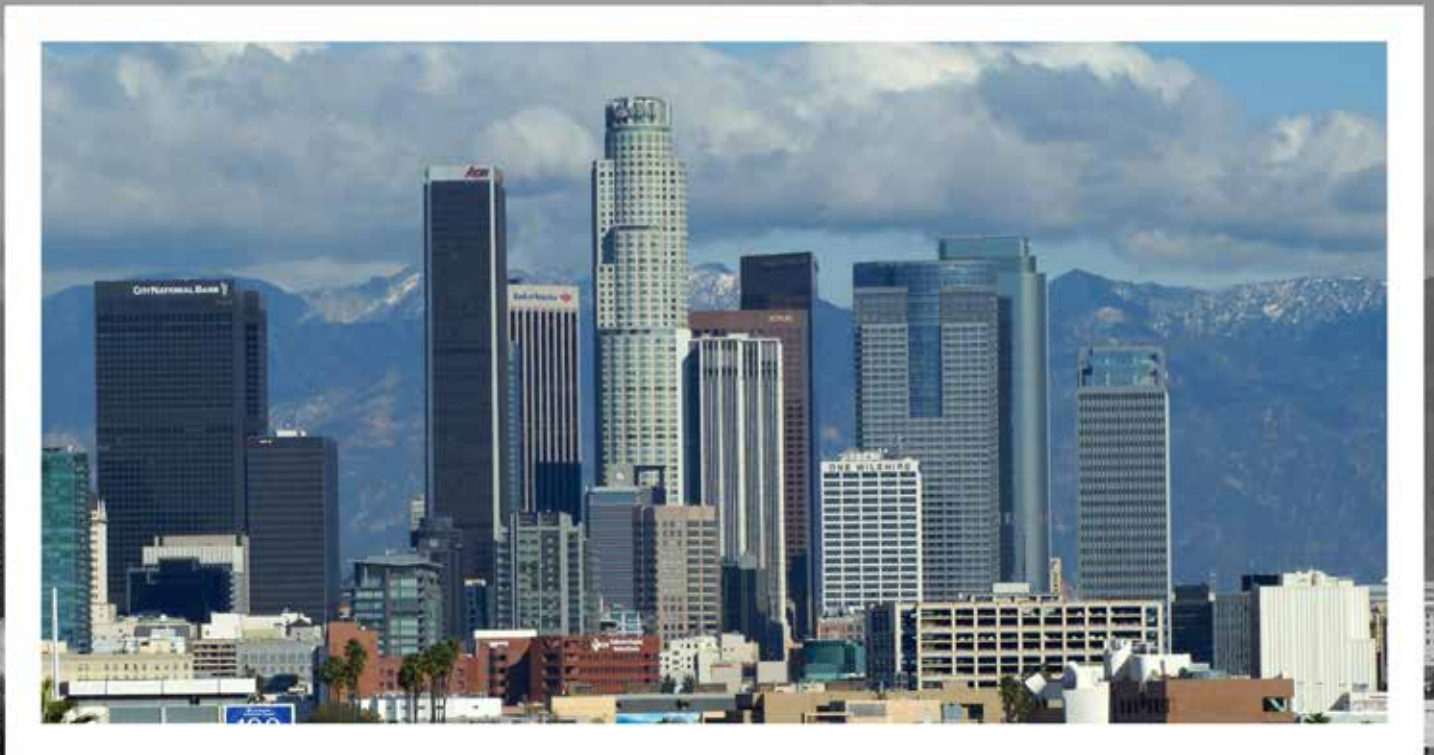


Future50

Identifying the rising generation of
leaders inspired by faith in Los Angeles

Honoring the work of the Interreligious
Council of Southern California



USCDornsife
*Center for Religion
and Civic Culture*

Contents

3	Overview
6	Reflections from the Interreligious Council of Southern California
8	About Future50
10	About the Interreligious Council of Los Angeles
12	About the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture
13	Cohort Member Profiles
63	Index of Cohort Members
65	Contact info for CRCC

Overview

Future50

Los Angeles is one of the most religiously distinct and diverse cities in the world. Every faith that exists can be found here, and several religious movements even trace their roots to this area. Moreover, the spiritual landscape of Greater Los Angeles is in constant motion. There are almost 10,000 congregations in L.A. County alone, and 53 percent of the population is affiliated with a religious institution. This could be a source of great tension, as it is in many other parts of the world. In Los Angeles, however, religious pluralism is a tie that binds our diverse populations together.

The individuals profiled in this report are on the leading edge of the work that bridges divides, builds communities and brings our region together. They include young congregational leaders, non-profit professionals, volunteers, board members, organizers, artists and activists. Their passions are as varied as their institutional homes, but they are knit together by the idea that their faith can inspire them to do great things for the communities in which they live, work and worship.

These emerging leaders also represent the evolving face of religious pluralism and, to some degree, of religious leadership in Los Angeles. Much has changed since 1969, when the Interreligious Council of Southern California (IRC) was established as a pioneering coalition of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, with the goal of fostering interfaith dialogue. Just as IRC has grown to include an array of religious traditions and expressions that is more representative of current-day Southern California, the diverse Future50 cohort comprises the leaders of today and tomorrow for the Los Angeles region.

It is hard to overstate how much Los Angeles has changed in the last 45 years. Interreligious cooperation is becoming the norm among the Millennial generation. They grew up in a much more diverse environment, having close friends and neighbors who were as likely to be of another cultural/ethnic/gender/faith group as they were to be similar to themselves. Further, their experience of congregational membership, denominational affiliation and religious authority has changed as well. Yet the religious and spiritual lives of many members of this generation, and the source of their inspiration for making the world better, can be traced back for many to their faith traditions.

This suggests that there has been a sea change in how people understand, articulate and live their religion in the public sphere. Interacting with people who are “other” seems more natural especially among young people. This, in turn, suggests that we are looking at the beginning of a new way of doing “interfaith,” or perhaps more accurately, “multifaith” work.

A common thread running through the statements of Future50 cohort members can be summed up in one simple word—abundance. Rather than trying to hang on to their piece of the pie, these individuals seek to multiply what is available and uncover resources that can be shared beyond themselves.

This way of working needs to be nurtured so that it can grow into its full potential, not just for its own sake, but rather so that the larger region (and every region connected to this most global of metropolises) can benefit from the material and spiritual wealth that all faith groups can provide.

Thus the Future50 project is an attempt to highlight the coming wave of faith-inspired leaders who will help to shape the Los Angeles religious landscape for the next half-century, just as the Interreligious Council of Southern California has shaped this

landscape over the previous one. In the coming months, Future50 cohort members and IRC will join together to build connections within the group, and also between current IRC members and the communities represented by this cohort. This project aspires to strengthen relationships and cooperation between these leaders, and to forge a bond between a seasoned generation and an emerging one that together will blaze a new, innovative path for Los Angeles.

It should be noted that this list is not at all complete. There is a far larger talent pool in this arena than we were able to uncover through the application process for the Future50 cohort. And in this brief report we could not profile everyone who applied. But we know that the work these young leaders—and many others like them—will undertake in the coming years will attract the attention they deserve. It should also be noted that Future50 has chosen individuals based on their own efforts, and not necessarily as a reflection or endorsement of the overall work of the organization in which they are currently situated.

We hope that this list will not only be of use to the leaders of faith communities, but also serve as an inspiration for those seeking creative ways to link their faith with social change for the betterment of all.

Brie Loskota, Managing Director, USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture, Future50 Project Director

Richard Flory, Director of Research, USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture.

Reflections from the Interreligious Council of Southern California

The Interreligious Council of Southern California is pleased to partner with the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture on this groundbreaking project to identify the rising generation of leaders who are inspired by their faith to work for the betterment of all Angelenos—carrying on the legacy and enduring spirit of IRC's decades of service.

IRC undertook three years of reflection and preparation prior to launching this project to assess, first, what core values and insights we could transmit to a new generation of faith-based leaders and, second, what key issues face Southern California in these times of rapid religious and social change. The array of challenges ahead is complex, but now more than ever before, a commitment to promoting vibrant, civic-minded religious pluralism is the indispensable quality we seek in those who will take up our mantle.

It is clear that Millennials view religion from a perspective that is radically distinct from the one that shaped IRC at its founding in 1969. Because religious authority and leadership is no longer a top-down affair in many contexts, hierarchical faith traditions are finding that they must recalibrate internal structures to achieve greater balance. Meanwhile, brick-and-mortar institutions have given way to digitally networked associations that are more responsive to the spiritual needs of a generation that is evolving at a much faster pace than the generations that came before it.

While all faith traditions invest energy and resources in young people, some do not confer actual leadership roles until much later in life. These differences could be a source of misunderstanding between seasoned faith leaders and a younger generation that sees the world through an entirely different lens. But as we look to the coming 50 years, we are confident that our efforts to build mentorship opportunities with the individuals in the Future50 cohort

will open creative new ways in which our region's unparalleled diversity of generations, religious traditions and global cultures can evolve together harmoniously well into the 21st century.

Our intention therefore is to lay the groundwork for ongoing, fruitful interactions between IRC's leadership and members of the Future50 cohort, and between individual cohort members, who collectively represent a large portion of the L.A. mosaic. We hope that every Angeleno will reap some benefit from this project for many decades to come.

Robert Williams, Vice President for Communication, Interreligious Council of Southern California (Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles)

Judy Gilliland, a past president of the Interreligious Council of Southern California and a public affairs representative of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, co-chairs the IRC Future50 initiative with Williams.

About Future50

The Interreligious Council of Los Angeles (IRC) and the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (CRCC) partnered to create a project celebrating IRC's nearly half-century of contributions to the dynamic religious pluralism of Southern California.

This project, Future50, celebrates IRC's work by indentifying and highlighting emerging faith leaders (aged 24-35) committed to the values of IRC and to building a better region for all.

In addition, IRC and CRCC selected an honorary advisory board comprised of outstanding mid-career leaders motivated by faith whose work is making an impact in Los Angeles. These Honorary Advisory Board members aided in the recruitment of applicants to Future50. The application was made publically available on the CRCC website and widely circulated to ensure a diverse application pool.

Staff, advisors, and others involved in Future50 were encouraged to use their networks and associations in the recruiting process. As a result, many of those who applied for and were eventually selected to participate in the Future50 cohort have connections to the leadership of this project.

The applications were reviewed by IRC and CRCC, as well as several of the honorary advisory board members.

The final Future50 cohort was selected based on the overall strength of their applications, their demonstrated commitment to religious pluralism and civic engagement, and their potential for future impact in these areas.

Following the release of this report, IRC has created a program to engage Future50 cohort members with opportunities for shared learning, networking and mentoring.

Future50 would like to thank the following members of the Honorary Advisory Board for their support and efforts on behalf of the project:

Rabbi Sharon Brous, Founding Rabbi, IKAR, Los Angeles

The Rev. Francisco Garcia, Director of Peace and Justice,
All Saints Church, Pasadena

Steve Park, Board Member, Korean American Federation of
North Los Angeles Council

Nadia Roumani, Co-Founder & Director, American Muslim
Civic Leadership Institute

Joumana Silyan-Saba, Senior Human Relations Analyst,
Los Angeles City Human Relations Commission

The Rev. Dr. Najuma Smith-Pollard, Program Manager,
Cecil Murray Center for Community Engagement

Varun Soni, Dean of Religious Life, USC

Michael Stanley, Bishop, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day
Saints, Santa Clarita

Najeeba Syeed-Miller, Assistant Professor of Interreligious
Education, Claremont School of Theology

The Rev. Dr. Neil Thomas, Senior Pastor, Founders
Metropolitan Community Church, Los Angeles

About the Interreligious Council of Southern California (irc-socal.org)

The Interreligious Council of Southern California is a unique model of interreligious cooperation and collaboration made possible by the rich and diverse population of the region. Founded in 1969 as a conventional interfaith coalition of Protestants, Catholics and Jews, it soon welcomed the membership of the Muslim Community.

Today the Interreligious Council fulfills the promise of its name with the participation of all of the major religions of the world. Official delegates of the member organizations take part in the planning, decision making and implementation of all programs of the Council.

Members of the Interreligious Council

Armenian Apostolic Church - Western Diocese
Bahai Communities of the Greater Los Angeles Area
Board of Rabbis of Southern California
Buddhist Union of Southern California
The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints
Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles
International Society for Krishna Consciousness
Islamic Center of Southern California
Religious Society of Friends (Quakers)
Roman Catholic Archdiocese of Los Angeles
Sikh Council of Southern California
Southern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
Southern California Ecumenical Council
Vedanta Society of Southern California

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Ravi Verma
Canon Robert Williams
Ilker Yildiz

About the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture (crcc.usc.edu)

The Center for Religion and Civic Culture at USC was founded in 1996 to create, translate and disseminate scholarship on the civic role of religion in a globalizing world. CRCC engages scholars and builds communities in Los Angeles and around the globe. Its innovative partnerships link academics and the faith community to empower emerging leaders through programs like the Passing the Mantle Clergy and Lay Leadership Institute, for African–American church leaders, and the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute.

Since its inception, the Center has managed over \$30 million in grant-funded research from corporations, foundations and government agencies. In 2002, CRCC was recognized as a Pew Center of Excellence, one of ten university-based research centers. Currently, the Center houses more than 20 research initiatives on topics such as Pentecostal and charismatic Christianity, the transmission of religious values across generations, faith-based non-governmental organizations, and the connection between spirituality and social transformation.

CRCC is part of the Dana and David Dornsife College of Letters, Arts and Sciences at USC.



Sumaya Abubaker

Altadena

Muslim

Cofounder

Rahma Network

Sumaya is a co-founder of the Rahma Network, an organization established to educate Muslim communities on how to prevent and respond to sexual violence and abuse. She also serves as project manager for the USC Center for Religion and Civic Culture. Prior to joining CRCC, she worked for Wells Fargo Bank, the Council for Islamic Education and The Minaret magazine. She has spent many years on the board of ELEV8, a nonprofit designed to empower youth with the tools to engage in activism through the arts. She received her Bachelor's degree from the University of California, Los Angeles, where she studied international development with a specialization in the Middle East/North Africa and sub-Saharan Africa. Sumaya was a fellow of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, a program that engages diverse groups of Muslim and Jewish Angelenos in an innovative community-building process of intra- and inter-faith education and reflection, leadership training and civic engagement.

“The inspiration for my activism came mainly from my parents—first-generation Yemeni immigrants who provided support, resources and assistance whenever and to whomever they could. They always emphasized to me that their work on behalf of others reflected values and a way of life rooted in our faith.”

“I have learned the vital importance of creating networks of shared knowledge between faith-based and interfaith communities, on the one hand, and secular, business and governmental entities on the other.”

“I was motivated to do this work by my love for my community and my firm belief that the rising epidemic of sexual violence can be stemmed through helping communities break through their discomfort with traditionally taboo topics.”

Omar Ahmed

Upland

Muslim

President

Impact Southern
California



“One of the issues that concerned us was homelessness, so we began a weekly feeding program in 2010. Four and a half years and around six thousand meals later, we recently concluded our weekly homeless feeding project in order to pursue direct housing initiatives.”

“I am inspired by the following verse from the Quran in which God states, People, we have made you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should recognize one another (49:14). This verse speaks to the diversity of humanity and is the basis for my understanding of religious pluralism.”

“In this multi-cultural and pluralistic world, I believe that we must get to know one another and work with one another for the common good of everyone, especially those who are marginalized and socially excluded within our society.”

Omar Ahmed is the president and co-founder of Impact Southern California. The mission of Impact is to provide community outreach, education and opportunities for collaborative partnerships in order to engage in service. In addition to his work with Impact, Omar is the co-founder of M&Ms, an intimate fellowship group of Methodists and Muslims that meets monthly to bond over a shared meal and discuss issues related to faith and community. Omar also serves on the board of the Islamic Center of the Inland Empire and the advisory council of the UMMA Community Clinic. He resides in Southern California with his wife and two children.

(www.impactsocial.com)



Cullen Armet

Pasadena

Christian

Program Coordinator

Emergency Network
of Los Angeles

Cullen has served as the program coordinator for the Emergency Network of Los Angeles (ENLA) since 2011. ENLA is the L.A. County VOAD (Voluntary Agencies Active in Disaster), the local chapter of National VOAD. In his time with ENLA, he has helped to increase the organization's visibility in the operational area of Los Angeles County by creating working relationships between governmental agencies, volunteer groups, businesses, non-profits and other community stakeholders to unify disaster response efforts. He is continually implementing new outreach strategies to recruit and retain members and partners by implementing technological solutions, providing trainings and presentations and galvanizing existing coalitions.

Cullen also serves as an agency representative for a contracted project with L.A. County Department of Public Health, UCLA and the RAND Corporation to establish a local community resilience program (LACCCR Project: www.laresilience.org). Cullen was selected to be a part of a team to represent Los Angeles in the National Leadership Academy for Public Health in 2013. He graduated from the College of William and Mary in Virginia in 2009 with a B.A. in international studies. (www.enla.org)

“The faith-based community has an obvious role to play in any disaster since the very nature of their business is helping others and supporting those in need.”

“Disasters affect every group the same regardless of race, religion or economic status, so emergency preparedness is a neutral topic that can bring together many groups.”

“When we bring these different faith groups together to discuss disaster response and recovery, we try to focus on what they all have in common. It is a beautiful thing to see all these distinct groups working together to share best practices and solve common problems.”

Eden Banarie

Los Angeles

Jewish

Youth Engagement
Coordinator

Jewish World Watch



“While the work we do directly influences people on the other side of the world, my work here also impacts the hundreds of students I work with, educating them about Jewish World Watch, genocide and what they can do to make a difference. The middle school, high school and university students I work with become young leaders, organizing their peers to be advocates for causes they care about, gaining community-building skills, confidently raising money and awareness and therefore making change.”

“As the granddaughter of a survivor of the Holocaust, I know first-hand from my grandmother’s stories the evils that lack of respect for harmony and pluralism can cause. While the work I do focuses on modern genocide, here in Los Angeles, there is also an incredible need to embrace and celebrate religious pluralism, as it adds richness to all of our lives.”

Eden Banarie has been involved in civic life since she ran for secretary of her 4th grade class by singing her election speech to the tune of a popular song. She lost the election, but not her will to make a difference in our world. After experiencing first-hand the need for qualified professionals in the nonprofit field, she earned her B.A. in business and M.B.A. in nonprofit management from American Jewish University. In graduate school, at a university deeply rooted in Jewish values, only 60 percent of her classmates were Jewish. There she was introduced to the rich variety of faith-based organizations throughout Los Angeles and to the importance of connectivity and collaboration. She now works as Youth Engagement Coordinator at Jewish World Watch (JWW), a leading organization in the fight against modern genocide and mass atrocities. While JWW began as a coalition of synagogues and other Jewish institutions fighting genocide with remembrance of the Holocaust, it has grown into a coalition of faith-based organizations and political institutions of all types, including other groups who have historically been targeted for genocide. Her work to activate young, enthusiastic students and teach them how not to stand idly by while injustice occurs inspires her on a daily basis.

(www.jww.org)



Sarah Bassin

Culver City
Reform Jewish
Assistant Rabbi
Temple Emanuel

Rabbi Sarah Bassin starts her new role as assistant rabbi at Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills with a passion for bringing the entrepreneurial start-up spirit to the temple's core religious institutions. For the past three years, Sarah served as the executive director of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change.

In 2013, under Sarah's leadership, NewGround's high school leadership program was named California's 2013 Faith-Based Organization of the Year by Governor Jerry Brown. Prior to joining NewGround, she served as the program manager at the Center for Muslim-Jewish Engagement at the University of Southern California and as a program professional at Princeton University's Center for Jewish Life.

She graduated summa cum laude from Lafayette College with a B.A. in religion and history. She received her rabbinic ordination from Hebrew Union College. Sarah currently sits on the advisory board of the Southern California Council for the Parliament of World Religions and on the steering committee of LimmudLA, a pluralistic Jewish learning community. In joining Temple Emanuel of Beverly Hills as the assistant rabbi in July 2014, she transitioned from executive director to the board of NewGround.

(www.tebh.org)

"I remember specifically thinking about the concept of forgiveness at a young age and how Jesus inspired my Catholic family members to emulate his magnanimous nature. It caused me to want to know what Judaism said about forgiveness and the role of Yom Kippur in our own tradition. I can say without hesitation that I am a better Jew today because of the interfaith encounters I had at a young age and that I intentionally sought out as an adult."

"Professionally, my rabbinic training and rabbinate have been driven by a commitment to strengthen the Jewish community's appreciation of religious pluralism – both internal to the tradition and external with other faith communities."

Dawnesha Beaver

Los Angeles

Baptist

Director of
Special Projects

Mt. Calvary Baptist Church



“Indisputably, community engagement is not optional but essential... For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve...(Mk 10:44-45) Just as the Son of Man came to serve and meet the needs of God’s people, I also work diligently in my local church and community in the follow-ship of Jesus Christ.”

“Both in ancient and contemporary times, history tells the story of the immense problems caused by religious intolerance and the ongoing solutions to overcome them.”

“Only through my commitment to religious pluralism, civic engagement, leadership development, the acquisition of interpersonal skills and community involvement will I be able to effect change in the lives of the people that I have been called to serve.”

(www.newmtcalvary.org)

Min. Dawnesha K. Beaver is a public health researcher and faith-based public health advocate. She holds a B.A. in psychology from California State University, Los Angeles in addition to being a graduate of Charles Drew University of Medicine and Science, summa cum laude, with a Master’s degree in urban public health. Presently, she is pursuing a Master’s degree in theology with an emphasis in youth, family and culture at Fuller Theological Seminary.

Dawnesha is interested in the role of research and education in addressing public health care disparities among vulnerable and underserved populations. For over three years, she has served as director of special projects and community initiatives at New Mt. Calvary Missionary Baptist Church, Los Angeles. In this capacity, she works directly with civic, community and lay leaders to develop culturally appropriate and relevant faith-based strategies to improve social service outcomes for congregants and the community at large. She also works at Children’s Hospital Los Angeles as a project coordinator on a faith-based public health partnership to address diabetes and obesity in the African-American community. Her motto is “And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him” (Col 3:23).

Yvonne Chang

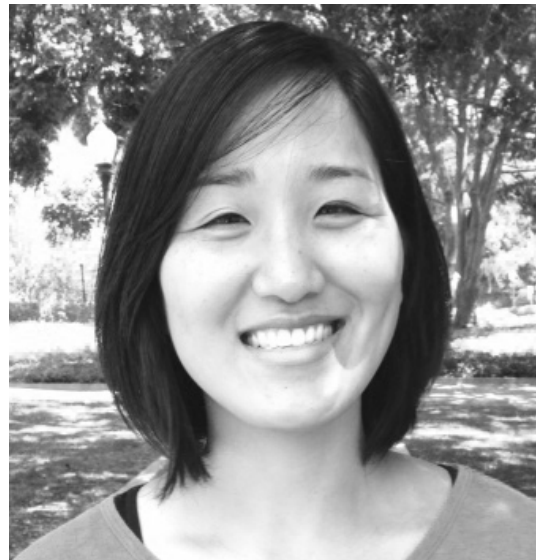
Santa Monica

Presbyterian

Associate Pastor

University

Presbyterian Church



“Over the past seven years I have had the privilege of guiding young adults on their faith journey. I love working with college students as they discover their passions and see that they can make a difference in the world.”

“I feel blessed and grateful to live in a nation that has as its first amendment the protection of the freedom of religion as I pursue my faith and as I learn more about other religions. I am thankful for the understanding that I have gained from friends in other faiths and look forward to more learning and growth together.”

An Old Testament course at the University of Virginia changed the course of Yvonne's life as she discovered a love for the study of religion. She graduated with a major in religious studies with a primary focus on Christianity and secondary focus on Eastern religions. She came to Los Angeles after graduating from Princeton Theological Seminary (M.Div. '07) to work as the college ministry director at University Presbyterian Church.

Yvonne's interfaith work includes her experience working as a hospital chaplain at UCLA in the summer of 2010 and serving as a board member at the University Religious Conference representing the Presbytery of the Pacific since fall 2010. She was ordained as minister in the Presbyterian Church in June 2013. In her spare time she enjoys reading and catching up with friends over coffee.

(www.upcla.org)



Jason Chu

Pasadena

Interdenominational
Christian

Hip-Hop Artist

AAsian-American hip-hop artist Jason Chu is on a mission to speak hope and healing in a broken world. He tells stories of a generation wrestling with fear and joy, greed and hope, hurt and healing.

Jason has been covered by the *Huffington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, *China Daily*, *Angry Asian Man*, *INHERITANCE* magazine and other outlets.

He has performed at venues like Tuesday Night Cafe and 626 Night Market (L.A.), Section 6 (Beijing); college events (UMass-Amherst, NYU, UW-Madison, etc.); and conferences like Listening to the Silence (Stanford), Urbana 2012 and more.

(www.jasonchumusic.com)

“As a full-time hip-hop artist, I have devoted my career to creating music and videos that encourage a culture of respect and care. Through my art, I aim to initiate and guide discussion around issues like mental health, bullying and ethnicity in media.”

“Through my seminary training, I grew deeply convinced of the need to clearly establish a foundation for people of different faith traditions to meet and honestly discuss our shared tenets of faith as well as that which distinguishes our doctrine and praxis from each other.”

Liza Colenzo

Alhambra

Roman Catholic and
Hare Krishna

American Sign
Language Activist



“Most of my fondest childhood memories involved volunteering with my parents for different organizations. My parents were superior role models. They were grounded in Roman Catholicism and believed in putting their faith into action, so I didn’t just learn about spirituality and service—I lived it.”

“I believe that we human beings, regardless of our color, ethnicity or religion, need each other, and if we truly band together the force of good that will come out this union will be able to overcome any evil thrown our way.”

Liza T. Colenzo grew up in the San Gabriel Valley and spent most of her childhood volunteering for non-profit and for profit organizations. Liza received her secondary education at San Marino High School in San Marino, California. She went on to pursue her studies at the University of the Pacific in Stockton, California and obtained a B.A. in psychology. Throughout her educational career, Liza divided her time between her interests as a student, intercollegiate athlete and philanthropist. Liza won awards for her sportsmanship, leadership and athleticism as well as national recognition from the White House for her philanthropic dedication. Soon after completing her studies, Liza took a position in Beverly Hills as a human resources assistant for the world’s leading luxury retailer. In her fascinating job, Liza oversees all the daily operations for the human resources office at Barney’s. Her hobbies are exploring new places, cooking vegetarian dishes, yoga and interfaith dialogue. She is deeply passionate about communicating American Sign Language with the deaf and hard-of-hearing community and bridging the gap with the hearing and deaf worlds.



McKenzie Eggers

Los Angeles

The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Director of Public Affairs

Los Angeles Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Following her studies in psychology at the University of Utah, McKenzie Eggers lived in France and Switzerland for 18 months as a missionary for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. Through this experience she developed a deeper connection to her own religion as well as a great appreciation for the beauty found in all faiths. McKenzie moved to Los Angeles in 2009 and has been in love with the city and its diversity ever since. She has been involved in many community service events hosted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, including Mormon Helping Hands events for the past five years. Currently, McKenzie serves as the director of public affairs for Mormon congregations in the Los Angeles region. She is also pursuing a career in interior design, with a focus on special populations.

(www.facebook.com/LosAngelesStakeCenter)

“I was raised by very service-oriented parents, who instilled in me a love for getting involved with my community. Growing up we regularly helped at soup kitchens, city clean-ups and smaller volunteer efforts for neighbors in need. I’m grateful for the sense of civic responsibility modeled by my parents, and I plan on continuing in this legacy of volunteering.”

“In the cacophony of discussion and disagreement, there must also be respect and learning. Recognizing there is a common thread, we can also accept that there is beauty in contrasting ideas, and hopefully learn something about ourselves in the process.”

Shawn Evelyn

Los Angeles

Episcopalian

Chair, Program Group of
Youth/Young Adult Ministries

Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles



“Ministry can mean a lot of things, but it doesn’t require much more than you already have. Giving of your time when you can, sharing what you can and supporting others makes a world of difference. Being a conduit for growth opportunities is not only something I enjoy but something that has been and will continue to be deeply fulfilling to me.”

“Although Angelenos have different faiths we are still part of an overall community. The concept that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts makes me believe that all our paths eventually intersect, which is necessary for a peaceful society. I embrace the concept of religious pluralism because diversity allows us to explore what makes each of us special. To affirm my commitment to religious pluralism, I work on making the connections to allow youth and young adults to have positive encounters with individuals of different faiths.”

Shawn Evelyn works with and for youth and young adults at the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles. He is the current chair of the Program Group on Youth and Young Adult Ministries, for which he has actively participated for many years. He has served with the Diocese of Los Angeles for many years in various programs and has also participated in national church events and ministries. Shawn is the first and current recipient of the Diocese of Los Angeles Bishop's award for service, presented at 2013 Diocesan Convention. Shawn is also currently on the executive council for the 2015 General Convention Committee on Science, Technology and Faith. As a youth he participated in events and programming that inspired his continued involvement in leadership and allowed him to help mold others leaders. He is a willing volunteer and has great energy and enthusiasm. Shawn always encourages others to take part and is not afraid to try new experiences. He has long participated in the life of local parishes, where he not only preaches but serves on the altar, assisting in the celebration of services on a regular basis.

(www.ladiocese.org)



Malka Fenyvesi

Los Angeles

Jewish

Managing Director

Avi Schaefer Fund

Malka Haya Fenyvesi is the managing director of the Avi Schaefer Fund, dedicated to furthering Avi's values of empathy, mutual respect and active listening. Malka is an educator, facilitator and trainer. She leads workshops throughout the U.S. on topics ranging from facilitation, conflict resolution, interfaith dialogue, pluralism and the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Her specialties include problem-solving, curriculum and program development, facilitation and team-building.

She is the co-founder of NewGround: A Muslim Jewish Partnership for Change. Malka has an M.S. in conflict analysis and resolution from George Mason University's Institute for Conflict Analysis and Resolution (ICAR). In June 2008, Malka was honored to be a delegate on a citizen diplomacy trip to Syria and Egypt that was funded by the State Department and led by the National Peace Foundation and Islamic Society of North America. In addition, she has participated in a number of local and national coalitions and interfaith efforts to bring a peaceful and just resolution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and has traveled throughout Israel and the Palestinian territories. Previously Malka worked for the Center for Nonprofit Management, Progressive Jewish Alliance and Search for Common Ground.

(www.avischaefer.org)

“As a teenager, my civic engagement experience began with testifying before local and state government assemblies as an advocate for environmental protections and saving the last old-growth forests in the Mid Atlantic. This experience sparked a commitment in me both to understand and be active in the issues impacting me and the broader communities.”

“The roots of my commitment to civic engagement are my values of inclusion, mutual respect, reciprocity, social transformation and authentic coexistence. My commitment to religious pluralism is entangled with Auschwitz, the challenges of modern day Hungary and Israel-Palestine, refugee camps, Maslow’s hierarchy of basic human needs, meditating, and multi-layer narratives.”

Nancy Frausto

Episcopalian

Associate Rector and
Priest-in-Charge

St. Mary's Church and
Trinity Episcopal Church



“Many of the youth I led are now college students dedicated to making a difference in their own communities by partnering with different agencies who promote a just system where the dignity of every human being is honored and respected.”

“My commitment to religious pluralism has emerged over the last couple of years. In all honesty this was not something I gave much thought to until I heard someone I considered a mentor speak about the irrelevance of other faiths.”

“I often think back to that day and wonder why I did not speak up. Why was I afraid to challenge his bigotry? I never want to repeat that mistake. That is the main reason why I am committed to religious pluralism; people of all faiths should be working together as partners for the betterment of humankind.”

Nancy Frausto is the Diocese of Los Angeles' first Latina leader who grew up in a Spanish-speaking Episcopal Church and who went on to pursue ordination. She is an Episcopal Church Foundation Fellow and a recipient of the Thomas Cranmer Scholarship for Distinguished Achievement in Liturgical Scholarship. In May 2013, Nancy completed her Diploma in Theology at Bloy House and her Master of Divinity at the School of Theology at Claremont. Growing up in poor neighborhoods as an undocumented child, Nancy experienced firsthand the suffocating pain caused by the racism and classism that still infect this country. It was those experiences of hate that pushed Nancy to seek higher education and make a positive impact in her community. As a young adult, she led a group of young people from her church to serve their community and be conscious of the needs of others. Now, as a clergy person and DACA recipient Nancy continues to work in what she affectionately calls “scrappy churches” in “scrappy neighborhoods.” She is focused on identifying and cultivating the gifts of lay leaders who can minister and serve their communities as advocates of change.

(www.stmarys-la.org)
(www.trinity-la.org)



Todd Gallinger

Claremont

Muslim

Director of Chapter
Development

Council on American
Islamic Relations

Todd Gallinger is an attorney and activist. He currently works as the director of chapter development for the Council on American-Islamic Relations (CAIR), the largest American Muslim civil rights and advocacy group. Todd has a B.A. in religious studies from U.C. Santa Barbara and a J.D. from the George Washington University Law School. He is currently pursuing an M.A. in religion with an emphasis in Islamic leadership at the Claremont School of Theology / Bayan Claremont. Prior to joining CAIR, Todd was in the private practice of law in Southern California. He represented numerous small businesses and non-profit organizations, including religious and interfaith institutions. Todd served on the board of the New Horizons School in Irvine and was president of the CAIR-CA PAC. In 2008 he ran for Irvine City Council, where he received over 22,000 votes and came within 2 percent of all votes cast of his incumbent opponent.

(www.cair.com)

“Religious pluralism is very important to me personally because I am not a member of the same faith tradition as my parents. If I did not live in a place where religious beliefs and ideals could be freely shared, I never would have discovered Islam and a very large part of my life would be missing. I believe that our diversity makes us stronger as a community, by providing different options and opportunities for all our members. A shared commitment to openly sharing knowledge and appreciating differences is vital to our shared search for truth.”

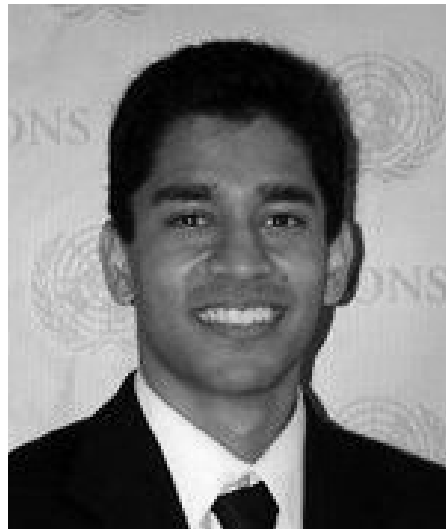
Arin Ghosh

Rancho Palos Verdes

Hindu

Youth Leader

Vedanta International
Cultural Center



“I never realized the importance of interfaith until I was bombarded by ridiculous questions on reincarnation. I was 14 at the time and didn’t understand that the motive of the person asking the question was to belittle my faith and to make fun of me. But things changed when I explained why Hindus believe in reincarnation, why we have an elephant-headed god and why we worship cows. It was knowledge that set the haters free, not a retaliatory strike of hatred.”

“Interfaith work is not a tool for growing America; rather it is a stabilizing force. Through interfaith efforts we can create a culture and society of compassion—one that can overcome fears, hatred, racism and sexism.”

An Alumni of USC, Arin Ghosh has been serving the Southern California interfaith community since the age of 14. In his first speech at the First Congregational Church of Long Beach, at the age of 15, Ghosh likened Gandhi to MLK, discussing how he would get the two great leaders mixed up as a young child, all before a crowd of hundreds on Martin Luther King Day. Ghosh is an entrepreneur who acts as a youth leader in the Southern California Hindu community and is a member since infancy of the Vedanta Society of Southern California. He graduated magna cum laude from the University of Southern California in 2012. He was the recipient of the university’s transfer merit scholarship, and his development of U.S.-India ties was covered by USC News. He has been guided by many USC greats including Rev. Dr. Cecil “Chip” Murray and L.A. interfaith leaders including Rev. Dr. Moira Foxe and Father Alexi Smith.

(www.vedanta.org)



Albert Giang

Pasadena

Episcopalian

Youth Ministry

Episcopal Diocese of
Los Angeles

Albert Giang is an attorney and a retreat leader. He serves on the program group of youth ministry for the Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles, fostering youth and young adult spirituality, community and service throughout the diocese. He has been an active parishioner at All Saints Pasadena, as a small group facilitator and a leader of the college and young adult ministry. In addition to offering retreats on spirituality and visioning, he provides consultation to a variety of organizations from individual parishes to nonprofits.

(www.ladiocese.org)

“In working with friends of different faiths at a local soup kitchen, I was exposed to differences in our respective traditions yet also similarities in our commitment to serving others. I was impressed that the other students had deeply held religious beliefs but were willing to dialogue, engage and find commonality with other perspectives. Indeed, their shared passion for social justice deepened my commitment to the Christian tradition’s call to a life of service.”

“I have a particular interest in the overlap between Buddhist meditation and Christian contemplative practice, and have incorporated theology and practices from a variety of faith traditions into my spiritual retreats, particularly my work with youth and young adults.”

Courtney Gonzales

Culver City

Hare Krishna

Volunteer

New Dwaraka Temple



“Self-awareness, kindness and compassion are not common core standards for education, but they are the most important standards for humanity.”

“Tunnel vision and limited thinking can lead people to act as if their way of serving God is the best way or even the only way. This leads to quarrels and takes us further from our intention: devotional service and sharing respect, gratitude and love with others.”

Gonzales considers teaching elementary school a wonderful honor. She loves helping children develop skills they will use throughout their lives, especially their social skills. She also volunteers for the Bhakti House outreach program, ISKCON's way of welcoming newcomers (teenage through mature). Members and visitors gather on Thursday nights for meditation, discussion and vegetarian dinner. Gonzales manages the email list, welcomes guests, helps with food preparation and clean-up and promotes Bhakti House activities on Facebook and Instagram.

With a co-author, Courtney Gonzales is working on a biography of Aimée Crocker. Crocker was a Victorian heiress (transcontinental railroad money) who was famous in her time for her extravagant parties and so-called exotic spiritual practices. Crocker was a world traveler before jets, a princess, Bohemian, mystic and author best known for her adventures in the Far East, her collection of Buddhas, pearls, tattoos and snakes. Among other things, she helped to establish the first Buddhist yoga colony in New York around the turn of the century, after her extensive travels through India and the Far East.

Caedmon Grace

Glendale

Progressive Christian

Minister of Congregational
Care

Founders Metropolitan
Community Church



“I think working toward pluralism is so important because it respects the integrity of multiple belief systems, which are what make up the quality of our lives. The more people pursuing God and living lives in relationship with God (or not God), the better the world is. It’s important to navigate the places we share, where we differ and support one another in authentic spirituality. My time at Children’s Hospital as a chaplain particularly shaped my commitment to this, because as a chaplain it doesn’t matter what my beliefs are, I am there to provide support to the person in the context of what gives meaning to them.”

(www.mccla.org)

Rev. Caedmon Grace is one of the youngest ordained clergy with the Metropolitan Community Church, a progressive Christian denomination founded by and for the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender community. Having earned an M.Div. from the Claremont School of Theology after undergraduate work in sociology and women’s studies, he is the first in his family to attend and complete college-level studies. Professionally, Caedmon has been responsible for creating programming within the congregational setting and currently works in congregational care, where he recruits, trains and supervises volunteers who carry out meeting the emotional, spiritual and physical needs of the community from a spiritual perspective.

Caedmon co-founded Young Professionals of Founders MCC, a group that builds authentic community and carries out acts of service. He has diverse experience in the mental health field and is currently working on a peer support project with the California Institute for Mental Health. He has a deep passion for designing spiritual retreats and incorporating the arts into spiritual life and worship. As a result of his commitment to a healthy integration of spirituality and sexuality, Caedmon is the editor of a book of religious and spiritual erotica that explores the intersection of our spiritual and sexual identities and experience.



Nathan Graeser

Marina Del Rey

Christian

Community Liaison/Analyst

USC Center for Innovation
and Research on Veterans
and Military Families

After joining the Army National Guard as an Intel Analyst in 2000, Nathan Graeser went to Indiana University, where he obtained his B.A. in criminal justice and a B.S. in policy analysis. After a successful enlisted career in which Nathan experienced the effects of war on his soldiers and unit, he moved to Los Angeles to acquire his Master's degree in divinity at Fuller Theological Seminary. He went on to pursue military social work, obtaining his Master's in social work with a concentration on military community organizing, planning and administration at the University of Southern California.

Currently, he serves as the chaplain at the 1-144th Field Artillery Battalion in Burbank, where he provides religious support, counseling and services to over 400 service-members. Nathan has been recognized for his innovative interfaith ceremonies and community approach to healing as well as his creative integration of holistic spiritual and mental health treatment for veterans facing mortal injury. Nathan currently serves as a community liaison/analyst at the USC Center for Innovation and Research for Veteran and Military Families, where he convenes and coordinates the Los Angeles Veterans Collaborative, consisting of over 200 public and private agencies serving veterans through out L.A. County.

(*cir.usc.edu*)

"I conducted numerous death notifications for families who lost their soldiers, offering hope and peace to them in their grief. This role solidified my commitment to serve people on all levels of their humanity—spiritual, emotional and physical."

"A common misconception about religious pluralism is that everyone must believe the same thing in order to live alongside other religions. I find this to be terribly unhelpful. This approach to religious pluralism reminds me of a time in Thailand when we asked some elementary school children to paint a wall with us in town. We mixed hundreds of colors, but at the end of the day the walls were all brown and black. They had blurred all the colors into each other. Instead my approach to religious pluralism emphasizes each of the colors."

Adam Greenwald

Los Angeles

Jewish

Director of the Miller
Introduction to Judaism
Program

American Jewish University



“I am most proud of my role, during my tenure as the Revson Rabbinic Fellow at IKAR, in helping to lead our participation in LA Voice’s successful campaign to change LAPD regulations regarding the impound of vehicles driven by undocumented drivers. This major, city-wide interfaith campaign taught me the power of communities of faith moving together with resolve.”

“In my current work with Jews of all religious and cultural backgrounds, as well as non-Jews who are sharing their lives with Jews in interfaith relationships, my commitment to denominational pluralism and creating safe space for people from both within and outside of my tradition of origin is constantly being tested. I feel that this work strengthens my commitment to religious pluralism and the pursuit of social and personal justice in a multi-faith context.”

(intro.aju.edu)

Rabbi Adam Greenwald is the director of the Louis and Judith Miller Introduction to Judaism Program at American Jewish University, the largest preparatory program for those considering conversion to Judaism in North America. He also serves as a lecturer in education in the AJU’s Graduate School of Education. In 2014, Adam was named one of “America’s Most Inspiring Rabbis” by the Jewish Daily Forward.

Adam previously served as Revson Rabbinic Fellow at IKAR, a Los Angeles congregation often recognized as one of today’s most innovative spiritual communities. He is committed to interfaith work, serving on the Los Angeles Archdiocese’s Priest-Rabbi Dialogue and was selected as a delegate to the Nathan Cummings Foundation’s “Faith in America 2030” summit. Additionally, he has served as a community organizing resident with Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice and as a “Kol Tzedek (Voice of Justice)” fellow with American Jewish World Service. His writing has appeared in the *Washington Post*, and he is a contributor to “S-Blog” at *Sh’ma: A Journal of Jewish Ideas*, the Ziegler School’s “Today’s Torah” and “Jewish Values Online.”

Adam is a graduate of UCLA with a B.A. in history and received his Master’s degree and rabbinic ordination at the Ziegler School of Rabbinic Studies in 2011.



Aziza Hasan

Los Angeles

Muslim

Interim Executive Director

NewGround: A Muslim
Jewish Partnership for
Change

Aziza has extensive experience in program management and coalition building. She has worked with diverse groups to deliver quality programming that developed the skills of its participants in the areas of civic engagement, advocacy, service learning, leadership, conflict transformation and diversity training.

She is the interim executive director of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change. An experienced mediator and conflict resolution practitioner, she has co-facilitated multiple fellowship cohorts. NewGround is a community-building organization that believes in creating, connecting and empowering Muslim and Jewish change-makers.

Supported by the L.A. City Human Relations Commission, NewGround seeks to empower the quiet majority and build resilient relationships that withstand conflict and help build Los Angeles with community projects. A successful model of genuine engagement, NewGround has been featured in *Haaretz*, American Public Media's "Speaking of Faith" with Krista Tippett, the United States Institute for Peace, Arabic Radio and Television, the *Los Angeles Times*, the *Jewish Journal*, and *InFocus*.

(www.muslimsjewishnewground.org)

"I grew up in an interfaith family. My mother is Christian Caucasian and my father Muslim Palestinian. My own personal experience modeled a reality that demonstrated the possibilities of partnership and cooperation. So while others said that Muslims and Christians could not get along, I knew at my core that people who follow these religious traditions can not only tolerate each other, but can thrive side by side."

"I entered the Dome of the Rock and came to the realization that I needed to not allow extremists to speak in my name and in the name of the faith that I hold dear. I could either continue to be angry with religion and allow others to call for destruction or I could be a constructive part of building a better future by translating my faith into action."

Naama Haviv

Los Angeles

Jewish

Assistant Director

Jewish World Watch



“One of the first things that Rabbi Harold M. Schulweis, co-founder of Jewish World Watch, explained to me when I started working here was his understanding of the creation story in Judaism. It was important to remember, he explained, that God didn’t create Abraham—he didn’t create Jews. God created Adam, humanity, and God created Adam from every color of clay on earth.”

“We are all fundamentally interconnected—a mother’s pain across the world is as real as my own. This means that the horror one community suffers in the face of genocide and mass atrocities is no different from the pain we once suffered in Nazi Europe. I quickly realized how lucky I was to work at a faith-based organization that was not driven by dogma but by values, and that those values were truly universal.”

Naama Haviv, who holds an M.A. in comparative genocide from Clark University, joined the Jewish World Watch team as assistant director in April 2007. In this role, Naama directs the organization’s policy and advocacy work to end genocide and mass atrocities, manages JWW’s programs and works with JWW’s international partners to ensure the strength and quality of JWW-supported relief and development projects for Sudan and Congo. Before joining Jewish World Watch, Naama created and managed educational programs for Relief International, connecting students from the U.S. to students in Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Tajikistan and the West Bank. She also held research positions with the Institute for the Study of Genocide, the Middle East Media Research Institute and the American Anti-Slavery Group.

(www.jww.org)



Deana Helmy

Anaheim

Muslim

Director of Programs and Compliance

Mutli-Ethnic Collaborative of Community Agencies

Deana Helmy is the director of programs and compliance at the Multi-Ethnic Collaborative of Community Agencies (MECCA), a non-profit consortium of local ethnic organizations that provide mental health prevention and early intervention services in various ethno-linguistic communities across Orange County. As a native to Southern California, Deana grew up very connected to the Muslim and Arab-American communities, spending most of her years teaching and mentoring youth and sitting on various committees at local mosques and organizations. Her focus was on bridging the gap that many youth felt as a consequence of being born to immigrant parents and living in a society that was foreign to their parents.

Deana graduated from California State University, Fullerton with a Master's degree in counseling and was awarded the university's Academic Excellence Award. Prior to becoming a Titan, Deana graduated summa cum laude with a Bachelor's in psychology and social behavior from the University of California, Irvine. She hopes to use her skills not only to promote positive mindsets and lifestyles, but also to empower her community to examine a new narrative for America: one that is built on mutual respect, understanding and connectedness.

(www.ocmecca.org)

"I felt it was my duty to bridge the gaps between Muslims and people of other faiths. My question was, How can I expect people to understand me and get where I'm coming from if I'm not engaging them in dialogue and giving them an opportunity to get to know me and ask questions? The answer was simply that I couldn't, and if that was my expectation, it was an unrealistic one."

"While there were times that I felt judged for being a Muslim-American, I made a conscious effort to be comfortable being uncomfortable and not take things personally. The quality of dialogue and engagement that has resulted from this mindset has been positively reinforcing and rewarding."

Zachary Hoover

Los Angeles

American Baptist Church

Executive Director

LA Voice



“By training people of faith, with a focus on low income communities and communities of color, we bring the stories and power of those closest to the broken parts of our society into the public debate, ultimately changing the stories we tell about ourselves and our neighbors and winning policies that promote racial justice and opportunity for all.”

“Social change will not happen if I simply represent enough people’s interests. Social change happens when more and more people bring shared interests to those who have power and authority to change conditions to favor equity, racial justice and inclusion—to reflect the world God is dreaming of.”

“If L.A. and California can figure out how to do this, then perhaps we can teach not just our country, but our world. That is the promise of a commitment to religious pluralism.”

Zach Hoover is the executive director of LA Voice. He holds a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard University and a ministry license in the American Baptist Churches of the U.S.A. Zachary also serves as a peer-elected member of the Guiding Council for PICO National Network and as vice-chair of deacons for First Baptist Church of Pasadena. Zach has nine years of organizing experience, first as lead organizer for Inland Congregations United for Change, and then as lead organizer and now executive director for LA Voice. He has experience cultivating congregational leadership in diverse religious communities, is a fluent Spanish speaker and has led national trainings with clergy and professional organizers. Zach has led organizing campaigns that have dismantled predatory car impound policies affecting immigrants, increased access to groceries in food deserts, increased public accountability for reinvestment by major financial institutions, increased voter participation in communities of color and bridged gaps between communities often divided by race, class and geography. He is and his wife are both avid cyclists. (www.lavoicepico.org)



Milia Islam - Majeed

Chino

Muslim

Executive Director

South Coast Interfaith
Council

Milia Islam-Majeed obtained her undergraduate degree in world religions and psychology from Westminster College and is a graduate of Harvard Divinity School, where she earned her Master's in theology of the world religions. She currently is the executive director of the South Coast Interfaith Council, the oldest and largest interfaith council in Southern California.

She has participated in hundreds of interfaith discussions and programs throughout the world. In 2008, she was part of an interfaith program sponsored by the U.S. Department of State in which an American delegation of six scholars and community leaders were invited to Indonesia to participate in interfaith dialogues. Subsequently, in 2009 she was chosen to be a part of a fellowship program at the University of Southern California that focused on Muslim leaders through the American Muslim Civic Leadership Institute (AMCLI).

Milia was awarded NAACP "Woman of the Year" in Long Beach for her interfaith work. She was chosen to be part of the national "I Won't Stand For" public service announcement on USA Television Network and invited to Italy to participate in the Fetzer Institute's Global Gathering of Love and Forgiveness. At the 2013 World Assembly for Religions of Peace in Austria, she shared her work with 600 interfaith leaders from around the world.

"I was raised in a small midwestern town of 10,000 where we were the only Muslim family in a predominantly conservative Christian community. Growing up, I went to church because I was fascinated by religion; my best friends, to this day, are from other faith traditions. A life that started with death threats being sent to our home urging us to go back to where we came from blossomed into a beautiful illustration of what can result when we stop fearing the other and truly get to know one another as brothers and sisters in humanity."

(www.scinterfaith.org)

Sarah Jawaid

Pasadena
Muslim
Organizer
LA Voice



“I grew up with modest means with my biggest inspiration being my parents belief in me. They valued education and made immense sacrifices which gave me the ability to attend the University of Southern California.”

“My commitment to civic engagement is fueled by recognition of how much I’ve benefited from the legacies of the civil rights movement, women’s liberation movement, Chicano movement and the immigrant struggles of my own parents. My work in the community takes the baton from generations before me, and I look forward to handing the baton off to those who will come after me.”

(www.lavoicepico.org)

Sarah Jawaid is a community organizer with LA Voice, a non-profit that does faith-based social justice work in Los Angeles and is part of the PICO national network. LA Voice’s main issue areas include healthcare, dismantling mass incarceration, campaigning for citizenship, economic opportunity and affordable housing around transit. Sarah is specifically organizing with the Muslim African-American communities in South L.A. on mass incarceration and across multi-faith congregations on affordable housing and transit issues.

At an early age, Jawaid had a fascination with cities, particularly how zip codes determine opportunity levels. She formerly worked on national transportation policy at the Urban Land Institute and affordable housing advocacy at the National Housing Conference. During this time, she was the director of Green Muslims, a group founded to raise awareness on global environmental issues within an Islamic framework. Jawaid is also an artist who has exhibited work in shows and galleries. Her work can be seen at www.sarahjawaid.com. She has a B.S. from the University of Southern California in public policy and a Master’s degree from UC Irvine in urban planning.



Nathaniel Katz

Claremont
Episcopalian
Director of Communications
Claremont School of
Theology

Nathaniel Katz is an Episcopal priest, faith-based communicator and social entrepreneur. He is currently the director of communications for Claremont School of Theology, where he manages the school's external communications, including its website, publications, media relations and its content presence across multiple social media platforms.

Nathaniel holds a Master of Divinity degree from Harvard Divinity School, where he studied with Diana Eck and Peter Gomes, among others. After completing his studies, Katz served for three years as the Epps Fellow in the Memorial Church at Harvard University. As Epps Fellow, Katz was charged with overseeing the church's undergraduate ministries. He also collaborated closely with the campus interfaith community on several joint programmatic initiatives and assumed leadership for the planning of an interreligious campus vigil following the 2013 Boston Marathon bombings.

During the 2012-13 academic year, Nathaniel was responsible for programming speakers for Morning Prayers, a daily ecumenical service that dates back to the 17th century. He also launched the first podcast of Morning Prayers services, making it possible for listeners far beyond Harvard Yard to benefit from that daily space of grace.

(www.cst.edu)

"For some, religious pluralism is a problem that needs to be solved. For others, it is a reality to be managed. For me, religious pluralism is nothing short of a gift from God."

"The most important interreligious work I have done to this point has come in small, intimate settings, addressing the concerns of Christian students who, for the first time, had developed friendships with people of different religious traditions. I felt myself come alive whenever I walked students through those aspects of Christian tradition that informed my own belief that religious pluralism does not pose a threat to my faith, but instead presents an opportunity to grow in relationship to God."

Jyotswaroop Kaur

San Dimas

Sikh

Education Director

Sikh American Legal Defense
and Education Fund



“As an immigrant at age 14, I lost my community and home and have worked hard to rebuild both in Los Angeles. I understand civically engaged communities as an essential component to building healthy, thriving cities.”

“For years I have worked on economic empowerment and access to cultural- and language-specific legal assistance for domestic violence survivors in New York City. When we were able to organize the survivors and supporters, we reconfigured a broken system to obtain the resources that we deemed necessary. Civic engagement is essential to effecting change and building sustainable leadership in communities.”

Jyotswaroop Kaur is the education director at Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF). She joined SALDEF in 2013 with over 10 years of experience in youth education programs, teaching, economic and social justice work. In her role at SALDEF, Jyotswaroop is responsible for the strategic growth and development of the two SikhLEAD programs: the Internship Program and the Leadership Development Program. She also oversees community relations work including the Sikh Vote and Law Enforcement Partnership Program.

Jyotswaroop received her Master's degree in public administration, non-profit management and policy from the Wagner School of Public Service at New York University. She obtained her B.A. in English with a minor in conflict resolution from the University of California, Irvine. Jyotswaroop lives in Los Angeles. In her spare time, when she is not busy keeping up with her book club or sweating it out in a hot yoga studio, she is out supporting the work of Strategic Actions for a Just Economy (SAJE), an organizing CBO in South L.A., where she serves on the board of directors.

(www.saldef.org)



Sondos Kholaki

Irvine

Muslim

President of the Board

Islamic Center of Irvine

Sondos Kholaki was born in Damascus and raised in Southern California. She graduated from UCLA with a Bachelor of Arts in English and creative writing. She has been featured in the *Washington Post*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and the *Orange County Register*. Sondos is passionate about teaching others about Islam through service and interfaith connections. She has actively volunteered for the Islamic Center of Southern California, Masjid Al-Hedayah, the Council on American-Islamic Relations, the Muslim Public Affairs Council and the Muslim-American Society. Sondos has served on the board of directors of the Islamic Center of Irvine since 2011 and was appointed president of the board in August 2013. She is also a member of the Irvine Women's Interfaith Council and volunteers regularly at Woodbury Elementary School. Sondos lives in Irvine with her husband and two wonderful children. She enjoys an excellently brewed cup of coffee, gourmet dates (the fruit, not the people), and listening to Qur'an recitation by Turkish qurra' (reciters of the Qur'an).

(www.icoi.net)

"I was fortunate to grow up in a household and religious community that not only placed a strong emphasis on coexistence and mutual respect, but integrated members of other faiths into my daily life. Our shared values and dedication to God and service makes it easy to work together on common social challenges, and the beauty of collaboration between religions constantly amazes me."

"We emphasize that the ICOI interfaith committee is not a dawah committee in the sense that we are out to debate with others about the right religion. Our goal is not to convert, but rather to increase understanding between communities. Putting aside our theological differences and focusing on a shared goal to improve the lives of those around us is the key to our purpose in life."

David Levitus

Los Angeles

Jewish

Director of Development

Yiddishkayt



“Recently I won election to the West L.A. Neighborhood Council with a platform organized around smart growth, affordable housing and the creation of more community spaces and relationships. The only Jewish person on the council, my victory resulted from persistent community outreach and the consequent backing of a coalition of largely Japanese-American churches and Buddhist temples.”

“Working closely with more devout Christians has been rewarding, even though the iconography, ritual and theology sometimes unsettle me. I persist because I see the political power of such multi-faith work and because I know that my discomfort is worth surmounting in the name of creating the kind of pluralistic society in which all people can flourish to the greatest of their potential.”

David works as director of development at Yiddishkayt, which explores the cosmopolitan culture, art, language and history created by Eastern European Jews as they made their way into multicultural modernity.

Previously he served as the California deputy director at Young Invincibles, which advocated for affordable health care and higher education, and worked as the Southern California director of Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice, after many years as a volunteer leader with Progressive Jewish Alliance, the predecessor of Bend the Arc.

Originally from the D.C. suburbs, David completed his B.A. at NYU in history and economics with a semester in South America to study globalization and economic development. He earned a Ph.D. in U.S. history from the University of Southern California. He has written widely about politics, cities, race, culture and theories of social change throughout the twentieth century.

David is a member of IKAR, a Jewish spiritual community, and he serves as the leader of LA Voice’s affordable housing campaign. He was just elected to a four-year term on the West L.A. Neighborhood Council.

(www.yiddishkayt.org)



Bailey London

Los Angeles

Jewish

Executive Director

USC Hillel Foundation

Bailey London is the Allen and Ruth Ziegler executive director of the USC Hillel Foundation. Under her leadership, student engagement and participation in Jewish life at USC has grown exponentially. Bailey previously served as the director of emerging leadership and Next Gen initiatives at the Jewish Federation of Palm Beach County. While at the federation, she developed and implemented a prestigious leadership training program and significantly impacted the Jewish community through financial resource development and young adult engagement. Bailey graduated with two Master's degrees from the USC School of Social Work and HUC's School of Non-profit Management. With infectious enthusiasm and energy, and as a proud Trojan alumna, Bailey is excited to be back on campus to continue the transformation of Jewish life at USC.

(www.uschillel.org)

"I have been able to utilize grassroots organizing and leadership training to empower others to make a difference in their community and the world."

"Every day, I am inspired by the beliefs of my colleagues and learn something new about their faith. The best part of these relationships, though, is the collaboration that comes out of them."

Nathanel Lowe

Los Angeles

American Baptist

Community Engagement
Coordinator

Asian Americans Advancing
Justice-Los Angeles



“My leadership and experience in empowering marginalized communities through breaking barriers to the voting process underscores my commitment to civic engagement and social justice.”

“I am determined and committed to raising consciousness around the role of faith in social justice, history and understanding oppression.”

Nathanel Lowe is the community engagement coordinator in the Democracy Project, where he mobilizes and educates voters to empower and lift up the voices of the Asian American, Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander community. Most notable among his accomplishments for Advancing Justice-L.A. is the work he did in November 2012 to recruit, train and manage nearly 300 bilingual and culturally competent volunteers to participate in non-partisan voter engagement activities. Together, they educated voters, helping to pass Proposition 30 to fund education and public services.

Prior to joining the staff of Advancing Justice-L.A., Lowe was a graduate student at UCLA, where he combined his studies with work on increasing transportation access for homeless persons, public housing policy and “grass-tops” education to promote awareness of the need for supportive services for formerly incarcerated individuals affected by the Public Safety Realignment law (AB 109). Before graduate school, he worked at the California State Assembly and the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency.

Lowe holds a Bachelor’s degree in community and regional development from UC Davis and a Master’s degree in urban and regional planning from UCLA.

(www.advancingjustice-la.org)



Victor Luna

Los Angeles

Church of Jesus Christ of
Latter-day Saints

President of the Board of
Friends of School
Mental Health

Victor graduated from Long Beach Poly High School in 1991 and immediately joined the United States Marine Corps Reserve. He worked in the family business after completing his USMCR training. Victor served a mission for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints in Chile. After his mission, Victor transferred to the Navy Reserve Chaplain Corps where he served as a religious program specialist. A few years after receiving his Bachelor's degree in business economics and entrepreneurship from Long Beach State, Victor decided to pursue a degree in social work at the University of Southern California.

He graduated from USC in 2008 with a Master's degree in social work with a concentration in school social work and mental health. Victor has worked in a variety of positions using his social work background within the Los Angeles Unified School District. Victor currently works at Fremont High School as a psychiatric social worker supporting students and families, acting as liaison to a variety of community organizations and serving as the school's mental health consultant. Victor is the president of the board of Friends of School Mental Health, an organization dedicated to raising funds to assist Los Angeles Unified School District students in crises that affect their ability to attend and learn at school.

(www.fremonths.org)

"I observed how different organizations, government and non-government agencies worked collaboratively to establish a school-based health center that now provides health and mental health services to students and families in the Fremont community."

"As a social worker you are trained to be civic-minded and to consider how public policies can affect the clients you work with directly. I have worked closely with many organizations to rally local and federal agencies to support legislation that will bring additional resources to impoverished communities and community agencies in order to create a better environment for students and their families."

Daniela Madrid

Torrance

The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints

Volunteer

The Church of Jesus Christ
of Latter-day Saints



“My concept of religious pluralism permits me to experience other points of view with a desire to listen, feel and learn from others. I believe that this type of environment permits spiritual growth which in turn can foster a deepening of faith and openness of the heart.”

Daniela is a California native, born and raised in Torrance. She attended an international school in the Dominican Republic for three years but otherwise received her elementary and high school education in the Los Angeles area. After graduating from L.A. Harbor College she studied at Brigham Young University, majoring in Latin American studies, with a double minor in women’s studies and Spanish. She is a recent graduate of the University of Southern California, receiving her Master’s in social work, and is currently working on her Master’s in public health, focusing on global health.

She has many years of experience working with adults with intellectual disabilities and has had many other and varied volunteer experiences. Her work abroad includes rehabilitation and intervention work with victims of human trafficking, international health development and serving as a consultant with NGOs and start up nonprofits. She is an active member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints and has served an 18-month mission for her church to Argentina. Her interests are in education, the intersectionality of health and education, immigration patterns and human rights.



Lia Mandelbaum

Los Angeles

Jewish

Blogger for Sacred Intentions

Jewish Journal

Lia Mandelbaum has had a varied and interesting career through activism and community-building. She is a graduate student in social work at Cal State L.A., where she also received a Bachelor's degree in social work. Over the past two years, Lia interned in South Central and at a high school in the LAUSD as a psychiatric social worker. Starting in 2008, she worked in the development department for Beit T'Shuvah, a non-profit Jewish residential treatment center in Los Angeles. She volunteers for JQ International, an LGBTQ Jewish movement. Since 2010, she has helped to produce various community-building events for Craig 'N Co. and the Sinai Temple community. She is an alumna of the Jeremiah Fellowship with Bend the Arc: A Jewish Partnership for Justice, and just completed a fellowship with NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change.

Lia has a blog with the *Jewish Journal* called "Sacred Intentions." She also enjoys public speaking and often shares her personal journey about discovering the power of transparency and vulnerability, leadership through non-violence, embracing the "other," building compassionate communities and the importance of community dialogue about social inequalities. She has become a leader in developing cultures of compassion as an organizer of "The Compassion Games: Survival of the Kindest."

(www.jewishjournal.com)

"My mission: Continually strive for spiritual development within myself and with community members. Be an advocate to help the unseen to be seen and the unheard to be heard. Diminish indifference and create a greater awareness of social inequality. Strengthen individual communities and build bridges between them."

"I absolutely see the value of bringing different religions together and finding common ground, which usually becomes the goal of being compassionate and of service."

Haroon Manjlai

La Verne

Muslim

Public Affairs Coordinator

Council on American-Islamic Relations - LA



“My self-identity and how I viewed others was challenged when I migrated from Pakistan, which is for the most part religiously homogenous, to the wonderfully diverse city of Ann Arbor, Michigan. I questioned my own reasons for identifying as a Muslim after being around people of various faiths. I reached the realization that my reason for being a Muslim was simply that I was born into a Muslim household, and my religion was not a choice that I had made for myself. This realization made me study my own faith critically for the first time. I subsequently was able to connect with my tradition in a new way.”

“I find religious strife unsettling because I know how similar all faiths are in their call for justice and human dignity. The only way for me to be completely true to my faith tradition and push back against the violence that occurs in the name of religion is to collaborate with people of faith, or of no faith, in the effort to uplift our brothers and sisters who need us.”

Haroon Manjlai is CAIR-LA's public affairs coordinator. As such he directs programs to increase civic engagement in the Greater Los Angeles Muslim community, represents CAIR in various social justice coalitions and maintains relationships with stakeholders, community leaders and elected officials. He earned his B.A. with a major in political science and minor in religious studies from Eastern Michigan University, and his J.D. from the University of Toledo College of Law.

Born in Pakistan, he migrated to the States at the age of 12. Growing up in the diverse city of Ann Arbor, Michigan, his encounters with believers and institutions of various faith traditions he had only previously heard of challenged his perception of himself as a Muslim and of others. His desire to learn more about the religious identities of others led him to study Christianity and Judaism in college.

Migrating from a country that continues to struggle with religious tolerance, to a country where religious identities are deeply politicized, Haroon is interested in the positive impact that religious communities can have. He believes that besides finer points of theology, all faiths, whether young or old, call adherents to service, justice and ethics. He is interested in building authentic connections between people and communities to leverage the power of faith to uplift the marginalized, the poor and the disempowered, starting from our own neighborhoods.

(ca.cair.com/losangeles)



Sable Manson

Carson

Christian

Director of Residential Life
USC Office of Religious
Life

Although Sable Manson grew up in a religiously engaged household, it was her undergraduate experience at Loyola Marymount University that solidified her interest in college students' spiritual lives. This interest led her to serve as a campus ministry retreat leader as well as a small faith sharing group leader for Christian Life Communities.

Her development as a religious affairs administrator continued at the University of Southern California, where she pursued a Master's degree in postsecondary administration and student affairs. During her Master's training she began working for USC's Office of Religious Life (ORL) as the residential program director for the Muslim/SChalom floor, (inter-) religiously themed special interest apartments.

In 2013, Sable created Souljourner Interfaith Service Scholar Program and continues to serve as its program director. Souljourner encourages interfaith engagement by partnering with academic courses to facilitate co-curricular experiences related to interfaith service and weekly written reflection.

Sable is currently a Ph.D. candidate in urban education policy at the USC Rossier School of Education. Her research interests include religion and spirituality in higher education, and her dissertation work examines how intentional interfaith experiences influence college students' ecumenical worldview.

(orl.usc.edu)

“Scholars and interfaith leaders like Diana L. Eck and Eboo Patel have identified the primary challenge of a multireligious society to be finding points of engagement, which minimize conflict while leveraging the diversity of perspectives. I believe one important point of engagement is higher education because it is important to educate the next generation of leaders about the benefits of religious pluralism, both for their own development and well as the enrichment of society as a whole.”

Ali Mir

Los Angeles

Muslim

Director of Muslim Student Life

USC Office of Religious Life



“Aside from my mother, who is the longest tenured spiritual teacher that I have in my life, I have found spiritual upliftment from individuals who on the surface would not seem like an obvious source of inspiration. One of these people is my best friend Paul, who happens to be an atheist. Whereas some Muslims who choose not to eat halal/zabihah meat have mocked me for trying to do so, Paul has always been not only a source of moral support, but of tangible support. Paul always accommodates me by making meals that include seafood, vegetarian or halal/zabihah meat options. This effort is impressive because it is not something that I asked him for.”

(orl.usc.edu)

Ali is a graduate of the USC Sol Price School of Public Policy and has over 15 years of experience working with and for various Muslim communities in Southern California. Currently Ali serves as the director of Muslim student life at the USC Office of Religious Life. In this capacity he serves as the staff advisor to the USC Muslim Student Union (MSU) and USC Ansar Service Partnership (ASP). Additionally, Ali serves as the faculty-staff mentor to the resident advisor and residents of the Muslim floor located at the USC Parkside Apartments.

He is an adjunct faculty member in the Sol Price School for Public Policy. He is an executive committee member for the Council on American Islamic Relations Greater Los Angeles Area (CAIR-LA). Ali serves as an instructor for the Muslim Gamechangers Network (MGN), a social justice training program for high school youth. He is also an advisor with ISLAH-LA, a community center in South L.A. committed to social justice based on Islamic principles.

Ali is a former fellow of NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change. He is also an urban, transportation and environmental planning consultant. He currently works for a firm that specializes in public mass transit and transportation projects.



Michael Morgan

Los Angeles

Christian Science

Volunteer Chaplain

Veterans Administration

Michael Morgan is a servant-student at heart. He loves to apply the science of prayer and service to his work as a Christian Science chaplain in a way that uplifts humanity as a whole. His journey has brought him from a career as a professional actor and video game player to over 40 countries in order to live and learn about healing and justice from a wide-spectrum of faith traditions. He currently is building “It’s About Good,” an inclusive faith community that heals the sick, awakens consciousness and empowers service through health, art, technology and education programs in Los Angeles.

Ever since college, Michael has been actively engaged in civic and volunteer work in his community. Whether it has been serving in youth detention facilities, tutoring programs or doing urban missionary work through healing on the streets of Los Angeles, Boston, Austin or San Francisco, Michael has always worked to make his community better. He has also served with the Los Angeles Unified School District, Los Angeles Police Department and local government as a healer and counsellor.

Michael has worked to implement environmental education and homeless shelters and feeding programs in his community. He serves at the Veterans Administration Hospital

as well as county and state prisons as a Christian Science chaplain and loves to see transformative healing occur. His teaching and and tutoring English and English as a second language through the mediums of poetry, music, art, dance and design have a very special place in his heart.

“The more I get out and see the state of Los Angeles, the more convinced I am that the work to be done is too much for one single faith or denomination. The stewardship of our earth, God-given dominion (not domination) described in the first chapter of Genesis, is a gift for all of us to develop together!”

Timothy Murphy

Los Angeles

Christian Church

Executive Director

Progressive Christians
Uniting



“Los Angeles County is one of the most diverse places in the United States in terms of religion. From the Abrahamic to the Dharmic traditions, and from folk traditions from immigrants around the world to those carried on by the descendents of the First Peoples of California, we daily live with this pluralism. It is a fact of life that one may lament, tolerate, or celebrate. Personally, I welcome and affirm this religious diversity.”

“It is not that I relativize the validity of my tradition or make it irrelevant in the face of theological difference. Rather, my desire to follow Jesus and love God and my neighbor invites me to see the way their tradition points to religious truth from a different angle. Even so, I do not believe that all religions are ultimately the same or provide the same insights. If that were so, I would not need to learn from sisters or brothers who practice differently from me.”

The Rev. Dr. Timothy Murphy is the recently appointed executive director of Progressive Christians Uniting. He holds ordination in the Christian Church (Disciples of Christ) with ministerial standing in the United Church of Christ. A Kentucky native, Timothy remained there through college before earning an M.Div. at Eden Theological Seminary in St. Louis.

The discovery that he had cancer at age 19 and his subsequent recovery radicalized his sense of calling to religious service with marginalized communities. He came to California to serve at a progressive church in Carlsbad outside of San Diego. After three years, he moved to the Los Angeles area, where he entered and recently completed a Ph.D. in religion at the Claremont School of Theology. The focus of his studies was the radical transformation of what church means, which he calls “churching” as actively following the way of Jesus. His passions, which also inform his leadership at PCU, include transforming church into an alternative way of life, participating in small group ministries and encouraging spiritual practices that inform social activism. He also enjoys reading and watching movies in his spare time. Timothy currently lives in Pasadena with his wife, Candace.

(www.progressivechristiansuniting.org)



Bharathwaj Nandakumar

Woodland Hills

Hindu

Director of Hindu
Student Life

USC Office of Religious
Life

Bharathwaj Nandakumar, is the director of Hindu student life at USC's Office of Religious Life. He is a video game developer by profession and works on some of the leading games in the industry. He also serves as a mentor for the Hindu and Indian student communities in USC. He is a graduate from USC Viterbi School of Engineering, where he completed his Master's degree in computer science. He has been heading the prayer rituals for all the Hindu festivals at USC since 2006. He has initiated programs like Hindu Textuality, which focuses on understanding religious texts and discussing methods for using their values to help make our world a better place to live. He has also been a panelist in various interfaith discussions held at USC. He is currently working toward a service initiative using video games to help kids with special needs.

(orl.usc.edu)

"I would like the mode of pluralism to be based on active discussions that can give us an idea of the similarities and differences in religions. The purpose of these discussions is not for everyone to agree but simply to commit to listening and understanding what others have to say. I believe that the idea behind pluralism is to not leave our identities and commitments behind but to make a difference in the life of any person in need and not to hurt others and their feelings by any means."

Tasneem Noor

Culver City

Muslim

CEO/Life Coach

Noor Enterprises:
SOULful Transformation



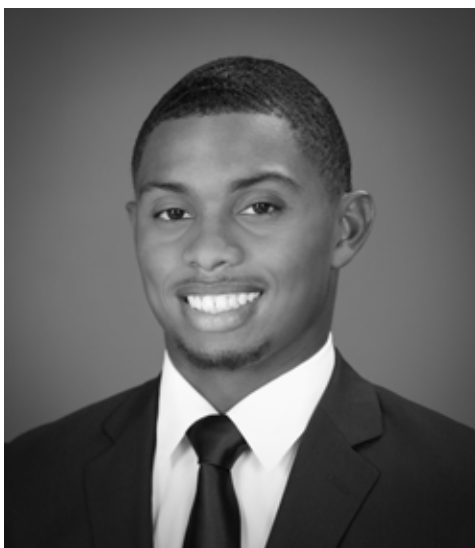
“We may have different expressions, histories and practices, but if we can trace our values (such as service, community, compassion and peace) back to our religious/non-religious identities, we’ll be fascinated with our findings. This has been my experience repeatedly through all my interfaith involvement. I grew up practicing Islam, listening to Hindu-God stories and Buddhist readings and with a familiarity with the People of the Book. The differences are interesting, but the commonalities are inspiring.”

(www.TasneemNoor.com)

For over seven years Tasneem Farah Noor has worked within the higher education system, helping college students build their dreams, accelerate their results and create richer, more fulfilling lives. Tasneem has taught students to become self-aware, acknowledge and articulate their strengths and passions and learn leadership skills to bring out their greatest potential.

Tasneem, born in Pakistan, has also lived in India and the United Arab Emirates. She has been in Los Angeles since 2000. Her exposure to different cultures, languages and ways of living has given her a greater appreciation for celebrating life. Tasneem completed both her Bachelor’s degree in English and her Master’s in education at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA). She has worked as a counselor, advisor and programs coordinator at several campuses, including Santa Monica College, UCLA and Cal State University, Los Angeles.

Tasneem is passionate about creating safe spaces for authentic dialogue to explore different expressions of our identity and an understanding of differences. To this end, she has created and led numerous trainings, workshops and seminars on leadership, communication skills, conflict resolution, faith engagement, cultural sensitivity, diversity and social justice issues. Her biggest passion lies with interfaith work, and she is dedicating the rest of her professional career to creating safe spaces for interfaith dialogue on university campuses.



Demontre Reeve

Compton

Baptist

Youth Pastor

Pilgrim Missionary
Baptist Church

Demontre Reeve was born in Inglewood to James Reeve and Donna Locklin. At the tender age of 16 he accepted the call to minister and preach the Gospel. While attending high school Demontre served as president of his school's Fellowship of Christian Athletes. This group of Christian athletes would meet during lunch and discuss current events and study the Bible. After graduating from high school Demontre started working as an unloader for United Parcel Serve (UPS). After a two-year stint he became one of the youngest supervisors at his location. In the winter of 2010 Demontre accepted the position as youth pastor of Pilgrim Missionary Baptist Church under the leadership of pastor, Dr. Albert Nicholas. Currently Demontre is attending Cottonwood College in Los Alamitos where he is pursuing a degree in Christian studies.

"Many teens, no matter what race, creed or religion, feel that they are misunderstood when it comes to speaking to adults about teenage problems. I stop that excuse by simply being available to them when they need to speak on any subject matter."

"I combat the attack of gang affiliation and teen pregnancy by playing basketball with teen members on weekends. I myself am not a basketball star, but I take the time to play with the teens from my church because I understand if they don't use their time productively they will make bad choices. I cannot count the number of times deep conversations have begun just from spending a few hours on the basketball court. The number one reason teens are gang-affiliated is because they want to belong to something, and when the teens are out on the court they belong to something."

Jonathan Russell

Altadena
Protestant
Chaplain

Union Rescue Mission



Jonathan Russell holds a Master's degree in theology from Fuller Theological Seminary, where he focused his studies on postmodern philosophical engagements with religion and science, and theology and culture. A former college pastor and humanities teacher, he recently took up a post as a chaplain for the Union Rescue Mission on Skid Row in downtown Los Angeles, where he works with men in a long term homelessness and substance abuse recovery program.

Recently admitted to Claremont Graduate University on under the Meritorious Arts and Humanities Fellowship Award, he will begin work on his Ph.D. in philosophy of religion and theology in the fall of 2014. His recent academic presentations have focused on neuroscience, religion and philosophy, and he is currently preparing a chapter on

aesthetics and theology for a edited volume on postmodern theology. Prior to returning to ministry and academia, he was a professional musician, songwriter and founding member of the highly acclaimed band Cold War Kids, touring widely throughout the world and writing and co-producing three major-label studio albums. He blogs at the progressive Christian website and podcast homebrewedchristianity.com.

(www.urm.org)

“After seven years working in a highly public position as a professional musician, engaging and partnering with artists all over the world, I’ve had extensive exposure to people from radically diverse backgrounds and socio-cultural contexts. This experience has deeply informed my conception of what good ministerial and academic work looks like—that is, I am committed not only to applying ministry and education to civic life and community development, but I also see the process of serving as minister and educator as fundamentally about building a rich, safe, and diverse civic sphere.”



Affad Shaikh

Palmdale

Muslim

Delegate

36th District
Democratic Party

Raised in Los Angeles County, Affad started his career at the intersection of civil rights, national security policy and Muslim community advocacy after graduating from U.C. San Diego in 2006. Affad spent a year with the Los Angeles-based NewGround: A Muslim-Jewish Partnership for Change, as a Muslim fellow. Affad is passionate about civic engagement and democratic institution-building and has been involved as a board member with New Leadership Council, Orange County chapter and in 2013 was elected as a California Democratic Party delegate for his district. In his spare time, Affad likes to explore national parks and discover places to eat, though he wishes he had time to do both more often.

“I turned to religion for meaning; then to exclusion for defining my religious identity; and finally to inclusion as a necessity for successful religious practice. Therefore the challenge I see today is particularly interesting to me because it’s one that rests on two things: whether an individual religion can create an inclusive society and whether religions can work together on a challenge that they all face. I believe the answer to this is the robust development of religious pluralism.”

“The Prophet Muhammad called on people not to join an exclusive community or to practice religion in a bubble, but rather to create an inclusive one that promoted universal values and stood for principles that brought about the better aspects of humanity. The Prophet preached that it was together as a community that one got closer to understanding the Unity of Creation; thereby, as individuals we got closer to the Creator.”

Tahil Sharma

Claremont

Hindu, Sikh

United Nations Youth
Representative

Claremont Lincoln University



“What motivates me every day is the hope that amity and cooperation become not just the ideals of a future world but the actions of our emerging posterity; that our work to make a difference starts here, now and shall forever serve as a foundation for all people to live by. I know the challenges of engaging numerous groups and the obstacles to the creation of equality and justice—to this I respond, even in the most barren of deserts, progress is the blossoming of a single flower.”

(www.parliamentofreligions.org)

(www.sikh.claremontlincoln.org)

Tahil Sharma is pursuing his Bachelor’s degree in Spanish with a minor in international studies at the University of La Verne. Growing up in an interreligious Hindu and Sikh family, as well as being exposed to numerous other faith traditions at a young age, his focus of work delves greatly into promoting respect and understanding within our diverse and inclusive diaspora. Through the coordination of events, conferences and service opportunities, he has worked to create a more pluralistic atmosphere that creates greater, more positive change at his university and within numerous local communities and congregations. In recognition of his focus on social justice, community service and education, built upon working with others to establish an interfaith student council on his university campus, he was named a Newman Civic Fellowship in 2013. Tahil serves as the co-chair for the Claremont/La Verne Relay for Life (American Cancer Society) and as coordinator for the Center for Sikh Studies at Claremont Lincoln University and was recently selected as a Youth Representative for the Parliament of the World’s Religions at the United Nations.



Treasure Sheppard

Pasadena

Christian-Pentecostal

Outside Events Coordinator

Lake Avenue
Church

Born and raised in Greater L.A., Treasure currently works as the outside events coordinator for Lake Avenue Church and volunteers as an Action Team leader for the Peace Alliance. A graduate student pursuing her M.S. in leadership, Treasure has volunteered for and led numerous projects in the non-profit and religious sectors. Her unforgettable encounters have been with the youth in her community. As a mentor to teens, Treasure noticed the amazing aptitude the youth had that was not being attested to. Mentees shared their interests about the political and cultural changes affecting society and enjoyed conversing with her about it, ultimately gaining knowledge and a newfound respect for subjects that were not introduced to them due to their age.

After discussing topics like religion, ethnic studies and religious beliefs, the youth shared that when they inquired about these subjects with other adults, they were told they were too young to be concerned or that they would not understand. As an aspiring professor of religion and culture, Treasure found this appalling and decided to address the issue directly with the REBELshift Initiative--a project committed to educating teens in the areas of religion, ethnic studies and beliefs through ethics education and leadership. Her hope is that the REBELshift Initiative will equip the youth of Greater L.A. with the mutual respect and conflict resolution skills necessary to live in a country as diverse as the United States.

“Martin Luther King, Jr. said it best when he declared, Nothing in the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity. Ignorance in the areas of religion, ethnic studies, beliefs, ethics and leadership lead to racism, sexism, scandal, dishonesty, bullying, terrorism and much more. Why should we keep our youth ignorant when they yearn to know more? They are equipped with powerful minds, passionate hearts and infinite energy that can help change the world for the better.”

(www.lakeave.org)

Angad Singh

Encino

Sikh

Director

USC Sikh Student
Association



“As a practicing Sikh born and raised in Los Angeles, serving others in need and fighting for the rights of those disadvantaged regardless of their gender, race, religion or sexual orientation are bedrock foundations of my faith. Seeing the blatant inequality presented in front of me in Los Angeles motivated me to apply my Sikh belief in selfless service to serving the city’s underprivileged.”

Angad Singh is currently a second-year law student at the UCLA School of Law. He is currently serving as the Sikh religious director for the USC Office of Religious Life and is actively involved in the Sikh School of Los Angeles (SSLA). While teaching at the SSLA, Angad has also designed five Sikh history class curriculums that are currently in use. Additionally, Angad is an active volunteer for the Sikh American Legal Defense and Education Fund (SALDEF). He was selected to the prestigious SALDEF SikhLead Leadership Development Program last year and continues to participate in SALDEF activities. In 2012, Angad founded the Gurmat Sangeet Collection, an online database of rare recordings of Sikh hymns (Kirtan). The site features hundreds of rare and old recordings in an effort to preserve traditional Sikh religious singing. Since launching in July of 2012, over 21,000 downloads of recordings by thousands of visitors across 55 countries have occurred. Angad graduated from USC in 2012 with a double major in international relations and communication. While at USC, Angad served as the president of the USC Sikh Student Association and the official Sikh representative to the USC Interfaith Council. He also co-founded and served as editor-in-chief of the Southern California International Review, USC’s only undergraduate international relations research journal. Born and raised in Los Angeles, Angad is an avid Los Angeles sports fan. He also loves to travel and has visited over 22 countries on five continents.

Steven Smith

Pasadena

Christian

Director of Communications
for Admissions

Fuller Theological Seminary



“My work, both professional and volunteer, is organized around advocating for the rights and inclusion of marginalized communities and influencing religious groups to adopt justice issues as central to their communal identity. Thus, the career trajectory I am working toward is to be a scholar-activist, always keeping theory rooted in practice.”

“My commitment to religious pluralism is rooted in my deep commitment to the Christian faith. Theologically, following Jesus means following a path that rejects the distinctions of neighbor vs. enemy but rather embraces both neighbor and enemy with self-sacrificing love.”

(www.fuller.edu)

Steve Smith is director of communications for admissions for Fuller Theological Seminary. Additionally, he is the staff coordinator representing Fuller for InterSem, an interfaith dialogue conference convened by the American Jewish Committee. Most recently while completing his Master's degree, he was a faith community organizer for the National Religious Campaign Against Torture, organizing religious communities in Southern California to advocate against the use of indefinite solitary confinement in California prisons. He holds a Master of Arts in Theology and Christian Ethics from Fuller Theological Seminary.

Steve is deeply concerned about marginalized communities and the relative lack of attention paid to them by his own religious tradition, evangelicalism. To that end, he will be pursuing a Ph.D. in Christian ethics to develop a theology of social justice that is amenable to evangelical theological commitments. As co-director of the Peace and Justice Advocates group at Fuller Seminary, he led a number of efforts to educate and influence evangelicals about immigration reform, including a public demonstration of 350 students, staff, faculty and alumni.

Before returning to seminary in 2012, Steve had a successful career as a development director, raising funds for several nonprofits, including a community development organization serving undocumented immigrants and their children.

Chris Untiet

Los Angeles

Christian, Interfaith

Faith Relations Manager

Habitat for Humanity of
Greater Los Angeles



“I have been truly honored to be a part of Habitat for Humanity’s worldwide housing mission as the greater Los Angeles faith relations manager, bringing together people and congregations from all walks of life around a common goal to provide every man, woman and child with a safe, decent and affordable place to call home. This has involved reaching out to hundreds of different faith-based congregations and organizations across the city and rallying them together to build hope, transform lives and bring people out of poverty across greater Los Angeles. Bringing people together to serve the community has and will continue to be a central part of who I am.”

Chris Untiet grew up in Iowa, receiving his Master’s degree in political science and history from Iowa State University in 2008. He joined the AmeriCorps National Service Program to serve with Habitat for Humanity of Greater Los Angeles (HFH GLA) from 2009 through 2011. He has since served as HFH GLA’s faith relations manager, connecting 100 diverse congregations of various faith traditions from across greater Los Angeles with Habitat’s mission to eliminate poverty housing. He has also traveled to China, El Salvador, Paraguay, Malawi and South Africa. He enjoys screen-acting, traveling, running, watching movies and reading in his spare time.

(www.habitatla.org)

INDEX

Abubaker, Sumaya

Cofounder, Rahma Network

Ahmed, Omar

President, Impact Southern California

Armet, Cullen

*Program Coordinator, Emergency Network
of Los Angeles*

Banarie, Eden

*Youth Engagement Coordinator,
Jewish World Watch*

Bassin, Sarah

Assistant Rabbi, Temple Emanuel

Beaver, Dawnesha

*Director of Special Projects and Community Initiatives,
New Mt. Calvary Baptist Church*

Chang, Yvonne

Associate Pastor, University Presbyterian Church

Chu, Jason

Hip-Hop Artist

Colenzo, Liza

American Sign Language Activist

Eggers, McKenzie

*Director of Public Affairs, Los Angeles Stake of the
Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Evelyn, Shawn

*Chair, Program Group of Youth/Young Adult
Ministries Episcopal Diocese of Los Angeles*

Fenyvesi, Malka

Managing Director Avi Schaefer Fund

Frausto, Nancya

*Associate Rector and Priest-in-Charge,
St. Mary's Church & Trinity
Episcopal Church*

Gallinger, Todd

*Director of Chapter Development, Council on
American Islamic Relations*

Ghosh, Arin

*Youth Leader, Vedanta International
Cultural Center*

Giang, Albert

*Member, Program Group for Youth Ministry, Episcopal
Diocese of Los Angeles/All Saints Pasadena*

Gonzales, Courtney

Volunteer, New Dwaraka Temple ISKON

Grace, Caedmon

*Minister of Congregational Care,
Founders Metropolitan Community Church*

Graeser, Nathan

*Community Liaison/Analyst, USC Center for Innovation
and Research on Veterans and Military Families*

Greenwald, Adam

*Director of the Miller Introduction to Judaism Program,
American Jewish University*

Hasan, Aziza

*Interim Executive Director, NewGround: A Muslim
Jewish Partnership for Change*

Haviv, Naama

Assistant Director, Jewish World Watch

Helmy, Deana

*Director of Programs and Compliance, Multi-Ethnic
Collaborative of Community Agencies*

Hoover, Zachary

Executive Director, LA Voice

Islam-Majeed, Milia

Executive Director, South Coast Interfaith Council

Jawaid, Sarah

Organizer, LA Voice

Katz, Nathaniel

*Director of Communications,
Claremont School of Theology*

Kaur, Jyotswaroop

*Education Director, Sikh American Legal Defense
and Education Fund*

Kholaki, Sondos

*President of the Board of Directors,
Islamic Center of Irvine*

Levitus, David

*Director of Development,
Yiddishkayt*

London, Bailey

*Executive Director, USC
Hillel Foundation*

Lowe, Nathaniel

*Community Engagement Coordinator,
Asian Americans Advancing Justice - Los Angeles*

Luna, Victor

*President of the Board,
Friends of School Mental Health*

Madrid, Daniela

*Volunteer, The Church of Jesus
Christ of Latter-day Saints*

Mandelbaum, Lia

*Blogger for Sacred Intentions,
Jewish Journal*

Manjlai, Haroon

*Public Affairs Coordinator, Council on American-Islamic
Relations, Greater Los Angeles Area Chapter*

Manson, Sable

*Director of Residential Life,
USC Office of Religious Life*

Mir, Ali

*Director of Muslim Student Life,
USC Office of Religious Life*

Morgan, Michael

*Volunteer Chaplain,
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