

Report 6:

Women Encounter through Women's Feast

Food, Dance and Stories of Faith

As concluding event in Kolding Observance of the UN World InterFaith Harmony Week 2020

Women Encounter is a monthly program we have which caters to the needs and interest of women from different countries and women of different religions. The Committee for Women Encounter (*Kvinder møder kvinder*), in cooperation with us, decided to hold **Women's Feast** to conclude the observance of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week on the last day of the month, February 29.

Women were invited to come with food, to dance and to tell stories of their religion. We could not expect all who could do the tasks, but we needed to start finding some of them because when women have tasks to do, then they are more interested to join in an event. There were those who promised to come with food. Four women said yes to dance traditional dance from their home country. They were Roya from Iran, Vera from Thailand, Jona and Ginging from the Philippines. Their dances should also enable other women to join in dancing. There were also women invited to share their stories of faith, what their religion means to them or to their daily life. An Indian lady, Ajitha, said yes to the task. We just believed that women are more open to share their life of faith and if Ajitha and one or two more women could share, then others would just hop in to share their own story of faith.

We started with coffee and tea around a long table, serving the cakes and fruits which women came with. The sponsoring organizations also contributed food added to what some women brought along. There was sharing information on WIFHW history and the reason behind our event. Each woman was asked to say her name and country and more about herself. Others spoke of their family and work, others about the reason why they landed in Denmark, about their country and education. There was also openness in sharing their own problem which they are facing.

Then there was time to share what their religion meant to them. Ajitha started to share her Catholic faith in India and how her faith in God helped her to overcome difficulties in her life. Then there were more sharings from women. A Muslim from Iraq described her family as very open, making her open to come to events with people of other religions. Then a refugee from Syria shared her story of faith. The woman from Iceland told about her illness and the project she wanted to do for the women in her own community. A Chinese lady confessed that she did not have religion, but she likes that in Buddhism there is also that kind of love of God and love of neighbor which she likes. The woman from Hungary did a recap of the shared stories that even if we had different cultures and religions, we could be together and what is important that we are the same human beings. Women continued to talk among themselves while having tea and coffee. On the other side of the hall were the children with a table of materials for creative activity. Two women in the committee attended to the needs of the kids.

We moved to the center part of the building. In a big circle, we sang small songs to greet each other and songs to dance together as partners while singing. It was received with much joy as women sang and danced. They sang a welcome song in four languages – Danish, English, German and Spanish- and did body movements while singing to welcome each other.

We expected three traditional dances. But after the three dances, a Chinese student offered a dance from her country to which everyone was invited to join. There was a mother from Afghanistan who joined to

dance with Iranian women. And the women from Africa grouped themselves to sing together and to dance while singing. Laughter and joy filled the atmosphere as most women tried to join in dancing, even if some of them showed signs of awkwardness but the more they laughed in knowing they could try and just have fun. There were also a few who were shy to dance but only watched and showed joy on their faces. There were balloons and flags of different countries that brought colours around us.

We were all 35 women and 12 children. Women represented 17 countries: India, Afghanistan, Congo, Lithuania, Philippines, Brazil, Tanzania, Hungary, Eritrea, Iran, Iraq, China, Ireland, Iceland, Namibia, Syria and Denmark. Again, the bad weather, affected the attendance. Many areas in Denmark on that day experienced high rise of water causing some flooding because of the daily heavy rains. But more than 40 women and children joined in that event.

Then we had the common meal for dinner. There were women in the kitchen who prepared food and heated some food which came earlier. Elsebeth Fischer Nielsen from the women's committee invited the women and their children to eat, reminding each one the responsibility not to waste food, the need to start getting food what likes to eat and the possibility to come back again to get food from the common table if one needs more. The request was to refrain from wasting food that should only end up in garbage container.

Personal cameras of women kept on clicking taking pictures of those who were wearing national costumes. We sang a song of farewell. And most women stayed to help in cleaning up the site of the venue: Simon Peters Hus at Islandsvej 4 in Kolding.

Reflection: When women are invited to do something for an event, it is most likely that they turn up even if it rains or even if the weather is bad. Active participation makes women to come to meetings like Women Encounter. Sharing a part of their culture as part of their identity is a sacred and valuable gift a woman can give to other women. They begin to openly appreciate the taste of food, to ask how a recipe is done. Encounters that allow them to share from their life and culture enable them to know other women by names and show interest in them. Some of them find women in this Women Encounter as good friends and they start inviting them to their private homes or private feasts.

Women who come for the first time are attracted to a fellowship with openness, freedom and joy and certainly, the meeting like the Women Encounter on February 29, should not be the last meeting they will attend. There are among those who write thanks and inquire when is the next women's event and others offer help if we need it. Women are willing to actively participate. Respect for women is recognition who they are, their talents and innate capacity to appreciate, contribute, uphold, nurture and protect life.

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