

UPF Hosts Japanese Tea Ceremony in Washington, D.C.

Tomiko Duggan
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Washington, D.C., USA—UPF’s D.C. Office hosted its annual fall Japanese Tea Ceremony at the Peace Embassy on December 11, 2015.

Wearing traditional Japanese kimonos, UPF staff and other volunteers warmly welcomed the guests as they entered the Peace Embassy, which was decorated with colorful Japanese dolls; flower arrangements, or Ikebana; kimonos, made of silk; and other items of Japanese art and culture.

More than 40 guests and friends of UPF attended, including H.E. Dr. Thelma Phillip-Browne, ambassador of St. Kitts & Nevis; H.E. Mr. Soorooj Phokeer, ambassador of Mauritius; H.E. Mr. Jose Luis Rocha, ambassador of Cape Verde; and other diplomats and staff from the embassies of Cambodia, Fiji, Thailand, Qatar, and the U.S. Department of State, as well as NGO leaders.

In the tradition of *ichi-go ichi-e*, a concept established by the 1500s tea master, Takeno Joo, the host or tea master, welcomes the guests with utmost sincerity, as each single tea meeting is unique and can never be repeated in one’s lifetime. The host prepares the tea room to the cleanest condition and selects bowls of tea for the occasion with an emphasis on the season, and according to the people who are invited.

This uniquely developed way of tea in Japan is deeply rooted in Zen Buddhist teachings on how to live in peace and harmony, respect others and all things, keep a pure and honest heart, and try to obtain tranquility of heart. Tea master, Mrs. Kumiko Francis, welcomed the guests, and examined all the accouterments involved in the tea ceremony.

Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, director of public affairs of UPF’s D.C. Office, briefly explained: “The core teachings of Zen is reflected in the spirit and principles that UPF promotes in its efforts to build ‘one global family under God,’ by practicing ‘living for the sake of others and the whole,’ which is a prerequisite to living in peace and harmony.”

She also prepared a flyer with photos of a tea house to explain how a traditional Japanese tea house is usually built—in a simple manner—to host a tea ceremony for three or four people. It has a special entrance for guests, which is built lower than the entrance for the host to signify humility. Lowering the head during entry was done as a sign of respect to the other guests already seated in the room and to the tea master.

Another reason to bow upon entry was so the guests would feel that they were entering a different world. One might be a rich and powerful businessman or an ambassador, but one will leave all the cares and social status behind and enter the tea house as just an individual person. The guest enjoys the simplicity and tranquility in the ceremony, relieving stress and their problems for a time.

For this ceremony, the guests did not have to lower their heads to enter the room, and enjoyed experiencing the Way of Tea, which has been practiced for over a thousand years in Japan.