

February 26, 2013

TO: 2013 World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize Award Selection Committee

FROM: Rev. Doris W. Davis, Interfaith Minister

RE: Guest Testimonial: World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival, Los Angeles

The First Annual World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival held in Los Angeles, California February 6-10, 2013 delivered on its promise: **“Creating Harmony Through Cinema.”**

When I first heard about the film festival I knew that I wanted to be present at the foundation of an annual event that has the potential to reach large numbers of people with the World Interfaith Harmony message -- and not just those who congregate regularly in churches, temples and mosques! People everywhere yearn to be enthralled by inspiring stories. The child in each of us wants to be entertained, yes, but the soul longs to be educated, elevated and enlightened as well. There is healing power in such stories that our world desperately needs. As the film medium is one of the greatest forces for good -- or ill -- on the planet, the Festival organizers, to their credit, recognized the value of harnessing and focusing that power to bring about inter-religious understanding on a global scale.

I will not go into detail here about specific films (you will see that in the report) except to say that I had the good fortune to be able to attend *all* of the film screenings, workshops and panels over the 5-day period, so that fact alone makes my perspective somewhat unique. My heart was touched many times over and I cried tears of deep joy and appreciation as the stories unfolded -- stories about brave people with determination and courage to put everything on the line to serve the greater good. The Festival itself is testimony to the fact that, as a genre in its own right, “spiritual cinema” has come of age. What a privilege it was to be able to enter into intimate conversations with the filmmakers who shared their own inspiring stories of bringing their visions onto the screen. Each filmmaker’s story was a spiritual odyssey in its own right.

The Festival was envisioned thematically by the organizers in such a way that each day addressed a distinct issue which impacts every human being on the planet: the unique contributions of indigenous peoples, the changing role of women in society as the impact of their voices and visions is felt, environmental concerns, peace and justice issues, and pervasive throughout, of course, was the spirit of inter-religious dialogue among and between participants. I detected many different points of view all blending and working harmoniously together: Native American, Jewish, Hindu, Christian, Muslim, Buddhist, Sikh, Secular Humanist, New Age, and Sacred Activist. Nor were the youth ignored, for Saturday morning was dedicated to the voices of young filmmakers. One of the most powerful sessions that morning featured a film teaching the pervasiveness of “The Golden Rule” in all religious and spiritual traditions.

If the committee were to award a prize to the World Interfaith Harmony Film Festival it would be surely invested to grow the next one, for this is an ongoing enterprise which, I predict, within 10 years time will bear much fruit to glorify the Great Creator. There is no doubt that it will inspire and encourage more courageous filmmakers to tell stories that satisfy the soul of humanity, and bind up its wounds.