

**Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert's Opening Statement  
and  
First Nation Indian Blessing in Recognition of Interfaith Month 2016  
Utah State Capitol Rotunda  
Friday, February 5, 2016 - 3:00 p.m.**



*Utah State Capitol*

Father Elias Koucos, Chair of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable and Assistant Priest at the Holy Trinity Cathedral and the Prophet Elias Greek Orthodox Church warmly welcomed everyone to the Capitol Rotunda for an opening statement given by Governor Gary R. Herbert for the kick-off for Interfaith Month in Utah and a First Nation Indian Blessing Ceremony given by Lacey Harris.



*Rev. Fr. Elias Koucos*



*Pamela Atkinson*

Pamela Atkinson, community activist and homeless advocate, introduced Governor Gary H. Herbert to the audience who said that it was fitting to have this ceremony in the Capitol as Utah was founded by people seeking religious freedom. Marjorie Cortez of the Deseret News reported on Fr. Elias Koucos and Governor Herbert's remarks in the following link: <http://www.deseretnews.com/article/86564707>



*Utah Governor Gary R. Herbert*



*Lacee Harris*

Lacee Harris, a Northern Ute and Northern Paiute and Board Member of the Salt Lake Interfaith Roundtable, was introduced by Fr. Elias. Harris began by welcoming everyone to his land, saying that his ancestors used to spend the summers in the Salt Lake area. Harris then brought out his ceremonial pipe, showing two pieces which he joined together in symbolism of unity. He showed everyone his bag of tobacco, which he stated is a medicine for his people and that each tribe has a different recipe.



*Lacee Harris, Fr. Elias Koucos, Governor Gary Herbert, Pamela Atkinson*



*Audience*

Harris began the ceremonial blessing by offering a pinch of tobacco in six directions; east, south, west, north, above to God and below to Mother Earth. In his following prayers, Harris invoked God to bless everyone, once again praying in all directions and moving his Eagle Feathers from each direction towards the audience. In previous years Harris had included the audience by passing his Peace Pipe around the circle.

In conclusion to the Blessing ceremony light refreshments were served allowing participants time to talk with Lacee Harris.