

Greater Lowell Interfaith Leadership Alliance (GLILA)

220 Pawtucket Street, Suite 380H, Lowell, MA 01854-5147

President: Imogene Stulken – Imogene_Stulken@uml.edu

MISSION STATEMENT

The Greater Lowell Interfaith Leadership Alliance (GLILA) is open to and welcomes leaders from diverse faiths within the Greater Lowell area. Our unity is based on our shared purpose of building relationships of mutual respect among the members, the communities they represent and area faith communities. Our mission is to broaden our understanding of faith traditions and to support each other's work and faith journey. Our commitment is to be a united force for spiritual and moral leadership and cooperation within the Greater Lowell community and to promote dialogue among the faith traditions. (Revised 02/01/2010.)



OFFICERS 2015 – 2016

President The Rev. Imogene Stulken
Vice-President The Rev. David Rinas
Secretary Sr. Pauline Leblanc
Treasurer The Rev. Ruth Richards

REGULAR MEETINGS
First Thursday of each month
8:00 – 10:00 AM

6 March 2016

Dear Esteemed Judges:

I write in support of **Dr. Mary Kantor** in her application for a World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize. Of the many interfaith events that took place on the campus of Phillips Academy Andover (PA) during Interfaith Harmony Week (IHW), I was able to attend only one program - *Unveiled*, written and performed by Rohina Malik. In addition to PA students, the audience included numerous guests from the community at large. For example, joining me for this performance were Christian and Muslim women who, with me, are members of the Merrimack Valley Chapter of Daughters of Abraham (a book group of Jewish, Christian, and Muslim women that was started as a positive response to 9/11). I am hopeful that, at some point in the future, Rohina Malik will be able to perform *Unveiled* at the University of Massachusetts Lowell, the campus where I serve as Protestant Campus Minister. In this way, the effects of just this one program would have the potential to be multiplied far beyond the PA campus. Who can tell what the full impact will be of all the other events that Mary Kantor implemented during Interfaith Harmony Week?

As a parent of a 2011 alumna of Phillips Andover, I understand the importance of programs that bring together students from various faith, religious, and spiritual traditions, as well as from different cultures. In fact, I think it is crucial for the well-being – even the very survival – of our world that intentional educational, worship, dialogue, and community outreach opportunities be offered where students can be introduced to, and begin to understand and to respect, those who think and believe differently.

I am, therefore, impressed with the breadth and depth of the IHW programming. The events used a variety of different media - art, story/ drama, lecture, displays, documentary, student panel, a luncheon, a festival, meditation, and a fundraiser. The fundraiser was in collaboration with Merrimack College's Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations' project to "Think Globally/ Act Locally: Feed Your Neighbor." I was pleased to be part of this endeavor, at which nearly 15,000 nutritious meals were packed and donated to the Merrimack Valley Food Bank. (A key organizer for this project is one of the Jewish members of the Merrimack Valley Chapter of Daughters of Abraham.) Again, who can tell the full impact of *this* one program?

Dr. Kantor brought an extra urgency to the programming for Interfaith Harmony Week this year, connected as it was to the *Nostra Aetate*, put forth 50 years earlier in October of 1965, which called for "dialogue and collaboration with the followers of other religions".¹ As Catholic Chaplain at Phillips Academy, Dr. Kantor



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is open and welcoming and available as a spiritual guide to students from all backgrounds; a natural part of her ministry is ecumenical and interfaith work – work that is not limited to an annual Interfaith Harmony Week. I know from personal experience that she invites people from other traditions to participate in on-campus worship services. For example, she invited my daughter to sing at the services several times, and she invited me to preach one year during the Week of Prayer for Christian Unity.

As Faculty Associate of Merrimack College's Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations, Dr. Kantor encourages her students to participate in interfaith events hosted by the Center. At a recent Interfaith Prayer Service there, she shared with me her delight in the various IHW events and her firm commitment to continue this important and necessary work, for which she has a deep and abiding passion.

One of my operating principles as Protestant Campus Minister at the University of Massachusetts Lowell is that I am "intentionally engaged in interdenominational, ecumenical, and interfaith conversations and efforts." To that end, during my tenure at UMass Lowell, I have hosted multi-faith conferences and celebrations, worked with an Interfaith Student Association, organized Focus on Faith Forums, preached at Merrimack College's Interfaith Prayer Services, and served as a resource for the larger community.

As long-time member and current President of the Greater Lowell Interfaith Leadership Alliance, I have been instrumental in planning the two annual signature events: an Interfaith Thanksgiving Gathering in the fall; and an Interfaith Service for a World without Violence in the spring.

As an ordained pastor of the New England Synod, Evangelical Lutheran Church in America (ELCA), I have had the very great privilege of hearing the Rt. Rev. Dr. Munib A. Younan. (The New England Synod has as one of its partners the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, and the ELCA is one of the member churches of the Lutheran World Federation.) I have a deep respect and gratitude for Bishop Younan and his leadership, wisdom, and compassion – all of which he brings to his interactions with those of different faiths and beliefs.

Because of my own work toward interfaith harmony (as I have mentioned above), I can genuinely appreciate the efforts and energy Mary Kantor has put forth for the recent Interfaith Harmony Week. There is no doubt in my mind that she has been instrumental in "promoting interfaith harmony, and impacting religious understanding."²

Sincerely yours,

Imogene A. Stulken

¹http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651028_nostra-aetate_en.html [accessed 7 March 2016]

²<http://worldinterfaithharmonyweek.com/world-interfaith-harmony-week-prize/> [accessed 6 March.2016]