

## **REPORT OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR/CEO February 8, 2018**

2017 marked the 160's anniversary of the movement known today as the Network of Religious Communities. It is a long and distinguished history of cooperation and collaboration among the religious communities of Western New York.

- \*1857 religious communities join together to assist children in need.
- \*1911 Women form the Inter-Church Missionary Union
- \*1913 Churches form the Buffalo Federation of Churches
- \*1930 The above mentioned groups merge to form Buffalo and Erie County of Churches.
- \*1931 Rev Jesse Nash leads the Council of Churches in a response to the great depression.
- \*1943 Margaret Laub donates her home at 1272 Delaware Avenue for an ecumenical center.
- \*1950's TV ministry, chaplaincies and cooperative planning begin.
- \*1960's "Your Neighbor's Faith" series and Living Room Dialogues occur.
- \*1970's Religious communities ride busses in Buffalo school desegregation
- The religious community welcomes new immigrants, refugees and religious traditions.
- \*1980's Hunger advocacy and Food for All begins.
- \*1990's Buffalo Common Ground addresses the conflict over abortion.
- \*1999 Network of Religious Communities unites together former organizations.
- \*2001 Support for muslims and programs to "Understand Islam"
- 2006 Beginning of Spirituality and Medicine Programs with UB Medical School

This is a story of ever broadening efforts to understanding our religious diversity and to foster collaboration among religious communities of WNY for the common good.

On January 15, 2018 we celebration the 89th birthday of Dr Martin Luther King Jr, and April 4, 2018 will mark the 50th anniversary of his assassination. While many focus upon his "I have a dream" speech I believe we would do well to focus upon his commitment to nonviolence and his being a drum major for justice.

We tend to forget that Dr. King began his first pastorate in Montgomery, Alabama and was reluctantly thrust into a leadership role in the Montgomery Bus Boycott. The boycott began at the very time of the birth of his first child. Soon threats began against he and his family, his home was bombed and shotgun blasts were fired into his house. While he was committed to nonviolence he also believed in his right to protect his family. Only after a time of great anguish and prayer did he decide that he would never again use a gun to protect himself and his family regardless of the cost. Nonviolence for Dr. King became a way of life that was deeply personal.

Only months before his assassination Dr King preached a sermon he titled "The Drum Major Instinct" in which he addressed the drive in all of us to be famous, to be number one.

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Near the end of the sermon he spoke of his own mortality. He said, “If any of you are around when I have to meet my day, I don’t want a long funeral....Tell them not to mention that I have a Nobel Peace Prize—that isn’t important. Tell them not to mention that I have three or four hundred other awards—that’s not important. Tell them not to mention where I went to school....I'd like somebody to mention that day that Martin Luther King, Jr., tried to give his life serving others....I want you to say that I tried to love and serve humanity.”

He continued, “Yes, if you want to say that I was a drum major, say that I was a drum major for justice. Say that I was a drum major for peace. I was a drum major for righteousness. And all of the other shallow things will not matter. I won't have any money to leave behind. I won't have the fine and luxurious things of life to leave behind. But I just want to leave a committed life behind.”

As we move into the one hundred and sixty first year of the Network of Religious Communities we need to remember from whence we have come and what he have accomplished thus far. We should remember our history of continually reaching out to welcome new members to the religious community of Western New York and we must continue to find new ways to collaborated for the common good.

At the same time we must heed the call of the Drum Major for Justice to work together for justice, righteousness, peace and the common good and to do so nonviolently.

This is not an easy call. We live in a time of narcissistic arrogance, the celebration of violence, and demonizing those who do not belong to our particular group and abide in our silo. Never has there been a greater need for those communities who choose to live out the history of the Network of Religious Communities and follow the call of the Drum Major for Justice.

Enough said. What did we accomplish together in 2017?

\*We held three major public events: 1. Our 37th Annual Appreciation Dinner attended by over 500 at which 70 persons received Religious Service Awards; 2. Faith Songs, Spirit Voices”, an amazing 3 hour event of music, dance and storytelling; and 3. Our 35th Annual Interfaith Thanksgiving Service held at True Bethel Baptist Church.

\*We produced: 1 twelve monthly editions of Kaleidoscope broadcast of TV 2 and Time warners; twelve monthly editions of Challenge for the 21st Century broadcasts over TV7 and Time

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Warner; and we produced 52 editions of Crossroads Radio program broadcast weekly over four different radio stations.

\*We held a major Spirituality and Healthcare Conference with D'Youville School of Nursing, the Professional Nurses Association and Catholic Health and we held our 12th two day Spirituality and Medicine program for third year medical students with UB Medical School.

\*We responded to the needs of the Hungry. We provided food to an average of 400 families a month through our food pantry. We assisted 75 households in Erie County and 208 in Genesee county receive food stamps. We supported farmers market and promoted healthy eating. We lobbied to protect food stamps and reduce harmful penalties for jobless adults.

\*We held eight evening meetings of the Network of Religious Communities Board of Governors at various houses of worship throughout the year. We participated in numerous events and activities of concern to the religious communities of Western New York.

We provided a home for seven different groups, as well as our own offices at 1272 Delaware Avenue, Buffalo, NY.

We served as a field education site for a diaconate and candidates for the priesthood at Christ the King Seminary and we served as community experience site for first year medical residents of the Catholic Health System.

2017 was a busy 160th year for the Network of Religious Communities. There were numerous meetings, conversations and speaking engagements not mentioned, but the above should give you an overview of what the Network of Religious Communities has been about in the past year.

In concluding this report I want to thank Sue Tannehill for her excellent service as President of the Network of Religious Communities during the past two years and helping us to understand and experience the "Quaker way." I also want to express my deep appreciation for the work and support of Kelly Kowalski, David Bond, Kay Brion, Fr Butch Mazur, Robin Raphael, Jessica Thorpe and Chris Barbara. Finally, I want to express my appreciation to our treasurer Richard Wright, secretary, Rev. Dr. Jonathan Lawrence, Chair of Trustees, Rev. Msgr Paul Litwin and all of the members of the Board of Governors, Trustees and the volunteers of the NRC.

Stan Bratton (Dr G. Stanford Bratton);

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