

Report on Women Encounter Women UN World InterFaith Harmony Week 2022

Women Encounter Women is a monthly event for women of different faiths and religions every last Saturday every month. And this year in February 2022, we have tried to tailor the program to relate it to the observance of UN World InterFaith Harmony Week.

This we did on February 26 from 1 to 5 pm in the fellowship hall in Simon Peters Church. The Women Committee chose that there should be an introduction to the history and purpose of WIFHW as approved resolution at the UN General Assembly, and that our women get information on how communities, nations and organizations across the globe have arranged creative activities year after year to inspire the common pursuit for common existence in love, harmony and peace. The committee picked up the theme on FASTING and FEASTs for the meeting of women on this February Women Encounter Event.

Denmark celebrates *Fastelavn* Festival on the last day in February, which reminds us of the coming Lent and Fasting and so we thought it's relevant to explore the practice of fasting among our women of different faiths and religions. We also thought to explore the different feasts we know from our own cultural and religious upbringing, and share women about them. We would like to discover if there are certain feasts which are open for others, outside the community of faith, to participate or join in the celebration.

The Women Encounter Event began as women came in and spent time to talk with one another. As more and more women arrived, we entered the fellowship hall, where the tables were prepared for our number. We did some singing with guitar accompaniment. There was time for every woman to introduce oneself and say one's own country of origin. One was also free to say greetings in one's own language, giving each one the chance to hear the local languages of the women in the group. Then it was time for tea and coffee, cream buns and fruits. Children were also attended to by one of our women leaders after the coffee time.

We were a group of 16 women and 5 children, representing Danmark, Sweden, Lithuania, Iraq, Iran, Syrian, Poland, Philippines, Trinidad, and England: of two religions, Islam and Christianity. After the coffee time, women were requested to find a partner to talk with and share the practice of fasting from one's own culture and religion.

After 25 minutes they came back to the forum to share about their ideas on fasting and practice: Following thoughts came up:

Personal and practical ways of practicing fasting:

- Fasting is having a break from something that preoccupies our mind and fills us with worries.
- Fasting can be a form of saying no to wine and much food.
- It is saying no to unhealthy food, no to cigarettes and other unhealthy obsessions.

- It is fasting from excessive use of hours before TV or iPhone or smart phones or Facebook.
- Fasting is also to refrain oneself from buying expensive things but choose to buy second-hand goods from secondhand shops for the good of the environment.
- It is fasting from many parties, fasting from jewelries.
- It is fasting from abusive actions that destroy relationships.
- Fasting is reduction of attending to our own needs, but to decide to give and share with those in need.

Religious thoughts around fasting:

- Fasting is spending time before God and to seek for God's leading and guidance for some major decisions in life.
- Fasting is to seek concentration on what is very important and essential in life for meaningful existence.
- Fasting is seeking strength in the human spirit despite hunger or pain or illness.
- Fasting is doing good in action and not only in words.
- Real fasting is to help the needy, to liberate the oppressed, to comfort the suffering
- Fasting is seeking to surrender to God's will and purpose, asking for healing and renewal as a human being.
- Fasting is finding strength in weakness or smallness and finding humility to forgive.

The next activity was for every woman to work alone in a creative way. Women got a round paper plate and colored pens where they could write the name of the feast they have in their own language and decorate the name of the feast they choose with some colors. They could also consider if the feast they choose to present to the group of women would be something they can invite others or the gathered women to join or participate in the future.

The following feasts being shared in the forum:

Eid, Ramadan, Norouz, Harvest Festival, Christmas, Pasko, Easter, Confirmation feast, Pentecost, Anniversary etc. Each one described how the feast is being observed by one's own family or community of faith. The same feast celebration shows unique ways of doing in different local contexts. Women, smilingly, confirmed that these feasts are open to anyone interested to experience and participate in.

We sang some short songs in different languages. And there was time to talk around tables. Then we moved to another round table, where we could make a circle to pray for Ukraine and other concerns. As each prayer concern was mentioned, there was given a minute of silence:

- For peace in Ukraine, for Europe and for other war-torn countries in our one world
- For world leaders that they may find wisdom in making decisions for peace and reconciliation
- For the fleeing refugees in Ukraine and other refugees that they may find help and be received with love and compassion

- For separated families, for comfort in the hearts of mothers, fathers, and children and for their protection
- For Aid workers in Red Cross, for example, and other charitable organizations and protection of their workers
- For medical personnel, nurses and doctors and bringers of food and medical supplies that they also be protected, thereby praying also for protection of hospitals.
- For the STOP of War and violence in our time and in our world.
- For churches, mosques, temples and synagogues to be united in prayer for love, hope, mercy, peace and justice in our one world.

Then we raised our hands to express solidarity and common dream for peace in our world.

The women helped in cleaning up the area. Some stayed longer to talk with others.

It was a good time because it allowed us to be together after cancellations of Women Encounter events because of Corona virus and the imposed restrictions. But the month of February gave us time to breathe because restrictions were lifted and Covid 19 ceased to be considered as critical disease in the Danish society. Even if restrictions were no longer imposed, the fear of Covid 19 still lingers as the cases of Omikron infections also rises, thus several women could not join in this meeting.

But we are happy that the Women Encounter Event in February was held after all, after a series of previous cancellations of physical meetings. Last year we could only meet via online. Thanks to the FN World Inter Faith Harmony Week which gave us the push and courage to gather women to mark this global event in 2022, giving us time to meet face to face, eat and sing together, share thoughts and experiences, and pray.

Some photos:



