



Who Is Your Neighbor?



**A Weeklong Interfaith Initiative and Interfaith Dialogue
in Celebration of the 2024 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week**

February 1-7, 2024

Harmony. Dignity. Understanding

For the third year, Pikes Peak Habitat for Humanity celebrated the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) Feb. 1-7 with an advocacy initiative. Starting Feb. 1, this weeklong campaign provided opportunities for interfaith engagement, dialogue, and volunteerism. A seven-day Interfaith challenge on our website encouraged participants to learn about the UN initiative, explore how the concept of neighborliness translates across faith traditions, and discover how diverse faith groups can put faith into action by advocating to support affordable housing/homeownership in our local community.

In an era of deep polarization and isolation, Pikes Peak Habitat's interfaith subcommittee recognized the need to create an event focused on the idea of neighbors coming together to address an issue affecting us all and build bridges across lines of difference. Because of this, we posed the question of *"Who Is Your Neighbor?"* as the focal point of our 2024 WIHW celebration.





Team Up National Pilot Initiative

This year, Pikes Peak Habitat was selected to participate in a competitive pilot program in the United States that focuses on building bridges across lines of difference. Team Up began as a part of the bipartisan “United We Stand” September 2022 Summit at the White House, which sought to counter the corrosive effects of hate-fueled violence on our democracy and put forward a shared vision for a more united America. Following the Summit, the White House reached out to YMCA of the USA, Habitat for Humanity International, Catholic Charities USA, and Interfaith America to create a pilot program focused on bridgebuilding. Each organization selected 10 local affiliates to participate, and Pikes Peak Habitat was chosen because of our interfaith work. We centered our pilot project around the 2024 World Interfaith Harmony Week and our annual interfaith dialogue.

As an affiliate, we felt that the Team Up initiative's goal to empower people to build connections across differences matched the overarching goals of the international WIHW initiative to spread the message of interfaith harmony and goodwill among diverse faith communities. Since our project will be shared with the Team Up national network and the expansive networks of the partner organizations to serve as an example of bridgebuilding, our affiliate wanted to use this pilot program to share the message of WIHW on a much larger platform than we would normally have access to.

Interfaith Volunteer Day

On Friday, Feb. 2, Pikes Peak Habitat hosted a special volunteer day on our construction site. The session brought volunteers from Temple Shalom and First Congregational Church together to hear about WIHW and work on our interfaith house.

At the same time, members of Pikes Peak Habitat’s Interfaith Build for Unity (IBU) Subcommittee assembled a special bench for our 3rd IBU partner family. Diverse faith communities decorated pieces of wood to showcase their beliefs. The bench – a physical representation of the beauty that can be created when different faith groups come together – was presented during the IBU home dedication Feb. 24.

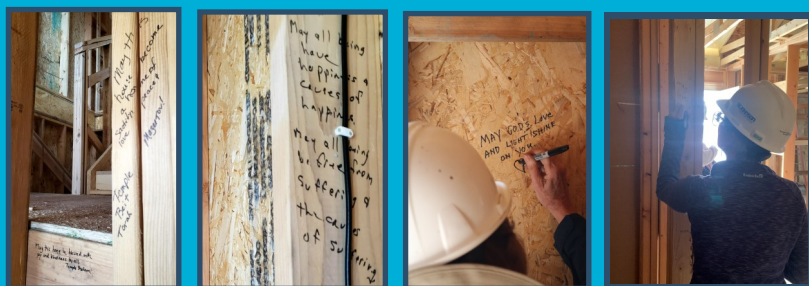
Bridgebuilding: An Interfaith Collaboration Video Training Series

As part of our Team Up pilot project, Pikes Peak Habitat partnered with faith leaders throughout El Paso County, CO, USA, to create an eight-part video training series focused on equipping individuals to work across lines of faith. We developed this series out of a desire to offer an interfaith resource that would center the reflections, perspectives, and feedback of diverse faith leaders who are actively involved with interfaith work and are helping their groups get involved as an expression of love of God and/or neighbor.

This video series will equip organizations to engage across lines of faith and to dispel misconceptions about different faiths. During WIHW, this video series was promoted to volunteers and dialogue attendees as a resource they could use to become interfaith bridge builders.

To view these videos please use the QR code.





“Who Is Your Neighbor?” Dialogue

Our celebration of WIHW culminated in “Who Is Your Neighbor? An interfaith dialogue focused on neighborliness and partnering with civic officials to address affordable homeownership” on Sunday, Feb. 4, hosted by Pikes Peak Habitat in collaboration with the Pikes Peak Inter Faith Coalition. The event took place at the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and approximately 92 people from diverse faith traditions participated. Pikes Peak Habitat Faith in Action Program Manager Chloe Henry explained that the event was created to enhance mutual understanding across faiths and lines of difference, and that attendees were not only part of a national bridgebuilding initiative through the Team Up pilot, but also part of the international WIHW movement to spread interfaith harmony and goodwill. The bench assembled by IBU Subcommittee members was on display, and attendees were encouraged to add their own scriptures or well-wishes.

Then a group of panelists spoke:

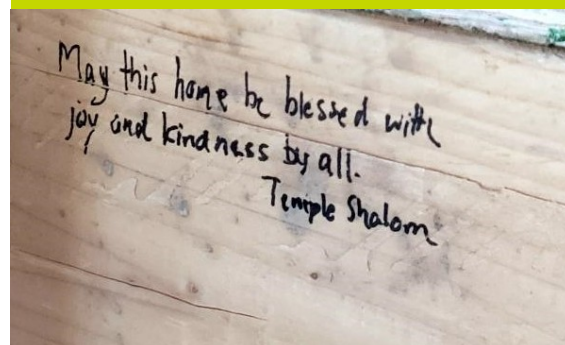
- Gilas, Future Pikes Peak Habitat Homeowner
- Kamel Elwazeir, Former President, Islamic Society of Colorado Springs
- Janice, Future Pikes Peak Habitat Homeowner
- Dick Conn, Founding President, Temple Beit Torah, and Former Executive Director, Partners in Housing

The panelists described their personal experiences seeking housing in El Paso County, and Janice said, “I’m excited about having a sense of community. I’ve gotten to know my neighbors, and they’ve become my friends.”

Then panelists shifted to discuss how the concept of neighborliness figures in their own faith traditions. Kamel shared, “Islam means submission. I submit to the will of God; I submit to the teachings of God; I submit to the Scriptures, and the Scriptures tell me to be a good neighbor... Many stories in my faith teach me that you’re not considered a true believer if you don’t hold the evil back from your neighbor. And it didn’t specify if you have a Muslim neighbor or an atheist or a Jewish or a Christian neighbor.”

“God forbid, if I see a fire across the street, I’m not going to say, well, he’s a Jewish neighbor, let him burn, or he’s a Muslim neighbor from a different sect, let him burn. No, I would immediately do the right thing...If I have to jump over the fence to save the family, I will do it, because that is the right thing to do.”

- Kamel Elwazeir



“I’m a member of Springs Reformed Presbyterian Church, and my church is all about helping others...We help with prayer and action and financial support.” - Janice

For more information, please visit Pikespeakhabitat.org/world-interfaith-harmony-week/ or use the QR Code.





Similarly, Gilas, who belongs to the Yarsani faith, said, “There is a phrase in Arabic.... It means you have to buy the neighbor and then jump on to buy your house, so the neighbor is that important in our belief.”

Panelists also underscored that we can learn from those who do not share our beliefs.

Finally, they left attendees with a call to action. Dick stated, “Get involved. Get active. Nonprofits could use your help and expertise.”

Mayor’s Office Remarks

Following the panel, Steve Posey, Chief Housing Officer from the City of Colorado Springs Mayor’s Office, discussed the city’s plan to address local housing needs, including seeking innovative solutions to reimagine how housing can be built. Steve said, “Colorado Springs is striving to become an inspiring example of a city where everyone has the ability to choose housing that is right for them.” He urged faith communities to embrace a welcoming attitude toward others.

Facilitated Interfaith Dialogue

Following the panel, attendees were invited to participate in facilitated interfaith table discussions. Questions encouraged attendees to express why their personal belief system makes the topic of housing important, describe potential barriers to creating a culture of neighborliness, and brainstorm ways the collective power of diverse faith communities can be leveraged to advocate for sustainable and inclusive policies that promote access to decent housing. The final question provided an opportunity for attendees to provide feedback to the mayor’s office. We hope this community feedback will be helpful as the city continues to address affordable housing.

Participants represented the following belief systems: Agnostic (Eastern thought/tradition), Baha’i, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Humanists, Jews (Reform and Conservative), Muslims, Native Americans (Native American Women’s Association), Pagan Universalists, Protestant Christians (Anglicans, Episcopalians, Evangelical Lutheran Church of America, Evangelical Covenant Order Presbyterians, Lutherans, Methodists, non-denominational Christians, Presbyterian Church U.S.A., United Church of Christ), Roman Catholics, non-religious individuals, self-identifying spiritualists, and Unitarian Universalists. Also in attendance were representatives from the Pikes Peak Inter Faith Coalition, Faith Table, the Colorado Springs Mayor’s Office, chaplains and cadets from the U.S. Air Force Academy, senior faith advisors to Congressmen, representatives from Habitat for Humanity International and Interfaith America, professors from the University of Colorado, Colorado Springs, and representatives from Interfaith Alliance of Colorado. Participants were pre-assigned tables to ensure diversity of belief.

Call to Action

We hope that the tenets set forth by WIHW of mutual understanding, respect, and love for God and the good of our neighbors continue to unite our diverse faith groups around the need for affordable homeownership, not in spite of our differences, but because of them. In the words of Pikes Peak Habitat’s Executive Director Kris Lewis:

“Our lives are so much richer when we get to see who our neighbors are.”