

Nelson Mandela: A Celebration of His Life and Legacy



From left to right, first row: Rev. Kris Marshall (First United Methodist Church), representative of St. Catherine of Siena Episcopal Church, Rev. Howard Dotson (Spanish Springs Presbyterian Church); second row: Bishop Luther Dupree Jr. (Church of God in Christ), Rev. Neal Anderson (Unitarian-Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada), Rajan Zed (Universal Society of Hinduism), Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. (International Community of Christ), Rt. Rev. Sean Savoy (International Community of Christ). PHOTO: Rajan Zed

A celebration of the life and legacy of Nelson Mandela, who

passed away on December 5, 2013, was held at the Atlantis Hotel & Casino Resort on Monday, December 16, 2013. The event was presented by the Nevada Clergy Association (NCA) and organized by Reverend Howard Dotson of Spanish Springs Presbyterian Church and Bishop Gene Savoy Jr., NCA president. Both Bishop Gene Savoy Jr. and Rt. Rev. Sean Savoy of the International Community of Christ spoke in the program along with other interfaith leaders.

Bishop Gene Savoy provided his reflections on the similarities of Mandela, Martin Luther King Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi. A summary is provided here:

“On behalf of the Nevada Clergy Association, I welcome you and thank you for coming to this very special memorial of a great leader of our times. The ‘last great civil rights leader of the 20th century,’ as President Obama put it last week.

“It is wonderful to be here with you today – in fellowship, peace and unity – as we celebrate the life, legacy and work of Nelson Mandela. So much has already been said, and we have watched, read, and learned so much about this fascinating man for many decades.

“A couple of years ago, I had the opportunity to travel to South Africa. While in Johannesburg, I visited a jail. It was the same jail that the Mahatma Gandhi inhabited as a young lawyer when he was forging the way of non-violent civil resistance about 100 years ago.

“As a young man studying law in London, Gandhi was fascinated by the English system of justice – its laws and, most importantly, the equity in the law. However, he was much less impressed with the fact that justice wasn’t blind. It certainly wasn’t blind to color. And thus he began a movement of non-violent resistance which he had learned about by studying the Transcendentalist movement in America, which

took place in the early 1800's. That movement which Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau explored as well.

"So why do I bring up Gandhi at an event honoring Mandela? It is because Mandela was in a line of righteous individuals who followed this path. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Journeyed to India to learn of the works of Gandhi. And Nelson Mandela was born in, and a part of, the country, people, and land where Gandhi got his start in civil disobedience – a start that would send him to his native land to expel the British from almost 400 years of domination in India.

"Mandela's vision, however, was unique, in that, of the three, he switched from violent resistance to non-violent resistance and developed his values while in the solitude of a jail cell – not for merely weeks, months or years, but for almost three decades. He was not only a great orator but, more importantly, someone who could bring people together. When most of us in the world were waiting for South Africa to explode into civil war, Mandela showed us how a nation could so quickly change with very little bloodshed and not collapse.

"We all believe and know that slavery of any and every kind is wrong. But slavery comes in many masks. Gandhi wished to end poverty in India. Dr. King, after civil rights legislation was passed in this country, also sought to end poverty. Mandela, due to his age and health was not able to achieve that same goal. But it is a goal which all three great leaders had in common. It is a goal that we should also have in common. For poverty is indeed slavery. And we see it more and more every day in this great country of ours.

"With this in mind, as president of the Nevada Clergy Association, I invite all of you to attend our Martin Lither King Jr. celebrations on January 19th and 20th.

“Thank you for being here today.”