

Unificationist opens Meditation and Reflection Rooms at University of NV, Reno

Sarah Canak
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On March 16, 2016, religious community and student leaders gathered to attend an Open House of the Meditation and Reflection Rooms on the University of Nevada, Reno (UNR) campus, an achievement for interfaith five years in the making.

Since initiating the effort to open an interfaith prayer room on the UNR campus in 2011, Unificationist alumnus Sarah Canak has walked a long road to create an open space for religious expression and interfaith interaction at UNR.

It was after a fateful engagement about the status of spirituality on campus over tacos with UNR president, Marc Johnson, and other UNR students that Canak was first inspired to create an interfaith chapel or prayer room on campus. With the support of local Unificationist Stephen Child and fellow classmates Sumayya Beekun and Daniel Sanchez (presidents of the UNR Muslim Students Association and Interfaith Students' Club, respectively), Canak reached out to both student and community religious representatives, inviting them to sign a petition and proposal for an interfaith prayer room to be offered to the president.

At first, Canak and her partners were met with resistance from different quarters of the campus community: as often happens on college campuses today, several professors and student organizations were opposed to the initiative as one that would encourage open religious practice and interaction. In the end, however, 20 people representing multiple faith traditions signed the petition and the proposal was finally approved by President Johnson in 2012.

Four years later, the Meditation and Reflection Rooms opened their doors for the first time upon the completion of construction of UNR's impressive new William N. Pennington Student Achievement Center.

Many of the original signers of the petition attended the Open House to celebrate the hard-won success of their common initiative. There appears to have been a true spirit of cordiality and camaraderie among those in attendance, as well as an appropriate solemnity as those gathered prayed together in the new facility.

Reflecting on the whole of her experience in securing a space for interfaith prayer and meditation on the UNR campus, Sarah Canak commented, "I feel like this whole sequence of events was God working. The background to this story is that I had been praying for almost a year in my hometown. I would run up a mountain or sit down by the riverside just asking God, 'What do you want me to do in my community?' Through that foundation of prayer, I feel like God was able to work so quickly and I was able to meet the right people, like Rajan Zed, a Hindu leader in our Reno faith community, and others to move forward.

"Whatever you want to call him, 'Allah' or 'God'—whatever your name is for this universal spirit of love and unity—I think he brought us all together to make this project a reality."