

UPF New York, USA's landmark three-day conference to create a world of peace

Tom McDevitt
November 12, 2015



New York, United States -- A diverse group of respected religious thinkers pledged to create "a world of lasting peace" at the close of a landmark three-day conference.

Under the banner of "Overcoming Division, Building Unity," close to 300 clergy and lawmakers from 28 nations convened at the iconic New Yorker Hotel on November 10 to 12, 2018, to mull paths to reconciliation.

"On this day, November 12, 2018, we endorse the proposal to establish and develop a new interreligious association, known provisionally as the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD), in our cities, in our nations, and together, throughout the world," according to the resolution accepted unanimously by the assembled clergy and lawmakers. "Our common ideal is a world in which people of all nationalities, ethnicities, races, cultures, and worldviews live together in mutual respect, harmony and cooperation, as one family under God," the resolution stated.

Participants included Cardinal Kelvin Felix from Dominica; Imam Muhammad Elahi of Detroit; Protestant clergy from dozens of denominations, as well as Orthodox priests, Buddhist monks, Shinto priests from Japan and yogi masters from India. Lawmakers included Dan Burton and Todd Tiahrt, both former members of the U.S. House of Representatives, as well as legislators currently serving around the world.

The opening session probed for consensus on universal values that all religions could support. Thomas P. McDevitt, the president of UPF International, proposed the principles of centering one's life on God and committing to "live for the sake of others."

The conference drew from two separate but allied organizations: the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLCLC), founded in 2000, and UPF, founded in 2005.

Dr. Michael W. Jenkins, national co-chair of ACLCLC, emphasized that "clergy" in ACLCLC means "clergy of all religions." He mentioned that a year ago, Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the co-founder of ACLCLC and UPF, "gathered us together and said, 'Wherever someone gathers 10,000 or more people, I will go there.' She has kept her word. She gathered 10,000 in Africa, 10,000 in Brazil, over 10,000 in Asia [at public speeches], and so many more places around the world."

The gravity of the discussions of peace was underscored by the fact that the conference was held on the centennial of the armistice declared at the close of World War I.

Many panelists disclosed that their trust of representatives of the UPF founders had begun decades ago,

and that they endorsed the unique style of UPF. "I have been to many interfaith meetings in my career, but the passionate, focused, consistent efforts of the followers of Rev. Moon is extraordinary. I don't know how you people do it," according to Imam Elahi.

The topic of "Marriage and Family as Our Essential Resource" was explored by Rev. Dr. Luonne Rouse, a marriage and family therapist from South Carolina, who also paid tribute to the teachings of Rev. Moon on family as the building block of a godly society. "Jesus brought me to reconciliation at age 16, in 1971. The same Jesus visited Sun Myung Moon. Marriage and family are an essential resource to solve the problems in this world. If we reduce true love to perverted sex, we lose the essence. I am a true son of Sun Myung Moon and true love. Let peace start with me," Rev. Rouse said, echoing the theme of Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's 10,000-person rally at the Nassau Coliseum on Long Island later that day.



Pastor T.L. Barrett Jr., the senior pastor of the Life Center, Church of God in Christ, in Chicago, gave his testimony to the ideal of family as a universal benchmark as well. He said that when he met the UPF founders about 25 years ago, "There was one mandate that was universal for all their children, and that is to live for the sake of others. I decided I would do that, to live for others. I found it kind of difficult, because blacks in America tend to have certain prejudices and preferences. But when you decide to honor your parents, God will bless you with whatever you need to do to honor that parent. So God blessed me with insight. That is, to be able to recognize the identity, the true divinity of my brothers and sisters through identity -- which is God. Because if you are breathing in and out, you are actually exchanging breaths with them."

Dr. Thomas Walsh, the chair of UPF International, told the conferees: "Mother and Father Moon have created many organizations. They have this calling from God to transform this world, to build the kingdom of God, that they take with absolute seriousness and commitment and built a spiritual/religious foundation and imparted great teachings.

"I do not mean the religious men and women of the world, but I mean people who are working in academia, in civil society, in the arts, in sports, and in media. Because if you are going to transform this world, it won't just be the religious leaders alone," Dr. Walsh added.

"Why do some peace agreements fail?" asked panelist Professor Eliezer Glaubach-Gal, the president of the Jerusalem Peace and Security Forum. He pointed to the key role of the values of those on both sides. "Values are stronger than any physical body. To have peace, we need to remove cultural barriers. That can happen based on common interests," he observed, crediting the UPF founders for sponsoring interfaith clergy conferences for as many as 20,000 religious and civic leaders in Jerusalem over many years. "Those of you who came on those trips were the heroes who walked the streets when people in Jerusalem, like me, were hiding in holes, afraid of coming out," Dr. Glaubach-Gal said. He went on to say, "The great Rabbi Maimonides was asked about who the messiah was to be. He responded, the person who is to unite the nations. He is the Messiah. Was he not referring to [the UPF founders]?"