

Interfaith Peace Blessing 2018.

Sponsored by UPF and FFWPU UK.

Saturday July 14th.

Birmingham, United Kingdom.



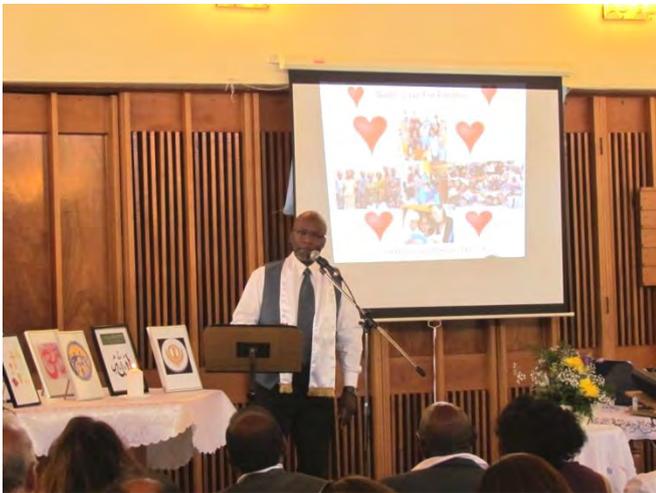
As the UK's second city, Birmingham is relatively small, with a population of just over 1 million. However, from being a haven for Nonconformists in the 1660's until today, over 350 years later, its capacity to welcome people of all religious, racial, ethnic and cultural backgrounds has been one of its best characteristics. The resulting, astonishing diversity is nowhere better displayed than at the Interfaith Peace Blessing, held each year for the past 10 years, and Saturday July 14th 2018 was no exception!

We were grateful to be able to hold the Peace Blessing in the Unitarian New Meeting House where around 180 people, including 60 representative couples, gathered together, focusing on the value



of the family as the bedrock of a healthy society, seeking to renew our shared commitment to one another, as couples, families and within the wider 'family' of brothers and sisters under one God. We had made a considerable amount of preparation in the months preceding the Blessing, both internal conditions such as prayer, and also giving numerous presentations about the value and meaning of the Blessing to individuals, couples and at 4 evening meetings in our home.

Bishop John Jackson, one of five Christian ministers present, opened the proceedings with an invocation, inviting God's presence and blessing on us all. Such a great man of God, and someone who's lifelong devotion, in service to others, has touched many lives. We were privileged to have our Deputy Lord Mayor, Cllr Chaudry Rashid, with us together with three other city councillors, all of them great public servants. Also with us were Dr Pyara Bhogal from the Sikh Council UK, Mr Adrees Sharif from the Muslim Council of Britain, and Mr Jatinder Birdi, Co-Chair of the Interfaith Network UK. Several other organisations were represented, including: the Indian Ladies Club, the Birmingham Iranian Club, the Bahu Trust, Arya Samaj, the All Pakistan Women's Association, the British Organisation for People of Asian Origin, and the Federation of Indian Muslim Organisations. Several families were also present having sought refuge in Birmingham as a 'City of Sanctuary' - from Syria, Rwanda, Somalia and Eritrea.



Viola Dirnhofer sang a beautiful devotional song for us to begin proceedings, followed by Rev Carver Anderson, a long-standing friend, who gave a personal, Christian perspective on 'God and Family', full of heart and passion. David Earle then gave a presentation to remind everyone of the purpose of our gathering together - to renew our commitment to fidelity, purity, family life and public life within our respective faith traditions, personally, but also in solidarity with our brothers and sisters all over the world, in Africa, Asia ... Such a great feeling!



Following the Holy Nectar ceremony, with couples sharing from the same cup, symbolising our oneness under God, we reminded ourselves of the darker side of human history, comprising physical, emotional and psychological abuse, especially perpetrated by men against women. Current figures in the UK for domestic violence are unacceptably high. We made a promise to each other, with 3 light taps on the shoulder, to do our best from now on never to allow violence or anger to enter into our relationships, to always treat each other with the utmost respect, and through our words and actions always try to focus on our shared happiness.



Six ladies offered a short reading about 'blessing' from different faith traditions : Sikh, Muslim, Hindu, Christian, Bahai and Brahma Kumari. Attendants then sprinkled everyone with holy water, as a symbol of a new and fresh beginning. We all then affirmed the Blessing Vow : to uphold the best values and virtues of our respective faith traditions, to remain faithful to one another as couples, to try and bring up our children with purity of mind and body and, finally, to develop a 'True Parental heart' and be a blessing to others - in our family, neighbourhood, workplace and all spheres of influence. This was then solemnised with a Blessing Prayer.



We heard two more wonderful perspectives on the family, from Serina representing Sikhism and from Sheikh Nuru Mohammed representing Islam, followed by a beautifully sung recitation of the Holy Qur'an from Amina Sultana. Congratulatory remarks were offered by Mr Jatinder Birdi of the Interfaith Network UK, and then David Earle led 3 joyful cheers, in Korean no less (!), having taught everyone rapidly to say "Ok Mansei" - which means literally 10,000 years of happiness and peace.

Having concluded the Blessing, all that remained was to present Ambassador for Peace awards

to a number of deserving recipients, five men and ten women. The award recognises each person's past efforts in family and public life, and also commissions them to continue their good work in living for others, which benefits our future society.



A variety of food and refreshments was then on offer, some supplied by one of Birmingham's finest caterers, Mr Shankar and family, and with contributions from a number of our local Peace Federation members, all of whom came together and worked so hard to make the event such a great success. We look forward with anticipation to many more such blessing events in the future.



Here are some of our beautiful couples, families and friends : all faiths, races and nationalities!!





