

# ANNUAL REPORT

2020/21

**ON THE COVER**  
Michael Frishkopf, Professor of Music and Director, Canadian  
Centre for Ethnomusicology at the U of A, entertaining us  
at city hall with members of the Middle Eastern and North  
African Music Ensemble [bit.ly/mename](https://bit.ly/mename)



## EDMONTON INTERFAITH CENTRE

FOR EDUCATION & ACTION

# OUR VISION

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The Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action is recognized as a vital organization that addresses faith issues locally, nationally, and globally. We model a solidarity that embraces both diversity and commonality of faith groups.

# OUR MISSION

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The Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action promotes peace and facilitates interfaith solidarity among our members, and our local, national, and global communities, through educational programs, social action, and modelling respectful pluralism.

## EDMONTON INTERFAITH CENTRE FOR EDUCATION & ACTION

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The Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education & Action was founded in December 1995 to promote respect, friendship, harmony and understanding between people of various faiths. Our actual incorporation became official on March 19, 1996 so we have just celebrated our 25th anniversary, a major accomplishment for a small not-for-profit society! We grew out of a few local initiatives such as the “Edmonton Inter-Faith Group” (1987). That is not so long ago but we have come far; the sort of dialogues and public prayer services with which many of our founders were involved 35 years ago were a novelty at the time and we are pleased and proud that, due in part to our work, the novelty has worn off. In fact as we continue to promote religious literacy we look forward to a time we might not be needed, when the embrace of difference and recognition of it as a strength will be taken for granted.

Our programs aim to help people live together as good neighbors and we have lay and clergy members from many different religions with representatives of a dozen on the board alone. We have implemented a wide variety of projects, large and small, from an hour long to four full days, local and international. All have brought together people of many faiths to discuss critical issues facing our communities. These include lectures, prayer services, dialogues and presentations, and the Centre also works to raise awareness

about local and global discrimination and to model a non-discriminatory lifestyle.

On an ongoing basis we provide speakers to schools across Edmonton, addressing the diversity of religious expressions found in the community. The Centre facilitates visits to houses of worship both for children and adults and coordinates interfaith prayer services throughout the year. We have hosted the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) Connect conference twice, presented workshops both locally and internationally at every NAIN Connect for over twenty years, and at four Parliaments of the World’s Religions.

We are particularly proud of our partnership with the City of Edmonton. Since 2006 we have had a permanent, changing display at City Hall called “Celebrating our Faiths”. We have also implemented or created material such as the two peace posters created by local graphic designers, a booklet, “Seeking Peace... Visions of Peace from Twelve Faith Traditions”, the “Walking Together” curriculum, and the “Faith in the Classroom” component of the “Safe and Caring Schools” booklets used by the Alberta Teachers Association.

The Edmonton Interfaith Centre looks forward to continuing to serve the community through the two arms of education and action.

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# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (HELD ON ZOOM) JUNE 2, 2021 - AGENDA

## Welcome

- ▶ Devotional – Don Mayne
- ▶ Approval of Agenda
- ▶ Minutes of last AGM, July 15, 2020
- ▶ President’s Report
- ▶ Coordinator’s Report
- ▶ Treasurer’s Report
- ▶ Committee Reports
  - Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative
  - Celebrating Our Faiths
  - Concert
  - Gender Based Violence
  - Genocide Memorial Service Invitation – July 18, 2021
  - Lunch & Learn
  - Membership
  - North American Interfaith Network Connect – 2021 & 2022
  - United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination - March 21
  - United Nations International Day of Peace - Sept. 21
  - World Interfaith Harmony Week
- ▶ Nominations Committee: Approval of Board & Executive
- ▶ Any New Business
- ▶ Meet some Life Members

## ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (HELD ON ZOOM) JULY 15, 2020 - MINUTES

**Attendance:** *Helen Arnott, Eileen Bell, Paul Bergen, Jagjeet Bhardwaj, Guy Blood, Audrey Brooks, Bev Cooper, Keith Dannacker, Larry Derkach, Karen Farkas, Avau Fast, Karen Gall, David Geddes, Len Gierach, Shulamit Gil, Rob Hankinson, Farah Jamil, Shiraz Kanji, Nasim Kherani, Paula Kirman, Lawrence Loyek, Beth Mackenzie, Ursula Maydell, Kara Murray, Pauline Paulson, Netta Phillet, Virginia Sharek, John Tanasichuk, John Wright.*

- ▶ Approval of Agenda
- ▶ Minutes of last AGM, July 15, 2020: moved by Virginia, seconded by Audrey, passed.
- ▶ President's Report
- ▶ Coordinator's Report
- ▶ Treasurer's Report
- ▶ Committee Report
  - "Building Bridges" video
  - Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative
  - Celebrating Our Faiths
  - Concert
  - Gender Based Violence
  - Lunch & Learn
  - Membership
  - North American Interfaith Network Connect – 2019 & 2020
  - United Nations International Days: Peace Sept. 21 & IDERD March 21
  - Invitation to the Annual Genocide Memorial – July 19, 2020
  - World Interfaith Harmony Week

All reports accepted as information

# ANNUAL GENERAL MEETING (HELD ON ZOOM) JULY 15, 2020 - MINUTES

## Nominations Committee: Approval of Board & Executive

Board members are elected for two-year terms. The following members were elected or re-elected last year (June 2019) and have indicated their willingness to continue to serve one more year: **Audrey Brooks, Karen Gall, Farah Jamil, Kara Murray, Mitra Knight, Pauline Paulson, Kathie Reith, Manish Shah & Karnail Singh.**

The following members are completing the second year of their term and present themselves for election for another two-year term: **Jagjeet Bhardwaj, Guy Blood, Avau Fast, Len Gierach, Zohra Husaini, Shiraz Kanji, Nasim Kherani & Virginia Sharek.**

Karen Farkas moved, Eileen Bell seconded approval of the new board, carried.

The new executive committee, once ratified by the membership, will be:

**President – Guy Blood**

**Vice-President – Farah Jamil**

**Secretary – Virginia Sharek**

**Treasurer – Kara Murray**

**Past President – Pauline Paulson**

**Shiraz Kanji moved, Farah Jamil seconded, approval of Guy Blood as president, carried.** Shiraz Kanji moved, Audrey Brooks seconded, approval of Farah Jamil as vice-president, carried. **Acceptance of entire executive moved by Shiraz, seconded by Karen Farkas, passed.**

Joining the board is **John Tanasichuk**, welcome.

We continue to value the contributions of our Honourary Board Members:

**Rev. Dr. Rob Hankinson**

**Sushil Kalia**

**Rev. Dr. Don Mayne**

**J.V. Mehta**

No new business, meeting adjourned by Guy at 7:45.

Minutes submitted by Virginia Sharek



## PRESIDENT'S REPORT GUY BLOOD

Activities in the past year have been fairly restricted but we have still accomplished a lot. For details please read the reports. Our events are initiated and carried out by the volunteer members of our committees who all do an excellent job. One surprising result of the COVID restrictions is the increased attendance at all our programs; having to stay home makes it easier to just turn on one's computer and join a Zoom event rather than travel to a location.

It has been wonderful to work with other organizations: we have joined with the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation, the Edmonton Branch of the United Nations Association in Canada, the Lethbridge Interfaith Network, the St. Albert Interfaith Connection, the Strathcona County Diversity Committee and the Pakistan Canada Association of Edmonton.

We have been following developments at the Parliament of the World's Religions planning their next major Zoom event for October, the federal government's progress on Bill C-15 for the inclusion of Indigenous rights into Canadian law, the work of the Canadian Interfaith Conversation, the work of the IF20 which holds meetings to gather information that is important to faith communities and deliver it to the major governments of the world gathering at annual G20 meetings, the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) Action Campaign that brings people together to reinforce their importance and the role religious leaders play in helping faith adherents understand the issues, and the Centre for Race and Culture.

We are working with the City of Edmonton to make sure all faith traditions are welcome and included in our community, and the Alberta Minister of Justice to identify issues in the Police Act that cause faith communities some concern,

As an active member of the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) we have attended and participated in planning meetings.

Our efforts at improving the website are ongoing with the addition of Facebook, Instagram and Twitter. Many of our Zoom and Youtube events have been placed on the website for public viewing, please watch them.



## COORDINATOR'S REPORT NETTA PHILLET

What a year we have all been through! Here we are again with another Zoom AGM! All in all the EIC has done well in the plague. Guy and Kara in their president's and treasurer's reports will approach this from their viewpoints. One blessing is that I have been able to come to work as usual with few exceptions. If you've visited us you know the building which houses our office is the Garneau United Assisted Living Place, not a nursing home. Tucked away in a corner I've felt totally safe here, not endangering the residents or myself. My husband and I tested positive for COVID in November so I stayed home for two weeks and again over Christmas and New Year when there was a tightening of restrictions; both times I had some warning and took work home. Another lucky thing is that Pauline and Guy have been willing to come in to sign cheques while we have tea and a visit; the board has only met through Zoom for well over a year now.

I work with all committees, seeking permissions, paying honouraria and getting receipts for them, disseminating information to all members and our new communication coordinator McKenzie. Grant applications, tax and other receipts, monthly and annual financial statements for two bank accounts, all are done in the office.

Last summer I had some spare time and hope I will again this year; archiving is an ongoing task, there is a lot of duplication in paper and electronic files to be eliminated plus older historical material that ought to be properly organized some day by someone. Did you know we have a library? There are almost 600 books and dozens of journals and CD's, please come and browse when that can happen safely. We have posters and newspaper clippings of many events, important records that need organizing, and 13 brochure/pamphlet holders, all sizes, both free-standing and attachable, anyone need them?

Guy was a signatory on our behalf to a public letter about a church that was not following the laws on COVID restrictions for the size of gatherings; I was contacted by Global TV and did an interview which was on the 6 o'clock news on Sunday February 21. Both the letter and the TV clip have received (mostly) positive comments, our members were very grateful that we will speak out about this irresponsible behaviour which many felt reflected badly on us all.

On January 28th I spoke for an hour and a half to a class of 13 "Certified Spiritual Care Practitioner" students and 2 supervisors in Calgary & Edmonton from AHS and Covenant Health as part of their "didactic teaching". I know a bit about their program because I have been on the accreditation committee twice, last year and ten years ago. Class began with a viewing of our "Building Bridges" video. This is my favourite part of the job, talking about what we do, how, why and the difference we are making in the world.

Calendar sales are always a priority for a few months a year, as a source of revenue and to help fulfill the education aspect of our mandate. Everything was different this year, many schools, government offices, etc. are working with fewer staff and/or at home, just finding previous customers was not always possible, and in spite of that we sold about 800. Many board members continued their commitment to help by taking calendars to give away and sell.

As always I thank the board and members for your support over the last 15 years.

## TREASURER'S REPORT KARA MURRAY

This year we have been fortunate that during the current restrictions we haven't been negatively affected financially speaking. We have both our operating and casino accounts with a healthy balance. The proceeds from the casino have allowed us to pay panelists and our concert performers for their valuable contributions to our events. We are proud that in addition to donations to the Food Bank and WIN House mentioned in the last report we also donated to the Capital Region Interfaith Housing Initiative.

At this time we are not aware when our next casino will be as the pandemic and its restrictions have pushed it back to a date to be determined. Fortunately we have foreseen this and have ensured we have some funds set aside in that account to pay for our approved expenses for the next while.

As always we acknowledge the wonderful support we received from the Northern Spirit Regional Council of the United Church, our largest faith-based donor, and the Edmonton City Investment Operating Grant, our largest grantor. We would also like to thank all the other donors listed in the financial report for their support this year: Edmonton Community Foundation, Chin Yin Temple, Unitarian Church, Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha Society, Ramgarhia Gursikh Society, Al Rashid Mosque, Shaama Centre, Beth Shalom Synagogue, United Nations Association Edmonton, as well as the various individual donations received.

**Edmonton**  
**Interfaith Centre**  
for Education & Action

## AUDIT STATEMENT

Fiscal Year 2020 - 2021

**To the Members of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education & Action:**

The Board of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre has chosen Jagjeet Bhardwaj and Len Gierach to review the 2020 - 2021 Financial Statements.

**Accordingly they have reviewed the TD Canada Trust records, cheques, deposits and bank statements for two accounts:**

**Operating Account # 0873 - 5203980 and**

**Casino Account # 0873 - 5223027.**

**We believe that the "Income & Expenses" statements and the "Balance Sheet" accurately represent the financial position of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre for Education and Action on March 31<sup>st</sup>, 2021.**

**In common with other membership organizations, we could only verify income as deposited.**

**Signed:**

**Jagjeet Bhardwaj**

**Len Gierach**



**Dated May 12<sup>th</sup>, 2021**

## INCOME & EXPENSE OPERATING ACCOUNT (NOT CASINO)

APRIL 1ST, 2020 TO MARCH 31ST, 2021

<b>Income</b>	<b>Amount</b>
City of Edmonton Grant	\$16,500.00
Sales Revenue	\$10,484.25
Donations from Individuals	\$6,305.75
Northern Spirit Reg. Council United Church	\$6,125.00
Membership Dues	\$2,035.00
Edmonton Community Foundation	\$1,215.00
Chin Yin Temple	\$1,000.00
Unitarian Church	\$800.00
Ramgarhia Gursikh Society	\$500.00
Gurdwara Siri Guru Singh Sabha Society	\$500.00
Al Rashid Mosque	\$250.00
Shaama Centre	\$250.00
Beth Shalom Synagogue	\$250.00
UN Association Canada (Edmonton)	\$200.00
Parkland Poets	\$50.00
Stroll of Poets	\$50.00
Concert 2019	\$270.00
<b>Income</b>	<b>\$46,785.00</b>

<b>Expense</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Salary	\$30,356.19
Calendars	\$6,380.00
Office	\$1,070.45
Genocide Memorial Service	\$300.00
UN Int. Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination	\$200.00
Paypal Charges	\$71.93
Bank Charges	\$15.28
<b>Expense</b>	<b>\$38,393.85</b>
<b>Total Income</b>	<b>\$8,391.15</b>

# EDMONTON INTERFAITH CENTRE CASINO ACCOUNT

APRIL 1ST, 2020 TO MARCH 31ST, 2021

<b>OPENING BALANCE - APRIL 1, 2020</b>		<b>\$64,793.06</b>
	<b>Debits</b>	<b>Credits</b>
REPAID EXPENSE DENIED BY AGLC		\$469.32
RENT	\$13,608.55	
DONATION (WIN House)	\$5,000.00	
DONATION - (Edmonton Food Bank)	\$5,000.00	
DONATION - Capital Region Interfaith Housing	\$1,000.00	
"NORTH AMERICAN INTERFAITH NETWORK" RETREAT (travel November 2019 -2 attended)	\$3,006.00	
WEBSITE MAINTENANCE	\$1,879.50	
OFFICE	\$1,513.90	
CONCERT PERFORMERS' HONOURARIA	\$1,500.00	
INSURANCE - OFFICE AND DIRECTORS & OFFICERS	\$1,446.00	
DESIGN ANNUAL REPORTS (two years)	\$1,050.00	
PROGRAM - GENDER BASED VIOLENCE PANEL HONOURARIA	\$800.00	
SHAW CABLE	\$712.53	
MEMBERSHIP IN EDCC & NAIN (two years)	\$325.92	
MONTHLY PROGRAM SPEAKERS' HONOURARIA	\$200.00	
BANK CHARGES	\$104.75	
<b>SUM</b>	<b>\$37,147.15</b>	<b>\$65,262.38</b>
<b>CREDITS</b>	<b>\$65,262.38</b>	
<b>EXPENSES</b>	<b>\$37,147.15</b>	
<b>BANK BALANCE MARCH 31/20</b>	<b>\$28,115.23</b>	

## EDMONTON INTERFAITH CENTRE BALANCE SHEET

MARCH 31, 2021

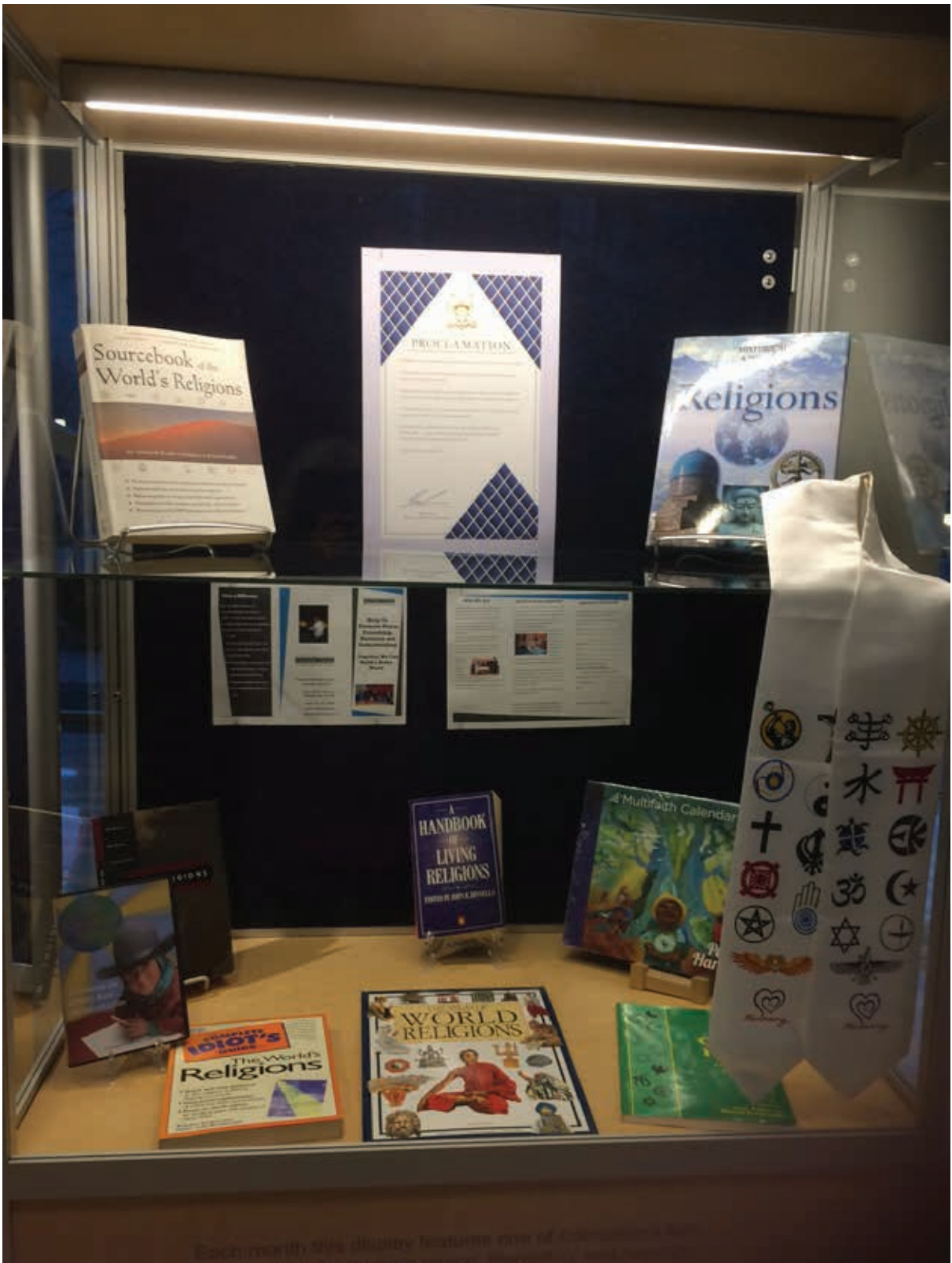
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<b>ASSETS</b>	<b>Amount</b>
TD Bank Regular Account	\$30,987.53
TD Bank Casino Account	\$ 28,115.23
<b>Total Assets</b>	<b>\$59,102.76</b>

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<b>Equity</b>	
Restricted Funds	\$28,115.23
Unrestricted Net Assets	\$22,833.28
Net Income	\$8,391.15
GST	-\$236.90
<b>Total Equity</b>	<b>\$59,102.76</b>

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Each month this display features one of



## CAPITAL REGION INTERFAITH HOUSING INITIATIVE (CRIHI)

REV. AUDREY BROOKS | INTERFAITHHOUSING.CA

We have been involved since its inception in the creation of the 10 Year Plan to End Homelessness and Housing First, stressing that this work is the responsibility of all Edmontonians. On Sept. 24 Netta and I attended a meeting, at that time there was Anglican, Catholic, Christian Reform, Jewish, Lutheran, Muslim, Sikh, Unitarian and Salvation Army representation. The Raging Grannies sang about the special housing needs of seniors, a wonderful song they wrote based on “All I Want is a Room Somewhere”.

## CELEBRATING OUR FAITHS NETTA PHILLET

Since 2006 we have enjoyed a partnership with the City of Edmonton, prompted by a comment to Mayor Mandel that City Hall belongs to all citizens, and should reflect the diversity of faiths found here. It is a successful program which advances our mission and that of the city, to be a place of inclusion. Keeping a new display moving smoothly in and out each month was challenging and rewarding. Sadly City Hall has been closed to the public for over a year and the display from March 2020 is still there. In October we anticipate a gala 15th anniversary celebration.



## CONCERT KAREN GALL

On Sunday, February 7, 2021, we presented our annual “Building Bridges Among Faith Traditions” concert in celebration of the 25th Anniversary of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre as well as World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW). Because of the ongoing Covid19 pandemic, the concert was pre-recorded and held online rather than in-person this year. On behalf of the City of Edmonton, Mayor Don Iveson proclaimed the first week of February to be WIHW and provided a proclamation certificate for us. We were entertained by wonderful performances from a variety of cultural and faith traditions. Sharmila Mathur performed Rajasthani music on her sitar; Mike Ankiewicz (clarinet), dancer Paromita Kar and Ensemble Topaz presented a program of Afghan music and dance; Melanie Gall performed a variety of popular music by Jewish composers; and Martin Kerr (with help from his adorable daughter, Iona) sang his original songs inspired by the Baha’i faith.

The program also included inspirational prayers and poetry representing various faith traditions by Rev. Audrey Brooks (First Nations poem), Ursula Maydell (Eckankar Hu chant), Nasim Kherani (Muslim prayer) and Rev. Dr. Rob Hankinson (Christian prayer). Melanie Gall explained the calls of the shofar in the Jewish tradition and Karen Gall blew the shofar.

Special thanks to Audrey who served as both the concert chair and mistress of ceremonies; Centre president Guy Blood who welcomed the viewers, brought greetings from the Interfaith Centre and explained about WIHW; my daughter Melanie Gall and I coordinated the program and she produced the video of this beautiful event.

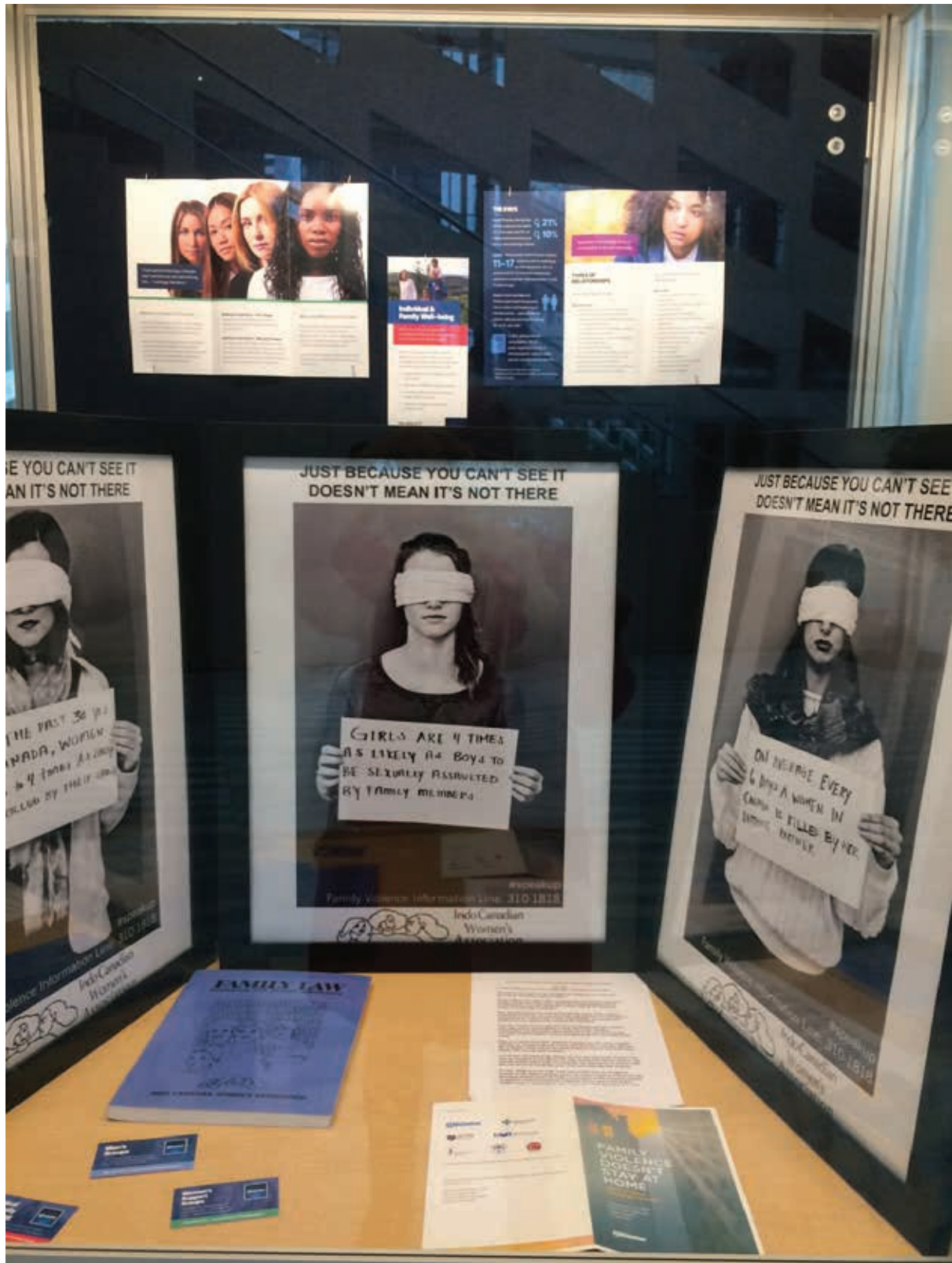
It can be found on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/96DjFrYrZa8>

## GENOCIDE MEMORIAL SERVICE

AUDREY BROOKS

In 2009, with the support of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton and the Interfaith Centre, Rev. Audrey Brooks founded the annual Genocide Memorial Service. It witnesses and honours people who died violent deaths because of war and other deliberate acts of violence against them. The 13th anniversary will be commemorated on Sunday, July 11th at 10:30 a.m. via Zoom, with the theme of “Making a Difference”. All peace-minded persons are invited to attend the service which will be available on YouTube as “Genocide Memorial Service 2021”.

Contact Rev. Audrey at [audbrook@telusplanet.net](mailto:audbrook@telusplanet.net) for ways you can participate.



## GENDER BASED VIOLENCE

JAGJEET BHARDWAJ, GUY BLOOD, NASIM KHERANI

We are making progress on our commitment to this important issue, helped by the experience and contacts of our members to combat this pervasive and destructive societal problem. Many of our faith groups recognize that there appears to be support for gender oppression in religious texts and are countering by discussing a present-day perspective; they are actively involved in providing education and support services to their members and the general public. On November 25 (the United Nations International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women) we held a very successful educational Zoom event. Each of the speakers brought a different perspective.

- **Rabbi Gila Caine** is the spiritual leader of Temple Beth Ora, Edmonton, a rape crisis centre volunteer and one of the founders of the rabbinic women's group "*B'not Dinah*" which created female and feminist rabbinic traditions for healing after sexual trauma.
- **Jodi Calahoo-Stonehouse** is Cree and Mohawk from Michel First Nation with a BA in Native Studies and is completing an MSc with the Faculty of Resource Economics and Environmental Sociology, is a founder/co-owner of a film production company and producer/broadcaster of an award-winning Indigenous radio program.
- **Salima Versi** is a psychotherapist with her own practice specializing in working with Muslim women, women of colour, and queer folx as well as a scholar, preacher, and spiritual care giver in her own Ismaili community.
- **Jeff Wilks** is the Client Safety Consultant for a women's shelter in Sherwood Park where he assisted victims with safety assessments. For 25 years with Edmonton Police Service his work involved domestic violence and bullying.

A link to that panel discussion can be found on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/kzPm4zrSISc>

Last year we distributed a survey to members to find out where and how best we can be of service to them; two years ago we were invited to participate in the city-led "It's Time, Gender-Based Violence Prevention Initiative". Our commitment to this issue goes back at least 10 years when we collaborated with the Indo-Canadian Women's Association (ICWA); they had two major projects funded by Status of Women Canada and sought our help to ensure that there was a multi-faith approach since this wide-spread problem is not confined to any ethnic, socio-economic or cultural group. One outcome of this was a brochure: "Perspectives: Faith Leaders Speak Out - Religious Leaders' Response to Harmful Cultural Practices". A third ICWA project is underway involving home visits. The work continues.

## INTERGENERATIONAL DIALOGUE

LEN GIERACH & FARAH JAMIL

We have a new project aimed at providing opportunities to listen and learn from people in our varied local faith traditions. The format is to create dialogue groups of younger and older adults with a facilitator/moderator. The discussion will be based on prepared responses to the group's selection of questions, intended to encourage reflection and thoughtful sharing. Each of us comes from a place of searching and learning about how we can find our place in the world. This often involves looking within and finding the deep part of us that is spiritual, though perhaps not yet settled in one faith. Others have found a spiritual home that nourishes them and are strong in that community. Sample questions: What are the gifts and blessings of your spiritual practice? What is the role of the sacred/divine spirit in your daily life? If your family incorporates more than one faith in their family circle, please share a success story from your experience. What advice would you share with others who are on a spiritual journey? Where do you find joy, playtime, and adventure within your spiritual self?

The Bahai community did a wonderful job of pioneering this project in January. Please check out the video on our website or on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/6rcpp3QB3EM>. We encourage additional faith communities to participate over the coming year. Please contact us to champion this project to the next level.

## MEMBERSHIP

GUY BLOOD, KATHIE REITH

Having members from all religious traditions is very important and we represent most faith-based organizations with 3 membership categories: Member, Life Member, and Organizational Member. The newest category is the Organizational Member, which is non-voting. Our membership numbers are less than we would like. Currently, we have 142 members of whom 39 are life members. Although not defined as such, we would like to increase the number of young people. We named February as Membership Month to take advantage of the World Interfaith Harmony Week awareness campaign. Our web site has a membership page and easy to use payment buttons so people can easily become members. There is a list of categories, fees and benefits. A video, "Building Bridges", has been produced and it is hoped that this will, tangentially, aid in membership enrolments. We have been showing it in zoom meetings, reaching out to inform the audience of our work and the importance of interfaith harmony. At every event we mention the idea of becoming members. Because of the restrictions of the pandemic, we have not been able to increase our community presence by having information tables at major religious and cultural events. With the addition of Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram accounts, we hope to appeal to a wider range of people.



## LUNCH & LEARN NETTA PHILLET

The pandemic has made our lively noon hour meetings and visits to houses of worship impossible so we have been getting together on Zoom. Besides the programs covered elsewhere in this report we have heard from Susan Morrissey about her work with the Edmonton Social Planning Council, Gary St. Amand on the history and challenges facing the Bissell Centre and Mike Van Boom, Edmonton's first housing ambassador, see our CRIHI article.

## NORTH AMERICAN INTERFAITH NETWORK (NAIN) KATHIE REITH

It was my privilege to represent the EIC at the NAIN annual general meeting on March 10th, 2021. NAIN has spent the year focussing on the sustainability of its existence. The board hired a consultant to look at how the organization can be improved.

The first step was to look inward, these are steps focussed on:

- a) streamlining polices and procedures;
- b) tightening procedural schedules;
- c) maximizing funds;
- d) have committees based on needs;
- e) have more flexibility to make needed changes without having to redo bylaws.

Next we looked outward:

- a) develop partnerships with grant makers (funders);
- b) develop partnerships with other interfaith groups;
- c) clear articulation of membership categories;
- d) better telecommunication between partners;
- e) find the services of a Spanish translator;
- f) expand into Central America and the Caribbean;
- g) set up an agency in Canada to enable tax deductions;
- h) create more diversity in terms of race, ethnicity, gender, faith and age.

The NAIN Connect 2021 (annual conference) will be a digital online event planned for August.

## UN INTERNATIONAL DAY FOR THE ELIMINATION OF RACIAL DISCRIMINATION (IDERD)

GUY BLOOD, KAREN GALL, KARA MURRAY, KATHIE REITH

On March 21st there is an annual commemoration of the 1960 massacre by police of 69 unarmed civilians in Sharpeville, South Africa. The people were peacefully demonstrating against the discriminatory 'pass laws' of that country. In 1966 the United Nations General Assembly proclaimed this as a day of remembrance. Canada was the first country to support the initiative, making it an annual campaign in 1989. For many years the Interfaith Centre has held a public program on that day. The 2020 event was cancelled at the last minute because of the COVID19 pandemic. As it is still not safe to hold in-person events, this year we collaborated with the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation (CMEF) and the United Nations Association in Canada, Edmonton chapter, to present a panel discussion on Zoom. Titled "Confronting Inherent Racism" we heard from esteemed participants who shared their knowledge, experience and commitment to fighting all forms of discrimination. Speakers were Dr. Alvin Finkel, CMEF President Beryl Scott and Dr. Chaldeans Mensah. We are grateful for the added participation of Centre president Guy Blood who welcomed attendees, Elder Pauline Paulson who shared a First Nations Blessing and moderator Harriet Tinka who guided the program.

The video can be found on YouTube at: <https://youtu.be/bWU6ttxOy2E>

## UN INTERNATIONAL DAY OF PEACE

AUDREY BROOKS

For many years we have celebrated the UN Day of Peace on Sept. 21 outside city hall but after filling out a 14- page COVID Emergency Response Plan as well as a lengthy Civic Events form and being told we would need a certified first aid person, etc., we decided to meet at Government House Park. It was a beautiful day with good attendance, the Raging Grannies sang as they always do for us, Guy spoke about the centre and 3 new members joined. It was fantastic to be together on a beautiful sunny day, especially realizing it might not happen again for a long time. And indeed it was the last one, please see the short video on our Facebook page.



## | WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK (WIHW) LEN GIERACH

Our celebration of WIHW began on January 31st with a discussion of “The Life Ahead” starring Sophia Loren. The participants watched it on their own and then joined Lori Stewart and Jack Jervis to share their reactions. Jack has been facilitating movie discussions at the Naramata Centre in BC, St. Stephen’s College at the U of A and various churches in Edmonton for over 25 years. Lori is a spiritual director, poet, and former faculty member at St Stephen’s College. On February 6th we celebrated “Poetry and Spirituality”; our special guests read their own and other poetry that had meaning for them. Discussion followed with a sharing circle where attendees offered a poem by themselves or someone else as a source of personal inspiration. We are grateful for the collaboration with the Stroll of Poets Society and The Parkland Poets.

Both these events were so well-attended and successful that we are planning to offer them more than once a year. The culmination was our annual concert on February 7th, please see a separate report on that.

## NOMINATIONS AND APPROVAL OF NEW BOARD MEMBERS - CHAIR PAULINE PAULSON

### 2021 - 2022

Board members are elected for two-year terms. The following members were elected or re-elected last year (June 2020) and have indicated their willingness to continue to serve one more year: ***Jagjeet Bhardwaj, Guy Blood, Avau Fast, Len Gierach, Shiraz Kanji, Nasim Kherani and Virginia Sharek.***

The following members are completing the second year of their term and present themselves for election for another two-year term: ***Audrey Brooks, Karen Gall, Farah Jamil, Pauline Paulson, Kathie Reith, Manish Shah and Karnail Singh.***

The executive committee, once ratified by the membership, will be:

**President – Guy Blood**

**Vice-President – Farah Jamil**

**Secretary – Virginia Sharek**

**Treasurer – Nasim Kherani**

**Past President – Pauline Paulson**

Leaving the board: thank you to Kara Murray who has served two terms on the board and been our very able treasurer, and Dr. Zohra Husaini, member since 1999! She will become an honorary board member. We wish Zohra and Kara all the best in the future.

Joining the board are ***Eileen Bell, Lewis Cardinal, Archit Gandhi, Kimberly Lang and Rebecca Wright,*** welcome.

We continue to value the contributions of our Honourary Board Members:

**Rev. Dr. Rob Hankinson**

**Sushil Kalia**

**Rev. Dr. Don Mayne**

**J.V. Mehta**

## BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

**Jagjeet Bhardwaj** is a retired scientist who now devotes her life to full-time volunteer work. For the past thirty - five years she has volunteered for many organizations including the Girl Guides of Canada, Red Cross Society, the Marian Centre and the Millwoods Welcome Centre for Newcomers. Mrs. Bhardwaj is also a member of the Provincial Court Nominating Committee of Alberta. She is a recipient of the Centennial Medal from the Province of Alberta in recognition of her multi-faceted volunteer work. She has also been honoured by the Indo-Canadian Women's Association, with whom she has served as president and is currently treasurer for a third term. She also edited several publications for them. She has been nominated for the YWCA Tribute to Women of Distinction Award.

**Guy W. Blood**, *M.Sc., P.Eng.* has been a member of the Baha'i Faith since 1979, after an extensive search of all possibilities of committing to a spiritual path within a religious community. He has been interested in interfaith harmony for many years and demonstrated that interest early on by producing a weekly community television show in the early 80's, titled Unity in Religion. People from all faith traditions were interviewed using questions that focused on the similarities amongst religious traditions, rather than on the differences. That show ran for 3 years on local cable channel 10. Guy has functioned as a structural engineer since graduating from the University of Calgary with a Master of Science degree in Civil Engineering. Work included designing bridges and buildings, providing educational seminars on cement and concrete, teaching at NAIT, and most recently, structural engineering consulting, before retiring in 2018. He has held leadership positions with the United Nations Association in Canada, several condominium boards, the Edmonton Soaring Club, and the Baha'i Faith, and is currently chairman of the Parkland County Baha'i Assembly. Hobbies have included: golf, curling, photography and flying gliders and tow planes. His wife is Joan Blood.

**Rev. Audrey Brooks** (M. Ed.; M. Div.) is a retired chaplain with the Unitarian Church of Edmonton. For many years she facilitated the Interfaith Centre's annual concert as well as our UN International Day of Peace celebrations, the UN International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination commemorations and the Genocide Memorial Services. She also serves on the Board of the Central Region Interfaith Housing Initiative which works to end homelessness in Edmonton. Audrey is involved with the Missing and Murdered Women and Girls marches; served on the Truth and Reconciliation Commission as part of the University of Alberta Interfaith Chaplain's Association; is a founding member of the U of Alberta Pride Alumni Association; and is a Raging Granny. She is the mother of 5, grandmother of 13, great grandmother of 13, and great-great grandmother of Lincoln, who was born in October of 2020.

**Avau Fast** was born in Baluchistan, a beautiful region north west of India, during the British colonial period. She grew up in an area replete with different ethnicities. Later in India no matter where she lived there were churches, temples, synagogues and mosques around the railway colony where she lived. Before attending boarding school she lived with her aunt, and every morning as they walked to pick up fresh vegetables from the market, at each place of worship on the way, they would stop to pray. She recalls that she really did not mind as this gave her a few seconds to rest her weary feet. Avau looks upon India as an old multicultural country and Canada as a new one. As a born Zoroastrian she is proud to be a part of the Canadian mosaic; studying and working among different faiths and cultures has always been her interest in life.

## BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

**Karen Gall** has served on the Centre board since 2009; she is Vice President/Secretary of the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation (CMEF) where, for over a decade, she served as Chair of the annual CMEF Harmony Brunch commemorating the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. At her synagogue, Temple Beth Ora, Karen has served as a lay leader for Shabbat and festival services, a member of the Ritual Committee, a founding member of the Chavurat HaShir choir and as a cantorial soloist. She has worked with the LGBTQ community to support and help organize both the annual Interfaith Pride Service as well as the Pride Shabbat service at her synagogue. Karen focuses her time on successfully building bridges, using her appreciation and awareness of the value of multiculturalism and interfaith connections while welcoming opportunities to share her Jewish values and traditions with students of all ages and members of the broader community. Karen is also working with a diverse group of people in St. Albert to establish St. Albert Interfaith Connections. She has received recognition for her dedication and work advocating for interfaith, multicultural and human rights issues including a St. Albert International Women's Day Award and a Daughter of the Year Award.

**Len Gierach** is a volunteer cleric with Eckankar and has been involved with interfaith activities in Edmonton for almost thirty years. In 2019 he chaired the committee which had a vision and hired Spoeth Creations to film our "Building Bridges" video documentary. He served as chair for the Edmonton Committee for the Parliament of the World's Religions from 2010 – 2015 and as a member of the North American Interfaith Network 2018 proposal committee. He is employed with Westlawn Memorial Gardens as a pre-need specialist. He is active as a writer, chorister with the Richard Eaton Singers, and various service work. Len and his wife Heather enjoy their five children and two grandchildren in the Edmonton area.

**Rev. Dr. Rob Hankinson** has been associated with the EIC since witnessing the signatures of the Centre's founding board members to the Alberta Societies Act application, December 1995. Since then he has held a number of positions on the Centre's board and is now happy to be an honorary member. In December 2012 Rob retired from 40 years ministry with the United Church of Canada. On the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) Rob serves as a member of the newly formed NAIN Council. In August 2019 Rob relocated to Wolfville Nova Scotia where he works with the local Interchurch Council to host NAIN in 2022 or 2023.

**Dr. Zohra Husaini** is an educator and human rights activist. She was born in India and migrated to Canada in 1971. She received her Masters of Letters degree from Cambridge University, England in Philosophy and her Ph. D from the University of Alberta in Sociology. She has taught Philosophy, Sociology and Education both in India and in Canada. Her academic work has been in the fields of metaphysical epistemology, education, women's studies and minority and ethnic group's studies. Her community work is extensive in the areas of community action research, human rights, promotion of interfaith relations and advocacy on women's issues. She is Vice-President of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women, on the board of the Interfaith Council of Canada and Past-President of the Indo-Canadian Women's Association. At present she is working on a research project on Muslim Women, Human Rights and Law with the Intercultural Action Committee for Advancement of Women. She has received the Alberta Centennial Medal for her contributions to the life of our City as well as the Senior Women's Award and the Alberta Seniors Minister's Award (2013) for her work with immigrant women.

## BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

**Farah Jamil** is a health executive, where she has combined her love of science and business to work in several sectors including: government, health region, non-profit and academia in Canada and the United States. While in school and during her career, she recognized the need for bringing down barriers and building bridges in the realm of interfaith dialogue. Therefore, Farah has volunteered for several interfaith boards, committees and organizations, including the American Muslim Health Professionals (AMHP), A Common Word Alberta – Christian Muslim Interfaith Dialogue, and more. As a member of EIC Farah is committed to “help create a society which respects the richness of human diversity”.

**Shiraz Kanji** recently retired having worked in three different careers – professional engineer, Information Technology and recently as financial planning consultant. He has worked in three different countries and speaks five languages. Shiraz is passionate about public speaking and has spoken to a wide variety and sizes of audiences on different subjects including religion and Islam. He has been an active Toastmaster for over 30 years and has conducted many training seminars locally and overseas. He enjoys learning about different faith communities and participating in interfaith dialogue. Shiraz is an active volunteer, having served his Toastmasters District, his professional organizations, church and community organizations. He has also volunteered for the Provincial Government sponsored Board Development Program. His other interests include music, cinema and reading.

**Nasim Kherani** is a long-time volunteer having served extensively both within and outside the Muslim Ummah over the past 40 years. While serving as treasurer of the Edmonton Chapter of the Canadian Council of Muslim Women (CCMW), Nasim helped restore and find a new home for Edmonton’s first mosque at Fort Edmonton Park, Al Rashid Mosque. Following her service as president of the Edmonton chapter of CCMW and treasurer of the Western Canada Group of Soroptomist International, she returned to serve the Ummah by becoming director of the Edmonton Council of Muslim Communities chairing the Interfaith Portfolio. As the resource development coordinator for the Aga Khan University, she has coordinated more than five major fundraising drives aiding in the creation of an international-standard medical school, nursing school and sports centre in Karachi, Pakistan, and Nairobi, Kenya. Most recently, Nasim served as president of CCMW, Edmonton Chapter and also has been elected to be part of the CCMW National Board. In her professional life, Nasim completed accounting designations (FCCA, CGA, CPA) in both England and Canada. After working in a public practice in London, England, and then for more than a decade as Senior Financial and Management Auditor with the Alberta Social Services, Nasim switched focus to the health sector, managing and performing the accounting for a large dental office for over three decades. Using this experience, Nasim has spent the last seven years consulting for the Aga Khan University Nairobi on dental practice management and expansion as part of a larger public–private partnership. Nasim has completed further training to become a certified financial planner (CFP) and now operates a group of companies focused on investment and real estate development.

**Rev. Dr. Don Mayne** was born in Edmonton but took his schooling, university, and theological training in Saskatchewan and his master’s degree at Boston University School of Theology. His

## BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

doctorate is an honorary degree from St. Stephen's College. He was the founding president of the EIC, serving for five years, then continued on the board until he was appointed an honorary member in 2011. He served on the board of the North American Interfaith Network and was president from 2000 to 2004. He also was a founding member of the No Room in the Inn Committee of the Edmonton and District Council of Churches (EDCC). They have encouraged the congregations of the EDCC to donate to a different community agency each year to assist with poverty and housing issues, and in 20 years they have raised over \$1 million for various service agencies.

**Kara Murray** has 25 years of experience in the not for profit industry in various capacities such as program management, fund development, human resources and governance. She enjoys various projects and initiatives and has participated in some eclectic ones such as producing a sold out show of The Vagina Monologues at the Jubilee Auditorium, hosting a 13 episode radio series and running her own business, Beauty Blends. She has done guest lectures at Grant MacEwan on inclusion and disability services, was a director on the board of the Edmonton Sport Council, and ran a million dollar research project for the province. Kara loves collaborating and working together to bring about positive social change. In partnership with her husband she owns and operates a home construction and renovating company, Alair Homes in St. Albert.

**Pauline Paulson** is a Metis Elder who was born and lived her young years in Northern Manitoba, adolescence on a farm in the central part of the province and the balance in Winnipeg. In Edmonton she divides her time between Native Counseling Services as a spiritual and cultural advisor, the Elders Counsel for Concordia University and Elder in residence for the HIV Drop in Centre. Her formal studies include but are not limited to a diploma in Applied Counselling from the University of Manitoba, another in Child Family and Community Services through Red River Community College (Winnipeg) sponsored by Metis Child and Family Services, and the facilitator training program "In Search of Your Warrior" through Native Counselling Services of Alberta. Her informal education includes over 30 years of participating in aboriginal ceremonies and learning from various Elders, locally, nationally and internationally. She says, "I believe Spirit led me so I can fulfill the reason I was born into this world at this time".

**Kathie Reith** says that at a young age she was taught the value of being actively involved in the betterment of her community. She has served on many committees and boards, including the Regional Heritage Fair which encourages students from Grades 4 to 9 to get excited about history and the Soroptimist International Group which empowers women to make an impact on others' lives by financing their dreams. Other projects are an awareness campaign on the effect of human trafficking and "Welcome Home" which befriends newly housed participants who were previously homeless.

**Manish Shah** was born and brought up in India; he has a Bachelor of Science & Medical Laboratory Technology degree as part of his academic carrier and studied Fundamentals & Science of Jainism as part of his spiritual journey. This work explains the basic and complex principals of Jainism with the scientific point of view and translates it in a way that can be easily



## BOARD MEMBER BIOGRAPHIES

understood. He also studied Vedic Hindu philosophy and Buddhism and the major technical differences between these three major religions practiced in South East Asia, mainly in India, Burma, Myanmar, Cambodia, Sri Lanka. Jain philosophy connects with nature and the environment and its effects on all life including human, animal, plants and nonliving matter. Volunteer activities include fund raising for earthquake relief, blood donation camps and organizing annual republic day functions in India; he captained the intercollege cricket team of Gujarat University for many years. He teaches mental health improvement and food habits and does public and motivational speaking, promotes and practices naturopathy, nonviolence and Jain lifestyle and vegetarian food ideology for healthy human society and keeping the environment safe for generations to come. He is passionate about motorcycle riding and exploring the natural beauty of Alberta in all directions as well as in learning about religious diversity and different cultures. He is working towards achieving a Vedic concept of “Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam”: that we are part of a universal undivided family.

**Virginia Sharek** is an Albertan who attended the U of A, completing a Bachelor of Education in 1967 and a Bachelor of Arts in 1990. After her first degree she spent a year in London, England. Upon her return to Canada she taught in Calgary for a year then two more years in Edmonton. She was married in 1973 and chose to stay home to raise her two sons. In 1993 Virginia took the opportunity to serve as the ecumenical and interfaith officer for the Ukrainian Catholic Eparchy of Edmonton until her retirement in June 2013. During those years she held a number of positions in the Edmonton & District Council of Churches as well as in the Western Diocesan Eparchial Coordinators of Ecumenism. She was the representative for the Ukrainian Catholic Church of Canada on the Canadian Council of Churches for six years. Being a member of the “No Room in the Inn” committee since 2001 has provided the opportunity to get to know so many dedicated individuals in many organizations that are engaged in providing safe and affordable housing for people experiencing difficulties and hard times. In 2014, Virginia became a Life Member of the Interfaith Centre and joined the executive in 2019 as secretary. With appreciation and enthusiasm she continues to be part of the activities, educational opportunities, experiences, projects and workshops provided by the staff and members of the Centre.

### **Karnail Singh**

**Netta Phillet** has been the coordinator of the Edmonton Interfaith Centre since 2006 after six years on the executive. She was born in Edmonton and has a degree in Religious Studies. Much of her working life was spent in independent bookstores going back to the days of Mel Hurtig. For five years she co-owned and managed a newspaper distribution business, bringing the New York Times and the Wall Street Journal to Edmonton for the first time. She is a life-member of Hadassah WIZO and has been active in different capacities at Beth Shalom Synagogue and the Women’s League for Conservative Judaism. She is currently secretary-treasurer of Project Ploughshares Edmonton, a member of the Arab/Jewish Women’s Peace Coalition (1991) and was a founding member of the Phoenix Multifaith Society for Harmony. Much of the focus of her volunteer life is inter/intra faith dialogue and conflict resolution, as well as the place of women in religious ritual and observance. And she belongs to three book discussion groups, one that has been meeting since 1977.



# BOARD OF DIRECTORS

2020 – 2021

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## EXECUTIVE

Guy Blood – *President*  
Farah Jamil – *Vice-President*  
Kara Murray – *Treasurer*  
Virginia Sharek – *Secretary*  
Pauline Paulson – *Past-President*

## GENERAL BOARD MEMBERS

Jagjeet Bhardwaj  
Rev. Audrey Brooks  
Avau Fast  
Karen Gall  
Len Gierach  
Dr. Zohra Husaini  
Shiraz Kanji  
Nasim Kherani  
Kathie Reith  
Manish Shah  
Karnail Singh

## HONOURARY MEMBERS

Rev. Dr. Rob Hankinson  
Sushil Kalia  
Rev. Dr. Don Mayne  
Jasvant Mehta

Netta Phillet – *Office Coordinator*



# EDMONTON INTERFAITH CENTRE FOR EDUCATION & ACTION

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**ANNUAL REPORT**  
2020/2021