Letter From The President

Peace and Blessings Friends! I can smell the flowers, hear the birds, and feel the sunshine. Can you tell it’s finally springtime? With the changes of the season, come hope and motivation, and a new outlook to work on great things together. MCCT has been doing great things… we’ve been busy bees working on events and programming to better serve our community. We have recently adopted a new method of event planning that we are currently testing. Our board meetings are now held every other month, and we have established six committees to take action on specific MCCT programming and events, including new projects. We are looking for enthusiastic and passionate volunteers like you to serve on a committee and help us with planning our events and even some new projects. If any of these committees are of interest to you, please contact us today! Committees meet every other month (when there is not a board meeting) at a mutual time/place or via phone to discuss goals and work on achieving them.

Six Committees:

1. Community Service
2. Media Relations
3. Finance/Fundraising
4. Speakers Bureau
5. Community Relations
6. Interfaith Outreach

In this issue, you will find some reflections and a look back at a productive quarter. I would like to sincerely thank you all for your continuous commitment and support. Without our generous donors, motivated volunteers, and supportive partners, we would not be able to thrive in an environment filled with ups and downs. Please continue to keep MCCT in your prayers and to remain engaged with us throughout the months ahead.

Sincerely, Samia Hussein, MPH

MCCT BY THE NUMBERS – January to March 2018

- Speakers Bureau engaged 400 attendees at 14 events.
- 700 new towels were donated to 4 local shelters as part of the National Day of Service.
- Approximately 350 people were served by at least 40 volunteers at the monthly Shelter Serves.
- About 35 women attended the Women’s Health and Fitness Event in March at Newington Healthtrax
WELCOME NEW MCCT BOARD MEMBER

Colleen Keyes, Ph.D.

I began my career as faculty of Spanish and English in the New Haven Public schools in the 1970s, moving in the 1980s into higher education. I served for 15 years as professor and dean of academic affairs at Tunxis Community College, and then as vice president of academic and student affairs and faculty at Zaytuna College in Berkeley, CA, leading the first Muslim liberal arts college in America to its first WASC accreditation in 2015. Happy to be back with family and friends in CT, I am currently teaching English at Tunxis; assisting with local refugee support efforts; guiding the accreditation efforts of California Islamic University and the Boston Islamic Seminary; and serving as Secretary to the boards of directors of CAIR-CT and the Institute of Muslim Mental Health. I have been speaking on Islam in academic and public venues for over 20 years.

I hope to utilize my teaching and leadership background to contribute to MCCT’s educational mission to help dispel stereotypes and misunderstanding of Islam and to help forge strong connections with other organizations working for interreligious understanding throughout CT. I am pleased to chair the Speakers’ Bureau and co-chair the Media Committee and hope in these roles to increase our visibility and presence across the state.

Dr. Colleen Keyes
WELCOME NEW MCCT BOARD MEMBER

Maheen Rahman

I recently graduated with a Bachelor’s in Science with a degree in Allied Health Sciences from the University of Connecticut. I am currently working as a Medical Scribe at the Hartford Healthcare. I am an advisor for MSA CT Council as well as Muslim Youth Association of CT. I help manage Islamic Association of Greater Hartford Sunday School. I enjoy spending time with my family and friends. I like to invest my time in blogging, reading, working out and baking.

I have been a part of the Muslim Coalition since I was in the 6th grade. We are growing in a time where it is easy to fall into pits of darkness, we ruminate, we frustrate ourselves, we focus on our shortcomings and internalize so many dangerous things. Finding purpose and worth has become difficult and that is what pushed me closer to working with the Muslim Coalition seeing the effects it had on my life growing older. You find a hand to hold on to, it teaches you to voice your opinions and reminds you that you are apart of something, that you are not alone. I always witnessed that real happiness is in serving others-without promoting the act itself to others so as to garner admiration and just that is comforting to know.

Maheen Rahman
MONTHLY SHELTER SERVE PROGRAM - VOLUNTEER PERSPECTIVE

Olivia Rotter and Layan Alnajjar are both 11th grade students from West Hartford. They are co-presidents of the teen chapter of Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom in Connecticut.

For the past year, Layan and I have been co-leaders of one of the first Teen Chapter’s of Salaam Shalom Sisters. The aim of this organization is to unite Muslim and Jewish women during this time of bigotry and anti-semitism. Our goal is realizing that we are much more alike than different. This group takes part in open dialogue discussions and also a plethora of community service activities monthly. The experiences we have are uplifting but the friendships that we all have built are priceless. By learning more about each other as people, we have changed the way we perceive the individuals of the other religion and instead forged a peaceful sisterhood.

One of our favorite experiences was giving back to our community through MCCT at the Mercy Shelter in Hartford. Our teamwork was tested and so were our values. Witnessing the misfortune and hunger of others has impacted us on an emotional level.

As Jews and Muslims, we both share strikingly similar morals. Serving those who are in need of our help is a primary goal for both religions. This is just one of the many concepts that we have in common.

There are three terms that come to mind when I think of what being Jewish is all about: Tikkun Olam, Tzedakah, and Mitzvah. Tikkun Olam translate to repairing our world. To fix our broken world we must serve those who are less fortunate. God commands us to perform Mitzvot (acts of kindness) to reach the destiny of a wholesome world. Deuteronomy 15:11 declares that “there will never cease to be needy ones in your land.” I interpret this to mean that we must continue to everything that we can in order to help others and that is why participating in the Mercy Shelter serve is vital. Tzedakah connects the hand and heart. Judaism teaches that serving others is as beneficial for them as it is for us. The one who donates their time receives the merit of sharing Eloheinu’s work.

Additionally, lending a helping hand stems back to ancient times. Recently we celebrated the holiday of Passover. The beginning of the Haggadah declares “All who are hungry, come and eat.” On Passover we reminisce on what it felt like to be hungry and poor in Egypt. We pledge to never forget our sufferings and to assist those who are presently dealing with hardship.

Fasting during the holy month of Ramadan is one of the five pillars of Islam, which also include Shahada (the creed), salat (prayer), sawm (fasting), hajj (pilgrimage), and zakat (charity). Muslims abstain from eating, drinking, smoking and engaging in sexual activity from dawn to sunset. It’s the physical body we are feeding all day, but by abstaining from eating we are paying attention to the pains of hunger and thirst, which gives us the ability to remain more aware of the individuals who don’t get to break their fast because they’re hungry all of the time. It makes us very grateful for the things and privileges that we obtain. By serving at the Soup Kitchen, we were able to physically give back to these people who remain hungry and homeless, a very empowering and moving experience. This idea of giving back connects right to Islam’s core values. As the Quran says, “(The righteous are those) who feed the poor, the orphan and the captive for the love of God, saying: ‘We feed you for the sake of God Alone; we seek from you neither reward nor thanks.” – Quran, 76:8-9

A man asked the Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ), “What sort of deeds or (what qualities of) Islam are
good?” The Prophet Muhammad (ﷺ) replied, “To feed (the poor) and greet those whom you know and those whom you do not know,” and this is exactly what we aimed to accomplish through this community service project.

The Sisterhood of Salaam Shalom has given us this opportunity to give back, but as a team united. The concept of Jews and Muslims coming together to accomplish such a courteous deed shows how we are able to unify during any circumstance and help those around us, with a main goal, once again, of simply aiding those in need, and giving back to our community. The experience was one we will never forget and will most certainly do again, and many more times after that.

In conclusion, serving alongside our sisters was beautiful. One of our Muslim members, Samah Mohamedzein reflected on her experience serving, saying, “It was quite eye opening. These are people in a nearby city with a totally different situation than mine.” She said that it felt, “rewarding to serve.” Sari Eisen, a Jewish member, said that, “when coming together and giving back religion, gender, or ethnicity does not matter.”

Layan and I loved waitressing the tables and having pleasant interactions with people who are in such a difficult place. Although it was sad to see how little they had we hope that our work will continue to make things just a little bit easier. We will return to MCCT soon!
MCCT NATIONAL DAY OF SERVICE – TOWEL DRIVE

Once again, MCCT participated in the National Day of Service by collecting donations of new towels and delivering them to local shelters for those in need! The MCCT towel drive takes place each year between Thanksgiving and Martin Luther King Day.

This year, we collected approximately 700 towels! Towels were collected by various participating organizations including Islamic Association of Greater Hartford, Madina Academy, UConn Health Center, Stowe House, and Hartford Seminary. Towels were donated to The Eddy Shelter in Middletown, Mercy Shelter in Hartford, South Park Inn in Hartford, and the New Britain Friendship Center Shelter. Many thanks to all who donated for this worthy cause!

Above: MCCT Board member Mukhtar Suleiman dropping off towels at area shelters.

Below: Students from IAGH Weekend School with their towel collection.
YOUTH HIGHLIGHT

Alishbah Siddiqy is a high school sophomore in East Hartford

As part of completing the International Baccalaureate Middle Years Programme, I must complete an individual project called the “Personal Project” in Year 5 of the Middle Years Programme. For this Personal Project, I decided to question how religious clothing, specifically the Hijab, affects the way that people are treated. I have found the answer to this question by holding a social experiment in which students from Connecticut International Baccalaureate Academy wear the Hijab for a day. I then interviewed the participants and put together a video to raise awareness about how covering your hair can make people around you change the way that they feel about you.

The reason that I chose this project is I believe that if I can show the community how wearing religious clothing does not change who you are as a person and that no one should hold someone’s religious beliefs above their “person” and make generalizations about them after one encounter. In my social experiment, I chose to use people that were from my school because I felt that seeing how the student body reacts to seeing their friends wear the hijab would be interesting and more effective. I wanted to emphasize to my peers and my family how wearing religious clothing does not change who you are as a person by conducting the social experiment and documenting how the participants felt others were treating them.

My finished product/outcome was a video that showed and documented the social experiment that took place at my school where students wore the Hijab for a day and they were interviewed about how they felt throughout the day and how they were all treated. My video is available at this link: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EMwTrwNkYWw
MCCT SPOTLIGHT
Quotes and Success Stories from our Partners

“Thank you so much Linda for taking the time to come in to our school and educate our sixth graders. It was a wonderful experience and you do an excellent job fielding questions and keeping students engaged. I look forward to having you here for our next group of students.”

- Thank you letter sent to MCCT speaker Linda Miller

“Aida, I just wanted to drop a message to tell you that I very much enjoyed your presentation last night at the Stratford library! I found it to be extremely educational; I am embarrassed to admit that I know almost nothing about Islam. Will you be speaking elsewhere anytime soon? My friend had wanted to come but unfortunately had a previous engagement that she couldn't get out of.”

- Thank you letter sent to MCCT speaker Aida Mansoor
UPCOMING MCCT EVENTS

PLEASE NOTE: Dates and venues are subject to change – please look out for announcements via email, facebook, and on our website closer to each date.

Saturday, May 5 - Shelter Serve
Mercy Shelter, Hartford 11:30 am
Registration Link

Saturday May 5
Foodshare Walk Against Hunger
Join the MCCT Muslims Against Hunger Team!
Dunkin' Donuts Park, Hartford
Registration 8:30 am
Walk Begins 10:00 am
Registration Link

Tuesday, May 8
Public Board Meeting
Newington Library, Newington
7:00-8:00 pm
rsvp to info@mcct.us

Sunday, June 3
Annual Taste of Ramadan
Interfaith Presentation and Communal Breaking of the Fast
Avon Community Center, Avon
Registration link open soon

*Shelter Serves are held the first Saturday of each month in Hartford. Board meetings are generally held the second Tuesday of every other month (venue to be announced).

GET INVOLVED!

If you are interested in volunteering with MCCT or would like more information about our events, please send your inquiry to info@mcct.us. We are currently looking for interested members of the community who would like to serve on one of our program committees, or volunteer at one of our events. Programs include:

• MONTHLY SHELTER SERVE
• TASTE OF RAMADAN
• WOMEN’S EVENTS
• SPEAKERS BUREAU
• LEADERSHIP BANQUET

We are also looking for volunteers to help us with web design, marketing design, videographers, photography, social media, volunteer coordinating, newsletter editors, etc.
OUTSIDE EVENTS OF INTEREST

CAIR-CT
ANNUAL BANQUET & FUNDRAISER

LIVING Our FAITH:
DEFENDING FREEDOM

WHEN
SATURDAY,
APRIL 28TH, 2018
6PM - 9PM

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HOTEL CROMWELL
100 BERLIN RD
CROMWELL, CT • 06416

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IMAM SIRAJ WAHHAJ
Imam of Al-Taqwa mosque
in Brooklyn, New York &
the leader of The Muslim
Alliance in North America
(MANA)

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