

Love Thy Neighbor

News from the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding



The Killings Must Stop Hatred Only Leads to Tragedy

The Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding and all of us in our nine religions stand in grief with the devastated families and the entire Tree of Life Synagogue community in Pittsburgh.

We weep over the incomprehensible loss of life; we cry out with shock, confusion and pain; we mourn together over this senseless act of violence and destruction; we stand as one on this day of remembrance, united in grief, united in loss, united in our promise to go forward, together.

No one should suffer violence because of their religion. No one should be subject to fear because of the way they call out to God. No one should have to depend on a guard with a gun in order for them to go about their daily activities. It is not more guards we need. It is more understanding.

CCIU calls upon all people, of all religions and no religions, to examine our culture, and to examine our hearts. Where there is ignorance and fear of an “other” — within ourselves or among our neighbors, we call upon each of us to fill that void of ignorance with knowledge. We ask each of us to address the cancer of fear with the remedy of understanding and reason. We call on all Americans to act in the pursuit of our common value: To Love Thy Neighbor.

And we call upon all our leaders — national, state and local — not to exploit the fear of others, not to denigrate any among us, and not to poison the civic atmosphere with negative words and images. Instead, we ask our leaders to make every effort to speak positively about others and to embrace every American with the vision, the principles, and the values for which our country stands.

When we understand each other more...
...we hurt each other less.

“Sharing moments of hope in today’s challenging world”

16 leaders from the Greater Hartford community shared their inspiring stories:

Thomas Barnes, CEO, The Barnes Group

Frank Harris, journalism professor and columnist, Hartford Courant

Carolyn Kuan, music director and conductor, Hartford Symphony

Philip Lazowski, rabbi, author and Holocaust survivor

Dr. Reza Mansoor, physician and president of the Muslim Coalition

Elliott Matos, service director for Hoffman Auto

Homa Naficy, Hartford Public Library

Lucy Nalpathanchil, host of WNPR’s “Where We Live”

David Rosado, Hartford chief of police

Elizabeth Horton Sheff, civil rights activist

Dr. Bo Subbarao, vice president of the Connecticut State Medical Society

Diane Sugarman, executive director of The Connecticut Forum

Dr. Joanne Berger Sweeney, president of Trinity College

Jay Williams, president of Hartford Foundation for Public Giving

Dr. John Woodall, psychiatrist specializing in traumatized populations around the world

Fely Yigle, a senior at Conard High School, West Hartford



Jay Williams, president of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving, speaks at the 2018 Love Thy Neighbor Dinner.

Love Thy Neighbor Dinner: Inspiring Compassion & Understanding

“Love thy neighbor” is a well-worn expression, alive in the practices of each of CCIU’s nine religions. Given the current state



of our world, it has never been more important than now. On September

17, more than 200 CCIU supporters like you came together at the Hartford Marriott to celebrate that message in our second annual “Love Thy Neighbor” dinner.

Sixteen speakers, representing a wide range of leadership in our region, spoke for about four minutes each, sharing one inspiring story after another about what “love thy neighbor” means to them and how we need to make change for a more accepting diversified community. Thanks to the support of our attendees and several significant sponsors, the

event also raised the funds we need to carry out our important work throughout the year.

Although it was fabulous to hear the diverse speakers, many attendees said the highlight of the evening was being able to have short discussions with friends and strangers at the tables. Speaking about the speakers’ messages gave them a few moments of hope in today’s challenging world.

Over the next few months, you will help us continue the dialogue. Together, we will focus on creating the steps necessary to reach out to other people willing to carry

on the work of loving our neighbors. We would love to count you

in. Keep your eyes peeled for further details. In the meantime, get to know a neighbor who is different from you.



Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors

CCIU recognized the atmosphere of Islamophobia back in 2015 and responded in a new and creative way. We invited the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut and Hartford Seminary to work with us to create one of the most successful and critical programs in our history: Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors.

To date, we have held these programs in more than three-dozen locations all over the state, and reached over 2,500 people. We've been in churches, synagogues, a mosque, libraries and universities. We have informed people about Islam, corrected erroneous understandings and made clear how our basic values and religious practices have much in common. Most of all, we have countered an often relentless

negative media portrayal about Islam and Muslims.

Each conversation comprises a panel of three or four members of the Muslim Coalition's Speakers

Bureau. We invite the audience to ask any and all questions by writing them down on cards.

This ensures a wide range of topics is covered, maximizes the time the panel can respond, and allows people to ask any question without embarrassment or difficulty. And it allows us to control for questions asked in hatred, which has occurred more than once.



Former Hartford Seminary President Heidi Hadsell moderates an Honest Conversation event with panelists Linda Miller, Feryal Salem, Reza Mansoor, and Mike Karpman.

Panelists have shared their own knowledge and understanding of Islam, as well as their personal experiences of being a Muslim in America and elsewhere.

We will be meeting shortly with Hartford Seminary's new president, Joel Lohr, to discuss a closer involvement of the Seminary in our work.



CCIU and Public Schools

CCIU is changing the way public schools approach the study of religion in the classroom. With the support of the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and gifts from people like you, CCIU has led to the redrawing of guidelines for social studies curricula both in Connecticut and on the national level.

CCIU's mission has always been to reduce religious illiteracy that leads to misunderstanding, fear, and hatred, and what better place to do that than with the youth in our schools. To that end, we created a professional development seminar with guidance from Prof. Diane Moore of Harvard Divinity School who is an expert in interfaith and intercultural education. Jessica

Blitzer of Conard High School of West Hartford selected the teachers who would attend. To date, social studies teachers from 19 Hartford regional high schools have participated in the seminar.

Connecticut State Department of Education leaders learned of our efforts and invited Diane and Jessica to help them redraw state guidelines covering this critical subject matter. Diane and Jessica have since been invited to serve on a national task force creating guidelines for school districts countrywide.

This is the most expensive project ever undertaken by CCIU, and we are grateful for your support which has helped create a better climate in schools all over the country.

From CCIU's Executive Director Terry Schmitt

When you learn that something horrible has happened in our country or elsewhere, do you ever wish that you could do something in response — something that conveys your sense of outrage or despair, or your feelings of love and empathy for the people involved?

Most of us involved in CCIU feel that way, and lately, we have had too many occasions for those feelings. Certainly the anti-Semitic attack on the Tree of Life Synagogue kindled all sorts of feelings of loss, anger, sorrow, and pain. "What can we do?" we may ask ourselves.

Well, I want you to know that you do respond, you do reach out, you do seek to build avenues of understanding and hope instead of walls of fear and hatred. You do that

through the work carried out in your name by CCIU. Your support helps us do all sorts of things behind the scenes and in the public eye, because we have the resources and relationships to respond.

Here is a small, but significant example. Media outlets were scrambling to find representatives from Jewish and Muslim communities to speak in response to the attacks in Pittsburgh. The producer of WNPR's "Where We Live," hosted by Lucy Nalpathanchil who was a speaker at our last "Love Thy Neighbor" dinner, reached out to me and other CCIU board members to see if we could recommend good guests.

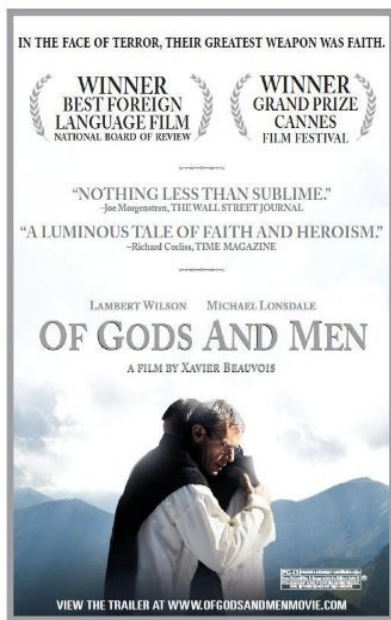
And we did! Or rather, you did, because we wouldn't have the experience, time, or relationships if it weren't for



your support of our ongoing work. We referred NPR to Rabbi Debra Cantor and Dr. Reza Mansoor, president of the Islamic Association of Greater Hartford, both of whom were interviewed on the program.

I want you to know how privileged I feel to represent your deepest concerns and fondest hopes for religious understanding in the work that you enable at CCIU. CCIU exists to promote understanding, hope, and acceptance. It happens only because so many people care enough to support our work.

Sixth Annual Film Series Coming Up This Spring



CCIU, in partnership with the Wadsworth Atheneum Museum of Art and the National Conference for Community and Justice, is producing its sixth annual film festival this coming March. We present films that feature the interface of two or more religious perspectives at play in certain historical contexts. Previous films have explored Hindu-Muslim relations at the time of the independence of India and Pakistan, the struggle of a young Jewish boy to survive WWII Poland, and struggles of couples in interfaith marriages.

This year, films will include "The Black Robe," "The Band's Visit," and "Of Gods and Men." They will be shown on Sunday afternoons at 2 p.m. from March 3-17 with a special brunch on the last Sunday of the festival, the proceeds going to support the cost of all the films.

Filmgoers will enjoy a unique presentation and discussion after each film led by a different leader with expertise in the issues raised. This will allow filmgoers a deeper exploration than is possible in just viewing the films alone. We hope you will enjoy this year's offerings.