

## Blessing Ceremony during interfaith Iftar dinner at the NOVA Family Church

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June 9, 2018



A diverse mix of cultures and faiths came together to celebrate Ramadan and the Blessing Ceremony during an interfaith Iftar dinner Saturday, June 9, at the NOVA Family Church Learning Center in Fairfax, VA. The combined effort of the Family Federation for a Heavenly USA's Virginia Chapter and Express Care made this event possible. Express Care, based in Herndon, Virginia, is a humanitarian organization that provides social service information and emergency assistance to low-income families, individuals, immigrants, and refugees in Northern Virginia.



Dr. William Selig, who served as the evening's emcee, welcomed everyone with an enthusiastic, "Welcome, Salaam, Shalom, Peace, Namaste, Sat Sri Akal," and explained the Interfaith Blessing Movement. Dr. Selig described the Interfaith Blessing Movement as a celebration of the commitment of couples, families and extended families to live for the sake of others, then quoted the Prophet Muhammad: "No foundation has been built in Islam more loved by Allah than marriage (and family)."

The first guest speaker was Anh C. Phan, Outreach Representative of Senator Mark R. Warner. Phan was invited by her friend, Naila Alam, Founder and CEO of Express Care. "It's hard to say no to Naila," she said. Phan wished everyone a happy Ramadan and meaningful fast on behalf of the senator who was unable to attend due to other engagements.

Muhammad Irfan Qureshi spoke about the meaning of Ramadan and Iftar. Iftar is the evening meal with which Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. Within Islamic tradition, Ramadan is observed by Muslims as a month of fasting to

commemorate the revelation of the Quran to Muhammad and is one of the five pillars upon which Islam is founded, along with prayer, faith, charity, and the pilgrimage to Mecca.

Just before the fast was broken at sundown, Muhammad Irfan Qureshi led the azaan (call to prayer) and offered recitation from the Quran. Afterwards, everyone was invited to participate in the Blessing Ceremony, which concluded in a toast with holy juice to God, the creator of all faiths and true love.

Dinner was a delicious buffet of Pakistani halal dishes, including dates, fruit salad with spices, date cookies, chickpea salad, pakoras (fritters), chicken biryani, chicken korma, naan bread, salad and assorted Pakistani desserts. During the feast, Naila Alam gave a heartfelt testimony about a serious personal health

issue she had faced, but through her faith she was able to recover from it. Through this profound spiritual experience, she understood her calling to help others which led to the founding of Express Care.



Dr. Zulfiqar Kazmi, Executive Director of Common Ground USA and UPF Ambassador for Peace, spoke about his long-time association and many experiences with True Father and True Mother and about the principles of peace which have impacted his own life. "I feel so blessed," he said. "We have come together tonight for a higher purpose, and that purpose is to declare our gratitude to God, the creator of us all."

After the conclusion of the program, participants stayed for fellowship and continued to enjoy the delicious food. Many offered their sincere thanks for the beautiful service and were truly moved by the unity between all of the cultures and faiths who gathered together that day.

