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P-ED Politics Economy Immigration Interview Arts & culture Lifestyle Religion Humour Food Holistic Life Supplements E-pa

HOME > INDIAN-AMERICAN > GLOBAL CHAMPIONS OF INTERFAITH UNITY WIN HOFSTRA'S PRESTIGIOUS \$50K GURU NANAK PRIZE

INDIAN AMERICANS

Global Champions of Interfaith Unity win Hofstra's prestigious \$50K Guru Nanak Prize

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(Photos provided by ASB Media)

Oxford scholar and world's largest grassroots faith network honored for promoting peace through dialogue

Hempstead, NY: Hofstra University, in partnership with the Sardarni Kuljit Kaur Bindra Charitable Foundation, is proud to award the 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize to two visionaries: Dr. Thea Gomelaury, founder of the Oxford Interfaith Forum, and the United Religions Initiative (URI), founded by pioneering interfaith leader and president emeritus Rt. Rev. William E. Swing.

The biennial prize – \$50,000 split between the two winners – recognizes extraordinary contributions to promoting peaceful dialogue between faiths and cultures. The ceremony will take place April 22, 2025, at the Crest Hollow Country Club in Woodbury, NY.

“It was our parents' desire to bring better understanding among people of various faiths and founded the Interfaith Prize in collaboration with Hofstra University to promote interfaith dialogue and to recognize individuals or organizations that bring people together. It is named after Guru Nanak who preached and practiced equality of all human beings irrespective of their religion, caste, color, creed or sex. We are very pleased with the selection of two very well deserving awardees for 2024 Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize” said T J Bindra of Bindra Family.

“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."

From the Halls of Academia to the Grassroots: Two Leaders, One Vision

Dr. Thea Gomelaury, a biblical scholar at the University of Oxford and director of the Oxford Interfaith Forum, has brought together academics across the globe to explore sacred texts and religious traditions through an inclusive lens.

Her groundbreaking research on Georgian Jewry – the world's oldest surviving Jewish diaspora – has helped shed light on forgotten communities and manuscripts, earning her international acclaim.

"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," Dr. Gomelaury said.

The Forum was recently honored by King Abdullah II of Jordan with the UN World Interfaith Harmony Week Award for its contributions to peace and religious education.

The United Religions Initiative, meanwhile, stands as the largest grassroots interfaith network in the world, spanning more than 100 countries. Born out of a bold vision by Bishop William E. Swing during a 1993 interfaith service at the United Nations, URI now mobilizes everyday people – from youth activists to elders – to build peace in their own communities.

"The generous heart of Guru Nanak was powerful in his time, and through this award the spiritual power only increases," said Bishop Swing. "To be honored in his name is an inward blessing."

URI's work ranges from conflict resolution to environmental sustainability to advocacy for human rights, impacting communities on every continent across the globe.

"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," said Eric Roux, chair of the URI Global Council.



(Photo provided by ASB Media)

Honoring a Legacy of Peace

Founded in 2006 by Sardar Isha Singh Bindra and family. The Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize celebrates the legacy of Guru Nanak, the 15th-century founder of Sikhism, who championed equality, service, and unity across faiths. Past recipients include His Holiness the 14th Dalai Lama and Dr. Eboo Patel, founder of Interfaith America.

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."

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Guru Nanak Interfaith Prize

Dr Thea Gomelaury

United Religions Initiative

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Crest Hollow Country Club