

Keeping the Faiths



In challenging times - WIHW 2021

Interfaith Harmony can restore the heart and soul of humanity – Rev Berry Behr, CTII

Cape Town Interfaith Initiative has a legacy, some might call it a legacy of catching the wind in the sails and moving into something new.

In 1999, our elders caught the wind and sailed our city into new waters when they hosted the Parliament of the World's Religions. It was the first time ever that the Parliament was held outside Chicago.

In 2010, CTII Founder, Father John Oliver, and his team caught the wind of change when they were amongst the first to formally adopt the newly released Charter for Compassion.

In 2019, CTII caught the wind again as we shifted our focus to more grassroots inclusivity, and won the King Abdullah II prize for WIHW along with our partners, Faith Hope Love Communities.

In 2021, we have done it again. This time, the wind in our sails is our status as 2019 prize winners. We went on to use the platform of that prize to bring together all the prize winners of previous years to speak about what winning the prize has meant to them, and how we have continued our dedicated work, each in our own contexts, throughout the challenging times of the pandemic and often political, social and economic upheaval.

It seemed such a simple idea when we first considered it. We have so much passion for our interfaith work, and we believe that as prize winners it is our duty and our honour to amplify the message of interfaith harmony in the world. Many voices sing louder and with more harmony than one voice, and we wanted share our stories of interfaith triumph as well as our stories of challenge. We wanted to learn from the others.

But it was not simple at all! There were seven time zones to consider, there were language barriers. We did not know each other, and CTII was asking the world to trust a small group from Cape Town who had a lot more heart than skill.

That is why it was so very humbling when every single prize winner agreed to participate, and to share their time, energy and insight so generously.

The event taught us the power of relationship, and it demonstrated how interfaith engagement works at every level, all the way through from 3rd world grassroots conflict resolution and solution seeking to peaceful first world cities where there is time and space for a different kind of deep exploration of diversity. Always, respect and inclusivity are at the heart of interfaith engagement and this is where relationship, friendship and mutual value find true expression. We learned in our discussion that although the work of interfaith harmony looks and feels different in our diverse contexts, the intention is always the same. Love of Neighbour, Love of Good, Love of God = Peace on Earth.

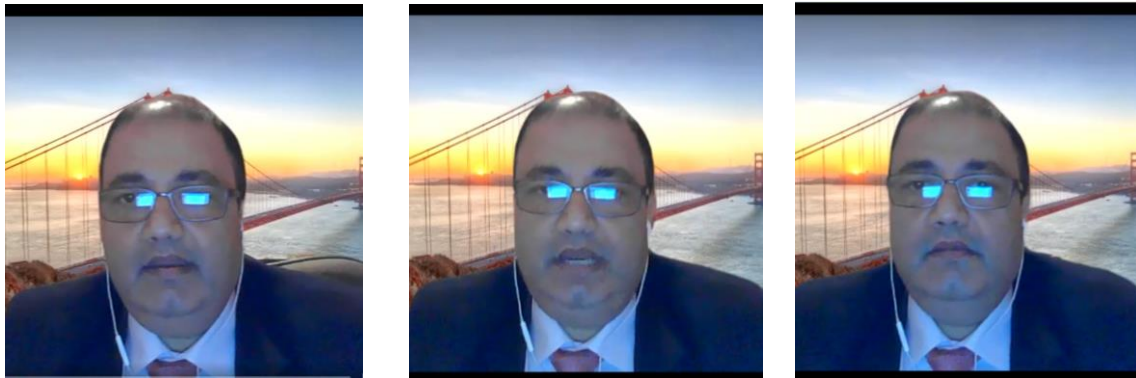
Here is the link to the event which was shared on Facebook and promoted by the Parliament of the World's Religions: <https://www.facebook.com/capeinterfaith/videos/419178619360422/>

Here is a window into the wisdoms shared during our event, which has attracted some 1547 views on the CTII website alone.

From New York: Mr Nitin Ajmera, newly elected Chair of the Parliament of the World's Religions, was our introductory keynote speaker. He helped us recall the Cape Town Parliament of the World's Religions event of 1999 which gave rise to the CTII, and paid tribute to our city's 22 years of success and relationship. In all those 22 years, he said, the clear vision of PoWR is in our one-ness, not in ego or pride. That is where strength and success come from.

Even in 2021 we need to discuss colour. I read the news about the end of apartheid in 1990... but last year has shown us that we are not done yet..."

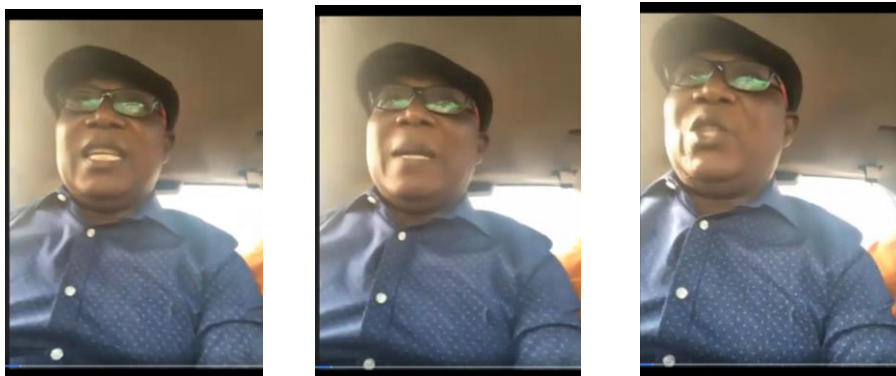
Do we have a 2020 vision? I believe the year 2020 has shown us what our clear vision should be. It should be about our world, our climate, our peace, our friendship and our one-ness.



Each winner then had a chance to express what winning the award meant to them and how they have been able to utilise that in their respective ministries.

2013 Nigeria – Pastor James Wuye of Interfaith Mediation Centre of Kaduna spoke of the importance of the fact that the WIHW was the initiative of a Muslim country as it had encouraged Christian-Muslim engagement in his country.

The award gave us a voice, strength and support for Christians and Muslims to talk with one another.



2014 The Philippines – Father Sebastiano DÁmbra from Silsilah Dialogue Movement in Mindanao, Philippines where religious differences have contributed to a violent conflict zone. Father Sebastiano said winning the award had enabled the Silsilah Dialogue Movement to inspire other people to move forward in love. Father Sebastiano has written a number of books on his spiritual path amidst the challenges of conflict.

When WIHW was launched we in the group were so happy because it was a surprise for us to see the UN focus on something new, something spiritual in nature, which is the Love of Neighbour, the Love of Good



2015 Pakistan - We took a moment to remember and honour Allama Ghulam Rasool Chishti of the Universal Interfaith Peace Mission, Pakistan, who passed away in 2020. We played the video message he sent to WIHW in 2019, just a few months before his transition.

We all should support WIHW from the depth of our hearts, from the strength of our minds... because all human beings are one and we all should be one because our God is One.



2016 The Gambia – Muhammed Loom from Euclid University told the story of the first Muslim migration of the followers of Prophet Mohammed (Peace be upon him), when they fled from Mecca. The Christian King Ashama ibn Abjar, who welcomed the first influx of fleeing Muslims into the Kingdom of Aksum, is alleged to have commented: “We pray well together”. Mohammed Loom encouraged us all to keep building on the gains of today’s solid foundation of relationship.

2017 Canada – Reverend Deborah Faulk representing the Interfaith Council of Calgary inspired us with her relating of the group’s puzzle project. She and her colleagues took a picture of their city, Calgary, and cut it into pieces like a jigsaw puzzle, reminding people that each piece has its place and its importance. Rabbi Shaul Osadchey joined her later on our platform, encouraging us all to think globally, but act locally because it is the local action which makes the difference and benefits the world.

It is faith.... That motivates us to ethical action, to the work of the common good, to live in harmony with others and the planet. – Rev Debra Faulk

Love cannot take hold when partners do not know each other well – Rabbi Shaul Osadchey



2018 Australia – Reverend Helen Summers, who founded the Interfaith Centre of Glasgow 21 years ago, quoted an Australian Rabbi who taught that politics are short term but all religions are long term.

There is so much we can do with just small kindnesses to each other.



2019 South Africa – Reverend Berry Behr of Cape Town Interfaith Initiative spoke about the importance of relationships, saying: “We can’t do interfaith alone”. She also spoke of CTII’s realisation that it was not the grandness of a WIHW event that mattered, but its authentic desire to bring people together to promote interfaith harmony and create community.

We seek to mend our relationships at home and also to build relationships with our neighbour across the world. To bring harmony back we need to mend and reconnect with each other.



2020 The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan – Minister of the Awqaaf, His Excellency Dr Mohammed Al-Khalaila, spoke about the years of dedication to interfaith ministry in his country, which was the initiator of the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week. He closed by saying there is more that unites us than divides us.

The land of Jordan is a beacon of light for all humanity so that people can learn how to respect and tolerate each other. We spread the message of peace to all humanity... God has created all of humanity, and wants us all to live in peace. There is no superiority of one religion over another.



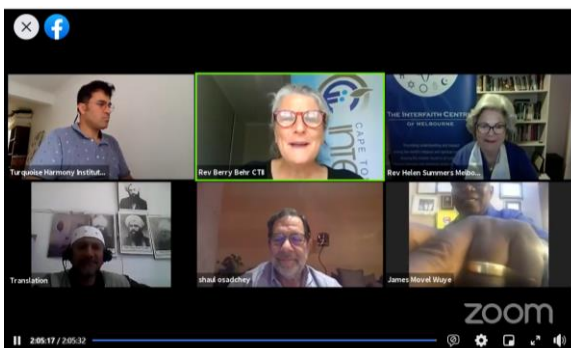
We need to pay tribute to our interpreter, Mr Abduragmaan Shaikh. Mr Shaikh had literally run across town (he had no transport) to help His Excellency with interpretation when our booked interpreter was suddenly indisposed. This act of service from Mr Shaikh and the Ahmadiyya community highlights the interfaith friendship, trust and collaboration between diverse faith communities in Cape Town.

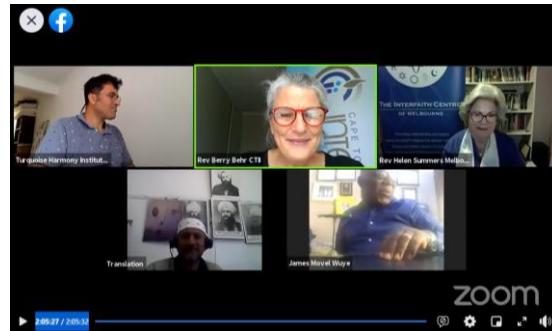


Keeping the Faiths in Challenging Times was the first event in CTII's WIHW calendar, which we called Seven Sacred Days Online.

The newly appointed Regional Coordinator of United Religions Initiative, Nyasha Mukaratirwa, offered the closing remarks in her very first public appearance in her new role. Due to poor bandwidth, Nyasha needed to keep her camera off to deliver her message:

We must do all we can to embrace diversity at every opportunity.





Each contributor received a personal certificate like this



God bless us all, every one.

Report compiled by Rev Berry Behr, Chairperson, Cape Town Interfaith Initiative