

UPF Moscow, Russia: 2019 Mr. and Ms. University Contestants & World Interfaith

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Moscow, Russia -- Contestants of the 2019 Mister and Miss University beauty pageant learned about a variety of faith traditions during World Interfaith Harmony Week.

Together with members of the youth organization Collegiate Association for the Research of Principles (CARP), which is affiliated with UPF, and volunteers of the charity foundation In the Name of Peace, the pageant participants visited a number of houses of worship in Moscow.

The program "Steps toward a Conflict-Free World" was very rich and diverse. Every day the participants learned something new about the history and culture of different nations.

The program began on February 3, when the group visited the Martha and Mary Convent, which is connected to the Russian Orthodox Church, and participated in a volunteer project called Traditional Lunch.

Margarita Bavrina, a Mister and Miss University pageant contestant, wrote about the convent: "This is an extraordinary place full of compassion, mercy and kindness. These feelings penetrate one's soul and leave a noticeable trace there. I am extremely grateful for the opportunity to visit this place and learn about the life course of the monastery's founder [Grand Duchess Elizabeth Feodorovna]. The extraordinary atmosphere and the people who work there for the benefit of others inspire everyone with their high inner spirit."

On February 4, the group visited the Jewish Museum and Tolerance Center.

Veronika Zalivakha, a CARP member, wrote: "In the museum we were told about the Jewish history; we were introduced to their traditions and their way of life. I was amazed by the quite modern exhibition with numerous interactive tablets and stands, with which it was possible to individually get acquainted with the

information. We were very interested!"

On February 5, the participants visited the Moscow Cathedral Mosque.

Natalia Lopatyuk, a Mister and Miss University contestant, wrote: "The mosque is striking in its scale. I was shocked by its beauty. Numerous patterns in the Muslim style looked amazing. The guide introduced us to the history of the mosque, which is central in Moscow and one of the largest in Russia and Europe."



On February 7, the group visited the Armenian Cathedral of the Lord's Transfiguration.

Martynas Olyaka, a CARP volunteer, wrote: "I have always been interested in different religions, their distinctive features, and also how they are similar to each other.

"It was interesting to listen to a lecture on the history of Christianity in Armenia, as well as to learn the basic tenets of their faith. I liked that, on the whole, Armenian Christians traditionally respect other religions. I would also like to note the beauty of the museum itself on the territory of the temple complex; the museum houses rare exhibits describing the history and culture of Armenia.

"A cheerful and friendly guide, Artyom, gave us a very informative tour. Many thanks to all the participants and organizers of this event!"

On February 8, the group visited the Hillel Jewish Youth Center and observed the Jewish Sabbath. Margarita Bavrina, a Mister and Miss University contestant, wrote: "Shabbat. Before I came to this holiday, I did not know about it. It was very interesting to get acquainted with the customs and traditions of the Jewish holiday and to plunge into this atmosphere. I haven't met such kind and very cheerful people for a long time: We sang songs, participated in the quest, shared bread – in general, we enjoyed a great evening! I hope we will visit Hillel again and again."

The World Interfaith Harmony Week program ended on February 10 with a roundtable on "The Role of Youth in Building a Conflict-Free World," in which students in the cities of St. Petersburg, Ufa and Minsk also took part by Internet. The participants of the roundtable expressed different opinions about the significance of religion in the world, what it promotes, and what it gives to people. One of the conclusions was: "Religion teaches peace and unites people, friends, and family."

The roundtable was attended by experts who offered their understanding of the role of religion in human life and in the world. These were the Buddhist priest Sanal Sanjay and Mufazal Hossain Rumon, the coordinator of International Volunteer Programs of the Religious Youth Service (RYS), a UPF initiative.

Elena Knyazeva, director of the Mister and Miss University pageant, gave a presentation about volunteer projects that are planned for the current year.