



THE RELIGIOUS FREEDOM & HUMAN DIGNITY INITIATIVE

BYU-HAWAII

CONFERENCE REPORT

ICLRS: 2024 RELIGIOUS FREEDOM ANNUAL REVIEW: BECOMING PEACEMAKERS THROUGH SUPPORTING RELIGIOUS FREEDOM AND PLURALISM

JUNE 18 - 22, 2024

Provo, Utah

Introduction:

This year's Religious Freedom Annual Review focused on the theme of "Becoming Peacemakers through Supporting Religious Freedom and Pluralism." The sessions emphasized the critical role of pluralism in fostering peace across governmental, religious, and social landscapes. Discussions highlighted how understanding and embracing differences can pave the way for unity.

Key sessions included a panel moderated by Bob Roberts Jr., featuring insights from religious leaders like Johnathan Ammons, Kevin C. Brown, and Micah Fries, who shared their experiences on practical peacemaking within their communities. Speakers from Southern Virginia University showcased their curriculum dedicated to civility and peacebuilding, inspired by President Russell M. Nelson's call to cultivate peacemakers.

The conference also explored legal developments affecting religious autonomy, celebrating the 30th anniversary of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). Other highlights included interfaith dialogues that promoted collaboration among future leaders, sessions on addressing societal polarization with skills from organizations like "Braver Angels," and discussions on building religious pluralism in the workplace.

Overall, the conference underscored the importance of dialogue, empathy, and inclusive practices to create a more peaceful and harmonious society.

Student and Fellows Experiences:

John Andrew Quizana

As a freshman at Brigham Young University-Hawaii, I am deeply honored to participate in this year's annual review on religious freedom, which focuses on understanding peacemaking. While I have attended significant conferences before, this one stands out as particularly impactful. It has afforded me the opportunity to share my insights and contribute to a meaningful cause.

One of the highlights of the conference for me was collaborating with law students. I was truly impressed by their professionalism in handling challenging scenarios and their adept organization of the event. Witnessing their dedication and sense of responsibility was inspiring. Engaging with them also provided me valuable insights into academic paths and the career opportunities associated with participating in such conferences.

I was truly impressed by the respect shown to religious delegates, who were given ample opportunity to share their perspectives on religious freedom. Imam Mohamad Arafat, one of the speakers, began the conference with a heartfelt prayer, setting a profound tone for the event. Witnessing such a dedicated space for the exercise of religious freedom was a remarkable experience.

Imam Arafat, who also has a passion for photography, graciously allowed me to capture moments of him using his own phone. In our conversations, he expressed admiration for BYU's remarkable efforts in addressing issues of religious freedom. He highlighted how BYU has made significant contributions to this cause, surpassing those of many other institutions.

Additionally, I was able to talk with Gordon Larsen, Senior Advisor for Federal Affairs, office of Utah Governor Spencer Cox. Gordon talked about how the National Governors Association of the US reaches out to people and uses social media to promote their platform. He also emphasized the importance of avoiding disagreements despite the polarization and differences in perspectives. I personally talked with him about the significance of campaign commercials in US politics. He told me to send him an email to address my thoughts so that he can connect me with some social media managers working with the government and do some studies with them. I am planning to reach out to them this summer so that I can start a new project on commercials in government studies.

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me to send him an email to address my thoughts so that he can connect me with some social media managers working with the government and do some studies with them. I am planning to reach out to them this summer so that I can start a new project on commercials in government studies.

This experience will truly impact my understanding not only of politics but religion as well. I am more excited to participate in more activities that discuss certain issues and also comprehend how I could contribute to a change.

Johann Faana-Kong

The religious freedom annual review conference was an amazing experience full of learning. I have learned a lot about religious freedom and I think it was very important to me to see that people from different religious beliefs really care about religious freedom. At the beginning of the trip, I really thought that religious freedom was more of theory instead of practice, and that people would only speak about it, but there were no actions to make a difference. All of the sessions that I have attended, especially the one on Dignity index and Braver Angels have completely changed my perspective on religious freedom. The first one I attended was the Dignity Index session. The session really inspired me because it opened my understanding to religious freedom. Religious freedom is actually an umbrella that covers different topics, including dignity, human rights, equality, and so on. The first speaker talked about how her family is polarized with different political views. During Thanksgiving dinner or Christmas dinner, they have many conflicts when they debate on politics. However, as they started implementing the Dignity Index, they were able to see dignity in others, building peace in the family. In the second session with Braver Angels, I also realized that people get involved by organizing events such as workshops where they can teach others to be open minded and adopt an open discourse towards different viewpoints. I really felt that Tami Pyfer and Casey Jorgenson should be invited to further conference events at BYU-Hawaii. I really enjoyed watching their role play. To illustrate their principle, they invited one person to come to the front and start an argument on political views with somebody else. As they started arguing, they were invited to implement the LAPP skills. It was very interesting to see it in action.

During the conference, I felt that it was hard to get to know the delegates because it was a one-day conference and the schedule with our assignments was pretty full. I did not take any pictures with the delegates that I have talked to but I was able to connect with some of them. I think that a one-day conference does not really help building a genuine connection with delegates because everything seems to be in a rush. I think that if we had more time to get to know people, it would be more impactful. However, I was able to talk to some people, including Bill Benac. I shared my conversion story and we talked about his career path. I was very inspired because he earned an MBA and JD degrees. It was really inspiring to talk to him because I am really interested in doing an MBA at BYU. In addition, this trip has opened my curiosity on Law School. I really thought that I was not

made to study law. However, after networking with people who have earned a JD degree and with the law students, I think that Law is fascinating and I have become interested in studying law. The people I have networked with the best during the trip were the law students. I really felt comfortable talking to them and asking them questions. At the beginning of the trip, I really thought that it was going to be difficult to talk to the law students because they may feel entitled. However, I realized that I was totally wrong and I think it was very easy to talk and get to know them. One of the best people that I have networked with is Dallin, a law student. I became really good friends with him and he invited me to hike the Y with him. While we were on the hike, and when we were on airport runs, we had really interesting and deep conversations about politics in the world. I was also able to ask many questions that I had in law school, such as how the classes are. I really learned a lot from him. He really inspired me, and I feel interested in studying law. I really felt that I have learned a lot from the law students and interns at BYU. I felt really blessed to get to know them.

My last experience from the trip happened during our lunch in the church office building. I was randomly approached by a person who introduced himself. I was surprised because I talked to John Lidang's former internship manager. I really thought that I was meant to meet him because he was the only delegate/manager who approached me throughout the whole conference. Most of the time, I was the one who had to approach people. However, he came to me and started talking. I was very pleased to get to know him especially because I was very interested in doing an internship within the church office. I remember that John did his internship for the church and I was trying to find a contact in the office. His name is Kyler Mecham. He shared with me that he really enjoyed having John in his office as an intern. I ended up sharing with him that I was interested in doing an internship with the church related to international affairs/relations. He then directed me to his manager and told me that his boss was the one over international affairs for the church and that if I wanted to find an internship, he would be the best one to reach out to. I was able to get his name and will email him later on.

Overall, I really enjoyed this conference and learned a lot from it. I really think that it is a good thing for BYU-Hawaii students to explore abroad, get to know other students, such as law students, to inspire them. I really think that sometimes, we need to be in-person to feel that we are being called to do something. I really think that it is important to network with delegates, but I have realized that it is also important to network with other students because they are the future generation, and the future leaders of the country. I am beyond grateful for our donors and the opportunity they offer BYU-Hawaii students to go on this trip and learn a lot. It really opens horizons. It helped me to see what I want to do as my graduation quickly approaches.

Rina Hirano

Firstly, I couldn't believe that I was chosen, and I feel very honored. Since I am a marketing major and have never studied political science or law, writing a case brief was a first for me. I was very anxious about keeping up with the discussions because I was not confident in my English skills. It was also my first time visiting the mainland, making me the first in my family to do so.

When I arrived in Provo, I met law students. Most of them were Caucasian and seemed very intelligent, so I was initially hesitant to talk to them as an Asian because I had a little prejudice that Caucasians might have pride. However, as we prepared for the conference and worked together, I became friends with everyone. They were all very kind and friendly, and by the time we parted ways, I almost cried because I was so sad to leave. I learned much from them about graduate school life and living in Provo. They study for exams for ten hours a day every two weeks and talk about their careers. They are truly hardworking, and it made me realize that I need to work harder too.

I had seen the list of speakers at the conference beforehand, and their impressive backgrounds and experiences surprised me. When I met the participants, they all greeted me with smiles and were very polite. The night before the conference, I had dinner with one of the participants who could speak Korean, which I also speak, so we had a great time talking. I was also able to discuss business and social media with other participants so I was glad that I could follow what they were saying.

On the day of the conference, one participant asked me to tell them about myself, and I realized that my elevator pitch would be useful here. I successfully introduced myself, and many people complimented my English skills, which made me very happy. During the sessions, I learned a lot, especially from Gordon Larsen, promoting the "Disagree Better" project. As a marketing major, I found it insightful to learn that using government leaders involved in the project in commercials can generate more buzz than hiring extras or unknown actors. In the afternoon session, I watched a detailed presentation with concrete examples of "Disagree Better." I learned that disagreements can happen anywhere, but that doesn't justify blaming others.

I met Sister Bonnie H. Cordon, in the bathroom and talked about Japan and how my mother is a fan of theirs. They were very approachable yet had an incredible presence. I got autographs and messages from Camille N. Johnson and took photos with her. I also got photos and autographs from many other people.

Timothy Samad

Joining the Religious Freedom Annual Review at BYU Provo was an amazing experience. Religious leaders from different states, religions, and perspectives gave interesting insights. From the first day I got the invitation to join this conference, I felt the excitement and logistics preparedness from the BYU-Hawaii team was very professional. The trip leaders, faculty members, and students were cooperative and ensured the success of the departure to the conference. Arriving at Provo with one of our faculty members from BYU-H (Aaron Shumway) was very helpful and inspiring. We got to

learn what the expectations of the conference were, what we needed to do, and how to get the most out of the conference.

Prior to the conference day, we were assigned to different logistical tasks. I was assigned as an airport presenter, and I met with the conference speakers as they arrived at the SLC airport. As soon as they arrived, I was tasked to help and direct them to the pickup lobby where the driver and the companion could drive them to Provo. It was great learning for me because, from the speaker's point of view, coming to a different state and having someone at the airport to greet and pick them up builds comfort and professionalism. It sets the tone of the conference. Alongside our assignment, the volunteers were fortunate to talk and have dinner with the speakers the day before the conference. I was able to sit beside Imam Mohamad Bashar Arafat. It was a humbling and wonderful experience for me to meet with him and learn from him. Even though I'm only a student, Imam Arafat speaks with me respectfully, and we have a great conversation. The Imam asked for my phone number and connected with me. We became good friends later throughout the conference.

On the day of the conference, we were given various tasks and assigned sessions that we needed to attend. I was fortunate to attend several sessions, including Rising Generation on Religious pluralism by President Bonnie H. Cordon. The session talks about how Southern Virginia University focuses on interfaith and religious pluralism as part of the framework of their institutions. They include religious education as part of their curriculum and one of the main frameworks for the university. I learned how vital it is for many higher education to focus on religion in their universities. This could help students to understand and engage in religious activity. On the same topic on Rising Generation, I also attended a session by Noah Silverman, the VP of interfaith America and the director of Wheately Institute from BYU Provo. They talked on the importance of collaborations between interfaith organizations in the US with Religious higher education programs in the US. This points in the same direction as President Cordon's vision in helping the rising generation to engage and participate in Religious activities. Another specific session I was assigned was Religious Freedom and Pluralism in Businesses. Another interfaith organization speaks about the importance of religious pluralism in companies/corporations. They show how religious activities and consultation can help employees understand the different beliefs and backgrounds of their clients. The employees need to be in harmony with their co-workers and their religions as well.

I also attended general sessions that I think were also helpful and had wonderful insights. These are the key takeaways in terms of sessions at the conference.

1. The rising generation is increasingly less engaged with religion. It's crucial to help young people understand and appreciate diverse beliefs for the future of religion.
2. The power of "and" – We don't always have to choose between two options. Collaborating and using "and" allows us to incorporate different beliefs.
3. Higher education and interfaith initiatives worldwide need to collaborate to create frameworks that help students understand diverse religious beliefs, fostering religious pluralism.

Closing to the end of the conference, we went to the church welfare and the general conference building in Salt Lake. Coming there was a dream for me; growing up in Indonesia, I've always wanted to visit the conference center. As we entered the conference center, we were greeted by

wonderful tour guides, and we got to listen to one of the Tabernacle choir organists play. It was an amazing experience, as the guests and the speakers enjoyed it.

Throughout the conference, during lunch and dinner. I always try to sit beside different speakers and the guests at the conference. I was amazed by their stories and insights. I was able to connect and network with them. I learned that it's important to connect with them for future opportunities.

Looking back on the conference, I have a great idea of how to run, lead, and help a religious freedom conference like this in BYU-Hawaii. I am confident that BYU-Hawaii can host this conference for our focused area delegates.

Pimwara Hootini

Being selected to participate in the Religious Freedom Annual Review has been a privilege to learn and serve people with similar values and beliefs. Before the conference, I had numerous questions, ranging from broad topics like the importance of religious freedom and its relationship with the law to personal doubts like whether I could balance studying law with my personal aspirations. Each session, discussion, and interaction answered all my questions and affirmed that going to law school is what I should do post-graduation.

Two days before the conference, we dedicated most of our time to planning and coordinating airport pickups for speakers and delegates. During one of these airport runs, I had the opportunity to have a brief conversation with Imman Arafat. He shared details about his work. I reciprocated by discussing my experience at a similar conference, Dare to Overcome, which focuses on religious freedom and took place last year in Washington, DC. While in DC, I assisted a blind Muslim US diplomat who turned out to be a close friend of Imman Arafat. This connection sparked a meaningful interaction between us.

In addition to a conversation with Imam Arafat, I had the opportunity to listen to Dave Gibbons, the author of "The Shape of My Eyes: A Memoir on Race, Faith, and Finding Myself." During his talk, he mentioned that he lived in Thailand for a little over a year. Afterward, I approached him and had a great conversation about teaching Thai people about Jesus Christ. It turned out he knew a Thai musician who was a good friend of my family.

Meeting professionals in the fields of religious freedom and human dignity, such as Josh McDaniel and Blaine H. Evanson, significantly expanded my understanding of the legal aspects of matters like religious freedom. Both were speakers in the sessions I was assigned to report on. Professor McDaniel kindly offered to email me his talk summary after I expressed my concern about not fully understanding many of the legal terms he used. We exchanged contact information and discussed law and church matters further. They also provided valuable advice on preparing for law school. Josh McDaniel is the first church member of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints who gets to work as a professor at Harvard University. Through our brief interaction together, he inspired me to work harder and plan more effectively to achieve my goal of attending law school.

This conference provided numerous networking opportunities, which led to valuable mentorships with law students Elena Balkova and Dallin Everton, who had just completed their 1L year. Elena, originally from Russia, shared excellent tips for succeeding in law school as an international student. She aspires to practice international and immigration law in the future. Working together during the conference, we developed a strong friendship that continues beyond the event. Dallin used his downtime during the conference preparation to give us a tour of the BYU campus and BYU Law, and he also offered to mentor me as I prepare my law school applications. I appreciate their help and their willingness to go above and beyond to support my academic journey.

Vilai 'Ilohahia

The Religious Freedom Annual Review conference has given me a whole new perspective on understanding the concept of pluralism rather than religious tolerance. I enjoyed hearing what speakers had to say about integrating a foundation of interfaith relationships with each other to build a safe environment for religions alive in any community. Micah Fries, an evangelical pastor, told a story of the Imam in his local neighborhood and how the Muslim mosque was burnt down by a white supremacist. Before Micah arrived at the scene to offer assistance to the Imam, the Imam had already received the keys from another local pastor, allowing the Imam to use his church for as long as he needed to worship while he waited on the reconstruction of the mosque. Micah's remarks to the story is that "there should be a little less emphasis on advocacy, and more emphasis on friendships." This story inspired me to look at helping religious pluralism at a community level. I also had the privilege to meet Kevin C. Brown, who gave an inspirational answer to the question that I had asked the panel: How can we teach the youth and younger generations the importance of pluralism and religion? He said that "we do not convert to preach, but we preach because we are converted." On one of my duties as a volunteer in running airport runs I met Mrs. Jean Darlae Yim. In the orientation we were told not to proselytize but Mrs. Jean's curiosity on the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, gave me an opportunity to share my testimony of my faith with her and my fellow volunteers. It was enlightening to learn and relive through the eyes of someone outside of my faith.

This experience was especially enjoyable with the companionship and friendships of the BYU Provo students who made the experience of the conference heartwarming and fun to attend. It is important to look past religious tolerance and move towards religious pluralism where we help each other as a community. "Friendships need to be less transactional and more relational."- Kevin. C Brown

Oftentimes when we meet new people, we are often interested in what benefits the relationship will have for both parties. This can be seen as a transactional way for people to be invested in each other. We also see this in the interactions of an individual with members of an organization. As Kevin C. Brown brought up as a point to helping people understand the concept of religious pluralism and human dignity and the value thereof, he says that in order to build relationships, there has to be less

focus on the transactional aspect of it and more. I think that in a world where people have taken advocacy upon themselves and infringed on their own dignity over the value of other individuals, it is important that rather than to have tolerance, we must have an understanding of our relationships as a people. This is not an easy task but it does have hope for a more unified world that can share the human values of human dignity.

Conference Schedule

Thursday, June 20, 2024

8:30 A.M. – 5:00 PM

Registration

BYU Conference Center

9:00 – 9:15 AM

AM Welcome

9:15 – 10:15 AM

General Discussion Session:

- Understanding the Climate for Religious Freedom and Pluralism

CHOICE OF BREAKOUT SESSIONS

10:30 – 11:30 AM

Breakout Sessions

- Practical Peacemakers
- Rising Generation—Peacemaking and Civility
- CLE—Church Autonomy and Free Exercise Developments in State and Lower Federal Courts

11:45– 12:45 PM

Breakout Sessions

- Practical Peacemakers—National Governors’ Association “Disagree Better” Campaign
- Peacemaking through Interfaith Engagement
CLE—Religious Freedom Restoration Act
- Rising Generation— “Peacemakers through Pluralism: Equipping the Rising Generation”

2:00 – 3:00 PM

General Session

- Finding Shared Solutions and Creating a More Peaceful Future

3:00 – 4:00 PM

Breakout Sessions

- Practical Peacemakers—Disagree Better Online Curriculum for Families
- Rising Generation—BYU-Fuller Theological Seminary
- CLE—Religious Freedom and the Administrative State
Lessons from Business in Building Religious Pluralism
CLE—Civility-Dignity Index

4:15 – 5:15 PM

General Discussion Session

- Peacemaking and Religious Pluralism in Politics

5:15 – 5:30 PM

Closing Remarks

Summary Reports

Breakout Session: Becoming Peacemakers Through Supporting Religious Freedom and Pluralism

Introduction:

This year's annual review discussions emphasize the principle of becoming peacemakers. Discussions in all sessions revolved around pluralism in areas of government and religion, how pluralism is effective peacemaking, and how understanding pluralism can pave the way to unifying people through differences.

Brett G. Scharffs: *International Center for Law and Religious Studies*

Brett Scharffs, director of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies, opens by welcoming all the attendants at the Annual Review conference. Scharffs points out the purpose of the International Center for Law and Religion Studies and the significance of the Annual Review. The significance of hosting such a conference is to first and foremost help secure religious freedom and the exercise of religion everywhere. Furthermore, to become a peacemaker. Scharffs goes on to say the ideas that animate this work are; ensuring religious freedom for all, being the best of our faith, human dignity for everyone everywhere, the principle of acknowledging pluralism, and becoming a peacemaker. Scharffs adds on to say that the key to overcoming contention is understanding that we are all children of God. In continuing the welcome address, Brett Scharffs introduces the president of Brigham Young University Provo, President Shane Reese.

President Shane Reese: *President of BYU*

As a welcoming note, President Reese acknowledges the purpose of the conference and how this conference is centered on becoming peacemakers through pluralism. Reese refers to the General Conference talk given by President Nelson of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints *Becoming a Peacemaker*. President Reese highlights the important themes brought about in this talk and how becoming peacemakers is to be drawn together by common purpose. He highlights how in this day and age the world desires more monologue rather than dialogue. Reese notes this to be the problem and why this conference is impactful by bringing together leaders and groups of different

faiths and beliefs to have a common dialogue and to leave with a commitment to act. “Religious Freedom is a human good and it belongs to believers and non-believers.”

Understanding the Climate of Religion Freedom and Pluralism

Ryan P. Burge: *Assistant Professor at Eastern Illinois University, American Political Scientist and Statistician, Baptist Pastor*

As a statistician, Professor Burge, engages the audience and participants of the conference with the question. “Do you like statistics?” His presentation represents the statistics of religions and religious populations in the United States. His focus on these statistics was to compare and address the politics that shape the world of religion and how there is an upset to the balance between liberals and democrats, where one political party dominates the conversation of religion. Burge says that this has a causal effect on the long term run of things. Because there is a dominant party of liberalism controlling religion, it often involves a cancel culture that this generation is often accused of, that is a lack of dialogue. He says that because of this, there is no middle ground, which becomes bad for the country, democracy and religious freedom. “America is better when there is religious secularism.” He points out in one of his graphs the statistics of church attendance between devout catholics and catholics of younger generation as an example, he notes and emphasizes that the gap between them is getting larger, highlighting the effects of his theory and argument on liberalism.

Burge offers four suggestions that would have an inclusive effect on the issue of one party dominating the conversation and can reduce prejudice between majority and minority group members. First, an equal status among inter-faith group members. Second, common goals that highlight interdependence. Third, focus on cooperation, not competition. Fourth, gaining the support of authority and the law. Burge concludes by bringing up the Equality Act and continues to add how this is an act that limits the freedom of religion, “how much freedom does religion have under this act?”

Question: How can churches be more politically moderate?

Due to time constraints on the plenary session, Ryan Burge answered by saying that churches need to be ok with cultivating this discussion, opening the floor up and working towards an understanding. He concludes by saying that this is the best time to be alive and the best time of our lives where we enjoy these freedoms that we do, and we have a charge to protect and secure these freedoms we enjoy.

Peacemaking Through intra-Faith Engagement

Bob Roberts Jr: *Moderator, Institute of Global Engagement*

Introduction:

This breakout session on practical peacemakers, it focused on the different perspectives of Johnathan Ammons (The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints) , Kevin C. Brown (The perfecting Church), and Micah Fries (Multi-Faith Neighbors Network) on the significance of being a peacemaker. This session is moderated by Bob Roberts Jr. where he conducted the questioning of the panelists. Bob Roberts begins the session by stating that peacemaking was not taught to him in any textbook or scholarly books. In his role as a pastor, all he does is peacekeeping, among the constituents of his church and his neighbors.

Question 1: *What is your organization and what does it do for peacemaking? What have you done in your life personally for peacemaking?*

Jonathan Ammons responded with a story about his upbringing, he said that his grandparents were his greatest influence and example to what it is to be a peacemaker. Ammons' grandparents were not members of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints, but his father fell in love with a member of the church and he would later decide to get baptized. The church was in infamy in the time of his grandparents and he would have expected a disconnection from his grandparents due to his father's decision in baptizing and marrying a member of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day saints. However, he quoted that what his grandparents told his father was "that they only wanted to support what was beneficial for him."

"Sometimes as an ambassador, one may represent ideals that one may not believe in." "Peacemaking can come from anywhere." Jonathan refers to the General Conference talk given by President Nelson known as *Peacemakers Needed*. Ammons says that as a peacemaker he focuses his time in his relationships in ensuring its genuinity and how he can always act as a helping hand.

Kevin C. Brown answered by telling the story where he truly felt that he was the peacemaker in a situation between individuals with different beliefs. It was at a church planting event at Bethlehem where he felt an overpowering feeling moving him to build bridges among people, therefore he established his church. Brown says that cultivating conversations for building bridges helped him to be a peacemaker not only in his church but to his community as well. He said that filling up a room of jews, muslims, christians etc. with a goal to not create or identify an elite class, but to cultivate conversations at the grass roots.

Micah Fries contributed his thoughts by adding that bringing clerics together for a collaborative exercise with a theme of leading with difference. He says that if people rallied around the belief that everyone has dignity, value and beliefs. In doing this there is a fostering of friendships through difference. He also mentions the remarks of Ryan Burge on cancel culture, and he says that “There needs to be less emphasis on advocates, and more emphasis on friendships.” He tells the story of the local Imam at his community, whose mosque was burnt down by a white supremacist. He said that as he went to check on the Imam to offer assistance, local pastors have already stopped by to offer the keys of their church buildings for this Imam to continue his worship. This story highlights his point of fostering friendships over advocacy. “Having fun together creates authentic friendships.”

Micah concludes his remarks by saying that firstly, everyone loves peacemaking in theory, nobody loves peacemaking in practice. Secondly, rally together around dignity, worth and value rather than theology. Third, focus on authentic relationships and friendships rather than transactional friendships.

Question 2: *What is more important between peacemakers?*

Kevin- “Relationships are important and should not be transactional.”

Micah- “Friendships transcend everything else.”

Question 3: *Does peacemaking happen often in your life or on occasion?*

John- “Peacebuilding is a lifestyle and not a transaction.”

Kevin- “I have found myself in situations where I need to lean in and extend myself as a human for humanity over being a public figure.”

Micah- “Discipleship.” “To be consistent as an individual in being a disciple of Jesus Christ. Peacemaking should be a part of my DNA.”

Question 4: *How do you deal with threats of peacemaking relationships?*

John- “Listening and being there for those hurting and in need, and seeking understanding.”

Question 5: *What makes a good peacemaker?*

Bob Roberts adds to the discussion by saying that humility is the key to becoming a good peacemaker. Asking inquiry of the other person before engaging and winning hearts. “Any value of any faith has to be measured by what that value brings to other people.”

Kevin C. Brown also adds to the remarks of Bob Roberts in saying that “we do not love in order to convert; we love because we are converted, and that is the true essence of Jesus Christ.

Rising Generation

Introduction:

The speakers are from Southern Virginia University. The university embraces the values of The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints. The speakers mainly focused on the university’s curriculum featuring the essence of peacemaking and civility. They also shared their peacebuilding program founded by the principles of the restored gospel. The main question being emphasized during the session is how SVU abides with President Russell M. Nelson’s invitation of creating peacemakers.

Bonnie H. Cordon: *President of Southern Virginia University*

President Cordon said that if religious freedom does not exist, then there will be no Southern Virginia University. She said that the university is composed of people who can change the world, but it always depends on their ability to connect and make a difference. They also need to have the ability to lend their voice. She underscored that the university is striving to help students improve or gain the ability of mutual dialogue. She also provided some examples of young people making significant changes in things. Some of the examples she provided are the lives of the US Founding Fathers: James Madison, Thomas Jefferson, and Alexander Hamilton, who at a very young age, were able to do great things such as drafting the US Constitution. She said, “You are not the future leaders, you are the leaders now.” She cited a quote from a devotional by President Russel M. Nelson, “You are among the best the Lord has ever sent to this world. You can be smarter and wiser and have more impact on the world than any previous generation.”

Dr. James Lambert: *Associate Professor of English*

Dr. Lambert emphasized the importance of dignified dialogue and mutual respect. He stated a quote from President Russell M. Nelson, “We can change the world—one person and one interaction at a time. How? By modeling how to manage honest differences of opinion with mutual respect and dignified dialogue.” He said that college or university students are more likely to decrease their levels of religiosity and increase their civic/political engagement. He further stated that the university encourages the students to become “smarter, wiser, and become honest even in the differences of opinion.” He then said that the university will start offering peacemaking classes in Fall. Lambert concluded by inviting everyone to understand the importance of certain gospel

principles such as loving one another, seeking wisdom, teaching one another words of wisdom, and caring for others.

Deidra Dryden: *Director of Athletics, Southern Virginia University*

Director Dryden shared how the school helps students apply the principles of dignified dialogue and mutual respect, especially in athletics or sports. Knights' civility and sportsmanship helped the school maintain its image in sports as it continuously gathered awards from different competitions. She said, "The school teaches the students how to behave during activities." She also shared the NCAA Division III Philosophy Statement that states "They seek to establish and maintain an environment in which a student-athlete's athletics activities are conducted as an integral part of the student-athlete's educational experience, and an environment that values cultural diversity and gender equity among their student-athletes and athletics staff."

Jeremiah John: *Professor of Politics; Social Science Division Chair; Political Science Program Coordinator*

Professor John said that Whoever is underrepresented in your life will be over-represented in your imagination. He said that the relationships between students and their institutions became bureaucratic. He also said that meaningful relationships between people are the basic prerequisites for learning and the mechanisms of their learning process. He also added that the university is founded and built on a common purpose: Faithful, Honest, and Kind. He also concluded that pluralism in schools will help students find a spiritual framework.

Church Autonomy and Free Exercise Development in State and Lower Federal Courts

Introduction:

There are three sessions to attend. The first explores recent legal developments in church autonomy and the free exercise of religion in state and lower federal courts. The speakers focused on their impact on religious institutions. The second marks the 30th anniversary of the Religious Freedom Restoration Act (RFRA). They discussed its historical significance, impact on religious liberty, and ongoing legal challenges. The third is an interfaith dialogue between Fuller Seminary and BYU students on faith, hope, and love, with the goal of increasing mutual understanding and collaboration among future religious leaders.

Annika Boone Barkdull: *International Center for Law and Religion Studies*

Barkdull discussed the Free Exercise Clause and its implications. She used the example of a construction project that harmed religious practices, citing the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals' dismissal of an argument by Apache Stronghold members. They claimed that building a mine on national forest land used for prayer violated the Religious Freedom Restoration Act.

Carl H. Esbeck: *University of Missouri*

Esbeck discussed foundational matters, including the distinction between church autonomy claims and five subject matters comprising church autonomy cases. He stated that church autonomy is a powerful categorical immunity. He also shared a few recent developments, such as a right granted to churches and other religious nonprofits to refuse the use of its sanctuary or similar facility to solemnize or celebrate same-sex marriage in Section 6(b) of the Respect of Marriage Act.

Blaine H. Evanson: *Gibson, Dunn & Crutcher*

Evanson emphasized that church autonomy and free exercise developments are crucial for peacemaking. While the state cannot dictate church actions, there are necessary limits, such as prohibiting practices like human sacrifice.

Dignity Index (Civility Credit)

Introduction:

Speaker talked about the role of the Dignity Index in bridging differences between different religious and political beliefs. The speaker provided a Dignity Index that contains self-reflective questions that will help each individual see other people through the lens of dignity instead of contention. The main issue in our world is contempt. The solution to solve those issues is dignity, the ability to understand others, recognize their opinions, and treat them as people.

CLE (Civility) - Dignity Index

Tami Pyfer: *Chief of Staff and VP External, UNITE*

Tami Pyfer talked about how political polarization has a significant impact on our families and communities. The main problem that the world faces is “contempt”. It is the idea of divisions in the country. People have different views and opinions on religions and politics that it becomes a subject of conflict. The idea and solution presented by Tami is the Dignity Index. The dignity Index is based on the fact that “everybody needs to be treated with dignity. It is a mutual recognition of the desire to be seen, heard, listened to, and treated fairly; to be recognized, understood and to feel safe in the world.” Pyfer believes in promoting dignity to help bridging differences and help people accept other people’s opinions. To help people understand Dignity, the organization came up with an Index that

“focuses on the language of disagreement.” It ranges on a scale from 1 to 8, where 1 is contempt, and 8 is dignity. The more people implement the principles of Dignity index, the more they are able to see others through the lenses of Dignity. It helps them to understand “how to treat people when they disagree.” The main goal of the Dignity Index is to change mentalities. She showed a video of a student’s testimony of the impact of the Dignity Index and how it helped her understand that she needs to change. Pyfer talked about “The Mirror Effect” of the Dignity Index. People start judging and think that other people should change their opinions, but as they go through the lenses of Dignity, they start realizing that they also need to change as a person. As people practice the Dignity index, the organization hopes that they will be able to “change the world, and change mentalities to avoid contentions in families, and communities.”

National Governors’ Association “Disagree Better” Campaign

Introduction:

It was a one-on-one Q&A session.

Q: What national government association?

1. This association involved meeting governments to discuss policy and announce decisions. The 2024 chair was in Utah. The Governors’ initiative focused on healthcare, computer science, and childcare. Childcare played a significant role as a peacemaker. Being a peacemaker within a team was crucial. Conflict was not a bad thing; it was necessary. Disagreement could lead to better decisions and learning.

2. We watched a video explaining the importance of a peaceful family dinner. Communication and discussion were essential, and there should have been no violence. Disagreement happened, but it was not a bad thing. It was important to keep listening. "We can disagree better." This project involved 21 governments. Campaigns were used during the Super Bowl and on social media to reach a large audience. Sharing content and viral videos on YouTube helped reach more people and gather more feedback and opinions.

One of the government workers suggested, “Do you want to do a commercial with government people?” They were good friends, so they could make a commercial together for the project. They tested the campaign at a university to evaluate its effectiveness.

Unifying the space and choosing the right places was important. The speaker emphasized the importance of focusing on the most important titles. He was a Republican, but he said he was a father, husband, and fan of the Utah Jazz. He advised keeping your beliefs but not criticizing others.

3. A worker from the Religious Dignity Index also spoke from the audience to promote their efforts by distributing pamphlets. Paul mentioned that Gen Z tended to look for the answer rather than

understanding how it was solved. Social media was not the only tool. Gordon said that social media was a part of marketing, and it was effective to reach families (the target audience of the government project) through TV and social media.

Renewing and Deepening Civic Skills

Introduction:

Speakers talked about the effects of polarization on our society. They explained how polarization creates conflict in our families, communities and work environments. The organization “Braver Angels”, is committed to teaching and educating people through debates, workshops, and activities to practice LAPP skills. By practicing these skills, they hope that people will be able to think differently on any topic and build peace when they meet somebody who does not have the same opinion.

Practical Peacemakers – Renewing and Deepening Civic Skills: Lessons from Braver Angels

Lori Cartwright: *Blue State Coordinator for Braver Angels*

Casey Jorgensen: *Former State Co-Coordinator, Mtn. Region Co-Lead, President’s Support Team, Braver Angels*

Jefferson Shupe: *Utah Red State Coordinator for Braver Angels*

The speakers talked about the mission and vision of Braver Angels. The main problem that the society faces nowadays is “affective polarization”. Politics is one of the main topics that encourages contention between political parties. As people talk about politics, they see the other party with their faults. One of the goals of Braver Angels is to create an atmosphere of learning where everybody tries to understand the other side’s point of view. Their rule is to have “red and blue leaders equally represented in their discussions.” The company started with two people that had different views on politics. Their initial idea was to gather both parties instead of separating them. The main results and impacts of Braver Angels is to reduce polarization, build relationships. “It is not to change views.” The Speakers also shared about the initiatives that Braver Angels implements to fight against affective polarization. The way to engage people is through workshops, where they teach skills and have discussions. These skills are used for “less polarized conversations with people who think differently on ANY topic: politics, religion, lifestyle, and more.” The skills empathized are the LAPP skills: Listen, Acknowledge, Pivot, Perspective. One of the speakers also shared his perspective and experience with the Braver Angels. It’s good to remind ourselves that others have good intentions. Once we can connect, we can make an impact and change anything.

Peacemakers Through Pluralism - Equipping the Rising Generation

Introduction:

The conference session is about the Rising Generation – “Peacemakers through Pluralism: Equipping the Rising Generation.” It talks about how an interfaith NGO (Interfaith America) collaborates with the Wheatley Institute of BYU Provo and a Seminar and institute program from the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints.

Noah Silverman: *VP of Interfaith America*

Noah Silverman introduces Interfaith America to the audience, where the organization focuses on religious pluralism in higher education in the US. Interfaith America works directly with the administration and faculty members in US universities, where they help the students understand other religions. Noah shared a concern about how little religious impact there was during COVID-19. He mentioned that during COVID-19, many people and organizations focused on politics and government regulations and had little knowledge of the religious aspects. Interfaith America's focus during that time was to train 1000 community interfaith workers to engage in their communities. They understand and teach the communities by listening to their concerns and offering more information. Information given by religious leaders often has a greater impact on government leaders. Interfaith America also works with corporations to provide training and consulting to workers in businesses in the US. He shared how collaborating with the BYU and LDS church institute will help reach more universities. Within their collaboration, they will have a 5-week workshop with different universities in teaching about peacemaking.

Paul Lambert: *Director of Wheatley Institute BYU*

In BYU Wheatley, they also focus on the rising generation in religious pluralism. Working alongside interfaith America. Wheatley Institute has a public-facing team and an internal team. The public-facing focuses on religious pluralism outside of the BYU community, while the internal team focuses on the internal BYU/LDS community. Lambert mentioned that BYU students are not living in a diverse place; its LDS culture and religious background limit the student's ability to understand other religions. After students graduate from BYU, students aren't very familiar with other religions and cultures. The Wheatley Institute partnered with the Marriott school to include one of the courses in the curriculum. This helps and prepares the students to understand other religions in respect and have different perspectives outside of the LDS environment.

The Religious Freedom Restoration Act 30

Daniel L. Kaminetsky: *Agudath Israel of America*

Kaminetsky advocated for careful legislation. He warned us that new laws could harm certain populations. He gave the example of a court order mandating electricity use on Sunday, which would negatively impact those who, like him, observe religious prohibitions on using electricity on Shabbat. According to Jewish law, turning on lights, heating, and air conditioning on Shabbat is prohibited. He emphasized that laws should be crafted to benefit both individuals and communities rather than cause harm.

Joshua C. McDaniel: *Harvard Law School*

McDaniel discussed the history of free exercise law in the United States, including early decisions like those in Reynolds, Jehovah's Witness cases, Sherbert, and Smith. RFRA passed 30 years ago. Thirty years ago, with just three negative votes in either the Senate (97-3) or House of Representatives, Congress passed the RFRA to protect what President Bill Clinton, when he signed it into law, called "the most precious of all American liberties. First, it replicates the strict scrutiny standard that allowed the government to substantially burden the free exercise of religion only when doing so is "the least restrictive means of achieving some compelling state interest." Second, it requires that strict scrutiny be applied to all Free Exercise Clause claims. The RFRA states its purpose of "restor[ing] the compelling state interest test...and... guarantee[ing] its application in all cases where free exercise of religion is substantially burdened." It applies "to all Federal law, and the implementation of that law, whether statutory or otherwise, and whether adopted before or after [the RFRA's enactment]."

James C. Phillips: *Wheatley Institute*

The discussion revolves around whether state law or federal law governs certain issues, particularly in the context of Rafah. If Congress passes a law, it could affect land transfers and other related matters. A key question is whether the principles or rulings related to Rafah apply to private matters or if they are strictly limited to public or governmental issues.

Finding Shared Solution and Creating a More Peaceful Future

Introduction:

The speakers of the general session talked about their perspectives and some ways to unite our effort and promote religious freedom. Religious Freedom is a way to create a more peaceful future when we are able to allow others to practice their faith, and when we see them as people with rights. They also talked about the role of governments in establishing and promoting those ideas to society.

Bonnie H. Cordon: *President, Southern Virginia University*

Bonnie Cordon talked about the place of women in our society. She said that “women need to feel empowered.” “There is a poor outcome when governments block the progress of women.” She emphasized the need for freedom of religion to women to be able to build peace in the future. “Religion and spirituality connect us with the divine.” Cordon also invited us into action. “We are not to neglect individuals in our circle of care.” Women make a great impact in their communities as they have freedom of religion. “We can and must seek ways to remove unnecessary restrictions on women. Build a global sisterhood of peace makers.”

Imam Mohamed Arafat: *Former Chief of Staff and Former VP External, UNITE*

Imam Mohamed Arafat talked about the similarities and differences between the LDS church and the Muslim religion. He also talked about the term “Clash of civilization” meaning that there is a need to make the people know that they need to help each other. One of the things that Imam Arafat does is to provide cultural exchange. He is willing to participate and learn from other religious beliefs. As people get a chance to have cultural exchange, they will be more open to religious freedom, resulting in a more peaceful future.

Frederick A. Davie: *United States Commission on International Religious Freedom*

Frederick Davie talked about how religious freedom is one of the components to create a better future. Religious freedom is part of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and ICCPR. Because religious freedom is in the core and is a written law, “any person anywhere around the world has the right to enjoy freedom of religion without any restrictions applied.” The existence of a majority of religions cannot result in impairment of any covenant in ICCPR.

Dave Gibbons: *Founder and CEO, Dave Gibbons, LLC*

Dave Gibbons talked about the art of creative collaboration. It is the idea that we should all be united together for our future. According to Gibbons, “the greatest innovation happens when cultures converge.” It is the “power of one.” To make this happen, we need spiritual intelligence. This means that we need to be able to see people as people. When we create an environment where people feel spiritually safe, they are more likely to stay. For example, in a business setting, people need to feel safe about their religion so that they stay in the company. When they feel safe and protected, they are more likely to better perform for the company, resulting in the success of the company. We need to work on spiritual intelligence.

“Disagree Better” Online Curriculum for Families

Introduction:

The discussion highlighted the importance of understanding and managing disagreement through self-assessment, family rules, and peaceful communication, emphasizing that disagreement can lead to better relationships and decisions if approached respectfully. They shared tips and an animation that illustrated the need to consider others' backgrounds and feelings during disagreements, promoting empathy and respectful attitudes. Additionally, they introduced a parenting toolkit website to help parents set good examples for their children, reinforcing the value of effective and peaceful communication within families.

It was a one-on-one discussion where they introduced the concept of disagreement through the following aspects:

1. **It starts with me:** They surveyed self-assessment and received a variety of opinions from parents who were struggling with their relationships with their children.

2. **In the home:** They discussed family rules for working together, emphasizing that language can be difficult and verbal violence can occur easily. On the screen, they showed examples of family rules, most of which focused on communication, such as apologizing or asking a parent. These rules were very accessible and adaptable.

3. **Outside the home:** They emphasized that disagreement is not always bad, but listening without anger and discussing peacefully is essential. Approving disagreement does not mean we can be rude to others.

After sharing a few tips, we watched an animated story about disagreement. The animation was simple but easy to understand through visual representation. It highlighted the need to consider others' backgrounds and feelings during disagreements because we are all human, which leads to respectful attitudes in discussions. They also introduced a website about a parenting toolkit designed to help many parents set good examples for their children.

Navigating Christian Nationalism

Introduction:

The speakers came from various religious organizations. They talked specifically about certain issues in Christian nationalism and how it's observed in the United States. Certain issues such as Christian misconceptions and engagement in politics were raised. Numerous questions were being discussed. That includes, “How to bring Christian convictions to the public if we are running to

office? How do symbolisms like “God bless America” affect Christian nationalism, and what are the places people can speak about Christian Nationalism?

Reverend Chris Butler

Chris Butler, a pastor in South Chicago known for his independent Democratic politics, emphasizes that nationalism, in any form, should be seen as an American national project due to the country's diversity. He distinguishes this from Christian nationalism, arguing that American Christianity already wields significant cultural influence. Butler advocates for faithful Christian civic engagement, highlighting the importance of seeing the good in differing viewpoints and actively participating in political endeavors, including supporting political projects. He stresses that our civic participation is a form of stewardship and that the church has yet to learn how to navigate democracy effectively. According to Butler, moderates must be actively involved in political processes to foster a positive political climate and ensure that Christians are engaged in responsible and impactful ways. He said, “We can make government work if we work together.”

Cal Jernigan: *Central Christian Church of Arizona*

Nationalism differs from patriotism in several significant ways. According to Cal Jernigan, one issue is identity, where individuals in the church may reject any organizational affiliation. Another issue is the debatable perspective of history, particularly whether the country's founding was based on the beliefs of the founding fathers or biblical principles, which remains a subject of debate. The notion of the nation being founded as a Christian country and the prevalent "take and back" mentality are also concerns. The biggest issue, however, is the will of power—power that controls, punishes, halts future agendas, and influences laws. Jernigan emphasizes that "Christ never reached for power; He released it. He freely offered Himself," and that "Jesus won by losing." He critiques how many are more concerned with news and politics, mistakenly looking for a president to act as a savior.

Pastor Bob Roberts: *Founder of Glocal Net. Multi Faith Neighbors Network, President of Institute of Global Engage*

He emphasizes that no institution has done more for religious freedom worldwide than BYU and the church. He warns against taking Christian Nationalism lightly, as it justifies actions by Christian leaders and nations "in the name of God," which he believes is detrimental to both the nation and minorities, and a driver of racism. Roberts argues that accepting Christ should not be part of Christian nationalism, as God called us to become Christians of all nations, transcending all differences. He asserts that America, while founded on Christian principles and values, was not created as a Christian nation. Regardless of political affiliation, he insists on the need for God and repentance, noting it is easier to confess cultural sins. Roberts urges believers to "be salt and light," to be with Christ, and to become His witnesses. Without this, he warns, we fail to be effective witnesses, lacking both dialogue and the ability to listen.

Lessons from Business Building Religious Pluralism

Introduction: The conference session is about “Lessons from Business in Building Religious Pluralism.” The panel mainly talks about how Interfaith, as an NGO, focuses on helping companies with religious pluralism and faith that promote peace through service.

Sumreen Ahmad: *Consultant*

Sumreen explained that Interfaith focuses on universal principles and values within the faith to promote peace through service. Part of the key component of the company is how faith defines peace and envisions the role of service evolving within faith tradition to contribute in the workplace. People value interfaith by helping company employees reduce stress during the day, providing a sense of belonging and learning, enjoying learning others and other beliefs, career development, learning abilities, and being their true authentic selves at work.

Adam Smith Crains: *Consultant*

Adam Smith Crains, furthermore, explains the mission and vision of Interfaith. The interfaith mission is to create a company culture where diverse philosophies and belief systems are respected and discussed so employees with differing worldviews can bring their whole selves to work. The value proposition of Interfaith stands for a community that helps employees create awareness around faith, promoting a forum that supports, educates, respects, includes, and tolerates in their companies. Interfaith involved in multiple companies in addressing faith, foundational laws and ideas, faith with individuals and teams, faith and belief of company interests

Faith, Hope, and Love: A Dialogue with Fuller Seminary and BYU Student

Greta L. Bennett: *Panelist, Fuller Theological Seminary*

Bennett expressed her belief in "love" being the right answer when it comes to people with whom we disagree. She emphasizes the need to demonstrate God’s love in all interactions to represent Christ authentically. While agreement is not always necessary, she believes love should be the foundation of everything we do.

Sarah A. Johns: *Panelist, J. Reuben Clark Law School*

Johns shared about how she navigates life with guidance from her faith. As a straight, religious woman, she often questions her role in conversations about LGBT matters. Yet, she has come to understand that only by collaborating can we find peace.

Shonda McPherson: *Panelist, Fuller Theological Seminary*

McPherson shared her experience when she was pondering how she could bridge the gap and engage in meaningful dialogue or build relationships with those who may not share her beliefs. She believes in the importance of embracing others. She encouraged us to recognize that true understanding comes from building relationships. She reflects on her faith, questioning if one can truly call themselves a Christian if one professes Christ but does not embody His teachings. In her view, everyone deserves dignity and respect. She acknowledges that disagreements are natural and should not lead to harm. Treating others poorly is never justified.

Jean Darlae Yim: *Panelist, Fuller Theological Seminary*

Yim shared about how harm can be done even with us being silent. It can be inflicted on LGBTQ individuals. Yim mentioned that as she reflected on religious freedom, she acknowledged the inevitable differences that exist. She believes that despite these differences, we must learn to love genuinely. She thinks we can cultivate a deeper and more compassionate love by listening and understanding others from their perspective.

Closing Remarks

Brett Scharffs reflected on an event focused on religious freedom, interfaith dialogue, and peacemaking. He expressed his gratitude to the participants, particularly the young scholars, and emphasized the importance of faith-driven action in addressing these issues.

Key points highlighted by Scharffs included:

1. The necessity for individuals to maintain a deep commitment to their faith as a basis for collaborating across different faiths.
2. The challenge of maintaining ideological purity and its impact on peacemaking.
3. The role of moderates in civic engagement and the difficulty in motivating them.
4. The importance of personal transformation as a prerequisite for transformative dialogue and broader societal change.

Drawing on teachings from the church, Scharffs underscored the significance of understanding God, unity, and distinguishing between conflict and contention. He concluded by reflecting on the non-coercive nature of divine authority and called for sustained efforts to promote religious freedom and peace.

This summary captures the core of the discussion, emphasizing the integration of faith and action in addressing intricate social and spiritual challenges.