

# Love Thy Neighbor

News from the Connecticut Council for Interreligious Understanding

## Search Committee Begins Work as CCIU's Executive Director Announces Retirement

CCIU's Executive Director Terry Schmitt has shared with CCIU's Board his plans to retire at the end of 2019.

"This has been a wonderful experience for me working with a fascinating board on the crucial issues of interreligious acceptance and understanding," Terry said. "It is time for someone new to move our organization to the next level of outreach. It's also time for me to move on."

The Council is deeply grateful for Terry's leadership since coming to the CCIU in 2013.

"We will miss Terry's energy, breadth of knowledge, friendliness, and wide range of connections in our region," said Search Committee Leader Barbara Lederer, "and, of course, his wonderful leadership over the past six years."

Prior to joining CCIU, Terry served for many years as the senior minister at Center Congregational Church in

Manchester. He worked with Missionworks, a Boston-based nonprofit organization that supports people engaged in public life, and at Yale's Program on Non-Profit Organizations. He also served on West Hartford's Board of Education, and on the Capitol Region Education Council. Those experiences proved immediately useful, as Terry's first major task with CCIU was to help organize the project to train public school educators to integrate study of religions in their regular coursework.

During his time with CCIU, Schmitt has been instrumental in helping develop and lead several of the Council's key programs, including the ongoing series "Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors" as well as the signature "Love Thy Neighbor" dinner fundraising events that feature prominent speakers from the region each year.

"Terry was recommended to



*Retiring CCIU Executive Director Terry Schmitt*

us by a person familiar with our mission," Lederer noted. "We are hoping to encourage the same thing now. We would love for any of our friends to recommend someone they think might be interested in serving in this vital capacity."

To learn more about the position and apply, visit [www.ccfiu.org/job-description.html](http://www.ccfiu.org/job-description.html).

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

## New CCIU Leadership Chosen in June



*Vivian Carlson (center) and Barbara Lederer (right), CCIU's new co-chairs, handle check-in duties at the second annual "Love Thy Neighbor" dinner in September. Board member Sukhdeep Cheema assists on the left.*

Vivian Carlson and Barbara Lederer were voted in unanimously as CCIU's new co-chairs at our annual meeting in June.

"We accepted this challenge because we know

how important CCIU's work is," said Carlson, "and it's clear how many people care about understanding each other in the face of our state's increasing religious diversity. CCIU gives us a place to act on that caring."

Vivian is a retired professor of family relations, and Barbara Lederer runs her own Human Resources consulting business. Both are active in their respective religious communities, with Carlson an active member of the Unitarian Universalist Society East in Manchester, and Lederer the former president of Temple Sinai in Newington.

They join Piyush Shah (secretary) and Terry Robinson (treasurer) who continue in their respective leadership roles.

"We need everyone's help as we move through the coming year," Carlson said. "Each person who supports CCIU will help make our jobs easier."

## New Program Launches This Fall

People like you have suggested that CCIU expand its dialogues to make all nine of our religions available in live "question and answer" events. We agree. So this fall we will launch a new series of events called, "To Love Your Neighbor, Know Your Neighbor."

Following on the success of the panel format created for our "Honest Conversations" series, we will feature an interreligious panel made up of CCIU board members sharing a bit about their religion, and then answering audience questions.

The first program will be Thursday, September 26, at First Church of Christ, Congregational, in West Hartford, at 7 p.m. For this inaugural session there will be a representative of Judaism, Islam, and Christianity sharing a bit about their respective practices, and then answering audience questions. As always, CCIU events like this are free and open to all.

If you or your organization is interested in hosting one of these events, drop a note to Executive Director Terry Schmitt at [interfaith@ccfiu.org](mailto:interfaith@ccfiu.org) or to Board Member Jim Friedman, at [jpf7332@comcast.net](mailto:jpf7332@comcast.net).

## "Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors" Going Strong

Because of your support, CCIU's "Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors" events continue to invite people into dialogue and understanding. Along with partners from the Muslim Coalition of Connecticut and Hartford Seminary, your help allowed CCIU to produce five events this spring.

There were Honest Conversations at Trinity College, St. Patrick-St. Anthony Roman Catholic Church, as well as Unitarian Universalist congregations in West Hartford and Manchester. We were also the featured guests of "The Old Guard" in West Hartford one Tuesday morning in May.

CCIU and its partners have hosted nearly 40 "Honest Conversations" in the last three years, and reached well over 3,000 people, all because you have enabled us to make these events free and open to all. There are now thousands of Connecticut residents who know more about Islam and are able to put news reports into context in ways that they couldn't before. Thanks to your continued support, we will produce more "Honest Conversations with Muslim Neighbors" events across our state this fall.

## Guess Who's Coming to Dinner? You Are!

CCIU will host its third annual "Love Thy Neighbor" dinner on Monday, November 4. We hope you can come, and bring friends! We have a spectacular lineup of speakers for you, each sharing their personal perspectives on what "loving thy neighbor" has meant to them.

A favorite part of this unique event is that you get to engage in dialogue with your tablemates. In most cases, you will have people at the table who are new to you, who may come from different religious, ethnic, national, or professional backgrounds. You will be discussing key issues raised by the speakers. Many of you will have one of our speakers at your

table, too!

The "Love Thy Neighbor" dinner seeks to engage leading voices in our region with a wide variety of perspectives. We put interesting people, including you, together to talk with each other, because we believe that only when we share openly will we be able to understand, accept, and grow. That mission is as important to us as the dinner's other function, which is to serve as CCIU's main fundraising effort each year. By joining us, not only will you support CCIU's work, but your time at the table will be an active part of the mission: to help us understand, respect, and accept each other.

### This Year's Speakers

**Dr. Saud Anwar**, Physician, State Senator from South Windsor

**Joe Brennan**, President, CT Business & Industry Association

**Patricia Camp**, Lawyer, State Board of Pardons and Parole

**Rabbi Debra Cantor**, Congregation B'nai Tivoh-Sholom, Bloomfield

**Briann Greenfield**, Executive Director, Harriet Beecher Stowe Museum

**Min Jung Kim**, Executive Director, The New Britain Museum of American Art

**Joel Lohr**, President, Hartford Seminary

**Joaneshly Marquetz Cantana**, Hartford High School Student

**David McGuire**, Executive Director, ACLU Connecticut

**Richard Robinson**, Chief Justice, CT State Supreme Court

**Meredith Ritz Shay**, CEO, Incord Corp.

**Gursehaj Preet Singh**, Southington High School Student & Immigrant

**James Tillman**, Wrongly Convicted Prisoner

**Megan Clark Torrey**, Chief Executive Officer of the World Affairs Council

**Greg Woodward**, President, University of Hartford



## Thank You for Joining Us at CCIU's 25th Anniversary Dinner!

Rev. Dr. Robert Sellers, recently retired board chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions, headlined CCIU's 25th anniversary event in April. Dr. Sellers spoke about his pathway towards interreligious acceptance and understanding. He also expressed his hope for organizations like CCIU to continue to educate and lead regionally and nationally.

Shyamala Raman presented a very short summary of CCIU's history. You can find the full version at our website, [www.ccfiu.org](http://www.ccfiu.org), along with a slideshow of key events and people in CCIU's 25-year history.

As always, your participation and support helped CCIU move forward. During the dinner, we asked you to

share your ideas on cards, and you came up with great ideas. Here is a sample:

- Present our interfaith message to high school and college students.
- Teach the Parliament's "global ethic" to schoolchildren, beginning in kindergarten.
- Have more youth-focused opportunities and work with teachers.
- Create art that promotes interfaith understanding.
- Train people to talk with one another to build relationships.
- Host a 'To Love Your Neighbor, Know Your Neighbor' event.
- Have a multifaith teen walkathon.

With your help, you can expect us to work on many of these great ideas in CCIU's next 25 years!

## From CCIU Executive Director Terry Schmitt

I want you to know that you have touched the lives of countless young people in school districts all over the state, and even the nation, through your support of CCIU.

Here is how. The first thing I did when I began as CCIU's executive director was to help produce a professional development seminar for high school social studies teachers. The seminar brought together teachers from five area high schools under the leadership of Dr. Diane Moore, from Harvard Divinity School, and Jessica Blitzer, a social studies department supervisor in West Hartford.

Your support, along with a grant from the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving,

allowed us to run the seminar for five summers, reaching nearly 20 school districts. Materials about world religions are now included in those classrooms, and thousands of students have learned in new and inclusive ways.

But your impact has gone far beyond that. It enabled Jessica and Diane to develop new curriculum guidelines used by Connecticut's Department of Education across the state. Later, this great team helped create new guidelines for the whole nation through the National Council for the Social Studies. Tens of thousands of students now learn about how religion has impacted history, society, and human relationships in ways they wouldn't

have without you.

Diane and Jessica would never have met if it hadn't been for your support of CCIU. Had they not led their seminars, they would not have been invited to create new curriculum guidelines nationally. Students nationwide are now exposed to more religions than their own in ways that promote understanding and acceptance. This is all because of the work you have enabled us to do!

So thank you for your support. One of the teachers in that first seminar gave us our motto as a summary of what you do through us: "When we understand each other more... we hurt each other less." Thank you for reaching so many young people through this work!