

## U.S. Activists Study and Discuss Peacebuilding Model in New York

Mi Young Eaton  
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New York, United States—About 100 social activists came together for a day of focused study, reflection, and discussion of themes essential to successful and principled leadership.

“Discovering a New Paradigm to Address Our Critical Challenges” was the first of three pilot sessions of the American Leadership Conference (ALC) that were organized jointly by the U.S. chapter of UPF, The Washington Times Foundation, and the Sun International Peace Federation.

The initial program took place on Saturday, March 11, 2017, in the heart of Manhattan, at the Learning Center of the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU), an affiliated organization.

### Opening Plenary Session

In their opening remarks, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim, the regional chair of UPF North America, and Dr. Michael Jenkins, president of The Washington Times Foundation, each emphasized the centrality of God-centered families to the resolution of challenges of our time.

Dr. Kim said: “As Richard de Sena [president of UPF-USA and emcee for the day’s program] said, I wear many, many hats ... [but] I have only one focus and one hat, at the end of the day. Even though we have many critical challenges these days, I am a family man. ... This is the only hat I wear and carry with me all the time, wherever I go, whenever I wake up, whenever I go to sleep. More than anything else, the greatest and most critical point is how we can bring family values back to our American society, government, and community.”

Dr. Jenkins said: “The Washington Times Foundation ... calls upon all people to solve their problems by recognizing that we have one Creator, one Heavenly Parent, and that if we understand that, we can see that we don’t have enemies. We should not see others as our enemies. They’re just part of our family ... and the way our family will calm down and come together is we have to live for them. We have to show that we’re more concerned about them than we are about ourselves.”

They were followed by Maria L. Vargas, president of the Sun International Peace Federation and executive director of the UPF-USA Office of Latin Affairs, who passionately articulated the necessity of peacemakers committing to creating a world of peace.

“We have tools with us today, like never in history, to bring about rapid change, to bring sustainable development, to end poverty, to end disease. We have the tools; we need the political will and the continued commitment of all peacemakers throughout the world,” Ms. Vargas said.

“I have worked with the United Nations—this is my 24th year. What I have learned and seen the most is what a few committed people can do,” Ms. Vargas said. “It does not take masses to change society. It is the heart, and the fire, and the spirit of the Creator that motivates these people. You, distinguished leaders in this room, are the light, are the peacemakers, are the very same ones who will usher us into a new world of peace.”

### Main Program

UPF-USA Chair Thomas McDevitt introduced the purpose and goals of the day’s program. According to Mr. McDevitt, the event was organized to provide an easily replicable model for American citizens and leaders to find meaning and meet the challenges of our time. The program consisted of four sessions:

“True Character, Leadership, and Governance”

“Marriage and Family as Our Essential Resource”

“Building Community and Civil Society beyond the Boundaries of Race and Religion”

“America as God’s Hope—Is This Even Possible Today?”



Each participant was given a pen, a highlighter, and a “sourcebook” that included selected readings on each of the day’s four main topics, as well as historic speeches given by Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon and Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, the founders of UPF and FFWPU. The sourcebook also contained prominent addresses given by U.S. presidents George Washington and Abraham Lincoln.

Each session proceeded in four parts. First, a representative would read aloud from the sourcebook on a particular theme. Then a commentator actively working in a related field briefly conveyed his or her insights about the reading. The rest of the attendees would then engage in roundtable discussions. Finally, a few representatives summarized their roundtable insights and presented them to the entire room.

Many powerful readers, commentators, and audience members contributed to the program throughout the day. During the second session, FFWPU-USA President Dr. Michael Balcomb invited the audience to join the growing Marriage Blessing Movement, a collaborative effort to revive family values through the reinvigoration of marriage in the United States and around the world. Pastor Tanya Edwards of the Family Church of New York City gave an impassioned reading for the fourth session, declaring with conviction her confidence that concerted effort can bring America back to God. And Joseph Placide, president of Sure Access Communications, described eloquently the challenge and opportunity now faced by the United States and the world to bring about much-needed change.

“What is our responsibility, given that we have so much to give and that we’ve been given so much? Within the boundaries of this great nation lie all of the possibilities for good. But we are also faced with many of the perils that can consume us and cause paralysis, preventing us from doing good,” Mr. Placide said. “What am I asking of everyone here? What am I asking of myself? ... We must look deeper, look inward, do more, aim higher, and go further.”

Throughout the day, attendees were entertained by Grammy Award nominated singer/guitarist Bruce Stephen Foster, whose set ranged from pop hits like the Beatles’ “Here Comes the Sun” and Paul Simon’s “Diamonds on the Soles of Her Shoes” to intricate classical guitar melodies from Barcelona—which were so astutely played that they even moved some to get up and dance.

Two more pilot sessions of the ALC were announced for Clifton, New Jersey, on March 25 and in Washington, D.C. on April 1.