



## OPEN SPIRIT

A PLACE OF HOPE, HEALTH & HARMONY

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A Buddhist, a Jew and two Christians walk into a Muslim wedding....

It's not the beginning of a joke filled with bad stereotypes. It's a story about Open Spirit and the power of friendship to break down stereotypes and celebrate our distinctive gifts. When Open Spirit created the Multi-Faith Collaborative, which includes Baha'i, Muslim, Jewish, Christian and Buddhist members, we began with each member sharing their own spiritual journey. That starting point of story-telling and listening has created a base for deepening friendship; it has also built trust to enable them to create inspiring programs.

In 2021, the group drew upon their diverse perspectives to offer gatherings to explore ways to honor grief, live with uncertainty, claim joy, and work for racial justice. In 2022, they will focus on Liberating Hope: Spiritual Perspectives on Climate Change, sharing ancient and contemporary wisdom to inspire our response to this global crisis.

Neela, the Buddhist in the story, is grateful for her multi-faith friendships, which have led to wedding invitations, walks in the woods, and many shared cups of coffee. Even more, she is grateful for the sense of welcome she experiences at Open Spirit and the chance to learn about other faiths and deepen her own. As a Botanist and a Buddhist, she has led many guided contemplative walks in nature. She says, "Open Spirit has made a place for me at the table and I have gained friendships and had discussions with people who would not have ordinarily crossed my path." There is a place for her at Open Spirit's table. There is a place for you.



*At Open Spirit, we come together with open hearts to celebrate and deepen understanding of our diverse spiritual and cultural backgrounds...*



When COVID-19 forced Open Spirit to move our Mind-Body Initiative to Zoom, Helen was not at all convinced it would work. Now, she says, she is "floored" by the depth and power of community that has formed virtually. "I don't know what we would have done without this community bringing us together."



In addition to her role on the Open Spirit Steering Committee, Helen is co-leader of the Prayer Shawl group and a core member of Katherine McClean's Guided Meditation and Debbie Clark's Gentle Yoga. In all three, the combination of caring community and centering practice has been powerful for Helen. Each time the Prayer Shawl group gathers, they share a ritual of sending out the light to people in their lives facing challenges. Through the Guided Meditation group, Helen has learned to use breathing techniques to stay present in the moment. It has become so much a part of her that she naturally shares it with family members having a hard time: a simple—and profound—reminder to take five minutes and just breathe. And when Gentle Yoga class centers on a poem that reminds her of a friend or family member, she passes it on.

Passing it on. That's the heart of our Mind-Body Initiative. It's also the heart of our Nourishing Teachers-Strengthening Classrooms project. In a year of stress and distress, we have responded to the needs of teachers and students in the Framingham Public Schools and beyond. Our new website offers a wide variety of self-care and mindfulness resources. We are working with Framingham Public Schools to create short videos, in English and Spanish, to support their social-emotional learning initiatives and help children thrive in these challenging times.

*At Open Spirit, we come together to enable healing of body, mind, spirit and earth...*



Carl was intrigued. He signed up for one of our first Training Active Bystanders workshops, a 2-1/2 hour course Open Spirit began offering in 2020, in partnership with Quabbin Mediation and Jewish Family Services. He quickly went from intrigued to committed. "It sparked something in me," he said. He saw an opportunity to put shared values to work, collaborating with people from many backgrounds, making visible the "invisible connections" with people we encounter.

Carl signed up for a nine-hour "Training For Trainers" course. Now he is part of the Framingham Hub, one of twelve leaders offering Training Active Bystanders in the greater Framingham community. In 2021, the group trained more than 88 people—from faith communities, social service agencies, libraries, municipal organizations, school administration, student groups, and more.



For Carl, these trainings are opportunities for transformation—personal and communal. "There is so much we share in common," he says. "The connections we make on the street are extraordinarily important, and they can be so rich." Even more, the trainings help us claim that we are not powerless. Instead, we can practice "proactive communal compassion." That, he says, changes everything.

*With open hearts, at Open Spirit, we inspire courage to transform our lives and our communities.*



Because of your support, Open Spirit creates a table of welcome, where friendships turn difference into cause for celebration, where understanding leads to deepened appreciation and collaboration. Because of your support, Open Spirit creates communities that center and strengthen us, so we can pass it on to our neighbors. Because of your support, we are building proactive communal compassion.



With your support, Open Spirit can live ever more fully into our mission. We can widen the table of welcome even further. We can pass on healing practices to even more people. We can be leaders in a movement to create a courageous compassionate society.

Your gifts are an investment in Open Spirit. You are investing in the power of relationships. You are investing in the potential for healing. You are investing in courage. Your investment enables us to create the infrastructure of staffing, physical and virtual space, and program planning that allows all these things to happen. Your investment will bear fruit in ways we can only begin to imagine.

Every gift to Open Spirit matters. If you can give \$2500, it matters. If you can give \$250, it matters. If you can give \$25, it matters.

Thank you.