

UPF USA Convenes IMAP Program on Religious Freedom and the Media

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Nancy Jubb

United States - "The Weight of Words, What Is the Media's Role in Preserving Religious Freedom?" was the topic of this month's IMAP webinar. Approximately 60 participated in the online event held February 23, 2023.

In the opening remarks, the emcee made mention that those who pursue a career in journalism often do so because they believe their work contributes to the betterment of society. The same could be said of those who join spiritual or religious communities. However, research shows that media representation of religious communities is often negative, or worse - derisive.

The panelists discussing the implications of religious representation in the media, both culturally and politically, and why it matters for religious freedom, included: Prof. Joel Campbell of the Brigham Young University School of Communications; Mr. Bobby Ross Jr., editor-in-chief of the Christian Chronicle; and Ms. Nancy Jubb, media spokesperson for the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification.

"Moving from Distrust to Cooperative Engagement" was the title of Professor Campbell's presentation. He began by defining the issues that create distrust between spokespeople and journalists as both are engaged in managing organizational expectation of "devotional journalism" vs. professional religious reporting. His presentation revealed the challenges in unpacking the reluctance to work with the media and the need of resetting the relationship of spokespeople and journalists away from the vicious cycle of misinformation by appealing to ethics and professional standards. A key point in his presentation was the need for critical media commentary and informing religious media watchdogs to place emphasis on the importance of training and conversations by religious reporters and organizational spokespersons in coverage of religious literacy and religious freedom issues.

"Religion in the News Media: Challenges and Opportunities" was the topic explored by Mr. Bobby Ross, Jr. of The Christian Chronicle, a former religion writer for the Associated Press and The Oklahoman. Ross writes a weekly newsletter on the best reads and top headlines in the world of faith for ReligionUnplugged.com.

Mr. Ross' informative talk gave the audience a view of the reporter on the street and how with honesty, the broadening of perspective and sincere efforts by both spokesperson and reporter, fair and truthful reporting can be achieved.

Ms. Nancy Jubb, communications director for Family Federation for World Peace and Unification USA, spoke on the topic of "The Pen: Sword or Shield." In her role as a spokesperson for a religious organization, she emphasized the power of words to both dehumanize and divide if used carelessly or intentionally, due to religious illiteracy or lack of reporting professionalism. "Language matters," she said. "We are all responsible to call out dangerous language when we see it. Contempt and dehumanization is a process and can be used to demonize the enemy. Zero-sum thinking results in moral exclusion." Ms. Jubb used the word "cult" as an example of othering and separating - concepts intended to negate and stigmatize another's individual humanity.

Ms. Jubb proposes the model of "asset framing" formulated by Trabian Shorters. It is a process of defining a community based on their aspirations rather than their defects and limitations and can serve as a form of conflict resolution.