

2017 AEP Forum - Presenters

Imam Hassan Muhammad Selim of the Islamic Center of Cedar Rapids is vice-president of the Inter-religious Council of Linn County. Imam Hassan studied at Al Azhar of Cairo. He moved to the United States in 2012 and received the position of Imam at the Islamic Center of Cedar Rapids since 2013. If not at the Islamic Center leading prayers, delivering Friday sermons, teaching the youth, or offering spiritual counseling, Imam Hassan is usually lecturing on Islam at a church, a high school, a university, or giving a tour to groups interested in learning about Islam and Muslims in Cedar Rapids. Imam Hassan is currently furthering his academic studies of religion at Coe College at Cedar Rapids.

Mark Danner – Through his company Locus Strategic Insights, Mark provides business risk management services to internat'l companies seeking to invest in the housing/infrastructure sector in Egypt. He is actively engaged in building a culture of engagement with Muslims and the Islamic world through various collaborative initiatives. Mark has served as risk management and security expert for Deutsche Bank's Corporate Security and Business Continuity group in NYC, and with US Government Executive Branch, where he specialized in Middle East political affairs, international science and technology programs, and protection of US critical national infrastructures. Mark was born in Morocco and is the third generation to begin his professional career in North Africa. He received his Master's Degree in Arab Studies from Georgetown University, and pursued Arabic language and Islamic studies in Cairo, Egypt. Mark is a leader in the international Catholic lay movement (Communion and Liberation) that has led such bridge building initiatives as the Cairo Encounter cultural festival, and is organizing the 2018 New York Encounter cultural festival which will present reflections on the prophet Abraham by representatives of Islam, Judaism and Christianity.

Dr. Raphael Danziger - Abdelkader scholar and author in Washington DC, joined AIPAC in 1990 as Director of Research and Information, and in 1992 became Editor-in-Chief of AIPAC's biweekly newsletter, *Near East Report*. He is Senior Research Advisor at AIPAC's Policy and Government Affairs department and *Near East Report's* Editor-in-Chief Emeritus. During the 1980s he was a foreign policy analyst at the American Jewish Congress. Previously, he taught modern Middle Eastern history at the University of Haifa in Israel, and at the University of Washington in Seattle. Dr. Danziger was a visiting fellow at Princeton University and a consultant on Middle Eastern affairs at the Hudson Institute. He holds a Ph.D. in Near Eastern Studies from Princeton, M.A. from University of Washington, and B.A. from Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He has published a book and many articles on the Middle East and North Africa, and his op-eds have appeared in the *New York Times* and other leading newspapers. He has lectured extensively on the Middle East, and was interviewed on the PBS MacNeil-Lehrer NewsHour and other news programs.

Rev. Clint Twedt-Ball is Co-Founder and Executive Director of Matthew 25, a non-profit focused in Cedar Rapids neighborhood revitalization. Matthew 25 focuses on rebuilding communities using foundations of healthy food, quality housing and education for all. In its first ten years, Matthew 25 has invested more than ten million dollars in economically marginalized neighborhoods. Matthew 25 has rebuilt more than twenty-five blocks of flood-impacted neighborhoods including nearly 300 homes, created the state's first urban farm and started other innovative programs such as a tool library, school gardens and a youth arts venue. All of Matthew 25's programs are built upon the belief that communities are strongest when they rebuild from within. Prior to founding Matthew 25, Clint worked for eight years a pastor in United Methodist Churches. He holds a Masters of Divinity degree from Garret-Evangelical Theological Seminary and a B.A. in psychology from the University of Iowa.

Timothy Knepper - Philosophy Professor at Drake University, he directs The Comparison Project (TCP), a public program in global, comparative religion and local, lived religion. He is the author of books on the future of the philosophy of religion (*The Ends of Philosophy of Religion*) and the sixth-century Christian mystic known as Pseudo-Dionysius the Areopagite (*Negating Negation*). He is editor of a student-written, photo-narrative about religion in Des Moines (*A Spectrum of Faith*, Drake Community Press, 2017) and TCP's lecture and dialogue series on ineffability (*Ineffability: An Exercise in Comparative Philosophy of Religion*). The Comparison Project programming currently includes a biennial lecture and dialogue series, a monthly series of open houses at faith communities, an annual interfaith youth camp, and on-line guides to the "religions of Des Moines."

Dr. Nahed Artoul Zehr - Executive Director of Faith & Culture Center in Nashville, holds a Ph.D. in religious studies from Florida State University. Before taking this position, she spent one year as a Minerva Research Chair at the United States Naval War College in Newport, Rhode Island, and five years as an assistant professor at Western Kentucky University where she taught courses on Islam and comparative religion. Dr. Zehr is a Palestinian Christian. She was born in Israel and immigrated to the U.S. (New York) as a child. Most of her extended family remains in Israel, and she spent most summers and school breaks there visiting family. In the States, she has lived in Iowa, Minnesota, Florida, Rhode Island, and now resides in Nashville, TN with her husband, Joel, and their two daughters. Dr. Zehr has been transformed by the work of Faith & Culture Center, and, in particular, its relationship-building approach. In 2017 she resigned from her appointment at Western Kentucky University to accept the position of FCC's executive director in order to use her professional and personal experience to help continue and develop FCC's work of integrating communities across boundaries through meaningful relationships.

Rais Bhuiyan, an American Muslim from Bangladesh, is IT executive at Sabre Corporation in Dallas, and has a powerful story. After serving as an air force pilot in Bangladesh, Rais moved to the U.S. in 1999 to study computer technology. Ten days after 9/11, a self-described "the Arab slayer," Mark Stroman, shot him in the face. Rais barely survived but two others were killed. Though ultimately unsuccessful, Rais led an int'l campaign, fighting to save Stroman from execution. Rais' near death experience and subsequent religious pilgrimage sparked a journey of soul searching and began his path as a human rights activist for peace, forgiveness, and empathy. Widely recognized, Rais received the *Excellence for Human Service Award*, United for Change; *Search for Common Ground Award*; 2011 *American of the Year*, Esquire Magazine; 2014 *Human Relations Award*, Muslim Public Affairs Council Foundation. Rais' story is chronicled in *The True American: Murder & Mercy in Texas* by NY Times journalist Anand Giridharadas; the 2014 New York Times Book Review Notable Book and Publishers Weekly Best Book of the Year. He is featured in the 2016 documentary, *An Eye for An Eye* and in Emmy Award Nominated documentary series, *The Secret Life of Muslims* (Seftel Productions) featured on Vox, PRI, and USA network. His segment was chosen by CBS Sunday Morning for national broadcast on 11/27/16.

The Rev. Dr. Joelle Colville-Hanson is the Director for Mission with the Evangelical Lutheran Church in America. She works out of the Northeastern Iowa Synod in Waverly with congregations and leaders in the areas of outreach, advocacy and renewal. She helps congregations and leaders use digital media to further mission and build community.

2017 AEP Forum – AEP Team

Kathy Garms, AEP Co-founder and Executive Director, is proud of her hometown...Elkader, Iowa. Kathy revived the sister city program with Mascara, Algeria, and undertook reorganizing the program, strengthening cultural understanding by renewing friendships and building relationships between the U.S. and Algeria. She organized the 2008 Elkader launch of John Kiser’s biography, *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader* and together they created the Abdelkader Global Leadership Prize Essay Contest that has evolved into the 501c3 non-profit AEP with its many components. Kathy has led AEP’s efforts and continues to expand its network at home and abroad through education and outreach. She has participated in many international events such as Council of Nations/Emir Abdelkader Foundation “Human Rights Seminar” in Algiers. Her presentations provide insights into the Abdelkader Education Project, Emir Abdelkader, Elkader, Mascara and the sister city relationship. Kathy and her husband live near Elkader where they raised their three sons.

John Kiser is a writer and a pioneer who introduced advanced Russian technology and know-how to the United States during the 1980's and early nineties, challenging many stereotypes about dealing with Communist Russia. After selling his business and spending a year in France in 1995, he wrote two books about the French-Algerian love hate relationship that festers today: *The Monks of Tibhirine: Faith Love and Terror in Algeria*, (St. Martin’s Press 2002), and *Commander of the Faithful: The Life and Times of Emir Abdelkader – A Story of True Jihad* (Monkfish Books 2008). His launch of *Commander* in Elkader Iowa led to the founding of the Abdelkader Education Project in 2009 with Kathy Garms. His books open new horizons for readers who only know about Muslims from the media. John has degrees from University of North Carolina (history), Columbia University (European history) and University of Chicago (business) and an honorary diploma from the Urals Branch of the Russian Academy of Science. He is a member of the board of directors of The International Center for Religion and Diplomacy (DC), Religions for Peace (NYC) and Faith and Culture Center (Nashville). He is also the Chairman of the Board of the William and Mary Greve Foundation, a private family foundation (NYC). An adjunct instructor at Marine Corps University in Quantico VA and contributor to the Marine Corps Gazette, John also raises pigs on his farm in The Piedmont.

Tamar Miller is consulting Program Director at Center for the Study of Jewish-Christian-Muslim Relations at Merrimack College who provides leadership on the Abdelkader Education Project and the Goldziher Prize for Journalists. Tamar’s work on strategy and project design for social change and social justice organizations ranged from the *Center for Contemplative Mind in Society*, introducing Harvard and MIT faculty to meditation as a pedagogic practice; crafting parliamentary campaigns in Kuwait; and strategic evaluations for *Fetzer Institute’s* science and spirituality unit. Tamar was VP Education and a founder of *American Higher Education, Inc.* in Cambridge, MA, and was Partner in *Middle East Holdings*, business development firm in Boston and Dubai. She was Director of Leadership Development at *Harvard’s Kennedy School*, then Executive Director of then *Harvard’s Institute for Social and Economic Policy in the Middle East*. Tamar is on board of directors of *Parents’ Circle* and *Israel Palestine Center for Creative Regional Initiatives*, and was on founding board of *Alliance for Middle East Peace*. Tamar holds BA in Philosophy and Judaic Studies, MSW from *Yeshiva University* and MPA from *Harvard University*. She has three grown daughters and lives in MA.

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