

Lowell and America Callahan named 2016 America's Parents of the Year

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Washington, D.C. – The National Parents Day Coalition and the National Selection Committee named the **2016 America's Parents of the Year**, Lowell and America Callahan from Wheatland, California who were nominated by Bob and Maree Gauper from the same state.

The Callahans, who have been married for 37 years, have fostered special needs children (adopting four of them) and raised seven biological children. They are advocates for parents of children with special needs and assist Spanish-speaking families in accessing community resources and provide translation when necessary. They are devout members of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints and live their faith by caring for less fortunate people.

National Parents' Day was proclaimed as a federal national holiday in 1994, after Dr. Hak Jan Han Moon proposed its creation before the U.S. Senate one year prior. President Bill Clinton approved the House Joint Resolution 398, declaring every fourth Sunday of July as a recurring and perennial day of commemoration. The 22nd annual Parents' Day banquet, organized by the Parents Day Coalition headed by the Family Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) USA, the Universal Peace Federation (UPF) USA, the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLIC), the Women's Federation for World Peace (WFWP) USA, and The Washington Times Foundation (TWTF), was held on August 5, 2016 at the Arbor Ballroom of The Washington Times in Washington, D.C., where over 250 people gathered to honor finalists and recipients of the National Parents of the Year Award.

Awardees came from all around the nation, as far as Hawaii, and from a diverse range of religious and ethnic backgrounds. Some honorees brought their children and grandchildren, and were celebrated together, as exemplary families with parents who have demonstrated incredible sacrifice, love and virtue in raising their children and community.

"I am amazed to see such a rich array of different races and religions represented here tonight, which I did not expect and also don't see in other places," said Nabeela Ahmed, a Parents of the Year award nominee from Maryland. *"It's great that what brings everyone together and unites everyone is the common vision of family love and family values."*

The venue was beautifully decorated and provided tremendous dignity to the twelve top finalists for the National Parents of the Year, who are listed below. Nine of the couples attended the banquet.

- Pastor Mark and Edna Abernathy (Georgia)
- Lowell and America Callahan (California)
- Apostle Ralph L. Edwards and Prophetess Irene Edwards (New York)
- Kenneth and Kim Fox-Muhammad (North Carolina)
- Sen. Mike and Carol Gabbard (Hawaii)
- Daniel and Lakeisha Meadows Ivey (North Carolina)
- Pastor Bill and Faye McDonnell (Nevada)
- Bishop Alfred A., Jr. and Dr. Susie C. Owens (Washington, D.C.)
- Andrew and Rebecca Powell (West Virginia)
- Dr. John and Leah Schaut (Wisconsin)
- Andrew and Judith Ross (Illinois)
- Phengchanh and Wilaiwan Soundara (Virginia)

Mr. Larry Moffitt, Vice President of The Washington Times Foundation, emceed the program. To open the evening, Ms. Lubana Al Quntar, designated First Lady of Opera in her homeland of Syria sang the national anthem, and Barbara Moseley-Marks, Executive Director of UPF Virginia, gave a very moving invocation. A buffet dinner was then served, during which more musical selections were performed by Ms. Al Quntar.

Angelika Selle, President of WFWP USA, shared a few words recognizing the sponsoring organizations and the national selection committee for the Parents of the Year Award. Afterward, Rev. Tom Cutts, Executive Director of ACLIC, gave an overview of the history of Parents' Day.

"The Founders of our country recognized the importance of virtue," he said. "I believe that the establishment of Parents' Day takes the American experiment one step further toward the Constitutional Ideal of our Founders. Not only does society require good morality, and public virtue, but we also need true and loving parents. Today, we are celebrating more than just fatherhood and motherhood. I have heard it said that the best gift a father can give his child is to love the child's mother. So, tonight we are also celebrating husbands and wives, and healthy

marriages.”

After this message, Richard de Sena, President of UPF USA, shared a report on local Parents’ Day programs that happened across America to celebrate and express gratitude for all outstanding parents. He also gave an overview of Parents’ Day plans for the upcoming years. Several speakers gave congratulatory remarks, including FFWPU North America Continental Chairman, Dr. Ki Hoon Kim.

Tom McDevitt, Chairman of UPF USA, introduced the finalists for the 2016 National Parents of the Year award. Each couple and family was greeted onstage with rousing applause, as they receive their plaques of recognition and gifts. In response, three couples also shared brief words of gratitude to the organizers.

“What moved me most and brought me to tears were the individual stories of the awardees unique life experiences and accomplishments as told in their introductions,” said Stanley Marks.

Attendee Roberto Turconi said, “I was very inspired by the testimony of every honor recipient, about how they used their role as parents to help other less fortunate people, and how they used their time, resources and energy to build a better world.”

In addition to the Parents of the Year Award, the **Legislator Parents of the Year Award** was presented to Hon. Mike and Carol Gabbard; the **Excellence in Parenting and Community Leadership Award** was presented to Andrew and Rebecca Powell, Kenneth and Kim Fox-Muhammad, Andrew and Judith Ross, Phengchanh and Wilaiwan Soundara, David and Lakeisha Meadows-Ivey (not present), and Dr. John and Lead Schaut (not present); and the **Excellence in Parenting and Pastoral Leadership Award** was presented to Pastor Mark and First Lady Edna Abernathy, Apostle Ralph and Prophetess Irene Edwards, Bishop Alfred Owens, Jr. and Dr. Susan Owens, and Pastor Billy and Faye McDonell (not present).

“Seeing everyone’s face with either a big smile or tears of joy made all the work we did, starting from the nomination process, to the selection and finally to the awards celebration, all worth it,” said Emiljun Rapada of UPF USA. *“It was an honor to celebrate with these exemplary couples who genuinely gave and sacrifice everything for their families and community.”*

Banquet attendee, Sevil Kalayci, said, *“It was an inspiring night surrounded by wonderful people who love their families. I never knew there was a day set aside to recognize outstanding parents from around the country. It’s good to see an organization that promotes families and family values. Good parents should be recognized.”*

In closing, Dr. Michael Balcomb, President of FFWPU USA gave a dynamic call to action inviting everyone to the upcoming 40th anniversary celebration of the Washington Monument Rally (September 17 in Washington, D.C.) and Peace Road rally. Archbishop George Augustus Stallings, Jr. Co-chairman of ACLC, gave closing remarks and a prayer. He urged the audience to make America parenting again.

“Congratulations to UPF USA for an exceptionally powerful and emotionally moving evening celebrating National Parents Day,” said Jan Du Plain, a banquet attendee. *“The selection of honorees from around the nation was extraordinary, and each honoree’s story was special, inspiring us to each love more, serve more and be the best parents possible. Thank you UPF for once again being at the forefront of one of the most important movements in the world—restoring God-centered families in our society.”*