

## UPF Czech Republic's Gathering Considers Religion's Role in 21st Century

Juraj Lajda  
February 10, 2025



**Prague, Czech Republic** – Religious representatives gathered to celebrate Interfaith Harmony Week on February 10, 2025, in the chapel of the Community of Christians in Prague. This year's meeting was entitled "The Role of Religion in the 21st Century" and was jointly organized by UPF-Czech Republic and the Community of Christians.



The program was opened by **Rev. Tomáš Boněk**, pastor of the Community of Christians, who welcomed the capacity audience and guided the program. A festive and spiritual atmosphere was set by the Missionary Choir of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, followed by a classical music performance by two young artists.



Rev. Bonek bemoaned the fact that some scholars evaluate religious movements from an external viewpoint without understanding their essence and deny that a real experience of God is possible. He also commented that different religions bring beauty in diversity and need to embrace each other and meet on a deeper level.



**Mr. Juraj Lajda**, president of UPF-Czech Republic, began his speech with a short history of the 20th century, in which more has happened than in the entire preceding 2000 years. He stated that the goal of religion is to create a world of peace and harmony, and is a tool to achieve this. Religion is the conscience of a nation, brings awareness that this world has a Creator, and should impart to students the necessary wisdom to love humanity and contribute to the establishment of a world of peace. He said we stand at the dawn of a new age in which cooperation between different religions will play a key role.



**Mr. Jan Pohořelický**, president of the Prague Czech Republic stake – an administrative unit composed of multiple congregations – of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, stated that the world needs the influence of religion although it is often profaned by the secular world. People often make a religion out of material wealth, luxury or possessions. But sacrifice and faith have always been the basis of

religion, the role of which is to awaken good character. People can always choose conflict or peace, he said.

The next speaker was **Mr. Jakub Koldovský** from Zen Buddhism, who began his talk by asking our purpose for being here. He related a beautiful experience when he was helped by a complete stranger on the street whose religious persuasion was irrelevant. He concluded that this is the role of religion.



**Ms. Nina Nováková**, a member of the Czech Parliament, said that religion is under intense criticism but if we raise our heads, we can see things in a different context from others. Adherents of religions try to describe the highest dimension of God, but because they themselves cannot attain that level, they lower the standard to their own level, and often do more harm than good.

Philosophy looks at the world according to reason, she explained. Today, however, philosophy has been replaced by an ideology without deeper context and wisdom. People are losing the ideals that guide us, even if we cannot fully live up to them. Religious people are the hope of the world, she concluded.

**Pastor Mikuláš Vymětal**, priest for minorities from the Evangelical Church of Czech Brethren, commented that although at the turn of the 19th and 20th centuries it seemed that all humanity was becoming Christian, the 20th century became a godless century of wars. But despite the secularizing trends in the 21st century, there is a growing desire for spirituality. Regrettably, religion is often formalized and becomes a source of conflict, whether interreligious or between conservative and liberal groups within a religion. The role of religion, he said, is to have a dialogue on all levels: between religions, the proponents of different views within a religion, and religious people and secular society.

**Mr. Robert Řehák**, special representative for the Czech government on affairs pertaining to the Holocaust, interfaith dialogue, and freedom of religion, began his speech by humorously describing how money corrupts character. In the 21st century, he went on to say, we are experiencing the most difficult period since World War II. There is tension in the world, a crisis of wars, and increasing brutality in the public space. People are losing the ability to communicate, and the world is becoming polarized. There is a lack of mutual listening and dialogue. He added that churches should mediate real dialogue in society.

The speeches were followed by the symbolic lighting of candles and a ceremony where water is poured into one common vessel by the representatives of each religion present.

Another musical performance by missionaries from Korea enlivened the meeting and strengthened the sacred atmosphere.

Then followed group discussions and an opportunity for all to express their opinions and exchange ideas. Refreshments and informal conversations rounded off the meeting.