

United Nations International Day of Peace in Richmond Virginia

F. George Russell
September 21, 2014



“There’s so much fighting going on these days, world peace seems like a dream,” said the news anchor for the local NBC television station in Richmond, Virginia, “However, there’s a program which intends to make it a reality.” The anchorman was referring to Harmonious Interfaith Relations, an event that took place in partnership between the Richmond Catholic Diocese and Universal Peace Federation (UPF) of Richmond.



In commemoration of the United Nations International Day of Peace on September 21, 2014, the event took place on Monday, September 22, and welcomed representatives from 12 faith groups including Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus and Buddhists.

Monsignor Patrick Golden gave the opening Invocation for the event, which was held in the beautiful Cathedral of the Sacred Heart, the mother church of the Catholic Diocese of Richmond. The church is a treasured historic landmark in the city, and with its prime location in the heart of Virginia Commonwealth University near beautiful Monroe Park, the church sees interreligious dialogue and the call to advocate social justice as prominent elements of its mission.

After congratulatory remarks from Virginia Governor Terence McAuliffe were read, commending the organizers on their “noble efforts” and conveying his best wishes for success of the program, Venerable Cang Kim (AFP 2005), an abbot at the Buddhist Monastery of Richmond, offered an interfaith prayer.



Lynn Johnston (Ambassador for Peace, 2013) of Unity Church of Richmond and Midge Falconer, a representative of the Baha’I faith, then read from *World Scripture: A Comparative Anthology of Sacred Texts*. Both women are former presidents of the Interfaith Council of Greater Richmond (ICGR). “The *World Scripture* selections showed the richness and similarities of content which lay at the heart of the sacred texts of the respective faith traditions,” said Rev. F. George Russell, chairman of UPF-Virginia.



The readings were the perfect segue into the second half of the program, a panel discussion on the topic “Interreligious Dialogue: Keys to Success in Richmond.” The panelists—Rabbi Ben Romer (Judaism), Malik Khan (Islam), Justin Myers (Catholicism), Sanjay Thirunagari (Hinduism) and Priest Sarah Boyles (Buddhism, and Ambassador for Peace, 2013)—discussed five central questions presented by the moderator, Dale Fickett (Ambassador for Peace, 2013) of the Virginia Conference of Catholic Bishops. The questions were explored from each faith perspective and ranged from views on ultimate reality to the pursuit of justice and peace to approaches to effect better changes in society, “Although there were varying differences,” said Rev. Russell, “the overall unifying commonalities were quite evident.”

The highlight of the evening came with the keynote PowerPoint presentation on: “A New Dimension of Interfaith Relations for Greater Cultural Transformation,” given by Rev. Russell. The presentation emphasized the five core principles of the Ambassadors for Peace program as well as the mission of UPF, and an inspirational recounting of the sacrificial life of UPF founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. Coincidentally, the event came after not only the International Day of Peace but also the National Memorial Service for Dr. Moon on September 20. This succession of events helped create a wonderful spirit and foundation from which the interfaith event could take place.

“Today the world’s religions are professing on the global stage. The time has arrived for the harmony of the faiths through rediscovering ‘the original ideal of God’ and the vastness of their shared spiritual heritage—common ground,” said Rev. Russell. “The world of peace, the ‘Peace Kingdom of God,’ will be the consummation of such a quest. It is embodied in the ideal which UPF founder Rev. Moon has brought to the world: ‘One Family under God.’”



Seven new Ambassadors for Peace were appointed during the event, including the president of the Interfaith Council of Greater Richmond and the president of the Hindu Temple of Richmond. The event closed with a ceremonial toast to “dissolve historical resentments” between all present and to receive God’s blessing on the participants’ families. The spirit was one of hope and determination for the participants to bring the message of “One Family under God” back to their communities.