

WORLD INTERFAITH HARMONY WEEK 2021 - REPORT

EXTENDING OUR EMBRACE

1. DESCRIPTION OF THE EVENT AND ITS IMPACT

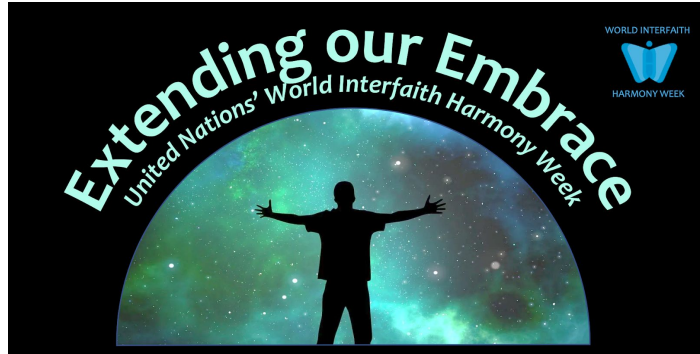
Extending Our Embrace

February 24, 2021

1:00 pm – 2:30 pm

The past year has been very challenging for all of us. Yet in spite of the need for social distancing, there are many unsung heroes among our faith communities who have found ways of

extending their embrace and compassion into the wider world. Now, more than ever, we need to broaden our embrace, especially to those who are suffering.



In light of this reality and inspired by the fitting theme of this year's World Interfaith Harmony Week 2021 - "Extending Our Embrace" - the *Office for Interreligious Dialogue of the Archdiocese of Toronto, The Mary Ward Centre, the Toronto Catholic District School Board (IYAM)* and the *Intercultural Dialogue Institute* came together to sponsor and envision an online program that would express the power of "Extending Our Embrace." We sought to widen our circles of compassion and care through inspiring story-telling and art from diverse faith traditions. As we wanted this event to be intergenerational as well as interreligious, we put a call out far and wide to elicit the artistic gifts of young people.

Program Impact

The **impact of the program** can be seen through the a) attendance of 882 viewers (see below), b) pre and post-event resources, c) testimonials, d) additional 631 views after (see below), and e) requests to use the program video for study and reflection groups (as per emails from The Grey Sisters, the Dominican Laity, and several schools).

Please note, the [pre-event resources](#) invited participants to consider what it means to extend one's embrace and the [post-event resources](#) provided opportunities to take action as a follow-up. Resource teachers on the planning team will be providing support to classes who wish to build on the momentum from the event. Participants were also invited to document their follow-up actions on social media using the hashtag **#ExtendOurEmbrace**.

A. Names of the Collaborating Partners

1. [The Office for Interreligious Dialogue, Archdiocese of Toronto](#)
2. [The Mary Ward Centre](#)
3. [The Toronto Catholic District School Board](#)
4. [IYAM](#) - Interfaith Youth Alliance Movement
5. [Intercultural Dialogue Institute](#)

This collaboration reflects ongoing efforts to work together in the past three years to promote interfaith dialogue through diverse events. Past events include the [launch of IYAM](#) (March 2019), a visioning session with International Children's Peace Prize nominee and *Green Hope Foundation* founder, Kekashan Basu (May 2019); an interfaith [Advent celebration](#) (December 2019) and World Interfaith Harmony events: [Models of Hospitality](#) (2019) family [Festival of Creation](#) (Feb. 2020) and [An Interfaith Prayer Service for the Well Being of the Earth and All Beings that Dwell Upon It](#) (May 2020). This collaboration reflects our *intergenerational* and interreligious initiatives.

B. Speakers

1. **Cheryl Perera** (Catholic), Founder of *One Child*. Distinguished as a *World Economic Forum Young Global Leader* and Canada's Most Powerful Women: Top 100, *One Child* is the first organization in the world empowering children and youth to combat the sexual exploitation of children through prevention education, advocacy, survivor care, and survivor empowerment, benefiting over 74, 000 in 15 countries. *One Child* has been named as one of the Top 5 Canadian Charities run by Young Professionals. She has been featured in the *Wall Street Journal*, *Globe & Mail*, *Al-Jazeera*, *CNN*, and the *Financial Times of London* etc. She received the 2017 L'Oreal Canada Women of Worth Award; 2006 World of Children Founder's Award; and 2005 Canada's Top 20 Under 20, among others.

<https://www.onechild.ca/our-founder/>

2. **Dr. Bhante Saranapala** (Buddhist), Global Public Speaker and Teacher of Mindfulness Meditation, Spiritual Counsellor & Founder of “Canada: A Mindful and Kind Nation”. The “Urban Buddhist Monk” is a recipient of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms Award*, and *Canada 150 Medal and Sesquicentennial Community Award* from the Government of Canada. Recipient of the *Spirit Award* from the Government of Ontario.

<https://canadamindfulnation.ca/urban-buddhist-monk/profile-of-the-urban-buddhist-monk>

3. **Tariq Syed** (Muslim), Founder of the *Good Neighbour Project*. Featured on Canadian national news outlets as “*The Pandemic Hero*” in responding to the needs of the elderly, vulnerable and health-care workers.

<https://www.goodneighbourproject.com/who-we-are>

4. **Nick Gunz** (Jewish) and **Alison Jenkins**. Nick is a naval and intelligence historian, as well as a member of *City Shul Synagogue*. He participates in a Catholic-Jewish-Muslim dialogue group. Alison is a music teacher and song-writer from Vancouver. Their heart-warming story of extending our embrace during the pandemic is featured on national news outlets, including the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation (CBC).

<https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/diary-toronto-returned-owner-38-years-later-1.5875638>

5. **Diane Montreuil** (Indigenous, Eastern Metis, Algonquin). Artist and Knowledge Keeper. Her artwork has been exhibited in Canada and the USA, and some of her paintings in Europe. She is the co-founder of *Dancing Deer*, an Indigenous craft company focusing on hand-made native arts and crafts and was also part of the Manitou Kwe Women’s group: “women spirit singers” who perform traditional drumming and singing.

<https://dianart13.wordpress.com>

Various artists - From diverse ages and faith traditions. Please see the full program description.

C. Attendance

Planning Team Members - 10 people

Presenters - 21 people

Attendees as per [Registration](#) - 852

(i.e. 198 individuals who completed registration and included students who would be watching with them; see link to spreadsheet above)

Thus, **Total Attendance for the Day of the Event: 883** (10 + 21 + 852)

Views since the event - as of Saturday, March 6th: 631 total YouTube views

Represents 433 **additional** people who have watched since the event ended.
(calculated from 631 views - 198 registered viewers)

Total Views including the day of the event and after = 1,316

(calculated from above: 433 + 883)

Registrants identified themselves as part of the **following traditions:**

Catholic	Jain	Hinduism
Christian	Islam	Unitarian
Mennonite Christian	Universal Worship	Advaita (Hinduism)
Anglican	Interfaith	Sai Multifaith
The Salvation Army	Judaism	Buddhism
Quaker	Baha'i	Brahma Kumaris
Disciples of Christ	Pantheism	United Church of Canada
Christian Reformed	Pagan	
Presbyterian	Universal Love	

2. MEDIA LINKS, VIDEOS, PICTURES & AUDIO

a) Media Links

Archdiocese of Toronto Website:

<https://www.archtoronto.org/en/offices-and-ministries/pastoral-ministries/office-for-interreligious-dialogue/home/interfaith-events/>

World Interfaith Harmony Week - Toronto Website:

<http://www.interfaithtoronto.ca/events.html>

[Article](#) written by Jacob Stocking for *Youth Speak News*, in an upcoming *Catholic Register* issue. Publication pending. The [Catholic Register](#) is the oldest English Catholic publication in Canada, founded in 1893. It is distributed to more than 30,000 homes through subscription and to churches across Canada.

Extending Our Embrace is included in the **Archdiocesan Update**, an internal newsletter distributed twice a month via email to the parishes, clergy and chancery departments of the Archdiocese of Toronto, including departmental information as well as relevant announcements and event listings.

b) Videos (including segments of the event)

Event Video on YouTube (1 hour, 45 minutes)

<https://youtu.be/3gqnaxc7A1M>

Candle Prayer for Closing (3 minutes)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1VMtIQpH773_5RUpZPAN22ZOHQtwRd1GD/view?usp=sharing

People Over the World Dance (3 minutes)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1GZaEJRy-dJmE8f2z01qGOP6ftsb9bwEW/view?usp=sharing>

Jesus of the Pandemic - Spoken Word (1 minute)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1k0Vyavkm8_Khw7Po73tbWbejOCSOtLW/view?usp=sharing

Calligraphy Art - Peace, Compassion, Embrace (1 minute)

https://drive.google.com/file/d/1JNKxP2xetcR-mMdYYLVh_Km1NrEvG-3m/view?usp=sharing

Sikh Art - Timelapse Drawing - Bhai Kanhaiya Ji (1 minute)

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1hByDRJoT1cQfAkfYiZB4hjve0XfhEjAZ/view?usp=sharing>

c) Photos

Photo Series Summary of Event:

<https://animoto.com/play/QB4ZnOPaqjW19QBrAbsdYQ>

3. SOCIAL MEDIA LINKS WHERE ADVERTISED

Twitter - Toronto Catholic District School Board:

https://twitter.com/TCDSB_NCC/status/1365522920752230404

<https://twitter.com/MICHAELaCACCAMO/status/1364652638776791040>

https://twitter.com/TCDSB_NCC/status/1364007173739667462

<https://twitter.com/TCDSB/status/1363988203112456193>

Twitter - Office for Interreligious Dialogue: @DialogueOffice

<https://twitter.com/DialogueOffice>

Facebook - Office for Interreligious Dialogue:

<https://www.facebook.com/ecumenical.interfaith.TO>

Instagram - Office for Interreligious Dialogue: @Interreligiousarchtor

www.instagram.com/interreligiousarchtor/

Interfaith Connections - newsletter emailed to a distribution list

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1BI5kUBkr1cDzcmNhuN-vZm9ggPhEdvmW/view?usp=sharing>

Other:

<https://twitter.com/CryPeace2/status/1362814228864921602?s=20>

<https://twitter.com/KeevilDaly1/status/1362590202951307275?s=20>

4. TESTIMONIALS

Please see the [testimonials](#) collected from emails sent by viewers.

5. POSTER OF THE EVENT

Please see the attached [poster](#).

Please see the [Eventbrite Posting](#).

6. FULL PROGRAM OF THE EVENT

Also please see the [Full Program Outline](#) as well as the [PowerPoint slide deck](#) used for the event.

Program Summary

Our program began with a warm welcome and general introduction to WIHW by Father Prakash, the Director of the Office for Interreligious Dialogue, followed by an acknowledgment of the indigenous peoples whose land we are standing on by Lisa

Malcolm. The singing bowl rang and we invited people to place their hands on their hearts and extend their love like the sound of the bell in ever-widening circles out into the world.

In the Introduction to the importance of this year's theme Kathy Murtha asserted that that the fundamental origin and on-going momentum of all our religious traditions lies precisely in the call to extend our embrace. The examples offered were the Sikh Langar, the Buddhist Bodhisattiva, Jesus' Healing Touch, Islam's origin in the call to move beyond a tribal identity and loyalty to a larger sense of community and the Indigenous peoples' gift of extending their embrace to include the earth itself and all its creatures.

The introduction was followed by a moving dance interpretation of the Song "People All Over the World." Nine dancers from St. Marguerite d'Youville High School danced in their own home, in their own zoom box to the words: "People over the world, reach out your hand, touch one another."

Attendees were then invited to take a moment of silence and recall a person in their life or their faith community who has lived with "Arms Outstretched." Dorothy Day was offered as a Christian example and 18-year-old Anjali Kaur Ghajminger, from the Sikh community spoke about the saintly Bhai Kanhaiya who brought comfort and water to the wounded and dying on both sides of the battlefield. After speaking Anjali presented a time-lapse video of her art piece capturing this poignant expression of a Sikh "Extending their Embrace." Five-year-old, Avani Kaur Sidhu then shared what the Golden Rule meant to her and wished everyone a "Happy WIHW!"

The central part of the program featured four speakers who have received positive national and or international media attention, along with artists from diverse faith traditions. The presenters came from locations ranging from Vancouver, the far west of Canada to Iran and they ranged in ages from five years old to elders of a distinguished age. There were representations from the Jewish, Muslim, Sikh, Christian, Buddhist and Indigenous communities.

Nick Gunz, a member of City Shul Synagogue, shared his delightful story of reaching out to a stranger across the country to return a diary that she wrote as a nine-year-old girl, nearly 40 years ago. The long-lost diary had remained hidden in Nick's parents'

attic all those years and was just recently discovered. This act of reaching out sparked the beginnings of a new and surprising friendship. The author of the long-lost diary, Alison Jenkins, just happened to be an accomplished songwriter and singer and she graciously shared with us one of her own compositions that spoke to the theme.

We were very privileged to have Cheryl Perera as one of our key presenters. Cheryl shared the story of how she was inspired by a Grade 10 teacher to delve into the plight of child trafficking. She founded the internationally renowned organization OneChild. This organization is the first in the world empowering children and youth to combat the sex trafficking of children. Cheryl has been listed as one of the 100 most influential women in Canada and has been appointed to the Order of Ontario.

Tariq Syed, a Torontonians business analyst, shared the story of how he was stocking up on essentials with his young daughter during the Pandemic when they noticed a number of senior citizens shopping alone, struggling with mobility and unable to find key provisions. Two days later, Tariq described, he started the Good Neighbor project which connects available, able-bodied individuals with people in need. Tariq, who has been listed as one of Toronto's Pandemic Heroes, ended his presentation by presenting the real inspiration behind this outreach, his young daughter, Hannah. Hannah warmly waved and greeted all the attendees.

The final speaker was the Buddhist monk Dr. Bhante Saranapala, the founder of "Canada: A Mindful and Kind Nation." Dr. Bhante, the "Urban Monk" as he is commonly known, shared with us how the practice of mindfulness meditation can enable us to extend our compassionate embrace.

Artists from diverse faith traditions offered various creative expressions of the theme "Extending Our Embrace." Zoha Sojudi, a student at the As-Sadiq Islamic School in Toronto presented a powerful spoken word piece entitled "Heavenly Crown" from her home in Iran. Hyla Beauvais, a 10-year-old Jewish girl recited a poem. Sinan Samil Ilhan, a gifted Calligrapher from the Intercultural Dialogue Institute, provided us with a time-lapsed video of his calligraphy expressing the theme. Students from Madonna High School Media Arts Class offered us inspiring photographs. Vanessa Curran, a student from Sacred Heart High School presented the third panel of her triptych art which spoke about compassion. Using spoken word and visual art portraying a girl behind a mask another Sacred Heart student, Jewella Bernadette Macabenta, spoke of

seeing a light and smile behind the mask. She said.” If one part of the body suffers, we all suffer.” The final creative expression was by Diane Montreuil, an Eastern Metis Algonquin, whose art displays the Indigenous Teachings of the Grandmothers. Diane shared three of her colorful paintings and spoke of the Indigenous insight into “Extending Our Embrace” that are reflected in these pieces.

The closing began with Daniel Niamat reading Albert Einstein’s quote on “widening our circle of compassion to embrace all living creatures and the whole of nature in its beauty.” The African concept of “Ubuntu- A belief in the universal bond that connects us all” was shared by Susan HooKong Taylor along with a touching story about how this truth is lived out among African children.

Our grand finale consisted in a Closing Ritual and Prayer which involved committee members extending a candle to each other through the zoom boxes while reciting a prayer “Take my Light and My Heart to. . . “ This *tour de force* entailed several hours of practice. But it was well worth the effort given the number of astonished comments we received.

In closing, Superintendent Michael Caccamo asked attendees to reflect on how they could extend their embrace in this moment in time. He informed them that they would be receiving information regarding possible follow up actions. Fr. Prakash thanked one and all, and invited us to Go Light Our World! While the acknowledgment and credit slides rolled, Susan HooKong-Taylor performed Kathy Troccoli’s song “Go Light Your World.” The last slide said, “Thank You” and recaptured the original image of our poster of a figure looking out into the universe with their arms extended.

Submitted by the **Extending Our Embrace Team Members:**

Fr. Prakash Lohale, OP - Archdiocese of Toronto Office for Interreligious Dialogue

Daniel Niamat - Archdiocese of Toronto Office for Interreligious Dialogue

Kathy Murtha - The Mary Ward Centre

Michelle Peres - The Mary Ward Centre

Audrey Ferrer - Toronto Catholic District School Board

Lisa Malcolm - Toronto Catholic District School Board

Michael Caccamo - Toronto Catholic District School Board

Michael Consul - Toronto Catholic District School Board

Susan HooKong-Taylor - Toronto Catholic District School Board

Veronica Tuzi - Toronto Catholic District School Board