

Sun Jin Moon's Thanksgiving Awards at the National Press Club, Washington, DC

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A message of peace united different religious leaders, former lawmakers, and various community members from around the country at a special Thanksgiving awards luncheon at the National Press Club in Washington, D.C., on Saturday, November 16. Hundreds of people gathered in support of the Peace Starts With Me: Bridging the American Divide program, co-sponsored by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) and Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU). "In order for us to have the sacred peace we seek, we need love that allows us to be bridge-builders," said ACLC National Co-Chairman Dr. Luonne Rouse. "You need a bridge that unites one heart to another."



The luncheon served as a platform where societal divisions of race and class, among others, were discussed, featuring several guest speakers as well as two question-and-answer forums addressing the impact of the political and religious spheres. Both forums were moderated by Universal Peace Federation (UPF) President Dr. Michael Jenkins, who welcomed former U.S. Representatives Loretta Sanchez (D-CA) and John Doolittle (R-CA). "It takes trust," said Sanchez. "Working in Congress is like working on a marriage. If you help me get what I need, I'll help you get what you need because I'm not in a destructive mode, I'm in constructive mode."

The word congress itself means 'coming together,' and both former Congress members emphasized the

importance of faith and inclusion of God in the decision-making of national leadership. "We are spiritual beings having a human experience," said Doolittle. "We are God's spirit children and we have to keep that in mind because it will have an effect on the peace we seek to spread." Religious leaders also echoed similar sentiments in a subsequent forum.

"We cannot conform to the spirit of this age, we are to become God's vehicle in this world to accomplish His purpose," said one pastor of a megachurch in Maryland. "Our growth is coming from our division and not our multiplication; something is wrong." Archbishop George Augustus Stallings, Jr., founder of the Imani Temple African-American Catholic Congregations (AACC), also weighed in on peacemaking efforts. "God has breathed the quintessential paradigm in each of us so that we are all a temple of God," said Archbishop Stallings. "The God in me recognizes the God in you -- we are inextricably linked and when you suffer, I suffer. We need to act like brothers and sisters, one family under God, and we need to stand together."



Banquet participants were inspired by the heartfelt speeches bridging hope, unity, and peace to transcend all of humanity's divides. "The bridge I'm really inspired about is the bridge we're building back to God and back to each other," said FFWPU-USA President Rev. Demian Dunkley. "That is the bridge I'm happy to help build." Keynote speaker Dr. Sun Jin Moon, vice president of Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI), also shared the importance of self-reflection, prayer, and repentance moving forward. "Only true love can bridge the divides in society," she said. "Each of you are anointed and appointed by God to bring the ideal of peace to this world."

Three people were honored with True Family Values awards during the event for exemplifying and uplifting the values of family: Bishop Glenn Staples, senior pastor at the Temple of Praise, who has spearheaded 200 churches in India and Nigeria; Rev. Dr. Augustus Phipps, who has helped those who are incarcerated find God; and Rev. Dennis Williams, who is a broadcaster who has helped many ministries expand their reach around the world. A special rendition of God Bless America was also sung by revered Rev. Dr. Wintley Phipps.

Banquet organizers are now preparing for the final Peace Starts With Me event, a rally at the Prudential Center in Newark, New Jersey, where keynote speaker Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, co-founder of FFWPU, will address 30,000 clergy. Dr. Moon has been on a world tour continuing the legacy of peacebuilding by her late husband Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon, co-founder of FFWPU. "This is a special time, God has ordained this vision of Dr. Moon to bring us all together to bring peace into the world," said Bishop Noel Jones, pastor of City of Refuge megachurch in Los Angeles. "It begins with each one of us."