

## Building Our Global Community Through Faith

***“We have inherited a large house, a great world house in which we have to live together—black and white, Easterner and Westerner, Gentile and Jew, Catholic and Protestant, Muslim and Hindu— a family unduly separated in ideas, culture, and interest, who, because we can never again live apart, must learn somehow to live with each other in peace.”***  
***~ Martin Luther King***

On February 4, 2021, [The New Seminary for Interfaith Studies](#), an NGO in Special Consultative Status with [ECOSOC](#) and oldest Interfaith Seminary in the world, sponsored an online dialogue entitled, “*Building Our Global Community through Faith*”. The New Seminary was founded in 1981 as an act of “*Communion*” by a Rabbi, an Hindu Swami, a Catholic Priest and Protestant Minister, to promote understanding among faith traditions by studying their rites, tenants, rituals and sacred texts of the other. We have graduated close to 3200 ministers. The seminary was founded upon the radical *Divine* vision that faith traditions working together will build community and not divide it. Our core belief is that through mutual understanding and accountability, and by adhering to the sacred threads of peace, love, understanding, joy, forgiveness, compassion, and justice, that bind the garment of Martin Luther King’s, “*The Beloved Community*”, every child of God should be able to achieve their wholeness and completion and use their uniquely imbued divine gifts to achieve their divine purpose.

[Dr. Claire Nelson](#), a New Seminary Doctoral Candidate from The Futures Forum, organized the event and co-hosted with The New Seminary and Rev. [Jim Webb](#) from The Takoma Park Metaphysical Chapel.

Our goals for this event were:

- 1) To explore new approaches to foster an era where religions can be a tool for building community and not dividing it.
- 2) To begin building a US and global network of leaders representing organizations with sizable membership or constituents to promote general Interfaith values consistent with our core beliefs and World Interfaith Harmony Week.
- 3) To arrive at clearly defined strategies to promote Interfaith values in public policy.

[Rev. Dr. Jay Speights](#), Executive Director of The New Seminary and [Rev. Dr. Dorsey Blake](#), the successor to the pulpit of [Dr. Howard Thurman](#), who was the thought leader of the American Non-violent Civil Rights Movement, mentor to Dr. Martin Luther King and founder of The Church for the Fellowship of All Peoples, which was the first multi-faith congregation in America, kicked the event off with a chat. The chat was moderated by Howard University Divinity Student, [Minister J. Jioni Palmer](#),

of [Metropolitan AME Church of Washington](#). The exchange between them resulted in two key points:

***We must unmute the voice of God*** — Action must be taken to identify those who interpolate sacred text and alter their higher original intent to create and maintain a culture of enemy thinking where differences determine how faith traditions interact. The “Us vs. Them Approach”, prevents the global community from not seeing that diversity as an enriching gift that blesses and enriches the whole of creation.

***We must pour new wine into new wine skins*** — Action must be taken to stop pouring new ideas into old structures and expect them to work. There must be a focus on building organic relationships and focus on communities of intentionality who seek to educate future generations to see diversity as a blessing and work together to combat radicalized fundamentalism. Direct and benign militant action should be applied to influence governments, cultural and religious leaders to work to allow all to practice their faith and cultural traditions free of fear, judgement and harm.

The second panel was blessed with enriching thought and diversity. The panelists represented a broad group of representatives from major denominations, interfaith and Civil Society Organizations. It was a true community building event and it is our intention to build on the energy it generated. This panel was moderated by Dr. Claire Nelson. The panelists included:

**Rev. David Lindsey**, [Interfaith Council of Metropolitan Washington](#) — He is The Executive Director of the main interfaith organization in Washington, DC and surrounding areas with organizations from many faith traditions whose congregations have hundreds of thousands of members. His presence on our program was a plus because his organization is a potent political force in the National Capital Region whose churches are attended by major political figures and VIPs. It was our goal that the potential impact of our dialogue could filter out to his membership and foster a new coming together of the regions faith communities based on the vision of World Interfaith Harmony Week. They already do outstanding work in building bridges between divergent faith communities. **We must allow everybody to speak for themselves and not allow others to speak for them has been the key to their success over forty years of operation according to Rev. Lindsey. And we must arrive to strong belief of the priesthood of all believers. We were all excited that he offered to expand his organizations table for those of us not considered to be from non-mainstream religious or spiritual traditions.**

**Dr. Mary Hunt**, Women’s Alliance for Theology, Ethics and Ritual — WATER transforms religious structures by strengthening women as religious agents and encouraging them to work for inclusive religious communities and an egalitarian future. They have a global impact, and international reach and promote eco-feminist work. They are a collaborative and participative and involved in alliance with justice networks worldwide. **Dr. Hunt’s major contribution that resonated most was building real “Alliance” with religious organizations who want to build community and not**

**brand. And to work with groups that area not rooted in the business of life but the spirit of life and moving away from the non-binary. She made a strong appeal for ethics as a focal point in building community.**

**Rev. Dr. Majorie Lewis, [Arcadia University](#) —** She is the Chaplain for Arcadia University and worked as Acting Anglican Chaplain for the Diocese of Nova Scotia in various hospitals across Halifax. She also served as a Visiting Scholar at the Atlantic School of Theology and conducted action-oriented research on best practices in training ministers to provide exceptional counselling to diverse populations such as the LGBTQ and inter-faith communities. **Dr. Lewis' main contribution to the dialogue was that we need to build bridges between faith communities by an expanded concept of hospitality between faith communities. She believes that using spiritual resources, such as Clinical Pastoral Education to help those in crisis from other communities is an important community building tool. Joint action on life giving items should also be a focus according to her as well. Dr. Lewis also appealed for ethics to be a center piece in building community alliances.**

### **Final Thoughts:**

The program was well attended for a Zoom event. There was a core group of about forty who stayed for the entire event and another thirty folks who stayed for a while and left. Our goals were met and we are now in dialogue with the participating groups about following up with specific action items discussed in the dialogue. This was our desire. It should be noted that most of those who viewed the dialogue were representatives of important and viable organizations. They too will be included in future activities.

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