

INTERFAITH PEACE MEETING AT THE AL MAHDI INSTITUTE

On Sunday November 13th, with the theme of 'United We Stand, Divided We Fall', 130 people of all faiths, races, cultures and ethnic backgrounds gathered together in the Prayer Hall of the Al Mahdi Institute in Birmingham, a beautiful venue which we have had the privilege to use a number of times before.

Following an ice-breaker, where we thanked those sitting next to us for making the effort to attend the meeting, we invited Shaykh Mahmood Dhalla to welcome everyone and briefly explain about the work of the Institute. Then eight representatives from our different faith traditions gave a short reading or prayer connecting to the theme of our meeting. The sincerity and spirituality of such offerings never fails to 'set the scene' for a meaningful occasion.

Our 4 main speakers then shared their thoughts. Anthea McIntyre, former MEP, spoke about her work in the European Parliament and the cross-party initiative she began against hate crime, following the 2016 Brexit referendum, concluding with a beautiful poem by Mary Baker Eddy. Sheikh Nuru Mohammed shared about his efforts to help young people see that they have a choice, either to be caught up with 'what is', the difficult circumstances of our current era, or to focus on 'what can be', and the ideal society which we all aspire towards and want to see become a reality. Kamlaish Kumari spoke so sincerely about the way in which her Hindu faith causes her to feel God's presence, and see the presence of God in others, each of us a divine spark in the grand tapestry of life. She also mentioned about a wonderful project she has been involved in, in India, bringing hope and practical help to many people there. Finally, David Earle shared about the importance of creating peace in myself, my family and the wider world, which must involve God and strike the right balance between myself and others, always centred on the greater good, and the purpose of the whole, with some practical ideas as to how we can bring this about together.

Elliot Yamamoto then explained to us about Youth and Students for Peace, a dynamic organisation which he heads up in the UK, and several young adults spoke for a few minutes about a Youth Service Project which they had helped to carry out last August, beginning to create a Peace Garden in the area of Small Heath. Ambassador for Peace awards were then presented to : Dr Umesh Yadav, Minister of Religion for the Arya Samaj community; Cllr Shehla Moledina, Councillor for Balsall Heath West; Jackie Taylor, Deputy Lord Mayor in Sandwell Council; Rev Jasmine Browne, Minister in the Church of England; Sadia Malik, former Consul General of Pakistan in Birmingham; Bishop Neville and Mrs Joyce Fletcher of the Church of God of Prophecy; and their daughter Shermara, a dynamic Christian youth leader who had the privilege of offering a prayer at the late Queen Elizabeth II's funeral service recently.

Finally, a lovely group of women who have been knitting blankets, scarves, hats and clothes for many years, presented 2 large bags from their labours to two Muslim women who were about to depart for Syria. The beautiful items will be given to widows and orphaned children there, as a warm gesture of peace and good will.

We concluded with food and refreshments in the Institute's dining area, where old friendships were renewed, new friendships made, and the spirit of 'togetherness' continued on into the early evening. Thanks to all who made this gathering possible, such that all could enjoy a very positive and hopeful occasion.







