rumi Club & Turkish Cultural Center; Bonny Vaught (clerk). *Visitors:* Nan Davies (Mount Toby Meeting of Friends); Kevin Billieux (Wesley Methodist); Melek Kocak (Turkish Cultural Center & UMass Rumi Club); *Guest:* Betsy Krogh (Transition Amherst & Interfaith Environmental Coalition).

Before the meeting, Naz described the October wedding of her son, Zafir. To everyone's delight, she brought photos of the couple's two-day celebration.

Naz also clarified the November 15 date on the ION agenda. Listed as Muslim Day of Hajj, it commemorates the last sermon given by Prophet Muhammad. (Read the sermon at www.islamreligion.com/articles/523/.)

Joan opened the meeting by introducing Melek Kocak, congratulating her on recently marrying Abdul in Turkey. Melek and Abdul are living in Amherst as he continues his doctoral studies. Betsy Krogh, member of First Congregational-Amherst, was welcomed and introduced as the guest speaker.

Betsy came to ION wearing two hats – wittily making a point – as she began to speak about Transition Amherst and the newly-formed IEC (Interfaith Environmental Coalition). She reminded us of two major issues: climate change and the end of cheap oil. She pointed to the way climate changes have lead to severe drought, massive floods, economic stability, and unexpected needs for food. After Betsy's interest in transition efforts was sparked by a talk at the Hitchcock Center, she began attending meetings, probing, learning about the Transition Town movement.

Started in the U.K. in 2006 by Irish students, the Transition Movement adopted the idea of making a plan to understand community resources. With people asking "How will we . . . change. . . adapt . . . grow?" the movement spread to Great Britain where 170 communities now participate. In the United States are 76 official Transition Towns; worldwide, 318.

Basic concepts: (1) Transition is going to be an adventure. (2) In many ways, transition leads to a better life.

Initial steps: (1) Raising awareness. (2) Mapping the community.

Betsy sees the Transition Movement as a connector. Cultivate contacts between groups – invite everybody to participate – foster open-ended reaching-out to everyone – eventually, form a regional hub including Amherst, Northampton, Montague and other communities. She gave everyone a flyer on Transition Amherst.

How might faith communities be involved? Invite someone to show a film – have Tina Clarke as guest speaker – explore The Transition Handbook – use synagogue//church/mosque facilities for events. [See the Yes! magazine article Joan handed out last month. It's online at <http://www.yesmagazine.org/issues/a-resilient-community/in-u.s.-transition-towns-the-big-challenge-is-bringing-people-together>.]

Changing hats, Betsy said the newly-formed Interfaith Environmental Coalition aims to raise awareness through events such as 350 Day. Betsy distributed flyers for the film IEC is sponsoring Sunday, November 7, at 4:00 p.m., “Sacred Lands & Wounded Lives: the Environmental Footprint of War” followed by discussion, at the U.U. Meetinghouse. She mentioned current faith communities participating in IEC: U.U., Grace, North Hadley UCC, and First Church. [There were general expressions of interest, and appreciation for Betsy's presentation.]

Next IEC meeting: Wednesday, November 10, 7:00 p.m., at First Congregational Church, 165 Main Street, Amherst. Everyone is welcome.

Next on the agenda, Barbara built on the concept of transitioning as it relates to her own parish, North Congregational-Amherst. The possibility of closing the church has been considered for some time as church membership declined. Now, with Pastor Nada Sellers beginning to work $\frac{3}{4}$ time at Edwards Church in Northampton and $\frac{1}{4}$ time in Amherst until June, there will no longer be regular services at North Congregational.

How can the three buildings best be used? (The church itself is 185 years old.) Meetings with town officials and various groups have led to several possibilities. Might the church, or the entire complex, be transformed into an arts center? Amherst officials are very supportive, but no final decisions have been made.

Barbara's personal hope is that the church might be a legacy for North Amherst – continue to be a place for meetings – a site left to the community.

Expressions of sympathy and concern came from all sides. ION members recalled events at this church over the years. Some were sponsored by North Congregational Church; many other groups were welcomed when they sought space. Can ION do anything to help? “Come to our Alternative Holiday Gift Fair on November 13,” said Barbara.

Joan voiced concern for Barbara's personal loss, and acknowledged the loss to the community. “We hold you and your congregation in our hearts and our prayers.”

Mindful of another transition, Bonny told about a new ecumenical ministry in Northampton: The Cathedral in the Night. Founding pastors Chris Carlisle (Episcopal),

Erik Kistler (UCC), and Stephanie Smith (ELCA) envision Sunday night worship services – outdoors, in a public park – where students and young adults will connect with homeless people. This ministry will also offer Thursday night discussions at the Green Bean (241 Main Street) from 7 to 9 p.m. First topic at the first session on November 4: “Jesus Was Homeless.”

This ministry promises to feature Worship and Justice, Fellowship and Food. For details as plans unfold: www.cathedralinthenight.org or www.interfaithamherst.org.

Looking toward “Bring Our War Dollars Home” resolution on the Amherst Fall Town Meeting agenda for November 8, Bonny distributed a brochure from the American Friends Service Committee’s “One Minute for Peace” program. It gives a graphic answer to how much of our money will go to the military in 2011.

Dilyara handed out printed invitations to the Turkish Friendship Dinner on Thursday, November 18 – third and last day of Hajj. The main speaker, from New York, heads the Turkish Cultural Centers throughout the United States. A 6:30 p.m. reception and 7:00 dinner will be in the Massachusetts Room of the Mullins Center. This year, the TCC invites each ION member and congregational leader (minister, rabbi, imam), plus several other people – a total of four to five persons from each congregation.

RSVP to Dilyara by November 15 with names of attendees.
tcc@tccwesternmass.org

Zina offered ten copies of Magid Fasts for Ramadan, a children’s book by Mary Matthews, and ION members snapped them up.

Joan announced an invitation from the Amherst Survival Center for December 1, ION’s regular meeting date. ASC offers to serve lunch, give ION a tour of the facility, then provide a room where ION members can hold a meeting. Exact time – 11:30 or noon – TBA.

As the meeting ended, Kathy offered ice cream to everybody. Much pleasure, many mmm’s over the ice cream – yet everyone was reluctant and sad to realize she may soon move out of state. *(Thanks for the treat, Kathy.)*

NEXT MEETING: December 1, 2010

Amherst Survival Center, 1200 N. Pleasant Street, Amherst

Lunch will be served by the Survival Center; exact time to be announced.

ION is a lay interfaith network that strengthens communication among the participating religious congregations for the purposes of education and collaboration.

www.interfaithamherst.org