

Peace Starts With Me and My Family 2019 in Daley Park, Tempe, Arizona

Linda Nishikawa, Staffan and Jane Berg
March 9, 2019



The Arizona sun was smiling behind a pleasantly overcast sky during the third annual "Peace Starts with Me and my Family" event on March 9th, led by emcee Glenda Lambert of the Arizona Global Women's Peace Network. The outdoor gathering of more than 70 friends, family and neighbors warmed up to breathe and bend with yoga instructor Michael in the beautiful Daley Park in Tempe, Arizona.

The group was welcomed by Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) pastor Margaret Sisseron, guided in meditation by Deborah Roether, and washed in Hindu prayers and Sanskrit quotes by Anita Rangaswami. Elaine Kozuka then led the "Star Spangled Banner." Rhia Nkulu, WFWP Arizona Chairwoman, provided an informative WFWP table, and encouraged much participation at this beautiful event, which included a Bridge of Peace and a marriage rededication ceremony.

A key ingredient was the Native American blessing ceremony conducted by Ramona Gutierrez of the Tohono O'odham people, who is also an Ambassador for Peace with the Universal Peace Federation (UPF). Prior to the program, she had asked all participants to write or draw what peace meant for them. A selection of the responses were read out loud by Trina Forti, 15, as the WFWP Regional Chairwoman Dr. Linda Nishikawa, of the Pueblo Nation, smudged the participants with sage smoke. With the crowd facing east, Gutierrez invited all the ancestors of the land to participate in the event and help further the goal of peace. They responded. The eyes of many in the crowd filled with tears. Their blessing was palpable.



After Dr. Nishikawa introduced the Bridge of Peace ceremony and explained its historical significance, 20 diverse participants paired up, each pair representing the desire to end the historical strife between their races, religions or nationalities. Each pair of participants, wearing white scarves, approached from the opposite end of a long red carpet. The lyrics of "Love can build a bridge" played softly behind the applause and cheer as the ten pairs exchanged their scarves as a symbolic gift of peace and reconciliation. There were tears of joy and relief as the profound work of restoration through the logic of love took place in plain view.



What followed was a moving marriage rededication ceremony. In an expression of unity, husbands and wives crossed the bridge with their children. Each family then shared sips from one cup of juice under the central arch by the red carpet bridge. The seven families from varied backgrounds were consecrated with prayers by officiators Staffan and Jane Berg, UPF regional coordinators.

A beautiful peace song by Ms. Teen Eco-Earth Arizona, Trina, and little sister, Kaela, ended the formal program. Flanked by a jumping castle, playground and BBQ pit, face-painted children buzzed around while a comedian entertained the crowd. People mingled and chatted around the potluck tables laden with goodies. Live jazz music muffled the park noise and proclaimed peace and harmony in our little oasis.

Our goal of an easily accessible family-centered program without an organizational budget was a great success, thanks to the combined efforts of WFWP, FFWPU and UPF working together.

The event was eagerly embraced by the people of the world, with participants representing various nations, races and religions: Black, White, Native American, Hispanic, Mexican, Brazilian, Filipino, Surinamese, Turkish, Indian, Japanese, Dutch, Polish, Welsh, English, Swedish, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, American Indian Spiritualists, singles, married couples, extended families, and our beautiful future, children. Peace starts with me, then in our families, our workplace, our community, always expanding outward from within, fulfilling and living out Jesus' words of peace on earth: "Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven" (Matthew 6:10).