



# AKRON AREA INTERFAITH COUNCIL NEWSLETTER

## FEBRUARY 2024





937-481-2316



ohiopcsn@gmail.com

JOIN US!

# BRIDGING THE DIVIDE

1st Annual Ohio Peace and  
Conflict Studies Network  
Conference



**23**  
**FEBRUARY**  
9AM-5PM



<https://www.ohiopeaceandconflict.org>



At Wilmington College, Wilmington, OH

Registration is now open for the Ohio Peace and Conflict Studies Network "Bridging Divides" Conference

Wilmington, Ohio (Hosted by the Wilmington College Peace Resource Center)

Friday, Feb. 23rd, 9:30AM - 4:30PM

**(REGISTRATION DEADLINE IS FEB. 8TH)**



# AKRON INTERFAITH COMMUNITY CONVERSATION

In 2023, AAIC defined its agenda as working against discrimination—that is, we saw ourselves as working to end discrimination against those defined as “others.” In practical terms, this has led to an agenda working as allies of those suffering discrimination based on race, gender, religious identity, sexual orientation, and immigration status. We have also identified gun violence, criminal justice reform, police reform, education reform, healthcare access, and environmental/climate justice as issues of concern.

With that in mind, we initiated a day of community conversation. Working with Round River Consulting, we engaged with then Mayor-elect Shammas Malik to invite the religious/spiritual community of Greater Akron to sit down and talk about violence in Akron. It was a wonderful day of conversation, across an enormously inclusive cross-section of our community. Round River compiled some of the best contributions of that day, from observations on the causes of the violence we experience, here, to suggestions on how to meet the problem head-on. That report is offered here for you to read and think about—both, so that we can return to our home congregations with an agenda to help, and so we can think of ways to help the new administration lead, with a grassroots-birtherd agenda of our own. Happy reading.

- Rev. Tom Bodie





## AKRON INTERFAITH COMMUNITY CONVERSATION WORLD CAFÉ REPORT on VIOLENCE Event: December 3, 2023

### **Meeting Format & Participants**

Akron's interfaith community came together last summer to plan a gathering of its members to help inform Mayor-Elect Shammus Malik's thinking to address a significant issue to the future of the city. Pastors Robert DeJournett and Nanette Pitt served as co-conveners for a conversation that explored *how the community might come together to reduce the prevalence of violence on the city's streets and in our homes.*

Dozens of leaders and volunteers representing a wide range of faith traditions came together to plan, design, and facilitate an interfaith community conversation on December 3, 2023, at The Remedy Church. The Akron Interfaith Council provided funding for coalition-building, design, and facilitation services. Round River Consulting, LLC served as the primary consultant and Project Ujima co-facilitated the actual event.

A diverse group of 200 people came to the event representing Muslim, Jewish, Hindu, Christian, and Unitarian Universalist faith communities. The gathering represented a balance of races and nationalities. Volunteers served as table hosts who were trained to support a World Café conversation, a simple yet powerful conversational process for fostering constructive dialogue, accessing collective intelligence, and generating innovative possibilities for action. This best-practice model cross-pollinates and connects diverse perspectives in search of patterns, insights, and deeper questions as we pursue the best solutions based on our collective wisdom.

Participants discussed these questions:

- Share one personal belief that guides your life every day.
- How has violence or the threat of violence impacted your life? (Personal relationships/Within the community via words, physical acts, etc.)
- What factors make life really difficult, causing stress, frustration, and fear? (and/or what do I observe others struggling with that is painful for me to watch, feeling helpless to have a positive impact?)
- How can we move toward more peace? Considering the work already happening, what other changes need to be made? What can we do as a group? What do we suggest our Mayor Elect do?

At the end of the several hour conversation, table hosts were asked to share their takeaways from the various rounds of conversation. This is what we heard:

***What did you get out of this conversation that you wish to convey to the mayor-elect?***

“We look forward to hearing more about your vision, specifically your vision to build a peaceful, loving community.”

- Participants want this kind of process to continue, expanding this type of program to bring us together.
  - ✓ Bring others to the table (who’s missing?)
  - ✓ Cultivate opportunities for a diverse group of people to come together/get to know one another
  - ✓ Cultivate “listening to understand” and curiosity
  - ✓ Become aware of our assumptions of one another
  - ✓ Seek out opportunities to address polarization (e.g. be willing to not be right, to be right)
  - ✓ Build intentional meeting designs to cross-pollinate a range of beliefs, perspectives, races, etc.
  - ✓ Celebrate and build “Community”
  - ✓ Use houses of worship and schools
- Relationships are at the center of everything.
  - ✓ Listen to understand
  - ✓ Build empathy
  - ✓ Find common ground
  - ✓ Act together
- Break the chains of fear.
  - ✓ Strengthen supportive relationships, especially for seniors
  - ✓ Build community (e.g. with neighbors, collective worship)
  - ✓ Support healing
- Take action to strengthen education for our children and young people.
  - ✓ Connections based on love – curriculum and support for home environment
  - ✓ Invest in the faith community advisory board
  - ✓ Expand opportunities for the trades
- Take immediate collective action to address system-level change.

*“The system” is waging violence on our communities.*

  - ✓ How do we mobilize the interfaith community to collaborate?
  - ✓ Be willing to have a courageous conversation regarding systemic racism
  - ✓ Lack of basic needs being met – identify needs priorities, most vulnerable populations, and increase access to resources
  - ✓ Identify root causes of violent crime (e.g., economic, healthcare, mental health/addiction, education, housing, unequal distribution of resources, etc.)
  - ✓ Address sense of powerlessness – engage people who don’t have hope
  - ✓ Provide training for police officers
  - ✓ Connect with the influencers

### ***What is one thing you/we can offer to the mayor-elect?***

- Build deep relationships based on *love* and *home* to lift us all up, build trust, and break the chains of fear
  - ✓ Talk with one another, listen to understand, be curious
  - ✓ Be aware of our own assumptions
  - ✓ Qualify our humanity - all humans have the same value
  - ✓ By block, within neighborhoods and faith communities, and among faith communities
- Activate our faith
  - ✓ Build a faith-based movement and give of our time & talent
  - ✓ Outreach to engage more people
  - ✓ Engage community-based influencers
  - ✓ Engage people who use the system
  - ✓ Break the cycle of violence
  - ✓ Help people tap into resources

### **Table Conversation Highlights**

#### **Question One: How has violence or the threat of violence impacted your life? (Personal relationships/Within the community via words, physical acts, etc.)**

People are scared. They experience fear and anxiety as they navigate their personal lives, neighborhoods, schools, and community at-large. They express feeling powerless and vulnerable, reporting that they constantly pay attention to their surroundings, scanning for danger. They are more protective of people they care about. They say they know they don't make the best decisions when they're afraid. They know their health is impacted.

Treyvon Martin, George Floyd and Jayland Walker's murders at the hands of police have certainly contributed to this feeling of fear, but participants stated that "we live with violence every day," some of us more intense than others. For more than a generation, young people have been negatively influenced by the media via promotion of a society with guns and violent video games. The impact of guns in our homes and on the streets has taught us that what we see on a screen is real. Participants feel that society accepts violence as the norm now.

*We struggle to find ways to cope.*

How do we heal the pain and frustration that comes from feeling there is a lack of respect for humanity, that social norms have diminished, and that there seem to be no more guardrails on behavior? There is a perception that a lack of concern for others is at the base of the challenge.

How do we heal the pain and frustration that comes from feeling there is a lack of respect for humanity, that social norms have diminished, and that there seem to be no more guardrails on behavior? There is a perception that a lack of concern for others is at the base of the challenge.

How do we recover from loss? How do we deal with the guilt that we're part of a community that's turned on itself? How do we connect with one another as victims? How do we support victims of violence? How do we affirm and acknowledge the reality of shame?

How do we prepare for the possibility of being confronted by the police? How do we foster better communication between the community and the police?

And finally, how do we address the fact that the system is waging violence every day, particularly on our most marginalized, vulnerable populations? This can be subtle and almost invisible, but it's happening every day over entire lifetimes via policies, resources, and discretionary practices that impact economic, education, safety, and criminal justice disparities to name a few. Some describe it as "oppression that masks as peace." The failure of systems to serve people equitably results in injustice. It breeds hopelessness. Marginalized people are told to "stay in their lane" or "stay home." Violence can often become the most available tool to communicate the injustice, try to correct the injustice, or try to change a situation or system.

Authentic and transparent conversation that addresses these issues directly is necessary. We need to show up. And we need to act. Some say that the faith community has not made a real difference in the past.

**Question Two: What factors make life really difficult, causing stress, frustration, and fear? (and/or what do I observe others struggling with that is painful for me to watch, feeling helpless to have a positive impact?)**

Many people express a lack of hope and a feeling of helplessness when it comes to facing the realities of "the system" waging violence of those most vulnerable. Someone said, "the big boys with the money do what they want." Because we are not in the rooms where decisions are being made, we have no control regarding where resources are invested.

As a result, poverty breeds depression, trauma, and grief. Stress often manifests in mental health challenges that tear families apart, cause loneliness and disconnection, and generate additional challenges such as drug issues. Jail is not the solution, but it is often the answer for the system. Hope is lost where there is no grace, no mercy. The pace of life doesn't help. There is a recognition that we're moving too fast.

Disparities that are created manifest in a lack of access to healthcare, decent affordable housing, a good education, sustainable wages, transportation, and other basic needs. Quite a few people mentioned the rate of illiteracy contributes significantly. Our values and ethics are under attack from a caustic culture. Desperation often emerges within an environment where one has little to no control. People begin to feel very isolated. Guns can give some power back.

Classism and deeply embedded systemic racism undermine our humanity. The attitude that "as long as I get mine, everything's ok," is prevalent. We don't tend to examine our assumptions about others who are different from us, and we don't really immerse ourselves in understanding the realities of their lives. We can be indifferent. We can be complacent. There is an absence of love.

Some suggest that our superpower lies within our differences. We need to listen to one another to understand one another, to break down stereotypes. We need to build trust within an environment where we have lost trust in one another and in the systems that were supposed to create a strong and equitable community. Generational differences seem to be rejecting long-standing traditions that built the foundation of what family means. Peer influence among our young people seems to have replaced much of that. Parents need our help to be their best.

Finally, a suggestion was made that “we need to reconnect with life, not just living.” It’s about relationship. It’s about community. It’s about being heard. It’s about having each other’s backs; young and old, black, and white, Muslim, Christian, Hindu, UU, etc. It’s about making sure we’re all connected to the resources we need. It’s about addressing individual vs community rights. It’s about an intention and commitment to face the systems-level headwinds directly and together. We can come together to raise our level of awareness with accurate information, to acknowledge and accept the problem(s), and commit to collective action.

**Q Three: How can we move toward more peace? In light of the work already happening, what other changes need to be made? What can we do as a group? What do we suggest our Mayor Elect do?**

Several messages emerged during this table conversation. They serve as a foundation for collective effort beyond December 3, 2023:

- **Continue to create opportunities for people to connect.** Begin with your neighbor, expand to the block and then the neighborhood. From there, connect our entire community in all its diversity. Sharing a cup of coffee with your next-door neighbor, organizing a block club that celebrates and solves challenges together, generating pride in our neighborhood ... these are the building blocks of knowing one another, listening to one another to truly understand, breaking down stereotypes, and having meaningful conversations across our differences. This is the way we build trust through curiosity and mindful and respectful engagement. As one participant said, “The more we get together, the less we fear one another” and the more we can connect with our common humanity.
- **Systems need to change.** Programs are certainly important. People access food, clothes, and emergency housing to meet immediate survival needs; however, an equally significant imperative is to intentionally address the root cause of poverty by influencing policy and distribution of resources. Disparities in virtually every social and economic system unevenly benefit a smaller group of people at the expense of a larger group of others based on geography, race, gender, etc. Access to good housing, safe neighborhoods, quality education, sustainable wages, and opportunities for economic advancement are out of reach for many.

Hope is the interfaith community’s language. We need systems of hope instead of systems that oppress people. Access to wrap-around services in schools and community centers helps, but removal of barriers and access to real opportunity is critical. We need to have one another’s backs by supporting parents, connecting young people with marketable skills, making sure immigrants experience a soft landing with access to resources to begin a new life, etc.

Several key messages were generated to share directly with the Mayor:

- **Respect and engage the diversity of the community.** Celebration is awesome. Action is necessary. Generating real partnerships to act together will cultivate ownership and transformation based on lived experience. Have our backs, open doors, bring us to the table, and use our gifts. Get out of the government bubble.
- **Bring us together again.** Continue meaningful community-based conversations/roundtable discussions across differences to get out of our own bubbles, to find common ground, and to work together to support change.



- **Think about the mindset of our next police chief.** It should be someone who understands our community in a deep way and who is prepared to hold people accountable. Remove the fear of retribution.
- **The interfaith community can be a resource to build bridges and accountability.** Let's be intentional.

## UPCOMING INTERFAITH DATES



### **Feb. 10: Lunar New Year, Year of the Dragon**

(Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism)

- The Chinese calendar designates 2024 as the Year of the Wood Dragon

### **Feb. 14: Ash Wednesday**

(Christianity)

- The first day of Lent

### **Feb. 14 – March 28: Lent**

(Christianity)

- 40 days of prayer, fasting, and almsgiving from Ash Wednesday to Holy Thursday

### **Feb. 24: Rama Navami**

(Hinduism)

- Festival that celebrates Rama's birth, a revered Hindu deity

### **Feb. 25: Sabe Barat**

(Islam)

- The Night of Forgiveness or Day of Atonement.

## AKRON INTERFAITH IMMIGRATION ADVOCATES (AIIA) SEEKS HELP WITH TRANSPORTATION

AKRON INTERFAITH  
IMMIGRATION ADVOCATES

AIIA is a nonprofit volunteer group that in existence since 2017 to help newly arrived immigrants get connected with needed services.

Help is needed especially with transportation, which is usually in the Akron area, for much needed medical, legal, and dental appointments and sometimes to ICE check-ins.

Please let us know if you would like to be on our transportation list by contacting us at our emails below and we will get back to you. If you are new and willing to learn about accompaniment, we can help you learn. You do not need to speak another language but it's is good if you can use google translate. Drivers must have a legal drivers license and car insurance.

Peace,  
Eileen and Kathy

Eileen Goldman  
[eyeleen45@gmail.com](mailto:eyeleen45@gmail.com)

Kathy Ress  
[kress3545@sbcglobal.net](mailto:kress3545@sbcglobal.net)

# HUNGER WALK NEWS

The kickoff for the 15th annual Akron Interfaith Council Hunger Walk will begin on Tuesday, March 5 at our monthly meeting. We will be meeting at New Covenant Community Church, 1587 W. Exchange St., beginning at 12:00 in person, or on Zoom. Link will be provided by the end of February. At the meeting, Dan Flowers, CEO of the Foodbank, will speak. Every AAIC congregation representative to AAIC will receive a packet with a letter, Hunger Walk flyers to be copied and distributed to the congregations' members, and a link to last year's Hunger Walk video which was made by member Leonard Brown from the Akron First Seventh Day Adventist Church. Please try to attend in person, if possible, to pick up your packet. Last year it was truly an achievement between the Stark County walk and the Akron Walk. We were able to raise over \$31,000.

## SAVE THE DATE:

The Akron Area Interfaith Council's 15th Annual Hunger Walk: Sunday May 5, 2024

# LAST YEAR'S HUNGER WALK



Gathering for last year's photo before the walk



Refreshments after the walk



# 15th Annual Akron Area Interfaith Council HUNGER WALK

Sunday, May 5, 2024

Unitarian Universalist Church of Akron  
3300 Morewood Road, Fairlawn, OH 44333

Registration - 2:00 pm | Walk begins at 3:00 pm  
Fellowship afterwards

We are grateful for 14 years of overwhelming community support.  
Please join us again this year.



100% of  
ALL DONATIONS  
go directly to



## WAYS TO DONATE

- **CHECKS** payable to AAIC Hunger Walk.

Mail to: 3300 Morewood Road, Akron, OH 44333

- **IN PERSON DONATIONS** on Sunday, May 5, 2024

- **DONATE ONLINE**

Click on QR code



Or go to [akroninterfaith.org](http://akroninterfaith.org) and follow the prompts.



# FOODBANK RIBBON-CUTTING CEREMONY



Pictured left to right are Liz Nelson, Nancy Williams, Ken Williams and Susan Gallagher representing The Akron Area Interfaith Council at the Akron-Canton Regional Foodbank ribbon cutting celebration to commemorate the completion of the Growing for Good capital campaign and expansion project at their Main Campus in Akron. AAIC sponsors an annual Hunger Walk each year to benefit the Akron Canton Regional Food Bank. Last year, together with Stark County, AAIC was able to raise over \$31,000 to help end food insecurity in Northeast Ohio.



Evahanna Cruz, new representative to the AAIC Hunger Walk committee, meets Nancy Williams, coordinator of this year's Hunger Walk



Dan Flowers gets ready to cut the ribbon



Shammas Malik, mayor of Akron, presents a plaque to Dan Flowers, from the city



And the ribbon is cut

# DR. DYSON LECTURE



On Sunday afternoon, January 14, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was once again honored at the Akron Summit County Public Library.

Dr. Michael Eric Dyson gave a powerful, yet conversational, talk with lots of humor to lighten his very serious message. Becoming an ordained Baptist minister at age 19, he has since earned a PhD at Princeton and now is a professor in the Divinity School at Vanderbilt. While in his remarks denouncing racism, anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, patriarchy and misogyny, he spoke of the Spirit found in all religions as being more important than believing solely in any one religion. The auditorium was standing-room-only with many members of the Eta Tau Lambda chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha lining the aisles.

This has been an annual event since 1985. The library's program was supported by the Eta Tau Lambda chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha, a Spark Grant from Ohio Humanities, Akron Summit County Community Action, and the National Endowment for the Humanities.

We were very grateful be able to spend time with this dynamic speaker and author and especially to hear his belief in **Spirit**, common to all religions.

- Elizabeth Nelson

# Alternatives to Violence Project (AVP) Basic Workshop: Creating Cultures of Justice and Peace

**February 16<sup>th</sup> -18<sup>th</sup>, 2024**

- **Friday Feb 16:** 5-6p meet & greet; 6-9pm session
- **Sat Feb 17:** 9:00 - 12:00p; 1:00 - 4:00p; 5:00 - 8:00p sessions
- **Sunday Feb 18:** 9:00 - 12:00p; 1:00 - 4:00p sessions

**Held at:** North Broadway United Methodist Church  
48 E North Broadway; Columbus, OH 43214



AVP is a grassroots, worldwide movement dedicated to building peace in ourselves & in our communities.

### **An AVP workshop can help you to:**

- manage strong feelings such as anger and fear
- deal more effectively with risk and danger
- build good relationships with other people
- communicate well in difficult situations
- recognize skills you already have & learn new ones
- be true to yourself while respecting other people
- understand why conflict happens
- uncover your innate “transforming power” to transform a situation from aggression to cooperation



### **FPT Facilitators:**

Nadine Hoover;



Timothy Dzurilla;  
& Melanie Siaw



**Cost:** Sliding scale \$10 - \$50\* (\*no one turned away if unable to pay)

- Ask about home-stay hospitality
- Meals & beverages provided
- Transportation assistance

Friends Peace Teams (FPT) is a Spirit-led organization that develops long-term relationships with communities in conflict around the world to work for justice and healing, and to create enduring cultures of peace.

**For More Info, contact:** Don Buckingham:  
[donabuckingham@gmail.com](mailto:donabuckingham@gmail.com); 614-517-9700

# Roots of Peace

*Roots/Shorashim/Judur*

[RSVP Here!](#)

**February 24th 2:00 to 4:00 pm. The Church of the Covenant**

*The Church of the Covenant* invites you to a presentation by leaders of the Roots Initiative, a local Palestinian-Israeli initiative for understanding, non-violence, and transformation.

*Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger* and *Noor A'wad* will share their personal and interconnected stories of cognitive dissonance and transformation upon meeting 'the other side' and will talk about the groundbreaking bridge-building work of Roots.

Roots is a unique network of local Palestinians and Israelis who have come to see each other as the partners we both need to make changes to end our conflict. Based on a mutual recognition of each People's connection to the Land, Root's is developing understanding and solidarity, despite our ideological differences.

Their work is aimed at challenging the assumptions their communities hold about each other, building trust and creating a new discourse around the conflict in their respective societies. This is a grassroots and local model for making change — from the bottom up.



*Rabbi Hanan Schlesinger*



*Noor A'wad*



**CASE CATHOLIC**  
NEWMAN CAMPUS MINISTRY



**The Church of the Covenant**  
11205 Euclid Avenue, Cleveland, Ohio 44106  
216.421.0482 • [CovenantWeb.org](http://CovenantWeb.org)  
[Covenant@CovenantWeb.org](mailto:Covenant@CovenantWeb.org)



A LOCAL PALESTINIAN-  
ISRAELI INITIATIVE  
FOR UNDERSTANDING,  
NON-VIOLENCE AND  
TRANSFORMATION

[www.friendsofroots.net](http://www.friendsofroots.net)

*This program is supported in partnership with Cleveland Hillel.*

**Cleveland  
Hillel**



Sojourner Truth Project—Akron

[Summitsuffragecentennial.com](http://Summitsuffragecentennial.com)

[Truth.2020.Statue.com](http://Truth.2020.Statue.com)

It's with great excitement  
that we announce

**THE DEDICATION OF THE  
SOJOURNER TRUTH LEGACY PLAZA  
AND STATUE UNVEILING  
ON MAY 29, 2024**

TO DONATE:



TO LEARN MORE:



Sojourner Truth Project - Akron  
present

# The Sojourner Truth Legacy Scholarship

## \$5000 Scholarship Award

Akron Public School seniors  
who are interested in studying  
journalism, communications,  
marketing, or public relations  
are encouraged to apply!  
Scan the QR code for more  
details and to apply.



Sojourner  
Truth  
STATUE FUND







## MISSION

The Akron Area Interfaith Council (AAIC) exists to initiate, coordinate and enable effective interfaith responses to the social, moral, ethical and cultural issues of our community and to promote freedom of religion, equality and understanding.

## VISION

We envision a strong network of faith communities that collaborate to make our city a haven for all.

## GUIDEPOSTS

- Diversity is a blessing and enriches us all; the diversities of all peoples, languages, cultures, and colors must be cherished and celebrated.
- We are responsible for each other's welfare.
- Because of the importance of individual's faith traditions in developing underlying values, faith communities can contribute to the development of a more just, humane, and ecologically responsible society. [We refer here to "faith traditions" vs. "religion" as AAIC is interested in reaching not only congregations but also those who are searching and may not have a specific faith affiliation (such as the NONEs).]
- Members of AAIC oppose any and all forms of discrimination, especially those based on faith, gender, race, heritage, nationality and sexuality
- Advocacy and Social Justice: AAIC has consistently put issues of social justice at the forefront. Our past history shows a deep concern for inclusiveness. The group has been focused on the issues faced by the immigrant populations in Akron, ongoing issues of racism in the community, hunger, as well as xenophobia.

## TO JOIN AAIC

Please visit our website for information on yearly dues:

Individual membership— \$30.00/yr., Institutional— \$50.00/yr.

Send your check or donation to:

**Akron Area Interfaith Council**  
**3300 Morewood Rd.**  
**Akron, Ohio 44333**

or send a membership fee via the following link: <https://donate.fundhero.io/aaic/aaicmembership>.

Meetings are the first Tuesday of the month. We are meeting in person and via Zoom.

Website: [Akroninterfaith.org](http://Akroninterfaith.org)

Facebook Group: [Facebook.com/AAICOH](https://Facebook.com/AAICOH)