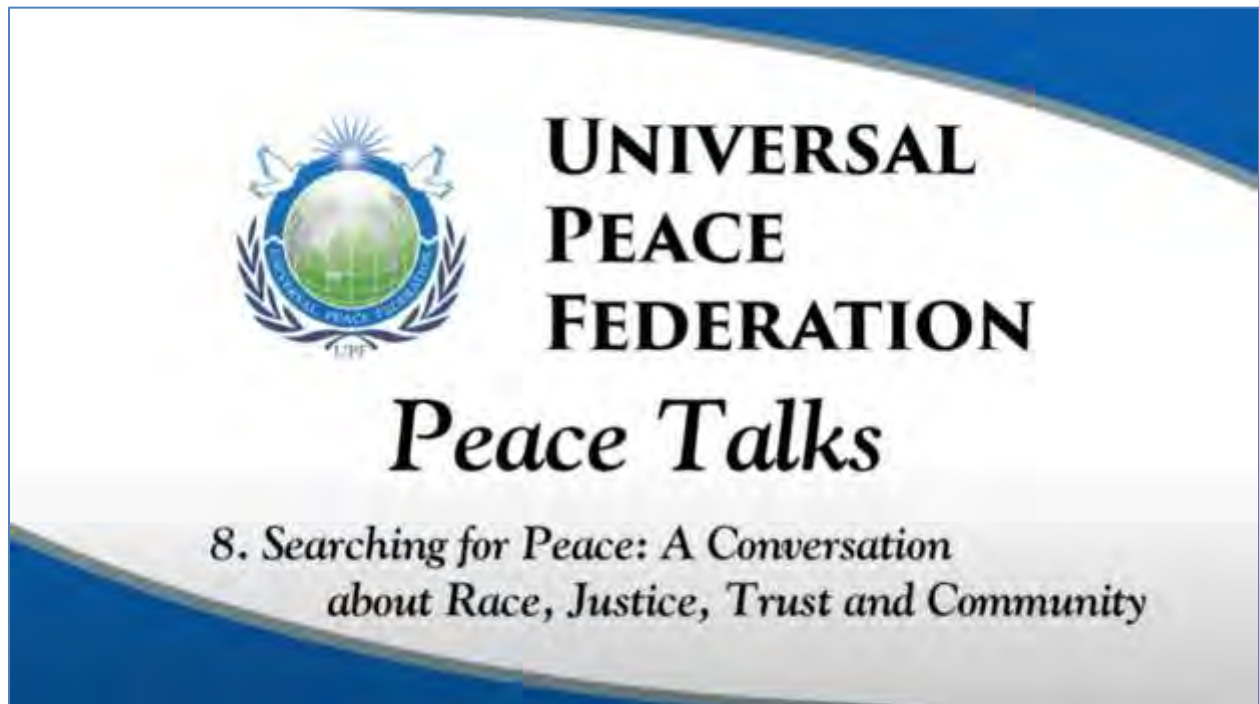


UPF International USA: Searching for Peace: A Conversation About Race

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UPF International, United States -- On the morning of June 5, 2020, UPF International held a web conference titled "Searching for Peace: A Conversation About Race, Justice, Trust and Community." The conference drew about 370 viewers from 54 countries.

Dr. Thomas Walsh (*Chair, UPF International*) gave the opening remarks and introduced the panelists. Many cities in the United States are in turmoil, he noted, facing a mix of peaceful demonstrations, civil unrest, and occasional violence arising out of the horrific killing of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota several days ago. Most demonstrators are outraged by what they believe to be a pattern of racism within the law enforcement and criminal justice system, if not society at large, a pattern that unfairly targets people of color. Others emphasize a wider context of economic inequality. To complicate matters further, citizens throughout the country and world are stressed by the lockdowns due to the pandemic. What can be done, he asked, to re-establish conditions of trust and solidarity, dialogue and cooperation, reform and social transformation?



Panelists

Dr. Michael Jenkins (*Chair, UPF USA; President, UPF International*) spoke first. The protests against discriminatory policing are very diverse. Racism is a conflict that touches everyone, and religious leaders have a key role in pushing back against racism. Coming to terms with our own prejudices and shortcomings is a complex, personal process for every individual. He and Reverend Rouse went to Charleston on the anniversary of the mass shooting in a black church. On the occasion of that shooting, religious leaders and community organizers successfully quelled any impulse to violence or destruction.

Dr. Jenkins concluded by expressing his hope for the future.

Rev. Victor James Smith (*National and Minneapolis President, Men Against Destruction, Defending Against Drugs and Social Disorder [MADDADS] Program*) gave his remarks next. He spoke of the "five Rs" necessary to move forward: *Rebuild* our communities, *reform* our laws, *restructure* our institutions, *revitalize* our communities, and *refuse* to accept the status quo from before these events.

Hon. Loretta Sanchez (*Member, U.S. House of Representatives (1997–2017)*) followed Reverend Smith. In July 2012, a police officer in Hon. Sanchez's district shot a young Latino man, resulting in protests and rioting. The rioting was largely perpetrated by people coming in from outside the community and was quelled in-part by organizations of mothers within the community. The federal Department of Justice also sent a pair of professional community mediators to build programs and trust in the neighborhood. This work has paid off; Anaheim has seen protests in the wake of the killing of George Floyd but has not seen the kind of violence or rioting that has happened in many other parts of the country.



Dr. William Lay (*Professor, Criminal Justice, University of Bridgeport*) gave his remarks next. His students represent a broad cross-section of American society: aspiring attorneys, police officers, advocates, and more. Black Americans have to give their children particular warnings about how to behave in public to avoid being labeled a certain way and harassed by police. Dr. Lay called for more "listening" to the communities affected by racism and problems in policing. He spoke skeptically of the ability of government to bring economic vitality to struggling community, calling for private generosity.

Ms. Gloria Howard-Geraldo (*President, Rotary Club of North Minneapolis*) followed Dr. Lay. Before we can get to Reverend Smith's "five Rs," she said, we need to "rewrite" our narrative in order to get to the root of the problems. We will likely see change coming from the current protests, but it very well may not be lasting change. Everyone needs to be educated on American history; there is a great disparity in the United States with regard to how much African American history is taught in schools. Education can lead to widespread empathy, compassion, and love for our fellow Americans. The problems we face are generational, and they require generational solutions.

Rev. Luonne Rouse (*United Methodist Pastor; Co-Chairman of American Clergy Leadership Conference*) was the last panelist. In 1913, W.E.B. Dubois labeled race the "problem of the 20th century," but the problem persists to this day. Rev. Rouse called attention to the Wisdom Literature of the Bible, which advises us to never let go of wisdom and understanding. As a Methodist minister, Rev. Rouse preaches and teaches love, and he sees that principle alive in the UPF community. He called for communities, religious leaders, and law enforcement to communicate and teach one-another to bring about change. In his conclusion, he recalled an experience he had in 1990, when he saw a young white man being beaten by a group of police that included a black officer. He saw then that the problem was not merely a racial one, but a failure to recognize human dignity.

QandA Followed:

Reverend Smith called for an end to "top-down" approaches; change must be initiated by communities rather than high-level officials. Honorable Sanchez emphasized the widening gap between rich and poor in the United States as a significant source of future public anger. Ms. Howard-Geraldo observed the need for basic economic skills education in disadvantaged communities; when people have that basic knowledge, they are able to find greater success. Dr. Jenkins emphasized that the only way to bring peace is through love, not through force.