

Building *as* one



An Interfaith Initiative & Interfaith Dialogue Event Surrounding Affordable Housing in
Celebration of the 2022 UN's World Interfaith Harmony Week

A Report Prepared for the World Interfaith Harmony Week International Competition

February 1-7, 2022





Background of Initiative to Celebrate World Interfaith Harmony Week

Pikes Peak Habitat for Humanity (PPHFH) celebrated World Interfaith Harmony Week (WIHW) with a *Building as One* initiative that provided a week of daily activities and events, Feb. 1-7, 2022. *Building as One* was created by PPHFH's Faith Relations Committee, a group of 17 individuals from a variety of different faith backgrounds and spiritual practices who unite to build affordable homes for low-income families in El Paso County, Colorado, USA. Our Faith Relations Committee (a long-standing committee but only recently energized to action under the leadership of the new position of Faith in Action Program Manager since 2019) is committed to interfaith work in an ongoing basis by supporting our Interfaith Build for Unity Project. This year the committee chose to celebrate the 2022 WIHW as a special venture, and provide ways to engage with the initiative for individuals of all ages, inviting more groups to collaborate in interfaith work locally.

Wanting more individuals to learn about WIHW and engage with different perspectives and belief systems as part of the *Building as One* initiative, PPHFH created a new, interactive webpage dedicated to the 2022 WIHW. The website provided ways to learn how to pursue "faith in action" locally. As part of the webpage, an interactive calendar for each day of the WIHW shows specific ways for individuals to engage daily. A separate PDF for each day allows individuals to learn more about the initiative, read prayers from different faith traditions and belief systems, find interfaith resources, and learn tangible ways to engage with interfaith work in El Paso County. Throughout the week, PPHFH published multiple posts on Facebook and Instagram to bring awareness to the public about WIHW and drive individuals to our website.



"In an assembly like this we have a lot of thoughts and feelings, many disagreements and contentions, but we've also got incredible opportunities. It's not often that such diversity can unite with absolute unity."

*Chaplain Major Kevin Hostettler,
United States Air Force Academy*

The week's daily call-to-action activities included :

***please find links on page 6**

- Participate in PPHFH's "Building as One: Interfaith Dialogue" Event in partnership with the Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition (more information starting on p. 3)
- Read about the history of the UN Initiative & Sign PPHFH's online declaration in celebration of the 2022 WIHW
- Learn about PPHFH's Interfaith Build for Unity Project (more information starting on p.5)
- Offer prayers and blessings for people in need of affordable housing, along with those published on PPHFH's website, by local Christian, Jewish, and Muslim leaders
- See testimonies by PPHFH Faith Relations Committee members and published comments by Christian and Muslim individuals, plus PPHFH's video highlighting why local faith leaders think the Interfaith Build for Unity is important
- Pursue "faith in action" as a way to help others in our community, and learn from others of diverse backgrounds



Overview of Building as One: An Interfaith Dialogue Event

The *Building as One* initiative culminated in our “Building as One: Interfaith Dialogue Surrounding Housing Affordability,” a presentation and community gathering held on Feb. 6, 2022, hosted by PPHFH and the Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition. This grassroots event was led by PPHFH’s Faith in Action Program Manager Chloe Henry with the help of five Habitat employees, and members of the Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition. Although PPHFH is an affiliate of Habitat for Humanity International and we tithe to build houses worldwide, our local work and outreach focuses on El Paso County, Colorado.

There were 32 in-person participants and 16 online via Zoom, which allowed us to record the event for future viewing by those who were unable to attend. PPHFH’s [“Together as One”](#) video kicked off the presentation.

Participants, in-person and online, consisted of Christians (Anglicans, Colorado Stake of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, Disciples of Christ, Lutherans, Methodists, non-denominational Christians, Presbyterians), Hindus, Jews (Reform and Conservative Jewish Movements), Muslims, Native Americans (specifically, representatives from the Native American Women’s Association), and Zen Buddhists. Members of the Sikh community planned to attend but were unable to because of a scheduling conflict. Additionally, two chaplains from the United States Air Force Academy attended, including Chaplain Major Kevin Hostettler who opened the event with a welcoming prayer and invited individuals to participate according to the dictates of their own beliefs and faith. **With the intent “to love God and neighbor; to love the good and neighbor,” our purpose in creating this event was to allow a safe and welcoming space for intentional interfaith dialogue that surrounds a critical priority in our community: affordable housing.**

The presentation began with Chloe Henry providing background information on WIHW and the goals for this global initiative. PPHFH Executive Director/CEO Kris Lewis, in her presentation, cited current data showing the need for affordable housing in El Paso County, and emphasized the integral importance of “seeing and recognizing the dignity of one another.” She also explained that Habitat for Humanity was built on the concept of diversity, pointing specifically to its origins that stem from Koinonia Farm, an interracial community built in 1942 near Americus, Georgia, USA, that welcomes “anyone and everyone regardless of race, religion, no religion, background or anything else that divides people.”



It is important to note that in El Paso County (730,395 people in July 2020), there are 550 churches and religious organizations, and over 90% of those follow the Christian faith. Roughly two-thirds of the county’s population reside in Colorado Springs, the second largest city in Colorado and also the office location for PPHFH. Several other faith traditions are also represented in our community, including Islamic, Jewish, and other eastern religions, but significantly fewer in comparison. As an ecumenical ministry,



PPHFH has historically partnered with Christian congregations. Even though the predominant faith of our community is Christianity, we believe that by opening the door to partner with other faiths, we can demonstrate respect toward others with increased acceptance of other religions and beliefs, dispelling misconceptions that we may have of one another.

Two future Habitat homeowners whose homes are being built as part of PPHFH's Interfaith Build for Unity Project (more details on p.5) shared remarks about what it means to be selected as homeowners of the two Interfaith Build for Unity houses currently under construction. Ms. Andino is a third-grade teacher and single-mother with a teenage son; and Anna has three daughters (the oldest is battling brain cancer) while also caring for her mother who has epilepsy. During her remarks, Anna expressed her gratitude "for the opportunity to be able to have interfaith groups build together as a unity and become one" as they work on building her home. Representatives from different faith traditions (Christian, Muslim, Native American, and Zen Buddhist) who have volunteered with the Interfaith Build for Unity project had a chance to speak and share from their own belief system or faith tradition on why they wanted to engage with interfaith work, particularly the Interfaith Build for Unity.

Rev. Dr. Jonathan Hall of First Christian Church shared the history, mission, and vision of the Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition that was formed in response to the anti-Semitic mass murder at a synagogue in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, USA (2018). Since then, the coalition has led various interfaith dialogue events for individuals in our local community. Following Dr. Hall's remarks, participants were invited to join breakout discussions (in-person and online in Zoom breakout rooms), facilitated by the Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition and PPHFH Faith Relations Committee. Table discussion focused on how to come together and engage in interfaith work to support affordable housing, but time also allowed for participants to meet and learn about each other and different faith traditions. Facilitators at each table stressed the importance of respectful dialogue, and the preassigned seating of participants ensured that a diversity of opinions and beliefs were present at each table. Following the discussions, facilitators from each table summarized their group's conversations and their key takeaways for the entire audience.

"We don't have to create anything within the interfaith community. We just have to live out who we are already created [to be]."

*Rev. Dr. Jonathan Hall,
Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition*



"..and so the priest asks, 'Will you seek and serve Christ in all persons, loving your neighbor as yourself?' and we say 'I will with God's help'. And then the priest asks 'Will you strive for justice and peace among all people and respect the dignity of every human being?' and we say 'I will with God's help.' To me, if you made that promise, it's really hard to ignore the need for safe, affordable housing for everybody everywhere."

*Dan Pitts,
Grace & St. Stephens Episcopal Church*



Ongoing Interfaith Efforts through Pikes Peak Habitat's Interfaith Build for Unity

Beyond the *Building as One* initiative, specifically in celebration of the 2022 WIHW, PPHFH and its Faith Relations Committee seek to offer ongoing opportunities for interfaith work locally through PPHFH's Interfaith Build for Unity project. Supported by a dedicated group of volunteers from a diverse set of faiths and beliefs, the Interfaith Build for Unity encourages people to put aside their differences, put their faith into action, and to work together to build homes, communities, and hope. Our goal is to expand the diversity of the participants from our WIHW event while creating conversation of tolerance and support for one another – all while building homes for low-income families in El Paso County. On the construction site, groups of five individuals from a faith tradition are paired together for the day with another group representing a different belief system, and both groups volunteer side by side as equals, and have a chance to get to know one another as they work on building a home for a local family. We are excited that our first Interfaith Build for Unity home will be completed soon, with a home dedication ceremony scheduled for March 27, 2022 in joint celebration with the kick-off for the second Interfaith Build for Unity house.

Call to Action & Moving Forward

Because our desire is for individuals to continue with interfaith work after participating in the 2022 *Building as One* initiative and attending the "Building as One: Interfaith Dialogue" event, the emcee encouraged attendees to put their faith into action to help our community, as well as address the lack of affordable housing. Proposed ideas for future interfaith activities included attending future Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition events, telling others about one's experience at the interfaith dialogue event, and/or bringing a group of volunteers to help build the second Interfaith Build for Unity house.

Following the interfaith dialogue event, numerous attendees, including representatives from a local Buddhist Sangha as well as the North Stake of Colorado Springs for the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-

"Pikes Peak Habitat for Humanity Interfaith Build is an opportunity to not only lay a physical foundation but also an emotional and mental foundation, for all faith groups, to come together as one, united for one common cause - HUMANITY. I joined the Interfaith Build [for Unity] because I wanted to show our community that Islam is built on a foundation of compassion for our neighbors regardless of their faith. We Muslims work hard to seek out charitable opportunities that reap great rewards with God, we strive for peace and harmony with our neighbors and lend a helping hand anywhere we can. To see a family walk into their home for the first time and be able to call a permanent place home makes every minute of hard work worth it."

*Feda Jodeh,
Islamic Society of Colorado Springs*





Day Saints, expressed interest in getting more involved with interfaith work through the Interfaith Build for Unity. As PPHFH moves forward to support ongoing interfaith efforts in our local community, we wholeheartedly share the sentiments of Zen Buddhist community representative Regan Arntzen who said, “We feel being involved in interfaith work is a true opportunity to have a larger impact on addressing key issues in our community than we would by ourselves.” It is our hope that the 2022 *Building as One* initiative not only brought awareness to the importance of the WIHW global initiative and its goals, but also acts as a catalyst for future engagement in interfaith work here in our local community.

Helpful Links

- [PPHFH's 2022 World Interfaith Harmony Week Website](#)
- [Pikes Peak Habitat for Humanity's Public Declaration](#)
- [Feb. 1 Event PDF - Learn about the UN Initiative](#)
- [Feb. 3 Event PDF - Learn about the Interfaith Build for Unity Project](#)
- [Feb. 4 Event PDF - Interfaith Prayer](#)
- [Feb. 7 Event PDF - Put Faith Into Action](#)
- [Video: “Together as One - Introducing the Interfaith Build for Unity”](#)
- [Media Alert for PPHFH's “Building as One” Initiative](#)
- [Video: Why Local Faith Leaders Support the Interfaith Build for Unity](#)
- [“Pikes Peak Interfaith Coalition Brings Together Muslims, Jews, Christians in Wake of Tragedies,” Article \(Gazette, 2019\)](#)



“A key concept in Buddhism is to do no harm. This is never as easy as the three words would imply. One needs to have wisdom to make choices on what actions actually cause no harm. For us it seems wise to be part of a group trying to do good while not expounding any specific religious tenet with the exception of compassion. We enthusiastically want to be part of such an Interfaith group.”

*Regan Arntzen
Springs Mountain Sangha*



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