

UPF Spain held an interfaith gathering to ask for God's blessings on the New Year

Armando Lozano
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Madrid, Spain -- UPF-Spain held an interfaith gathering to ask for God's blessings on the new year and also to show the beauty of spiritual diversity through music, words and food.

The stage at the December 18, 2018, event was decorated to simulate an altar in order to help the very diverse group of participants to have a deep experience.

As music is at the core of any religious ritual, the first half-hour consisted of short musical performances. A female Catholic choir singing Gregorian chants set the tone. The music helped the 70 participants to become calm and to open themselves to silence and sacredness. Nora Usterman offered two Jewish hymns. Then Sara Habasha and Wafir Sheikheldin; a beautiful interfaith couple who bridge Islam and Christianity, Sudan and Ethiopia, performed an Ethiopian Orthodox Church hymn and an Arab religious song.

Following that calming offering, Antonio Martin of Ananda Marga Association invited the audience to dance to the singing of a Hindu mantra. This part ended with Sirus Shanavaz, the Persian director of the Sufi Tariqa Molaviye, reading a poem by Rumi and accompanying a dervish whirling dancer on the stage. That was the amazing finale of the first part.

Gopala, a famous poet follower of Sivananda Vedanta, opened the second part, which was dedicated to poems and prayers, by reading some of his spiritual verses. Next, Yael Cobano, the director of a Jewish Reformed synagogue, read a blessing (berakhah). It was beautiful to see many members of the synagogue in the audience.

The program proceeded with the reciting of the Koran by Wafir Sheikheldin and a Tibetan Buddhist

prayer by Lama Jampa Chojor, before ending with Father Demetrios (Rogelio Saez Carbo) reciting the prayer that is said in the Greek Orthodox Church to start the new year. It was a very moving moment, because he asked the audience to stand up and respond to the prayer the same as if they were in an Orthodox church.



After that there was a moment of silent meditation so that all people could offer their prayers. Catholic representatives, theologians and lay people, Orthodox Christians, Unificationists, representatives of Reformed Judaism, Sunni, Sufi and Ahmadi Muslims, a great diversity of Hindu groups, Zen, Thich Nhat Hanh and Tibetan Buddhist, Scientology, and others all participated.

Following the meditation, the UPF staff distributed cups of sacramental wine and juice, and UPF-Spain Secretary General Armando Lozano as moderator read three wishes: "May love and compassion fill the earth," "May all humankind find the way to gather as one family," "May each living being reach liberation and enlightenment." These were followed by a prayer for God's blessing to the participants, their families and loved ones as the guests partook of the wine and juice. It was a great moment, and the participants were very touched.

The program ended with an interfaith banquet, as nothing is more unifying than food. Each participating community had been asked to bring small food offerings from their traditions. They were so generous that the result was a real banquet of sweet delicacies and exotic snacks from around the world, each with a tag showing what it was. The participants talked and talked, and no one seemed to get tired. It was beautiful to see all as one, a little sample of what could be the human family united by the love of God.