

# Report 1:

## **The opening of the Observance of UN World InterFaith Harmony Week Church Service and Reception**

### **The Church Service:**

The observance of the opening of WIFHW started with the church service of the International Community in the spacious Simon Peters Church as venue. The Rev. Birgit Urd Andersen on her biblical reflection touched on the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and its significance for our community of different nationalities, religious and political convictions, but united in the belief in God and our responsibility for our co-human beings and the rest of God's creation.

The Service included different elements: prayers, fundraising for FAROS and lively songs of faith, affirming our oneness as people grounded on love of God and love of neighbor. At the end of the church service, drums led us to march and dance together from the church to the reception hall.

### **The reception**

The theme of the reception was WIFHW and in addition to this, the theme friendship. Everyone was welcomed and introduced to the story and principles of WIFHW by Camilla Henriksen, the Consultant of the Migrant and Faith Encounter Work of Haderslev Diocese. The introduction included a short video created by our local team with the purpose of spreading the InterFaith message of unity and harmony across diversity.

Everyone was then welcomed to try "The International Buffet" with food from different kind of cultures. We were grateful that so many different people and families wanted to contribute to the buffet. Food or the love of food is something that binds us all together.

Following the meal, we gave the word to Simon from Eritrea and Asma from Syria, who both are refugees in Denmark. They both shared stories of their life before and after coming to Denmark. They told very different stories, but one common ground in their stories is their friendship with a local Danish family and what this friendship has meant to them and their life today in Denmark.

Simon became a part of a Danish family – Steen and Lone. They include him in their life, taught him about the life and culture of Denmark. He is very grateful to them for helping him and giving him friends and family in Denmark.

Asma from Syria recalled her time as refugee in different asylum centers in Denmark with her two small children and the constant fear to be sent back to Syria, plus the fear whether she could be united again with her husband. She met contact families that extended their kindness and compassion even after she was granted asylum and was moved to settle in Kolding. These

angels visited her in her new place and did offer great help in setting up her home and extended help in all the difficult times of transfer and time of settling down. She said, when she was in DK, her mother died in her home country, and she could not visit her as refugee. It was very difficult time. Nevertheless, when she looks back what happened, she believes that God provided her angels on her long journey as refugee.

The contact family of Asma had a letter for the reception to be read to the public. It told how the experience of knowing Asma and her family is an enriching experience for them and gives them great joy in their life. They have never regretted opening their home for Asma and her family.

After the reading, we opened the floor for questions and other stories from the room. The conversation circled around topics of culture, generosity, hospitality and friendship.

The Cross-cultural ministry of Kolding Deanery has one of its services, called contact family scheme with refugees. We have voluntary coordinator, Elisabeth Fischer Nielsen, that receives requests of refugees who want to get a local family contact who can help them in their integration in their new country, Denmark. Right now, we have 48 Danish families who are contact friends with more than 100 refugees in Kolding. Part of our work is to find church families and ask them if they are willing to be a contact friend with an individual refugee or a family refugee. And our coordinator does the matching of the family and the refugees who wish to be connected to a contact family friend.

We ended the reception how we started it with – music. Kidd Mkandawire and Charles Angelo played the drums and invited everyone to dance.

### **Reflection:**

In the opening event for the WIFHW, we wanted to gather people and tell them about the United Nations' initiative - What is it? And we wanted them to reflect and talk about the message of WIFHW. We wanted to highlight some of the things that united us across cultures and religions: faith, music, dance, food and life.

We wanted in the theme “friendship” to show the value in meeting across cultures and religions. In friendship, we enrich each other across backgrounds, cultures and religions. You do not have to be alike to be friends.

### **Enclosures:**

Video as introduction to UN World Interfaith Harmony Week and Invitation

<https://www.facebook.com/woranuch.jonasson/videos/10157291286268423/?t=1>  
(march from the church service to the reception hall )

<https://www.facebook.com/172642779417532/videos/168341431167990/?t=0>  
(video of the drumming when people were sitting down)

mention of the events on the Facebook Profiles

**Kolding International Congregation :**

<https://www.facebook.com/Kolding-International-Congregation-172642779417532/>

[https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=migrantsamarbejde%20og%20religionsm%C3%B8de&epa=SEARCH\\_BOX](https://www.facebook.com/search/top/?q=migrantsamarbejde%20og%20religionsm%C3%B8de&epa=SEARCH_BOX)

<https://www.facebook.com/farosgreece>, the organization which the offertory collections were sent. (Just to give information the nature of the work of FAROS in relation to the unaccompanied refugees that have landed in Greece).

**Some photos of the opening: enclosed.**

Note: there are those who did not wish to be included in the video .So the showing is much limited number of people.