

Week of Spirituality 2009 Report

“Honoring the Spirit of the United Nations: Global Peace through Reconciliation” the title of the 2009 Week of Spirituality initiated by the Committee Spirituality, Values and Global Concerns enjoyed many new and expanded elements. In its third year, the series of programs which took place from October 26-30th, overcame several hurdles as well, especially in the scramble to find venues as the UN renovations continue. Nevertheless, each program had its particular strength of focus and each provided poignant expression of our common purpose.

This year’s programming honored the 2009 International Year of Reconciliation, the 2009 International Year of Human Rights Learning, and the Decade of a Culture of Peace & Non-Violence for the children of the World (2001-2010). New co- sponsors joined in support of the Week both within UN Agencies and NGO Committees in consultative relationship with the United Nations (CONGO Committees,) UN Staff Recreation Clubs, and NGO Caucuses including the NGO Alliance on Crime Prevention and Criminal Justice, NGO Committee on Human Rights, NGO Committee for Social Development, NGO Committee on Sports, NGO Committee on the UN International Decade of the World’s Indigenous Peoples, NGO Committee on HIV/AIDS, Committees of the Conference of NGO’s in Consultative Relationship with the United Nations (CONGO), UNSRC – Enlightenment Society (SEAT), UNSRC – Feng Shui Group and Friendship Club, UN Women’s Guild, United Religions Initiative at the UN (URI-UN), Spiritual Caucus and Values Caucus.

The Award Ceremony, a core component to the Opening Day of the weeklong program, was expanded to include not only an outstanding Ambassador or Official in the U N system, but also exemplar persons both in a UN staff position and in the NGO community who have demonstrated that service which is hallmark to those spiritual principles upon which the UN was founded and which will ensure its future. Careful consideration as to the norms upon which an awardee will be chosen was formalized this year Ichinori Tsumagari & Diane Williams, Co-Chaired the Spirit of the UN Award Task Force.

Those chosen were H.E. Ambassador Augustine P. Mahiga from Tanzania and Dr. Monica Sharma, Leadership Director within OHRLLC. The NGO award, designated this year for the first time was shared this year between Monica Willard and Deborah Moldow. All Awardees embody great gifts in global reconciliation, in pursuit of peace building.

The series of programs that took place during the week involved inter-cooperation among the eleven Working Groups, along with sustained meditation opportunities. New approaches to programming also occurred. For example, the Culture of Peace Working Group (CofP WG), instead of hosting a speaking event, wanted to listen. Thus they designed and administered a "culture of peace" consciousness-raising questionnaire to explore the concept of "Global Peace Through Reconciliation." Led by CofP WG co-chairs, Iris Spellings and Anne Creter, with

input from a large group of CSVGC-NY members and friends, the intent of this instrument was not only to assess the opinions of participants but to inform and inspire thought that might advance the CofP WG's on-going project at the United Nations (in alignment with the Global Alliance for Ministries and Departments of Peace), which is to promote the creation of governmental peace infrastructures. They distributed their questionnaire during every program throughout the week and were elated with the high rate of return. Their work was in honor of the powerful support they received from former H. E. Ambassador Anwarul Chowdhury, who could not be with them during this occasion.

The Spirit of the UN initiative opened in the UN Meditation Room to ground the week in spiritual energy. Later, a circle was formed on the plaza of the United Nations where the group reflected upon the meaning of The Spirit of the UN. In Georgi Gala's words, "Beyond the glimmering Chagall stain glass window at the United Nations many of our group entered into sacred space in a very majestic and calming meditation on the morning of October 26 opening the events of Week of Spirituality 2009. Carving out a special corner outside the UN, our gathering was delighted to hold visions and hands, connecting with each other in a circle to inaugurate the UN Spirit Award ceremony. With clear sun streaming down and setting the mood for clarity and shining hope, Noemi asked the meaningful question, 'What does the Spirit of the UN mean to you?' "

Some reflections included, "The UN is a House of Humanity, the hope of humanity to aspire to a type of world with peace at the core. As Dag Hammarskjold noted, "May I grow quieter, stiller, warmer, braver, a warrior of peace." Others offered "...universal spirit beyond borders, cultures, wars....the temple of humanity, all things sacred and true,....working together for a culture of peace To create a better future for our world...impulse by the founders to come together beyond boundaries as one being-something higher, a spiritual mission.... doing something that leads to something bigger-that changes inside each individual, then out into the world... even as a child not knowing about politics and democracy, war was a threat --to all humanity and I wondered why-- when will we ever learn to co join in peace? this is our opportunity to make a difference-- one+one"

Three groups collaborated in developing the first day's program, "Reconciliation: A Manifestation of the Science of Consciousness and Its Impact in Day-to-Day Life. The Working Groups Science and Consciousness, Transcendental Arts, and Values and Business offered a video presentation followed by reflections and a Q&A providing much food for thought and clarity of principle with regard to which spiritual principles can make a difference with respect to reconciliation. The program was co-moderated by Ida Urso and Sharon Hamilton.

On Tuesday, The Eco-spirituality Working Group developed a program in collaboration with the Spiritual History of the UN and the Women's Rising Groups that drew over 70 participants who listened to Michelle Kim's elegant portrayal about the meaning of eco-spirituality. The Women Rising WG created an eco-spirituality ritual, while Tom Downes of the History of Spirituality welcomed participants and Deborah Moldow moderated a

panel that included a breadth of spiritual traditions. They shared their perspectives on ancient sources for eco-spirituality. Storyteller Therese Plair and Indian Traditional dancer Radha Devi Dasi gave extraordinary expression to Eco-spirituality as embodied in religious traditions.

The Spiritual Caucus meditation, facilitated by Frances Edwards of Findhorn and Martha Gallahue, provided spiritual refreshment on Wednesday at mid-point of the busy week. In the evening, the Campus Peace Center program held at Pace University and conducted by students and professors from Brandeis, Wisconsin, Pace, Vassar, Palestine, etc., affirmed that the peace movement is alive and well on campus, only it is truly non-violent and strategic in its process. The program, organized by Hanako Ikeno with Deborah Moldow and Neil Altman of the Campus Student Peace Center Working Group, helped us to appreciate the organizational savvy of today's college students. Time and time again participants reminded us that reconciliation is a cornerstone for peace. Courageous panelists and audience members who had been victims of violence themselves and are daily challenged to practice forgiveness shared their stories and the young musician was right on target in setting the tone for the evening.

The Thursday morning program, offered by the Spiritual Council was co-moderated by Audrey Kitagawa, Diane Williams and Bernice Cousin. The Spiritual Council facilitated a heartfelt dialogue about bringing reconciliation to the UN. During this program, a number of participants signed on to continue the dialogue into the future.

On Thursday afternoon, the Universal Ethics Working Group, co-moderated by Genie Kagawa, Martha Gallahue and Robert Reiser, Story Bowl Coordinator, broke new ground by holding its program at the Nigerian Mission where Minister Lawrence Obisakin represented the Nigerian Mission who co-sponsored the program. He joined with storytellers Laura Simms, and Sheku Monserray of Sierra Leone who were accompanied by celtic harpist Julie Haines and flutist Eileen Ains to present a Story Bowl Concert. The universal ethic that the program was built upon was empathy, described as both a skill and a tool for effective frameworks for action. In addition, the Story Bowl launched its initiative to raise one million dollars to combat hunger.

On Friday, The Health and Transformation Working Group led by Dr Ani Kalayjian and Georgina Galanis brought together powerful and integrated resources uniting science and spirituality to demonstrate the healing effects of inner peace, forgiveness and non-violence upon the body, mind spirit; featuring Karen Trueheart and Duke Duscherer of MK Gandhi Institute, Anne Mincey of the HeartMath Institute, the Dialogue Project and Raccoon conflict resolution groups.

And finally, in the afternoon our Closing event, co-moderated by Sharon Hamilton and Ani Kalayjian, featured Brahma on the exotic sitar and a talented and energetic New Jersey children's dancing troupe Starlite Kids trained by Julie Lira. Audrey Kitagawa, Chair of the CSVGC and this year's Task Force, brought the week to a close with an ancient powerful invocation deeply appreciated by the participants. By week's end, The Culture of Peace Working Group distributed over 400 questionnaires with several groups promising to distribute them more widely in their circles.

For the record, The Spirit of the UN 2009 attracted more participants who came to the programs on a daily basis. The programming involved more groups whose work extends beyond the official United Nations but whose efforts are directed toward the realization of the principles of it. About 400 persons participated in the programs. The promotional materials, flyers and programs, reflected a professional level of contribution to the week's success, while donations including the awards, flowers and cake illustrated the wide support of ever greater numbers of people seeking to be part of this event.

Special thanks go to Rabbi Roger Ross, Ichinori Tsumagari, Audrey Kitagawa, Anne Creter, Genie Kagawa and others who made special contributions. We are grateful to our volunteers, Zemoria Brandon, Irena Delahunty, Reverend Mary-Rose, "janini" Engle, Carolyn DeVito, Estella Harris, Reverend Julie Lira, Reverend Dana Mark, Carol Polcover, William Porter, Martha Shoup, And Danni Scher guided by Sharon Hamilton who prepared them for their service throughout the week.

Everyday, there was either music, dancing, videos, or storytelling that provided holistic portrayals of Global Peace through Reconciliation. We are especially grateful to Dr. Monica Sharma for her Leadership Training which inspired a more coherent and principled series built upon the norms of compassion, equanimity, forgiveness and empathy as the shared tools we would demonstrate during our programs. She encouraged a greater degree of collaboration among the working groups with programs that would inspire follow-up from year to year. Each group succeeded at embodying those norms and values in unique ways..

And always, we acknowledge Danilo and Adriana Parmegiani with the Legion of Good Will, for providing through their pictures and expert camera work a remarkable portrayal of the week's events. . This year's video promises to be stunning if they capture one-tenth of the thoughtful determined programming. We extend our gratitude to the Church Center of the United Nations, the Nigerian Mission and Open Center NYC and their staff for the venues. Together, we will continue to raise up our Week of Spirituality initiative. Together we will demonstrate our steadfast purpose to one day see it incorporated into the official UN calendar.

Martha Gallahue, Program Coordinator in collaboration with Working Group Chairs and Program Developers.