

THE CENTER REPORT

Fall 2016



Ecumenical Center and International Residence

*An Intentional, International,
Intercultural, Interspiritual,
Living Learning Community*

**The ECIR will soon be changing
its name to International House
Ann Arbor**

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Residential Diversity

This fall, the ECIR welcomes 50 residents from 18 different countries. Representing a wide variety of academic disciplines, our residents create a culturally diverse and intellectually stimulating living environment. It is important to mention that many of our students identify with more than one nationality. This year, out of our 50 residents, 37 are new. We would like to extend a warm welcome to our new residents and sincere greetings to our returning students.

The ECIR continues to attract students from myriad backgrounds, signifying a growing desire for intercultural connection and diversity.

YOUR SUPPORT, YOUR PROGRAMS

Donors and volunteers support the educational programs offered to our international residents and non-residents. Your tax-exempt contribution is needed now.

DONATE BY PHONE (734-662-5529),
CHECK PAYABLE TO ECIR, OR
ONLINE AT www.ecir.org.



Meet Our Team



Jessica Greenfield

Residential Program Manager

I received my master's in social work from UM in 2013 and have been with ECIR since early 2014. And how the time is flying! It's often said that if you find a job you love, you won't "work" a day in your life. And that saying rings true for me. Coming to ECIR every day is like coming home. My heart is so invested in this center and our mission and I am so thankful to be here.



Dr. Bruce D. Martin, Executive Director since 2009, earned a bachelor's degree in philosophy and psychology from the University of Wisconsin and a Doctor of Ministry from Princeton Theological Seminary. He has served as a chaplain at Eastern Mennonite University and at Penn State University. He is also an Adjunct Instructor in Indigenous Studies of the Great Lakes Region in CED at The Pennsylvania State University. He has been engaged in cultural education, formally and informally, his entire life.



Ying Li

Program Assistant

I am a second year graduate student from China at the School of Social Work at UM. I focus on social policy and evaluation within community and social systems. The friendly, inclusive environment at ECIR makes me feel at home. Here, I can interact with students from different backgrounds which allows me to create meaningful programs for international students and scholars to promote their awareness on culture and social justice issues.



Oksana Kutsa

Office Assistant

Born and raised in Ukraine, I am currently an undergraduate student studying microbiology, along with law and social change.

I am interested in the development of integrative and comprehensive healthcare for the most disadvantaged populations in both Ukraine and the US. I joined the ECIR team this fall, and I would like to extend a warm thank you for this wonderful opportunity!



Stoney Griffin

Building Manager

My experience at ECIR has been very fulfilling in several ways; I've met many wonderful people from all over the world. I also have been able to sharpen old skills and learn new ones. It makes me live up to the title of a book that my son used to read when he was 4 years old "My Dad Can Fix Anything"



Meet Cliff Johnson

Cliff has been delivering mail to our residents for the past few years. We decided to ask him what were his impressions and views of our community.

Can you tell us a bit about yourself and your family?

I am a dad, grandpa, and a veteran. I love spending time with my wife and grandkids. I have a boy who is 2 and a girl who is 4. I also enjoy riding motorcycles. I have worked as a mail carrier for 30 years.

Based on your interactions with the ECIR staff and/or residents, what are your impressions of ECIR?

It is a beautiful place with good atmosphere. Both staff and residents are very friendly.

Our Mission

Fostering understanding, respect, and peaceful relationships

A few months ago, ECIR became the sole owner of the Church Street property via a statutory merger with the University of Michigan Presbyterian Corporation (UMPC), its nonprofit partner since the 1880s. Even though ownership has changed, our mission has remained the same since the 1960s. It is good to remember that it is mission, and not property, that is the soul of an organization like ECIR. The following story expresses the essence of our mission better than commentary on our mission statement.

During Spring Break, a group of 32 students, scholars, and community members representing 11 nations spent a week in the Bay Mills Indian Community on Lake Superior's Waika Bay. The Anishinaabe (Ojibwe) people, indigenous to the Great Lakes region and to Michigan, introduced us to their worldview, history, culture, and spiritual traditions. Deepening our understanding and respect for different ways of life through cultural engagement creates a more just and peaceful world. But there is more to the story....

Levon, an Armenian post-doctoral student of religion and a clergyman of the Armenian Eastern Orthodox Church, and Emrah, a Turkish graduate engineering student and a devout Muslim, became friends while immersed in the Ojibwe community, a third culture and spiritual tradition unfamiliar to both. The Ojibwe purification ceremony (sweat lodge) tested and strengthened their friendship. Just minutes after the ceremony began, Levon crawled from the lodge, fearful of the darkness and heat.

After completing the two hour ceremony, Emrah asked the ceremonial leader if another sweat ceremony could be done for his new friend. Levon agreed to attempt the ceremony again. With the ceremonial leader offering gentle encouragement on one side, and Emrah providing the support of friendship on the other, Levon began to chant and sing in the Armenian language, to breathe deeply and rhythmically, controlling his thoughts and fears. When the ceremony ended an hour later, Levon and Emrah crawled from the lodge with a deeper appreciation for Ojibwe spirituality, an inexplicable bond of trust, and a deeper appreciation for their respective spiritual traditions.

Their growing friendship was, however, put to the test. Levon was invited to speak at a Protestant Church in Ann Arbor on Palm Sunday a few weeks later. He invited his new friend, Emrah, who had never before attended a Christian service, to join him. Emrah accepted and I drove them to the church. Introducing Levon to the congregation, the minister began to recount the painful history between Turkey and Armenia, the "genocide" perpetrated by the Ottoman Empire on the people of Armenia during the Great War (1915). The Republic of Turkey remains in conflict with Armenia today because it denies that genocide occurred. I wondered if their friendship would survive the recounting of this painful wound and international conflict.

After introducing his new Muslim friend to the unsuspecting congregation, Levon told personal stories about forgiveness in the midst of pain and conflict. Returning to the pew, he smiled and put an assuring arm around Emrah. During the drive back to Ann Arbor, Levon's and Emrah's friendship deepened as they openly discussed this century-old conflict and possibilities of personal and national reconciliation. They slid from the car on an Ann Arbor street corner, deep in conversation. As they walked away, Emrah hooked his arm over Levon's shoulder as if to say our future need not be determined by our past.

This story expresses the soul of ECIR and the essence of our mission: to build bridges of understanding, respect, and friendship across all cultural, religious, ethnic, and national boundaries in our own divided communities and in conflicted communities around the world.



-Bruce Martin, Director

Community Engagement

Community Meals

Community Meal at ECIR is an opportunity for residents and friends of the center to cook a meal from their native culture for the entire community. Attendance at Community Meals nearly doubled this past year. Some meals this summer and early fall brought in over eighty people! So what is it that makes Community Meals so special? First, food is universal. And we LOVE food at ECIR. Next, Community Meal are an informal opportunity for residents and friends to get to know one another, build bridges, and develop friendships. When you walk into ECIR's lounge the night of a Community Meal, you can feel the positive energy. At surface level, it may appear to simply be a group of people sharing a meal. But in reality, there is so much more happening! People from different backgrounds that may have thought they have nothing in common are finding similarities and overcoming fears. Friendships are forming. Cultures are being appreciated. A sense of community is being cultivated. Increasing attendance at Community Meals means increasing costs. ECIR's Go Fund Me Campaign aims to increase the Community Meal budget by \$3, 000. Please donate online or by check made payable to "ECIR" with "Go Fund Me" on the memo line.

ECIR GoFundMe Campaign link: www.gofundme.com/aaecir

-Jessica Greenfield, Residential Program Manager



Understanding Fear: A Response to Mass Violence

A presentation on "Understanding Fear: A response to Mass Violence" was given by Bob Van Oosterhout at ECIR on August 8 and September 20. Bob described how fear puts our body, mind, and emotions into crisis mode. Our capacity to learn and adapt are severely limited as our mind is drawn to simplistic or previously used solutions. These tactics don't address the nature of new threats and tend to make the problem worse. Bob's presentation offered a new perspective on responding to mass violence and terrorism based on understanding three different kinds of fear (Natural, Conceptual, Structural) and how to effectively deal with them.

Bob has over 35 years of experience dealing with people who have had problems with violence, including those who threatened and were about to commit mass killings. Bob developed a course for Lansing Community College that emphasizes restoring balance to body, mind, and emotions. He authored "Slow Down and Lighten Up: Letting Go Of Stress and Tension" and is currently writing two related books, "Balance: The Key to Quality and Effectiveness in Work and Relationships" and "New Perspectives on Anxiety, Depression and PTSD." A text of the presentation is available on Bob's website www.bobvanoosterhout.com

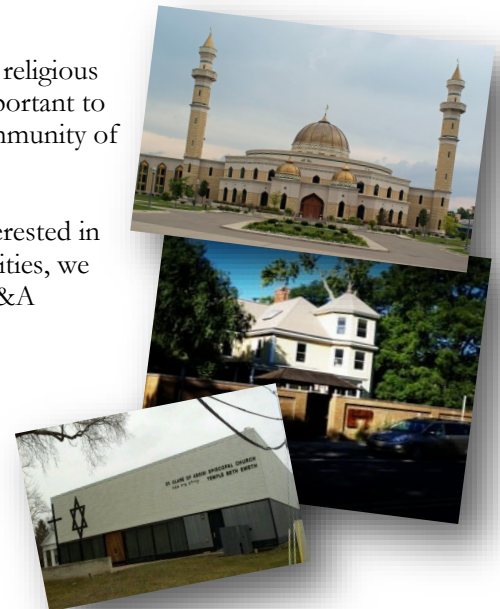


Spiritual Community Visit

Spiritual Community Visits, a series of educational programs, promote appreciation, understanding, and connection with different faith communities in Ann Arbor. Because religious diversity is a prominent feature of American culture, and because spiritual identity is important to all, appreciating and respecting diverse religious traditions is important to building a community of peace and friendship.

Our target audience is, but not limited to, international students or scholars who are interested in learning about specific spiritual beliefs. By coordinating with different spiritual communities, we encourage participants to observe or join the spiritual services and actively attend the Q&A workshop.

In recent months we have visited Quaker Friends Meeting House, Vineyard Church, First Presbyterian Church, Islamic Center of America, Temple Beth Emeth, Chinmaya Mission, Zen Buddhist Temple, Islamic Prayer Observe, and more spiritual communities will be covered soon. We aim to do a spiritual community visit once a month. This series is also supported and advertised by the International Center of the University of Michigan.



Interspiritual and Its Educational Purpose

What is ‘interspiritual?’ Is it the same as ‘interfaith?’ Not really. Here’s a quick comparison:

Interfaith refers to dialogue between people of different religions. In dialogue, people share faith experiences, motivations, or practices in order to find common ground and foster tolerance of differences. It also refers to marriage between people of different religious backgrounds. Interfaith efforts celebrate multiculturalism and religious diversity. Most dialogue typically involves members representing particular faith traditions. Interspiritual, a term coined by the Christian monk Wayne Teasdale, author of *The Mystic Heart*, refers to the mystical core at the center of all the world’s major spiritual traditions. Kurt Johnson, a scientist who is also ordained in three different spiritual traditions and author of *The Coming Interspiritual Age*, suggests that interspirituality is “...so deeply rooted in the heart-experience of oneness...that any creed, belief, background, history...that could cause separation between beings, becomes secondary if not irrelevant.”

In short, interspiritual describes mystical experiences or inner-journey work that finds unity in multiple faith traditions; interfaith describes dialogue and relationships that help preserve diversity among faiths. Interspiritual experience can result from, or lead to, interfaith activities. For this reason, the words are still often used interchangeably. What does Interspirituality look like in practice? The answer varies. Unitarian Universalists include the study of all religions in their youth curriculum. ‘Being Both’ communities teach the children of interfaith families both parents’ religions. “Interfaith” seminaries ordain ministers who lead communities that celebrate multiple religions. One seminary in particular, OneSpirit Learning Alliance, also trains interspiritual counselors to meet the needs of the growing Spiritual But Not Religious population.

As humanity moves more towards an integral worldview, helping people connect the choices they make each day to the future of life on our planet, even traditional religious leaders are beginning to experience a shift in perspective. Multi-Faith Worship Centers such as The Tri-Faith Initiative in Omaha, Pico Union Project in Los Angeles, The House of One in Berlin, The Center of Hope in Jerusalem are proliferating around the globe. Such communities enrich their members’ experience of religion and open them to a felt experience of unity. That was my experience with Jewibilation (a congregation I started for Jewish-Interfaith families). This experience then filtered into my role as a religious educator. What began as a traditional Hebrew School program for children of interfaith families gradually morphed into an interspiritual classroom. What does that mean?

When it came to celebrating the holidays and history of Judaism, I included insights and spiritual practices of different religions. Experiencing all the world’s religions is our human birthright. I encouraged my students and their families to apply these insights to their own lives. When we celebrated the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, I included Buddhist teachings on forgiveness. When we learned Hebrew chants, I added Hindu melodies too. When I taught a Jewish holiday, I had my students compare it with those in other traditions, learning even that much more about their own.



Of course, I taught traditional Jewish content—how to read and write Hebrew, chant Torah, recite prayers, interpret the rich wisdom in Jewish ethics, and appreciate Jewish history. But I didn’t stop there. I supported each student’s autonomy to identify with whatever religion or faith-style she or he was drawn to, even if it was different from their parents’, or their heritage; some of my students were atheists, some agnostic, some hybrids; none fit the traditional model of Jewish. And I did more. I curated interfaith programs locally and globally. I also brought science to the religious school classroom, and involved students in social justice. My classroom had evolved.

This is what it means to develop an interspiritual classroom; it means including and transcending to create something new. What’s new is an expanded sense of self that allows us to identify with all others. An interspiritual education can give rise to global citizenship, responsibility for the world — what we so desperately need today. This is its educational purpose. An interspiritual approach to learning/teaching religion may worry some traditionalists, but they can be reassured. Religion is not changed or lost. It is re-valued through a new frame of reality that leads us to something bigger. It isn’t religion that’s changing; it’s us — choosing to experience religion from a different perspective that makes ancient wisdom relevant to more of us today. As globalization increases, developing a sense of global identity makes sense. The interspiritual classroom is one way to get there. I believe we’ll see more interspiritual education for youth AND adults. If it leads to a healthier, happier planet, then I’m on board! How about you?

Lauren Zinn, Ph.D. is a Jewish-interfaith educator, ordained interfaith minister, and religion education consultant. She is dedicated to helping parents, teachers, and clergy of all backgrounds design and lead interfaith/interspiritual programs for youth and adults. Visit zinnhouse.com to learn more, or contact her directly at laurenzinn@zinnhouse.com

Alumni Spotlight: Volkan and Merve Dogan

Volkan and Merve Dogan, from Turkey, resided at ECIR for almost a year. Due to the political unrest in Turkey this past August, Volkan and Merve had to return home.

Why did you choose to live at ECIR?

To be honest, we had searched a lot of places before we found ECIR thanks to Volkan's advisor Rick Bagozzi. The most attractive features of ECIR were its location and great social programs. Beside those, it was all utilities included that made ECIR eligible for us.

What was your experience like?

Walking to city center whenever we want was a perfect opportunity for us. And there were social activities at least twice a week that we enjoyed a lot and met many friendly people. Initially, Jessica, Stoney and all the other ECIR people were so kind and helpful to us. When we needed something or we were in a mess, they tried to solve our problems patiently. Now, we live in our own home in our country cozily, but I miss ECIR's warm environment and Jessica's cheerful face. I'm searching new opportunities to come AA again and to have a chance to live in ECIR.

What words of advice would you give a new resident?

Try to not miss social programs.

You should cook for the community meal at least one time that makes you very happy.

When it's warm, you should lie on the grass in front of the ECIR and read something there.

Feed rabbits and squirrels.



New Pamper For Dotson Roof

After many years of patch and repair, we finally had a new roof installed on the Dotson wing. We had been saving for many years to get it done and now it's a reality. If you ever feel you need to go "Up On The Roof," the Dotson wing is the perfect place; it's not going to tinkle on our residents anymore

-Stoney Griffin, Property Manager

Wish List

There are many ways to give to ECIR and help the community! If you are interested in donating items, please contact ECIR at info@ecir.org. Here are some examples of possible donations:

- | | | | |
|-------------|---------------------------|----------------------|------------------|
| -Toasters | -Pillows and Covers (new) | -Wash Cloths | -Dining Chairs |
| -Microwaves | -Computers | -Kitchen Pots & Pans | -Mattress Covers |
| -Blenders | -Vacuum Cleaners | -Love Seat | -Bicycles |

All new or used items (in good condition), as well as cash, are tax-deductible gifts in support of our mission.

Giving

By combining our donations, we advance our vision to expand our Center, to extend our program as a living, learning community promoting understanding and peace between diverse peoples and cultures of the world." -Bruce Martin, Director

Options are available if you wish to donate. We accept checks or credit cards, one time or monthly contributions. You may choose to include ECIR in your estate plans, make donation using stocks or securities, or utilize a matching gift program with your company or organization.

For more information, please visit our website, www.ecir.org and our online GoFundMe Campaign at www.gofundme.com/aaecir

Visit us on Facebook and Yelp for photos, stories, and updates on our residents! Be sure to give us a "like" and share our posts with your friends and family.

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/ECIR.ORG/>

Yelp : <https://www.yelp.com/biz/ecir-ann-arbor>

ECIR needs you! Are you interested in being part of our program committee? Available to drive or participate in ECIR events? Email us at info@ecir.org

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