

UPF Honolulu, Hawaii Hosts Third Annual UN World Interfaith Harmony Week

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Honolulu, Hawaii -- UPF-Hawaii hosted its third annual UN World Interfaith Harmony Week event at the University of Hawaii Kamakakuokalani Center for Hawaiian Studies on February 26, with about 60 people attending.

Hawaiian Kahu [priest] Loko'olu Quintero and three members of his Hawai'i Nei Church opened the ceremony with several loud blasts of a seashell and a welcoming chant. Dr. Jeff Nakama, executive director for UPF-Hawaii and the host of the event, welcomed all participants and guests. He then urged everyone to take a few minutes to greet their neighbors and find out what religion and background they came from. The quiet of an empty auditorium soon erupted with the energetic sounds of loud and enthusiastic greetings. The opening chant and the guests greeting each other really opened the hearts of everyone present and set the tone for the evening.



Dr. Thomas Lynch of the Interfaith Academy offered grace for the dinner. As dinner was winding down, co-sponsors of the event, including the Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP), Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) and the University of Hawaii (UH) Center for Hawaiian Studies were acknowledged.

UH students Sejoon Nakama and Yongqi Lin read commendations from the governor of Hawaii and mayor of Honolulu respectively. Rev. Sage Chee, from the Ohana Family of the Living God, offered some beautiful songs that lifted the already electric atmosphere and testified about Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon's event in New Jersey and the idea that "peace starts with me."

This was followed by a short but recent video clip of Summit 2020 showing the recent developments of UPF, especially the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development (IAPD) which was (most relevant to our interfaith event), the International Association of Parliamentarians for Peace (IAPP) and their important combined role in sustaining peace. The video clip included the profound words of Father and Mother Moon.

Rev. Ernie Ho of the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLC) gave an exciting introduction to the We Are One Water Ceremony. Before the ceremony began, the UPF video "World Interfaith Harmony Week" was played as the order of participants, cups, bowls and water were being prepared off stage.

The host explained that the water being used for the ceremony was brought by a Hawaiian priest and was rainwater that had fallen onto leaves and collected into his gourd: This pure water had not yet touched the earth. The host later instructed that the faith representatives would come on stage in alphabetical order of faith. They would be given a cup of water, after which they would read a minute of prepared text from their sacred writings or pray and then pour the water into a large crystal bowl.

There were eight major world religions represented along with two other faiths: Bahai, Buddhism, Christianity, Hawaiian religion (state Christian hybrid), Islam, Jainism, Judaism, Sikhism, Shintoism and Unificationism. The Hindu representative had a family emergency to attend, so the Hindu religion was not represented. Both the Bahai and the Hawaiian religions had young participants, so they could also represent the unity of world religions to the next generation.

It was inspiring and uplifting to see and feel the sacred ceremony. Most participants wore some element of their traditional clothes; the Buddhist, Hawaiian, and Shinto representatives came with full-blown ceremonial garb. The variety of religious scriptures, dress, and cultures, and the symbolism of the world's religions harmonizing into oneness with the mixing of the water were beautiful to behold.



After the final representative had finished pouring the water into the bowl and while they were still on stage, the host urged everyone to pray out loud or in silence for world peace for one minute. This concluded the We Are One Water Ceremony. He later explained that the mixed sacred water would be divided into three parts and given to three representatives: The Hawaiian priest would pray and pour the sacred water on a mountain, Dr. Lynch would pour the water in the ocean, and Dr. Nakama would pour the water around two Peace Poles at the University of Hawaii. This represented spreading interreligious harmony on mountain, land and ocean on Oahu and throughout the Pacific Rim Region.

While the participants were still on stage a table and resolution were brought out. Signing a World Harmony Resolution was the brainchild of Keiko Nakama and Rev. Takami, and Rev. James Mitchell worded it. The MC read the resolution and then urged all the ceremony participants and religious leaders to sign it; the rest of the participants signed as well.

Finally, after a group photo, everyone came off stage and formed a circle while Reverend Chee led the closing song "Let There Be Peace on Earth." Suddenly, one of the members of the Hawaiian Church of Hawai'i Nei began an impromptu hula of the song. It caught the audience by surprise, but they all loved it. The host thanked everyone for their attendance and active participation and gave some final words of encouragement.