

Ann Marie B. Bahr receives 13th Annual Butler Human Rights Award

The City of Brookings will honor Ann Marie B. Bahr as the recipient of the 13th annual Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler Human Rights Award on Monday, September 27, 2012. Bahr is being honored for her work on inter-faith dialogue and helping to move Brookings towards a greater awareness of other religions.

The award is named after the Butlers, in recognition of their lifelong advocacy in human rights issues on the local, regional, and national levels. The annual award recognizes significant volunteer efforts on behalf of human rights. Previous honorees, in addition to Dorothy and Eugene T. Butler, Jr., are Phil and Winnie Baker, First United Methodist Church, Rev. Carl Kline, Rev. Scott Miller and Lisa Wolff, Margaret Denton, Dr. Steve Marquardt, Lawrence Novotny, Dr. Charles Woodard, Dr. Geoffrey W. Grant, Dr. Timothy Nichols and Scott Nagy.

“Ann Marie Bahr is a person who is deeply rooted in her own faith tradition” said Rev. Carl Kline, a United Church of Christ minister who has worked with Bahr on numerous dialogues. Kline continues “Perhaps that rooting has enabled her to consistently be an advocate for religious dialogue and understanding ever since she came to Brookings. She's advocated for inter-faith dialogue in her teaching, in programs on the SDSU campus and in the community and in written material she has provided for the *Brookings Register*. Her name is synonymous with inter-faith understanding in our community.”

When Bahr came to SDSU in the fall of 1988, she found Brookings to be a relatively homogeneous religious community. Bahr came from Temple University which had the nation's most international religious program. Bahr realized that Brookings has international residents who brought their faith beliefs with them and these beliefs were not visible. Bahr worked to connect South Dakota and the world in a way that was not being done.

Many people will remember the weekly columns that she wrote for *The Brookings Register* from 1999-2005. The columns related how peoples' lives were encapsulated in holiday traditions and sacred stories.



Bahr was the lead organizer on a series of workshops entitled “Faith and Food” that were held during the 2012 spring semester at SDSU. These workshops brought together the public to dialogue with religious leaders from Catholic, Protestant, Muslim, Hindu, and Native American beliefs.

Bahr worked with the local Muslim community to organize two public Muslim-Christian dialogues (2009 and 2010). She also designed an interdisciplinary course on the Middle East for SDSU in 2002.



“Ann Marie Bahr is a true believer that bringing community together is a mission that all of us must carry through dialogue and education” said Fathi Halaweish, a member of the Brookings Muslim community. “Relentlessly, she supported seminar series and discussions in the community for many years. Through her support, Ann Marie introduced and engaged many of us from the Islamic faith to Brookings and SDSU community. She hosted speakers from all walks of life and faith in her classes, encouraged her students to interview people from different faiths, and to write and publish these discussions and interviews in the newspapers. She planted the seed of recognition and respect in her students, which represent the best learning experience that students can get.”

Bahr had philosophical questions about knowledge and truth that were not being answered by her initial training in geological science. After considering several different fields in the humanities and social sciences, she went to Stanford University to pursue religious studies.

Bahr, a Catholic, said the purpose of any religion is to connect people to reality and truth. “While human beings are capable of discerning true from false, and good from evil,” Bahr said, “we must also acknowledge the limitations of our knowledge and not claim to ‘own’ truth or virtue.” Bahr believes that a lack of such humility leads to human rights injustices in the name

of religion. Bahr said “looking at different religions breaks you free from blindness and prejudices which hinder the practice of human rights as well as the service of humanity advocated by most religions.” Bahr has been a member of the Brookings Human Rights Committee for the past 20 years.

Bahr commented that the various religions’ ability to get along can be compared to a marriage. “In a marriage, each spouse comes from a family with its own wisdom, values, and traditions which are passed on from generation to generation. The challenge for the new couple will be to create a shared life from these originally separate paths. It takes understanding and love to accomplish this. With the move towards a global economy and society, we need to use the wisdom of various cultures and religions to build a new global life together,” said Bahr.

Dr. Bahr is the author of two books (*Christianity* and *Indigenous Religions*) that are part of Chelsea House Publishers’ Religions of the World Series, and the editor of a global history of Christianity published by Millennium House in Australia. Bahr has published numerous articles, served in leadership roles for the American Academy of Religion, and taught various religion courses at SDSU.