

The Year in Review

1. Board Membership

- **Connie Waterman**, Bahá'í, President
- **Derek LaCroix**, Christian/New Thought, Past President
- **Gale Spick**, Scientology, Director
- **Susan Kerr**, Scientology, Secretary
- **Acharya Dwivedi**, Hindu, Director
- **Louise Mangan**, Christian, Director
- **Cathy Merchant**, Buddhist, Director
- **Prameya Rukmini**, Hindu, Director
- **Dr. Eloceca**, Unity Consciousness, Director

2. Multifaith Calendar

Once again, the Multifaith Action Society worked with the team at Creative Wonders, which includes Diane Lund, owner and creative director, and Sharon McKenzie, art director. Creative Wonders is an award-winning communications firm that has taken the Multifaith Calendar into its 34th year of production as it prepared the 2020 issue for completion by the summer of 2019. Creative Wonders was awarded, in the winter of 2019, a Silver World Calendar Marketing Award for 'Most Original' calendar for their work on the 2019 MFC.

As well as being a stunning visual work showcasing international artists, the calendar is a unique educational resource which provides information regarding 14 Faith traditions and more than 450 significant religious and cultural occasions/observances including United Nations events that underscore the connection and similarities among the various cultures and Faith traditions worldwide.

The calendar is available in a physical format as well as an electronic version. New on-line electronic subscriptions for the calendar were obtained – Professional Engineers Ontario and United Way Worldwide. The Cities of London, Ontario and Markham, Ontario, Marquette University, Tennessee and Grand Valley State University, Michigan, and Wellesley College, Massachusetts.

The theme for the 2019 calendar was "Coming Together: Exploring New Connections." The theme for 2020, "Reimagining Peace and Harmony", was also the theme for the two interfaith dialogue symposia held in the Fall of 2019 and the Winter of 2020.

The production of the calendar is self-supporting and the sales, along with grants, allow the Society to continue to promote interreligious understanding, provide information and resources on the world's religions, and create opportunities and spaces for interfaith dialogue. Bernard Bouska, Calendar Distribution Manager works with a fulfillment manager, Melissa Granchi, in Sacramento California, to distribute the calendar to our American customers.

3. Interfaith Market Place

Interfaith Marketplace was officially birthed in 2003 as the USA distributor for the Multifaith Calendar. As sales of the calendar grew, the owner, Barbara Trites, added the sale of products from a variety of Faith and interfaith traditions to support the efforts of local communities. The Multifaith Action Society purchased Interfaith Marketplace in 2017 and now owns and operates the distribution of the interfaith products.

We began the process of developing an Interfaith “spiritual qualities” poster series that would be sold through Interfaith Marketplace.

4. Canada Summer Jobs - Internship

The Board applied for and received government grant to hire a student to work with the operations Manager for 8 weeks during the summer. Alexa Timlick, an International Relations student at UBC, was the successful candidate. Her responsibilities included basic office upkeep, however her position primarily focused on increasing, broadening and deepening public engagement with the Multifaith Action Society across all available points of access. She also asked to assist the operations manager on planning and promoting the two interfaith dialogue fora. The value of this job placement to Multifaith Action Society is as yet undecided, however, overall it was a good learning experience.

5. Annual Multifaith Project

Interfaith Dialogue Symposia: *Reimagining Peace and Harmony: One World, Many Faiths*

Held at Soka Gakkai International Association of Canada, Vancouver (November 16, 2019) and Northwood United Church, Surrey (February 8, 2020) The second event was promoted as part of the World Interfaith Harmony Week events hosted throughout the lower mainland, and indeed, around the world.

Objective:

The purpose and intention of the *Reimagining Peace and Harmony* project was to bring people of all ages, faiths, and backgrounds together in constructive, cross-cultural dialogue in order to challenge, affirm, and ultimately embody their own unique vision for a peaceful and harmonious future. We were witnessing growing tensions surrounding immigration, the fear of transnational terrorism, and an increase in racially or religiously-motivated acts of hatred and discrimination, therefore we felt that this kind of dialogue was (and still is) both timely and critically important.

We originally planned to host four separate dialogue fora at different faith centres throughout the Lower Mainland, with each session featuring two keynote speakers and engaging approximately 150 people in cross-cultural dialogue. This was based on our hope of receiving a \$5,000 Multiculturalism grant. With our funding halved to \$2,500 we scaled back our plans from four to two events.

Our project met the objectives of the 2018/19 Multiculturalism Grant program by:

- Providing hosting communities the opportunity to open their doors to a wide range of visitors, and to showcase aspects of their history or culture that are integral to their cultural identity and worldview;
- Exposing people to new and healthy intercultural experiences, broadening their awareness and understanding of other faiths and cultures, by incentivizing participants to visit a diverse array of sacred spaces and to ‘deep dive’ into different faiths and cultures through direct engagement;
- Creating opportunities for people of different backgrounds to engage in constructive dialogue, create lasting connections, and potentially collaborate on community initiatives;
- Providing a safe and positive environment in which participants can relate to one another in deep and meaningful ways without fear of judgment or persecution;
- Exposing participants to a diverse and inspiring roster of keynote speakers consisting of artists, scholars, and spiritual and community leaders from across British Columbia; and
- Helping to advance social cohesion by encouraging relationships across barriers of faith and culture and fostering environments that are welcoming of diversity.

Highlights:

One of the most significant (and encouraging) aspects of this year’s project was the heightened level of intergenerational engagement observed at the events, especially the one in Vancouver. We have been producing these kinds of dialogue forum events consistently for about 8 years now, and generally speaking the demographics of the attendees are quite predictable, with the majority being within the range of 40 – 70 years of age. However, this year we noticed a considerable improvement in participation levels among young people, with our youngest participants being in their early teens. Perhaps most significantly, two of our six keynote speakers were also college-aged youth. This shift in demographics is unprecedented for us, and we hope signifies a heightened level of respect and enthusiasm among young people for inter-religious dialogue and all that it entails.

6. United Religions Initiative

In the summer of 2019 the Multifaith Action Society board became a Cooperation Circle of the United Religions Initiative (URI). On August 15, 2019, Maureen Jack LaCroix and Connie Waterman participated in an orientation, and were introduced to seven other Cooperation Circles (CC) on the west coast of North America. The Orientation was followed up with a welcome packet that was distributed to all members of the MAS board.

On September 12, 2019, URI hosted a gathering of environmentally-concerned United Religions Initiative members in Juneau, Alaska. Board member, Louise Mangan, served as an advisor to the planning of this gathering, and attended it.

On April 15, 2020, the newly hired Regional Coordinator, Tahil Sharma, met with Connie Waterman as the Board’s contact with URI, to discuss his role as a bridge for the 99 cooperation circles to the Global Support office and other cooperation circles in North America and globally. He shared his thoughts on the need for a narrative shift that moves to action, and to “renew the commitment to the interconnected nature and virtual cooperation” of URI.

The MAS Board applied for and was approved to participate in the Trustee Selection Process for the Global Council of URI, which took place between May 1 – June 15, 2020. We did not submit a nominee for that election this year however we participated in the electoral process.

7. Behavioural Covenant:

The Board has begun the process of creating a behavioural covenant to facilitate consultation and establish healthy norms and expectations around clear communication and loving working relationships.

8. Response to Global Covid-19 Crisis

Statement to Public:

In the latter days of 2019 the world started to respond to what the World Health Organization would eventually call a pandemic, caused by a virus that was new to the scientific community. Together, the people of the world struggled to find ways to protect themselves and others. In April 2020, we posted the following statement on the MAS website and distributed it to members through the email distribution list.

“During this destabilizing time of the COVID-19 pandemic, we are once again reminded of the deep interconnectedness of all life on earth. Nearly every person in the world right now - from every race, class, country of origin, sexual and gender expression, and religious background - is facing this illness and quarantine simultaneously. In what is perhaps the ultimate paradox, at the exact time in which we must remain at our most physically distant, our lives and souls have become more intertwined now than they have ever been before. For that reason, those of us here at the Multifaith Action Society remain hopeful, even in the midst of our grief. We trust that the kindness, courage, and solidarity that people around the world are showing one another now will help carry us into a better future together.”