

RALPH J. COFFEY

❖ 27 The Farms Road ❖ Bedford, New York 10506 ❖ (914) 234-9748 ❖ rcofgcof @ gmail.com

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Re: The 9th Annual Interreligious Prayer Service for Peace and Justice celebrating World Interfaith Harmony Week.

As my wife and I entered the Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart in Yonkers, New York on Sunday February 3, 2013 to attend an interreligious prayer service, we did not know what to expect. Any apprehension we may have had was immediately put to rest as we were warmly greeted at the front door welcoming us to the church and the service. We were given a booklet with the order of events and all of the participants.

The Monastery Church of the Sacred Heart is absolutely beautiful. Music was playing softly as we sat in one of the pews towards the front and admired the stained glass and the architecture. Charles Chesnavage came over and greeted us (as he did for all of the attendees and participants).

Mr. Chesnavage began the program by illustrating the theme of peace and interfaith harmony with a fascinating story of a meeting between St. Francis and the Sultan during one of the Crusades. Although of different faiths and, at the time, at war with each other the two of them recognized in each other common human yearnings and the mutual desire for peace. Having a painting of that meeting projected onto a screen helped focus our attention as we learned of this intriguing encounter.

A film was then shown that visually recorded the many religious communities that live and worship every day in New York City. To see so many different faiths practices their customs so joyfully and reverentially was inspiring.

And then one representative after another of nine different faith communities rose and walked to the podium to say or sing a prayer. It was dignified, fascinating and beautiful. Some came with their families who either performed traditional music or translated into English the prayers of their faith.

There was no proselytizing. It was simply a sharing of one's faith traditions in a loving, non-threatening environment. Its goal was to give a face to the possibility of harmony among all the world's people. In a spirit of mutual respect it gave me hope that we would one day not equate different faiths as potential enemies or rivals. I think it was best summed by what a Jewish rabbi said at the service, "There are only two types of people in the world: People who are your friends and people who are not *yet* your friends."

This was a very special service and I highly recommend it. I am eagerly looking forward to attending it next year during World Interfaith Harmony Week.

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