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Interfaith Gathering At The Sikh Temple ~ Sikh Satsang Honors Rev. Kent Millard And Others

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Kanwal Prakash Singh

The Sikh Temple (Acton Road) in Indianapolis dedicated the last Sunday of January to the important work and vision of Interfaith Hunger Initiative (IHI). The Sikh Satsang of Indianapolis honored Rev. Kent Millard, one the highly respected spiritual leaders in Indiana who also serves as Co-Chair of the Indianapolis IHI, and others. Several visionary leaders dedicated to creating greater interfaith and cultural cooperation and awareness of Indiana's growing diverse ethnic and spiritual communities came to celebrate this special occasion. Some of these friends had attended and supported the Friendship Lunch at the Indiana State Capitol last September, and many of the attending guests were visiting a Sikh Temple and introduced to Sikh faith and culture for the first time. The Sikh community welcomed this opportunity as a blessing and planned this interfaith celebration as a part of the Sunday worship.

A GATHERING OF FRIENDS

Among those in attendance were: Rev. Kent Millard, Senior Pastor at St. Luke's United Methodist Church in Indianapolis and Giani Pritam Singh, Spiritual Leader of The Sikh Satsang of Indianapolis. They were joined by Dave Miner, Volunteer Executive Director of IHI; Bilal Eksili, President of Niagara Foundation; Former First Lady of Indiana, Judy O'Bannon; Keira Amstutz, President and CEO of Indiana Humanities Council; Sr. Norma Rocklage, Vice President of Marian University and co-sponsor of the annual Interfaith Peace Prayer Service; Jane Gahlhausen, Director, Multi-Cultural Affairs, City of Indianapolis; Charlie Wiles, Executive Director of International Interfaith Initiative and leader at the Peace Learning Center; Sonia Chen, President of Asian American Alliance; Carmen DeRusha, Co-Chair Multi-Ethnic Indiana Initiative; Rupal Thanawala and Young-Hee Yedinak (executive at WTHR Channel 13), Board Members of Asian American Alliance; Mary Milz, Reporter for WTHR Channel 13 in Indianapolis; Luis and Ingrid Mateos; Dave Douglas, Pamela Hayes, Mary Spolyar, and world-class photographer, Richard Clark. Some of the guests brought their spouses and children to the Temple.

The hosts and planning committee for this event were led by: Jasvir Singh Lalli, President; Maninder Walia and Harpreet Sandhu, Trustees; Narvinder Bhola and Tarlochan Bansi (past Presidents); Sonia Gill (designated Natural Helper); Kulbir (past President) and Pinka Singh; Nachhatar Singh, Paramjit Singh, Chirjeev Oberoi, Namrita Claire, Nupur Mer, Sukhdip Singh, Tarlok Singh, Gurvinder Dhillon, KP Singh; and a number of young volunteers who had assisted in the first canned-food drive of the New Year in support of IHI. Over 3,050 pounds of food and \$1,250 were donated in honor of our guests.

A WARM WELCOME

Jasvir Lalli warmly welcomed guests and turned over responsibility of the morning's program to long-time Indiana resident and community volunteer, KP Singh. We began by remembering Police Officer David Moore, his senseless death sent shockwaves through our community; prayed for the full recovery of U.S. Representative Gabriella Giffords, another victim of gun violence in Tuscon, Arizona and the well-being and for peace among faiths, cultures, and communities around the world. We briefly highlighted the central beliefs of Sikh faith: as a monotheistic faith founded in India in 1469, and today recognized as the fifth largest with over 30 million followers worldwide; a faith anchored in Oneness of

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Guests sharing Punjabi vegetarian lunch in the Langar Hall (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Sonia Chen, Young-Hee Yedinak, KP Singh, Dave Miner, Rupal Thanawala (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



God, unity, universality, justice and equality, sanctity of and respect for all faiths and spiritual traditions; service of mankind without distinction; and a faith guided by an interfaith scripture (Siri Guru Granth Sahib) in exalted poetry and venerated by the Sikhs as an Eternal Living Guru.

On behalf of the Sikh Satsang of Indianapolis, KP thanked the guests for taking the time to visit and learn about Sikh faith, culture, and traditions, and for enriching us all by the spirit that each brought to share and bless us. KP complimented the Sikh leadership for their strong commitment to interface with organizations and their leaders doing great things to advance cultures, faiths, and new ethnic pioneers in Indiana.

HONORS AND RECOGNITIONS

We took a few moments to honor some of our visiting guests for their contributions to the life and spirit of our City and State. Rev. Kent Millard with the Sikh ceremonial Siropa (religious scarf) and an elegant coffee-table book, *The Sikhs*, by world-renowned author Khushwant Singh by Giani Pritam Singh and Jasvir Lalli. Books and scarves were also presented: to Bilal Eksili, Sr. Norma Rocklage, Young-Hee Yedinak, Former First Lady Judy O'Bannon, Keira Amstutz, Sonia Chen, Charlie Wiles, and Carmen DeRusha. Dave Miner was presented a check, all funds donated by the Sikh congregation and visiting friends to support the Interfaith hunger Initiative. Each of these distinguished guests greeted the gathering and expressed solidarity and appreciation for the hospitality and generosity of the members of the Sikh congregation. They pledged continued support of future Sikh initiatives and endeavors.

The multi-generational and multi-cultural gathering of over 200 gave their approval with resounding Sikh Jakaras (joyful acclamations), as each guest was introduced and honored by the Sikh Satsang.

The guests participated and enjoyed the North Indian Punjabi vegetarian lunch served in the traditional style in the Langar Hall. Throughout the visit, the guests mingled with members of the Sikh community and learned about each other's professional pursuits, interests, and community involvements.

CHANGING HORIZONS AND FUTURE PROMISE

Each speaker reminded us about the need to come together for critical initiatives as hunger, homelessness, other worthy humanitarian causes, and learning from and about each other. Their presence symbolized the need to honor one of the universal mandates of our common humanity: serving in faith. There was a spirit of deep respect and kinship that radiated in their greetings and commitment to make interfaith initiatives a meaningful bridge to understand the cultures and communities that have gathered in central Indiana, the Crossroads of America. The comments during and since the gathering reflect deep cultural sensitivity, deep appreciation, and an unmistakable prayer to learn about the culture and spirit of the 10,000 Sikhs in Indiana and nearly a million Sikh Americans in the U.S.A.:

First Lady Judy O'Bannon: "... beautiful experience with people of a beautiful heart;" Keira Amstutz: "...thank you for the warm welcome and fellowship on Sunday at the Sikh temple;" Young-Hee Yedinak: "...we are humbled and honored by the warm welcome;" Luis Mateos: "...This just confirms how all faiths have ample common and meeting ground when the desire is there." The Sikh leadership was thrilled about this blessing to learn from enlightened faith, civic, educational, cultural, media, Asian and international community leaders; forge new friendships and look to the future projects where we may share our diverse talents, experiences, cultural heritages with all Americans; and together work for peace and goodwill and see God's Light in all God's Children. This was the true gift of the day, and the spirit of our shared concerns for others was the rightful winner of the moment. We were rededicating ourselves to an idea celebrated in every tradition that transcends time, place, culture, and ethnicity.

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Former First Lady Judy O'Bannon with Keira Amstutz and Chase (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



View of the congregation in the Temple sanctuary (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Honored guests Rev. Kent Millard and Bilal Eksili with friends (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Rev. Kent Millard blessing the collected canned food (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Harpreet Sandhu)



Sikh Singers Devender Singh and Jagir Singh, Charlie Wiles, Gianijee, Rev. Kent Millard, Keira Amstutz (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Luis Mateos)



Sister Norma being honored by Jasvir Singh Lalli (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Maninder Walia)



Dave Miner addressing the congregation at the Sikh Temple (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



A family portrait of all honored guests and members of the Sikh community in the Temple Sanctuary (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Luis Mateos)





Honored guests with Sikh friends in the Temple Library (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Honored guests with Sikh friends in the Temple Library (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Sanctuary and congregation in the Sikh Temple (Acton Road) in Indianapolis (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Luis Mateos)



Rev. Kent Millard with Giani Pritam Singh and Jasvir Singh Lalli (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Harpreet Sandhu)





Collected food loaded for Gleaners Food Bank (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit KP Singh)



Former First Lady of Indiana Judy O'Bannon being honored by Jasvir Singh Lalli (January 30, 2011; Interfaith Gathering at the Sikh Temple; photo credit Harpreet Sandhu)