



The Common Good News
Regis University Institute on the Common Good

issue nine | winter 2010

DIRECTOR'S NOTE



At a recent interfaith dialogue hosted by the Institute, I was humbled by those who sat with me at the table. A Rabbi spoke of the words of Rabbi Soloveitchik and Rabbi Saks, that the covenant of fate predates the covenant of faith. The words of Fethullah Gülen, the Imam from Turkey were invoked by a wise Muslim in the circle, "Being Human comes first." In my own tradition Jesus reminds us that only by acting as the Samaritan, helping whoever is in need, will we find our own salvation. Though Christian, Jew, Muslim, Mormon, Buddhist, or Hindu, we first and foremost are human beings. Though Republican, Democrat, Green, or Libertarian, we are before everything, humble fellow travelers on this planet. Forget the many labels....and you might find an amazing person standing before you, able to share a funny story, an action of compassion and much wisdom.

~ Paul Alexander, Ph.D.

HOW THE INSTITUTE IS SHAPING ME

Jon Denzler

College is a place for new things, a fresh chance to expand your horizons beyond the infamous "comfort zone." It is a time and place to meet new people, introspect, and perhaps change your outlook on life. These, are the generic catch phrases that grace the lips of most college recruiters and admissions guides. It's stuff that sounds good but what does it really entail, if anything?

As I left my comfort zone in Cleveland to move west to Denver, I had little idea what to expect. Until a year before I had never even heard of Regis University. Still, it was an exciting time in my development and maturation. After I had settled in for about a week on campus, I decided to find a job, as it was now apparent what additional costs were associated with college other than those printed on my admissions paper. Avoiding the generic campus job was important though. I wanted something that I could actually learn from. I had no interest in a desk job fetching coffee and making copies and that's what drew me to the Institute on the Common Good. They promised me a chance to provide input and suggestions into programs. They made me a part of the organization, not just a hired gun for the paper runs. Sure, I still do the occasional copy run but at the same time I know what I am making a copy of. The people who I have a chance to communicate with on a daily basis gave me that new avenue for learning that I sought.

This employment opportunity fulfills some of those phrases mentioned earlier. The Institute was a brand new opportunity for me in many facets. I am part of a job I truly enjoy. I don't mind waking up early to go to work. This isn't work, it is something completely different. I also have learned much about dialogue and its real implications. Without this job, those terms were just words on a paper that happened to have definitions.

What makes this job that much more rewarding is its relation to my plans for a major at Regis. When I arrived at Regis, I planned on declaring a Peace and Justice Studies major with little understanding of what that really meant. I had no clue how big the major was without a concentration or passion, and the Institute has given me a chance to figure this out as well. Whether I'm advertising a religious forum or researching policy of the state of Colorado, I have a front row view to peace and justice in the real world. I'm learning what it truly means to view the world in the common good mindset. To make this all even better, my superiors encourage me to do this research and see how to apply it to their work. So even with only six months on the job, this experience is giving me the tools and contacts to truly understand where I fit into the web of Regis University and life after Regis. My training and education on the job has proven invaluable and the most worthwhile aspect of my move here to Regis. And I expect more great things in the future.

Jon Denzler is a Regis College freshman from Cleveland, working for the Institute as a work-study student. When he's not learning about dialogue on the job, he usually can be found active in the Regis Music Department, playing sports, and doing anything outdoors related.

DIALOGUE TIP

The Left-Hand Column activity provides the opportunity to increase awareness of the tacit, unspoken assumptions we make which govern our conversations, interactions with others and the way we relate to the world. Complete your own Left-Hand Column by following the four steps outlined below; you will need some paper and a pencil to begin:

Step 1: Select a Problem

Choose a difficult problem that you've faced recently. Now write a brief paragraph describing the situation. Who are all of the players in the situation? What were you trying to accomplish? Who or what is blocking you from reaching your goal?

Step 2: The Right-Hand Column (What Was Said)

Recall a frustrating conversation that you had focused on this situation. Take several pieces of paper and draw a line down the center. Label the right-hand column "What was said" and write out the dialogue that occurred, providing as many details as possible. Leave the left-hand column blank until you have completed your recollection on the right side.

Step 3: The Left-Hand Column (What You Were Thinking)

Now in the left-hand column, write out everything that you were thinking and feeling, but never said or expressed, in the same conversation. Try to parallel what you were thinking during the same time that you were speaking/ listening in the actual conversation that took place.

Step 4: Reflection – Using Your Left-Hand Column

Read through both sides of the conversation you wrote. As you read, reflect on the thoughts and feelings that come up as you note the key points that you left out from the conversation that actually occurred.



By analyzing our left-hand columns, we can develop a way of talking about our tacit assumptions more effectively, and we are able to be our true selves in relation to others and the world (*The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*, 1994).

DIALOGUE RESOURCE

"Dialogue is when persons of different viewpoints come together and interact. Their 'coming together' could be in the form of conversation, sharing a meal, sharing in an experience such as creating art or participating in a religious observance or some other form of engagement."

~ *Interactive Faith* by Bud Heckman and Rori Picker Neiss

Interactive Faith: The Essential Interreligious Community-Building Handbook is a practical guide to the key methods and resources of the interfaith movement. The steps outlined in this guide will help you effectively engage people not just of other faith traditions, but also people of different cultures, races and social groups. Rev. Heckman and his contributors outline straightforward solutions for bringing peace and understanding to diverse communities. For the authors, it boils down to three simple words – ask, talk, and listen. Actions we engage in everyday, but their value is often pushed aside in our hectic busy lives today.

AROUND THE STATE

As the cost of energy continues to skyrocket, new photovoltaic (PV) solar energy projects in several Denver schools seem to be coming at the right time.

Oak Leaf Energy, Denver Public School District and Denver Green Print Council have partnered to utilize more than two years of dialoguing, planning and coordinating, which resulted in 16 school buildings throughout the school district being able to use solar panels to generate their school's electricity. The projects will be owned and operated by MP2 Capital, which will sell the electricity produced to the district under a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA).

"This is a terrific partnership for our taxpayers and for our students," said Tom Boasberg (DPS superintendent). "We'll see significant savings in our bottom line, with no upfront infrastructure costs to the district, and it's a great chance for our students to learn about the importance of sustainable energy in a very impactful way."

Martin Luther King Middle School, East, South and Thomas Jefferson High Schools, and Greenwood Elementary School are just a few of the 16 schools who will benefit from the PV solar energy projects. Boulder's Namaste Solar will design and build what will be the largest combined solar project for schools in Colorado. The schools were chosen based on the quality of their roofs. The PV projects will generate roughly 44 million kilowatt hours of solar electricity over the course of the 20-year PPA. The solar projects are expected to be completed by November, and the first project is expected to be on-line by March 2011.

Perhaps the most interesting part of this solar initiative is that along with a new energy source, an extensive educational curriculum will also be given to all the host schools. The curriculum was created by Namaste Solar and will concentrate on the science and economics of photovoltaic energy generation.



ICG HIGHLIGHTS

What is happening at the Institute on the Common Good?



Colorado's Future

Since forging a partnership with Colorado's Future to support the "Build a Better Colorado" Civic Engagement Project and realize a more prosperous form of direct democracy, the Institute has traveled across Colorado working with more than 700 "grass top" leaders from six Colorado communities. All 700-plus individuals participated in the deliberations on the Colorado initiative process and processes for amending the Colorado constitution. So far, the Institute's work in Greeley, Granby and Steamboat has helped build a new relationship between legislators, civic leaders and citizens who care about sustainable policy and the democratic process. Hopefully those relationships will continue to grow over the next several months as another nine communities participate in this process and continue to work on several of the legislative bills or referred measures that are now being developed. With a focus on dialogue and representatives concerned for the vitality of life in Colorado, the Institute and Colorado's Future have worked to identify solutions concerning state-wide fiscal matters as well as the establishment of support networks that can be relied upon in times of legislative change. These meetings, and others in Pueblo, Grand Junction and Lakewood, have all been highly successful, bringing in hundreds of participants and creating new diplomatic channels while simultaneously establishing a democratic presence with emphasis on participation. By using community models that focus on positive problem solving, the Civic Engagement Project hopes to build trust and respect within communities, and thus realize a more colorful Colorado while never underestimating the power of citizen initiatives.

Visit the project's website at coloradosfuture.org for more information.

Other Highlights:

BOULDER HOMELESS INITIATIVE

The Institute on the Common Good continues to work with Boulder County, the cities of Boulder and Longmont, the OMNI Institute, and many Boulder County nonprofit organizations to help develop a 10-year plan for the provision of housing and homeless services in the county. The Institute provides support for the process to help ensure its integrity and sustainable outcomes. The plan is scheduled for release in March 2010.

RELIGIOUS FOUNDATIONS PROJECT

For the past several years, the Institute has partnered with the Interfaith Alliance of Colorado on the Religious Foundations Project. At the center of this collaboration is a handbook that identifies key scriptural and religious teachings on important topics related to the common good. The book also includes tips on how to engage in an interfaith dialogue that will help individuals understand each other's traditions, find common ground, and move toward action on the complex issues facing us today. A pilot dialogue was held in early February. We anticipate releasing the initial draft later this spring. For more information, visit the Institute's website at icgregis.org.

REGIS FALL DIVERSITY DIALOGUES

Partnering with Regis' Office of Diversity, the Institute facilitated three dialogues for Regis community members around various diversity related issues facing the community. September's dialogue discussed interfaith relations and how to bridge the gap on campus. October's dialogue discussed GLBTQ issues in two separate dialogues with the intent of one large dialogue on the same issue in February 2010. Finally, November's dialogue combined humor and diversity with a live comedy performance. A group of Regis students opened the

dialogue with short comedy sketches addressing the topic of diversity on campus. Participants were then asked to share their reactions and feelings raised by the performance in an open dialogue.

All three dialogues were well attended and the Institute's partnership with Regis' Office of Diversity will continue in 2010. Check out our Upcoming Events section for future dialogue topics, dates and times or contact Malia Crouse at mcrouse@regis.edu.

BETA DIALOGUE SKILL TRAININGS

Kicking off in August, the Institute staff hosted a series of three dialogue trainings for members of the Regis community. The trainings provided an opportunity for Institute staff members to refine their dialogic skill training activities while providing focused hour-long workshops for participants.

The three topics covered included:

- *Icebergs: What's Under the Surface?* Focused on how and why we make assumptions.
- *Ground Rules: Guidelines for Productive Conversations.* Focused on the importance of and creating ground rules for dialogue.
- *Inquiry Circles: Connecting Inquiry and Dialogue.* Focused on the connection between approaching dialogue from a state of inquiry as opposed to advocacy.

The Institute will continue this project with a spring series starting in February 2010. The first training will address why we choose to say some things and not others using *The Left-Hand Column* activity. For more information and upcoming training dates and times, contact Malia Crouse at mcrouse@regis.edu.



MARK YOUR CALENDARS Upcoming Events

Speak Your Mind: A Conversation on Same-Sex Topics II Regis Lowell Campus, Mountain View Room, 4-5:30 p.m. Tuesday February 23 (Free)

This dialogue is the second of a two-part dialogue series around same-sex topics in the Regis community. The first dialogue was held in October '09 where participants were split into two separate dialogues, one for heterosexual members of the Regis community and one for the lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, questioning, and intersex (LGBTQI) members. *Speak Your Mind 2* will bring together both groups for a joint dialogue. The purpose of the conversation is to provide an opportunity for participants to share experiences on their perspective on same-sex orientation. Participants will be encouraged to share personal stories and experiences to add to the conversation. Participants did not have to attend the dialogue in October to attend the second dialogue; all members of the Regis community are welcome to participate. This dialogue is co-sponsored by the Institute on the Common Good and Regis' Office of Diversity. For more information please contact Malia Crouse at mcrouse@regis.edu.

New Institute Website

The Institute on the Common Good at Regis University will soon be launching a newly updated Web site. The site provides an overview of our mission, services, and staff. The new site will provide ongoing information about the Institute's work with a more appealing appearance. The Institute is hoping visitors, whether they are new or current supporters, will find the new site useful, informative and educational.

Gail Collins will speak at Regis University Regis Lowell Campus, Student Center 8 p.m. Monday, March 22 (Free)

The Institute is partnering with the Women's Studies Program, Peace and Justice Studies, and Regis College Honors program to host *New York Times* columnist Gail Collins at 8 p.m. March 22 in the Student Center. As the Keynote speaker for Women's History Month, Collins will discuss how the movement for women's equality since the 1960s has transformed social, political, and economic life in America. This event is open to all Regis students, faculty, staff and members of the community.

Become an ICG Sponsored Community!

Each year the Institute on the Common Good selects communities for full and partial sponsorship. If your community has a concern, opportunity, or problem which could be resolved through dialogue, community collaboration, or community conflict transformation, please contact us. Working closely with you, we will assess whether we might be of help. With full sponsorship there is no charge to you or your community.

For more information regarding any of the upcoming events or for a list of other future events, visit our website at www.icgregis.org or contact Fredricka Brown at 303-458-4967.

Need Help?

If you believe you may be in need of the collaborative dialogue resources of the Institute please do not hesitate to call Fredricka Brown at 303-458-4967, e-mail us at icg@regis.edu, or visit our website at www.icgregis.org.

MISSION STATEMENT OF THE INSTITUTE ON THE COMMON GOOD

The Institute on the Common Good at Regis University serves the community at-large by promoting the common good and providing a safe and effective space for community dialogue, communal discernment, and public deliberation.



Institute on the Common Good

Regis University
3333 Regis Boulevard, B-6
Denver, Colorado 80221-1099