

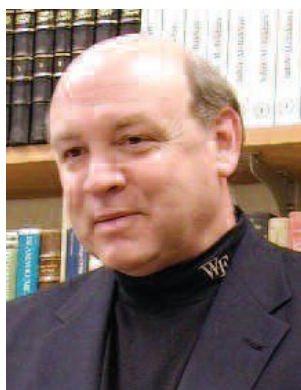


**INTERFAITH ALLIANCE  
OF TULSA**  
PROMOTING FAITH AND FREEDOM

# NEWS

## Tulsa Interfaith Alliance Annual Meeting & Dinner

### CHARLES KIMBALL TO BE SPEAKER ON APRIL 27



Mark your calendars now for the TIA Annual Membership Meeting on April 27. We are pleased that Dr. Charles Kimball will be our keynote speaker. Dr. Kimball is Presidential Professor and Director of Religious Studies at the University of Oklahoma in Norman, OK. Between 1996 and 2008, he served as Chair of the Department of Religion (1996-2004) and professor of comparative religion in the Department of Religion and the Divinity School at Wake Forest University in Winston-Salem, NC. During the 2006 fall term, Dr. Kimball was the Rita and William Bell Visiting Professor at The University of Tulsa. He is a graduate of Oklahoma State University and holds the M. Div. degree from The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. An ordained Baptist minister, he received his Th. D. from Harvard University in the comparative religion with specialization in Islamic studies.

Dr. Kimball's courses at OU include "Introduction to Religious Studies," "Comparative Religion," "Conceptions of the Afterlife," and "Islam." He is a frequent lecturer in universities and church-related settings as well as an expert analyst on issues related to the Middle East, Islam, Jewish-Christian-Muslim relations, and the intersection of religion and politics in the United States.

Dr. Kimball taught for six years at Furman University where he also served as the Director for International Education. From 1983-1990 he was the Director of the Middle East Office at the National Council of Churches, based in New York. He lived in Egypt in 1977-78, has made more than 35 visits to the Middle East and worked closely with Congress, the White House and the State Department during the past 25 years.

His articles have appeared in a number of publications, including *Sojourners*, *The Christian Century*, *The Los Angeles Times*, *The Christian Science Monitor*, *The Atlanta Journal-Constitution* and *The Boston Globe*. He is the author of four books, including *When Religion Becomes Evil* named one of the "Top 15 Books on Religion" by Publishers Weekly and one of the top ten books of the year by the Association of Parish Clergy.

**Monday, April 27, 2009**

**Dinner 6:00 p.m. \$25**

**Program 7:00 p.m. Free**

**All Souls Unitarian Church,  
2952 South Peoria, Tulsa**

Dinner reservations accepted until April 20.  
Please indicate if vegetarian meal is needed.  
Mail your check to

Tulsa Interfaith Alliance,  
P.O. Box 35654,  
Tulsa, OK 74153-0654

Books \$12 with reservation; \$15 at door.

Questions?

[tulsainterfaith@gmail.com](mailto:tulsainterfaith@gmail.com)

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## THE PRESIDENT'S CORNER

Tolerance is a good thing. The importance of tolerance is especially evident when we juxtapose it with its opposite, intolerance. Intolerance, the unwillingness to grant others freedom of thought or expression, is at the root of much of the world's suffering. Almost any aspect of life can become the source of intolerance: religion, politics, race, ethnicity, language, even conflicting loyalties to sports teams. A history of intolerance would be a bloody history, indeed.

So, to repeat the obvious, tolerance is a good thing. We applaud tolerance because it enables us to live together in a diverse world with some degree of tranquility. We may not always like it or find it comfortable. Indeed, we may grit our teeth and bite our tongues when in the company of people who think very differently. But we tolerate them because we know that it is the only way we can survive together in such a world, and we want for ourselves the same right to express our views.

Again, tolerance is a good thing. I do, however, have a problem with tolerance. The very idea of tolerance seems to imply a certain assumption of superiority or power. To be tolerant is to imply that we ourselves are somehow the norm. We tolerate the odd, the different, the fringe, the new, the weak, etc. Even as we advocate for toleration, would we not be offended to think that we are merely tolerated?

One of the goals of interfaith dialogue must be to move beyond tolerance. As we engage one another, we seek not only a larger truth but also a more profound relationship. In the Christian scriptures there is a letter that the Apostle Paul wrote to a congregation in Corinth. The community had become severely divided and obviously intolerant. The Apostle urged them to recognize and affirm their different gifts and perspectives. Then he said, "I'll show you a better way." What follows has become known as "the love chapter" one of the most beautiful compositions in literature, often quoted (totally out of context) in weddings. In context, it is not about romantic love at all. It is about a benevolent spirit and a mutual respect that enables us to live together. It is, to use the Apostle's words, about being patient and kind; not boastful, arrogant or rude. "It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful."

Tolerance, Yes! We need tolerance. We must teach tolerance. Tolerance is vital for our community, our nation, our world. But tolerance is only one step toward a more just and peaceful world. Through the Interfaith Alliance, the Open Tables, the Faith Book Clubs, and other opportunities to engage one another across the many religious and ideological divisions, we have the opportunity to move beyond tolerance and to discover a better way.

Steve Cranford

## From the Desk of the Executive Director,

Ken Patterson, March 26, 2009



TIA has had a busy first quarter in 2009. From supporting efforts to ban the use of Native American sports mascots in Oklahoma high schools to our upcoming film series at the Circle Cinema, TIA is promoting interfaith understanding in Tulsa.

We couldn't continue our work without our members! Your contributions and membership renewals allow us to educate and advocate on matters of faith and freedom. We are confident that TIA programs will play a positive, visible role in making Tulsa an increasingly progressive, accepting community.

We invite all our members to attend our events and programs this spring.

- Our Annual Meeting on April 27th at All Souls Unitarian Church, featuring Charles Kimball, will be a great opportunity to learn about pressing interfaith issues and to talk with each other over dinner. Please join us!
- TIA's Faith and Freedom Film and Lecture Series at the Circle Cinema will include insightful, non-commercial films that raise questions and promote dialogue on the role that faith plays in our country. The Series, scheduled to start in June, will introduce persons from diverse backgrounds to the larger interfaith community and engage them in discussions that are directly relevant to their lives. We'll keep you posted on exact dates so that you can mark your calendars.
- We are planning a series of enlightening forums on the separation of church and state that will focus on specific issues before the Oklahoma legislature.
- Oklahoma City is hosting the LEADD Program from May 29 - 31. LEADD stands for Leadership Education Advancing Democracy and Diversity. High school students in Tulsa are welcome to apply for limited slots in this fantastic program.

If you're not a member of TIA, please join us at any of these events! Come see what we're about and consider joining our ranks. Always feel free to call me with any questions about TIA Programs or to talk about how you can contribute your talents to our mission.

Thank you and see you soon! —Ken

## TIA HAS A NEW LOOK!

Jay Keller, Field Representative of the National Interfaith Alliance office, met with the Tulsa chapter board members on his visit to Oklahoma in February. A lot of new and exciting ideas for the future of the TIA were discussed, including the new look of our newsletter. The National IA has developed a lovely logo for use by all of its chapters, and this will be Tulsa's first edition of our newsletter using the new logo. The circle mosaic was introduced by National last year and is a way to better visually represent the vibrant community and cultural differences that make the Interfaith Alliance what it is. The circle is a universal symbol of unity. The mosaic speaks to our desire to bring people from diverse backgrounds together to protect religious liberty, and the boundaries between religion and government.



Jay Keller, National Field Director from the national Interfaith Alliance office, recently visited with TIA board members in Tulsa. Here he is shown on the left, next to Steve Cranford, TIA President. and John Osborne, TIA Treasurer.

## Faith and Courage Award Honors Tulsa World's Bill Sherman



The Tulsa Interfaith Alliance (TIA) will recognize Bill Sherman, Religion Writer of the Tulsa World, with the Russell Bennett Faith and Courage Award. The award will be presented at the annual meeting of TIA to be held at All Souls Unitarian Church on Monday, April 27.

In enthusiastically endorsing Sherman for the award, the TIA board emphasized his journalistic integrity as he covers the wide spectrum of religious communities in Tulsa. In his role as religion writer, he reports on the festivals, celebrations, special holy days, leadership transitions, controversies, etc., in each religious community. Spokespersons for the Hindu, Buddhist, Jewish, Christian and Unitarian faiths all testified to his objectivity and his careful attention to accuracy.

TIA Board President Steve Cranford said, "We are fortunate in Tulsa to have Bill in this important position. Religious faith is a sensitive area in which to work. People of faith would be reticent to share their spiritual journeys if they thought they would be misinterpreted or inappropriately reported. Bill Sherman has gained the trust of faith communities. He has widened our horizons and enriched our understanding of one another.

Sherman studied journalism at the University of Wisconsin. He joined the Tulsa World in 1983, holding a variety of editing positions, including assistant city editor and night editor. As night editor, he also appeared nightly on the evening news on channel 8 to preview the next day's newspaper.

In 2000, when the Tulsa World's religion writer resigned, Bill applied for the position. It was an unusual move from a management level position

to one with less prestige in the newspaper business. Bill explains that he wanted to get back to more basic journalism. In addition, he was interested in religion and has enjoyed the opportunity to be in the various communities and to meet people.

A Christian, Bill is a graduate of the Rhema Bible Training Center. He is married to Harrio. They have six children and 11 grandchildren.

The Russell Bennett Faith and Courage Award is named for the founder of Tulsa Interfaith Alliance. Reverend Bennett was the pastor of Fellowship Congregational Church UCC for 38 years before his death in 2006.

### The Interfaith Alliance

*Founded in 1994, The Interfaith Alliance (TIA) has grown into a national grassroots organization of 150,000+ individuals of faith and goodwill drawn from more than 75 different religious traditions or beliefs with a cyber-network of 10,000 activists and 75 local activist groups. Dedicated to promoting mutual respect, cooperation and civility, TIA strives to promote religion as a positive and healing force in the life of the nation.*

## Embryonic Stem Cell Research Focus of State and National Legislation

On March 10th, President Barak Obama signed an Executive Order approving federal funding of research projects using human embryos. In signing the order, President Obama said, "For the past 8 years, the authority of the Department of Health and Human Services, including the National Institutes of Health (NIH), to fund and conduct human embryonic stem cell research has been limited by Presidential actions. The purpose of this order is to remove these limitations on scientific inquiry, to expand NIH support for the exploration of human stem cell research, and in so doing to enhance the contribution of America's scientists to important new discoveries and new therapies for the benefit of humankind." Republicans like Nancy Reagan have praised President Obama's signing of this Executive Order.

Responding to this action, on March 12th, the

Oklahoma House of Representatives approved legislation that would make it illegal in Oklahoma to allow the destruction of "unborn children." House Bill 1326, by state Rep. Mike Reynolds, makes it illegal for any Oklahoma business to conduct research that would kill a human embryo. The bill passed by 82-6 vote, and now proceeds to the state Senate.

The Oklahoma embryonic stem cell legislation is an extension of the national abortion debate that pits those doing scientific research with human embryos against those who object based on their religious beliefs. The Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation is one of the leading research organizations in the country, and is doing cutting-edge research on AIDS and Parkinson's Disease. HB 1326 will negatively affect its ability to do such research.



### The 46,000,000 Minority

A new study recently revealed that 15% of Americans consider themselves 'nonreligious,' up from 8% in 1990.

As a point of comparison, 1.4% of America is Mormon. Mitt Romney aside, there is a long history of Mormons serving as members of Congress and in other high-ranking government positions, including the current Senate Majority Leader. And yet, a group more than 10 times as large has but one Congressional representative. The stigma surrounding the nonreligious in politics is vast and deep.

When secular organizations do speak out, such as the billboard recently put up by Humanists of Idaho, they are portrayed as un-American bullies. The nonreligious are often reduced to advocating for themselves through the judicial system because of the public derision they face.

It is high time for non-religious Americans to have more of a voice in the political process. The early statements coming from the White House Office of Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships are a good start, but the inclusion of atheist, agnostic, humanist and similarly non-theist groups is far from complete.

Reprinted from <http://stateofbelief.com/blog/?p=545>.

Read the details of the study at <http://www.americanreligionsurvey-aris.org/>

## President Obama Appoints Director of the White House Council for Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships

National Interfaith Alliance President, Rev. Dr. C. Welton Gaddy, issued the following statement in response to the pending appointment of Josh DuBois as head of the White House Council for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. The office was previously known in the Bush Administration as the Office of Faith-Based and Community Initiatives. Rev. Gaddy has been a leading critic of the office and has repeatedly called for shutting it down.

I congratulate Josh Dubois on his

pending appointment as director of the Council for Faith Based and Neighborhood Partnerships. He is an impressive, compassionate advocate with whom I have had several opportunities to meet throughout the electoral campaign and the work of President Obama's transition team.

In every conversation with senior officials on the transition team I have conveyed my preference for the faith based office to be eliminated and a community based office established to help the weakest, poorest, and neediest people in our nation. However, now that a decision has been made to establish and staff another faith based office, the question remains whether or not a change in the name of the office as organized by the Bush Administration will reflect substantive change in the policies of the Obama Administration that advocates for religious liberty find acceptable.

I am cautiously optimistic regarding the

new council. The transition team has been more than willing to listen to the problems of the prior office and consider a different approach for the new office. In recent conversations, senior transition officials assured me of President Obama's interest in establishing a council that protects religious freedom and assures constitutional separation between the institutions of religion and government.

Toward that end, assurances were offered that members of the new council would include people from different professions and not be limited to religious leaders. I await a final announcement that reflects these assurances.

Reprinted from [www.interfaithalliance.org](http://www.interfaithalliance.org).

**Tulsa Interfaith Alliance**

**PLEASE JOIN US!**

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_____	Supporter	\$100 - \$449
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After completing form, please send with your check to:

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Tulsa, OK 74153-0654

7020 South Yale, Suite 100

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## YOUTH LEADERSHIP WEEKEND IN OKLAHOMA CITY, MAY 29-31 SPONSORED BY INTERFAITH ALLIANCE.

LEADD (Leadership Education Advancing Democracy and Diversity) is an innovative program for high school students developed by members of the Interfaith Alliance and a dedicated group of volunteers who have acted as founders, curriculum planners, teachers and workshop leaders since 2005. Students who attend either the weeklong or weekend versions of LEADD become immersed in the history of the First Amendment, particularly its disestablishment and free exercise clauses, America's bedrock and unique devotion to

religious liberty, the hope in and vision for creating a truly pluralistic American society, and current policy, legislative and legal issues regarding religious freedom.

Weekend LEADD spans 47 hours from 5:00 p.m. on Friday to 4:00 p.m. on Sunday. It is held in a modestly priced conference center or retreat house and the fee covers lodging, meals, snacks, book bags, and learning supplies. Faculty and resident counselors are carefully chosen.

The first Weekend LEADD in 2009 will be held in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, May 29-31st. The fee will be announced soon. Watch for announcements and details here

<http://www.weleadd.org/>

or contact LEADD Director, Denise Davidoff, at

[ddavidoff@interfaithalliance.org](mailto:ddavidoff@interfaithalliance.org).