

**Calgary Interfaith Council**  
**UN World Interfaith Harmony Week**

**February 1-7, 2018**

**“Sharing Sacred Stories: From Generation to Generation”**

Since the launch of the Calgary Interfaith Council (CIC) in conjunction with the 2017 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, the organization has grown significantly in its goal of becoming the central address and voice of the Calgary interfaith community. Our website ([www.calgaryinterfaithcouncil.org](http://www.calgaryinterfaithcouncil.org)) currently serves as a calendar clearinghouse of all interfaith events in the city as well as a resource for interfaith speakers and for locating houses of worship throughout the area. Due to wonderful recognition as the First Prize Winners of the 2017 King Abdullah II World Interfaith Harmony Award, numerous religious, civic, and social justice organizations in Calgary have reached out to us for collaboration and advice.

With that as a backdrop for planning our 2018 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week, the Calgary Interfaith Council decided to explore ways of conveying the important value of interfaith understanding and cooperation to our youth. The theme of our week, **“Sharing Sacred Stories: From Generation to Generation,”** captures the desire of each religious faith tradition to transmit not only its particular values to their youth, but to encourage and promote interfaith relationships across religious boundaries.

Our 2018 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week program reflects the continuing commitment to improve interfaith religious literacy and respect on an intergenerational level. The planning process for the CIC’s World Interfaith Harmony Week began initially in August, 2017 with monthly meetings followed by weekly meetings during the last two months. Over 25 clergy and religious lay leaders, representing the Baha’i, Buddhist, Christian, Hindu, Jewish, Muslim (Sunni, Shi’a, and Sufi), Sikh, and Unitarian faiths regularly attended these planning sessions. This level of interfaith cooperation was remarkable in itself.

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

## A Week of Inspiring Programs and Relationship Building

The Calgary 2018 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 upon the foundation of 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. They were held at synagogues, churches, and mosques.

*February 1<sup>st</sup>- Opening Ceremony at City Hall with Mayor Naheed Nenshi and Anam Kazim, Member of the Alberta Legislature*



With an attendance double that of our 2017 program, hundreds in attendance were inspired by 15 faith traditions, including the Indigenous People, who began the week of harmony with unique calls to prayer. Mayor Naheed Nenshi spoke eloquently about the role of religious diversity in strengthening the fabric of society and read the City of Calgary Proclamation for UN World Interfaith Harmony Week. MLA Anam Kazim presented a Proclamation from the Province of Alberta declaring February 1-7 to be UN World Interfaith Harmony Week in Alberta, Canada. 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.

The major focus of this year's Opening Ceremony was to model the theme of **"Sacred Stories: From Generation to Generation."** We called upon an elder from several religious communities to share what they valued most about their tradition and hoped would be transmitted to future generations. These words were received

and acknowledged by a teen who spoke about what he/she cherished about the tradition and hoped to also pass on to the future. The presentations were made by:

1. Linda Heni-Nothing and Shenoa Snow- Indigenous People
2. Nazila Ghasemi and her son, Bardia- Baha'i
3. Rev. Robert Mutlow and Paris Bickersteth- Christian
4. Poorani Gopalapillai and teens Harini, Dahshayani, Haran and Patrick– Hindu
5. Sidney Cyngiser (Holocaust Survivor) and Mikayla Seidman- Jewish
6. Riaz Khawaja and his daughter, Afsa- Muslim
7. David Munoz (Student at Mt. Royal University)- College Youth

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.

### *February 2<sup>nd</sup>- “Sharing Sacred Stories: Youth to Youth”*

This unique Friday afternoon program involved teens aged 15-18 to share their faith stories and build friendships for future conversation and cooperation. The event was held at the **Calgary Islamic School** and began with a Muslim prayer service followed by table conversations in the school gym about what each student values about his or her tradition and how they practice it in today's society.

### *February 3<sup>rd</sup>- Indigenous Blanket Exercise Ceremony with Chief Lee Crowchild at Tsu'u Tina Reserve*

The “Blanket Exercise,” sponsored by Calgary Metro Alliance for the Common Good (MACG), was an interactive program that explored the post-contact Indigenous experience. 100 people signed up for The Blanket Exercise with 25 additional people on a wait list. It was followed by a small group discussion.

## *February 3<sup>rd</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>- Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build Project*



This program honours our commitment to serve humanity and to build interfaith harmony that will carry over from parent to child. 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. We have thus far received \$775,000 in donations.

## *February 2<sup>nd</sup> through 10<sup>th</sup>- Open Houses at Places of Worship*

Seventeen 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.

## *February 5<sup>th</sup>- “Breaking Barriers, Building Bridges”*

This interfaith breakfast for clergy and religious leaders engaged attendees in sharing their faith journeys along with the challenge of how to lead a religious life in the face of the growing trend toward being “spiritual” rather than affiliating with a specific organized religion.

*February 5<sup>th</sup>- “Students Share Sacred Stories”*



Held at Mt. Royal University for an audience of college students and interested members of the community, four students from the Christian, Muslim, and Sikh traditions shared insights about their personal faith journey from childhood to adulthood and in the process how they faced and overcame unique as well as common challenges and struggles in acquiring their religious identity.

*February 5<sup>th</sup> – “Religious Pluralism: An Imam’s Perspective”*

Hosted by Varsity Acres Presbyterian Church, Imam Fayaz Tilly from the Muslim Council of Calgary and Muslim Chaplain at the University of Calgary, explored the meaning of interfaith cooperation and co-existence from an Islamic perspective. His presentation was followed by a spirited Question & Answer period.

*February 6<sup>th</sup>- “Multi-Faith Dialogue: Is there Religious Discrimination in Calgary?”*

This program launched the CIC’s new Multi-Faith Dialogue. Thirty clergy and lay leaders from various faith communities examined the issue of prejudice and intolerance with the challenge of how to replace it with an appreciation for religious diversity and respect for the role of religion in the public arena. Participants committed themselves to an ongoing monthly conversation and dialogue to deepen their understanding of the issue and to offer proposals to enhance interfaith cooperation.

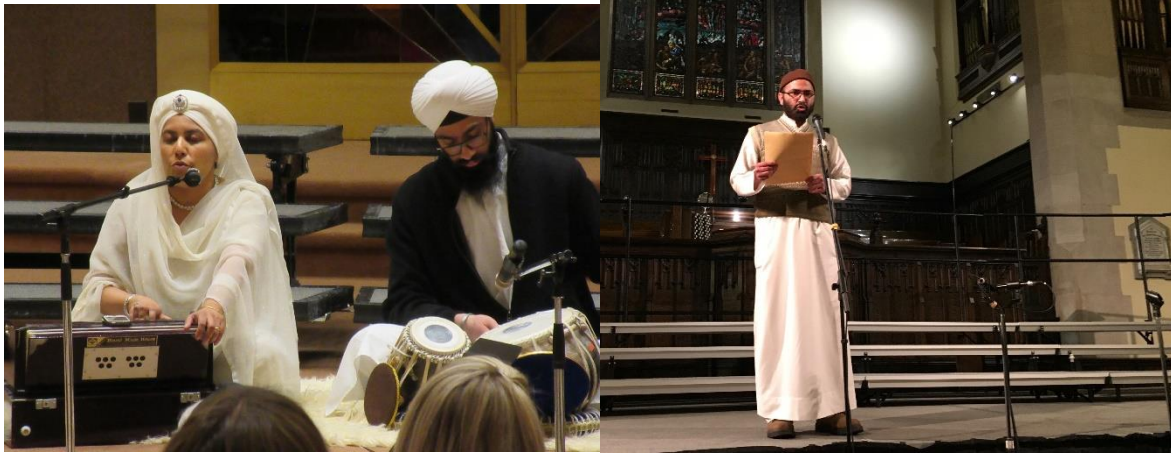
*February 7<sup>th</sup>- World Interfaith Harmony Week Closing Dinner*



The CIC 2018 UN World Interfaith Harmony week capped off its full program with a celebration of the successful events of the past week along with an eager desire to translate the goodwill and newly created interfaith friendships into future interfaith activities. The joy and energy of the evening was heightened through partaking of a delicious vegetarian meal featuring various ethnic cuisines and prepared by **EthniCity**, a social enterprise that hires and trains new immigrants to pursue employment in the food and beverage industry. Along with table conversation about the week's theme of "Sharing Sacred Stories," the evening featured entertainment by the joint **Jewish-Mormon Children's Choir "All God's Children"** and the thrilling dancing of the **Youth Whirling Dervishes**.

*February 10<sup>th</sup> and 11<sup>th</sup>- Second Annual "Building Sacred Bridges" Concerts*





Based upon last year's successful interfaith music concerts, the CIC's UN World Interfaith Harmony Week concluded with over 1300 people attending the two back-to-back performances held at Knox United Church on Saturday evening and Beth Tzedec Synagogue on Sunday evening. This year's concert featured youth choirs and participation by Muslim and Sikh clergy. 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 nearly \$20,000 toward the construction of affordable homes for low-income families.

### **Additional Notes about the CIC's UN World Interfaith Harmony Week:**

Through the efforts of the CIC, the observance of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week was expanded to the entire province of Alberta. Premier Rachel Notley made the proclamation before the entire Alberta Legislature who voted unanimously to accept it. It is our intention to work toward the adoption of the UN WIHW by the Canadian Parliament.

Each participant was provided a "WIHW Passport" with the schedule of events to be stamped at the various events s. (See attached)

Media coverage of the week's activities- from major newspapers to television to the internet- was extensive in light of our success in 2017 and the impact of the CIC subsequently in Calgary. 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.

*Attachments:*

- Calgary Interfaith Council's Passport for 2018 UN WIHW
- Opening Ceremony Outline and Video Link
- City of Calgary Proclamation
- Province of Alberta Proclamation
- Media Coverage

***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.***

***Respectfully submitted,***

***Calgary Interfaith Council Leadership Team***