At the annual Fall Leadership Retreat of the North American Region's Interim Leadership Council, we covered a lot of ground. The first four items in this newsletter (below) provide just a glimpse of some of the decisions we are planning on mobilizing in the next year. Watch for each month's newsletters for more to come. What we have in mind could change your CC's future!

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L-R Sandy Westin, Sande Hart, Michael Pappas, Ardey Turner, guest Mariah, Adelia Sandoval, Margie Coles (back to the camera) in the final working session of the Fall Leadership Retreat.

I. Getting to know you: Connecting directly CC to LC

From the ground up, United Religions Initiative is all about building relationships – between faiths, between cultures, between people. It was therefore not a huge leap for members of the Leadership Council to conclude that they wanted to build closer relationships with our region's Cooperation Circles. Two-way, one-on-one relationships that would help the whole Council get better acquainted with all 40 of our CCs, and also enable each CC to be more aware of what the region has to offer them in the process.

And what better way to build relationships than by communicating – directly, in person, and on a regular basis? Each member of the LC, therefore, is going to be establishing a personal relationship with up to five CCs of our region.

They'll be calling the Primary Contact person of "their CCs" at least once a quarter to discuss these four questions:
• What is your CC’s primary focal interest area? What are you working on?
• What stories do you have to share with others about what you’ve been doing and learning?
• How can we (as the region's Leadership Council) be of help to you?
• What can you offer other CCs that could be of help to them?

If, as the Primary Contact of your CC, you don't feel you are the best one to discuss these topics with your LC contact, find another person in your CC who is willing to develop this relationship and refer them to your LC member when he or she calls.

Who will your LC contact be? Perhaps you would like it to be someone on the LC who you already know and feel comfortable with. Or perhaps someone who is in your geographic area or faith tradition. Or maybe someone entirely new to you. Here's the list of members of the 2011 Leadership Council. If you have a preference, let Sandy Westin know, and they will be doing the same. Working together, we'll make some good matches and lay the groundwork for good "Peacebuilding Partnerships" that just might prove informative and supportive to all involved.

• Margie Coles, Seattle, Jewish
• John Denker, Denver, Methodist
• Kali Mallik, Baltimore, Hindu
• Michael Pappas, San Francisco, Episcopalian
• Anne Roth, Denver, Interfaith/Episcopalian
• Adelia Sandoval, San Juan Capistrano CA, Indigenous
• Rebecca Tobias, St. Louis and Vancouver BC, Jewish
• Ardey Turner, San Jose CA, Spiritual Seeker
• Katie Ward, San Diego CA, Interfaith Explorer

II. Bioregional and regional gatherings

Plans for our next Regional Assembly (RA) have been postponed once again, but for a good reason. It has been traditional for an RA to be held a year or so before the next Global Assembly (GA) so it can serve to bring the region's concerns, needs, suggestions and ideas together to present at the GA. Since the last GA was held in Mayapur, India, just two years ago this month, the next might be expected to be held at the customary interval of four years in 2012. Due to financial constraints, however, the Global URI has postponed holding the next GA to some future, as yet unannounced date. The North American Leadership Council has therefore chosen to postpone our RA until a date preceding the next GA, whenever that might be.

This decision frees up the considerable resources (staff time, Leadership Council committees and money) that would normally go into producing a successful Regional Assembly, and allows us to redirect those into supporting the creation of several Bioregional Gatherings in 2011. What, you might ask, is a "Bioregional Gathering"? Here's the definition as it has developed so far:

A Bioregional Gathering is an event hosted by one or more Cooperation Circles in a geographic area which highlights the interfaith work they are doing, as well as the work of all other interfaith initiatives and organizations located within a two-hour driving radius of that community.
It's a showcase where URI and other interfaith organizations as well as different faith traditions can come together to inform one another of their work, their values, best practices and missions. It's a public relations opportunity where all the participating organizations can be in the media and public spotlight, possibly attracting added support to their numbers. And above all, it's a networking opportunity where those who attend can become mutually acquainted and potentially find creative means of collaborating on future work.

In 2010, three such gatherings were held - in Denver, Colorado, Charlotte, North Carolina, and Los Angeles, California. Each event was different from the other two, following their own sense of what should be included, and by no means does this exhaust the list of possibilities! While these three had keynote speakers from the URI global office, that is not a prerequisite.

- The **Denver event** was designed as a fundraising dinner, with Bishop Bill Swing, Founder of URI, providing the keynote address as well as offering several other discussions and presentations over the weekend.

- The Charlotte event had Charles Gibbs, Executive Director of URI as keynote speaker at an interfaith celebration of the International Day of Peace, followed by a reception in which more than a dozen organizations had displays and special refreshment offerings from their faith tradition or culture.

- The **Los Angeles event** had music, sacred ceremonies, and even a Whirling Dervish in its diverse program in which new networking connections among many interfaith organizations was perhaps its most successful outcome.

We hope to see at least two or three Bioregional Gatherings held in 2011 in diverse locations so that people don't need to travel far from home nor spend a lot of money to attend. Would your CC like to host such a gathering? Your regional organization may be able to help make that possible. From offering guest speakers and program materials to matching seed grants and publicity assistance, just call on us. These events are proving to be of incredible value in strengthening efforts to get URI more visible and impactful in local areas. Contact Sandy Westin if your CC might be interested in hosting a Bioregional Gathering next year.

**III. Creative Fundraising That Can Benefit Us All**

Up to this year, the North American region's services and operations have depended entirely on the small ($26k) allocation provided to our region by the global URI organization. We've recently been informed that, solely due to a shortfall in donated funds at the global level, 2011 will see the third year in a row in which that allocation has not been increased.

Global has also begun encouraging all 8 URI regions to become increasingly self-sufficient in raising their own funds, starting with a goal of 10% of the budget in 2011. In order to meet or exceed that goal while also accomplishing an ambitious array of programs and services in 2011 designed to strengthen URI and its Cooperation Circles in our region, we're developing some creative ways of establishing and growing our own funding. Those currently in place and on the drawing boards include:
Amazon.com commissions In place: Start your holiday shopping at the uri.org/na website, click through to Amazon.com from the link on our homepage and the region will get a small percentage from your purchases at no extra cost to you.

Recycling program In place: Send in used printer cartridges, pagers, cell phones and more using the URI in North America address in the "From" section of this program's prepaid FedEx shipping label for the benefit of the region's budget.

Interfaith License Plates Drawing board: A nonprofit in Arizona has succeeded in raising hundreds of thousands of dollars by producing and selling a vehicle license plate through the AZ Department of Transportation that carries a special message about the Golden Rule. URI in NA could produce similar specialized plates in many states and provinces.

URI-branded products Drawing board: Produce and sell greeting cards and other products that bear the URI logo and a message of interfaith peace.

Challenge grants Drawing board: Several of the projects we have in mind, such as remodeling our uri.org/na website, could easily be achieved with the help or one or more generous donors. A matching grants approach could achieve a lot while enrolling the assistance of two or more supporters who are aligned behind the vision of strengthening URI in our region. Grants and corporate sponsorships Drawing board: Our most ambitious, region-wide programs could be accomplished if their costs were underwritten by foundations, corporations, or individual philanthropists. See "Region-wide Programming" elsewhere in this newsletter for a description of the plans we envision.

You'll notice that nowhere in this list are we suggesting that our CCs or Affiliates pay any fees or be required to give direct donations to fund the region's programs and services. In fact, we're thinking of just the opposite approach – finding ways such as mini-grants and mini-loans to have the North American region be able to help underwrite programs and services of our CCs! When we can get fundraising programs such as those described above rolling, all that – and even a Regional Assembly – become very real possibilities. If you would like to help hasten the day that could happen, consider putting your shoulder to the wheel – either as an individual or a CC. Our Fundraising Work Team could use a few more motivated, visionary participants. Send Ardey Turner an email through that link, or give her a call at (408) 694-3770. many hands make light work – and make the work more fun to boot.

IV. Region-Wide Programming Goals for 2011

Now that your Leadership Council is fully in place, we're setting our sights on accomplishing some ambitious goals in 2011, starting with announcing a theme for the programs and services we plan to roll out next year: "Tending Humanity's Garden: One Planet, One Garden, One Family".

The LC sees its function as being be to provide services in support of our CCs and of URI's Purpose, Preamble and Principles (the "PPPs") which the CCs cannot do on their own. In this light, programs and services being considered include:
• Developing a searchable database of what all the region's CCs, Affiliates, and other interfaith organizations are doing and what each considers to be their focal areas of interest. This would serve as a meta social map of the region's interfaith activist community.

• An interactive version of this "map" would be made accessible to everyone through our website to aid in facilitating direct, personal connections between those doing related work or who could otherwise serve as resources to one another.

• Provide region-wide and global publicity and other support for local CC programs by their visible association with the URI organization beyond the local level.

• Provide consistent focus on the PPPs as the "deep rudder" and unique contribution of URI to and through our CCs and Affiliates to promote a paradigm shift towards greater interfaith harmony and collaboration.

• An "Interfaith Leadership Development" program will be designed for launch in 2011 and/or 2012 which can be taken on the road and delivered as part of bioregional gatherings and other events. This will intend to provide learning experiences and resources for all interfaith organizations attending, not just those in URI.

• Provide a variety of opportunities for CCs to communicate with one another, with members of the Leadership Council, the Regional Coordinator and other resources including more "CC Campfire Calls", webinars, and other events. The CCs will be asked for input on their preferred format and subjects prior to launching such programs.

• The achievements of our CCs and Affiliates will be highlighted in the monthly news bulletins to honor the programs and events they have succeeded in hosting. (Example: See the report on OCICE's Caring for Creation Conference below.) Further recognition will be provided by the Leadership Council by awarding "URI Star" certificates to any deserving interfaith organization, including those not currently an Affiliate or CC of URI.

V. CC Spotlight: OCICE's Caring for Creation Conference 2010

On Saturday, October 30, Margaret Henke and her wonderful team of the Orange County Interfaith Coalition for the Environment (OCICE) CC succeeded in organizing and producing an exceptional conference focused on our Earth and its environmental issues at St. Mark's Presbyterian Church in Newport Beach, California. Bishop William Swing, founder and president of URI, delivered a stimulating keynote address titled "Is Environmentalism a Religion?", followed by six workshops presented by local and global environmental leaders. A delicious vegetarian lunch and the presence of a wide variety of exhibitors topped off the rich, day-long experience. Congratulations on a job well done, OCICE!
VI. Another New Affiliate for North America

The Cascadia Center at Camp Brotherhood has joined our region in working towards interfaith peace. Located near Mt. Vernon, Washington, the Center represents a new generation for what has become a fixture in the Pacific Northwest community of interfaith conference and educational centers. Welcome, Cascadia!

Check out the homepage of our regional website at www.uri.org/na for op-ed pieces that are put out occasionally. Consider them nutritional supplements and food for thought. Responses welcome!

See you next month.

Sandy Westin, Regional Coordinator
Roger Eaton, Communications Coordinator

The Communications Committee of the North American Leadership Council