

Recipients of Hofstra University's 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize Announced



Dr. Thea Gomelaury and Rt. Rev. William Swing have been awarded the 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, awarded by Hofstra University in collaboration with the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Charitable Foundation.

NEW YORK (TIP): Dr. Thea Gomelaury and the Oxford Interfaith Forum and the United Religions Initiative and its founder Rt. Rev. William Swing have been awarded the 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, awarded by Hofstra University in collaboration with the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Charitable Foundation.

The \$50,000 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, divided between the two organizations, is bestowed biannually upon an individual or organization for their significant work in promoting interfaith understanding. The awards ceremony is scheduled to take place April 22, 2025, at the Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury, NY.

“The Guru Nanak Prize embodies Hofstra University’s mission to foster global understanding while preparing students to thrive in the complexity of our interconnected world,” said Dr. Eva Badowska, dean of Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences. “At a time when peaceful collaboration, civil discourse, and cultural awareness are essential to addressing profound global challenges, this prize honors the principles of peace, interfaith dialogue, and selfless service that resonate deeply with the University’s values. It reminds us that education is not just about knowledge – it’s about inspiring action and shaping a better future for all.”

Dr. Julie Byrne, Hofstra University's Monsignor Thomas Hartman Chair in Catholic Studies and chair of the Department of Religion, said of this year's honorees, "The committee was deeply impressed by the complementary work done by these two stellar interfaith organizations: the United Religions Initiative that concentrates on grassroots networks of communities, and the Oxford Interfaith Forum that brings together scholars for the sharing and production of new knowledge about religions and their interactions. Community-based and scholarly approaches are both needed to advance understanding and acknowledgment of difference in today's global world."

Dr. Thea Gomelaury and the Oxford Interfaith Forum

Oxford Interfaith Forum is a global interfaith, intercultural, and interdisciplinary organization that enhances, and enriches understanding of diverse traditions and cultures through its signature Thematic International Interfaith Reading Groups and its inclusive approach to research and education with an interfaith lens.

Oxford Interfaith Forum is committed to raising awareness of the critical role of religious dialogue in the pursuit of peace. The organization's founder and director, Dr. Thea Gomelaury, a biblical scholar, codicologist, and public historian, serves as an associate faculty member in Asian and Middle Eastern Studies at the University of Oxford.

Her special interests are in neglected literary and cultural treasures of marginal communities. Her research topics include biblical exegesis, reception history of the Bible, and biblical manuscripts. Dr. Gomelaury is a member of the Jewish-Muslim Research Network, the Bible and Religions of the Ancient Near East Collective, and the British and Irish Association of Jewish Studies.

Her current research is focused on Georgian Jewry – the world's oldest living Jewish diaspora – and its forgotten contribution to the Jewish scribal traditions. She is the author of *The Lailashi Codex: The Crown of Georgian Jewry* (Oxford, 2023). She is currently working on a diplomatic edition of the 172-leaf Lailashi Codex. This book introduces the unknown Georgian Jewish manuscripts providing a necessary context for further interdisciplinary studies.

In 2023, Oxford Interfaith Forum was honored with the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Award, given by King Abdullah II of Jordan, for contributions to peace and religious education.

In his Guru Nanak Prize nomination, The Rev. Dr. Andrew Gregory of University College, Oxford, wrote that Dr. Gomelaury's "strategic and visionary thinking, indefatigable energy, and ability to bring people together is at the core of the success of the Oxford Interfaith Forum."

Dr. Elizabeth Mackintosh, teacher and lecturer of philosophy and religious studies at the University of Winchester in the UK, said that the Oxford Interfaith Forum "models the best interfaith harmony through education. It is a radically inclusive **space** (<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/space-beyond/>) that encourages a pluralism of ideas. [The work of] Dr. Thea Gomelaury and the Oxford Interfaith Forum not only animates Guru Nanak's vision and values but also propagates them."

"We are immensely honored and grateful to all our supporters, the distinguished panel of judges, Hofstra University, and the Bindra family, for this highest recognition of our unique contribution to interreligious education," Dr. Gomelaury said. "We are delighted to be joining the esteemed laureates of the Guru Nanak Prize. Sharing the honor with The Rt. Rev. William Swing is a very special privilege. We also want to thank Dr. Eboo Patel [the award's 2012 recipient], who influenced our work in more ways than he knows. This prestigious award in the name of Guru Nanak Dev Ji inspires us to continue the promotion of universal peace through interreligious education at this critical time in our history."

Rt. Rev. William Swing and the United Religions Initiative

The formation of the URI, currently the largest interfaith grassroots organization, was first inspired in 1993, when Bishop William E. Swing was invited to host an interfaith service commemorating the 50th anniversary of the signing of the **United Nations** (<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/united-nations/>) charter.

Convinced that the world's religions have a "vocation to be a force for good in the world," Bishop Swing shaped URI's mission to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation; to end religiously motivated violence; and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the earth and all living beings.

Bishop Swing currently serves as URI's president emeritus. From 1980 to 2006 he was the 7th Episcopal Bishop of **California** (<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/california/>). He has authored *A Bishop's Quest: Founding a United Religions* and *The Sacred and the Silly: A Bishop's Playful and Eventful Life*.

Of being awarded the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, Bishop Swing said, "The generous heart of Guru Nanak was powerful in his time, and through this award the spiritual power only increases. For the United Religions Initiative and me to be honored by association with this great man is an inward blessing, indeed."

"It's a great honor for URI to receive the Guru Nanak Prize, in the tradition of such illustrious interfaith figures, under the auspices of the revered Guru Nanak," added URI Chair of the Board Eric Roux. "We feel proud and grateful for this honor which celebrates URI, its founder, and the entire URI network of interfaith activists who dedicate their lives to a world where we can all live in trust, love and unity, beyond and through our necessary and lauded differences."

Hofstra University's Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize was established in 2006 by Sardar Ishar Singh Bindra and family and named for the founder of the **Sikh** (<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/sikh-news/>) religion. It is meant to encourage understanding of various religions and foster collaboration between faith communities. Guru Nanak believed that all humans are equal, regardless of color, ethnicity, nationality, or gender identity. His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama of **Tibet** (<https://www.theindianpanorama.news/tibet/>), Tenzin Gyatso, was the first winner of the Guru Nanak Prize in 2008.

For more information, visit the webpage for Hofstra's Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize.