

Sun Jin Moon at Peace Starts With Me and Chicago TFV Awards Banquet

David Rendel
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For the last 24 years, a peacebuilding initiative has taken root in Chicago, where violent crime, gang activity, and racial tension has long thrived. But the city is also a wellspring of hope. The True Family Values (TFV) Awards Banquet, an interfaith and intercultural education effort founded in 1996 by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLCL), has brought together thousands of people over the years, and this year it is through a 'Peace Starts With Me' gala and concert on Saturday, October 19.



Lights dimmed in a grand ballroom at the Marriott Marquis Chicago hotel, where more than 1,300 people of various cultures and backgrounds came together to celebrate peace and reconciliation. "This gives hope," said ACLC Midwest Chairman Rev. David Rendel. "It's not just the event, it's really celebrating the work that is happening here." It's steadfast work and commitment toward peace, through individuals -- and families as the bedrock of society -- that co-sponsors Peace Starts With Me (PSWM) and Family

Federation for World Peace and Unification (FFWPU) have strived for in creating this hybrid event. "Gathering this many people together under this type of banner and purpose is proof that people care, and it's also proof that people will work together to do something about it," said FFWPU-USA President Rev. Demian Dunkley. "In Chicago, it's especially poignant because of the crime rates."



The Chicago Police Department reported more than 1,600 shootings in the city in 2018, but it hasn't deterred community members from banding together to make a difference in their areas. "Instead of protesting, we're releasing peace," said Walt Whitman, founder and director of the internationally acclaimed and award-winning Soul Children of Chicago. The talented gospel choir roused the crowd to its feet with inspiring songs and high-energy performances throughout the evening. "We're all like a family," said Naomi Gray, a member of the troupe. "We want gang violence and gun violence in Chicago to stop, but it's also about bringing all the different people together, all the races together, and uniting as one."



The TFV Awards Banquet has historically recognized many prominent peacemakers in Chicago's communities. For 2019, five award recipients were honored at the gala for their respective efforts and impact: Elder Kevin Anthony Ford of St. Paul Community Development Ministries; Dr. Wayne "Coach"

Gordon of Lawndale Community Church; Keith and Cho Sung Sook Anderson of Little Angels Ambassadors for Peace; Chaplain Helen "Queen Mother" Sinclair of Volunteer Prison Ministry; and Spencer Leak, Sr., of Nehemiah Project.



"The spirit of love, the spirit of joy, the spirit of rejuvenation, and the spirit of hope was here to remove the apathy and to say that peace begins with me," said award recipient Elder Ford. "This was very heavenly; I enjoyed it to the highest," added chaplain Helen Sinclair, another award recipient. They follow in the footsteps of other notable awardees and speakers, including TFV Awards Banquet speakers former U.S. First Lady Michelle Obama in 2003, and former U.S. President Barack Obama in 2005.

Gala keynote speaker and Senior Vice President of Women's Federation for World Peace International (WFWPI) Dr. Sun Jin Moon, who works as a peace advocate alongside her mother, FFWPU co-founder Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon, shared an inspiring message of hope from her late father, FFWPU co-founder Rev. Dr. Sun Myung Moon. "The universal truth and values in family transcend religion," said Dr. Sun Jin Moon. "This is not the 'Windy City,' it's the 'Winning City' of true love." Dr. Hak Ja Han Moon has tirelessly worked to promote peace across the U.S. and around the world, continuing her late husband's legacy, while emphasizing unity, happiness, family values, true love, and personal connection with God.



A special JAM concert concluded the evening, with musical performances from the Soul Children and Christian gospel artist Maddie Rey. "It's so important for this generation to really just receive that love and peace to overflow in them and around them," said Rey. "The energy here was just amazing, I was so honored to be here." Participants shared similar sentiments about their uplifting experience at the gala and concert. "The performances and speeches that were given were so inspiring," said participant Mary Olwalowo. "I have a lot to take back to my community and teach them what I've learned and just encourage them."