Religious Actors Shine a Light in the Darkness

April 2, 2020

Dear friends,

It is in these challenging times that the resilience of the human spirit is truly tested. As we stand under the shadow and uncertainties of COVID-19, social distancing, and shelter-in-place, we are still called to hold one another in the light of the divine. Our spiritual and religious convictions and our ability to recognize the sacred nature of our shared humanity are more important now than ever before.

Many of us are wondering how we might help to build peace in these bleak times, especially as the impact of COVID-19 is already having a dramatic impact on the persistence of violent conflict around the world. As just one example, in Afghanistan, peace talks originally scheduled for March 10 have yet to take place. Furthermore, experts are increasingly concerned with the country’s already fragile health infrastructure and how an outbreak might further impact any progress that has been made toward peace.

We also wonder what role religion can play in confronting the spectre of COVID-19, especially as in-person traditions and rituals are restricted with the shuttering of houses of worship. With all of this in mind, I would encourage us not to forget a vital question: “How do we respond to the needs of our neighbors?” And it is here that many faith groups are stepping up and offering thoughtful and careful responses.

In Florida, for example, an interfaith council in Gulf Breeze is coming together to provide families that normally rely on food assistance programs with meals. In Cyprus, religious leaders are coming together in solidarity, across identity divides, to pray for those impacted by COVID-19. In Thailand, Senior Buddhist monk, Venerable Phra Paisal Visalo, has offered a mindfulness reflection on how to take spiritual strength from the shifting dynamics of COVID-19. Sikh communities in the UK and New York are bringing food to the elderly and to those in isolation.

As in-person events and convenings are being cancelled in the best interest of the public, religious services and rituals are being offered online in order to maintain a sense of community. Educational, social, artistic and work platforms are offering their materials for reduced or no cost, which can be utilized to support those who are particularly affected by the loss of their in-person faith practices. As the dynamics of religious practice are shifting, we are reminded that religion still has a serious role to play in these difficult times. If you have stories of individuals of faith acting to help those around them, share them! Many people are looking for examples to follow. Join ICRD in recognizing the positive role that these folks are playing in keeping us safe and healthy from a distance, while still helping us cultivate our spiritual lives.

It is in this spirit, and in the interest of public health and safety, that ICRD would like to announce the postponement of our upcoming Faith-in-Action Awards Dinner. While we know that many of our supporters look forward to the evening’s activities and the opportunity to be updated on the
Center’s work and to celebrate the accomplishments of our awardee, our commitment to your health and safety is of the utmost importance. Formerly scheduled for May 21, 2020, we have made the decision to reschedule for September 10, 2020. This year’s awardee, Karenna Gore, will still be able to join us that evening, and we look forward to seeing you all there. I wish you all health and wellbeing and encourage you to care for one another. Please don’t hesitate to reach out to ICRD for more information.

Warm regards,

James Patton

Do you enjoy working in a mission-driven environment? Do you believe that religion is an underutilized resource in peacebuilding and conflict resolution? We have the perfect opportunity for you because ICRD is hiring! The Center is looking to immediately hire two Program Assistants for our Yemen and Saudi programs, with a strong preference for candidates with experience in peacebuilding, proposal development skills, and Arabic language fluency. Check out the posting on our website at www.icrd.org to learn more about the positions!