Christian Spirituality in a Multi-Faith World

As people of faith, we find ourselves in a new era. No longer are persons of other faith traditions strangers to us—they are more likely to be our neighbors, co-workers, and friends. As we relate to our Jewish, Hindu, and Muslim brothers and sisters, we discover insights from their unique spiritualities. We may also find new faces of our own Christian faith tradition and practices coming into view. Although challenged at the “boundaries” of our differing understandings, we are also stirred to know more deeply what it means to be a follower of Christ!

OUR KEYNOTE SPEAKER

Dr. Thomas Thangaraj
grew up in a Christian family in South India and has enjoyed a multi-faith context all of his life. He will share from his experience and study, as well as guide our thoughts around questions of negotiating diversity and interfaith dialogue. Based on his experience, Dr. Thangaraj shares a profound discovery: other faith traditions have enriched his own Christian spiritual practices!

Recently retired from teaching World Christianity at the Candler School of Theology, Dr. Thangaraj continues to have a lively calendar of speaking engagements on topics of dialogue with other faith traditions and one’s own spiritual discovery in the midst of diverse religious practices. He has been actively involved with inter-religious dialogue at both the local and international levels. Dr. Thangaraj has written three books and is currently working on a fourth, Negotiating Diversity: Crossing Boundaries as Spiritual Practice. He has also written twenty hymns as part of his passion for Christian hymnody in Tamil, India.

INTERFAITH WORSHIP WITH SENSITIVITY AND INTEGRITY with Al Dodson

Interfaith worship planning and facilitation can feel like walking a tightrope. How do we model inclusiveness and diversity with integrity? What language do we use? What ritual practices and music support differences with care for the traditions involved? Al Dodson, ESR student, brings his experience and passion for worship planning to these questions. As time allows, participants will create liturgy for and plan a brief interfaith service.

THE PRACTICE OF MINDFULNESS with Pat Thomas

Vietnamese Buddhist monk Thich Nhat Hanh teaches that following one’s breath enables one to bring calm, peaceful mindfulness even to the most difficult of circumstances. While his teaching is Buddhist in principle, the practice is available and useful to all faith traditions. As he notes, “One’s breath, after all, is hardly attached to any particular creed.” ESR student Pat Thomas shares her familiarity with this vital spiritual practice and will guide participants in an experience of mindfulness that Hanh teaches.

THE JESUS PRAYER MEETS THE BUDDHIST MANTRA OF AVALOKITESHVARA with David Wunker

What is it like to put two faith traditions into dialogue of a similar spiritual practice? During this workshop, ESR student and world traveler David Wunker will explore and then guide brief experiences with both prayer forms. First, he will reflect on the history, meaning, and intention of the Jesus Prayer with time devoted to the practice of this prayer. The same process will be applied to the Avalokiteshvara Mantra. Through this brief, but experiential exploration of both prayer practices, Dave hopes that participants will see how they might orient body and mind toward meditative states of being.

THE MULTI-FAITH WORLD OF STORYTELLING with Patty Willis

Patty Willis, ESR student and storyteller, shares her experience of creating and performing stories that she wrote during her 14-year stay in a traditional Buddhist village in Japan. In that space of performance, created by the unique interplay of human voice and music, Patty discovered a universality of feeling among seemingly different traditions and persons. In this workshop, she will explore how the search for stories and the sharing of them may be an instrument of understanding in our multi-faith world.

DILOGIC EVANGELISM ACROSS CULTURES with Stephen Angell

Quaker theologian Rufus Jones, among many others, pioneered a form of dialogic missions across cultures (mostly through his work with the Laymen’s Missions Inquiry of the 1930s). Jones emphasized the importance of preaching through example and that missionaries needed to be as ready to learn, as they were to teach. Steve Angell, Geraldine Leatherock Chair of Quaker Studies at ESR, will explore how this vision and that of other Quaker theologians informed Quaker missionaries in China, Japan, and Kenya, and the insights it might bring to contemporary Christians in a multi-faith world.

SPIRITUALITY ACROSS RELIGIOUS TRADITIONS: THE SAME OR NOT? with Lonnie Valentine

There has long been a search for a common thread among religious traditions. More recently, spiritual-ity has been offered as that thread, and spiritual experience as a unifying force across faith traditions. We are told to embrace our identical spiritual experiences and ignore differences of theology, morality, and cultural context that our various faith traditions bring to such experiences. In this workshop, Lonnie Valentine, ESR Professor of Peace and Justice Studies, questions this approach, exploring how no one ‘spirituality’ is identical across traditions.

LISTENING TO THE ENCOUNTER WITH THE OTHER with Stephanie Ford and Susan Kaul

As we get to know our neighbors, here and abroad, we find ourselves listening to new ideas about the Divine, new visions of the role of humanity in the universe. What may we learn about ourselves and our own spiritual formation from these encounters? Stephanie Ford, Associate Professor of Spirituality at ESR, and Susan Kaul, pastoral care minister and ESR grad, will share experiences from their own personal journeys and the effect those have had on their practices of faith, theology, and relationship. The conversation will hopefully spark others to share their own interreligious encounters and discoveries.

BUDDHIST TEACHING STORIES with Cynthia Durgan

In this workshop, researcher and writer Cynthia Durgan will be sharing stories from scripture, the extracanonical tradition, and folklore of Buddhist cultures, illustrating moral and mystical teachings. Thailand, Japan, and others will be represented. The question guiding our discussion is the following: How do the messages of these stories compare to messages in your own faith tradition — if the story were not labeled as Buddhist, would it have served to teach a message of your own faith?
Listening to the Spirit

MarCh 7, 2009
RICHMOND, INDIANA

Keynote Speaker:
Dr. thomas thangaraj

a n  e S r    S p I r I t u a l I t y
g a t h e r I n g
College Avenue
ESR Center
„D” St.
„C” St.
ESR Office            Parking
Bethany Center
National Road West (U.S. 40)

Earlham School of Religion
228 College Avenue
Richmond, Indiana 47374
765-983-1423 or 1-800-432-1377 • E-mail: fordma@earlham.edu

SCheDule Of eventS
8:30 am Registration & Continental Breakfast
9:00 am Worship
9:30 am Opening Presentation:
Dr. Thomas Thangaraj,
Keynote Speaker
11:00 am Break
11:15 am Workshop I
12:30 pm Lunch
2:00 pm Workshop II
3:15 pm Break
3:30 pm Closing remarks:
Dr. Thomas Thangaraj,
Keynote Speaker

regIStratIOn FOrM
❑ Gathering prior to February 20, 2009: $35
❑ Gathering after February 20, 2009: $40

The registration fee covers the day-long event, which includes the keynote address, two workshops, a continental breakfast, lunch, and refreshments. Vegetarian options will be available.

Workshop One preference (first & second choice)
___ Interfaith Worship/Sensitivity and Integrity—Al Dodson
___ The Practice of Mindfulness—Pat Thomas
___ The Power of Mindfulness in Cross-Cultural Contexts—Pat Thomas
___ Spirituality Across Religious Traditions—Lonnie Valentine

Workshop Two preference (first & second choice)
___ Dialogic Evangelism Across Cultures—Jonathon D.T. Farri
___ The Jesus Prayer meets Avalokiteshvara—David Wunker
___ Listening to the Encounter—Stephanie Ford & Susan Kaul
___ Buddhist Teaching Stories—Cynthia Durgan

Send registration to:
Listening to the Spirit,
Mandy Ford,
Earlham School of Religion, 228 College Avenue, Richmond, IN 47374.

Send registration to:
Listening to the Spirit,
Mandy Ford,
Earlham School of Religion, 228 College Avenue, Richmond, IN 47374.

Please make checks payable to Earlham School of Religion.

Name _______________________________________________________
Address ______________________________________________________
City ________________________  State _________ Zip ____________
Phone (______) _______________________________________________
E-mail  ______________________________________________________

TO REACH EARLHAM SCHOOL OF RELIGION:
Approach Richmond via Interstate 70; exit at Williamsburg Pike south, merging after about a mile into Northwest 5th Street. Follow Northwest 5th Street to U.S. 40 (National Road West). Turn right and prepare to turn left one block later, at College Avenue. Turn left (south) on College Avenue. The ESR Center (stone building) sits on the southwest corner. To reach the parking lot, continue north on College Avenue to the first stop sign, turn right. Turn right again at the next stop sign and take the next right into the large parking lot.