



InterFaith - Run for a United World

Intercultural and interreligious peace-project in Luxembourg

Short description: Essential information about this project

InterFaith: Celebrating diversity and promoting unity of cultures and religions

InterFaith, Luxembourg is a project that has evolved over the last 8 years, dedicated to building bridges between cultures and religions through team spirit, stamina and enthusiasm in sporting endeavor. Through sport, Interfaith has created a “Rendez-Vous of Religions” with international reach.

It is our goal to make a contribution for a peaceful coexistence of religions by

- 1) Staging an annual InterFaith weekend as part of the „ING Night Marathon Luxembourg“. This high profile public event also involves providing local host families for our participating runners – thereby also building bridges between religions and cultures.
- 2) Ongoing public relations work, for example our website www.interfaith.lu, and other social media such as a Facebook page.
- 3) Creating and maintaining a network of like-minded representatives of organizations who are all committed to promote peace among cultures and religions.
- 4) And especially by promoting the InterFaith idea of encounter, of building bridges, through sport.

Origins, facets and aims of InterFaith in Luxembourg

Bridge between sports and religion

The InterFaith project began as the idea of two Protestant ministers, Jens Krohmer and Ingo Hanke, who shared a passion for running. Added to this was a good personal contact to Erich François, the organizer of the Luxembourg Marathon and the idea was born to build a bridge between religion and sport. It was a fascinating concept to explore the relationship between these two worlds, theology and sport, from a theological as well as practical perspective. From the outset, the founders of the InterFaith project were convinced sport has an enormous capacity to forge peace

and harmony by bringing people with very different worldviews, of different religions, cultures and nationalities together in a common venture. At the same time we wondered, what specific contribution religion could bring to the world of sport? What does the physical being mean to the spiritual dimension of our lives?

The first answer to these intriguing questions was the “Geistlicher Startschuss” (spiritual send-off or the religious starting signal) – an event that took place before the Luxembourg Night Marathon on 27 May 2006. From its inception, this event was conceptualized as an ecumenical service, for all those runners, friends, family and guests sharing in the InterFaith project and was hosted together with the Catholic priest, Edmond Ries.

With this religious service we offered to participants a moment of contemplation a few hours before the start of the Night Marathon. We are well aware of the importance of training, nutrition and mental attitude for successful running, but we wanted to introduce a fourth dimension, the so-called spiritual dimension, a transcendental source of power and energy.

The “religious starting signal” was a success and thus encouraged we proceeded to the next step. We just want to mention that the relationship between religion and sport has become a popular field of research and in particular the spiritual dimension of running. We notice and follow these developments with great interest. Sport can have strong religious element and religion can emphasize the dignity of the body and mind.

"Priests United": Bridge between Denominations and Religions

The positive experience of and feedback to this first "religious send-off" motivated the small team of InterFaith organisers to go one step further and to organize a full weekend of activities: "Priest United" was born. Ordained ministers of different denominations were invited to participate in the Luxembourg Marathon races. Host families, mainly recruited from within the members of the German speaking Protestant church in Luxembourg helped to ensure that the ordained ministers and representatives of other world religions, coming from Germany, Austria and Romania enjoyed Luxembourgish hospitality. "Priests United" took place under the patronage of Dr. Margot Käßmann, a German Protestant bishop and Jean-Claude Juncker, the then Prime Minister of Luxembourg. Further bridges were built between participants of different religions and denominations, through support for "Healing of Memories", an interdenominational and interreligious charitable organisation working for religious and cultural reconciliation in several countries. Thirty participants ran under "Priests United" in the run on 18 May 2007. Matthias Vosse!er, a Protestant minister from Germany, finished the marathon in 2 hours 47 minutes and to date still holds the record as fastest interreligious runner. Philipp Groll, also a Protestant minister from Germany, is still the record holder of the half marathon with a time of 1 hour 23 minutes.

"InterFaith - Marathon for a United World": A Sporting Bridge between Religions

The successful "Priests United" weekend inspired the InterFaith team to continue and to do even more: A new vision arose: the organization of an interreligious peace run. When this idea was put to the race director of the Luxembourg Marathon by Jens Krohmer and Ingo Hanke he replied by saying: "Just do it!" So in 2008 "Priests United" became "InterFaith - Marathon for a United World", Ordained ministers and representatives of World Religions were invited to an inter-religious, multicultural face-to-face encounter in Luxembourg. 'InterFaith turned out as a great success. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama accepted the patronage of our project.

It is the right mix: Multifaceted opportunities for inter-religious dialogue and encounters during the InterFaith weekend

Hospitality:

The network of host families and different faith groups are a core element of the InterFaith weekend. In stressing the importance of hospitality, InterFaith connects with one the oldest principles of humanity, which is again growing in importance with the current challenges Europe faces. Intercultural dialogue is happening throughout the entire weekend. Personal friendships have resulted in this way and mutual understanding for different cultures has been strengthened.

Eating together: The Pasta-party

Food and drink does not only keep body and soul together, but also forges a strong sense of togetherness. The InterFaith weekend starts on the Friday evening before the Marathon, with the Pasta-party, allowing participants from near and far to truly arrive with a warm welcome. Through music and songs which emphasize togetherness, the runners get to know other participants of different faiths. The Pasta Party also includes some organizational matters for the weekend.

Interreligious Team-run

The interreligious teams, participating in the Marathon Relay team run are a strong symbol for peace, emphasizing the team spirit of the InterFaith ideal. Team members wear the InterFaith T-shirt, sporting the InterFaith logo, as a public show of a shared belief that interreligious conflicts are not fate, but instead that bonds can also be forged across and between religions. These interreligious teams have become increasingly popular and in 2013 led to our new name: 'InterFaith – Run for a United World'.

Visit of different faith groups

A further piece in the mosaic of interreligious encounters during the InterFaith weekend is the visit to different faith groups in Luxembourg. In 2014 all InterFaith participants and host families were invited by the Baha'i. In 2015, a reception was hosted by the Archbishop of Luxembourg, who is also patron of InterFaith. On Sunday, following the 2015 Marathon, the InterFaith participants were invited by the Jewish community to visit the synagogue in Luxembourg. These warm and open encounters and deep discussions about the various faith groups are extremely rewarding.

Interreligious prayer for peace: a special spiritual encounter

The religious “send-off“ just before the start of the Night Marathon, has now become the „prayers for peace of world religions“ and represents a spiritual highlight of the InterFaith weekend. Joining in prayers, songs and meditation creates a special, spiritual bond among participants. This bond is felt particularly strongly during the meditation, when no words are spoken. This deeply spiritual experience opens up the vision for a more peaceful world, in which no one feels excluded.

Holistic characteristic of the InterFaith encounters

From the deliberations above it can be deduced that the InterFaith weekend can be described as a holistic experience. All senses are involved. Expressed in a different way: InterFaith recognizes that human beings form a unity of body, spirit and soul. If body, emotions, as well as the cognitive side are touched upon and brought together, then a door opens to a more all-encompassing experience. This illustrates how rewarding InterFaith encounters can be. This wealth of experiences also explain why so many InterFaith participants and InterFaith team members have been involved from the beginning and continue to be involved in the project.

Education and support of Weltethos (Global ethics foundation)

InterFaith also contributes to educational initiatives, which share its vision. One basic motivation of the InterFaith project has always been to create the opportunity for meeting people of different faiths, to create understanding through dialogue. InterFaith believes that a culture of tolerance and mutual respect can only develop, if a space is created where encounters can take place. The theoretical understanding of other cultures is important, but only the first step towards a different way of being and of being together.

Since we consider education to be an important key towards promoting peace between religions, we have supported the educational projects of the Global ethics foundation since the inception of the InterFaith project in 2008.

Vision, contacts and expansion of the InterFaith idea.

The InterFaith project is an example how a **culture of welcoming** can be supported in Europe.

InterFaith Luxembourg has the vision to create a network of peace between religions through sports. Over the years, this vision has led to close contacts with some groups, starting with our **British Sikh** friends. This group of Sikhs have themselves initiated and participated in interreligious encounters at various sporting events. Inspired by InterFaith Luxembourg, interreligious runs were offered as part of the **Francfort Marathon**.

A long-standing participant of InterFaith, Luxembourg, the Dutch minister Olaf Haasnot, was so inspired that he organized an InterFaith weekend as part of the **Amsterdam Marathon** in 2011.

A particular highlight is the InterFaith run in **Kyoto, Japan**. A group of Japanese Buddhist monks participated in the InterFaith weekend and proceeded to organize the Kyoto InterFaith run. In February 2016, the **third InterFaith weekend in Japan** will take place. InterFaith Luxembourg continues to promote its Kyoto “sister-run” and

two intercultural educational trips to Japan could be offered. Through kind support offered by a Japanese firm located in Luxembourg InterFaith is able to offer these trips on a favorable price.

Important is also our contact with the **InterFaith-Community-Sanctuary, Seattle, USA**: This is an interreligious community with was founded in the aftermath of 9/11. This group has published several books on interreligious dialogue.

In 2016, we expect the first Seattle InterFaith runners.

InterFaith Luxembourg has also been in contact with the organizers of the **Jerusalem-Marathons**. Talks have already taken place on how InterFaith Luxembourg can help in organizing an interreligious relay run in Jerusalem. In 2016, InterFaith Luxembourg expects the first participants of the Jewish community in Luxembourg.

Ingo Hanke und Joachim Hoeke,
Koordinatoren des InterFaith-Projekts