

Eid Mubarak!
What did we do this Ramadan?

Executive Director's Message

Kia ora and welcome to our 2019 Ramadan Edition Newsletter.

Once again, the holy month of Ramadan has blessed us with an abundance of food, gracious guests, wonderful speakers, and many unforgettable encounters and interactions. In total, we organised 9 institutional Iftar dinners, hosting over 720 people within 1 month.

We're also very pleased with the 45 Home Iftar dinners organised by our supporters. All up, 143 people attended these spaces where individuals can engage in first-hand cultural exchange and consequent dialogue.

We aim to foster growth and development within a harmonious and inclusive community, accepting the beautiful diversity New Zealand has to offer.

Ngā manaakitanga,

Yalcin Solak
 Executive Director

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Otara-Papatoetoe Local Board Iftar dinner, 07 May 2019

Pearl of the Islands Foundation Inc. (PIF) kicked off the season of fasting by co-hosting its first ever Iftar dinner with the Otara-Papatoetoe Local Board on the first day of Ramadan.

The Iftar dinner took place within the Diversity Forum. The objective of the Forum is to provide a platform for ethnic communities to come together and celebrate their unique cultures and heritage. Over 90 people attended.

The Master of Ceremony on the night was Yongjie Li, Specialist Advisor at Auckland Council, who welcomed guests and then invited the Imam to conduct the 'Call to Prayer' which signals the 'breaking of the fast' and invites people to eat. Dinner was served as a buffet. Following the dinner, a Quran recitation took place with the same mesmerising voice of the Imam.

Welcome speeches were given by both Lotu Fuli, Chair of the Local Board, and Abdul Celil Gelim, Director at the Pearl of the Islands Foundation. Ms Fuli said, "the beautiful celebration of Ramadan reminded us that we need to work together more than ever before to create social harmony and remove prejudice and racism."



Mr Gelim relayed the following words, "At PIF, we see it as an obligation to remind each other to love, respect and communicate with one another. In particular, when we live in a wonderful country like New Zealand, it is important we achieve a society which exemplifies social harmony, cohesion and mutual understanding."

Ms Tayyaba Khan, Khadija Leadership Network, gave the keynote speech on the night. She acknowledged the important work PIF and Auckland Council does to organise such events. Ms Khan made an ardent call that we all continue to participate in these events which breaks down barriers and shatters stereotypes while also emphasising the importance of bringing someone along to interfaith events.

Reflections from the floor allowed guests to share their thoughts and experiences while baklava and fruit were delivered to the tables.

Dr Ashraf Choudhary, Local Board Member, closed the evening by thanking all for attending. The co-hosts of the evening presented each other with gifts of appreciation. This event was made possible thanks to a grant awarded by the Local Board.



AUT Diversity & Dialogue Iftar dinner - 08 May 2019

On the second day of Ramadan this year, Pearl of the Islands Foundation Inc. (PIF) co-hosted its first ever Iftar dinner with the Auckland University of Technology (AUT). The Iftar dinner saw over 80 people attend comprising mainly of academics and community/religious leaders from various ethnicities and backgrounds.

Dr Valance Smith, Assistant Pro-Vice Chancellor at AUT, was the Master of Ceremony. The AUT Choir sang for us to open the evening. This was followed by the 'Call to Prayer' announced by Mohamed Soliman, which marks the time when Muslims 'break their fast'. An international buffet with foods from Morocco, Turkey, Malaysia, and India were served. Quran recitation followed the dinner break.

In his welcome speech, Dr Andrew Codling, Head of Vice-Chancellor's Office at AUT, spoke highly of PIF's work, "Having known them for quite some time, I'm amazed and astounded the work this small and dedicated group of people do and it's a delight for AUT to be partnering with them for this event."

Abdul Gelim, Director at PIF, explained how Ramadan is becoming a month which embraces everyone, "Coming together here at one table is really a situation of richness. And this table fellowship offers remarkable opportunities for mutual understanding, sympathy, acceptance, and friendship. Tonight's union demonstrates that in society, people can come together and live together regardless of faith, ethnicity or dissimilar world-views... and we sincerely hope that this gathering benefits all."

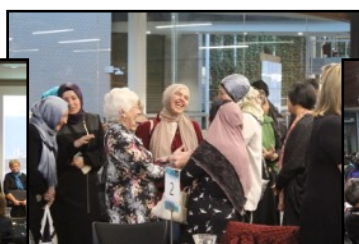


Professor Edwina Pio, AUT Director of Diversity, gave the keynote speech on the night. She emphasised the significance of the role in which we play in society. "Sacred activists are compassionate disrupters, tempered radicals, who in the face of growing injustice, suffering and violence are committed to being a source of hope, energy and change, and this is each of us." Edwina finished off with a gentle reminder, "Difference is a blessing. Let us give thanks for our many blessings."

A variety of Turkish desserts were served and the Maori Student Association performed a Waiata (song) before the floor reflections. These Reflections allowed guests to share their thoughts and experiences.

Sheikh Rafat Najm provided the vote of thanks by recounting his memories following the Christchurch tragedy. He finished his remarks by urging is to continue loving and accepting one another.

The co-hosts of the evening presented each other with gifts of appreciation. This event was made possibly partly thanks to AUT's contribution.



Friendship & Dialogue Iftar dinner - 15 May 2019

Our 11th annual Friendship & Dialogue Iftar dinner took place. This was the 4th Iftar dinner Pearl of the Islands Foundation (PIF) organised this Ramadan.

We hosted at least 115 people which included diplomatic corps, members of parliament, academics, community and religious leaders, not for profit organisations representatives, police, and government staff.

Brendan Telfer, broadcaster and author, was the MC for the function. An opening karakia was performed by Doug Rawiri. The 'Call to Prayer' was conducted by Imam Murat Safa.

Guests helped themselves to splendid kai (food) at the buffet stations. After the dinner break, a Quran recitation followed by the same Imam.

Our Iftar dinners are held to bring people of different backgrounds together for the primary purpose of relating to each other at the common denominator. Our co-hosts for this event were from both major political parties to reflect this diversity.

"I would also take this opportunity to congratulate and commend efforts of the Pearl of the Islands Foundation towards organising this dinner and bringing together people of various faiths and backgrounds" were the remarks by Kanwaljit Bakshi MP.

Michael Wood MP touched on the importance of Iftars, "These Iftar dinners run by PIF... have become one of the high points for interfaith dialogue about inclusion in our country... You also learn what you have in common. You see the common humanity in people. You see that fundamentally, the things that drive us are the very same things."

Abdul Celil Gelim, Director at PIF, spoke of how the recent Christchurch and Sri Lanka tragedies will affect us, "I hope that these deplorable events will urge us to question why and how prejudices, fear and hate have been on the rise and seek solutions together." Mr Gelim then proceeded to present each of the co-hosts with gifts of appreciation.

Dr Chris Galloway, Senior Lecturer at Massey University, shared his distaste in why world peace has not been achieved, "There is, he (Dr Martin Luther King) said, a sort of poverty of the spirit which stands in glaring contrast to our scientific and technological abundance. The richer we have become materially, the poorer we have become morally and spiritually. We have learned to fly the air like birds and swim the sea like fish, but we have not learned the simple art of living together as brothers" in his keynote speech.

A waiata (song) performance by girls from Epsom Girls Grammar and the InZone Education acted as a colourful break to the speeches.

Pearl of the Islands Foundation Awards Ceremony also took place on the night. The Community Leadership Award was awarded to Dr Mustafa Farouk for his considerate efforts after the Christchurch tragedy and the Public Service Award was presented to Dr Ashraf Choudhary for nearly 2 decades of public service.

Dessert was served before the floor reflections. Bill Cashmore, Lotu Fuli, Ikhtlaq Kashkari, Graeme Henderson, and Ruth Cleaver all spoke a few minutes about the importance of these intercultural events.

Ms Pauline Cornwell provided the vote of thanks by speaking about gratitude, "I'm grateful each of you have shared this event and that we live in a free country where you can all achieve your potential and I'm grateful that our work doesn't finish here and goes beyond these walls."



Beth Shalom Progressive Synagogue Iftar dinner - 18 May 2019

Beth Shalom co-hosted an Iftar Dinner with the Pearl of the Islands Foundation (PIF). This was a first for Beth Shalom and possibly a first in New Zealand where a Synagogue hosts Muslim for the daily breaking of the fast during the holy month of Ramadan.

The hall was abuzz with conversation as 20 members from PIF and just over 40 people from Beth Shalom attended. Members of the NZ Police joined us inside while members of the police force protected us on the outside. The evening started with the call to prayer by Imam Murat Safa.

Dinner initiated with delicious hors d'oeuvres put together by Wendy Wilton. Paul Wilton led the Havdalah to close Shabbat and celebrate the new week for the Jewish congregation.

Naomi Johnson was the MC for the evening and welcomed everyone. She talked about the importance of focusing on what we have in common and not focusing on the differences in our faiths. Then we enjoyed the delicious soup made by Debbie Miller.

Quran was recited by Imam Safa followed by an assortment of foods and salads for our mains.



After dinner, Yasir Demirbas spoke about the custom of hosting such Iftar dinners. It is through interacting that we break down barriers and develop strong relationships. Baklava was served for dessert. We were fortunate to enjoy beautiful music by both Tamar Lazarus Jason Lankino Bandara throughout the evening.

As the evening drew to a close, we heard floor reflections from Nazife Basar, Sue Berman, Nan Jensen, Ivica Gregurec and Aaron Pascoe. Their thoughts and feelings mirrored what we were all feeling in our hearts.

Debbie Swiatek, President of Beth Shalom, gave the vote of thanks and presented our organisation with a Kevin Kilsby pottery wall decoration. In return, we presented a Turkish ceramic plate to Debbie.

New friends were made, email addresses and phone numbers were swapped and everybody left feeling happy and satisfied thanks to the wonderful food and the stimulating conversations.

We thank Naomi Johnson for writing this up. We thank Beth Shalom for the splendid hospitality.



Holy Trinity Cathedral Iftar dinner - 20 May 2019

The Holy Trinity Cathedral (HTC) hosted its 3rd annual Ramadan Iftar dinner and its 2nd in collaboration with the Pearl of the Islands Foundation (PIF) to enhance understanding, break stereotypes, and build bridges. The act of coming together under the same roof to break-fast and celebrate the Ramadan spirit was commended by over 90 guests.

An organ impromptu by the Cathedral organist kicked off the evening followed by the MC, Revd Ivica Gregurec, Cathedral Precentor, who welcomed guests. He invited the Imam to conduct the 'Call to Prayer' who did so in the main Cathedral in what was a marvellous display of interfaith dialogue and acceptance. The Rt Revd Ross Bay, Bishop of Auckland, followed with his prayer.

Dinner was served in the Bishop Monteith Visitor Centre thanks to the generosity and hospitality of the HTC. Dinner table conversations generally began with introductions and then divulged into curiosity about one another's origin and work. Following dinner, the official programme began.

Formal welcomes were given by the Rt Revd Ross Bay, Very Revd Anne Mills and Abdul Celil Gelim. Ross thanked both organisations for putting together the Iftar which showcased peace and unity. Anne urged other places of worship to follow suit, "You might be inspired and decide to have an Iftar in your churches around the city next year... they need to be organised with your Muslim neighbours with an openness of heart." Abdul spoke of the importance of sharing a meal in the month of Ramadan, "It is reported the Abraham (PBUH) would find company to share his bread and thus some Muslims invoke blessings on each other by saying, 'May you have the barakah (blessings) of an Abrahamic table.'"



Religious texts were read from the Quran, Micah (Hebrew Scriptures) and the Gospel of John (Christian Scriptures). The keynote speech was given by both the Venerable Michael Berry, Anglican Archdeacon. He expressed the following words, "Our cause is that we hope for a society that ...accepts people of faith, no matter their creed. That requires a vision that takes us beyond tolerance and coexistence with people who are different from us. It requires us to move beyond a drive to shift our attitudes and views to something more open and inclusive and active." Hymns were then sung and given the large presence of Cathedral clergy in the room, the chants bounced off the walls to create a wonderful ambience.

Alike the religious text readings, floor reflections were also delivered by representatives from Abrahamic religions. Taner Basar, Naomi Johnson, and Jocelyn Armstrong all spoke briefly about their experiences. Dr Zain Ali wrapped up the night by offering his vote of thanks. He joked that when his daughter asked what the trinity was he said, "It's Islam, Judaism, and Christianity." Following an exchange of gifts, prayers by Revd Bruce Keeley and Abdul Gelim concluded the night.



Dunedin Iftar dinner - 28 May 2019

Pearl of the Islands Foundation, Dunedin Abrahamic Interfaith Group (DAIG) and Otago University (OU) hosted its first-ever Iftar dinner. 50+ people attended including faith and community leaders, management from the University, academics, and advocates for peace and racial equity.

Formal welcomes were given by Abdul Celil Gelim (PIF), Ken Baker (DAIG), Prof Helen Nicholson (OU). Prof Richard Jackson delivered the keynote speech while several guests offered floor reflections.



Massey Uni Diversity & Dialogue Iftar dinner - 29 May 2019

The 2nd annual Diversity & Dialogue Iftar dinner with Massey University saw over 70 guests attend.

Dr Jeffrey Stangl, Executive Director of Strategic Partnerships, welcomed guests on behalf of Massey University while Abdul Celil Gelim, Director at PIF, shared his pleasure in being able to share the spirit of Ramadan with guests consisting of many students, academics, ethnic community representatives, government figures, and those active in the field to advance ethnic and religious understanding.

Professor Peter Lineham, as the keynote speaker, referred to historical events to explain how peace can prosper in New Zealand. Following floor reflections by Ricky Waters, Sundip Patel, Ngawai Haitana-Tuhoro and Jenny Green, gifts of appreciation were exchanged between the co-hosts.

