



Halifax, CANADA Report - 2017

2017 was the fourth year for Halifax to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW). This year something tragic happened that made an impact on the whole country.

Visits to *Sacred Spaces* are at the heart of our program, and on January 29th, the very same day that our *Sacred Spaces* began; six people were murdered in a Canadian sacred space. It happened in



[Photo: Jane Woodford, MetroNews Halifax]

Quebec, a different Canadian province; however, it struck at the heart of all Canadian people. Our hearts grieved for those who died and for the loved ones who lost a father, husband, teacher, or friend. Our hearts grieved for Muslim sisters and brothers who were afraid in their schools, homes, streets, and sacred spaces. And together with our mayor we rallied. With immediate response,

thousands of Haligonians filled the Grand Parade reaching out to offer care and support. World Interfaith Harmony Week helped to strengthen us all. As one participant in our Program commented, *"I was surprised how hopeful I felt by the end of the week. It felt like an extremely timely antidote to the fear and hopelessness engendered by the attack of the mosque in Quebec."* (Sarah Michleh, Jewish, Interfaith Engagement participant, environmentalist)

In 2017 our experience of WIHW expanded and deepened in so many ways. New collaborations, especially with the Local Immigration Partnership, and Mount Saint Vincent University's International Education Centre, along with the participation of three new faith communities, led to increased creativity, participation, and a stronger program. We see growth in our endeavours reflected in the strong local response to world events, in increased participation in the Interfaith Engagement

Certificate Program, in the numbers who attended events, and in the eagerness of people to become ambassadors for the Week, including Halifax Regional Police.

At the heart of all this growth is the deepening awareness of and relationships with the now 13 diverse



[Photo: Anthony M Power, AMPwerx]

faith communities who host the *Sacred Space* events. We gather with representatives from these communities at an annual meeting in October for education and networking, specifically to: raise awareness of WIHW, and how it is celebrated locally and worldwide; to get to know each other, and to explore together how to become better hosts to those visiting their sacred spaces.

Who Is Interfaith Harmony Halifax?

We, a 21-person team who work to promote the vision of WIHW, represent community partners, cultures, ages, skills, and abilities, as people of diverse faiths and good will. More and more people are eager to get involved as they experience the Week and appreciate its global nature, as well as the local work that has been recognized. The team met monthly throughout the year to plan, de-brief, report, envision, refine, and expand. We further developed our website to include more information on each of the Sacred Spaces, including notes on their tradition and the history of that tradition in Halifax.

Elements of 2017:

1. Sacred Spaces: Meeting Our Neighbours – ***NEW NAMETAGS and SPACES***
 - Communal Action of Support at the Ummah Mosque – ***NEW***
 - Art Memorial: *Walking With Our Sisters* – ***NEW***
2. Interfaith Engagement Certificate Program – ***NEW TRAVEL POUCH and PASSPORT***
3. Celebration of Interfaith Harmony – ***MORE ENGAGEMENT***
4. Declarations of Interfaith Peace and Friendship – ***NEW CONNECTIONS***

1. Sacred Spaces: Meeting Our Neighbours

NEW NAMETAGS and SPACES



[Photo: Michelle Munro, Halifax Shambhala Centre]

The heart of the Week was the opportunity to visit sacred spaces in Halifax to observe, meet, and engage with diverse faith communities. These 13 communities participated: Aboriginal, Baha'i, Brahma Kumaris, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim, Pagan, Quakers, Sikh, Taoist, and Unitarian Universalist. This was an increase of three more community visits than the previous year; and in order to accommodate the additional requests for visits to faith communities we extended the Week to the last Sunday in January.

During the visits, guests were warmly welcomed, received an introduction to WIHW, participated in spiritual practices traditional to those communities, and then engaged in times of conversation and refreshments. We prepared nametags for hosts this year, and guests found these helped them to feel more welcomed, comfortable, and safe. It was an immediate way to identify the host.

- **Circle of Support and Care at Mosque** **NEW**

Media contacted us, wondering how this tragedy would impact our events during WIHW. Without a doubt, the importance of promoting interfaith harmony was heightened – a matter of life and death. As a result, participation at all of our events increased. Of special note was the visit to the Ummah Mosque. The prayer hall was filled to overflowing,



[Photo: Anthony M Power, AMPwerx]

and hundreds of people surrounded the mosque holding hands, creating a circle of care and support. In the cold and icy dread of fear, our hearts had been warmed and opened. We had changed. *"The event in Quebec gave greater meaning to having harmony. Need not just be tolerant. Need to have appreciation and love for each other."* (John MacLennan, Christian, Interfaith Engagement participant)

- **Art Memorial: *Walking With Our Sisters* *NEW***



"Honoring missing and murdered Indigenous women, girls and two-spirit people and their families" exhibited over 1,800 vamps (tops of moccasins) from across Canada.

The exhibit, directly linked to the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, calls all Canadians to a wide range of actions that support Indigenous well-being and prosperity. Along with the Quebec tragedy, the exhibit exposed our hearts to the raw suffering in our First Nations' communities, and opened our hearts to community and right relations.

Although not officially one of our events, we promoted and encouraged attendance, as it was more than an exhibit. It was a place of healing, a ceremonial, prayerful experience of deep human suffering and resilience. More than 500 people attended the opening, with over 3,000 attendees over the span of the exhibit and a phenomenal amount of media coverage. "*WALKING WITH OUR SISTERS is very powerful and highly recommended. Maybe your ❤️ will be broken too.*" (Dawn Carson, Buddhist, Interfaith Engagement participant)

2. Interfaith Engagement Certificate Program *NEW TRAVEL POUCH and PASSPORT*

The Program is an intensive weeklong experiential engagement with the people, places, and practices of world religions. This year over 50 people participated from such areas as government, the city



[Photo: Junfang Fu, Student, MSVU]

police, health, education, and immigration services. Along with diverse cultures, professions and ages, the participants represented a wide range of religious, spiritual, and secular beliefs. To receive a certificate, they were required to participate in two sessions before and after WIHW, visit at least three of the thirteen *Sacred Spaces* and the interfaith celebration, keep a reflective

journal during the week, and share learnings with others. Since past participants said the program felt

like going on a pilgrimage, we offered them passports, which were signed by hosts, and travel/nametag pouches. They enjoyed seeing other “pilgrims” at the *Sacred Spaces*, and the nametag pouches helped them connect. It became a group experience. Along with connecting at sites, they participated in a group Facebook page.

3. Celebration of Interfaith Harmony *MORE ENGAGEMENT*



[Photo: Anthony M Power, AMPwerx]

Bringing together close to 200 people from diverse faiths and good will, we celebrated the interfaith harmony that is in Halifax. Given all that people were experiencing, we felt that an opportunity to reflect, engage, and celebrate was deeply needed. After a sweet grass ceremony of purification outside led by an Indigenous Elder, we remembered

the sacred land of the Mi'kmaq people. Once inside, we formed small and intimate groups to meet several other people from diverse traditions and explored what qualities we felt were needed in the world (e.g., belonging, respect, honesty, wisdom, love, etc.). Then we shared stories about where we experienced these qualities. This communal experience was followed with instrumental music, reflections from two participants in the Interfaith Engagement Program, community singing, and joyous bhangra dancing led by a highly popular group of young Sikh men. The very satisfying afternoon celebration came to an end with socializing and refreshments.

5. Declaration of Interfaith Peace and Friendship *NEW CONNECTIONS*

Inspired by our deep desire for peace and harmony in the world, we have continued to expand the *Declarations of Interfaith Peace and Friendship*, which organizations are invited to endorse with their logo and signature. Over 40 declarations have been received to date from local, regional, national, and international organizations representing education, media, government, business, diverse faiths, as well as community groups. We continued to gather declarations throughout the year and displayed them online. This is an excellent way to raise awareness about WIHW, give groups an easy way to participate, and help to expand and strengthen the network. **See Appendix 3.**

Ongoing: Inspired by this year's events, we will continue to promote the vision of WIHW by celebrating two new UN initiatives: an Earth Day cleanup highlighting environmental teachings from diverse traditions, which will be organized by several members of our team, and a Peace Day celebration, which will be organized by one of our partners, as well as two academic presentations by team members about how international students' participation in the Interfaith Engagement program contributes/affects their cultural competency and learning experience in Canada. Finally, our Facebook has grown to be an important source of communication throughout the year, with Feb 13-18 reaching over 8,000 and engaging almost 700.

TESTIMONIALS

A. Interfaith Engagement Program

"I felt proud of Halifax, I didn't really know my city until I did this program, and I was born and raised here. I really could not wrap my head around how beautiful and varied the diversity is in this city was until I went out to witness it and participate in it for myself." (Nzingha Millar, Christian, young African Nova Scotian)

*"I would recommend this program. Often we wonder, 'What do **they** do in **there**?' This gives us a chance to respectfully and openly answer that question and promote understanding and acceptance of others. It dispels myths and provides a foundation for understanding religions and why people are drawn to them."* (Constable Amit Parasram, Hindu background, Diversity Equity Officer, Halifax Regional Police)

B. Sacred Spaces: Meeting Our Neighbours

"These kinds of initiatives pull us back to our humanity. Visiting the spaces, feeling the warmth, so different from outside in the cold weather, pulled me back, celebrating spirit of depth, that deep experience that being human entails. The interaction with every space, welcomed me, and they were very warm with each other. Gives hope with being a person." (Roberto Montiel, Philosopher, Interfaith Engagement Participant; Coordinator, Local Immigration Partnership)

REFERENCES

Ms. Sylvia Calatayud, Coordinator of Welcoming Communities, Immigrant Services Association of Nova Scotia. scalatayud@isans.ca

Dr. Ashraf Al Zaman, Associate Professor of Finance at Saint Mary's University and Executive Chair of the Ummah Mosque Executive Committee in Halifax. Ashraf.Zaman@smu.ca

Mr. Mike Savage, Mayor of Halifax, mayor@halifax.ca

Mr. Jean-Michel Blais, Chief of Police, Halifax Regional Police, stjohnb@halifax.ca

RESOURCES

Interfaith Harmony Halifax
Coordinator, Kim MacAulay
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RESOURCES (cont'd)

Interfaith Harmony Halifax Links

<http://ihhalifax.ca>

<https://twitter.com/ihhalifax>

<https://www.facebook.com/UNWorldInterfaithHarmony>

APPENDICES

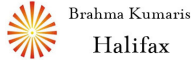
Appendix 1: Testimonials from Sacred Space Hosts

Appendix 2: Media (Television, Radio, Print)

Appendix 3: Declarations of Interfaith Peace and Friendship

OUR SPONSORS

AMPwerx, Baha'i Community of Halifax, Brahma Kumaris, Dalhousie Multifaith Centre, Earth-Spirit Society of Nova Scotia, Grove of Nova Scotia Druids, Humani-T Café, Lutheran Campus Ministry, Maritime Sikh Society, Mount St. Vincent University, Mount Interfaith Peace and Friendship Centre, Silverbirch Spirit Connections, Touch BASE, United Pagan Collective, and Waves of Compassion





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Appendix 1: Testimonials – Hosts, Sacred Spaces

Aboriginal: Aboriginal Student Centre (ASC)

“The ASC was pleased to host its first Blanket Exercise as part of the Interfaith Harmony Week events. We were able to accommodate 35 guests who all spoke highly of our exercise once it was completed. We all enjoyed fry bread and fruit, and visiting with each other. We look forward to continuing our relationship with Interfaith Harmony Halifax.” Veronica Gore, ASC Coordinator

Bahá’i Community of Halifax

“As one of the founders of the observance of World Interfaith Harmony Week in Halifax (and before it, World Religion Day) we have observed wonderful growth in interfaith understanding and fellowship among members of diverse faith communities due in large part to the unity-building efforts of Interfaith Harmony Week. WIHW has also helped to spawn more interfaith activities in Halifax outside of the bounds of Interfaith Harmony Week and to support the work of groups and individuals promoting religious harmony. The Bahá’i-hosted event this year was our largest in the four years we have participated and our guests outnumbered the Bahá’is attending. Fellowship and good will was palpable. We look forward to an even larger event next year and to ongoing efforts by peoples of good will to promote religious unity throughout the year.” Ehsan Yazdani

Brahma Kumaris

“As always Interfaith Harmony week is a wonderful celebration of spiritual life in all its glorious expressions. At the Brahma Kumaris Centre our space swelled with the participation of over 50 individuals. Our large meditation room was filled to capacity with standing room only. All who came were interested in our understandings and left fulfilled and happy.

Participants were provided with a history of the Brahma Kumaris, its worldwide growth and some of the BK world-wide service initiatives. A brief discussion of the underlying knowledge we use for self transformation and cultivating a peaceful internal world and it ended with an experience of God's love and peace through a guided meditation. Of course, the night wouldn't have been complete without everyone receiving a blessing and a sweet.

After the formal part of the program we all enjoyed wonderful conversations and community building with great Chai tea and cookies. It was a most inspirational and uplifting evening for all.” Judy Johnson, Centre Coordinator, Brahma Kumaris Halifax

Buddhist: Halifax Shambhala Centre

“It was a warm delight to host some 60 people at the Halifax Shambhala Centre as part of Interfaith Harmony Week. Even in the thick of what felt like a very dark and confusing week, the atmosphere was cheerful & celebratory, all the while contemplative and peaceful. We look forward to playing a role in IHH 2018!” Dan Corbett, Shambhala Buddhist Community

Christian: The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

“It was a wonderful experience to welcome visitors to the chapel in Halifax for the sacrament service on the Sunday of Interfaith Harmony week. Because this particular congregation has many married university students with young families, several families with teenagers, and many older members, it encompasses a wide range of ages. The bishop and the three speakers represented those ages. Visitors appreciated the emphasis on family. Socializing with a few of the visitors after the service provided a wonderful opportunity to begin to develop good relationships.” Janet MacLennan, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints

Hindu Temple

“The Hindu Temple was honored by the visit of Interfaith Week group on Sunday 29th January. The members of the visiting group were welcomed at the entrance by the temple's executive. During the announcements the members were introduced to the congregation and were accorded a warm reception. The information about the award won in 2016 was shared with members of Hindu community at the services. The community members chatted affectionately with the visiting members and saw that they felt at home. The visiting members explained the role of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and their activities in Halifax. The visiting members participated in giving ‘Aarati,’ traditional waving of lamp to the deities on the altar. They were given ‘Charanamrut,’ a sacred mixture of milk, yoghurt, ghee, honey and sugar to drink. At the end all members were treated to gourmet vegetarian meal, which is part of Hindu Temple services. Some members remarked that they liked the sermon given by the priest during services.” Sastry Vankamamidi, Priest at Hindu Temple

Jewish: Shaar Shalom Synagogue

“Shaar Shalom synagogue was deeply honored by the impressive turn-out of IHW who graced us with their thoughtful presence during IHW for a Friday night Shabbat service. We sang and learned some words of our tradition together throughout the service, but the highlight was the conversation that followed the services and the opportunity to share our traditions with each other. Best of all, my family and I were delighted to host 15 WIHW participants for a festive Shabbat dinner and interfaith dialogue at our home, following services. We all felt the experience was deeply nourishing spiritually and have already expressed active interest in continuing our dialogue together. Thank you for making these sacred relationships possible.” Rabbi Raysh Weiss, Shaar Shalom Congregation

Muslim: Ummah Mosque

“The World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration event at the Ummah Mosque has given us the opportunity to host and learn about our neighbours from other faith communities. Like the previous years, we shared and recognized the commonality that we have across communities. However, the heartfelt support that the Muslim community received from the members of other faith communities, in the backdrop of the unfortunate event in the Quebec City and other developments, has been exceptional.” Ashraf Al Zaman, Ummah Mosque

“World Interfaith Harmony Week this year coincided with the tragedy of murder of six Muslims and injury of many more while praying in a Quebec City Mosque. This sad event showed the true beautiful face of Canada as manifested in the outpouring of sympathy, solidarity and love by communities of faith, officials and politicians on all levels and the public at large. It also underlined the critical need for interfaith harmony and provided an example far beyond a local activity to embrace the entire country.” Jamal Badawi

Pagan: Pagan Presence

“We hosted our Imbolc celebration at the Universalist Unitarian Church. We had a chance to socialize prior to the ritual and we were blessed to have so many visitors that came with open minds and hearts. We introduced ourselves and explained that we are made of individuals and groups of various faiths under the Pagan umbrella and that there are many others in the Pagan community. We then invited them into the ritual space and explained what they could expect of the Druidic ritual that was to follow. With the provided programs I was pleased that most joined in with the chanting. People were able to bring items up to the altar to be blessed and were able to sample mead. After the ritual there were refreshments and tables with people from various groups available to answer questions and a number of people stayed in the ritual space to ask about our Grove, the altar and the ritual itself.” Dan Negus, Pagan Presence

Quaker

“As we set up forty-five chairs in a large circle in preparation for our open Meeting for Worship, we did not know whether to expect two guests or twenty. But soon every chair was occupied by guests of many faiths, interested to see how Quakers worshipped. Everyone accepted the request to sit in worshipful silence, to listen for the Divine. When, not only our own members, but several guests were moved to speak, we felt that we all were blessed by the Spirit.” Maida Follini, Quaker Community

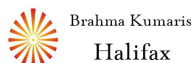
Sikh

“The visit by the esteemed participants of Sacred spaces program to Gurdwara (Sikh Temple, Maritime Sikh Society) was an honor for us. We had 35+ participants of different faiths and backgrounds visiting us for Sunday prayers. Starting the visit with covering their heads, taking off shoes and washing hands followed by the prayers and ending with a delicious meal. It never felt we had guests because they understood and participated in the prayers in such a way that it reinforced the feeling of oneness and love between all of us.

A team of volunteers was available with them at every step since they enter the temple, to make them comfortable with ceremonies, prayers and answer any of their questions about the faith and its beliefs. We would love to continue working with team of IHH, Halifax to do more of these events to strengthen our community in many ways.” Hasmeet Singh Chandok, Maritime Sikh Society

Taoist: Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism

“The Fung Loy Kok Institute of Taoism was delighted to welcome guests from a wide variety of backgrounds during our open house on February 5th. It was wonderful to have our new friends join us for Taoist Tai Chi ® practice and in chanting the Northern Dipper Sutra. The visitors' enthusiasm and respect for our tradition lifted our spirits, and we were pleased to have them join us for our regular Sunday lunch together.” Steve Dingwall





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Appendix 2: Media

All Media Links

- <http://ihhalifax.ca/home/resources/news-links>

Television:

[Global News: Interfaith Harmony Week](#)

[Global News: People to form human circle around Halifax mosque for silent vigil](#)

[Global News: Vigils held in Halifax, across Maritimes for Quebec shooting victims](#)

[CBC News: 'Beautiful' show of interfaith support wraps arms around Halifax mosque](#)

[CTV News Atlantic: Faith in Harmony](#)

[CTV News Atlantic: Interfaith Harmony Week](#)

Radio:

[News 97.5 Radio: Hundreds attend Quebec City vigil on Grand Parade in Halifax](#)

Print:

[Metro News: 'Standing on guard:'](#)

[Metro News: Solidarité from Halifax](#)

[The Chronicle Herald: Haligonians invited to link arms in show of support for local Islamic community during prayers today](#)

[The Chronicle Herald: Halifax is ready to celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week](#)

[Touchbase Magazine: Solidarity gathering at UMMAH masjid in Halifax today](#)

[Touchbase Magazine: Halifax vigil honours victims of Quebec city mosque attack](#)

[Touchbase Magazine: UN interfaith celebration at MSVU on Sunday, February 5](#)

[Faith in Canada 150: Harmony in Halifax](#)

[The Signal: A show of solidarity at a Halifax mosque](#)

[The Signal: Interfaith Harmony Week in times of great turmoil](#)

[Conivium Magazine: Harmony in Halifax](#)

Youtube:

[Candle Light Vigil In Halifax](#)

[Candlelight vigil held in Halifax for victims of Quebec City Mosque terror attack](#)

[Dalhousie University holds vigil to support victims in Quebec City](#)



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Appendix 3: Declarations of Interfaith Peace and Friendship

Local

1. Baha'i Community of Halifax
2. Brahma Kumaris
3. Chebucto West Community Health Board **NEW**
4. Dalhousie Multifaith Centre, Dalhousie University **NEW**
5. Halifax Community Health Board **NEW**
6. Halifax Local Immigration Partnership **NEW**
7. Halifax Regional Fire & Emergency **NEW**
8. Halifax Regional Police **NEW**
9. Halifax Shambhala Centre
10. Interfaith Harmony Halifax
11. Mount Interfaith Peace & Friendship Centre
12. Mount Saint Vincent University
13. Mount St. Vincent University – Student Union **NEW**
14. Silverbirch Spirit Connections **NEW**
15. The Caring Human Association **NEW**
16. Ummah Mosque
17. United Way Halifax **NEW**
18. Universalist Unitarian Church
19. Waves of Compassion
20. World University Services of Canada – Local Committee

Regional

1. Alba Nuadh Druid Arts of Nova Scotia
2. Atlantic Contemplative Centre
3. Atlantic Jewish Council **NEW**
4. Atlantic Lutheran Campus Ministry Council **NEW**
5. Atlantic Soto Zen Centre
6. Be the Peace Institute
7. Earth Spirit Society of Nova Scotia
8. Engage Nova Scotia **NEW**
9. Grove of Nova Scotia Druids **NEW**
10. Inverary Resort on Baddeck Bay
11. Maritime Sikh Society
12. MLA Fairview-Clayton Park, Government of Nova Scotia **NEW**
13. MLA Lunenburg, Government of Nova Scotia
14. MLA Timberlea-Prospect, Government of Nova Scotia
15. Nova Scotia Health Authority **NEW**

National

1. Honourable Geoff Regan, The Speaker, House of Commons, Parliament of Canada
2. Encounter World Religions
3. The Institute of Canadian Archives
4. Toronto Steering Committee, WIHW
5. United Pagan Collective **NEW**

International

1. Charter for Compassion – International
2. Charter for Compassion – Pakistan
3. The Parliament of the World's Religions
4. Touch BASE – Magazine for Global Canadians

