

UPF Michigan Honors UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

David Kasbow and Teresa Ledesma
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Lansing, MI – In January the Michigan chapter of UPF made a new start with the installation of our sister, Teresa Ledesma, as the Executive Director. Since she had worked in the Foreign Service with the U.S. Department of State, we knew the interfaith aspect of the mission would be natural for her. We also wanted to support the UPF’s work supporting the UN. When we went to the UN’s website to see how we could connect, we discovered a recent initiative, “UN World Interfaith Harmony Week.” It just so happened that the week, the first week of February each year, was just coming up.

We decided this would be a good place to start. We planned for an interfaith program to support WIHW. Ours would be on Thursday, Feb. 4th. Teresa chose to have the event at the Breslin Center, a landmark on the Michigan State University campus in East Lansing. At this location we planned to bring faith leaders and students as well. Richard De Sena, the USA Secretary General supported us all the way by attending the event.



Teresa got to work creating a mailing list of churches and faith groups in the area. Together we visited those we hoped would be on an interfaith panel. We were warmly welcomed by the faith community.

Panel discussion participants were Imam Sohail Chaudhry from the Islamic Center of East Lansing, Rabbi Dana Benson from the Hillel Jewish Student Center and Ladi Multani from the Guru Nanak Sikh Center. Over 100 invitations were mailed out, including hand delivering invitations to State Representative and Senator for the Lansing area.



We held a simple program showing a video of our work in the Middle East. Then each faith leader gave a presentation on the topic we chose, “Creating Peace.” After an interesting discussion of the unique approach to peace of each faith group, Richard De Sena presented the UPF approach. The attendees were impressed with the foundation of UPF and its unique aspects including the emphasis on family as being important to peace.

We concluded with the Sikh priest offering a prayer, announcements of other interfaith programs coming up and then shared refreshments. On the foundation of this event, Teresa plans to visit and cultivate a working relationship with the interfaith community.