

World Interfaith Harmony Week Observed in Czech Republic

Juraj Lajda
February 1, 2016



Prague, Czech Republic—Representatives of five world religions and four Christian denominations attended a meeting held by UPF to mark World Interfaith Harmony Week 2016.

Some 70 people participated in the February 1 meeting, which took place under the theme “The Role of Religion for World Peace in the 21st Century: Religion as a Source of Reconciliation and Conflict Resolution.”

The event was organized in cooperation with the Association for Religious Dialogue, Mosaics Platform Dialog, Community of Christians and Jews, and Community of Christians, in whose office the program was held.



In his opening speech Dr. Juraj Lajda, secretary general of UPF-Czech Republic, focused on the role of religion in history. Different religions came into existence in different parts of the world to different levels of understanding, he said, but the main purpose was the same for all: seeking internal values, the purpose of life and fulfilling God’s Will to establish a world of peace and harmony. It is not religions that fight against each other, he said, but rather the evil nature of people. Religious people should cooperate more, Dr. Lajda said.

Rev. Tomáš Boněk, pastor of the Community of Christians, the hosting organization, recalled the event that UPF held for World Interfaith Harmony Week in February 2014. He appreciated the progress that had been made since then in interreligious dialogue and cooperation. Each event that can contribute to mutual understanding is useful and must be welcomed as an opportunity, Rev. Boněk emphasized.

Rev. Miluláš Vymětal, an evangelical pastor, spoke of his experiences as an activist working in his parish to help minorities and people in need, as well as young people. He has a lot of experience meeting people of different religious backgrounds, especially Muslims, he said.

Mrs. Nina Nováková, a member of Parliament, started her speech by proposing that we should be able to silence ourselves; otherwise, we will not be able to listen to each other. We are failing on the family level as well as on the level of politics and religions and churches, she said. She as a Catholic expressed that we have to come back home. We need to know our own identity, and then we can create harmony. Coming

back home means coming to human integrity. The spiritual dimension is necessary, even though people think economics or politics are enough, she said. Humility is important so that we can respect others. We need to involve mind and heart and the spiritual dimension in our spiritual meetings. In the end she expressed her hope that the time until the next meeting would be less than one year.

Rev. Petr Wagner, a pastor from the Hussite Church who is working with the Czech Radio in the religious section, said he has the opportunity to meet people from many different denominations, which is very good. Also in his marriage he had to develop interreligious tolerance after his wife converted to another religion. However, he said, for their children religion is not an issue; they only want to be embraced.



The next speaker was the Venerable Jiří Hazlbauer, representing Zen Buddhism. Buddhists do not speak much, he said, preferring to do things for others. If we want to understand something, we need to experience it. If we want to know the taste of an apple, we need to eat it. The experience is most important. We always should ask ourselves how we can help others, he said.

Hüseyin Özörencik, the chairman of the Mosaics Platform Dialog, represented Islam. He said that harmony is like music, in that it has emotional elements. In order to create harmony, we need to remove the disharmonious sounds. The Muslim world has big problems, he said. Ignorance, poverty and hatred are some of them, and often these lead to extremism. A terrorist cannot be a Muslim and no Muslim can be a terrorist, he said. When children have no education and no food, then hatred may start and they may try to find a scapegoat.

The Roman-Catholic Academic Parish in Prague was represented by P. ThLic. Ing. Petr Vacík, S.J., who claimed that there is no religious dialogue but only dialogue among people. It is important that the message for religious dialogue comes to people who oppose it, he said.

Dr. Kateřina Děkanovská, chair of the Association for Interreligious Dialogue, pointed out that there is a gap between the secular and religious communities. The secular world is ahead and the religious world is behind and has a delay. The situation will become even worse. It is important to search honestly, she said. It is our responsibility and task to form unity.

Dr. Tomáš Kraus, secretary of the Federation of Jewish Communities in the Czech Republic, explained that it is the ethics of religion which is important. Everything depends on people. We should cut off politics from religious relationships. The core of Judaism is the hope that we can create a better world.

The final speaker was Trilomátmá Dás, representative of the Hare Krishna movement in the Czech Republic. He emphasized the importance of dialogue. The lack of dialogue creates an atmosphere of mistrust. A strong anti-Muslim attitude exists in those countries where there are few experiences with Islam. He appreciated this meeting and expressed the hope that religious people can meet on every level because, in the end, we have one God who has many forms.

In the end Dr. Juraj Lajda introduced the Religious Youth Service (RYS) project as a tool for further cooperation among people from different religious traditions and backgrounds.

The participants said that this meeting was very useful and important, especially at this time of human history. Some participants expressed their desire to hold such meetings more often. There was a suggestion to organize regular prayer meetings together.