

9/11 and the Interfaith Council

a personal reflection by Vern Barnet

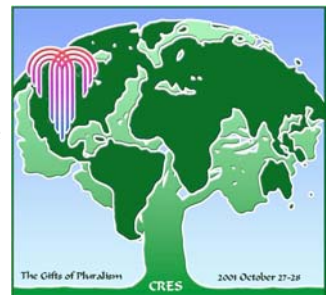
Organized in 1989, the Interfaith Council had prepared for two years for September 11, 2001, to give a press conference to announce *The Gifts of Pluralism*:

Finding the Sacred in a World without Direction 2001 Oct (26) 27-28 interfaith community conference. Just before leaving the house for the Pembroke Hill library where the Council was scheduled to have its press conference, I turned on the news and learned the horror. Concerned that Rauf Mir might not be able to make it, I called Syed Hasan, to be sure Islam was represented in front of the media.



As it turned out every member including the two of them were on hand, and every member speaking, with images of the towers repeatedly shown on the TVs behind us. I remember how stunned the reporters were, unable to ask a single question of either of our Muslim leaders. KCUR did a nice job reporting on the conference, and The Star gave us a section cover and inside just before the conference opened. The overwhelming success of the conference led to so many other things: Kansas City being on the national map for interfaith leadership, *The Hindu and the Cowboy*, the nation's first two-week residential, international Interfaith Academies sponsored with Harvard's Pluralism Project, Religions for Peace-

USA at the UN, and coordination with local, state, and national political leaders, some of whom participated in the conference, some of whom sent proclamations and other greetings, and some who followed up with their own efforts to carry on the interfaith message. The success led also to the Jackson County Diversity Task Force, with several Council members part of the commission, studying the 5-country area, presenting its 35,000-word, 77-page report and recommendations Sept 10, 2002.



Congressman Dennis Moore asked the Council to prepare an event for the metro area for the first Sunday after 9/11, at which each faith was represented on the platform, with Jewish, Christian, and Muslim speakers, along with greetings from Congressman Moore. This was the first time some Muslims had dared to come out of their homes. It was a front-page story the next day in The Star, with a continuation inside. Unfortunately, this event also led to a painful misrepresentation that persists to this day that harmed interfaith cooperation for at least five years.



Concerned that the first anniversary of 9/11 could be a military exercise, the Council, working with United Way and other civic organizations, including the Kansas City Ballet, the Symphony, and the Lyric Opera, with some 50 other satellite groups, organized a day-long observance for 2002, which began in the parking lot of Grace and Holy Trinity Cathedral with each member of the Council boarding a chartered bus before dawn with water from one's own tradition, riding to Ilus Davis Park across from City Hall, where a brass ensemble from the Kansas City Symphony played as the sun rose; and with ritual words, broadcast live on TV stations, each person poured water into the pool in the park with the First Amendment monument. Gathering into a single vessel some of the mingled water, we then marched, with police escort, back to the Cathedral, where the names of the deceased were projected on the wall of Founders Hall and read aloud. That evening, Jewish and Muslim children singing together began an observance at which dignitaries such as Kansas City Mayor Kay Barnes spoke, the Missouri governor and his family participated, and the Council members at the Holy Table received portions of the mingled waters to take back to their respective communities. This led to a half-hour national CBS-TV special on interfaith work in Kansas City, including videos of portions of the morning and evening observances.



The Council was shaped by 9/11, and much, including video, is archived at www.cres.org.