

CST and Jain Community Celebrate Landmark Moment in Interfaith Education



CST leaders Dr. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, Bishop Grant Hagiya, and Rev. Patricia Farris prepare to sign an agreement establishing an endowed professorship in Jain Studies.

LOS ANGELES, Calif. Wednesday, April 16, 2025/CST/ - Claremont School of Theology took part in an historic signing ceremony establishing The Bhagwan Chandraprabha Endowed Professorship in Jain Studies at CST.

The ceremony was held at the Jain Center of Southern California (JCSC) and attended by over a hundred people, including several prominent leaders in the Jain community. Dr. Nitin Shah, past president of JCSC and current Chair of the Academic Liaison Committee of the the

Federation of Jain Associations in North America (JAINA), kicked off this very auspicious ceremony by welcoming everyone and spoke about the history of the partnership between CST and the Jain community through the hiring of adjunct professor Sushama Parekh to start teaching Jain classes at CST in 2015. Other prominent leaders in attendance include Dr. Jasvant Modi, past president of JCSC and lead donor of the endowed professorship; Mr. Dilip Shah and Mr. Mahesh Wadher, past presidents of JAINA; Dr. Parveen Jain, CEO of the Arihanta Institute; and adjunct professor, Mrs. Sushama Parekh.

This landmark moment strengthens CST's commitment to global interreligious dialogue and deepens its partnership with one of the world's oldest religious traditions.

Rev. Patricia Farris, Chair of CST's Board of Trustees, lauded the significance of this milestone. "This professorship will facilitate the exchange of ideas, create new knowledge, and train graduate students to ensure the continued study and relevance of the ancient Jain religion," Farris said.

President Emeritus and Professor of Hebrew Bible, Rev. Dr. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan, also spoke, describing CST's long standing partnership with the Jain community as "one of the greatest honors and joys of [his] academic career," and celebrated the moment as "the culmination of a long friendship."

"When established, Claremont School of Theology was the first

ecumenical seminary of The United Methodist Church,” Rev. Farris reflected. “That early work across the Christian community soon evolved into our interfaith commitments—with Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, and Jain partners—across interreligious, intercultural, and global contexts.”

Dr. Kuan traced the origins of this collaboration to 2011, when Dr. Philip Clayton, then CST’s Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of the Faculty, initiated conversations with members of the Jain community including Dr. Sulekh Jain, Mr. Dilip Shah, and Dr. Nitin Shah, who now serves on CST’s Board of Trustees. He also acknowledged Dr. Brianne Donaldson—then a CST doctoral student—for her early and ongoing contributions to the relationship.

Since those early conversations, the Jain community has become an invaluable partner to CST, supporting scholarships for students to study Jainism in India through the International School of Jain Studies (ISJS), funding international conferences, and sponsoring annual courses in Jain studies.

Dr. Sulekh Jain, past president of JAINA, also addressed the gathering. “On behalf of all my Jain friends, I extend my deepest gratitude to all of you—especially President Kuan and Hagiya ji—for believing in us and for your steadfast support. Your commitment to this journey has been unwavering,” Dr. Jain said.

CST President Grant Hagiya reflected on the broader significance of the partnership and the values the Jain tradition has added to our

educational enterprise. “In our world and society of radical polarization and harm, the subject of forgiveness is critical for us to teach and live out in our daily lives. Dr. Venu Mehta and Dr. Jeffrey Kuan bring our two great religious traditions together to demonstrate that we have so much more in common than any minor differences. This is the greater vision that our coming together today represents: that we can join together under the values that our world so desperately needs: compassion, justice, and belonging,” President Hagiya said.

The endowment is made possible by the generous contributions of 20 families and foundations through the hard work of Dr. Nitin Shah and Dr. Jasvant Modi. CST's President Emeritus Dr. Jeffrey Kuan and his wife Mrs. Valentine Toh also contributed to this endowment.

Finally, CST would like to express its deep gratitude and thanks to JCSC for hosting and providing not only the space but also lunch to all gathered.





***Top:** Dr. Nitin Shah. **Center left:** Mrs. Sushama Parekh. **Center right:** Dr. Jasvant Modi. **Bottom (from left to right):** Dr. Brianne Donaldson, Dr. Venu Mehta, Dr. Nitin Shah, Dr. Sulekh Jain, Mrs. Ravi Jain, Rev. Patricia Farris, Bishop Grant Hagiya, Mrs. Kinna Gandhi, Mrs. Valentine Toh, Dr. Kah-Jin Jeffrey Kuan.*