

TIA News & Notes

October, 2006

The Newsletter of the Tulsa Interfaith Alliance

Volume 11, Issue 2

Russell Lawrence Bennett
April 12, 1937 – August 27, 2006

Jesus comes to me as grief
and I turn away and cry.
And Jesus comes to me as tears,
and my face is wet with Jesus.

—Sy Safransky, The Sun, January 2002

And the Lord's servant must not be
quarrelsome but kindly to everyone,
an apt teacher, patient, correcting
opponents with gentleness.

— 2 Timothy 2:24-25a

Remembering Russ

I first knew him as the quiet man who loved to run more than eat dinner when we were taking D.Min. courses in Oklahoma City. I didn't run much with him because I couldn't keep up or go as far. That describes his modeling for me in other areas of life and witness. ... He was the closest person to a Protestant monk I have known, not because he was celibate or removed from the world, but because he had that grace and shalom that only comes with intense fellowship with God that enables one to exude Christ's demeanor even when others ridiculed and spewed their venom on him for his concern and compassion for the kingdom of God.
— Radford Rader, former pastor of College Hill Presbyterian Church

I believe in my heart that Russ has been awakened to new and exciting destinies beyond our knowledge, and that he remembers us with love and prayers in his new plane of Life. It is those of us who remain that must grieve the loss of this kind, brilliant, passionate and loving man. God is with us as we do so, mingling her tears with ours.
— Mark Watkins, former Minister of Music at Fellowship Congregational Church

At a time when I was struggling, Russell took me to the crossroads and gave me the strength to follow my heart. He was a man of gentle words and rock solid actions. His teaching set my spirit free, and for that I will be forever grateful.
— Jack Hastings (Queensland, Australia)

"Making A Difference: One Person Can
Change Church-State History":

Also on a somber note, the cause of church-state separation recently lost three people who definitely made a difference. The Rev. Russell Bennett, a Congregationalist pastor from Tulsa, was a powerful opponent of the "faith-based" initiative and was able to bring hundreds of people together for a meeting when I passed through his community for a speech recently. - Barry Lynn's "Perspective" CHURCH & STATE, October 2006

The last time I talked to Russ I shared with him the importance of his life and support to the Indian community over the years. I told him that we purposely chose the Pendleton blanket, "Keep My Fires Burning," when we honored him at his retirement dinner because that is the job for all of us—to keep Russ Bennett's fires burning as we continue his work for social justice.
—Ann Dapice (Skiatook, OK)

He let his light shine, and it illuminated our way here in Oklahoma. He'll be missed!
— Tom Boyd (Norman, OK)

His moral courage, certain vision and steadfast determination has inspired and encouraged us all.
— Nancy Feldman (Tulsa, OK)

I grew up in Topeka, Kan., next door to Dr. Karl Menninger. We loved him. He was the nicest person. We thought the world of him because he was so soft and kind. I never thought I would meet anyone nicer until I met Russell Bennett. I was fortunate to have known both of these people. They would have enjoyed each other's company. I know I did.

– Phil Kyle, letter to the editor in the Tulsa World.

The true heroes among us are those like Rev. Bennett who have the courage to live a life that matches their values and serves as inspiration for the rest of us. – Valerie Pinamonti (Tulsa, OK)

It would take me too many words to express my awe at the intellect, insight and compassion Russ carried. He taught us all so very much.

– Lyn Larson (Tulsa, OK)

If all of us would live like Russ, with strong voices raised against messages of injustice, but gentleness and compassion for the messengers, the world would be healed.

– Colin and Becky Smith (Sand Springs, OK)

I met Russell Bennett through the Homeless Service Network meetings. I was always deeply moved by his caring and compassion for his fellow human companions. – Michael Woods (Tulsa, OK)

Russ's teachings spoke to all people. He spoke of the goodness of people helping others, sharing, loving and giving. – Steven Sievert (Houston, TX)

I'm in respectful awe of Russell's spirituality, gentleness, intellect, and his courage. My passion for genuine interfaith respect and dialog results in no small part from this influence.

– Rev. James Burch (Gilbert, AZ)

I've lost a dear friend, a mentor and hero. My world is different now. He made our world better than it would be had he and his gentle, prophetic voice and action not guided us in learning what loving one another really means.

– Harold E. Hill (Tulsa, OK)

Oklahoma is a whole lot poorer with Russ gone, but we were enriched by his presence while he was here. – Frosty Troy, editor, *Oklahoma Observer* (Oklahoma City, OK)

Russell, you were our lighthouse. Thank you.

– Jacque Maxwell (Tulsa, OK)

There are so many who will miss Russ that it seems almost inappropriate to single out only one organization and their "cause," but all those who struggled to ensure reproductive freedom in Oklahoma are grieving today over the loss of such a strong voice for choice, courageous pursuer of justice for women, and champion of religious freedom for all.

– Linda Morgan Clark (Muskogee, OK)

He lived among us as a speaker of truth and an advocate of justice and equality with a moral integrity that is a model for us all.

– Rev. Anne Clement (Sapulpa, OK)

Third Monday

On the Third Monday of the month, join TIA members and friends for information on "hot topics" and our current activities. We meet at Fellowship Congregational Church, 2900 South Harvard (south of Braums) at 7:00 p.m. Call the church office with questions 747-7777.

On November 20, 2006, the program will be on RESULTS which is a nonprofit grassroots advocacy organization, committed to creating the political will to end hunger and the worst aspects of poverty. RESULTS is committed to individuals exercising their personal and political power by lobbying elected officials for effective solutions and key policies that affect hunger and poverty.

RESULTS Educational Fund is committed to educating the public, the media, and leaders about issues related to poverty and hunger in the United States and abroad. We hold public forums, train citizens in democracy, hold media conference calls to share the latest information, and produce quality oversight research to determine the effectiveness of programs for the poor. [RESULTS Educational Fund](#) is a 501(c)3, tax-exempt nonprofit organization.

Creating a *Wisdom Culture in Tulsa

Citizens' Design Workshop

Friday, November 10, 6:00 – 8:00 p.m.

Saturday, November 11, 9:00 – 4:00 p.m.

Conference Center, OU-Tulsa campus, 41st & Yale

Wisdom University, San Francisco, in partnership with a coalition of groups from the greater Tulsa area, is convening a Wisdom Weekend to bring concerned citizens together around the possibility of building a wisdom culture in Tulsa. Whether your primary interest is sustainable environment, economics, education, justice, or simply a community that is fed by initiative and diversity, this is a unique opportunity to join with other Tulsans to bring an array of knowledge and experience together around a common vision of the future.

In this “citizens’ design” workshop, Dr. Paul Ray, sociologist and co-author of *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People Are Changing the World*, will set the stage by describing the wisdom culture that is emerging all across the country. The workshop is designed to enable Tulsans to both understand this national and global trend and to come together to support its emergence in Tulsa.

Jim Garrison, theologian and President of Wisdom University, will discuss how this Wisdom Weekend fits into a longer term planning in Tulsa in preparation for a major conference on *Sacred Activism: Finding a New Moral Compass in America*. The conference will take place May 10 – 12, 2007 at the Renaissance Hotel.

The purpose of the conference is to address the deepening concern Americans have across the political and social spectrum that our country is increasingly out of alignment with its basic foundational principles. It will challenge participants to consider more deeply the interface between their values and their actions. It will focus on how we can build a new sense of community as we shape the future by supporting the wisdom culture that is emerging all across America.

Workshop Registration:

Space is limited, so pre-registration is highly recommended.

Call (918) 599-9933 or e-mail sacredactivismtulsa@yahoo.com to pre-register. \$25/pay at the door

Friday Evening only: \$15/pay at the door

For further information on the conference Sacred Activism: Finding a New Moral Compass for America:

<https://www.wisdomuniversity.org/sacred-activism-index.html>

***Wisdom: an integration of discernment and compassion, an understanding of how all the parts of a given situation fit into a larger whole, a sense of proportion that leads to humility and kindness.**

AN OPEN LETTER

FROM: Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, President, The Interfaith Alliance
TO: Ken Mehlman, Chairman, The Republican National Committee
Howard Dean, Chairman, The Democratic National Committee
CC: RNC/ DNC Campaign Committees State Parties
DATE: September 19, 2006
RE: Partisan Politics and Preserving the Sanctity of Religion
and the Autonomy of Houses of Worship

The recent rush of candidates/political parties- and their often aggressive tactics - to reach out to "people of faith" lures religious organizations and religious leaders into dangerous legal territory.

Religion's powerful healing force will be severely compromised if America 's shared values are replaced by values that advance only one particular sectarian interest.

I write you today out of concern for religion and what the manipulation of religion for partisan gain is doing to Americans of all faith traditions. A partnership between religion and government should preserve the autonomy of houses of worship and ensure that religious institutions are not held hostage to the priorities and interests of federal, state, or local governments. Religion's powerful healing force will be severely compromised if America 's shared values are replaced by values that advance only one particular sectarian interest.

Houses of worship are permitted by the IRS, and encouraged by The Interfaith Alliance to provide nonpartisan information to worshipers on a broad range of issues and to encourage civic participation and hold non-partisan voter registrations. The Interfaith Alliance and its 185,000 members from over 75 faith traditions believe it is important that religious leaders encourage their worshipers to cast informed votes this November. Yet when candidates and their supporters use the language of faith to advance partisan interests, or when they seek to emphasize their beliefs as the only truth, Americans and our houses of worship become deeply divided.

For the sake of religion's prophetic voice, The Interfaith Alliance urges you to carefully consider and advise your respective state parties and/or political candidates to:

Refrain from speaking from the pulpit, bema or lectern;

Refrain from using sanctuaries or houses of worship as backdrops for campaign ads;

Refrain from collecting and/or using congregational membership directories;

Refrain from organizing congregants inside a house of worship or distributing partisan material on behalf of a candidate.

The Interfaith Alliance does not mean to suggest that religious leaders should refrain from discussing the important issues of the day with their congregations.

We firmly believe religious leaders can and should encourage an open dialogue about issues important to the country, the communities, and the congregations. Many historians contend that no other form of discourse has held the place of importance in this nation's life as that of preaching. Those of us who deliver meditations, homilies, and sermons have a responsibility to seize teachable moments in our national life -moments like those involved in a national election -as opportunities for talking with people about the basic values that emerge from our sacred scriptures and oral traditions and how those values impact and shape our civic involvement.

If we omit politics from the subjects to which we turn in those moments, people will assume either that politics is not important enough to be included in discussions of matters of faith or, worse still, that religion has nothing to say about politics. Truly great preaching -or any form of religious discourse -can no more ignore the great issues of the day than it can ignore the great texts and truths of the scriptures of the tradition within which it is done. Congregations look to their religious leaders for guidance - spiritual, moral, and otherwise - not manipulation on behalf of political organizations with a partisan agenda.

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Our nation can benefit from a recovery of a real, vital, and viable partnership between religion, politics, and government in which each treats the other realms with appreciation and respect without seeking to confuse them or join forces with them.

The core values of the nation's religions ultimately will lend strong support for the core values of our democracy. And our democracy will continue with vitality by allowing religion to remain independent as a contributor to the public's conscience, a facilitator of healing, an advocate for the weakest and poorest among us, and as a community of prophets, priests, and care-givers.

I also point you to our election year guides for political candidates located online at InterfaithAlliance.org/Elections.

I also point you to our election year guides for political candidates located online at InterfaithAlliance.org/Elections. This resource helps political candidates to draw the distinctions between: Reaching out to religion for personal strength; Respecting all religions publicly; Misusing religion for partisan political purposes; and Misusing religion as a strategy for winning. These guides have been mailed to your respective organizations but we are happy to send you additional copies.

I also make myself or any member of The Interfaith Alliance available to you for further discussion on these important matters.

Warm Regards,

Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy
President, The Interfaith Alliance
Pastor for Preaching and Worship, Northminster (Baptist) Church (Monroe, LA)

A Message from our President

When Russell Bennett called and asked me to become President of the Interfaith Alliance, little did I know that our time of transition would be extremely short. Nor could I have imagined the great loss I (and we all) felt at his passing weeks later. Urbane, scholarly, pious, and courageous, Russ Bennett was, in the felicitous phrase of D. Elton Trueblood, “a new man for our time”; a person of faith who uniquely combined a “warm heart and a clear head.” Russ leaves behind a legacy of warm hearted piety, critical thought, and prophetic courage the likes of which is truly rare. Are we not inspired to follow his example as we work for religious liberty, human rights and the freedom and dignity of all people in our community?

In one of our last meetings, Russ stated he envisioned that TIA would begin to move into a more institutional phase. At the same time, he certainly hoped that TIA would maintain its prophetic voice, to continue to repudiate the demonization of dissent and the idolatrous use of religious faith in public life. These we will continue to do even as we move to fulfill Russ Bennett’s dream of an Alliance that is more of an institutional force to be reckoned with in the community.

We are grateful for the beautiful light that was Russ Bennett’s life. May TIA be the living embodiment of that light in the days ahead.

Faithfully,

Keith O. McArtor

An Introduction to Keith

Keith O. McArtor is a native of Pryor, Oklahoma where he was reared in the First United Methodist Church there.

He graduated Bachelor of Science at Oklahoma State University in 1980; Master of Divinity at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary in Fort Worth, Texas in 1986, and J.D. from the University of Tulsa College of Law in 1991.

He was ordained to the Ministry by the First Baptist Church of Pryor, Oklahoma in 1979 and since that time has engaged in the Pastorate four (4) times and preached and taught in numerous settings.

He began the practice of law in 1991 and from 1993 to 1996 served as an Assistant District Attorney in Tulsa County.

Since 1996 he has been in the private practice of law in the city.

From 1999 to 2003 he served as Chairman of the Tulsa County Democratic Party. He is a member of the Oklahoma Bar Association, the Tulsa County Bar Association, the American Inns of Court, the National Conference of Community and Justice, and Chairman of the Oklahoma Human Rights Commission.

He is a member of the Centenary United Methodist Church in Tulsa.

He is married to Melani Hamilton and is the father of Victoria 19, Jonathan 14, and Abigail 12.

PLEASE JOIN US!

Uniting
people
of
faith
and
good
will
to
STOP HATE

Name _____

Address _____

email _____

Home Phone _____

Work Phone _____

fax _____

Congregation or Faith Group (Optional) _____

Leading
people
of
faith
and
good
will
to

DEFEND RELIGIOUS
LIBERTY

Membership Categories are

- | | |
|---------------------------|--------------------------------|
| _____ Student \$15 | _____ Sponsor \$500-999 |
| _____ Concerned \$25-99 | _____ Benefactor \$1,000-2,499 |
| _____ Supporter \$100-499 | _____ Sustaining \$2,500-4,999 |
| _____ Patron \$5,000+ | |

Equipping
people
of
faith
and
good
will
for

POLITICAL
PARTICIPATION

Committees are

- _____ Membership Development
- _____ Resources—fund raising & finance
- _____ Public Education
- _____ Program Development—forums, etc.
- _____ Media
- _____ Legal
- _____ Rapid response/monitoring extremism
- _____ Assisting with routine office tasks.

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, Inc. is an Oklahoma not for profit corporation and has received Internal Revenue Service income tax exemption under code section 501(c)(3). Membership dues are tax deductible. Membership in Tulsa Interfaith Alliance, Inc. consists of those serving on the Board of Directors or Advisory Board and all others who contribute financial support.

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October 2006

The Interfaith Alliance is a non-partisan, grassroots organization dedicated to promoting the positive, healing role of faith in civic life and challenging intolerance and extremism.

Newsletter Editor: Janet Storts

Bill Griffin is our web master. Check us out at
www.tulsainterfaith.org.

“Stately, high profile occasions of public prayer may make for a great photo opportunity, but the effectiveness of prayer is not measured by how many people see and hear it. The sacred experience of prayer can only be measured by the faithfulness and generosity of God alone who sees and hears it.”

Andrew Daugherty, Assistant to the General Counsel, Report from the Capital, Newsletter of the Baptist Joint Committee, May 2004, Vol. 59 No. 5

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