HOFSTRA UNIVERSITY

Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize

Award Presentation and Celebration

in collaboration with
Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Foundation

Tuesday, April 22, 2025

About Guru Nanak

Guru Nanak was born in 1469 in a village located near the contemporary Pakistani city of Lahore. Raised in a Hindu family, Nanak was also exposed to Muslim literature and learned to speak both Persian and Arabic. According to Sikh tradition, at the age of 30 Guru Nanak disappeared and was presumed to have drowned. He reappeared after three days, having experienced a divine revelation, which he proceeded to propagate through extensive travels through the Indian subcontinent and beyond. Immediately following his three-day disappearance, Guru Nanak was said to have remarked, "There is no Hindu, nor any Muslim." This statement, which rejects religious identity as a form of classification, has been interpreted by Sikhs to proclaim a message of universal brotherhood. It is this spirit that animates the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, an award that recognizes the oneness of humanity, even in the face of religious divisions.

The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize

As the founder of Sikhism, Guru Nanak taught that we discover our oneness with humanity by exploring the differences that separate us. The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize recognizes and supports the efforts of those individuals and organizations who work to advance that vision.

According to Guru Nanak, religions are paradoxical. They help us to discover and cultivate what is best and most hopeful about one another and the world that sustains us. And yet, they often spark conflict and violence. The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize is based on the conviction that religious dialogue helps to minimize religious conflict by cultivating awareness that we each view the world from the limitations of our own traditions, and we have much to learn from the traditions of others.

The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize was established with a gift from the family of Sardar Ishar Singh Bindra and Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra, prominent Sikh Americans living in Brookville, New York. In September 2000, the Bindra family endowed the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Chair in Sikh Studies at Hofstra University in honor of the family's matriarch.

The family's company, Paras Design Inc., based in New York City, is a major distributor of apparel, and the family has substantial interests in real estate as well. The Bindras are deeply involved in philanthropic activities that benefit both the Sikh and non-Sikh communities. The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize is an expression of Sardar Ishar Singh Bindra's longstanding dedication to interfaith harmony.

Sardar Ishar Singh Bindra

Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra

The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize Winners

2024:
Dr. Thea Gomelauri and the Oxford Interfaith Forum,
and the United Religions Initiative
and Founder Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

2022:
Amardeep Singh

2020:
Dr. Karen Armstrong and the
Charter for Compassion,
and the Interfaith Center of New York

2018:
Tanenbaum Center for Interreligous Understanding

2016:
The Pluralism Project at Harvard University
and Serve2Unite

2014:
Bhai Sabib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia
and the Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson

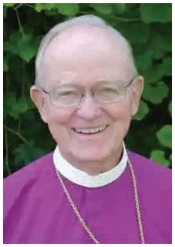
2012:
Dr. Eboo Patel

2010:
Rabbi Arthur Schneier and Religions for Peace

2008:
His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

Dr. Thea Gomelauri and the Oxford Interfaith Forum

The Oxford Interfaith Forum is a global organization dedicated to fostering interfaith, intercultural, and interdisciplinary dialogue through its Thematic International Interfaith Reading Groups and research initiatives. Led by Dr. Thea Gomelauri, a biblical scholar and historian, the forum emphasizes the role of religious dialogue in promoting peace and understanding. Dr. Gomelauri's research on Georgian Jewry and marginalized religious communities has enriched interfaith scholarship, earning the 2023 UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Prize and Hofstra University's Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize. Recognized for modeling interfaith harmony through education, the Forum continues to advance universal peace and inclusivity in religious studies. Learn more at **hofstra.edu/nanakgomelauri**.



United Religions Initiative and Founder Rt. Rev. William E. Swing

The United Religions Initiative (URI), the world's largest grassroots interfaith organization, was inspired in 1993 when Bishop William E. Swing hosted an interfaith service marking the 50th anniversary of the United Nations Charter. Believing that religions have a "vocation to be a force for good," Bishop Swing shaped URI's mission to foster interfaith cooperation, end religiously motivated violence, and promote peace and justice. Now URI's president emeritus, he served as the 7th Episcopal Bishop of California and authored several books on faith and unity. Honored with the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, Bishop Swing and URI leadership expressed deep gratitude, emphasizing how the award strengthens their commitment to fostering a world of trust, love, and unity. Learn more at **hofstra.edu/nanakswing**.

2022 Winner

Amardeep Singh

Amardeep Singh, co-founder of Lost Heritage Productions, has dedicated his work to exploring and preserving Sikh heritage through books, documentaries, and his latest 24-episode docuseries, "Allegory: A Tapestry of Guru Nanak's Travels." Filmed across 150 multifaith sites in nine countries, the series retraces Guru Nanak's 16th-century journeys, emphasizing his message of unity and interfaith harmony. Singh has also authored "Lost Heritage: The Sikh Legacy in Pakistan" and "The Quest Continues," along with producing two documentaries on Sikh heritage in Pakistan. His deep commitment to religious understanding and cultural preservation embodies the values of Guru Nanak and has earned him international recognition.

Hofstra University recognized Singh's work for its profound impact on interfaith understanding and cultural preservation. Hofstra President Susan Poser praised his dedication to Sikh heritage, highlighting how his creative journey aligns with Guru Nanak's principles of religious unity. Daniel Seabold, acting dean of Hofstra College of Liberal Arts and Sciences, noted that a committee of faculty and administrators unanimously selected Singh for his work's unique ability to foster universal fellowship across faiths. Singh expressed gratitude for the recognition, emphasizing that Guru Nanak's message of unity in diversity remains a beacon of hope for a more connected world.

Dr. Karen Armstrong and the Charter for Compassion

Dr. Karen Armstrong, a British author and historian, launched the Charter for Compassion in 2008, a pledge that urges people and religions to embrace compassion as a core value. The Charter for Compassion has grown into a global collaborative that includes initiatives in 440 cities and communities in more than 45 countries.

Interfaith Center of New York

ICNY
Interfaith Center of New York

The Interfaith Center of New York, founded 25 years ago, is a nationally recognized nonprofit organization that has built a religiously diverse network of leaders and organizations across the five boroughs to address the city's most pressing social challenges. These include gun violence, immigrant rights, social and racial justice, climate change, economic equity, housing and homelessness, and substance abuse and addiction. Its programs include education for social workers, teachers, lawyers, and police officers focused on religious diversity, interfaith civic engagement initiatives, leadership academies, and racial and social justice retreats for civic and faith leaders.

Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding

The Tanenbaum Center for Interreligious Understanding, founded in 1992 in memory of Rabbi Marc H. Tanenbaum, provides practical tools for educators, physicians, and corporate leaders to address religious differences and foster respect for religious diversity. Through its Peacemakers in Action Network, Tanenbaum supports grassroots peacebuilding efforts in conflict zones worldwide, uniting individuals from 23 regions to promote interfaith cooperation. The organization is widely recognized for its commitment to advancing religious understanding and inclusion across societal institutions.

Tanenbaum's impact extends to corporate diversity efforts as an inaugural member of the CEO Action Diversity and Inclusion movement and through its Combating Extremism campaign, which works to dispel stereotypes and promote interreligious respect. Hofstra University leaders praised Tanenbaum for embodying Guru Nanak's principles of inclusion and cross-cultural learning. The organization continues to lead innovative initiatives that enhance interfaith dialogue and foster peaceful coexistence.

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

The Pluralism Project at Harvard University, founded in 1991 by Dr. Diana Eck, was established to promote understanding and engagement with diverse faith communities in response to growing religious diversity in the United States. For almost 25 years, it has brought together religious practitioners, scholars, and interfaith leaders to advance research and education on religious pluralism. Through online resources, symposia, seminars, documentary films, and case studies, The Pluralism Project has fostered interfaith dialogue and civic engagement, profiling organizations like Serve2Unite, with whom it shares the Guru Nanak Prize. Dr. Eck expressed gratitude for the recognition, emphasizing that the award aligns with the project's mission of promoting inclusion and interfaith understanding.

Serve2Unite

Serve2Unite, a Milwaukee-based youth and community outreach organization, was founded by Pardeep Kaleka and the Sikh community in response to the 2012 Sikh Temple of Wisconsin shooting. The devastating event took the life of Kaleka's father, Satwant Singh Kaleka, and five others. A former police officer and inner-city school teacher, Kaleka turned tragedy into a mission for interfaith and intercultural understanding. In just three years, Serve2Unite grew from two Milwaukee schools to 20, engaging more than 600 student leaders in fostering unity through community service, artistic projects, and dialogue. Under Arts @ Large, which reaches 7,000 students, teachers, and families, the organization builds inclusive communities both online and in person. Honored with the Guru Nanak Prize, Kaleka emphasized that Serve2Unite's mission reflects Guru Nanak's values of equality, justice, and love, working to overcome fear and division with courage, wisdom, and human kinship.

2014 Winners

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia

Bhai Sahib Mohinder Singh Ahluwalia, chairperson and spiritual leader of the Guru Nanak Nishkam Sewak Jatha (GNNSJ), is a global advocate for interfaith harmony and peace. Awarded a Papal Knighthood in 2012 for his work in Roman Catholic-Sikh relations, he has led efforts to establish a Museum of World Religions in Birmingham (UK) and develop a "Charter for Forgiveness" promoting reconciliation. For 37 years, the Gurudwara (Sikh places of worship) he serves has held biannual, 11-day prayer sessions for global peace. Recognized with the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, Bhai Sahib emphasized Guru Nanak's vision of unity, equality, and interfaith cooperation. A respected member of Religions for Peace International and other interfaith councils, he continues to champion dialogue and understanding on global platforms, including his address to the UN General Assembly during World Interfaith Harmony Week in 2012.

Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson

Rev. Dr. Katharine Rhodes Henderson, president of Auburn Theological Seminary in New York City, is a trailblazer in interfaith leadership and justice work. Under her leadership since 2009, Auburn has expanded from its Presbyterian roots into a multifaith training center, fostering dialogue and collaboration among religious leaders. She has spearheaded initiatives such as a global youth leadership program, the "MountainTop" convening of faith leaders, and the inclusion of Muslim and Jewish members on Auburn's Board of Directors. Honored as the first woman to receive the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, she expressed gratitude for the recognition, emphasizing the importance of courage, dialogue, and multifaith cooperation for justice. A respected voice in national media, she regularly contributes to *The Washington Post's* "On Faith" forum and has been featured in *The New York Times, The Los Angeles Times,* and NPR's "On the Media."

2012 Winner

Dr. Eboo Patel

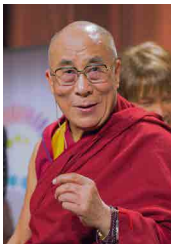
Dr. Eboo Patel is the president and founder of Interfaith Youth Core (IFYC) and a leading advocate for interfaith leadership and cooperation. A Rhodes scholar and recipient of the 2012 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, he was recognized for his significant contributions to interfaith understanding. Named one of "America's Best Leaders" by U.S. News and World Report, Dr. Patel has dedicated his career to fostering dialogue and collaboration among diverse religious communities.

Born in India and raised in Chicago, Dr. Patel's passion for interfaith advocacy was shaped by his childhood experiences with prejudice and inspired by figures like Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Mahatma Gandhi, and Nelson Mandela. Beyond his work with IFYC, he served on the inaugural advisory council for the White House Office on Faith-Based and Neighborhood Partnerships, furthering his commitment to social cohesion and religious pluralism.

Rabbi Arthur Schneier and Religions for Peace

Rabbi Arthur Schneier is a global leader in interfaith dialogue, religious freedom, and human rights advocacy. A Holocaust survivor, he has dedicated his life to promoting tolerance, peace, and the protection of religious communities worldwide. As the founder and president of the Appeal of Conscience Foundation, established in 1965, Rabbi Schneier has worked with religious and political leaders to advance mutual understanding and cooperation among faiths. His commitment to global peace has earned him numerous accolades, including the Presidential Citizens Medal and knighthood from Pope Francis for his efforts in fostering religious coexistence and reconciliation.

Rabbi Schneier is also a senior leader with Religions for Peace, the world's largest multireligious coalition dedicated to promoting peace and social justice. The organization unites leaders from diverse faith traditions to resolve conflicts, combat discrimination, and advocate for human dignity across the globe. Under his leadership, Religions for Peace has worked to address pressing global issues, from religious persecution to humanitarian crises, reinforcing the vital role of faith communities in fostering unity and diplomacy. Through his work, Rabbi Schneier continues to be a champion for interfaith collaboration and a driving force in the global movement for peace and religious harmony.



His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso

His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama, Tenzin Gyatso, is a globally respected spiritual leader known for his lifelong advocacy of compassion, nonviolence, and interfaith harmony. As the leader of Tibetan Buddhism, he has dedicated his life to promoting universal responsibility, ethical leadership, and dialogue among religious traditions. His teachings emphasize the importance of kindness, understanding, and respect for all faiths, aligning with Guru Nanak's vision of unity and peace. In recognition of his commitment to interfaith cooperation and global harmony, he was honored as the inaugural recipient of the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize in 2008, an award recognizing individuals and organizations that foster religious understanding and collaboration.

Throughout his life, the Dalai Lama has worked to bridge divides between faith communities, encouraging mutual respect and shared values as a path toward global peace. His message of compassion and spiritual unity has resonated with people of all backgrounds, inspiring countless initiatives that promote religious tolerance and humanitarian service. By awarding him the Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize, Hofstra University recognized his unwavering dedication to interfaith dialogue and the promotion of peace among diverse religious traditions, a mission that continues to influence and inspire the world today.

Guru Nanak Award Criteria

A panel of judges composed of religious leaders, academics, and individuals known for their commitment to interfaith dialogue will consider the career accomplishments of nominees. Award recipients will have demonstrated extraordinary leadership, courage, and a capacity for inspiring in others a willingness to embrace the vulnerability that is the key to true religious dialogue.

Eligibility:

Any living individual or organization that the nominator believes has contributed to the promotion of constructive dialogue and/or relations between faith communities.

Criteria:

The committee invites nominators to consider a wide range of activities. A nominee may, for example, have organized members of different faith communities to work toward a common goal; produced a work of art or literature that contributes to or publicizes the importance of interfaith dialogue; or uses a position of authority or power to bring faith communities together. Nominees may be designated on the basis of a single contribution or a lifetime of contributions.

Nomination Procedures:

Nominators should provide a brief description of themselves (no more than 100 words) and a two-page letter describing the individual or organization being nominated and the activities the nominator believes qualify the nominee for consideration. Nominations may be submitted at **hofstra.edu/gurunanak** or via email at **gurunanakprize@hofstra.edu**.

Sikh Studies at Hofstra

Sikh Studies at Hofstra University offers students a rich, interdisciplinary exploration of Sikhism, its history, philosophy, and cultural impact. Housed within the Department of Religion, the program provides courses that examine Sikh beliefs, texts, and traditions, fostering a deeper understanding of one of the world's youngest and most dynamic religions. Through academic inquiry, students engage with Sikhism's foundational principles, including seva (selfless service), equality, and justice, while also analyzing its historical development and contemporary relevance.

A unique aspect of Sikh Studies at Hofstra is its focus on Sikh Musicology, which explores the central role of devotional music (kirtan) in Sikh spiritual practice. This area of study delves into the intricate relationship between music, scripture, and community, highlighting the significance of the *Guru Granth Sahib* as a musical text. Students have the opportunity to study Sikh musical traditions, instruments, and performance practices, gaining insight into how kirtan shapes religious identity and communal worship.

By integrating Sikh Studies into a broader religious and cultural context, Hofstra University fosters an inclusive and scholarly approach to understanding Sikhism. The program encourages dialogue across disciplines, connecting Sikh philosophy with global issues such as interfaith relations, human rights, and diaspora communities. Whether through academic coursework, research opportunities, or engagement with the local Sikh community, Hofstra's Sikh Studies program provides students with a comprehensive and immersive learning experience.

For more information, visit **hofstra.edu/sikhstudies**.

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