

Interfaith Festival of Gratitude raises more than \$500 to combat homelessness

What has more than 500 legs, speaks more than 20 languages and raises more than \$500 to address homelessness? The eighth annual Interfaith Festival of Gratitude in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

More than 250 people came to The Grand in downtown Oshkosh on Monday, Nov. 20, to share their faith and to learn about the wide variety of religious traditions in their community. Representatives from 14 faith communities took to the stage in this historic building to sing, dance, chant, play music and even offered words to help those who attended experience their faith tradition.

The host, the Rev. Dr. Tom Willadsen, pastor of First Presbyterian Church of Oshkosh, opened the festival with the words of Desmond Tutu, ““Hope is nurtured in relationships and community.”

Willadsen added, “It takes time to build relationships, but it is time well-spent in society today where there is so much fear and distrust.”

The Ahmadiyya Muslim Community was host to a potluck that preceded the festival. Many community members brought foods from their ethnic or religious traditions to share with nearly 150 hungry people. Challah shared table space with Hungarian cinnamon bread, chicken biryani, Jell-O salad and Swedish meatballs.

The freewill offering raised more than \$500 for the Day By Day Warming Shelter. The shelter's executive director, Lorraine Yarbrough, said, “What a blessing to all who attended this event. This shows our community at its best. So many people share their passion in a safe, welcoming place. ... It is very gratifying to know that there are so many concerned, compassionate people in our community.”

The Oshkosh North Asian Cultural Dance Group performed two traditional Hmong dances. Their costumes and smiles lit up the auditorium.

A musical group from St. Raphael the Archangel Roman Catholic Church used 14 different languages to express perhaps the most universal human emotion: gratitude.

The Ambassadors for Christ African Fellowship choir was not able to attend this year, but the recording of their time on stage at last year's festival once again filled The Grand with movement and joy.

Willadsen even noted the stage crew at The Grand did an outstanding job.

Planning is already underway for next year's festival. Willadsen added, "In a time when there is so much fear and distrust in society, seeing so many people from different backgrounds celebrating and respecting one another is a shining example of the beloved kingdom."