

## YSP Thailand honors UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025

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February 15, 2025



Starting in 2010, the United Nations declared the first week of February each year "the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week" to promote understanding, harmony, and cooperation among people of different religions, beliefs, and faiths to achieve tangible results, which is another important dimension of a culture of peace.

The Universal Peace Federation Thailand is aware of this and conducts activities to bring about "Peace" to promote love, understanding, unity, respect, and cooperation beyond the boundaries of race, ethnicity, religion, language, and ideology. Therefore, in collaboration with the Youth and Students for Peace Foundation (IAYSP), we organized a Religious Youth Service (RYS) 1-day camp to commemorate the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025 on February 15, 2025.

70 participants from 3 religions, including junior high school, high school, and university students, as well as the general public, gathered in the UPF Peace Embassy in Bangkok to learn about different faith traditions.

The opening ceremony in the morning began with welcoming remarks by Mr. Kamol Thananopavarn, Secretary-General, Universal Peace Federation - Thailand. Then, Mrs. Ursula McLackland, Secretary-General, Universal Peace Federation - Asia Pacific, gave an inspiring lecture on the topic "Interfaith Harmony through Service Learning". After that, the participants visited 3 different religious sites nearby to learn about that particular religion.

Christianity: At "Mary Help of Christians Church" Fr. Suphot Riungam SDB welcomed the group and gave a lecture on the teachings of Christianity and religious customs. Then he led a prayer for harmony among religions on the occasion of the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week 2025.

Buddhism: At "Wat Ban Thung Seri", the abbot of the temple, Ven. Phra Khru Sathit Pariyattikit explained the history of Wat Ban Thung Seri and Buddhist customs and practices. He also chanted blessings and encouraged the youth who participated in the camp.

Islam: At the Foundation of the Islamic Centre of Thailand, Professor Shafi'i Naphakorn, Imam of the Islamic Center of Thailand mosque, gave the welcome remarks. The participants watched a video about the history of the Foundation of the Islamic Centre of Thailand and important Islamic traditions such as fasting during the month of Ramadan and praying five times a day. Then the Imam took them to the prayer hall.

Afterward, the participants joyfully engaged in volunteer service by collecting garbage and cleaning the Foundation of Islamic Centre of Thailand.

After their return to the Peace Embassy for the closing session, the participants shared their experiences of the day testifying that they had learned a lot during the day and made new friends from different backgrounds.

Ms. Sirikan Suwanich, District Chief of Bangkapi District, Bangkok Metropolitan was moved by the participants' reflections and gave words of encouragement to the youth. She said, "I would like to commend everyone who is a part of the Religious Youth Service Camp for coming to learn and exchanging ideas with each other. This is an important step for creating understanding and harmony between religions, which is important for a peaceful and strong society." She also presented certificates to the participants and assured the organizers that the district office is interested in conducting further youth programs with UPF and IAYSP.

The program ended with the closing remarks by Mrs. Ursula McLackland. Though it was a long day, participants stayed on and kept chatting with their new friends.



## Reflections

### **Ms. Kewalee Phangphan, a student at Sarasas Witaed Suksa School, Bangkok**

"The camp helped us to know more about different religions. In the past, we joined tree planting and other volunteer camps, but we never joined a camp that introduced us to religious sites and religious practices. I was impressed by Mrs. Ursula McLackland's lecture. "If we close our minds and don't open ourselves up to others, we won't be able to learn new things and develop ourselves."

### **Ms. Phetchalak Panthong, Meditation Teacher**

"I am impressed with the foundation's management system. The duration of 1-day which I think is short was just right for doing concise activities, and I got the most out of every activity. The places I visited were very beautiful (some places would be closed if you went there by yourself). I gained knowledge and understood the similarities and differences of each religion. I was very happy and satisfied. I would like to thank the organizers, the volunteers, and all the participants. Everyone was so lovely. See you next year."