

## Graduates-to-be Testify to UTS as an Interfaith Seminary

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*The audience stood for an interfaith invocation from a Jewish leader. Diarra Dass, far right, is a UTS student from Mali.*

It was an afternoon of tears and tributes as some of the class of 2015 gathered at the Unification Theological Seminary extension at 4 West 43rd Street in New York to recall the unforgettable highpoints of their experience at UTS. With more than 70 people in attendance, the get-together allowed friends and family to spend time with the soon-to-be graduates who will receive their diplomas on Saturday, May 23, 2015 in the UTS commencement ceremony to be held on the main campus in Barrytown, New York.

The Unification Theological Seminary offers educational programs in an interfaith context, which cultivate the heart, mind and spirit; bridge religious and cultural divides; promote leadership, service and engagement with the world; and provide tools for success in ministry and professional life. UTS is committed to the Unification vision of one global family under God. UTS Mission Statement

Dr. Kathy Winings, vice-president for academic affairs at UTS, gave welcoming remarks in which she noted that UTS offers the best interfaith educational program in New York and is the only accredited Interfaith Seminary in the state of New York. The Seminary is not only composed of students from diverse national, cultural and ethnic backgrounds but also represent diverse denominational affiliations. She noted that previously, UTS has also graduated students from the Islamic, Buddhist and Hindu faith

communities.

Yilan Shao, a current UTS student, read the new mission statement: “The Unification Theological Seminary offers educational programs in an interfaith context, which cultivate the heart, mind and spirit; bridge religious and cultural divides; promote leadership, service and engagement with the world; and provide tools for success in ministry and professional life. UTS is committed to the Unification vision of one global family under God.”

Four of the graduating students gave their testimonies. Remi Alapo, a Nigerian student, said UTS helped her discover her calling as an interfaith minister.



Amb Caroline Usikpedo: Asst. minister of Foreign Affairs, Intl Human Rights Commission, Ambassador for Peace, UPF-Nigeria, spoke to support an award for Mr. Doghudje Doghudje. Philippine student Elena Bahian, a former school teacher, testified that she realized God had called her to UTS. At a particularly challenging time in her life when she was thinking about dropping her studies, Bahian explained, one of her professors challenged her, asking why she had come to the Seminary. It was a turning point in her life. She intensely felt that God talked to her that day. Shedding tears, Bahian said, “I felt God was telling me that he had brought me to the Seminary for His purpose not for myself.”



*Mr. Bhupinder Sachdev-Sing, left, a leader of the Sikh Community receiving a gift from Dr. Winings*

I felt God was telling me that he had brought me to the Seminary for His purpose not for myself. Elena Bahian, Phillipines

Youngsoon Quinn, the youngest graduating Seminary student as well as the daughter of a UTS graduate, testified that she believed UTS was the most nurturing place for her, spiritually intellectually and emotionally.

Theresa Graham-Devore, called “Momma T” by her colleagues is the oldest of this year’s Seminary graduates to-be at age 69. She explained that even though she suffered through two strokes, four heart attacks and a diagnosis of lymphoma, this did not stop her because of her love for UTS. She said despite all the challenges, “my battery is still running very well.”



*Rev. Dr. Guru Dileepji, left, – Hindu (President, International Gurukula Community) was a co-organizer of the event, and made a presentation to Dr. Hugh Spurgin and Dr. Kathy Winings.*

After these moving testimonies, Dr. Hugh Spurgin, president of UTS, spoke about the reason why the Reverend and Mrs. Moon founded UTS 40 years ago. He said that there is a need for leaders who will seek to bring peace in the world. Spurgin cited Jesus’ immortal maxim to “Love your enemies” as the key to bringing peace worldwide, and he encouraged the future graduates to follow the Founders’ credo to “go into the world and to live for the sake of others.”

The celebration continued with a special program honoring the diverse interfaith partnerships and programs that have been offered at UTS as part of its dedication to interreligious peace and harmony. The

celebration included diverse prayers from leaders representing Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Hinduism and Sikhism. Immediately following the prayers, special awards were presented. The Global Interreligious Ambassador Award, sponsored by the Global Education for All Initiative in Nigeria (GEFAI) honored Mr. Anand Patole from India and Mrs. Sharon Hamilton-Getz from the United States for their contributions to interfaith dialogue and peace. In addition, Mr. Doghudje Doghudje was named an Ambassador for Peace by the Universal Peace Federation in New York for his work in fostering interreligious cooperation.

The celebration included food, fellowship and dance. All in all, it was a great way to spend a Sunday afternoon in NY City.