

The Unification Theological Seminary Honors Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate and UPF's Africa Regional Chair

William Selig
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New York, USA -- The Unification Theological Seminary held its 46th Annual Commencement ceremony at the main campus in New York City on Saturday, May 28, 2022. Dressed in caps, gowns and colorful sashes, twenty-five graduates from the class of 2021 and 2022, walked the stage to get their diplomas. In addition to the presentation of the master and doctoral degrees, honorary doctorate degrees were conferred upon Sunhak Peace Prize Laureate, Bishop Munib Younan, and UPF-Africa Regional Chair, Rev. Katherine Rigney.

Dr. Michael Mickler, vice president and senior faculty member, led the procession carrying the ceremonial mace. **Dr. Christine Hempowicz**, vice chair, UTS Board of Trustees, served as emcee.



Dr. Chung Sik Yong, regional president, Family Federation North America, speaking on behalf of UTS co-founder, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, thanked Dr. Thomas Ward, the outgoing UTS president who will continue at UTS and oversee the peace studies program, and welcomed the incoming president, Dr. Thomas Walsh, whom he called a "world-level leader in peace education." Quoting the Beatitudes, "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God," Dr. Yong asked the graduates, "Will you be the peacemakers?" He called on the graduates to follow in the steps of Jesus and "to share God's

heart and love."

Dr. Franco Famularo, chair, UTS Board of Trustees, welcomed Dr. Thomas Walsh, UPF International chair, who was recently elected as UTS's seventh president. Dr. Walsh said, "I'm deeply honored to have been appointed the president-elect of Unification Theological Seminary. I'll do my best to carry forward what's already an outstanding tradition that we hold in the highest regard and hope with your support and working together we can move to greater and greater heights." Dr. Walsh introduced Bishop Munib to receive an honorary doctorate.

The Right Reverend Munib Younan, bishop emeritus of the Evangelical Lutheran Church in Jordan and the Holy Land, served as president of the Lutheran World Federation from 2010 to 2017. For his work in inter-religious dialogue, he has received numerous awards, including the Sunhak Peace Prize (2020) in recognition of his pioneering work to promote dialogue and reconciliation among Judaism, Christianity and Islam in the Middle East.

Accepting the honorary doctorate of sacred theology, Bishop Munib conveyed "the greetings of your sisters and brothers in Christ in Jerusalem and ask for your continued prayers for peace based on justice in my homeland." The message of Jesus, who said, "follow me," is relevant not only to clergy but to "all of us who seek to follow a path of peace," he said.

"When following Jesus, we need to be steadfast in our faith. Faith recognizes God's promises as an actual fact, believing it is true, rejoicing in the knowledge of the truth. Faith turns a promise into prophecy. The reformer, Martin Luther, said each one of us should be little Christs in our world." He concluded by saying, "You are not alone in this world and don't think you are alone. Work with others. You have a great cloud of witnesses before you, behind you, around you and with you and all of them are a blessing to our world. You are standing on a firm foundation of love and you have each other. You have friends and family, cohorts and allies who will have your back as you seek to fill the world with the love of God. But the challenge always remains in everyday ministry when you are alone -- do you hear Christ's call to

follow me?"



The next honoree, **Rev. Katherine Harding-Rigney**, was introduced by Dr. Drissa Kone, chair, UTS Doctor of Ministry Program. Born in St. Louis, Missouri, Rev. Rigney joined the Unification movement in 1969 and was part of the 1800-couple blessing presided over by Rev. and Mrs. Moon in 1975. She is the proud parent of a daughter, Ivory, 33, and a son, Joseph, 22 years old. A missionary for 47 years, she served in Benin, Côte d'Ivoire, and Nigeria, and currently as UPF chair for the Africa continent.



Accepting the honorary doctorate of humane letters, Dr. Rigney, said, "I am humbled and thankful for the honor accorded me." Her words of gratitude were filled with heartfelt tears. Father and Mother Moon have "been at the cornerstone of my faith and are the ones who connected me to our Heavenly Parent. They taught me to reach out to the world and do and accomplish one thing -- to live for the sake of others." Living in Africa for 47 years, she described her life not as a sacrifice, but as "rich and filled with abundant blessing to live in this treasured continent called Africa."

She recalled her own time at UTS, 47 years earlier, when Rev. and Mrs. Moon would often visit the Seminary to speak to members preparing to leave for foreign missions. "At that time, Mother Moon had just given birth to her son, Kwon Jin Nim, in 1975. She was tired. It was her eighth or ninth child and she was recuperating. Father Moon said to her, 'You have to come today and you have to speak to these missionaries who are going out to nations all over the world.' When Mother Moon spoke, she said, 'Every time I take my son in my arms and look down at his face, my whole heart and my whole soul is purified

and I feel clean again." Dr. Rigney's guidance to the graduates: "As you go to your missions, if you receive the people you are witnessing to with the heart of a parent, you will never fail in your mission."



The Master's and Doctoral Degrees were presented by **Dr. Keisuke Noda**, academic dean, and **Dr. Drissa Kone**, respectively. **Dr. Thomas Ward** gave congratulatory remarks followed by a representative graduate's response from **Jinil Fleischman**, who earned an MA in Religious Studies, and **Cirilo Jagopapas**, a Doctor of Ministry. This year's UTS Public Leadership award was presented to **Rene Ballenas**. The ceremony also featured graduates' induction into Theta Alpha Kappa, the national honor society for religious studies and theology. The benediction was given by **Dr. Jacob David**, adjunct assistant professor of Ministry and Homiletics. Musical offerings were provided by **Ms. Carla Mongado**, a current MA student, who sang the National Anthem and closing song, and two uplifting selections by **Mr. Steve Honey**.

UTS was founded in 1975 by Rev. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon. The seminary is accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and the New York State Education Department.

The full recording of the commencement can be watched [here](#).

