



Working to Eliminate Discrimination: The Harmony Brunch

By Paula E. Kirman

A sad part of our world, both now and in the past, is the amount of violence and hatred that has been caused by divisions along religious and racial lines. March 21 is the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination. One of the ways the day is marked in Edmonton is with the Harmony Brunch.

“The message of the Harmony Brunch is that we all must to work together to eliminate racial and all other forms of discrimination,” explains organizer Karen Gall. “The atmosphere, while friendly and celebratory, is thought-provoking and encourages attendees to think about these important issues and take action to eliminate racism in their personal and professional lives.”

The Harmony Brunch has occurred annually for the past twelve years and is held on a Sunday some time close to March 21. It is organized by the Canadian Multicultural Education Foundation (CMEF), which is made of up individuals from many different cultural and religious backgrounds. The CMEF is an Edmonton-based non-profit organization with a mandate to promote public education and awareness of multiculturalism, and to advocate adherence to a wide range of multicultural values including diversity, equality, fairness, justice, unity, harmony and inclusiveness. “The annual Harmony Brunch has proven to be an excellent tool to further this goal,” Gall says.

Gall is Chair of the Harmony Brunch Committee. “In that role, I oversee all aspects of the Harmony Brunch as well as open the program and welcome the speakers, dignitaries and guests. All members of the CMEF Board assist in various aspects of the Harmony Brunch,” Gall explains.

The work that goes into organizing the Harmony Brunch is evident in the large attendance. “Approximately 400 people from various local communities-at-large attend the Harmony Brunch including representatives from the business community, public officials, academics, various religious and cultural (ethnic) groups, aboriginal groups, women’s organizations, youth, and the media - a good cross-section of Edmonton’s multi-cultural/multi-faith communities,” Gall says.

In 2009, the featured speaker was Mike Boyd, Chief of Edmonton Police Service who delivered the keynote address entitled, “Promoting Peace and Harmony in Our Changing World.” Former Edmonton Poet Laureate, E.D. (Ted) Blodgett read his new poem, “Questions” that he wrote for the occasion. The prayer before the meal (a delicious buffet) was delivered by Reverend Richard Reimer, Lutheran Chaplain, University of Alberta. As well, the Harmony Brunch also served as the book launch for *Among Friends*, the newly published biography of Robinson Koilpillai, C.M., founder of CMEF and lifelong promoter of racial harmony and multiculturalism. Both Robinson Koilpillai and author Allan Sheppard attended and they autographed and personalized copies of the book.



Working to Eliminate Discrimination continued...

Young people are encouraged to get involved and attend the Harmony Brunch. They can even get their tickets sponsored. “Two years ago we invited students from the U of A, Victoria Composite High School, the Hobbema Community Cadet Corps and others,” says Gall. “This year we invited university students, high school students, St. Albert Air Cadets, inner city students, and students from the Chinese bilingual and First Nations programs. Many of these students volunteer to make this event a success.”

Gall believes that the fruit of the Harmony Brunch is seen in the lives of those who attend. “The Harmony Brunch is an extremely effective tool for promoting peace and understanding between ethnic and faith groups in our region,” she says. “Many of the individuals who attend the Harmony Brunch are already working, in their personal and professional lives, towards racial and religious harmony and the elimination of discrimination in society. As well as providing an opportunity to network, it is encouraging for them to see the support from various individuals and organizations also working for similar goals. Each year, the CMEF attempts to address different aspects of these important issues in order to broaden our knowledge and educate the attendees. It is also a learning experience for all, including those public (elected) officials who join us for the Harmony Brunch.”

The CMEF presents the Harmony Brunch in partnership and with the assistance of the Northern Alberta Alliance on Race Relations (NAARR), the Alberta Association for Multicultural Education, Citizenship and Immigration Canada, the Alberta Human Rights and Citizenship Commission, and the Department of Canadian Heritage. Gall encourages anyone interested in volunteering for the Harmony Brunch to get in touch via the following contact information: harmonybrunch@cmef.ca