

# Calgary Interfaith Week aims to repeat global success

CHRIS NELSON

Faith leaders in Calgary are determined to make the second time just as sweet as the first, as they embark on an expanded Interfaith Week across the city.

The weeklong “coming together” of religious and faith groups of all kinds is part of the United Nations Harmony Week, an international celebration of inclusiveness. Last year, in its inaugural effort, Calgary surprised the world by beating out dozens of other such events to take home a gold medal prize for its work.

That has inspired local leaders to involve more groups and include more programs in this year’s Interfaith Week, as they build on that initial and surprising success.

Rabbi Shaul Osadchey of the Beth Tzedec Synagogue in the city’s southwest, Rev. Debra Faulk of the Unitarian Church and Imam Fayaz Tilly of the Muslim Council of Calgary travelled to Jordan last April to accept the gold medal and cheque for \$25,000 after being voted into first place for those initial efforts.

World Interfaith Harmony Week is an eight-year-old program that was first proposed by King Abdullah II of Jordan to the UN General Assembly, which then agreed to dedicate the first week of February to promote interfaith harmony for all people of good will.

It was King Abdullah who presented the three representatives from Calgary with the prize last year. The money is being spent

to build a more robust interfaith website based out of Calgary and the gold medal has been displayed to many congregations since that time.

This year’s city-wide event, which begins with a ceremony at City Hall on the evening of Thursday, Feb. 1 – is aimed particularly at appealing to younger people.

“We adopted a theme this year and have done some programming to reflect that theme, which is sharing sacred stories from generation

to generation. It is addressing the question of how do we pass on our values of interfaith harmony and co-operation to the next generation,” said Rabbi Osadchey.

He said that young people and college-age students have been involved in planning some of the programs, an example of which is a potluck dinner to be held at Mount Royal University. During the event, people will come forward to tell their own stories of how those faith commitments



Imam Fayaz Tilly was recognized by King Abdullah II of Jordan at the award ceremony last year, where Calgary won the first place.

have been shared and passed on through the generations.

Mayor Naheed Nenshi has reaffirmed the original city proclamation backing the week for its second year and organizers are welcoming the backing of the Alberta legislature, which recently added its provincial support and proclaimed Interfaith Week 2018 in Calgary.

Events this year also include a multi-faith dialogue series, an invitation to an interfaith build project on behalf of Habitat For Humanity, a clergy breakfast meeting, open houses at places of worship, an online interfaith scavenger hunt and pulpit exchanges, in which clergy switch congregations. The week wraps up on the evening of Feb. 7 with an interfaith dinner at the Latter Day Saints Church on 17th Avenue S.W. Details are at [www.calgaryinterfaithcouncil.org](http://www.calgaryinterfaithcouncil.org).

Rabbi Osadchey said it is a full and varied program, with more groups being invited to get involved this time around.

“I think we have every faith represented, either in an open house or the opening ceremony, as well as the Indigenous community,” he said.

Repeating the success of 2017 will be difficult, but Calgary faith leaders intend to give it their best shot.

“Yes, we are going to give it a go. I said to our friends in Jordan they should expect to see us back again,” added Osadchey.

Last year Calgary beat out about 80 other applicants for first place. Judges took into consideration the quality and impact of the effort together with how well participants collaborated, while still considering if every religion remained respected in its own right.

Awards for second and third place went to programs based in Sarajevo and London.