

Showing solidarity with March 15 victims

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The Auckland Interfaith Council (AIFC) demonstrated solidarity with the victims of the March 15 (2019) Christchurch attacks and, at the same time, called upon everyone to work for peace and unity despite different backgrounds, beliefs, spiritualities or walks of life.

An interfaith prayer service on March 15 this year was hosted by the Anglican Holy Trinity Cathedral and attracted more than 250 people.

A line in the introductory prayer for the service expressed the purpose of the event: “Let there be joy in our coming together today and let us celebrate the richness and diversity of life.”

Bishop Kito Pikaahu (Anglican Bishop of Te Tai Tokerau) set the scene with a mihi whakatau. A waiata tautoko by the Auckland Anglican Maori Club was followed by words of welcome from the host, Rev. Anne Mills, the dean of the Cathedral and from Ruth Cleaver, the president of the Auckland Interfaith Council.

The first speaker was Anne Degia-Pala, QSM, who represented the Islamic Women’s Council of New Zealand (IWCNZ). She gave a reflection, which concluded with a prayer. When she mentioned the victims and their families, she could hardly hold back the tears.

However, everybody was drawn back to hope and joy when Rev. Josh Jones performed a song that he wrote in 2019: “This is the Day – Te Rangimarie” . When he picked up his guitar, he started singing: “Aotearoa peace is calling. In the bonds of love, we meet; for the world this day is dawning, it shines a light to greet.”

Further speakers and readers were of the Buddhist, Hindu, Jewish and Baha’i faiths, and the Sufi Order. The Sikh community contributed with sacred music.

Beate Matthies, the Catholic representative on the AIFC, recalled the encounter between St Francis of Assisi and Sultan Malik al-Kamil 800 years ago, and concluded with a variation on the prayer of St Francis (“Lord, make me a channel of your peace”) that Mother Teresa prayed when she addressed the United Nations in 1985.

The programme was wonderfully put together with a combination of prayers, reflections, music, silence and the lighting of candles.

The prayer service concluded with the New Zealand National Anthem and a blessing by Anglican Bishop Ross Bay.

In the light of Covid-19, it was decided not to have afternoon tea afterwards in a confined area. However, many participants socialised in front of the cathedral and enjoyed the sunshine.

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