



# HINDU PATRIKA

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## Hindu Temple & Cultural Center of Kansas City

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## Interfaith Academies Visit Hindu Temple

In June of 2007, Kansas City was the site for a pilot program of national interfaith training for future religious leaders and for people already in leadership positions in their faith organizations. There is recognition that the United States of America is a multi-faith country where people can freely practice their faith traditions.

The purpose of these interfaith academies was to provide a forum where the people from diverse religious backgrounds can learn about each other's faith. This was accomplished through classroom lectures, seminars, readings, documentary films, interfaith story telling, and by visiting various religious places of worship. Henry Luce Foundation funded the interfaith academies in partnership with Harvard University's Pluralism Project, Religions for Peace – USA at the United Nations Plaza, The Saint Paul School of Theology and the Greater Kansas City Interfaith Council.

As part of the program, the students and faculties of the Interfaith Academies visited Hindu Temple on Sunday, June 17 to learn about Hindu religious principles and worship practices, and to interact with the members of the local Hindu community. There were about forty people in the group belonging to nine different faiths including Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism, Bahai and Zoroastrianism. The participants came from all over the country.

On their arrival at the Hindu Temple, HTCC President Kasturi Patro, Bob Sathyanarayana, Arvind Khetia, Anand Bhattacharyya and others greeted the visitors in a typical Hindu tradition. The visitors were invited into the Prayer Hall. Sridhar Harohalli, Program Chairman, was the MC throughout the session.

Our priest, Shastri Rajendra Pandya performed Ganesh puja. He also explained in English the symbolism and meaning of this worship service. After the puja, aarati was performed with some participation from the visitors. The visitors were full of praise for the way Pandyajji explained the Hindu ritualistic service. The visitors were then requested to go to the Fellowship Hall (downstairs) for lunch and other programs.

The highlight of the second half of the program was to honor Rev. Vern Barnet. It was communicated earlier to the academies that the members of the Hindu Temple would like to avail this opportunity to honor Rev. Vern Barnet during their visit to the Temple. Rev. Barnet is Hindu Patrika

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a prominent interfaith leader in Kansas City area and a well-wisher of the Hindu Temple from the very beginning. He was with the group as a local coordinator and a member of the faculty. Anand Bhattacharyya introduced Rev. Barnet. After the introduction, the priest, Pandiyaji performed a traditional Hindu blessing ceremony for Rev. Barnet and presented a shawl on behalf of the Hindu Temple. Then, the President of HTCC, Kasturi Patro presented a plaque to Rev. Barnet. In reply, Rev. Barnet expressed his appreciation and thanked the members of the Hindu Temple for such an honor by the Hindu Community of Kansas City.



After Rev. Barnet's acceptance speech, it was time for lunch. Before serving the food, the priest Pandiyaji chanted a Hindu prayer. The food, prepared by Hindu Temple members was delicious and our guests were pleased to taste Indian style vegetarian meals. Over the meals, informal discussions took place between the visitors and the temple members on various cultural and religious matters of interest. The Hindu Temple presented each member of the interfaith group a gift packet containing HTCC Brochure and additional informative articles of interest on Hinduism and a book on Vedanta by Swami Vivekananda. The visitors greatly appreciated the gift.



After luncheon, NRITYA - School of Indian Dance and Music presented a beautiful dance program, "Vishwa Vinayaka", a tribute to Lord Ganesh. The dancers were Hema Sharma, Latha

Venkatash, Mahima Natraj and Monica RoyChowdhury. The entire audience gave a rousing round of applause to the artists after the dance.

This program was followed by a Power Point presentation on Hinduism by Arvind Khetia. The focus of Arvind's talk was the Philosophy of Vedanta. The presentation was well received by the guests. Then, Sonal Khetia sang a beautiful song titled Nirvanasatkam, composed by eighth century Hindu saint and philosopher Sri Shankaracharya. Sonal asked the audience to participate and the audience responded enthusiastically.

Then, there was a video presentation of Swami Vivekananda's inspirational speech delivered on September 11, 1893 at the Parliament of Religions, Chicago. (This speech is printed at the following article) A question-answer session followed. Anand Bhattacharyya, Arvind Khetia, Nagar Nayak, and S. Y. Singh responded to questions from the interfaith visitors.

After Q/A session Rev. Bud Heckman, the leader of the group, gave a



glowing tribute to the members of the Hindu Temple for arranging such a warm reception and a cultural program for the interfaith friends. Finally, from Rig Veda, Arvind Khetia led a prayer of harmony and peace.

The members of the Executive Committee and other members also contributed their time and efforts for this program. As always, HTCC members have done a great job in showing Hindu hospitality to the visiting interfaith communities.