

5Qs: Dignity and Justice for All

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The Multifaith Society celebrates 60 years of Human Rights

Ever read the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights? Me neither, until now, but it's a fascinating document which includes the likes of this great line: "The advent of a world in which human beings shall enjoy freedom of speech and belief and freedom from fear and want has been proclaimed as the highest aspiration of the common people." That's just culled from the preamble to the Declaration's greater 25 articles and, with December 10 marking its 60th anniversary, the Victoria Multifaith Society is having a free conference featuring workshops, exhibits and speakers like local peace activist Mary-Wynne Ashford and Toronto's Gerald Filson. We asked society secretary Sheila Flood what participants—and their children—can expect.

Monday Magazine: Why would a multifaith group celebrate something that's more political than spiritual?

Sheila Flood: We never thought of it that way. We always thought of it as being based on common values. It's all about common ground, building bridges, having a common standard for all of humanity and when you read it, it's almost a cross between legalistic terms and poetry. It's really quite amazing.

MM: Should more people read the actual Declaration?

SF: It's definitely something anybody can identify with—I don't think you'll find too many people disagreeing with it. It's one of those rare treasures that people aren't generally aware of but should become aware of, because it can draw us together and build security in the world.

MM: You've got workshops for children. Why is that?

SF: You have to begin with children—they're the ones who are going to build this new world, so they have to be exposed to those ideals of cooperation, equality and justice for everybody. Those are things we take for granted, but it's important for children to be exposed to them in a more systematic way, to teach those basic values which cross all cultures and all faiths and really bind all religions together. So we've got Linda Kavelin Popov of the Virtues Project doing a workshop for children on Saturday and one about children on Sunday for parents and teachers. And that links right into the U.N., because they have the Convention on the Rights of the Child, which says what's needed is the development of the child's personality, talents, and mental and physical abilities to their fullest potential.

MM: Should we be paying more attention to the U.N.'s documents in general as a society, as a world?

SF: I think so. We're all looking up expecting the sky to fall, but what's really interesting is the grass growing under our feet. This is where the future is coming from—individuals and movements and organizations who are building these structures for tomorrow's world.

MM: Will it be about more local or global concerns?

SF: Both—on Saturday, it'll be global issues with Mary-Wynne and Gerald, and on Sunday, it'll be more local issues like homelessness, mental health, first nations and the rights of the child. You can't do a lot in a weekend, but it's

really important to give people hope, especially in these times when everything on the news seems so dramatic and scary. There are so many people around the world and in Victoria—Mary-Wynne, Guy Dauncey—who are focussed on solutions. These things that grow slowly over 60 years aren't that exciting, but the world needs to be focused on positive things.

The Human Rights Global Dignity Conference runs 1-4 p.m. December 6-7 at Cadboro Bay United, 2625 Arbutus. Admission is free and drop-ins are welcome, but registration is requested for the workshops. For details, visit victoriamultifaith.com or e-mail multifaithsecretary@gmail.com.