

Unification Theological Seminary held its 40th commencement ceremonies

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Members of the Board of Trustees: Dr. Hugh Spurgin, Bishop Billings, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim and Dr. Michael Balcomb congratulate Dr. David Eaton (2nd from right) on his honorary doctorate, conferred Saturday May 28

BARRYTOWN, NY - On Saturday, May 28, 2016, an unseasonably warm spring day, the Unification Theological Seminary (UTS) held its 40th commencement ceremonies in the chapel at its main campus in Barrytown, NY, overlooking the majestic Hudson River.

There was a standing-room only crowd of nearly 200 hearty souls, many of whom who came by car and bus from New York City, New Jersey, and Maryland, with some guests from as far away as Atlanta, Toronto, and Vancouver. The Ivorian Consul General (New York) attended, representing the Ivory Coast government to honor graduate, Dr. Idris Kone, a native Ivorian who received a Doctor of Ministry degree.



Dr. Ki Hoon Kim (UTS'96) gives the commencement address

Despite the heat and the crowd, a surprisingly festive mood filled the hall throughout the entire ceremony, with many friends and family members standing and cheering when “their” graduate’s name was called and the student came forward to receive his or her diploma from Dr. Hugh Spurgin, president of UTS.

In all, there were graduates from 13 countries representing Christian, Islamic, Buddhist, Shinto and Hindu cultures, which further re-affirms the UTS motto: “Bridging religious and cultural divides.”

The ceremony also marked the 10th anniversary of the Doctor of Ministry (D.Min.) program, with six people receiving their doctorate degrees, three from countries in Africa (Ivory Coast, Mauritania, and Congo) - a couple of which are predominantly Islamic - one from Barbados, and two from the USA.



This was also the first time certificates were presented to graduates from the new satellite site in Maryland, located in the Prince George’s County/Washington, D.C area. Other professional development certificates were awarded to FFWPU members who participated in online courses provided by UTS. Several “long distance” graduates earned Master level degrees by taking many of their classes online.

In interviews with the graduates before and after the ceremony, a very clear and distinct message was echoed by all – some are members of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), other graduates come from diverse religious backgrounds - a feeling of camaraderie and caring for each person and each person’s respective religion was honored by all during their time studying at UTS.



A particularly inspiring testimony was given by Sister Christiana Mmadu from Nigeria. A devout Catholic, she came to America to study at St. John’s University, a well-known Catholic institution located

on Long Island.

Due to administrative problems, she was unable to attend, but was then offered the opportunity to enroll at the UTS campus on West 43rd St. in Manhattan. Friends tried warning her off, reminding her that she is a person who is “very devout and faithful” to her church and her beliefs.

“I was skeptical at first,” said Mmadu, “because I knew how strong my faith was and thought there might be a conflict. But, it was truly a wonderful experience, everyone got along so well together and everyone respected each other’s beliefs.”

Two honorary doctoral degrees were bestowed by President Spurgin following introductions by Dr. Kathy Winings, Vice-President for Academic Affairs. Mr. David Eaton, Director of the New York City Symphony for the past 30 years, was the first honoree, followed by Rev. Michael Sykes, who is now in his 28th year as the Senior Pastor of the United Missionary Baptist Church in East Orange, NJ.

In his remarks Mr. Eaton gave particular thanks to “two very important women in my life,” Dr. Young Oon Kim, Professor of Systematic Theology at UTS (1975-1988), author of “Unification theology & Christian thought,” and the songwriter Joni Mitchell for her prophetic words from the song “Woodstock,” some of which he recited.

Rev. Sykes singled out his father as someone special in his life and ministry, thanking him especially for instilling in him the importance of hard work and giving to others “as important traits for a minister to have and to practice every day.”

Two other special UTS awards were given out by Dr. Winings: the first to Faye Braz, who was given the Outreach Award, and the second to Naresh Gullapalli, who was honored with the Voluntary Service Award. Both graduates were recipients of Master of Divinity degrees.

In his congratulatory remarks, President Spurgin spoke strongly about the new world we live in and the role UTS graduates must take going forward, encouraging and exhorting them to “become the leaders the world needs.”

The Commencement Address was given by Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, Continental Chair of the FFWPU, who recalled his time as a student at UTS as well as the time he spent with “Father and Mother Moon,” the founders of UTS.

Given the opportunity to choose between giving a two-hour address, “as Father Moon often did,” or, a short 15-minute speech, which is “Mother Moon’s preference,” he cited the warm temperature and, “for the sake of the audience,” he opted to side with the latter choice.

Dr. Andrew Wilson, Professor of Scriptural Studies, performed the duties of moderator, and world-renowned soloist Mrs. Seiko Lee, sang two exquisitely beautiful songs, “The Lord’s Prayer,” by Albert Hay Malotte and “You’ll Never Walk Alone,” by Richard Rodgers.

An official photo session was held immediately after the conclusion of the ceremony, followed by a reception in the Main Dining Room.