

UPF-Maryland's Together We Can Bring Peace breakfast

Tomiko Duggan
September 28, 2017



Program presenters

Together We Can Bring Peace was the title of a peace breakfast forum in observance of the United Nations' International Day of Peace, co-sponsored by the Maryland Governor's Office of Community Initiatives and the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) of Maryland. Emcees of the breakfast were Ms. Jennifer Gray, Director of Interfaith Outreach for the Governor, and Mrs. Tomiko Duggan, Director of the Washington, D.C. Office of UPF-USA.

The forum began the morning of September 28th, in the Maryland Government Office for Community of Crownsville, Maryland. Ms. Gray welcomed the 40 guests to the ground-breaking gathering of interfaith leaders, and Dr. Manon Gurley introduced the speakers of the lecture panel.

First to speak was Dr. Homayra Ziad, a scholar at the Institute of Islamic, Christian and Jewish Studies in Baltimore. Dr. Ziad emphasized the values that are common to all religions, explaining that each of us has a desire for deep self-knowledge and a drive to be ethically involved in the world. She finished by stressing the need for diverse voices in advocacy.

Rabbi Batya Steinlauf, Director of Social Justice and Inter-Group Initiatives at the Jewish Community Relations Council of Greater Washington, D.C., was asked what it would take for the world to be more peaceful. Drawing from her own background, she explained the Jewish holiday of Yom Kippur, a time

when followers resolve problems with one another and repent for both individual and community sins. “We are part of a group, and not separate,” she explained. “We can create a community of individuals who... strive for justice.”

The third speaker was Reverend Doctor Carletta Allen, the lead pastor at Asbury United Methodist Church in Baltimore. Reverend Allen spoke on the universal actions that religious communities can take for human rights. “We all should do less talking about the things that divide us and more on how we can be together as friends,” she began. “We have allowed our religious traditions to be hijacked by the patriarchal aspects of society, resulting in bad practices and unhealthy agendas,” she continued. Reverend Allen concluded by discussing how we can respond to humanity’s needs together.

The fourth speaker was Ms. Nadia S. Hassan, founder and director of the Young Leaders Institute. She was asked whether people need to change how they think in order for the world to be more peaceful. “Yes, of course,” she replied. Parents must teach their children that another person can be correct, even if we think we are the one who is correct. It is written in the Koran, she explained, that God does not change the condition of a people unless they change what is in themselves.

Rev. Medgar L. Reid, DD, Director of Spiritual Care and Chaplaincy Services, explained how we can all better live together as part of the human community. “Mindfulness is the key,” he began. “When you are mindful of who you are, and mindful of who you belong to (God), your collective thoughts and heart cause the world around you to coalesce...” He concluded with the words, “Hurting people hurt people; be always mindful of our inner voice and try to be at peace within ourselves.”

The final speaker of the day was Mr. Tom McDevitt, Chairman of the Washington Times. He shared his own strategies for transforming violent structures into peaceful ones. “We should hold this kind of meeting in each county, town, and area,” he began. He continued with the need for political figures to work together. “By gathering parliamentarians together in dialogue, many good strategies and the sharing of good insights can occur.” Finally, he urged the group to find “like-minded people in your own zip code to create a group to work with.”

A lively question and answer session showed that the members of the audience were moved by the speakers’ comments, but wanted to know what they could do next. One answer came from Tom McDevitt, who said, “Let’s do this again, county by county, city by city, village by village. I will assist in this process.”

After taking questions from the audience, the speakers were appointed as Ambassadors for Peace (AFP) by AFP Director Susan Fefferman and Tomiko Duggan. Mr. Steve McAdams, Executive Director for the Governor’s Office of Community Initiatives, thanked everyone for attending and encouraged those present to work with the Office of Community Initiatives. Much conversation and the exchange of many business cards followed the invigorating program.