

## Over 1,000 People Participate in UPF-USA's Ninth Interfaith Prayer for the World

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United States -- UPF-USA's ninth weekly Interfaith Prayer for the Nation and the World was convened on the Zoom and Facebook platforms on Thursday, June 4, at 1 PM (EDT) through a call out to Ambassadors for Peace, UPF members and friends of UPF.

UPF-USA recognized that the challenges of the COVID-19 epidemic requires a unified response. With the collapse of economic life and the isolation and separation of people forced by the mitigation discipline, many communities, families, and individuals are threatened. The threats are spiritual as well as physical. This need for those seeking unity and spiritual guidance was dramatically made more urgent this week by the nationwide reaction to the death of George Floyd on May 25.



The brief mid-week program features representatives from different faith traditions who offer prayers, comments, and scriptural readings to those linked remotely by internet views and audio connection. Over 1,000 people from the East and West coasts and Hawaii joined in.

Archbishop George Augustus Stallings of the Imani Temple African American Catholic Congregation and national director of UPF's Interreligious Association of Peace and Development (IAPD), moderated the June 4 UPF prayer program and introduced the faith leader prayer representatives. He began by acknowledging that not only the nation, but the world is indeed in crisis:

One thing we know about Yahweh, God, Allah, by whatever name we address that Divine Creator, that God provides for men and women of deep faith and trust to provide leadership in the midst of this crisis. The Chinese character for the word crisis is like a two-sided coin. On the one side, it reads "danger," on the other, "opportunity." We have been presented with the opportunity to bring forth men and women of truth and deep and abiding faith to come and offer prayer."

Calling in from Brooklyn, Rabbi Reuven Khaskin, director of New York's Jewish Explorer Project, Director, NY, also referred to the word crisis as it appears in the Bible. In the concept of a women giving birth, the place on which she is seated is taken from the Hebrew word that means crisis. Crisis, therefore, is linked to the idea of birth, he said. When we speak of the pangs of the Messiah, we speak about the idea that through all the crises we will see great things.



I'd like to start with a traditional Jewish prayer, Shma Israel, which is recited twice daily by observant Jews around the world. The words are taken from the Torah, the fifth book of Moses in the Hebrew Bible, the Book of Deuteronomy, Chapter 6. As you may know, we are constantly trying to focus on this idea of the unity of God. This prayer in many ways can be seen as one of the symbols of our faith and tradition. Now when we are living in these most difficult times, it is important to focus on His presence in the world. Thinking about God as the source of everything in this world is very difficult.

Upon reciting the first verse, we are traditionally covering our eyes to concentrate on its meaning -- proclaiming the unity of God and His kingship. [Hear, O Israel: The Lord is our God, the Lord alone (New Revised Standard Version).]

In the following verse, we are called to love God with all our heart, and our might, and all our soul -- with everything we have. [You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your

soul, and with all your might (New Revised Standard Version).]

Following the Shma recitation, Rabbi Khaskin explained:

Further in the text, Torah tells us to internalize these values, these ideas of loving God, of seeing his unity and presence in the world by making it part of our routine and daily life. So, we fulfill this as a religious obligation. It is a universal message of love and compassion that we need so much in this most challenging time of unprecedented polarization, uncertainty, and fear.

With violence on our streets and an invisible virus taking our lives, we are pressured to ask a question: What is God telling us? How are we to address the situation as people of faith and as religious leaders?

To answer this question, I would like to quote Lord Jonathan Sacks, former chief rabbi of Britain, who wrote the following in his important book, *The Dignity of Difference*:

One belief more than any other is responsible for the slaughter of individuals on the altars of the great historical ideals. It is the belief that those who do not share my faith -- or my race or my ideology -- do not share my humanity. At best, they are second class citizens. At worst, they forfeit the sanctity of life itself. They are the unsaved, the unbelievers, the infidel, the unredeemed; they stand outside the circle of salvation.

In the Introduction, the book gives us an important message for the future

In our interconnected world, we must learn to feel enlarged, not threatened, by difference. How can our religious tradition help us in doing this, recognizing humanity and dignity of every person on this planet?

One does not need to look any further than the very first pages of the Bible, the story of creation and creation of man as the pinnacle and the climax of that story -- Chapter 1 in the Book of Genesis. Each one of us was created in the image of God. Our rabbis are telling us that all humanity is descended from one person, Adam, to teach us our common bond and to recognize each human being as a microcosm, each as the whole world. How do we see God in the world? We need to see God, the spark of godliness, in each and every one of us.

God created the world with ten sayings, as the Bible tells us, to teach us that we can create with words. I believe in such times it is our responsibility to bring the language of cooperation, love and mutual respect based on our common belief in God and humankind. We as religious leaders are doing an important thing; we have a religious obligation.

My prayer is for the world to be healed, and for us to grow through this challenge and become more compassionate and human, seeing the image of God even in those with whom we strongly disagree

May Hashem God the Almighty help us.



Bishop Glen A. Staples, the senior pastor of Temple of Praise, a megachurch in Washington, DC, shared his perspective on the pandemic and on the protests against racial injustice that swept the country following George Floyd's death.

They are all over the world – New Zealand, Copenhagen – as well as the major cities in this country and in every state, they are protesting against racism. They are talking about the gentleman that was killed, George Floyd, and they are talking about who killed him. But I was thinking, it was not who killed him, it was about what killed him. We've got to deal with that as well.

It's almost as though we as African Americans have no country. Africa is not our country, and we are not welcome here, it appears. But we can pray our way through this because we prayed our way through slavery, Jim Crow, racism, industrial racism. And we can make a change.

I want to stop right there. Let us pray about this whole situation.

Father, in the name of your son, Jesus Christ, we thank You for blessing us to be able to call on You. We have called on You down through the years. You have blessed us tremendously. You have brought us from one degree of grace unto another. Now we need you.

Our children are marching, our children are protesting in the streets. Every one of us is affected by what is going on. People around the world have come to the conclusion that black lives matter.

We ask You right now, Master, to allow things to work out in a positive way, that we might be able to understand one another. We thank You for allowing us to realize that it was You that blessed us to be this far and understand, God, that You have power.

And so, we need You, to give that power to us, to give us the intellect we need to approach these things appropriately that we might be able to change some things in this world

I thank You. I know You are able to do so. You are the same God that rose from the dead. We give Your name to glory and honor and praise.

Bless those that are protesting. No more deaths, no more situations. Even today as they have the funeral, we pray that you will bless Brother Sharpton as he opens his mouth to provide us information.

We thank You now. And give Your name praise. In Jesus' name, we pray.

I want to mention that when they were filled with the Holy Ghost on the Day of Pentecost, the Bible says that they spoke in "other" languages. It did not say unknown languages. It said other languages. And that is what God is trying to tell us. He wants us to be able to communicate with one another. And that is what we are doing, getting us to communicate and talk to each other about these things that are going on in the world.

Imam Mohamed Qatanani, Islamic Center of Passaic County, expressed his appreciation for the interfaith gathering as the opportunity for us all to pray to one God, the God who created us all, "who created our father, Adam, and our mother, Eve, from dust, and after that created us from them to be one family. We thank You, God, that we are one family."



My dear brothers and sisters, it is so important for us to pray. It is especially powerful in these challenging times. We need to pray together regardless of our backgrounds or faiths. We pray to one God, to Almighty God. We pray for one reason: to love one another, to build unity, to build our humanity on the cause and principle on which God Himself created us for.

Iman Qatanani gave recitations from the Koran with translations and commentaries:

All mankind. We created you from one father and one mother, and We made you tribes and nations, by various communities, different languages, different places, to know each other, to cooperate with each other, to work with each other for each other. Not to kill one another, not to hate one another. Allah created us to know each other.

And Allah commanded us to do justice and be fair, with justice. Justice is one of the names of God in Islam -- the Just! All the rules of Allah, sayings, and actions, all His commands are built on justice. The main objective of all His commands is to have justice and peace for everyone on this earth.

From one of the holy Hadiths, "All my servants, I have prohibited oppression to myself, and I have prohibited it to you. Treat not with oppression." Do not oppress one another. Do not kill one another. Do not hate one another.

There is a verse chosen by Harvard University [displayed at the entrance to the law faculty] that I would go with as a slogan for everyone, for all humanity. Because this verse shows our unity, our brotherhood and sisterhood, that we have to stand up for justice

Oh, you who believe. Stand out firmly for justice, as witnesses for Allah. Even if it be against yourselves or your parents or your kin. Be he rich or poor, Allah is a better predictor to good than you. So, follow not the lusts of your heart, lest you avoid justice. And if you distort your witness or refuse to give it, then indeed Allah is ever acquainted with what you do. [Surat An Nisa 4: 135]

So, stand up, stand out firmly, for justice. Justice is for everyone; it is not justice just for us. We pray today for our beloved brother George Floyd, that his family be patient and in peace. We know it is not an easy time for us, especially our beloved brothers in the African American community -- and all those communities that are treated unjustly.

This is the time for clergy, for religious leaders. You are the true leaders of the world. There is a saying in Arabic that means the kings, the presidents, are rulers of people; but scholars, religious leaders, are kings of the kings. And Allah is the King of everything.

We need to say something for the leaders, for the police officers. To teach them, to educate them. To take all types of hatred, or racism. To take all kinds of oppression and aggression against anyone in this world. We have to say something. God will not accept for us to keep silent in this time.

Yes, pray about coronavirus, and for all the health and wealth and prosperity, and continue to pray that you and your family and communities remain safe and healthy during this difficult time. And pray for the healing and recovery of all those that are afflicted of the illness of coronavirus. We ask for Allah to take it out of the entire world.

But at the same time, we must stand with each other, for each other. The pandemic of hatred and injustice and racism is worse than the pandemic of the coronavirus. We must stand up for each other. Pray for each other, but we also have to say something. God will not accept our prayers without action, without speaking against any kind of racism. From any faith, from any department, from any politician, from any

religion, we have to say something when we see something wrong. We have to change it.

This is the message of all prophets and messengers: Moses, Jesus, Mohammed, Abraham, Jacob, Solomon, David. They came for one message. To be just and fair with one another, to worship one God, to love one another. The message of faith is built and established on love not hatred. If you see somebody whose heart is built on hatred, he is far from his faith. Moses, Jesus, Mohammed came for love and justice. All prophets and messengers came for building our humanity, to work together to build this earth according to the one God.

God, regardless of what we name Him, you know He is the creator who created us all. He created us through one father and one mother. That is the One from Whom we seek help, from Whom we seek protection. We seek refuge with Him. He is the only One who is above everything, that One who unites us, that One, Allah, that made us one.

May Allah bless you all, help you all, and help us stand up for peace for everyone, for everyplace, to stand against any aggressor even if he is my brother or sister or relative. Amin. Amin. Amin. May Allah bless you all.

Following Iman Qatanani's comments, Archbishop Stallings spoke about how all the day's prayers and comments from each speaker were woven together into a powerful message about justice based on the knowledge of our common bond of a shared Parent. For a summary statement, he brought attention to a verse from the Book of Micah [6:8]:

He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God.

Dr. Michael Jenkins, chairman of UPF-North America, expressed his sincere appreciation in recognizing the essential work and activities of the faith leaders and of the personal time spent with each of the speakers. He capped his compliments regarding their messages in linking them to "the effective, fervent prayer of a righteous man [[that] avails much" in James 5.

A righteous man and woman praying together has incredible power. When the faith communities come together in prayer, it is exponential multiplication of the power of God – to heal and cure sickness and illness.

We weep over the loss of Mr. George Floyd. We weep over his family. We weep over the tragedy that now has the whole world protesting. Why are they protesting? Because we are in a new age. Mother and Father Moon, the founders of UPF, in a prophetic anointing, are telling us we are in an age when all these divisions can and must be resolved. But it can only be resolved if the faith leaders come together as one. If we come together as one, then the effectual power of our fervent prayer will bring about the end of racism.

Yes, we are talking about the end of it. That is why every community is not going to stop. Every race, every religion, every culture, college students from every nation, every background pouring into the streets -- that is who they really are. And they are crying out from their original mind and heart towards God: "God, please end this! End this hatred, end this strife, end this division."

But it is the faith leaders that need to lead the way, because we see other leaders come out at night that do not have godly intentions. We must take the lead.

So, thank you for your prayers today. This is what brings the community into the rapport, into the relationship with God. We pray for peace. We pray for Allah, our dear God Jehovah, Yahweh, we pray for our God to now bless all your families, all your communities. Bless America to rise out of this darkness. And for the whole world to be liberated -- not only from the virus but from the most severe challenge we have ever faced in history, the challenge of racism. It now must be dissipated and cured and solved.

On Thursday, June 11, at 1:00pm EDT, UPF USA will continue this weekly outreach in bringing people of different faiths together in a larger communion to pray for the Nation and the World.

The live recordings of this and previous "Prayer for the Nation and the World" activity can be found on UFP-USA's Facebook page: [www.facebook.com/watch/UPFAmerica](https://www.facebook.com/watch/UPFAmerica)