BEACON ON THE SCENE

International and national leaders unite in diversity celebration

By Audrey J. Bernard
Society Editor

Intersections International aims to lead people to unite across lines of difference in mutual pursuit of social justice both globally and locally. The organization envisions a world united in diversity in which human differences serve to advance connection, equality, respect and abundance for all people. Founded in 2007 the organization builds communities between veterans and civilians, empowers Christians to work for LGBTQ equality, fosters common ground and leadership through the arts, and enables multi-faith religious and community leaders to develop social justice and human rights to transform relationships between countries like the U.S. and Pakistan.

On Wednesday, April 19, 2017, 450 international and national leaders united in diversity to celebrate the organization’s 10th anniversary gala at Cipriani 42nd Street in Grand Central, New York City, featuring a VIP cocktail reception with a silent auction; entertainment, delicious dinner and distinguished program. “Thank you for being here to celebrate the first decade of Intersections’ work and the remarkable leadership of The Reverend Robert Chase. We are especially grateful for the support of those who have been so willing to make all of this possible,” stated The Reverend Michael S. Boss, president, The Collegiate Churches of New York. “If there is one thing Intersections has taught us, together we really can shape the future!”

Themed “Honor the Past; Shape the Future,” the event acknowledged the selfless efforts of so many who have labored to build an entity that cuts across the many “silos” into which some would cast us in order to keep us separate. Intersections’ work is innovative and it is urgent; and it has never been more important than right now.

“Intersections, as a leading organization that identifies and raises awareness for our society about communities that are in conflict, brings diverse groups together in dialogue to enable them to find commonality upon which relationships can be repaired or built. Through dialogue we are able to change the story – dismantle the stereotypes, enable new learning and compassion that leads to genuine reconciliation,” said Daniita Branam, Intersections governing board chair.

After ten years of dedicated hard work, Founding Director of Intersections International, Reverend Robert Chase, announced his retirement. In his tenure at Intersections, Rev. Chase displayed unparalleled leadership in crafting an organization dedicated to multi-faith and multicultural approaches to dialogue, education and leading social change through the arts. “After 46 years of continued employment – the last ten at Intersections – I approach a future that holds new definitions, new identities, and new challenges. Emotionally, it is exciting and a bit daunting – yet another ‘intersection,’” stated Rev. Chase. “I face this future with gratitude for all that has been and with confidence in a future that holds possibilities as yet unimagined, expanded horizons and opportunities for continued service in pursuit of justice and human dignity.”

During the prestigious program, Intersections handed out its coveted awards. “Our gala affords Intersections the opportunity to give a ‘shout out’ for some of the incredible, persevering public and private advocates we encounter in our collaborative actions against injustice,” said Branam. “We want our acknowledgements to illuminate the efforts of the individual, as well as the focus of their work, so sorely needed to transform this nation and our world into one seeking to engage all in contributing to justice, reconciliation and peace.”

The Intersections Award for Enduring Support was presented to TD Bank and accepted on the company’s behalf by NYC Market President Peter Meyer whose personal commitment to enriching the lives of children and veterans has inspired this partnership, and who has become a great personal friend of the Collegiate Churches and Intersections, presented by Chukwuma “Chic” Obasi, Intersection’s program coordinator for arts & humanities.

The Intersections Special Recognition Award was bestowed on His Excellency Kairat Umarov, Ambassador of Kazakhstan to the United Nations, on behalf of the Government and people of Kazakhstan, for their continued consistent dedication to global peacemaking, presented by Branam.

The Intersections Award for Exceptional Service to the Veterans’ Community to Wendy C. McClinton, president and CEO, Black Veterans for Social Justice, for consistent work in veterans’ empowerment while bridging the military/civilian divide with "tender loving care and a listening ear," presented by Molly Pearl. The Intersections Award for Courage in Pursuit of Social Justice to Randall Miller, director of Global Religions Program, Arcus Foundation, for pioneering work at the intersection of global religions and LGBTQ equality, presented by Dr. Keisha E. McKenzie.

The Intersections Award for Social and Economic Transformation to Bibi Russell, founder, Bibi Russell Fashion for Development, for selfless dedication at the intersection of economic independence, empowerment and compassion, presented by Laurelia Holden. The Intersections Award for Community Advancement to Riaz Siddiqi, founder and managing partner, Denham Capital, for dedicated public service at the intersection of economic justice and human development across lines of faith and national borders, presented by Imtiazah Tarig. Branam also thanked the gala sponsors including TD Bank (lead sponsor), American Pakistan Foundation; Arcus Foundation (gold sponsor); and Collegiate Churches of New York, Collins Building Services and Izumi Hara and Kavid Chosch (silver sponsors).

The Celebration Committee consisted of Committee Co-Chairs: Rev. Gregory L. Johnson, Michelle Paige and David M. Valera; and Committee Members: Daniita L. Branam, Sabriya Ellis, Naja Fidelia, Marcia Fingle, Izumi Hara, Richard “Rick” Harper, Casey Kemper, Johanne Sander and Samuel A. Simon. Eccletic entertainment was provided by Luis Ramos, Irma LaGuere, Brandon Mills, Timothy DuWhite, Victor Y. See Yuen, Hasan Hakr and Salieu Sussu. In addition guests were treated to a performance by Intersections Dance Collective. This memorable evening was produced by Bee Season Consulting. (Photo credit: Jay McClinton of DoseOsMedia.com)