

Women Federation for World Peace USA: Second Quarter HerStory Award Event

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On April 25, 2026 Women Federation for World Peace USA held its second HerStory Award Event of the year. Graciously hosted by Adia Lancaster, GWPN Marketing Manager. Dr. Isabelle Vladioiu, Tenile Zayas, Minister Fannie Smith and Loretta White were honored for living their passion and in doing so changing the lives of those they came across.

Dr. Katarina welcomed all present and shared about the Global Women Peace Ambassador Award, highlighting that it is an award that honors women leaders from all sectors of society whose work contributes to reconciliation, cooperation, and the well-being of the human family. Global Women Peace Ambassadors stand on the common ground of universal moral principles, promote collaboration across boundaries of religion, race, ethnicity, and nationality, and demonstrate excellence in leadership that uplifts individuals, families, and communities. Through their example, they help foster mutual respect, strengthen social harmony, and advance sustainable peace. In addition, through the HerStory Award, we honor the women in our lives who are using their unique abilities and talents to create positive change in their communities.

The awardees were then introduced through their biographies and invited to share their personal journeys. The first speaker was **Dr. Isabelle Vladioiu, Founder of the U.S. Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights (USIDHR).**

Dr. Vladioiu began by reflecting on her childhood in Romania, where she was raised by her grandparents, who had lived under communist rule for 45 years. Growing up during Romania's transition to democracy allowed her to witness both the challenges and opportunities that accompanied such a transformation. Influenced by her grandparents, she came to appreciate the transformative power of education. She emphasized that education equips individuals to make informed decisions, noting, for example, that understanding the harmful consequences of drug use can help prevent substance abuse.

After passing the bar examination, Dr. Vladioiu realized that practicing law alone would not be enough to create the meaningful change she envisioned. This realization led her into advocacy work, which eventually resulted in her selection as a youth representative to the United Nations. She shared that she did not believe she had to wait for governments or international organizations such as the UN to advance the cause of human rights. Instead, she became convinced that education and teaching are among the most powerful tools for promoting and protecting human rights.

This conviction inspired her to establish the U.S. Institute of Diplomacy and Human Rights (USIDHR) with the vision that anyone, regardless of their background, can become a human rights consultant and empower others through education. She noted that many of those who have completed the institute's training programs have gone on to become leaders within their communities, with some even serving as advisors to heads of state and other senior government officials. In concluding her remarks, Dr. Vladioiu reflected that within the human rights space, there is little room for competition; instead, meaningful partnerships are essential to creating a better world. She emphasized that a single individual with a clear vision and commitment to change can make a profound difference. She encouraged the audience to recognize that every contribution, no matter how small, plays a vital role in advancing a shared vision. As she noted, just as countless drops of water come together to form the ocean, the collective efforts of passionate individuals can bring about lasting and meaningful change.

The second speaker, **Tenile Finister Zayas, Speaker, Author, and Licensed Christian Minister**, shared that her personal journey has been marked by numerous challenges. However, she explained that she has chosen to focus not on the hardships themselves, but on the lessons and growth that have emerged from those experiences. Quoting Revelation 12:11, *"They overcame by the word of their testimony,"* she emphasized the power of sharing one's story as a source of hope and transformation.

Ms. Finister Zayas encouraged the audience to recognize that they are not called to be mere spectators of change but catalysts for it. She affirmed that, regardless of the challenges people face, they are also equipped to overcome them. She urged participants to embrace opportunities to create meaningful change by living authentically, speaking honestly about their experiences, and sharing their testimonies. In doing so, she noted, others who may be facing similar struggles can find encouragement and realize that they are not alone. As she shared her story and pushed past the shame, she found healing and community. In concluding her remarks, she encouraged the audience to recognize their own capacity to create change. She reminded participants, *"You are the one who is going to save the day. You are the one who will turn everything around, and you are equipped to do that."*

The third speaker, **Loretta White, Director of Family Services Greater Middlesex & Morris, Habitat for Humanity**, reflecting on her childhood, she shared that her parents instilled in her the importance of not only appreciating what she had but also learning how to work for and earn her own success so that she could one day provide for herself independently. These early lessons shaped her values and continue to influence her work today as a housing advocate, where she has gained a deeper understanding of the challenges faced by individuals and families experiencing housing insecurity.

She recounted that in her early thirties, while raising young children, she found herself in a difficult financial situation. Although she was reluctant to ask her parents for help, she was able to access public assistance, which provided much-needed support during that period. Rather than viewing this as a setback, she saw it as a turning point that motivated her to build a better future for herself and her children.

Determined to improve her circumstances, she returned to school despite struggling with imposter syndrome and the competing demands of balancing her education with motherhood. Throughout her journey, she learned the importance of being present for both herself and her children while also accepting support from those around her. She credited her success to the strong network of family, friends, mentors, and community members who formed her "village," offering guidance, encouragement, and practical support along the way. She emphasized that meaningful support should be viewed as "a hand up, not a handout," underscoring the importance of empowering people with the resources, opportunities, and encouragement they need to achieve long-term independence and self-sufficiency.

The fourth speaker, **Minister Fannie Smith, Global Leader, Minister, and Ambassador for Peace**, reflected on the experiences that led her to partner with the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP). She shared that a visit to China was a defining moment in her journey, as it allowed her to experience firsthand the warmth, hospitality, and genuine sense of sisterhood among the women she met. Despite differences in language and culture, she discovered that these barriers did not diminish the spirit of unity, camaraderie, and mutual respect that they shared.

Through this experience, Minister Smith came to appreciate the transformative power of women working together in service to others. She observed how women from diverse backgrounds were using their God-given talents, gifts, and abilities to build stronger communities and foster peace through collaboration. She described this realization as the beginning of her work with the *Bridge of Peace* initiative in China.

Minister Smith explained that the *Bridge of Peace* is an emotional and spiritual experience designed to bring women together across cultural, racial, religious, and national divides. Through this symbolic exercise, participants build trust, deepen their understanding of one another, and form lasting friendships founded on reconciliation, compassion, and a shared commitment to peace. Minister Smith also shared that she made the decision to return to school in her forties to pursue a Bachelor of Arts in Business. Although balancing her studies with her personal and professional responsibilities was challenging, she recognized that acquiring this knowledge and expertise would better equip her to serve and empower others.

Reflecting on her journey as a mother, she acknowledged that there were seasons when work demanded much of her time as she strove to provide for her family. While she wished she could have spent more time with her children during those years, she expressed gratitude and pride as she now sees them thriving as accomplished and compassionate adults.

In closing, Minister Smith emphasized that lasting peace begins with each individual. She shared that true fulfillment comes from living a life of service, where one's gifts, talents, and experiences are used to uplift others.

We congratulate all the awardees for their unwavering commitment to fostering change wherever they go and may we learn from their examples of challenging the status quo to create lasting peace.