

Organization: Jewish Community Relations Bureau/American Jewish Committee

Program: Community Interfaith Initiative

Amount: Any

The Community Interfaith Initiative is a three-year program the JCRB/AJC launched in the fall of 2008 when Rabbi Alan Cohen joined the staff of the JCRB/AJC. Rabbi Cohen is leading this Initiative, designed to culminate in the establishment of an Interfaith Clergy Council. The Interfaith Clergy Council will oversee a community-wide social action project. While there are many faiths represented in our area, there is no Interfaith Clergy Council. The Council will allow for the ongoing development of relationships among clergy of different faiths, and the greater interfaith understanding that results will have a positive impact on the entire community. It is apparent that the need for interfaith understanding continues to grow and that the Jewish community will benefit as understanding and communication increases. The Community Interfaith Initiative gives the Jewish community the opportunity to take a leading role in developing interfaith understanding in Greater Kansas City. This Initiative will build on the interfaith work done by JCRB/AJC since its inception.

The Clergy Steering Committee consists of 25 members who meet quarterly. It has been charged with the challenge to determine the priority issue upon which the Clergy Council will focus in year-three. At its first quarter 2010 meeting, the Steering Committee agreed that youth at risk in our community should be the focus. The prime concerns are education and violence directed against youth. While the attention of the media is drawn to the urban core for these issues, the Steering Committee realizes that these are concerns of the entire community. This project has been tentatively called "Investing in our Youth". Because the Steering Committee only meets quarterly, it was agreed that a sub-group of 6-8 members will be formed to develop an action plan. This group is now in formation and should have its first meeting by the end of March 2010.

The Steering Committee continues to encourage the organization of interfaith lay study groups that will meet monthly for a minimum of 6-10 times. One group is already in place and will have met three times by the third week in March. Efforts are also underway to organize several other similar groups. These ongoing groups along with the clergy who study and meet together will provide the human resources to tackle the Clergy Council project for year-three and beyond. The Initiative has also helped to encourage other interfaith activities like Church Seders to study the roots of Christianity in Judaism. An interfaith dialogue program has presented two programs on "Making the Ordinary Holy" with plans to work on a new round on the subject of "War and Peace Within the Traditions of Jews and Christians".

The main thrust of the Initiative during year-three and need for funding will come from the "Investing in our Youth" efforts. The concern for the youth of greater Kansas City is a high priority. Homicide rates with teenage perpetrators and teenage victims is heading toward a dubious record. Groups like Concerned Clergy are trying to get a handle on the situation through the establishment of a task force. Rockhurst University is considering actions. It will be the goal of the Steering Committee which has members representing the above two groups and others to strive for collaborative efforts to tackle aspects of this problem. Other allies for these collaborative efforts would be MORE2 and CCO. These community organizing efforts are reaching out the faith community for support and partnership. The Clergy Council will be in the midst of these efforts. The Students Run KC is one example of a proposed program that can identify an "at risk" group and provide a program that would help those youth and provide role models for others. The Steering Committee sub-group will conduct studies to determine who the greatest "at risk" group is both to age and geographic location. Its action plan will include other ways to tackle the issues of education and violence. That plan will include a list of programs and activities that can engage the entire community. There will be costs for this kind of study and then to implement the programs suggested. This grant request is for funds to underwrite these efforts as well as the ongoing programs like the Clergy Institutes and the newly proposed

educational exchange between Catholic and Jewish schools. It is the feeling of many in the community that the urgency of these matters will bring people of faith together as a powerful force to help the community. The Clergy Council of the Interfaith Initiative can be an important player in this process as well.