

Making our communities more harmonious

The Calgary Interfaith Council has decided for its 2019 United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week project to challenge all of us to take a "civility pledge."

The civility pledge campaign was kicked off at an opening ceremony at city Hall Atrium on January 31.

Two leaders of the Calgary Interfaith Council – Rabbi Shaul Osadchey and Imam Fayaz Tilly – welcomed the audience, which was greeted by Major Naheed Nenshi and Calgary Glenmore MLA Anam Kazim on behalf of the provincial government.

Chantal Chagnon, an indigenous artist and educator, performed a traditional song. She was joined by Tony Snow of the Urban Indigenous Circle.

Following the opening ceremonies at city hall, various Calgary houses of worship were encouraged to devote sermons on the theme of civility and public discourse during the week-end of February 1 to 3.

On February 5, Mayor Naheed Nenshi was the feature speaker at a breakfast held at Beth Tzedec Congregation that was

passion, mercy and love" – ways that reflect civility – if we are to be "a beacon of hope in an often cruel world."

That capsule summary of the mayor's comments was written by Warren Harbeck, a columnist with the Cochrane Eagle newspaper and a volunteer member of the Calgary Interfaith Council.

The mayor said, "I worry about how the lack of civility impacts the rest of our lives." Amidst "increased tribalism, how do we go to a place where each of us is looking for the wellbeing of all?"

According to Warren Harbeck's well-told account of the breakfast meeting, Mayor Nenshi concluded his remarks as a Muslim speaking in a Jewish synagogue by quoting a prayer of the Christian Saint Francis of Assisi: "Lord, make me an instrument of Your peace; where there is hatred, let me sow love . . ."

The theme of this Interfaith project is stated simply as: "I Choose Civility: Listening, Caring, Engaging."

Participants at the meet-

"We've gotten lots of positive feedback. Many members of the Calgary Interfaith Council are actively supporting this. The mayor has signed it and he took forms with him for the rest of council."

Rabbi Osadchey the idea of a civility pledge arose from the simple observation that there is an erosion of civility in public discourse in Canada. Basic civility has practically fallen off the cliff in U.S. public life.

He said that religious leaders need to speak out more to promote the basic value of understanding and respect. True dialogue is to learn and understand from each other. It is about listening as much as speaking.

Rabbi Osadchey said caring about others is one way to break down what appears to be the growing fragmentation of society.

The week's events concluded with a dinner and celebration of Interfaith Harmony Week. It was to be hosted by the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints at 2021 – 17 Avenue SW.

A corollary event took

place in 2014 with a call to support poverty reduction in Calgary. By 2017 it amalgamated several smaller groups and launched its first program for the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.

That brought together clergy, religious leaders and interested Calgarians into a week of learning, dialogue, worship, social justice and relationship building. It touched the lives of thousands of Calgarians and was recognized by Mayor Nenshi with a City Proclamation designating the first week of February as UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.

The CIC's successful program was recognized by the United Nations and was awarded the King Abdullah World Interfaith Harmony 2017 First Prize. Three representatives of the CIC, Rabbi Shaul Osadchey, Rev. Debra Faulk, and Imam Fayaz Tilly were invited to Amman, Jordan for an award ceremony where they received the Gold Medal and a \$25,000 prize.

(For more information go to www.calgaryinterfaith-council.org)