**Summary Report**

**10th World Interfaith Harmony Week**

**On the Celebrations of**

**Interfaith Festival of Creation**

**Sunday, February 16, 2020**

Name of the Event: Interfaith Festival of Creation

Date of Event: Sunday, February 16, 2020 from 1:00 pm to 5:00 pm

Location of Event: The Mary Ward Centre, 70 St. Mary St. Toronto

Number of persons Attended: 250

Sponsoring Organizations;

1. The Mary Ward Centre, Toronto
2. Office of Ecumenical & Interfaith Affairs, Archdiocese of Toronto
3. IYAM! - Interfaith Youth Alliance Movement - Toronto Catholic District
4. School Board, Toronto
5. Eco Sikh Canada, Toronto
6. As-Sadiq Islamic School, Toronto
7. Intercultural Dialogue Institute, Toronto
8. Encounter World Religions, Guelph

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Links where the program was advertised are attached as a separate document.

On Sunday Feb. 16, 2020 The Mary Ward Centre opened its doors to host the first ever Interfaith Festival of Creation in Toronto. This Interfaith, Inter-generational event was our response to the global challenge of the 10th Annual World Interfaith Harmony Week’s call to promote “Interreligious Dialogue towards Harmony.”

There is a great deal of energy unleased and potential for transformational change when we come together to focus and collaborate on something beyond our own individual organizational interests that is for the common good. We decided to focus our Interfaith Festival around the international declaration of The Earth Charter which “seeks to inspire in all people a new sense of global interdependence and shared responsibility for the well-being of the whole human family, the greater community of life and future generations.” As we reached out to potential collaborators and exhibitors we set before them the compelling call to action expressed in the Earth Charter:

*“We stand at a critical moment in Earth’s history, a time when humanity must choose its future. . .. Let ours be a time remembered for the awakening of a new reverence for life, the firm resolve to achieve sustainability, the quickening of the struggle for justice and peace, and the joyful celebration of life.”*

With that focus in place we invited various multi-faith communities, organizations, activists, musicians, poets and youth to bring to our Festival their gifts and whatever initiatives they or their group is engaged in that protects and enhances the well-being of the community of life and our common home – the earth.

**Exhibitors**

Twenty-four different organizations responded to our invitation. They set up colorful and informative booths throughout The Mary Ward Centre and engaged with the endless stream of people from all walks of life that kept pouring in. The list of exhibitors is attached.

**Invited Dignitaries**

The following dignitaries were invited to attend the Festival:

1. Hon. Bill Morneau, federal Finance Minister
2. Hon. Jeff Yurek, Provinal Minister of environment and Parks.
3. His Worship John Tory Mayor of Toronto
4. Mike Layton, Toronto City Councillor.

Their responses to the invitation can be found in an attachment

**Food and Family Fun**

The Festival was greatly enhanced by the generosity of the Sikh community who provided us with two tables laden with enticing food items to enjoy. There was no end to the food and the line ups eager to partake. The food, warm hospitality and service was provided by the Guru Nanak Langar Sewa Society of Toronto and EcoSikh Canada. The Loretto Sisters, who founded The Mary Ward Centre, also contributed food trays. Plant (R)evolution brought baked vegan goods (banana bread, brownies, chocolate cake, etc.) to show how people can enjoy food while helping reduce their carbon emission footprint by eating less meat.

Thanks to our close collaboration with the Interfaith Youth Alliance Movement (IYAM) we were keen on involving families with young children and youth in the Festival. IYAM created a lively and engaging Interfaith Kids’ Corner which featured face painting, henna, friendship bracelets, origami, and hologram puzzles. There was an environmental station that taught children how to create tote bags out of old t-shirts and a coloring station that featured animals and mandalas for both old and young to color. A cozy corner was set up for High School students to read to little children books that promote interfaith and environmentalism. The lively and active Interfaith Kids’ Corner noticeably drew in a number of adults who were keen on getting into some of the action. Many remarked that it was refreshing and hopefully to see the involvement of young families and youth in an Interfaith event.

**Event Program** 1:00pm to 3:00pm

1:00 – 1:25pm **Varsity Jews A Cappella Choir**

The festival got off to a lively entertaining start with the exuberant members of this Jewish Choir who treated us to a smorgasbord of modern and traditional Jews liturgical music, folk songs, Yiddish tunes and pop songs.

1:30 – 2:00pm **Compassion Cultivation Training**

**Dan D’Agostino**, a certified CCT trainer, led a workshop inspired by Tibetan Buddhism on Cultivating Compassion. The workshop consisted of input and meditative practices that might assist us in dealing with the critical issues of our time.

1:40 – 2:00pm **Film:** **Robin Wall Kimmerer, “What the Earth Asks of Us.”**

Robin is an Indigenous elder from the Potawatomi Nation. She is the author of “Braiding Sweetgrass,” which has been described as “a hymn of love to the world.”

1:45 – 2:00pm **Waste Management Workshop**

**Karen Van Loon**, the Coordinator of “Cultivating Care for Our Common for Our Common Home” at Faith and the Common Good, shared her passion and expertise on where our garbage goes when we think that we are throwing it “away.”

2:00 – 3:00pm **Your Home is an Orchestra! HOZA!** **Mark Sepic**

Mark Sepic, an internationally recognized guitarist, composer and sound sculptor, inspired us to discover how everyday household objects can be made to sound unbelievably musical! He then picked up his guitar and encouraged us to act for a greener world.

2:10 -2:20pm. **Plant-Based (R)evolution: Adapting a Vegan Lifestyle**

The Team at Plant-Based (R)evolution led a workshop on adapting a Vegan Lifestyle. They introduced people to the powerful documentary “A Prayer for Compassion” and encouraged them to sample some delicious vegan food.

2:20 – 2:40pm. **Islam and Creation:** **Imam Vinay Khetia (Muslim)**

Imam Vinay Khetia**,** a scholar, teacher and international speaker on Islam presented an Islamic perspective on Creation and the state of our common home.

2:30 – 3:00pm **Film:** **Annie Leonard “the Story of Stuff’**

Annie Leonard, the executive director of Greenpeace USA, is a long-time advocate for sustainability and critic of consumerism. Her animated film “The Story of Stuff,” reveals how our obsession with stuff is trashing the planet.

**Formal Gathering** 3:00 – 4:30pm

The Formal Gathering was a weaving together of music, prayer, poetry, ritual and input from various religious traditions. The musical component featured **Neeraj Masih**, who has been described as one of “the most versatile Sitarists of our times.” His debut musical album, “Sounds of India” is a best seller. He was accompanied by two other accomplished musicians from Hamilton. **Azra Ergun**, a young Turkish Muslim from Intercultural Dialogue Institute also contributed to the Gathering’s music.

**Welcome:** **Fr. Prakash Lahole** OP, *(Director of the Office of Ecumenical and Interfaith Affairs, Archdiocese of Toronto.)* Fr. Prakash welcomed all the participants and the speakers and then read the messages of the Mayor of Toronto, John Tory and the His Eminence Cardinal Collins of Toronto. The Mayor thanked the organisers and conveyed his best wishes. He shared that World Interfaith Harmony Week is playing an impressive role in bringing communities together and raising awareness about the need for global environment protection. His Eminence, Cardinal Collins also lauded the efforts of the Loretto sisters, organisers of the event and the initiatives taken by the leaders of World Interfaith Harmony Week during the past ten years.

**- Lighting of the Diyya (Lamp)** used in Hindu, Sikh, Jain and Zoroastrian religious festivals. It symbolised that all the World Faiths and their leaders can fight against the various kinds of darkness spread around us and by standing together they can bring light and hope in the World. Representatives of the various religions that were present came up to participate in the lighting of the Diyya lamp.

**- Presentation of Elements:** Bringing in of the Elements that connect us to the earth and unite us to one another– Earth, Air Water and Fire.

**- Key note Speaker**: **Simon Appolloni** (**Christian)**

Dr. Simon Appolloni is a gifted teacher in the Department of Religion and the Environment at the University of Toronto. He is the author of “Convergent Knowing: Christianity and Science in Conversation with a Suffering Creation” and editor of “For Earth’s Sake: Toward a Compassionate Ecology.”

He offered a perceptive analysis on the present state of the earth community and challenged us to abandon our assumed entitlement as “Consumers” and to learning to live together in harmony with less. He stressed that the Environmental Crisis is a Spiritual Crisis and that the young people of this generation, who know there is something seriously wrong in the world, have a strong thirst for some spirituality. What can the Religions of the world offer this suffering young generation who are anxious and frustrated?

* **Presentation: Greg Kennedy, SJ:**

Greg Kennedy is a Jesuit Priest who has just recently published a book entitled “Reupholstered Psalms” – ancient songs sung anew “that speak to our current experience of consumerism, terrorism, climate change, forced migration, the extinction of species intolerance…. . “

* **Buddhism and Creation** – **Geshe Gedum (Buddhist)**

Geshe Gedum is a Tibetian Buddhist Monk. He communicated with the audience through a translator. He insisted that it is our greed that leads to suffering. The doorway to happiness is open when we cherish other people and the animals.

* **Water and the World’s Religions** – **Brian Carwana.**

Brian Carwana is the Director of Encounter World Religions which is a highly successful and creative organization that has introduced over 100,000 people to the religions of the world. Brian spoke on water and its centrality in the practices and symbolism of some of the world’s great spiritual traditions. Water is the “Mother of Life” in so many religions and is the bear of the sacred.

* **Sikhism and Creation and the work of EcoSikh –** **Rupreet Sidhu (Sikh)**

Rupreet Sidhu is the founder and President of EcoSikh Canada, a non- profit organization connecting Sikh values and environmental issues. He spoke about the teachings of their founder Guru Nanak Dev Ji who was very close to nature and always preached that if we are close to the nature will have peace and harmony in our lives. The goal of EcoSikh is to plant 55,000 trees in Canada by 2021 in commemoration of Guru Nanak’s 55oth birth anniversary.

**Music and Poetry**

* **Judiasm and Creation: Joshua Lesk (Jewish)**

Joshua Lesk, is a stellar scholar and teacher of Judaism. He is also a musician, poet and artist specializing in spiritual and mystical themes. He sang in English, Hebrew and Arabic and the audience were enthralled with his musical and poetic gifts.

**Spoken Word by Zoha Sojoudi (Muslim)**

Zoha Sojoudi is a talented young Muslim spoken word artist from the As-Sadiq Islamic School in Toronto. The audience greatly appreciated her style and confidence. The message she conveyed really touched the hearts of people. Her poem was entitled “The Shaper of Beauty.”

**The Shaper of Beauty**

As the bright green leaves of the Willow Tree dance in the breeze

My worries grow dim, my heart calm and at ease

Beneath the azure, a trace of amber, as the sun begins to rise

Compliments the entrancing wings of Monarch Butterflies………

(The full poem can be found in an attachment)

* **Closing Remarks and Blessing**

**Michelle Singh,** Co-Chair of ***World Interfaith Harmony Week Toronto.***

Rev. Michelle Singh, who is an interfaith minister and Deputy Directory of Faith and the Common Good, graciously thanked the people involved in creating this Toronto Interfaith Festival of Creation in solidarity with WIHW. Her inspiring and challenging words sent all of us as multi-faith communities out into the world to make a difference.

* **Closing Song:** “**Blessed Assurance”** by **Niraj Masih**

This beautiful song is featured in Niraj’s album “United Voices” and is a moving blending of Christianity and Hindu music. Such is the beauty of interfaith intermingling!

* **A Few Comments, Evaluations and Possible Impact** can be found in an attached document.