

## **Multi-faith Summit Council of BC's Inaugural All-Party Interfaith Caucus: The Role of Faith in Society**

The goal of the All-Party Interfaith Caucus was to create an opportunity for dialogue between members of the various political parties that have representation in government within the province of British Columbia and members of the Multi-faith Summit Council of British Columbia. Each Interfaith Caucus would focus on a single relevant theme.

The first All-Party Interfaith Caucus was successfully launched (via Zoom) on Wednesday February 1, 2023 as part of the local World Interfaith Harmony Week activities. The topic for the inaugural Interfaith Caucus that each speaker addressed was “ The Role of Faith in Society.”

Various politicians at both the federal and provincial levels of government were invited to participate and the positive response pleasantly surprised the Council. Participants who could not attend the Zoom meeting were invited to submit pre-recorded messages. The members of the Multi-faith Summit Council who were on the program were specifically chosen to showcase the diversity within the Council, not only diversity in spiritual backgrounds, but in age and profession as well. (Please refer to the Agenda that was submitted as part of this report.)

The Interfaith Caucus was planned as an hour long program. The Council was very grateful that a seasoned moderator, Rabbi Dr. Laura Duhan-Kaplan was available to oversee the introductions of speakers and the flow of the presentations. The program was followed by a Time of Reflection where attendees had the opportunity to share thoughts and discuss the presentations. Of the almost 50 attendees, most stayed to participate in the breakout groups.

The following notes on the event were submitted by a member of the council following the Interfaith Caucus.

- The MC, Sherry Marceil (Council Chair), the technician, Sameer Merchant and the Moderator, Laura Duhan-Kaplan were very resilient and positive in their handling of technical and timing-arrival challenges.
- The introductory comments by our Chair and Moderator were very thoughtfully and beautifully delivered, modelling cogency & brevity.
- In the unexpected absence of Acharya Dwivedi, Ashok Agarwal from the Victoria Hindu Temple, handled the sudden assignment of the opening prayer well.
- Teresa Wat's video set a tone of inclusivity and community safety.

- Nasir Zaidi heroically appeared, speaking smoothly and appropriately, despite feeling weak from a bout of COVID, was able to add an Islamic viewpoint to the presentations.
- Michael Goco offered a thoughtful, compassionate Roman Catholic view & guidance re: the vulnerable and did very well as the youngest speaker.
- John Borrows gave us insights about Faith -- in possibilities, principles and institutions, reflecting his academic background as well as his Christian and Indigenous background.
- Elizabeth May offered quite substantive comments on inter-faith and inter-party cooperation which stemmed from her experience in Interfaith Caucuses at the federal level.
- Ginny Sims accented education and young people as models for adult leaders and encouraged people to be more visible in their interfaith efforts in serving the community.
- Laura Duhan-Kaplan not only summarized major themes, but gave a positive overview of spiritual diversity and fluidity in our Province, focusing on her broader academic perspective rather than her Jewish background.
- Kala Singh introduced the Sikh Faith efficiently and then thanked participants sincerely.
- Harold Rosen selected and introduced a Baha'i prayer that lifted up the oneness of humanity.
- Akaash Maharaj, from Canadian Interfaith Conversations, provided opening remarks to the Time of Reflection and delivered a federal perspective on diversity's blessings and challenges.
- Our small groups were animated enough to bring many participants back for the whole-group closing and a glimpse of good things to come from the Multi-faith Summit Council and future Interfaith Caucuses.

The Council invited feedback from participants which took the form of emails. The emails that came in gave nothing but positive comments on the event and requests were made to be added to the email list of the Council. One individual expressed deep appreciation for the online interfaith meeting because of his isolation in the north. The organizing committee did a quick debrief where the success of the event was discussed, which led to unanimous approval to schedule another All-Party Interfaith Caucus later in the year.

Those who missed attending the All-Party Interfaith Caucus now have the opportunity to view the event on the Multi-faith Summit Council of British Columbia's new YouTube Channel.