

## ACLCLos Angeles-area Interfaith Marriage Blessing Ceremony

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On Sunday, July 29, approximately \_\_\_ people attended a Los Angeles-area event celebrating marriage and the family which culminated in a Ceremony of \_\_\_ couples. The program was hosted by the American Clergy Leadership Conference (ACLCL) of Los Angeles in the Old World Village Festival Hall, an outdoor shopping center located in Huntington Beach, California.

An array of participants from the interfaith community offered their prayers and spoke about the family as God's essential foundation for growth, peace and security in the community and the world.

Bishop Dr. Angel Maria Velandia, a former bishop of the Old Catholic Confederation of California and currently pastor of Misión Cristo Rey in the city of Bellflower, opened the assembly with a heartfelt prayer. His wife, Mrs. Cecilia Velandia, followed with an equally heartfelt prayer in Spanish.



Professional singer and musician Gregg de Castro followed suit with a song he wrote about the beauty of family entitled Kolokea, while his wife, Jene'a de Castro, gracefully interpreted the song through a traditional Polynesian dance. Gregg and Jene'a founded Kamakani Komohana, a non-profit organization dedicated to promoting Polynesian culture through song and dance.

Many representatives from different faiths offered their words and traditions. Dr. Omid Khodai and Sydelle Enyeart represented the Islamic culture through a prayer and a reading from a letter entitled "Traditions in the Jewish Family," whereafter Thich An Minh lead the group in a brief Buddhist meditation session.

The Holy Marriage Blessing was officiated by ACLC Co-Chair Dr. Nicholas Benson, the senior pastor of the First Summit Evangelical Church in Pasadena, and his wife, Dr. Eva Benson. Through prayer and words of healing they officiated an anointing and blessing of marriage and family.

To conclude the ceremony, Honorable Mike Posey, mayor of Huntington Beach, presented Parent of the Year certificates to six couples, followed by a closing prayer by Bishop Gale Oliver from the Greater Light Family Church for the health and success of the families, the community and the nation.

### Reflections

"Yesterday, I attended a lovely event at Old World Village in Huntington Beach honoring couples and ordaining their marriages. The ordaining ceremony by Drs. Nicholas and Eva Benson was meaningful, sacred, and special. The emphasis they placed on marriage and the family was inspiring and comforting. Speakers from several different faiths shared their experiences and wisdom. Their sincerity and their success with "raising families unto God" gave me hope for the country. We so desperately need to support one another as we try to save our country from the influences of evil all around us." –Mrs. Janet Garrick, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints

"I was very much moved by the different versions of what family means to people. Although each presenter had a different take based on their religious background, the basics were the same. Faith is an integral part of success. Family is the most important aspect of life. Building a successful family is the number one priority. Without love it just can't be done. It was a beautiful event of singing, dancing and testimonies. The Marriage Blessing Ceremony was very moving." –Mrs. Emma Reed, Women's Federation for World Peace Los Angeles Coordinator

"I was deeply moved and inspired by the Interfaith Family Celebration and Holy Blessing event in Huntington Beach. I felt that it was a multilayered event. It reminded me of the Interreligious Association for Peace and Development inauguration that was held in Seoul recently. It was truly amazing to see religious leaders and government officials coming together in one accord to celebrate God and family. The Holy Blessing was received in a solemn and powerful ceremony that truly embraced everyone in attendance. We had spirit-filled presentations based on strengthening the family, building the family, and peace in the family. I truly felt God's presence." –Rev. Michael Dickerson, ACLC Executive Director, San Diego

"We had an inspiring experience at the Marriage Blessing and Celebration of Marriage and Families in Huntington Beach. People from a variety of faith backgrounds spoke: Jewish, Buddhist, Christian, Latter-Day Saints, and Muslim. The Hawaiian music and dance were well done and appropriate for the occasion. Each speaker addressed a different facet of marriage and family. I especially like what the Buddhist monk had to say about breathing being so fundamental to who we are, and how we respond to our circumstances – when we control our breathing, we can properly manage our surroundings. That lesson doesn't speak directly to marriage and family, other than being a practical lesson in dealing with occasional frustration or anger." –Keith and Katrin McCarthy, Los Angeles Family Church

