

Peace Starts With Me international and interreligious peace conference in Korea

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Amidst the heightened nuclear threat of North Korea, over 200 religious leaders gathered at the Lotte Hotel in Seoul to kick off the “Peace Starts With Me” international and interreligious peace conference. The conference, sponsored by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC), marks a continuation of the theme of interfaith unity from the “Peace Starts With Me” event at Madison Square Garden in July. With tensions between North Korea and the rest of the world at an ostensible peak, religious leaders of a wide variety of faiths opened the conference with a ceremony and banquet in which they assessed, fortified, and united in their roles and determination to practice togetherness in a nation and world that has been enveloped in disunity.



Co-Chair of ACLC, George Augustus Stallings Jr. emceed the opening ceremony while Tom Cutts, National Executive Member of ACLC, delivered the invocation. Religious representatives participated in a beautiful, symbolic candlelight ceremony to officially mark the beginning of the conference.

Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Chariman of FFWPU North America, provided the first of three welcoming remarks. Despite the current threat of North Korea, Dr. Kim reassured those in attendance, historically and providentially, God has protected the nation of Korea. “How can we as religious leaders bring peace for Korea, America, and the world?” Dr. Kim asked the audience. “We can bring great results as God’s messengers,” he answered.



Rev. Kyeong Seuk Ryu, FFWPU President of Korea, followed Dr. Kim’s message by saying the theme “Peace Starts With Me” is another way to say “Providence Starts With Me.” In other words, Rev. Ryu explained, peace is God’s ultimate vision which cannot be fulfilled without first starting from within.



Mrs. Wonju Chung McDevitt, Chief of Staff of True Mother's Secretariat then delivered a congratulatory address to the clergy, reinforcing that in serving True Parents and actualizing God's kingdom of heaven on earth, every individual must take action in gaining and practicing a filial heart.



Once the welcoming and congratulatory remarks were given, Rev. Joel Barnaby of the Greater Church of Philadelphia, with a glass of McCol in hand, made a toast to the beginning of this interfaith celebration before everyone in attendance feasted on a delicious five-course meal.



Han Seo Hee, a talented soprano and North Korean refugee, provided the entertainment for the evening with her beautiful voice.



Ven. Hongra of the Gwaneum Order of Korean Buddhists then expressed openly about his interactions meeting True Father over 50 years ago in colle. He nonetheless insisted, had he stayed in being one with America despite all the conflict in the northern part of Korea.



FFWPU USA President Rev. Richard Buessing emphasized the significance of this conference, saying, “True Mother is bringing us here all not just for an event, but for us to experience the love and heart of God.”

With their hearts and their stomachs full of delicious food, the ceremony concluded as the diverse group of leaders greeted and got to know one another in preparation for the next few days of the conference.