

What has more than 500 legs, speaks more than 20 languages and raises more than \$500 to address homelessness?  
The 8<sup>th</sup> Annual Interfaith Festival of Gratitude, in Oshkosh, Wisconsin.

More than 250 people came to The Grand in downtown Oshkosh on Monday, November 20, to share their faith and to learn about the wide variety of religious traditions in their community. Representatives from 14 faith communities took the stage in this beautiful, historic building. They sang, danced, chanted, played music and even used words to help those in attendance experience their faith tradition.

Host Pastor Tom Willadsen began the festival with the words of Desmond Tutu, “Hope is nurtured in relationships and community.” “It takes time to build relationships, but it is time well-spent in society today where there is so much fear and distrust,” Willadsen added.

The festival was preceded by a potluck hosted by the Ahmadiyya Muslim Community. 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. 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. The ‘Least Among Us’ video reminded everyone our common need for a safe place to live. 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 fourteen 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.

Once again, the stage crew at The Grand did an outstanding job.

Planning is already underway for next year’s festival. 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.

Submitted by the Reverend Doctor Thomas C. Willadsen, November 22, 2017