

Calgary Interfaith Council
UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

February 1-7, 2017

“Celebrating Diversity & Connecting for the Common Good”

Calgary is blessed by a broad diversity of religious faiths whose origins and history originate from places that span the globe. Our city is enriched by the broad spectrum of languages, foods, and cultures that define Calgary’s international flavour. The ability of these religions, in particular, to flourish in a setting of respect and dignity is essential for the city’s future.

The intention of the Calgary Interfaith Council’s sponsorship of the UN World Interfaith Harmony week is to join with similar efforts throughout Canada and internationally to promote peaceful coexistence in the face of intolerance, prejudice, and conflict.

Over the past several years, great strides have been made in Calgary to create interfaith dialogues and educational programs to foster greater understanding and respect that has led to the building of harmonious relationships between Calgary’s faith communities.

We are proud of the presence of active clergy and laity from all faiths whose passion is interfaith work and who devote their time, energy, and resources to enhancing the quality of life for all Calgarians.

A Week of Inspiring Programs and Relationship Building

The Calgary UN World Interfaith Harmony Week was designed to offer worship, dialogue, educational, cultural and social justice opportunities to all participants based upon the teaching that the world stands on sacred wisdom, a spiritual bond to God, and service to humanity. The programs were spearheaded by the Calgary Interfaith Council with the co-sponsorship of the Calgary Council of Christians and Jews, the Calgary Jewish-Muslim Council, the Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build Project and the Intercultural Dialogue Institute.

February 1st- Opening Ceremony at City Hall with Mayor Naheed Nenshi

With hundreds in attendance, 15 faith traditions including the Indigenous People proclaimed the value of Interfaith Harmony through unique calls to prayer.

Representatives from Provincial government and the City of Calgary Police Services and Fire Department brought greeting along with the UN Association of Calgary.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi spoke eloquently about the strength of diversity and read the City of Calgary Proclamation for UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. Music was interspersed throughout the program and all 15 faith traditions places a piece into a 4'x6' puzzle that when completed revealed a scenic picture of the City of Calgary.

Display tables from the various faith traditions enabled attendees to learn more about the respective religions and their presence in Calgary.

A video of the ceremony is attached.

Attendance: 250

February 2nd- Interfaith Breakfast: “Multifaith, Not Interfaith Families”

Approximately 75 people attended this morning program that explored how parents who practice two different religious traditions can raise their children with respect and appreciation for both faiths.

Attendance: 75

February 4th and 7th- Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build Project

Twenty-four Calgarians spent two days building an affordable home for low-income families. This unique interfaith service project began with Jewish rabbis, Christian pastors, and Muslim imams joining together to launch this project to raise \$1 million to construct 10 homes in Calgary.

Attendance: 24

February 2nd through 8th- Open Houses and Musical Services

Nineteen congregations held open houses that welcomed Calgarians for a tour and talk about their sacred space and the rituals and teachings that characterize their faith. Many families charted a route to visit as many congregations as they could in one day! Refreshments were served and a truly warm and gracious spirit pervaded the open house program. The Calgary Interfaith Council also posted “Virtual Tours” of several sacred spaces for those who were unable to participate in the visits.

Attendance: 350 (on a cold, -17C day!)

February 6th- A Day Devoted to Sexuality, Storytelling, and Community Building

On this day, the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week turned its attention to a program on “Transsexuality and Other Border Crossings” presented by the University of Calgary, sharing personal faith narratives through “Fifty Stories of Faith,” and discerning ways to create community hubs to bring people from different faith, ethnic, cultural, and economic backgrounds together in safe and sacred places.

Attendance: 140

February 7th

Under the generous hospitality of the Intercultural Dialogue Institute, the UN World Interfaith Harmony week concluded with a celebration of the successful events of the past week through personal testimonies, examples of new learning, and visually through the music and dance of an Azerbaijani children’s performance. The joy and energy exuded through partaking of a delicious meal and conversation left the organizers and participants in the UN World Interfaith Harmony week eager to translate the goodwill and new friendships into future interfaith activities aimed at building bridges of respect and understanding through dialogue, learning, and service projects.

Attendance: 150

February 11th and 12th- “Building Sacred Bridges” Concerts

The finale for the week combined the best elements of all the programs into a concert that highlighted sacred musical renditions from various faith traditions. Held at Knox United Church on Saturday evening and Beth Tzedec Synagogue on Sunday evening, the audience comprised of young and elderly were treated to outstanding choirs, vocalists, and an instrumental trio. The concert, held in support of the Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build Project, raised over \$15,000 toward the construction of affordable homes for low-income families.

Attendance: 1,100

Additional information about the Calgary Interfaith Council’s UN World Interfaith Harmony Week program.

This was the first celebration of this kind in Calgary, the fourth largest city in Canada. Clergy and lay leaders from all the represented faith traditions devoted hundreds of hours and thousands of dollars to organize and fund the events.

Each participant was provided a “Passport” to be stamped at the various events and preference for reservations at the concluding dinner was given to those with stamped passports. (See attached)

Media coverage of the week’s activities- from major newspapers to television to the internet- was extensive especially in the wake of the mass shooting at the Quebec mosque on the previous Sunday. The Calgary World Interfaith Harmony Week program represented a positive antidote to the prejudice, intolerance, and ignorance that had emerged from the darkest corners of society. This event captured the hope and hearts of Calgarians who have come to value diversity and respect for one another as one of the city’s greatest assets.

It is our intention to hold this event next year featuring new events and with even greater participation.

We extend our appreciation to the UN World Interfaith Harmony organization for providing encouragement and resources to enable us to demonstrate the strength of interfaith cooperation.