**United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week**

**Celebration in Surrey, Saturday 07 February 2015**

**Surrey City Centre Library**

On the last day of Interfaith Harmony Week, the Surrey Interfaith Council hosted an interfaith celebration in the Surrey City Centre Library with almost 100 people attending. Eleven people recited, chanted, or sang prayers from their own tradition to open the program. Dr. Scott Daniel Dunbar, founder and director of the *Canadian Interfaith Research Centre* (CIRC), gave an inspiring keynote address before the attendees broke into small discussion groups to engage in a conversation on three questions that addressed the celebration’s theme of acceptance and respect for all Faiths.

The Surrey Interfaith Council is a grassroots organization of individuals committed to the promotion of interfaith understanding and collaboration as part of a healthy and vibrant community where people of diverse Faiths can live in harmony. The members of the task force were Reverend Edith Baird, Crossroads United Church; David Dalley, SIFC convener; Dr. Jagessar Das, president of the Kabir Association of Canada; Dr. Osahon Chris Eigbike, of African Stages Association of British Columbia and theology student; and Connie Waterman, External Affairs portfolio for the Spiritual Assembly of the Bahá'ís of Surrey. All members of the task force attend an Interfaith Contemplative gathering, a weekly devotional gathering for interfaith meditation and prayer where their unity of vision was forged. This greatly enhanced the ease at which every step of the planning progressed.

Dr. Dunbar is an Associate to the *UNESCO Chair in Interreligious and Intercultural Relations* at Monash University, Australia, as well as a faculty member in Monash’s Centre of Religious Studies.  He is also the founder and director of the *Canadian Interfaith Research Centre* (CIRC) and the academic co-editor of the *Journal of Religion and Popular Culture* published by the University of Toronto Press.  He attended two Parliaments of World Religions (Chicago 1993 and Melbourne 2009) and has sat on the board of directors of *Multifaith Saskatoon*, a Canadian Interfaith organization. He had published on interfaith dialogue in the *Journal of Ecumenical Studies,* and is currently writing a university textbook on religious cooperation with *Bloomsbury Press.*

Within the small group conversations there was much enthusiastic participation around the three questions posed and all were invited to share freely their observations and concerns. The facilitators were asked to record any insights and movements from a previously held conviction that broadened their understanding of other Faiths and their role in promoting harmony among them, with the intention of sharing this widely. The questions the small groups addressed were:

* What motivates me to promote interfaith harmony? What stops me from promoting interfaith harmony?
* What practical steps can I take to move towards acceptance and respect of all Faiths? Within the different sects/factions of my own Faith?
* What does interfaith harmony look like among very diverse Faiths and traditions?