

Interfaith Peace Blessing held in Birmingham

Birmingham, UK, 14. March 2015



This year, 2015, we held our annual Blessing Ceremony at a new venue right in the heart of Birmingham's city centre, in the Unitarian New Meeting Church. Sponsored by the Family Federation, Universal Peace Federation and the Women's Federation for World Peace, it brought together people of all colours and creeds, not just from Birmingham and the West Midlands but from cities as far away as Leicester, Rugby and Wellingborough. Two of our main dignitaries, the Lord Mayor of Rugby, Cllr Ramesh Srivastava, and the former Queen's High Sherriff of Leicester, Resham Singh Sandhu MBE, had travelled over 2 hours by car to be with us, a great honour.

More than 50 couples were represented on the occasion, from the Christian, Muslim, Hindu, Sikh, Jewish and Zoroastrian faith traditions. Some couples were friends whom we have known for more than 20 years, while others were relatively new acquaintances. Naturally, there were many different levels of understanding amongst all those attending the event, but virtually everyone had received preparation at an evening programme, or one-to-one. All the participants, therefore, realised and felt the need to make a new beginning, both as a couple and

also collectively, representing so many strands of humanity, and were inspired to know that the same ceremony was taking place all over the world. This sense of being 'One Family' is very real on these occasions, and is a powerful, positive, uplifting feeling which we share together, and very meaningful when we think of some of the conflict taking place in other parts of the world. We heard four perspectives on the family from Muslim, Hindu, Jewish and Christian ladies, followed by a brief summary of the purpose of the Blessing from David Earle. All participants then shared the cup of Holy Nectar, representing our new

beginning and oneness together under God.

As we began the Blessing ceremony itself, the depth of the occasion became more significant with prayers offered from 6 different faith traditions. We all then stood to receive the holy water, and to take the four universal vows, promising to remain true to the values and virtues coming from God and our respective faith traditions, to keep fidelity within our couple, to help our children maintain their purity of mind and body in a very difficult world, and to share God's blessing with our extended family, neighbours and the wider society.





Aisha Abdul-Latif giving a Muslim perspective on the family

After the presentation of flowers, we turned to the East and, thinking about the founders of all our different traditions - Abraham, Jesus, Prophet Mohammed, Zoroaster, Guru Nanak, Lord Buddha, the Hindu sages, and Father and Mother Moon - the founders of our Peace Federations and originators of the Blessing, we offered a collective bow to the Divine. The Lord Mayor of Rugby then gave his warm, congratulatory remarks and we concluded with 3 rousing cheers of

'Ok Mansei' - wishing each other 10,000 years of eternal happiness! We presented 3 UPF Ambassador for Peace certificates, 1 Family Recognition certificate and 9 WFWP Ambassador for Peace certificates. This was followed by some wonderful international food, much of it donated by a local Indian caterer, Shankars' Sweet Centre. and with tasty contributions from a number of our FFWPU members. We had estimated about 100 people attending, but in

fact we were almost 160 in total so the food had to be 'stretched' to make sure everyone could enjoy something. At the same time, the music began with our main act being Basil, Catherine and Candice Gabbidon. Basil was a founding member of the roots reggae band Steel Pulse in the 1970's, originating in the multicultural Handsworth area of Birmingham, which achieved international acclaim and a Grammy Award in 1986. We also enjoyed music from Fay Goodman, a composer, author and martial arts teacher who believes passionately in the use of both music and martial arts to help children and adults find inner peace, harmony and healing. Other singers, both young and old, added different flavours, helping to bring the whole occasion to a joyful conclusion. We have held the Blessing in Birmingham every year since 2007. It requires the investment of a huge amount of heart and energy to make it happen, and a big collective effort on the day itself, but the many participants almost always have a unique and unforgettable experience, coming away with a genuine sense of renewal and a greater feeling of hope in the future.



Nila Parmar - Hinduism



Helga Loeb - Judaism



Annette Taylor - Christianity



Prayers from the Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, Hindu and Zoroastrian traditions

