



The Annual Interfaith Symposium: Uniting Women of Faith

By Ayesha Mian

“Significant Women of my Faith.” “The Founder of my Faith and His Service to Humanity.” “The Portrayal of my Faith in the Media.” If in attendance at the Annual Interfaith Symposium organized by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women’s Association, Edmonton, one would find these topics being passionately examined and discussed by ladies belonging to major faith groups. For the past 12 years, these ladies have gathered at Bait-ul-Hadi Mosque to share their unique experiences as women of faith and to learn about others’ religions and belief systems.

An event designed to connect and unite women under a common banner of faith, understanding and respect, the Annual Interfaith Symposium has become a crucial date on the Edmonton interfaith calendar. This women-only event provides a warm and hospitable environment in which ladies feel comfortable sharing their thoughts in relation to faith and religion. In Canada’s vast multicultural landscape, it is crucial that a platform be created in which ladies can share their personal journeys, values and concerns.

The evening begins with a recitation from the Holy Quran, followed by an introduction by the moderator, Sister Rosaleen Zdunich, who became a vital member of the organizing team and one of the first panel speakers 12 years ago. The panel is comprised of four prominent women from Judaism, Christianity, Islam and another faith, such as Sikhism, Hinduism or Buddhism. Speakers present their views on the topic at hand either from a personal perspective, recounting their daily experiences in relation to the topic, or by describing the teachings of their faith in accordance with the theme.

An intermission presentation educates guests about a unique or interesting aspect of Islam. Topics in the past have included Khilafat, the system of successorship in Islam, and Hijab, the veil of a Muslim woman.

Following the remaining two presentations, guests are encouraged to browse the display tables, upon which each speaker has exhibited artifacts, books and significant relics relating to their faith, mingle and address questions to the speakers while enjoying the delicious food prepared by the hostesses.

The format of the evening allows for a comfortable and relaxed environment. Guests and panelists feel that they are able to express themselves honestly and connect strongly with females of other faiths. A discussion of the role of women in modern society and a focus on religious teachings prescribed for women enables the ladies to delve deep and create solid bonds with one another. Guests look forward to this event, mainly due to its emphasis on and appreciation of women of faith.

Since its inception in 1997, the Interfaith Symposium has grown significantly through word-of-mouth. The organizers were delighted to receive positive feedback from over 100 ladies last year. They consider it imperative that females from different cultures, religions and ethnic backgrounds express their unique experiences in the hopes of reaching a common Canadian goal of acceptance and understanding. Through the dedication of the Ahmadiyya Muslim Women’s Association and the eager participation of the interfaith community, the Annual Interfaith Symposium will continue to do its share in uniting women of faith.