Utah Valley University’s Brian Birch has been elected to the board of the Parliament of the World’s Religions, just in time to help with preparations for that global interfaith group’s 2015 meeting in Salt Lake City.

It is an honor to serve, Birch, director of religious studies at the Orem school, said in a news release. "The work of this organization is critically important in developing just and peaceable relations across cultures and traditions."

For the past two decades, Birch has worked "to strengthen awareness of diversity," the release said, "and to explore ways in which students can contribute to an atmosphere of respect and cooperation across religious traditions and ideologies."
As part of Birch’s assignment with the parliament, he is working with representatives of Utah colleges and universities to find student volunteers for the Oct. 15-19 event.

"The parliament’s presence in Salt Lake City is a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for our students," Birch said. "No other event in the world provides more opportunities for engagement with religious diversity."

Under the scholar’s leadership, UVU has hosted a number of influential scholars and religious leaders, including the Dalai Lama, who gave an address on the Utah County campus in 2001 and who will speak at the 2015 parliament gathering in Salt Lake City.

UVU has also hosted national interfaith leader Eboo Patel, a well-known writer and founder of Interfaith Youth Core. The parliament, the release said, soon will announce Patel’s participation in October’s event.

Peggy Fletcher Stack