

**The Faith Always Wins Foundation, Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance, and
The Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council**

2019 World Interfaith Harmony Week

REPORT

Event: *Humans of Interfaith in the Heartland*

**A Day of Service and Dialogue to find the love of: God, the good, and
the neighbor.**

Saturday 2nd February, 10:00 am - 2.00 pm

Rime Buddhist Center & Institute of Tibetan Studies

World Interfaith Harmony Week

In 2010, HM King Abdullah II addressed the 65th UN General Assembly and proposed the idea for a 'World Interfaith Harmony Week'. His goal was to further his vision of faith-driven world harmony by extending his call beyond the Muslim and Christian community to include people of all beliefs and those with no set religious beliefs as well. A few weeks later, HRH Prince Ghazi bin Muhammad presented the proposal to the UN General Assembly, where it was adopted unanimously as a UN Observance Event.

The World Interfaith Harmony Week, like all the previous endeavors of HM King Abdullah, is not an appeal to water down one's faith or set of beliefs. Rather it is a call to respect our differences and individual views and to unite around the basic principles that people of all views agree upon. It also encourages us to appreciate that harmony can only come if we build upon a solid foundation of dialogue which has "Love of God and love of the neighbor or, love of Good and love of the neighbor" as its core principle for engagement.

About the Organizers

Faith Always Wins Foundation

Founded in 2014, Faith Always Wins Foundation formed after the Jewish Community Center shoots in Overland Park, KS. It was this event that took the lives of 3 individuals who were thought to be Jewish, however they were Christians. In an act of faith and love after the shootings, the Faith Always Wins Foundation's mission is to promote dialogue for the betterment of our world through kindness, faith, and healing.

Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance

Founded in 2009, KCIYA is a collaborative nonprofit of individuals who want to change the conversation about religion by empowering youth of all religious, non-religious, and spiritual identities to come together to establish a religiously pluralistic understanding and respect by serving the Kansas City community.

Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council

The GKIC was originally formed as the Kansas City Interfaith Council in 1989 to bring awareness of the rich diversity of faiths that constitute our greater Kansas City community.

Background of the Event

Why choose a theme of “Humans of Interfaith in the Heartland” for this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week?

In a world that can often feel divisive, divided, and a daily news and media cycle, which illuminates images and stories of viciousness, illness, and cataclysmic events affecting the world around us, we can feel overcome by the magnitude of grief set in front of us. When we are faced with so much negativity and perceived lack of concern for the 'other', we retreat back into our tribes and isolation. We forget that we belong to each other. These concerns raise questions about the meaning of life, about Love of God and love of the neighbor, or love of the Good and love of the Neighbor.

To counter this trend, we (Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance, and Faith Always Wins Foundation) wanted to create a space where participants left our event more informed, more compassionate, more inspired people of the Heartland by their acts of leadership, service, and growth.

Kansas City is the heartland city of the United States of America. We wanted to embrace everything that means. We wanted to reach the young and the wise, the religious, nonreligious, and spiritually inclined. We wanted to reach the humans of interfaith in the Heartland. We collaborated with the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance, and Faith Always Wins Foundation to create this program with all the beautiful diversity that Kansas City has to offer.

The Event

We (Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council, Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance, and Faith Always Wins Foundation) captured stories from participants about their own interfaith journey - moments of inspiration, of awakening from prejudices, and moments of connection and service.

The event invites the religious, nonreligious, and spiritually inclined to a space of experiential learning and community building.

The event organizers wanted to weave the theme of interfaith cooperation into as much of the event as possible. We chose to host at the Rime Center because it was first built as a church and then converted to a Buddhist education and retreat center. The original stain glass windows are still in place and are located in the main prayer and meditation room.

Participants had the opportunity to share a meal, Langar, which is the communal meal shared by Sikhs and all visitors. This meal took different dietary needs into account as well so that everyone can partake in this meal. Participants also had the opportunity to learn about several belief systems, about how people orient around shared values, and “The Big Questions”. Participants also had the opportunity to work for the common good together by creating "Brotherly and Sisterly Kindness Bags" that contain words of kindness and sweets.

Faith leaders and high school age students were invited to bring community members with them to meet their “neighbors” who come from diverse religious, nonreligious and spiritual groups.

Newsletters were sent out with information about the upcoming free event with details of how to register. A blog post was written about the event and posted to the Parliament of the World’s Religions, which covers key upcoming interfaith events. We also had communication with several schools in the Greater Kansas City area. The publicity opened our invitation to the wider community as well as spreading the word about the World Interfaith Harmony Week to readers who may not be aware of its existence. A copy of the blog post is with this Report.

Several religious and spiritual leaders were invited to speak from their traditions and their nonprofits with which they are associated.

- Lama Matt Rice (Buddhist), Spiritual Director of the Rime Buddhist Center & Institute of Tibetan Studies
- Karta Purkh S. Khalsa (Sikh), Director of the 3HO Kundalini Yoga Center of Missouri, Inc.
- Rev. Kelly Isola (Unity), Chairwoman of Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council
- Natalie Rovello (Christian-Catholic), Member of Kansas City Interfaith Youth Alliance-Faith Always Wins Foundation Interfaith Youth Leadership Team

Each presenter offered their voice and shared stories from sacred texts or their oral tradition in their individual ways and shared many commonalities and recognizing the differences with respect. They wove together strands of religious teachings about kindness, the meaning of life, and gave useful ways of how we can care for each other.

While there was a great deal of interfaith literacy and individual story being offered into the community, we also shared a meal together that nurtured the community both in body and mind. It later prepared us to make ripples of kindness when the "Brotherly and Sisterly Kindness Bags" were created.

When deciding on whom to make the "Brotherly and Sisterly Kindness Bags", the event organizers really wanted to honor and lift those that are educating our young people on important lessons in character development and personal stories that contribute to the community narrative of Kansas City. We selected to donate those bags to two local nonprofits, Village Shalom, a retirement community that honors elders in accordance with Jewish principles by bringing dignity, choice, compassion and care to their lives and life transitions. Operation Breakthrough is a nonreligious nonprofit that strives to provide a safe, loving and educational environment for children in poverty and to empower their families through advocacy, emergency aid and education. The bags were given to residents of Village Shalom and the staff & faculty of Operation Breakthrough.

Over 80 people, including kindness bag recipients, were impacted by this event. Positive feedback was given about the insight they gained from the speakers and of how the speakers, in their distinct ways, agreed on so many unities and exhibited respect for each other's differences. We all learned more, even the speakers.

The event is expected to be covered by two local media outlets. They have yet to release the articles.