

UPF USA Celebrates the United Nations World Interfaith Harmony Week 2018

Tom McDevitt
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SALT LAKE CITY, UT

On February 1, The Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable (SLIR) held its Annual Prayer Breakfast in the Dean's Hall of the Episcopal Cathedral Church of St. Mark. This event, done in recognition of World Interfaith Harmony Week, opened a month-long series of interfaith programs. Josie Stone, chair of the Roundtable, welcomed about fifty members and guests. Lacey Harris, a Northern Paiute and SLIR Board member, opened the meeting with a Native American Blessing. Then Wendy Stovall, Secretary to the Board of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable and UPF Executive Director, invited representatives from the Catholic, Muslim, Jewish, Sikh, and Hindu faiths to read a passage from their Holy Scriptures. Then Ms. Stovall read from the Cheong Seong Gyeong, a book of Reverend Moon's words. The guest speaker, Mr. Sim Gill, Salt Lake County District Attorney, spoke of his upbringing as a Sikh in India and his later move to Utah, where he joined the Latter-day Saints (LDS) Boy Scouts and participated in other LDS activities. The event concluded with the presentation of annual awards for service to the Roundtable and the community. Local online magazine Deseret News reported the [event](#).

HONOLULU, HI



On February 2, the UPF-Hawaii chapter hosted a program called Ceremony of Religious Unity: "We Are One" at the Hawaiian Studies Department of the University of Hawaii, Manoa Campus. The program was co-sponsored by the local chapter of the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP). About 50 people attended the event, which celebrated members of various faiths, including Baha'is,

Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Jains, and Jews. The program started with a Hawaiian chant and blessing invocation by a Hawaiian priest and his spouse. Community youth read words of encouragement from the mayor and a councilwoman before a musical presentation and explanation of Aloha.

Reverend Ho, Local Coordinator of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) in Honolulu, then read the founder's message, entitled The Responsibilities of Religious Leaders in Building a Culture of Peace. Reverend Kazuo Takami, District Pastor of the FFWPU and UPF-Hawaii Special Advisor, gave a brief but entertaining introduction to the water ceremony. He explained that kind and loving words have a positive effect not just on people, but on all things. Then faith representatives came up one by one to pray and read scriptures on love, unity or peace before pouring water into a bowl. Dr. Nakama explained that the water would be later taken to a spot near the campus center and poured around a peace pole with the message May Peace Prevail On Earth written in four languages. Musician and singer Mrs. Donna Shaver concluded the ceremony with a brilliant rendition of the song Let There Be Peace On Earth.



PENNSYLVANIA AND NEW JERSEY

On February 3, UPF-Pennsylvania and UPF-New Jersey held separate events. In Pittsburgh, Mr. Ray Lipowcan, UPF Local Coordinator, hosted a roundtable discussion on peacebuilding at the Carnegie Library of Pittsburgh. The topics of the discussion included: What Role Does Interfaith Harmony Have in the Peacebuilding Process? and How Can We Balance The Sacred And Secular Dimensions of Our Society? Later, they read excerpts from Reverend Moon's autobiography, As A Peace-Loving Global Citizen. The program was supported by the local chapters of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) and the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP).

ELIZABETH, NJ

Meanwhile, in Elizabeth, Reverend Emiljun Rapada, National director of Youth UPF-USA and UPF Local Coordinator, initiated an interfaith and intercultural forum at the Elizabeth Family Church. The program featured 30 attendees and was co-sponsored by the Association of Christian Evangelists (ACE) and the local chapter of FFWPU. The theme of the forum was: Love of the Good and Love of the Neighbor. Reverend Dr. Gaudencio Soriano, Founder and Titular Bishop of ACE, emphasized that no matter our individual religions, we are all children of God. Mr. Samie Mohammed of the Nation of Islam talked about the essence of Islam, which is peace.

Reverend Georges Tegha, a Unificationist who is also of the Ubuntu faith, shared the uniqueness of his African traditions. He said, Ubuntu means humanity towards others. "We are all connected as one human family regardless of our differences," he added. Unificationist Pastor Darryl Franklin discussed the commandments of Jesus Christ as revealed in the book of Luke, Chapter 10, Verse 27: Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind and Love your neighbor as yourself. He then testified to the mission of Reverend Moon and his wife, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, to be the True Parents to all of humanity. Cultural presentations from the Buddhist Thai community and an African culture group followed.

Reverend Ricardo de Sena, President of UPF-USA, shared about the Five Principles of Peace. Together with Reverend Rapada, he appointed four new Ambassadors of Peace: Reverend Rodolfo Casuga of ACE; Wilfredo Macaraeg, former mayor and prosecutor; Mr. Samie Mohammed of the Nation of Islam;

and Mr. Jacob Smith, Founder and CEO of Common Sensibly. The host explained that all faiths are equal in value before God, and the program concluded with a water ceremony presided over by Buddhists, Christians, Muslims, Unificationists, and African Traditionalists.

NEW MEXICO

On February 7, members of UPF New Mexico participated in a World Interfaith Harmony Week celebration at the Baha'i Center in Albuquerque, called Prayers for Peace and Conversations of Friendships. Around thirty-five people attended the fellowship program. Several religious groups were represented, including Quakers, Buddhists, Catholics, Muslims, and Unificationists. The heart of the program took place in the chapel, where attendees were invited to come up and share prayers and read scriptures from their diverse faith backgrounds.

Fritz Schneider, one of three Unificationists present, gave a heartfelt spontaneous prayer that stood out for its sincerity. Dale Garratt, Executive director of UPF-New Mexico, spoke about the beautiful unity in the upcoming Olympics, emphasizing that athletes from North and South Korea would march together under one flag. He gave a short prayer in Korean and sang *Hollo Arirang*, which says in part: The way is difficult, but it may become easier. Let's walk together hand in hand. The program concluded as Albuquerque Mayor Tim Keller proclaimed February 1st World Interfaith Harmony Week in the City of Albuquerque.



WASHINGTON, D.C.

Finally, on February 8, UPF–Washington, D.C. held its annual celebration at the Beech Room of The Washington Times. Rev. Janel Johnson, Commissioner for Prince George's County, Maryland, offered the prayer to begin the program and read a message from Cece Cole, President of Silke Endress: "When I think of interfaith, I see a world where we all can be enlightened by sharing the various faiths and beliefs systems. ... People of faith can join forces to bring about peace as well as preserve our individual religion and cultural identities."

Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, Executive Director of UPF-Washington DC, spoke on the current state of international unrest and encouraged the participants to support initiatives which promote a greater understanding between religions. Five additional speakers, representing Christianity, Islam, Judaism, Buddhism, and Sikhism gave their perspective on the matter. Then Mr. McDevitt, Chairman of the Washington Times and UPF-USA, and President of UPF International, concluded by encouraging people of all faiths to come together and acknowledge the pain and suffering of others, so that we can move forward together toward building a peaceful world. Ambassador for Peace appointments were given to Reverend Deck and Bhante Mandawala Pannawahsa. This was followed by a juice toast to peace. A group photo made everyone laugh as they shifted to squeeze each participant together into the historical image.

Local religious leaders celebrate a year of interfaith achievements

Kelsey Dallas
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 Deseret News



SALT LAKE CITY — Sim Gill brings a unique perspective to discussions on peace and justice. He's been a prosecutor for more than two decades and serves as district attorney for Salt Lake County.

But at the [Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable Prayer](#) Breakfast on Thursday, he didn't dwell on a legal approach to fairness and forgiveness. He wanted to talk about faith.

"I'm lucky and blessed to have experienced a diversity of human beliefs," he said to a room filled with around 50 representatives of Salt Lake faith groups.

Gill was born in India to a Sikh family. There, he also worshipped at Hindu temples and Muslim mosques.

After moving to Utah, Gill regularly attended events hosted by The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints. He eventually married a member of the Maronite Catholic Church.

These days, Gill finds room in his schedule for Sikh, Hindu, Catholic and Islamic services, and he studies the Jewish and Buddhist traditions on the side.

"My disposition is either one of immense indecisiveness or maybe deep inquisitiveness," he said.

Thursday's breakfast served as an informal kickoff for [Interfaith Month 2018](#), a series of programs designed to celebrate Utah's faith communities. This year's events are linked together by the theme of service to others, which Gill said is needed now more than ever.

"What we really need is active engagement," he said.

Interfaith Month 2018 formally begins this Saturday at 3 p.m. at the Salt Lake Main Library. Roundtable members will lead a discussion on the relationship between the LDS Church and Islam.

During his remarks at the breakfast, Gill emphasized the importance of spirituality and religion at the present moment, which he said is marked by deep cynicism and distrust. He celebrated interfaith activism and discussed the importance of loving one's neighbor.

"The need for human understanding, compassion and kindness has never been more urgent," he said.

Gill spoke for nearly 30 minutes, his words peppered by gasps and murmurs of affirmation from the audience.

"I never thought I would be so inspired by a district attorney," said Janet Healy, community and volunteer director for Catholic Community Services of Utah.

The interfaith roundtable's prayer breakfast was timed to coincide with [World Interfaith Harmony Week](#), an annual event established by the United Nations to recognize the value of interreligious dialogue. The program included readings from the holy scriptures of Judaism, Islam, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

Josie Stone, the group's chairwoman, also handed out the roundtable's annual awards, recognizing people who went above and beyond to nurture interfaith friendships.

Ellie Anders Thompson, the interreligious engagement coordinator at Utah Valley University, was praised for her service to the roundtable's young adult members. Betty Yanowitz and Sue Prottas, both members of Congregation Kol Ami, were applauded for joyfully and diligently bringing a Jewish perspective to the group. Finally, Lacey Harris, a founding member of the roundtable, received an award for his longtime service to the Salt Lake community.