

Interfaith Leadership Projects at the University of the Incarnate Word



ADVANCING INTERFAITH EXCELLENCE: BRIDGING DIVIDES ON U.S. CAMPUSUS

Interfaith Leadership Projects
The University of the Incarnate Word
2019-2020

Generously supported by
An Interfaith Youth Core Campus Innovation Grant

Led by Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Th.D., Religious Studies,
and Dr. Sandra Guzman Foster, Education

The grant sought to multiply interfaith activity through providing small grants to faculty and students for projects that address “the religious, cultural, and political divides facing our country and advance interfaith cooperation on campus.” The projects involved service-learning classes, research, and education. Each project involved people or content from two or more of the major traditions, Hinduism, Buddhism, Sikhism, Judaism, Christianity, and/or Islam.



ACKNOWLEDGMENTS



Alejandra Escobar and Selena Casanova, UIW students in the leadership program sponsored by the Ettlign Center for Civic Leadership and Sustainability called the Cardinal Community Leaders, had an opportunity through the generosity of the Interfaith 2019 Youth Core to attend the Interfaith Leadership Institute in Chicago.

After this inspiring experience, Alejandra and Selena conducted formal presentations, personal witness, writings and posters through the skills they received to attract students, faculty, administration, and staff be part of the UIW 2019-2020 Interfaith Grant Program and its related activities.

THE SULTAN AND THE SAINT, AN EVENING OF INTERFAITH DIALOGUE

Project led by Dr. Sumeyra Tek, Physics Faculty and Selena Casanova, Psychology Student



We aimed to connect students, faculty, and community members by creating a better understanding of the Muslim and Christian religions. This ties into the University of the Incarnate Word's mission statement, by recognizing that UIW welcomes community members with diverse backgrounds. Also, the UIW mission seeks to create respectful interaction while advancing the discovery of truth, mutual understanding and self-realization.

With a seemingly endless cycle of conflict and violence in our world, religion is often used to legitimize the persecution of others. This project was created to bring people from both the Muslim and Christian faiths, to work together to achieve a better understanding of one another and their religious beliefs. The documentary viewing, "The Sultan and the Saint," discussed the history of the encounter of Sultan Malek Al-Kamil and the Christian Francis of Assisi. This encounter led to dialogue, that eventually led to ending the crusades.



An image from “The Sultan and the Saint” as a Muslim and Christian realize that each of their faiths in the one God calls them to build respect, justice, and peace.



In addition to the documentary, we also recognized the 800th year anniversary that occurred in 2019 of the meeting of Pope Francis and the Grand Imam of Al-Azhar, Ahmed el-Tayeb.

In this meeting, they signed the “Document on Human Fraternity for World Peace and Living Together” during a Global Conference in Abu Dhabi.

For those attending the conference, the documentary and document led to a discussion on lessons learned and how we can work together to create a positive impact in our daily lives as well as throughout the rest of the world.

Throughout this event, 15 UIW graduate students facilitated table discussions which helped to develop their leadership skills by conducting interfaith dialogue.

Undergraduate and high school students grew their knowledge and skills by volunteering at this event, as well as, participating in interfaith discussions. The evening of people serving, and dialoguing was originally inspired by the Hizmet Movement. Hizmet is the Turkish word for Service. Fethullah Gülen is a leader who started the movement which encourages justice, compassion, education, and service throughout the world.

Institutions included in sponsoring this event are the Raindrop Foundation San Antonio, UIW Ettlign Center for Civic Leadership and Sustainability and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church.

Participants included UIW students from Dr. Sandra Guzman-Foster's graduate education course titled Qualitative Research, and Sister Martha Ann Kirk's undergraduate course titled Religious Quest. In addition, students from Trinity University, local high schools, members of the Jewish community and St. Francis of Assisi Catholic Church, and other community members.

DIWALI: AN INTERFAITH CELEBRATION

A project led by Jahnvi Mijagiri, Jasmine William and Doan Maria Quoctram in the student Asian Culture Club



The Asian Culture Club promotes interfaith events on campus and especially educates the UIW community on festivals from Asia. This year the focus was on the Hindu festival of Diwali. Diwali is a festival that is celebrated by people of all faith traditions, as Hindus and Indians include people of all faiths in the celebration of good over evil. Students in the Asian Culture Club come from different faith traditions and work together to promote Asian culture and traditions. This project showcased how Diwali is celebrated by Hindus and Sikhs around the world. Both these religions are from the Indian sub-continent with different beliefs and faith traditions, and come together to celebrate this all-important festival.

Over 200 students, faculty, and friends attended the Diwali celebration in the Student Engagement Center Ballroom. The project helped the community understand the Interfaith nature of this big and beautiful celebration. The students of the Asian Culture Club conducted a survey during the Diwali celebration to assess what they learned about the festival and how it broadened and developed their



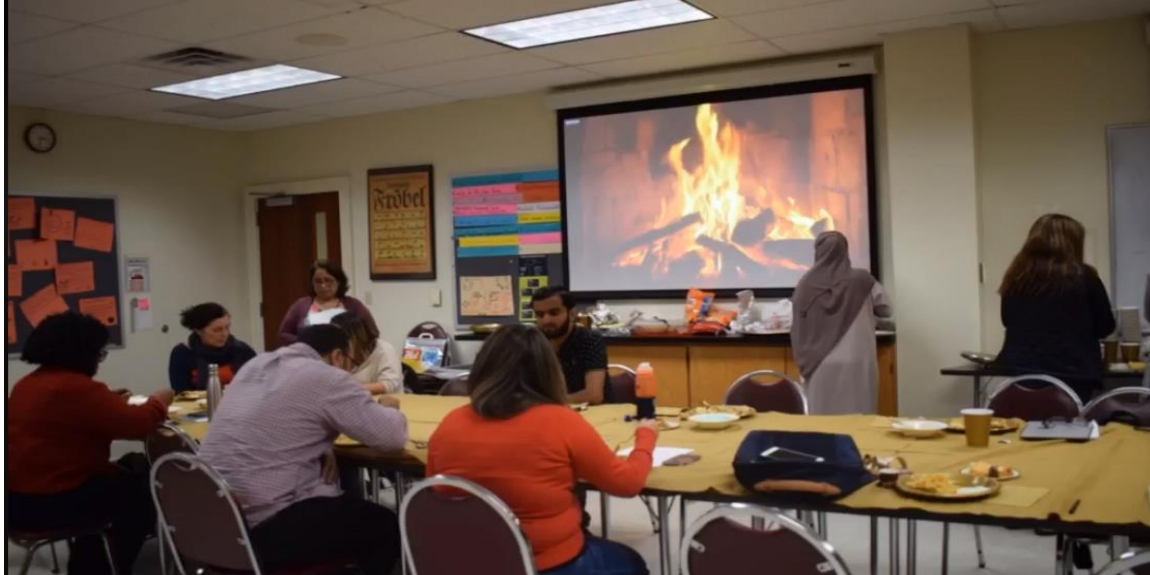
understanding of this and other Asian festivals, like Holi which is celebrated in the spring.



This project helped educate the community on how this festival is celebrated here and around the world. The City of San Antonio has one of the largest Diwali celebrations in the Nation, with about 20,000 people attending the celebration downtown. This project addressed the efforts to educate and advance Interfaith cooperation on campus. Results showed how students are starting to rise above the religious, cultural and political divides facing our country. Efforts like this are very much needed at this time and show how inclusiveness can make a community stronger and more unified.

COMING TO THE TABLE: BREAKING DOWN WALLS AND ADVANCING INTERFAITH UNDERSTANDING

Led by Dr. Sandra Guzman Foster, Graduate Education Faculty



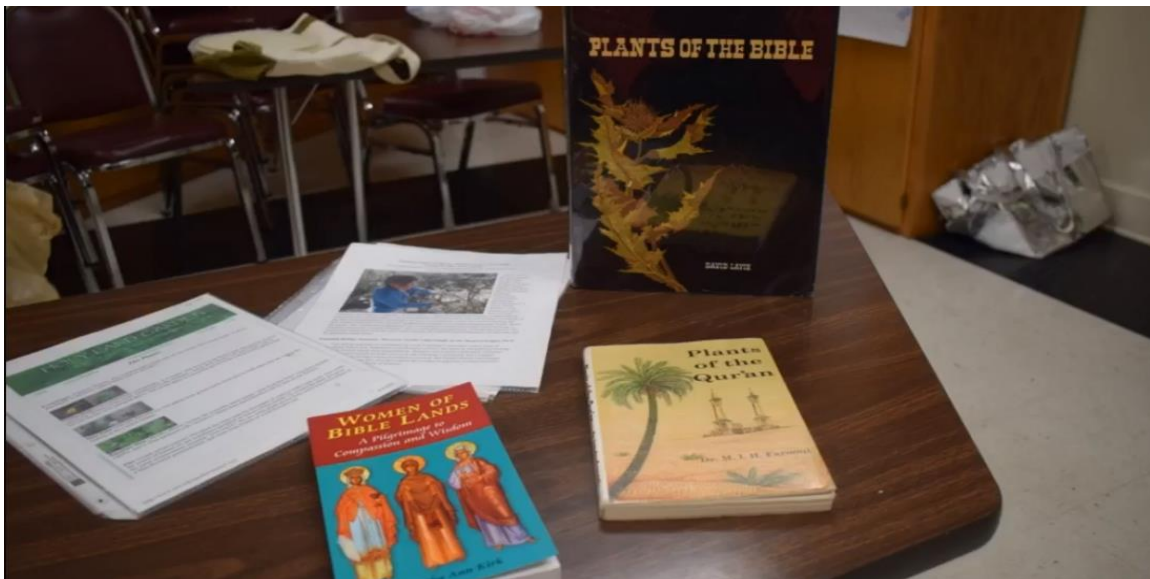
Doctoral students in Dr. Sandra Guzman Foster's Qualitative Research Methods/Analysis course participated in an experiential learning project titled "Coming to the Table: Breaking Down Walls and Advancing Interfaith Understanding," to learn about qualitative research methods and analysis through application.

Students paired up with peers who practice a different religion, faith or spirituality. They created an interview, observation, and focus group for collecting data. Then coded and analyzed the information to write a story.

On the last day of class, students shared a meal and talked about their experiences throughout the process. They shared their peer's stories, which resulted in them learning about other religions. Students found that interfaith dialogue is an essential part of the conversation to enrich the understanding between faiths and to bring people together.



This project was partially funded through a grant awarded to UIW from the [Interfaith Youth Core](#) within Advancing Interfaith Excellence: Bridging Divides on U.S. Campuses. Live, learn, and thrive in the Interfaith atmosphere of UIW and San Antonio. Many thanks to Sr. Martha Ann Kirk for joining our class and bringing foods mentioned in the Bible and Quran.



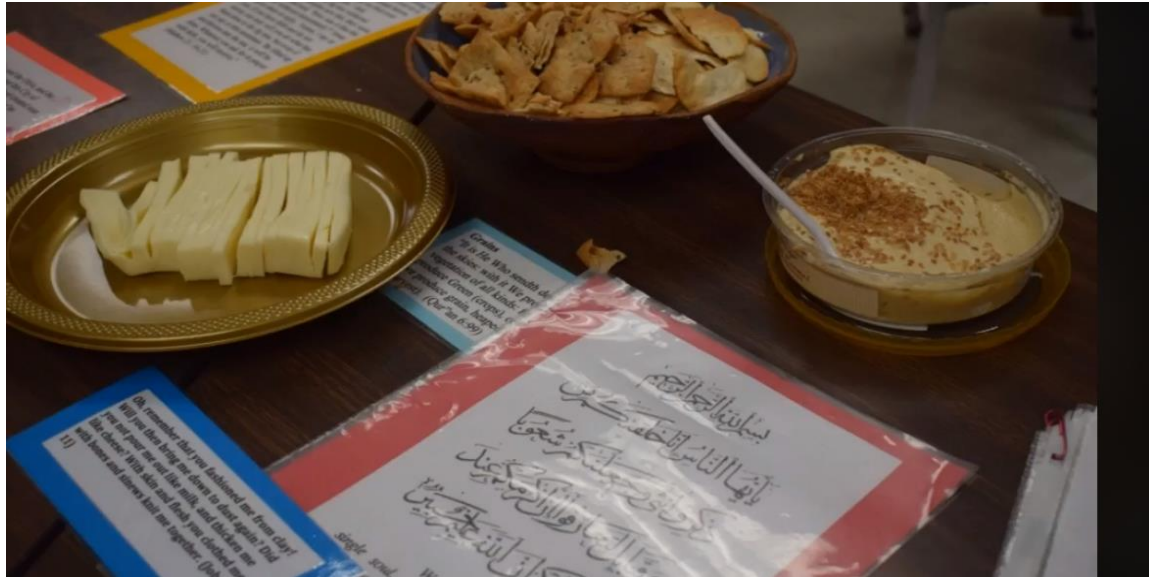
This engaged scholarship and experiential learning project benefited all students, not just Christians and Muslims. Our main objective for our engaged scholarship project was to examine in what ways might learning about a peer's religion, faith, or spirituality—strengthen understanding among Christians and Muslims; in particular, how might these new learnings empower members of the Christian and Muslim

communities to disrupt/dismantle discrimination about each other's religion, faith, or spirituality in relation to their religious and non-religious neighbors? Students in the Qualitative Research Class were paired with a peer from a different religion. As a class, they created an interview protocol, an observation protocol and a focus group protocol. Once these protocols were created, students interviewed each other and visited their partner's church, mosque, temple, spiritual group, etc. Students were encouraged to inform their faith leaders of their partner's visit out of respect for each other's place of worship.

The instructor of the class facilitated the focus group as to refrain from any possible biases. Additionally, students took photos of artifacts that were symbolic to their faith, religion, or spirituality through Photovoice. Students were encouraged to visit and learn from each other as many times necessary to gather data. Once data was collected, students took this information and used



narrative inquiry to write their peer's story related to how they feel as members of this community we can disrupt/dismantle discrimination about each other's religion, faith, or spirituality in relation to their religious and non-religious neighbors. All narratives were examined for patterns, themes that speak to breaking down walls and advancing interfaith understanding between Christianity and Islam. The goal of this presentation is to share these findings. This project indirectly addressed the religious, cultural, and political divides facing our country and advanced interfaith cooperation in the classroom in concrete ways because it strengthened understanding among Christians and Muslims and empowered members of the Christian and Muslim communities to disrupt—dismantle discrimination about each other's religions, faith, or spirituality through students' stories.



Our experiential learning and engaged scholarship project is located within the following existing framework that promotes social justice, from the Catholic Social Teachings: 1) Human dignity: Human life is sacred and that the dignity of the person is the foundation of a moral vision for society; 2) Community and common good: The role of the government and other institutions is to protect human life and human dignity and promote the common good; 3) Participation: It is wrong for a person or a group to be excluded unfairly or to be unable to participate in society. In the words of the U.S. bishops, "The ultimate injustice is for a person or group to be treated actively or abandoned passively as if they were non-members of the human race. To treat people this way is effectively to say they simply do not count as human beings; 4) Solidarity: We are our brothers' and sisters' keepers, wherever they live. We are one human family, whatever our national, racial, ethnic, economic, and ideological differences. Solidarity means that "loving our neighbor" has global dimensions in an interdependent world: and 5) Promotion of Peace: Peace as a positive, action-oriented concept. In the words of Pope John Paul II, "Peace is not just the absence of war. It involves mutual respect and confidence between peoples and nations. It involves collaboration and binding agreements." There is a close relationship in Catholic teaching between peace and justice. Peace is the fruit of justice and is dependent upon right order among human beings.

HOLIDAYS AROUND THE WORLD

Led by Dr. Tracie Edmonds, Accounting Faculty



Dr. Tracie Edmonds, a professor of Accounting, who has won our UIW Faculty Service-Learning Award, believes in leading students to class problems that help them be in solidarity with community members they might not know. Precisely a couple of her Business classes hosted “Christmas Around the World,” a party for children with games, toys, and refreshment. Students would practice their class skills in planning, setting the event up, and relating to people.



UIW has been encouraging faculty to consider religious diversity more and more since our 2017 IFYC grant. Dr. Edmonds began learning of diverse holidays and working with more of our religiously diverse faculty. She explained that the Project “Holidays Around the World,” served Martin Luther King, Jr. Academy, a Title I school in San Antonio Independent School District. (This school district would include the most disadvantaged ZIP code areas in our city. An average person there would live 20 years less than a person in the most privileged ZIP code areas of our city.)



“Holidays Around the World” served the third and fourth grades with about 70 children participating. In this event, students and teachers from UIW Dreeben School of Education teamed up with the H-E-B School of Business and Administration. The students in the Business Management Skills course managed the overall project, the students in the Cost Accounting course did

all of the accounting and budgeting work, and the two students in Accounting, helped with service drives and fundraising.

In the UIW Dreeben School of Education, one class used their skills to create virtual reality tours for children to experience the cultures and sights from five countries. The other class provided an educational booklet that provided more insight into the cultural and religious aspects of each of the countries.



The students in Northside Independent School District English as a Second Language class, as their final project, created stations for the third and fourth graders to actually experience the holidays, food and traditions from their country. Between these five classes, there were over 100 students working on the project.



The Martin Luther King, Jr. Academy would like for continue the event “Holidays Around the World” for next year and include even more grades. The large majority of students at that school and at UIW are Christian and for many this was their first time to think of holidays in broader ways.

CAMPUS NEWS



Dr. Eboo Patel, founder of the Chicago-based Interfaith Youth Core, spoke at Texas Lutheran University, January 28, 2020. Students Zuleyha Goral, Melike Kilic, Dr. Sumeyra Tek, Physics Faculty, Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia, Education, Dr. Sandy Guzman Foster, Education Faculty, and Sister Martha Ann Kirk, Religious Studies Faculty, who currently has an Interfaith Innovation Grant from the Interfaith Youth Core, attended this event.

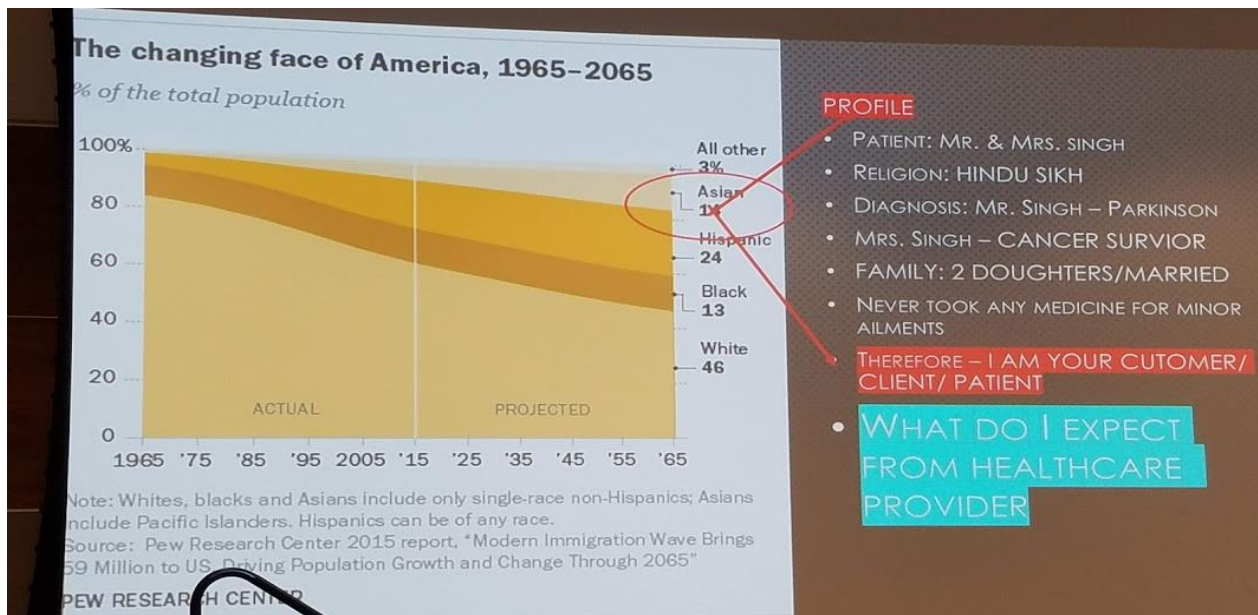
Dr. Eboo Patel, director of the Interfaith Youth Core, suggested that students were major agents of change during the Civil Rights movement in the 1960's. Students today can be major change agents to help overcome prejudice, exclusion, and hate crimes, in helping society recognize the beauty and value of many religions and cultures. The UIW community is active in this and will have received a second Interfaith Innovation Grant from the Interfaith Youth Core. Selena Casanova and Aly Escobar, who have been in the Cardinal Community Leaders Program, participated in the Interfaith Institute in Chicago. Dr. Sandra Guzman Foster and Sr. Martha Ann Kirk are co-directors of the current grant.

BROADENING NURSE LEADERS' INTERFAITH KNOWLEDGE AND UNDERSTANDING

Led by Dr. Jean Dols and Dr. Diana Beckmann-Mendez, Graduate Nursing Faculty

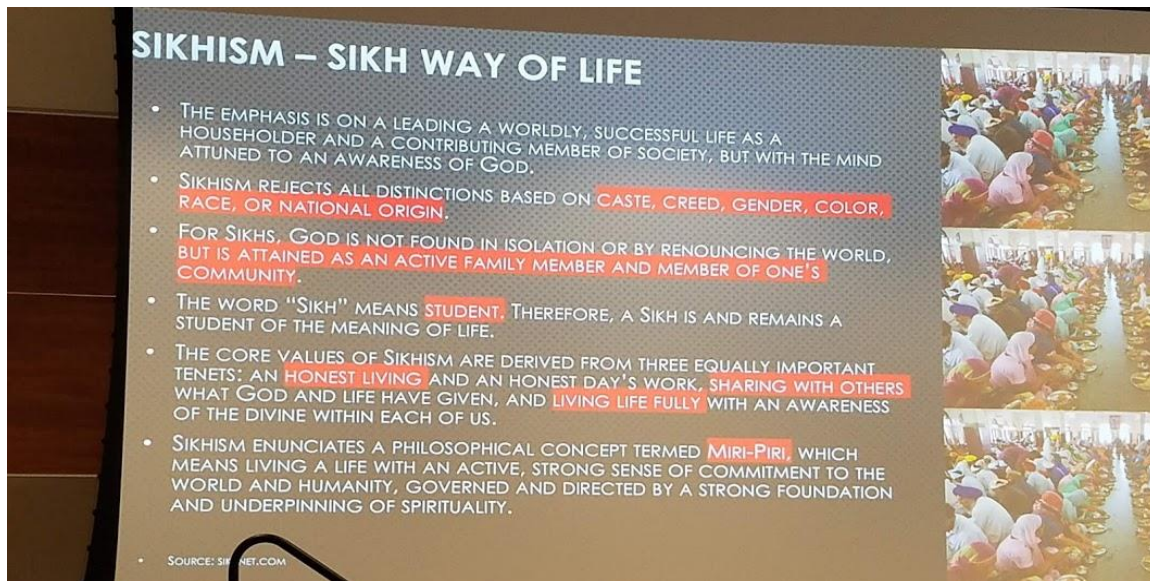
In January 2020, the first workshop focusing on nurse leaders and nurse practitioners' positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity was held to initiate efforts to create an informed empathy in relation to religion and spirituality.

The workshop was designed for UIW graduate nursing faculty and graduate nursing students including nurses preparing to begin careers as Family Nurse Practitioners, Psychiatric Mental Health Nurse Practitioners, and nurse leaders. In these roles the nurses interact with healthcare teams and individuals/patients who are most vulnerable and reliant on their spiritual beliefs for support.



The broadening of knowledge and understanding for graduate nurses is formed in the university setting to recognize the importance of spirituality and provide an opportunity

for the students to question the basis of their thoughts and actions reflecting on words and actions commonly used in their work life and home.



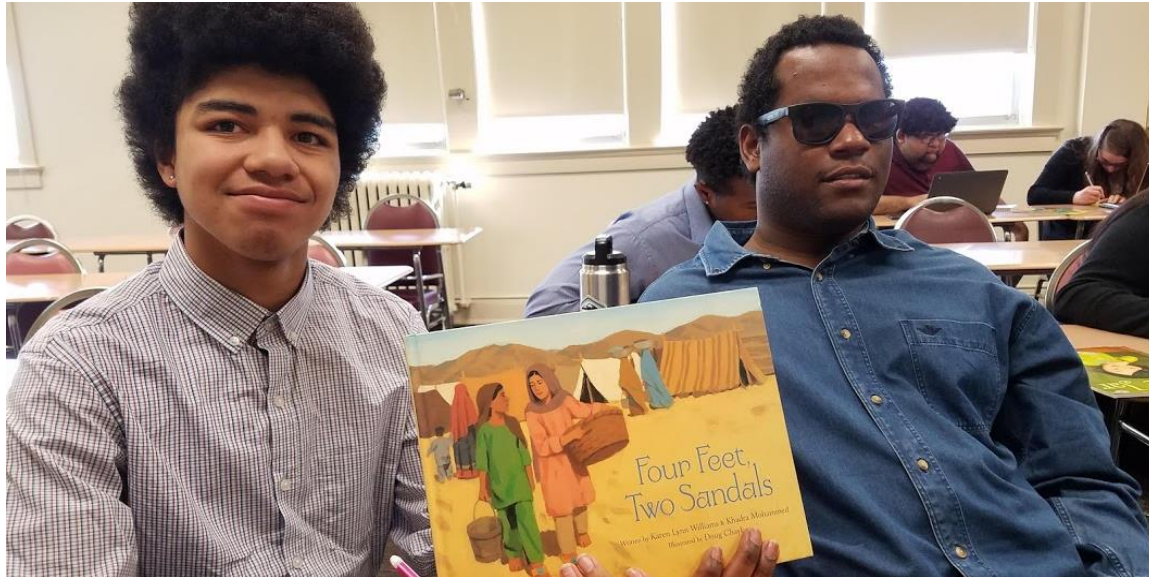
The university setting allows the vulnerability of the individual in both illness and health to be discussed and appropriate responses and understanding to be developed.



University faculty who were experienced and comfortable in sharing knowledge about their own faith traditions spoke at the workshop including Sister Martha Ann Kirk, professor emeriti of Religious Studies, Dr. Orit Amy Eylon, associate professor of Music, and Dr. Neeta Singh, associate professor of Nutrition.

THE INTERFAITH LIBRARY AND TEACHER RESOURCE CENTER

Led by Dr. Stephanie Grote Garcia, Education Faculty



Before the children's storybooks were taken to the elementary school on the UIW campus, all were invited to attend, "Many Faiths, Many Colors Make a Beautiful World." A presentation helping university people to understand this project and help children respect diverse faiths and cultures. Dr. Deepti Kharod assisted Dr. Stephanie Grote-Garcia at this event.

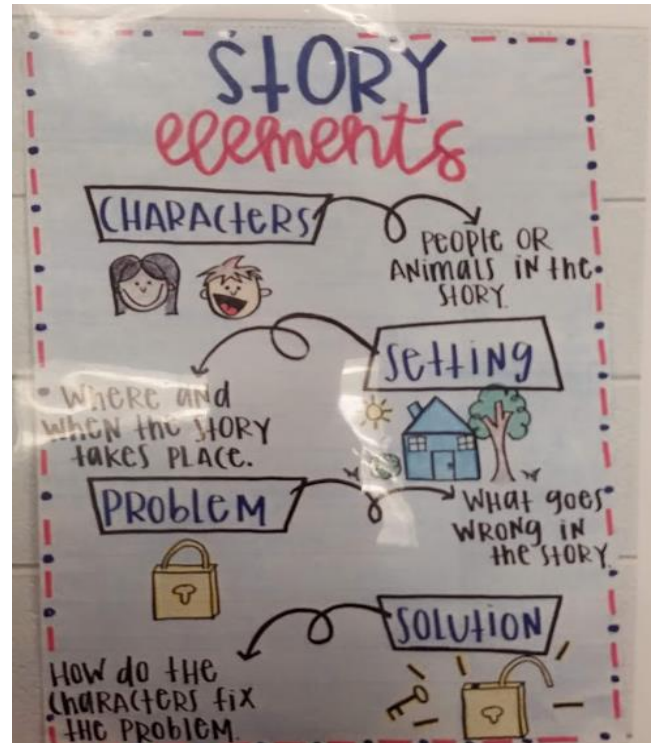


The

Teacher Education Program at the Dreeben School of Education prepares undergraduate students to become culturally responsive teachers. Part of this process involves preservice teachers designing and conducting literacy lessons using diverse children's literature at St. Peter Prince of the Apostles Catholic School in grades K-5.

The featured service-learning project created an Interfaith guided reading library and teacher resource center the school.

The project had three phases. Phase one, it required preservice teachers to create a list of children's literatures featuring characters of different faiths (Judaism, Islam, Hinduism, Sikhism, Buddhism). Doing so, strengthened their understanding of available literature and various genres. This phase was completed in the Fall of 2019. Stories can be like mirrors, windows, and sliding glass doors.



The second phase of the project will begin in the spring of 2020. Preservice teachers will create lesson plans and additional resources that can be used with the books. The targeted audience for the lessons and resources will be students in grades kindergarten to 5th grade at St. Peter Prince of the Apostles Catholic School. The final phase will involve preservice teachers and the teachers at the school using books and resources with the children.



The book collection and resources will be referred to as the Interfaith Library and Teacher Resource Center and will be housed in the library at St. Peter Prince of the Apostles Catholic School. The location of the books and resources will allow multiple audiences to access the center (e.g., elementary teachers, elementary students, parents, administrators, preservice teachers, and faculty).



The Catholic intellectual tradition celebrates faith as a catalyst for inquiry. This service-learning project is grounded in that tradition. Children's literature featuring interfaith

stories and themes addressed multiple Catholic social teaching principles such as life and dignity of the human person; as well as, rights and responsibilities.



COOKING UP CONVERSATIONS: A LOOK INSIDE THE FOODS OF FAITH

Led by Alejandra Escobar, Psychology Graduate Student



The goal of this project was to develop a profound understanding of some of the major faiths, such as Sikhism, Islam, Judaism, Hinduism, and Buddhism, to then share the research with the community of UIW through website postings, dinner meetings, presentations and panel discussions. The interfaith project is titled “Cooking Up Conversations: A Look Inside the Foods of Faith.” It is a special moment when an individual can sit down to share a meaningful meal with others who have different ideas about God and still be able to maintain an air of respect and openness.

This project involved connecting with individuals of different faith backgrounds to break down barriers and to learn about their traditions and meals surrounding their religion and religious holidays. Individuals from various backgrounds participated by sharing their stories and descriptions of their favorite religious tradition(s); what it meant to them, and their favorite meal associated with the tradition(s). We had a gathering to consider foods and customs and then the event with stories, foods, and dialogue. These built understanding and



awareness of diverse faiths and helped develop new friendships through candid conversations.



UIW seeks to educate individuals to become "enlightened citizens" and this research is committed to increasing students' awareness of the diversity that exists in the world so they can better serve the local and global community.



TREES, SACRED SYMBOLS, SHARING THE COMPASSION TREE PROJECT

Led by Thomas Hill and Jacob Rodriguez, Students

This project is to further [The International Compassion Tree Project](#), teaching people of different faiths about the importance of tree planting and leading an Olive Tree Planting Ceremony on campus. Olive trees are important in the scriptures of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Olive branches have been a symbol of peace through the ages. The project was led by UIW students



We are educating students and people of different faiths to work together in this positive effort in the face of climate change. The oxygen made by trees can positively impact the climate. We did research on trees in Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, and Christianity. We are helping to build bridges between faiths and taking mutual responsibility for the good of the planet. We are learning, teaching, and compassionately serving the global community. The beauty of the world comes in many different forms, but nature is one of many elements that captures the light of God. Trees are the building blocks that provide such lovely gifts to the world.

Trees play a key role in our environment. Without trees the biodiversity of different ecosystems would not flourish. They provide shade from the rays of the sun and shelter for many different animals who call it their home. Most importantly they provide all living things with the essence of oxygen. Oxygen is what allows life to be possible here on Earth. It is the foundation of our survival.

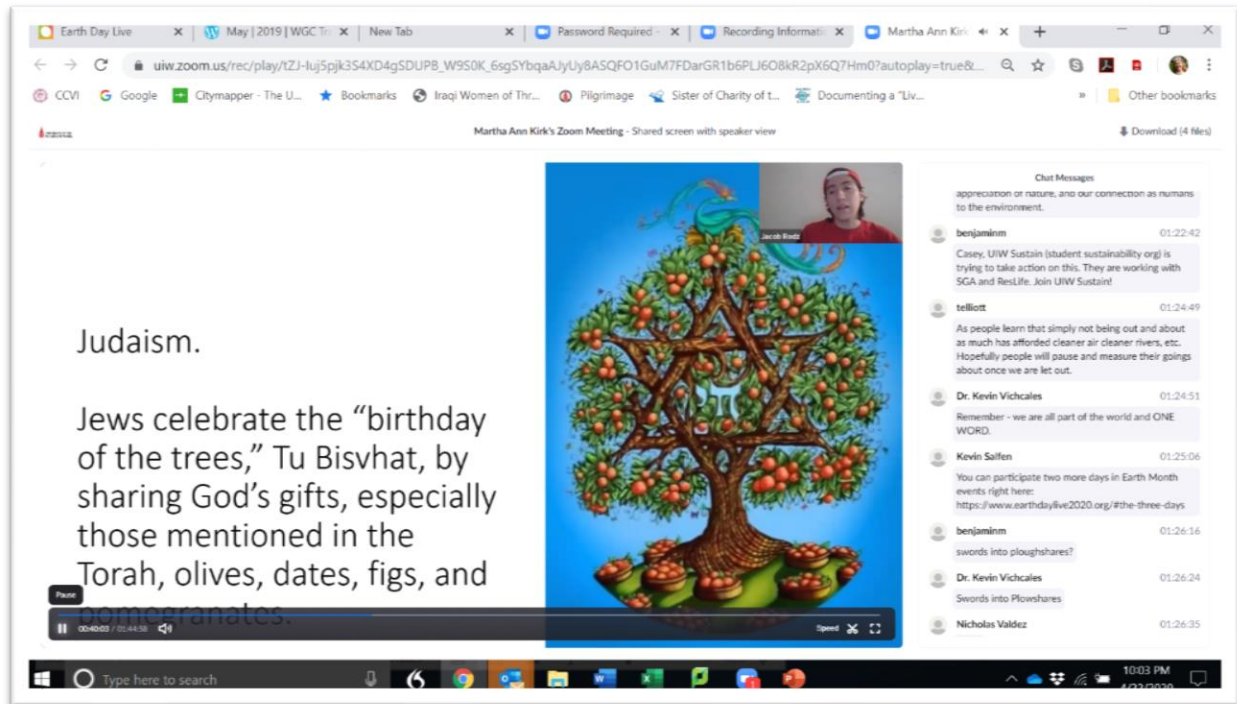


Many problems in the world today come from our differences in beliefs or understandings of other people's culture. People are being discriminated for their own religious beliefs and are unable to express their cultural upbringing. This project is allowing people of different beliefs and ethnic backgrounds to come together with one goal in mind. We want to “build a bridge of peace” through the care of our environment. Regardless of who you are or where you come from, we believe that caring for the environment is a universal language that we must come to understand.

This program has gifted us with the ability to view sustainability from a broader perspective in the world we live in. Trees are a part of the biodiversity of different ecosystems and provide shade from the sun and shelter for the animals. We believe that this project could be a building block for generations to build upon which could inspire others. This could be a message to let others know that something as little as planting trees can have a huge impact in future years. We are creating peace among others in the world. We are making new friends along the way. The world can live in peace with God’s creation.

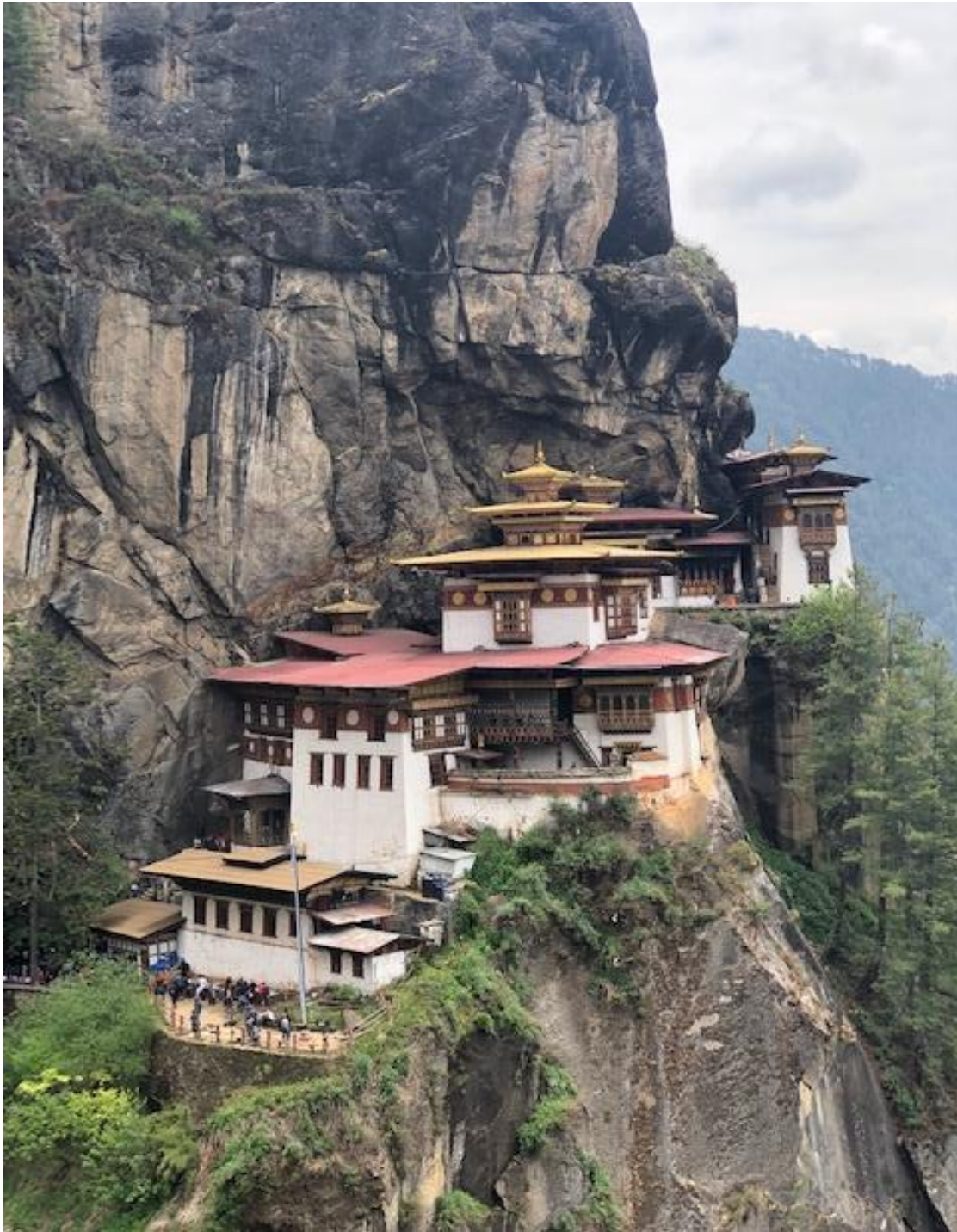
At the time that the Olive Tree Planting Ceremony with an educational program on trees as symbols in religions was to be held, our city and school were closed down because of the Coronavirus pandemic.

The leaders of the Compassion Tree project worked with a student government leader focusing on sustainability and promoted a virtual program for Earth Day. Over 35 people including the Dean, faculty, students, and family enthusiastically participated and affirmed the value of this interfaith project.



Jacob Rodriguez explained the significance of trees in Judaism. He and Hill spoke of trees in Hinduism, Judaism, Buddhism, and Islam, and Sister Martha Ann showed an image of an olive tree in the Garden of Gethsemane where Jesus prayed that she had taken when she was a research scholar in Jerusalem.

Hill stated, "Trees help communities. Trees help communities achieve long-term economic and environmental sustainability and provide food, energy and income. This is especially beneficial for poor and vulnerable communities. A new study found that adding 2.2 billion acres of tree cover would capture two-thirds of manmade carbon emissions." - catholicclimatecovenant.org



Taktsang Monastery, famously known as Tiger Nest Monastery, is located in Paro, Bhutan. The monastery is located 10 kilometres (6.2 mi) to the north of Paro and hangs on a precarious cliff at 3,120 metres (10,240 ft), about 900 metres (3,000 ft) above the Paro valley

Leaders in the small Asian country of Bhutan in the 1970's began exploring happiness rather than finances as a main value and began to measure national progress through that lens. Bhutan is a predominantly Buddhist country and happiness is valued within that philosophy.

In an interview with a *Financial Times* journalist in 1979, the king of Bhutan said that "Gross National Happiness" is more important than Gross National Product. In 2008 the Constitution of Bhutan instituted Gross National Happiness as the goal of the government. This idea has interested many in the world. The United Nations General Assembly in 2011 passed a Resolution "Happiness: towards a holistic approach to development" which encouraged other nations to focus on happiness and well-being. In 2012 there was a *High Level Meeting: Well-being and Happiness: Defining a New Economic Paradigm*.

This has led many governmental, non-governmental, educational, philosophical, and religious groups to try to define and to measure happiness. A study called the World Happiness Report is released regularly and is based on results from Gallup World Poll surveys. The report focuses on six main variables: income, healthy life expectancy, social support, freedom, trust and generosity.

While the human family continues to discuss different ideas of what are the essential components of happiness, the great spiritual traditions through the ages can be extremely helpful. The traditions have persisted because they have helped humans find meaning and joy. The great traditions have promoted trust and generosity.



Dr. Lopita Nath on her research trip in Bhutan, Summer 2019, at Buddha's Point in Thimpu

Buddhist Monasteries in Bhutan: a Spiritual and Meditative Journey

By Dr. Lopita Nath

Purpose: The purpose of the project is to educate and enlighten about the practice of Buddhism in the monasteries of Bhutan. What is the relevance of the ancient Buddhist monasteries, some as old as 1000 years, in this fast-paced changing world of the 21st century? How does a country like Bhutan sustain these monasteries, not just as cultural relics but as active, functioning religious centers that are used by its citizens every day? This project will directly address the importance of faith and interfaith cooperation as a policy of the government of Bhutan, in the current divisiveness of the world today.



Pangri Zhampa Monastery and Astrology School

Rationale and Significance: The project examines the traditions of Buddhism and its relevance to other religions like Hinduism in the 21st century. The presentation will emphasize the importance of monasteries, the Buddhist faith, how the study of the Buddhist scriptures is still popular and relevant.

It was significant that most of these monasteries were state properties and maintained by the government of Bhutan, which showed that the government was invested heavily in the upkeep of the culture and traditions of their ancestors and founders. It showed the intersection of history, culture and religion with policies of good governance.



Zilukha Monastery and nunnery

Methodology: The study was conducted through a combination of historical and ethnographic research methods. In the summer of 2019, I visited Bhutan on a research trip. I took this opportunity to undertake a tour of the monasteries of Bhutan to learn more about the Buddhist faith and the culture of the monasteries in Bhutan, which is

largely a Buddhist country. I visited close to six old monasteries, some of which were as old as over 1000 years, while some like the Takhtsang Monastery had a magical and surreal quality to them.



Butter lamps at Zilukha Monastery

The monasteries are still in use and revered by the people of the country who visit them to seek blessings, to meditate and pray on a daily basis or even to study the old texts and literature housed in these monasteries. Some of them had nuns and monks who were in

training, thus educating a young generation in ancient religious texts and practice. The information was collected through observation, examining the ancient artifacts, Buddhist texts and interviews and conversations with the monks and nuns in charge of these monasteries, as well as the lay people.



Prayer Wheels at Changangkha Lhakhang, temple for children and newborn babies

Findings: These monasteries are not just sites of historical interest and cultural relics, but also an instrument of state policy. This symbiosis of culture, tradition and religion as a part of the government's social policy keeps the citizens invested in these monasteries in full measure.

The one lesson I brought back from the tour was that inner happiness was all that mattered in this fast-changing material world.

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While the previous projects were directly supported by an Interfaith Youth Core Grant, the following activities were held in connection with our university's growing efforts for diversity in light of our ongoing awareness through **The Interfaith Diversity Experiences and Attitudes Longitudinal Survey**. "As the United States becomes an increasingly diverse community composed of citizens with myriad worldview narratives (informed by race/ethnicity, gender, religion, political orientation, sexual orientation, and/or identity intersection patterns), individuals must learn how to positively and meaningfully interact with others across differences. In many ways, colleges and universities serve as ideal environments for young adults to develop the skill set and mindset required for effective interfaith cooperation. . . . .

**IDEALS** is a research project that seeks to understand undergraduate encounters with religious and worldview diversity on a national scale. It is the first study of its kind to address U.S. college students' engagement with religious and worldview diversity in such an expansive and nuanced manner. The design and scope of IDEALS makes it possible to examine how students' interfaith diversity experiences and attitudes change over time and to pinpoint programs, activities, and other environmental factors that foster meaningful interactions with diverse others. Findings will be valuable not only for scholars, but also for practitioners and institutional leaders seeking to implement high-impact interfaith programs on their campuses." <https://www.ifyc.org/ideals>."

UIW began participating in the IDEALS project in 2017. When UIW received a first Interfaith Youth Core grant in 2017 for "Interfaith Literacy and Interfaith Fluency," we began these web resources which continue:

<https://www.uiw.edu/eccl/faculty-engagement/interfaith-literacy-and-service/index.html>

<https://www.uiw.edu/eccl/faculty-engagement/interfaith-literacy-and-service/interfaith-events.html>

**TIBETAN BUDDHIST CENTER FOR WORLD PEACE SERVICE PROJECT led by Yesenia Caloca, Assistant Director of the Ettling Center for Civic Leadership and Sustainability**



“Are those Fiesta flags?” “No, Buddhist prayer flags.” Our UIW group of Cardinal Community Leaders organized by Yesenia Caloca that went to do some service had the joy of a new adventure at the Tibetan Buddhist Center for World Peace <https://www.eventbrite.com/o/tibetan-buddhism-center-for-world-peace-san-antonio-14731464427> This image of the Buddha has many arms indicating reaching out with many acts or service, kindness, and compassion. This is sometimes called the “Compassionate Buddha.” That might describe our UIW group reaching out in kindness to help clean up the land and bur debris. For most of us, this was a first experience meeting a Buddhist monk and having a chance to learn a little about Buddhism.





Lama Passang had come to UIW and spoken about compassion when UIW Religious Studies students and interfaith friends, inaugurated the Charter for Compassion in San Antonio, Nov. 9, 2009. Through efforts of the peaceCENTER and others, San Antonio was proclaimed a City of Compassion by the City Council in 2017. Read about progress in the Compassion movement <http://saccvi.blogspot.com/2019/07/compassion-lab-about-global-and-local.html> and <http://saccvi.blogspot.com/2019/11/compassion-tree-planting-san-antonio.html>



When UIW had a grant for Interfaith Literacy from the Interfaith Youth Core in 2017, we began developing resources with some basic information so that all on our campus could become more familiar with major traditions. Read more about Buddhism at <https://www.uiw.edu/eccl/faculty-engagement/interfaith-literacy-and-service/index.html>

We continue to consider how to unite in compassion, justice, and peace.



**550<sup>th</sup> CELEBRATION WITH THE SIKHS Visit led by Parminder Kaur, student at the UIW School of Osteopathic Medicine**



The Sikh Center of San Antonio

<http://sikhcentersa.org/>

celebrated the 550<sup>th</sup> Birthday of Guru Nanuk, a founder of this religious tradition, the fifth largest in the world.

Parminder Kaur (third from the left), a student at the UIW School of Osteopathic Medicine, and Charanjit Kaur, her mother (left)

hosted Dr. Sandy Guzman-Foster (right) and Sister Martha Ann Kirk (second from the left), leaders in the UIW Interfaith Innovation Grant from the Interfaith Youth Core.

Warm hospitality and shared food (Langar) are part of the Sikh tradition

<https://www.learnreligions.com/primary-sikh-beliefs-2993513>





Harvinder Singh, Parminder's father (on the left) and Amarjeet Singh, her grandfather (third from the left) were leaders in the service of prayer and chanting

<https://youtu.be/F4NSi74e2qc>



Sister Martha Ann Kirk in 1995 had the opportunity to visit the Golden Temple, <https://www.goldentempleamritsar.org/> the main Sikh center in Amritsar, India, and learn some of their traditions of respect for all and care for the needy. After a hate crime at Sikh temple in Wisconsin in 2012, she spoke at a service in solidarity with the Sikh community. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3roorpVgBoo> At Temple Beth El in San Antonio, Catholic, Hindu, Jewish, Presbyterian, Muslim, Evangelical Christian, Jain, Parsi, Bahai, and Ismaili community members came together with the Sikh community to offer condolences and to pledge to work together to overcome hate and promote respect for all faiths.

The Sikh community contributed to a short film with Sister Martha Ann in the series on Women, War, and Peace made by PBS in 2019 <https://www.pbs.org/wnet/women-war-and-peace/video/sister-martha-oywmit/>

## **INTERFAITH SAN ANTONIO ALLIANCE UNITING EFFORTS FOR AFFORDABLE HOUSING AND HOMELESSNESS IN SAN ANTONIO**



*Second Row: Mr. Lukin T. Gilliland, Jr., ISSA Board, Rabbi Steve Gutow, initiator of ISSA, Suhail Arastu, Director of Advancement of Musical Bridges Around the World. Front Row: Yesenia Caloca, ECCLS Campus Coordinator, Andrea Del Valle Soriano, UIW Student Government President, Sr. Martha Ann Kirk, UIW and participant in ISSA, Selena Casanova, UIW Cardinal Community Leader, Aly Escobar, UIW Psychology graduate student, Father Jim Schellenberg, Oblate School of Theology, Dr. G.P. Singh, innovator, entrepreneur, and civic leader in San Antonio*  
<http://research.utsa.edu/reacsingh/>.

UIW leaders united with Interfaith San Antonio Alliance members for a luncheon and press conference at Haven for Hope, November 15, 2019, during National Hunger and Homelessness Awareness Month. Selena Casanova noted “the diversity of the religions that were present and cooperative in helping the homeless.” Interfaith San Antonio Alliance (ISAA) is faith leaders and their congregations seeking to make San Antonio a more just and livable city <http://interfaithsaa.org/resources/> ISAA began in 2018 through the invitation of Rabbi Sam Stahl, a friend of Rabbi Steve Gutow who works with New York University’s Religious Leadership and Civic Engagement Project.

During the civil rights movement faith leaders in San Antonio worked together to teach their congregations to move beyond racism and integrate school and businesses. With this history of cooperation and potential for good, Rabbi Gutow invited San Antonio as a pilot city which might be a model for other cities. Faith leaders reflect on the common good and try to motivate their networks to action.



*Archbishop Gustavo Gonzalez Siller (center) chatted with UIW community members, some of whom had been with his cousin, Incarnate Word Sister Leonila in Peru, and with Rev. Ann Helmke, leader of the City Faith Based Office (left).*

Andrea Del Valle Soriano of UIW said “It was eye opening to see how all the world religions work together for one goal, which is love your neighbor as yourself. Amongst all the wars and hate around the world, we unite ourselves.” Rev. Mignon Jones-Spann read the Proclamation which can be seen on <http://interfaithsaa.org/> Aly Escobar spoke of the gathering as “deeply inspiring and touching. We got to witness ISAA expand its efforts on building San Antonio into a truly compassionate city. I have complete faith that their proclamation will achieve much more than advocating for affordable housing for all. I believe it will help everyone involved grow despite adverse circumstances that attempt to rob all motivation.”

## UIW Visit to the Holocaust Museum Memorial Museum of San Antonio Led by Dr. Roger Barnes and Sr. Martha Ann Kirk



Students from Sociology and Social Justice Leadership classes and involved with the Etting Center for Civic Leadership and Sustainability, learned not just history of events about 80 years ago at the museum and memorial created by the Jewish community in San Antonio, but they were learning critical thinking, analysis, and principles of social justice, February 21, 2020.

Jazza Alshammari, a Graduate Assistant with the ECCLS was particularly touched by Mrs. Helen Banks, a survivor of the Holocaust. She told of her Jewish grandparents who had some business in the US and her mother had been





born in the US before her parents returned to Germany. Years later when Hitler has risen to power, with extreme effort her mother was able to get papers to leave Europe with her baby and little girl and come to the US, but her parents died in concentration camps.

While Mrs. Banks has every right to be filled with hatred and bitterness, she did not convey those but a calm and strong sense of generously offering ways for light to push out darkness, for love to push out fear, for unity to move us beyond polarization and hatred. She was an example of one of the worst experiences transforming her into a most compassionate and caring human being.

Students saw pictures of the Steam Ship St. Louis and read about over 900 Jews who were

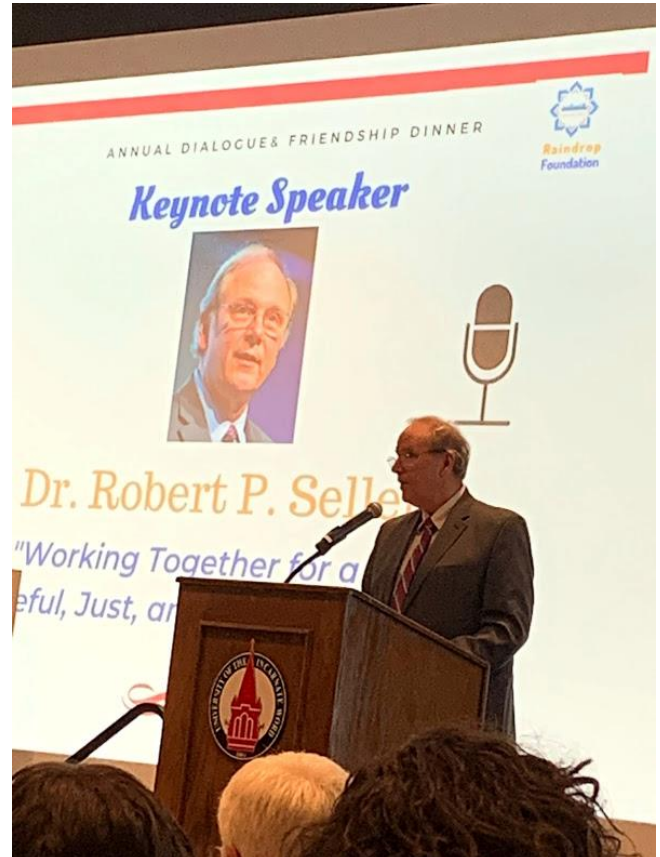
seeking asylum in the U.S. being refused entry. They were taken back to Europe and most were killed by the Nazis. Students had been reading about recent events, 138 Salvadorans who were not granted asylum in the U.S., were sent back to El Salvador. They were killed there. Students learned of Hitler's rise to power and the ways people had been attracted to support this person who spoke of economic advantage for the superior people. Students heard of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights which was developed after people saw the evil of the Holocaust.

**FIFTEENTH ANNUAL DIALOGUE AND FRIENDSHIP DINNER Led by Dr. Suleyman Tek, the San Antonio Raindrop Foundation, and UIW Liturgical Outreach**



Every year, more than 200 guests join this celebration of our city’s cultural diversity and honor individuals and organizations contributing to local and global justice and peace. Dr. Barbara Aranda-Naranjo, Provost of the University of the Incarnate Word welcomed guests.

Dr. Robert P Sellers, the past Chair of the Board of Trustees of the Parliament of the World’s Religions, the largest religious gathering in the world, shared a keynote speech, “Working Together for a More Peaceful, Just, and Sustainable World.”



While in leadership with the Parliament of the World's Religions he participated in four international conferences with Muslim and Jewish partners that resulted in the Marrakesh Declaration (Morocco, 2016) and the Alliance of Virtue Charter (United Arab Emirates, 2019).

This year the Communication Award was presented to David Martin Davies, Texas Public Radio – The Source; the Education Award to The SoL (Source of Light) Center at University Presbyterian Church, Dr. Dawn B. Martin and Rev. Andries Coetzee;



The Friendship Award went to Dr. Aaron Tyler, Provost and Vice President for Academic Affairs of St. Mary's University.



The Service Award went to Rev. Ann Helmke, City of San Antonio Faith Based Office and Compassionate SA. She had been in the Graduate Justice and Peace Program at Incarnate Word and has worked closely with UIW over the years.





Live music was shared by the Raindrop Ensemble, an interfaith group of musicians.

