

# News from the Wilson Center

November 2015

## Letter from the Director – Our Ever-Expanding Community

We had our first real frost last night here in Orono. The grass outside is silver and crunchy underfoot and the roofs are sparkling. When you take a deep breath, the air chills your lungs. It makes one think of fireplaces, warm soup and gathering around a big kitchen table. It makes me think of the Wilson Center!



All fall, long before there was even a hint of a nip to the air, we have been coming together and building connection and community.

We have done so by eating together, working together and listening to one another's stories. We have done so by laughing, playing and sometimes grieving together. We have done so by expanding our vision of community outwards to include those we might otherwise not have known.

The students have led this expansive celebration of community with our new "Come to the Table" dinners. Once a month the Wilson Center student

group, in collaboration with UMaine Hillel, the Muslim Student Association and the South Asian Association of Maine, leads a dinner focused around a specific multifaith topic. The idea is to foster conversation across faith traditions. In a large circle, and then in small groups of 4 or 5, people answer questions about how a particular topic touches them and those close to them. The topics have come from brainstormed lists created by the student groups and voted on by all who attend. So far we have had discussions on "Feasting and Fasting", "Happiness", and "Mystical Experiences". Students who attended have self-identified as: Buddhist, Hindu, Protestant, Pagan, Humanist, Evangelical Christian, Jewish, Roman Catholic, Anglican, atheist, agnostic, Native American, and Muslim! Topics planned for next semester include: Wealth and Social Responsibility, Compassion & Mercy, Relationships to the Earth, Forgiveness, and Letting Go.



The Board has followed suit with its own multifaith initiative, partnering with the Jewish Community Endowment Associates and the UMaine Judaic Studies program to expand the "Wilson Center Interfaith



Luncheon Series” from 2 lunches last year to 5 lunches this year. Topics this fall have included: “toward a unified field of existence. . . developing our common relationship to the Sacred,” presented by gkisedtanamoogk of the Wampanoag Nation, and “Sacred Aging: the Role of Elders in Our Traditions” a panel discussion led by Rabbi Richard Address, Rev. Lorna Grenfell and Omar Conteh, Outreach Coordinator for the Islamic Center of Maine.

Regular weekly events have continued as well – our Wednesday free Dinner & Dialogue, which has been the heart of our center for many years; our Monday meditation group led by Rev. Richard Johnson; and our Monday SpiritualTEA group, which explores big topics and sacred texts under the rotating leadership of its members. Attendance at all groups has grown and the energy in the Center is palpable. Between the events listed above, the UMaine community groups who use our space, and the one-time events we host (such as our Open-mike Coffee Houses) there is hardly a day of the week now without a crowd of people in the Center!



May your own lives be similarly filled – with joy, noise and the grace of ever-expanding community. And may

we ALL, one day, sit together at the table in deep conversation, laughter and love –

*Sarah*

## Building Report

Managing the Wilson Center’s facilities work this summer and fall has been a busy job. We have completed the repair work needed on the roof, re-set the brick walkway into the peace garden, and -most importantly - created wheelchair accessibility! As of the end of August, we have new ramps into both the back and front of the building and a new wheelchair accessible bathroom as well. Thanks to John Hackney, Thomas Griffith and Ron Rowe who made much of this work happen and to the students from Balentine Hall and the UMaine Alternative Breaks program, who gave so generously of their time to make this transformation a reality.



As you can imagine, the work was not inexpensive, and there are several aspects of the project which we are waiting to complete once funds become available - push button openers on all the doors, a sound system for the hearing impaired and a second bathroom on the lower level (or a wheelchair lift between the two levels) top the list. If you are able to donate toward our dream of full inclusivity and accessibility for all, we would greatly appreciate it! Just mark your checks or contributions “Accessibility fund” and they will be put into a restricted account designated only for this project.

## Hellos and Goodbyes



### **Stuart Dexter, Outgoing Accountant**

Many of you may know Stuart Dexter from the Orono United Methodist church or from his many civic engagements in the Orono/Bangor area. After serving as the Wilson Center's accountant for 4 years, Stuart has seen fit to retire from that role. We miss Stuart deeply and we are grateful for all the work he did to organize the center's finances throughout the years he served!

### **Introducing our new Accountant, Anthony Elkins**



“Siwmae! (Welsh for “How are you?”). My name is Anthony Elkins: I am a seven-year alumnus of the University of Maine and current instructor of English for Academic Purposes at the International Study Center. Since discovering the Wilson Center this spring, I have found at last a means of expressing and exploring long-underfulfilled spiritual needs in my life. Weekly Celtic Zen meditation and SpiritualITEA discussion groups have formed the cornerstone for my religious practice, providing a safe and affirming space for communion and inquiry without fear of scorn or

rejection. My time here has been especially fulfilling in my explorations of Buddhism, Paganism, and ecumenical Christianity. I am a ravenous devourer of eclectic religious thought and practice, and I have the Wilson Center to thank for introducing me to such a vibrant and thoughtful community of dear people to go exploring (and feasting) with!”

### **Introducing our new Program Coordinator, Morgan Kinney**



“Hello! My name is Morgan Kinney and I am a second year graduate student pursuing my Masters of Education in the Higher Education and Student Development program at the University of Maine. I am excited to be joining the Wilson Center this year to coordinate the SCOPE Social Justice Grants as well as the Peace Writing Prize programs, both of which provide great opportunities for students to explore and pursue their passions for justice and service. I currently work in Student Life at the university as the Graduate Advisor of the Alternative Breaks community service organization,

a group in which I was very involved as an undergraduate student as well. In my spare time, I love traveling, cross-country skiing, and being outside as much as possible!”

## **Jonathan McCullum, Outgoing Student Assistant and Student Group President**



A very special thank you goes out to Jonathan McCullum, who will be graduating with a degree in Nursing this December. Jonathan has been working or volunteering his time at the Wilson Center for several years now. He has served as both Student Administrative Assistant and Student Group President. In his time at the Center he has helped to lead the Monday night meditation sessions, coordinated our Open-mike Coffee Houses, co-founded our Come to the Table dinners, and SO much more. There is hardly a part of life at the Wilson Center which Jonathan's spirit has not touched. We know his energy and legacy will continue here for years to come and we wish him the very best in his next adventures.

### **Out of the Darkness Suicide Prevention Walk**

In my capacity as Director of the Wilson Center, I was asked this fall to give the opening interfaith prayer for the UMaine "Out of the Darkness" suicide prevention walk. Out of the Darkness is a national event held to help end the stigma and isolation associated with suicide. It gives people a chance to honor and celebrate the lives of their loved ones who have died and to work together to bring hope and healing to all survivors. More than 600 people attended the UMaine event, starting on the mall and walking through the town of Orono and back to the UMaine campus, in a visible expression of love and solidarity. If you have never had a chance to participate in this event I would highly encourage you to do so next year. Information can be found at the University of Maine's Counseling Center website: <http://umaine.edu/counseling/out-of-the-darkness-community-walks/>



**Social Justice &  
Community Service**

### **SCOPE grants are back up and running!**

Many of you may remember the Wilson Center SCOPE grants which were given out for a number of years beginning in the 1990's in memory of the Rev. Elizabeth Morris. Well, after a brief hiatus, the SCOPE grants are back! These grants are given to UMaine students to help fund innovative social justice and community service projects and to foster student leadership. Grants are awarded for up to \$750 and are open to all students in the UMaine system. Thanks to Morgan Kinney for her work in getting this program up and running again.

## Dorothy Clarke Wilson Peace Writing Prize – submissions due Dec 2nd!

The topic for the 2015 Dorothy Clarke Wilson Peace Writing Prize is the following quote:

“So I am for keeping the thing going while things are stirring; because if we wait till it is still, it will take a great while to get it going again.” --Sojourner Truth, *Equal Rights Convention, New York, 1867*



### Prompt Questions:

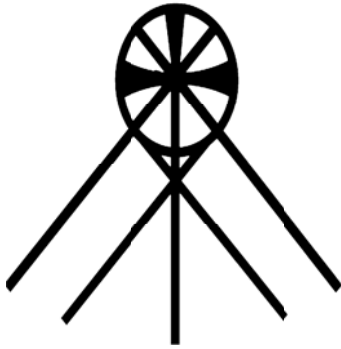
- Has America let things get still?
- Has our global society let social justice & civil rights issues get still?
- How do we "keep things going" and still walk a path of peace?
- What does Sojourner Truth's quote from 1867 say about where the United States has been and where we are now in regards to social justice and equity?
- What do you see as your role in "keeping things stirring"?
- Through the lens of Sojourner Truth's quote, write about civil rights gains and losses nationally and/or globally over time.
- Based on the Black Lives Matter movement and widespread attention to issues like police brutality, one might say, in Truth's words, "things are stirring" in America today. What needs to happen to "keep things going"?
- How does "keeping things going" look different today than it did in the 1860s? In the 1960s?

Students are asked to respond to one or more of the prompt questions listed above in any format they choose: poem, essay, editorial, play, short story, etc. Submissions are due by Dec 2 and should be sent to: [morgan.b.kinney@maine.edu](mailto:morgan.b.kinney@maine.edu). More information can be found on our website at: [umaine.edu/wilsoncenter](http://umaine.edu/wilsoncenter).

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*May your holiday  
season be full of  
gratitude and love!*

*The Wilson Center*