

03. April 2023

Integration Council

Mayor Kerkhoff welcomes 60 guests to the breaking of the fast in Bocholt's "Skylounge".

For the first time, a Bocholt city leader, Mayor Thomas Kerkhoff, invited people to break their fast. 60 people from Bocholt from mosque associations, the Catholic and Protestant churches, the Integration Council and various organisations came to the Skylounge of the LWL Textilwerk Bocholt on 31 March.

"I would like to hereby launch the resumption of interreligious dialogue and hope that this date of breaking the fast together will find its way into the annual calendar," Mayor Kerkhoff emphasised. Inter-religious dialogue is the "key to peace in the world. And we have to bring this dialogue back into our midst". He said he had found a good dialogue with the Integration Council. "We don't always agree, but we can talk about it", Kerkhoff emphasised. Breaking the fast means joy, coming together, but also reflection.

Strengthening social community

Memet Cinar, vice-chairman of the Integration Council, thanked the mayor for the invitation. "Such a meeting with representatives from different faith communities, politics and associations is unique in Bocholt."

Cinar reported on the five pillars of Islam. "They include the public confession of faith, daily prayer, social giving, pilgrimage and fasting in the month of Ramadan, which we are currently in." After sunset, the fast is first broken with a date. Often friends and relatives are invited to break the fast or people meet at the mosque and eat with the community. "In this way, the social community is strengthened in the community and in the surrounding area," Cinar continued.

He also touched on the Ukraine war and the earthquake disaster in Turkey and Syria. "Lent is the time not only in Islam, but also in Christianity to live charity and love your neighbour. Especially now, we must not leave the people there on the ground alone," Cinar emphasised and called for helping with reconstruction through fundraising campaigns. "The people also need financial and material support."

Cinar described Bocholt as a "big, colourful family with people from many corners of the world. This beautiful city belongs to all of us. Together we can shape it, together we can achieve something. The exchange between the faith communities, associations and politics is therefore very important and necessary. Because only through encounter and dialogue can we counter prejudices and fears."

Pastor Rafael van Straelen, who had returned from a pilgrimage the day before, emphasised that all religions had the same request in terms of content during Lent, to show mercy. "Christians and Muslims think during Lent, what good can I do?" said van Straelen.

"Ik bün ne Bokeltsen Junge," said Tugay Turgut, new chairman of DITIB Bocholt (Türkisch-islamische Gemeinde zu Bocholt e.V.). "I wish for more events like this." Jesus and also Mohammed said the same thing with the sentence "Thou shalt love thy neighbour". "Then let us do the same," Turgut demanded.



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Fastenbrechen in Bocholt

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"Bocholt is home to us all".

"Ramadan is the month of encounter," said Abdullah Zor from the association Integrations- und Bildungsstätte e.V. (Blue Mosque) afterwards. "Xenophobia and discrimination have no place in our society, let us meet each other with solidarity and charity." The most important thing is to talk to each other. Bocholt is "on the right track. Bocholt is home to all of us and in crises we show that we can be strong together." The willingness to donate has almost overtaken his association. "Harun Benli and I were born here, we grew up here with German-Turkish values, we studied and we are Bocholt residents."

Dr Abdul Waheed from the Ahmadiyya community highlighted the community. "I am also a Bocholt boy. Breaking the fast is a special event and this should be celebrated with respect, tolerance and solidarity and also lived by. We are all pursuing the same goal of living together peacefully and in solidarity."

Gülhan Zorlu brought greetings from the Akdeniz Alevi Association. "Breaking the fast in company, that's what makes it," Zorlu said. She reported on some fundraising activities her association had carried out in the past days and weeks. "A lot is being done, but further help, especially for the construction, is still needed".

Building bridges

Muaiad Abd Alrahman then spoke on behalf of the German-Syrian Association. "We founded ourselves in 2021 with the aim of building a bridge between the Syrian and German citizens of Bocholt," said Abd Alrahman. During Ramadan, he said, people should be aware of what is important in life: "Fasting, prayer and sharing."

Right on time for sunset at 20:11, Taha Cicekci initiated the breaking of the fast with the call to prayer and Harun Benli with the table prayer.

Organiser Bruno Wansing, Integration Officer of the City of Bocholt, drew a satisfied conclusion. "We put the different people from Bocholt at the tables in a colourful mix to promote dialogue right from the start. We succeeded in doing that."

The city of Bocholt would like to thank the "Blue Mosque", which supplied the food, as well as all the participants who made the exchange around breaking the fast a success. "We will continue the interreligious dialogue with further events," Wansing announces.