The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence, and to create cultures of peace, justice, and healing for the Earth and all living beings.

Dear readers,

In reflecting upon the 60th anniversary of Gandhi’s death, which is coming up at the end of January, I thought to include a quote of his as a way to introduce the new format of the North American Regional Update Newsletter (which shall hitherto be referred to on frequent occasion as simply, “the newsletter”). I went with my “A plan” for research. I Googled it.

Searching “Mahatma Gandhi” gave me 1,760,000 hits. Searching “Mahatma Gandhi quotes” gave me just under a million. Though he is more famous for his actions, the man has been cited for having said a great deal. Eventually, I came upon two especially appropriate quotations for the occasion, both of which Gandhi is rather famous for having said:

When a reporter asked him what he thought of Western civilization, Gandhi replied, “I think it would be a good idea.” He was also allegedly quoted for having said, “I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers.” In both instances, I am certain that Gandhi spoke in jest. He is also famous for having had a sense of humor.

As the newsletter’s editor (and a fellow humorist), I feel it necessary to point out two commonalities between my new role in URI and Gandhi’s aforementioned words of wisdom.

1. At the time of Gandhi’s death, 1948, Western civilization had much of the same (frequently negative) connotations as it does today in terms of its religious and cultural understanding. The “Western civilization” of which Gandhi spoke refers largely to North America, the region of the world we happen to represent within the interfaith community. However, it is because this region’s cultural and religious understanding is so strong, that I am honored to present this newsletter as a means of further communication, to show the world how passionately interfaith exists in this region, and how deeply we are helping it to grow.

2. When Gandhi poked fun at “reporters and photographers” I do believe he meant the Press. As it turns out, my duty to provide this region with an organized and informative update places me into the one category of people that Gandhi’s infinite belief in equality excludes.

To my relief, however, on a Google blog I later discovered, an obvious Gandhi guru, after having been asked if the quote was authentic, replied, “Gandhi said many important, intelligent, and even amusing things, but he most likely did not say, ‘I believe in equality for everyone, except reporters and photographers.’” A statement leading this reporter to conclude that Gandhi did, in fact, believe in equality for all.

I had originally planned to share a thought of his that would surely define peace and interfaith with better grace and wisdom than I would ever be able to, but then I figured there are about a million of Gandhi’s quotes out there (some of which he may not have said) waiting to be found by anyone seeking inspiration.

Just Google it.

From the bottom of my heart, thank you for reading and may peace forever prevail on earth,

Bailey S. Barnard, Jr.
EDITOR—NA NEWSLETTER

Post Script

First and foremost, I would like to formally thank Stephen Fuqua, Margi Ness, and Susanna McIlwaine. Though he is soon retiring from URI, Stephen made an enormous and passionate effort as URI-NA Coordinator, as well as the previous editor of the newsletter. His guidance has inspired me to make future newsletters live up to their potential. Margi (current URI-NA Coordinator) and Susanna (Interfaith Explorers CC) were gracious enough to aid in the compiling of this newsletter, and it would not have been possible to produce without their efforts.

Secondly, speaking of Google, check out how to join URI-NA’s web-based Google discussion group, as well as how to contribute material to this newsletter and how to become a member of the Editorial Board (both on page 12).
No One Gave Us a Handbook
Interviews with Eve Pope and Betsy Stang

BY SUSANNA MCILWAINE

Before the Global Council there was an Interim Global Council (IGC), which guided URI through its launch and first Global Assembly. The IGC was born out of URI’s Charter-writing gatherings at Stanford University, involving hundreds of people over several years (1996-1999). It was a highly fluid, creative time that attracted luminous innovators with religious, spiritual and organizational wisdom. Many came to only one meeting; a few came back to form a core, of which Betsy Stang (NY) and Eve Pope (VA) became an integral part.

Betsy Stang (NY) became aware of URI through her work at the United Nations (UN) where she represented concerns of indigenous elders. People kept telling her about some “interesting interfaith thing,” so she went to hear Charles Gibbs give a talk. She remembers being very direct with him afterward, demanding, “What is your objective here? Do you really want to do something new?” Charles assured her it was new, and that indigenous participation was sincerely wanted. That was enough to get Betsy to a meeting at Stanford to look at the Charter from an interfaith and indigenous perspective. She stayed on with the Charter process for four years.

Eve Pope became aware of URI through Mary and Sanford Garner. They were part of the first meeting called by Bishop Swing at the Fairmont Hotel in San Francisco in 1996 where people of many faiths gathered together. Among the roughly sixty people at the meeting was Robert Mueller, former Assistant Secretary General of the UN, who helped birth the URI vision. The Garners invited Eve to join them at the next meeting, which would be a Global Summit at Stanford in June of 1997.

“It was an incredibly diverse group of people from all over the world,” Eve recalls, “including lay people and people from many different religions. Clerical collars mixed with Buddhist robes, colorful saris, nuns’ habits and indigenous dress, gave a distinctively global look. That year, we struggled with how we were to be organized. Should we have a charter like the UN? Gradually the idea of a grassroots non-hierarchal organization emerged.

CONTINUED ON NEXT PAGE...
We would first need to define our purpose in a single sentence. This was a challenge! Defining our preamble and principles was also a daunting and lengthy process. All these people from different backgrounds, cultures and religions put something in the pot. We wrote all these things out, and put them on the wall and then walked around the room putting dots everywhere. In the end everything was decided by consensus. We used Appreciative Inquiry throughout all these meetings. It was new to everyone, and helped us connect heart to heart, and jump over our differences.”

When the participants were asked to gather by region and choose delegates to the IGC, Eve and Betsy were elected. Did they have a clear idea about what the IGC was going to do? “No one gave us a little handbook with our responsibilities. Everything was in such a formative stage—this was before the Charter was signed.”

Betsy remembers it as “quite a process.”

“One of the processes I liked the most about the IGC meetings,” she recalls, “was the development of trust and support for one another—we were able to tackle deep, difficult issues. Particularly in the early days, there were a lot of difficult issues. People got to express things about their tradition, their lack of participation, and their old hurts. We moved forward as family and started becoming co-conspirators in the vision of URI. That was the most amazing thing.

WHAT WAS THE PURPOSE OF THE IGC?

“A lot! How do you take this new form of a Cooperation Circle, with all of the cutting edge thinking, creative vision, circular dynamic—all pretty amazing—how do you make it work? We had this amazing conceptual charter that had never been done before. What did it mean? The work of the IGC is implemented in the structure of URI. People should read the minutes of the IGC meetings. We tackled financial systems, organizational structure…it was a pretty hairy time. The best thing I remember was one of the international conference calls of the IGC. Despite technical glitches, because we had been communicating by email, talking in subcommittees, it was amazing, and easy to do. We had really come to respect quite deeply each other’s traditions.”

“How did we walk without stepping on each other’s religious toes? We all live in our assumptions; we all come out of a field of ‘this is what it is.’ There were a lot of ‘wait a minutes.’ The idea of the Charter was to level the playing field, trying to find a ground of reconciliation—to create a field where reconciliation could happen.”

“Some of the issues back then are ones URI still struggles with: How do you fit the corporate, non-profit structure into the Global Council structure? How do you give people latitude to do what they want to do, and still support them? How do you balance the relative roles of trustees and staff? How do you decentralize? How do you share information?”

“Because of the Charter,” Betsy says, “URI has pulled in some really strong people of vision. This has such deep integrity and other people may not know that if they have not been as deeply involved. It is our job to spread the word.”

For more information on the birth of URI:


We would love other stories, reminiscences, photographs, or documents about the birth of URI to share in the newsletter and an online archive.

Send material to bailey.barnard@gmail.com.
International Day of Peace 2007

On September 21st, representatives from URI, as well as many other groups and individuals, participated in the events held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York.

BY MONICA WILLARD AND DEBORAH MOLDOW

NEWLY ELECTED UN SECRETARY-GENERAL Ban Ki-moon launched the 2007 International Day of Peace with the traditional ringing of the Peace Bell at 9:30 a.m. in the Japanese Garden. He delivered his powerful message for the International Day of Peace, stating that peace is the mission of the United Nations, but that it is not easy. He urged, “On this International Day, let us promise to make peace not just a priority, but a passion. Let us pledge to do more, wherever we are in whatever way we can, to make every day a day of peace.”

Mr. Ban noted with sadness the passing of Peace Messenger Luciano Pavarotti, and introduced Michael Douglas, Elie Wiesel, Jane Goodall, and newly appointed Messenger of Peace Haya of Jordan. He asked for a Minute of Silence, while students from the UN International School (UNIS) raised the flags of all 192 UN Member States. As a finale, a children’s choir sang a lovely song. The Messengers of Peace paused on their way out to take photos with the UNIS students, some of whom were resplendent in their native attire. All then proceeded to the Student Observance.

Under-Secretary General for Communications and Information Mr. Kiyoko Akasaka opened the event by introducing Secretary-General Ban Ki-moon. It was an honor and inspiration to have the Secretary-General address the youth. He was followed by the Vice-President of the General Assembly, Dr. Hjalmar Hannessan of Iceland. Next came the Messengers of Peace. Actor Michael Douglas spoke about the horrors of nuclear weapons. Dr. Jane Goodall talked about environmental degradation and said “hello” in chimpanzee. Dr. Elie Wiesel addressed the horrors people can subject upon one another and the importance of respect to break the cycle. HRH Princess Haya Bint Al Hussein of Jordan, who had been appointed that day as a Messenger of Peace by the Secretary-General, spoke about eloquently about those in need and our obligation to help.

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Students from the UN International School raise flags during the IDP opening ceremony.

The annual youth event organized by the UN Dept. of Public Information in association with Pathways to Peace, United Religions Initiative, and the World Peace Prayer Society for the International Day of Peace was a great success. Roughly 900 people attended the event, which meant that some adults were standing most of the morning.
The students were linked by satellite with youth at UN Peacekeeping sites in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Lebanon, and Sudan, providing information on life in areas of conflict and testimony from young people sharing their personal experience of war. Discussion and questions were handled with great skill by our young moderators, Kymberli Stewart and Sarah Nadeau. There were five youth presenters in four areas. Ana Dodson of Peruvian Hearts talked about the importance of the Stop Child Poverty Campaign and shared her work. She is a 14-year-old who was adopted as a baby from an orphanage in Peru. Her family returned to visit Peru when she was 11 years old. She saw the need of so many orphans and decided to raise money to help the orphans in Peru. Mitch Paine, a college freshman from Nebraska, spoke about the wonderful program founded by Dr. Goodall, Roots and Shoots. James Ajokomo Lual told of his harrowing escape from the Sudan by walking over 600 miles into Ethiopia, and how he went from being a refugee to a recent college graduate. Federick Huballa and Taylor Reed, both representing PeaceJam, called the group to take action! They shared the “Call to Global Action” written by the Nobel Peace Laureates to invite the youth to take action on the MDGs and nuclear weapons.

Monica Willard introduced Mrs. Ban Soon-taek, wife of the Secretary-General, who rang the bell for peace. This bell was crafted from recycled weapons. Everyone joined with the entire building in the Minute of Silence at 12 noon.

Hip-hop artist Chris “Kazi” Rolle, star of feature film “The Hip Hop Project,” shared a video about using hip-hop to promote good and dazzled the students by performing one of his hit songs. He also taught the students a hip-hop version of “May Peace Prevail on Earth” to accompany Deborah Moldow, who led the World Peace Flag Ceremony.

Students came forward raising each flag one by one, as everyone called out the names of the 192 UN Member States. The Peacekeeping sites also took part via satellite, and projections showed the various regions of the world and young people there celebrating the International Day of Peace with the message “May Peace Prevail on Earth.” Mrs. Ban also participated in the Flag Ceremony, proudly raising the flag of the United Nations. As always, the World Peace Flag Ceremony left everyone feeling inspired and uplifted, capping the event with a joyful message of peace.

Ms. Elizabeth Baldwin-Penn, Chief of the Public Relations Section of UN DPI closed the morning with appreciation to all who organized the event. Special thanks go to Dawn Johnston-Britton for vision and production. The morning was fun, rich in information, and left all participants with many ideas and direction for taking action to promote the culture of peace. 🌟

James Ajokomo Lual, Jane Goodall, Federick Huballa and Taylor Reed, Michael Douglas, and Ana Dodson.
**San Francisco Gathering to Celebrate 20 Years of Interfaith Dialogue in America**

**BY PAUL CHAFFE**

North American Interfaith Network (NAIN) is a nonprofit association for communication between, and mutual strengthening of, interfaith organizations, agencies and programs along with offices of religious and denominational institutions pertaining to interfaith relations... While it has minimal staff or program of its own, the Network sees its role as facilitating the networking possibilities of these organizations by providing information. It seeks to provide a coalition model for cooperative interaction based on serving the needs and promoting the aspirations of all member organizations.


**Embracing an Interfaith Future** is the theme of the 20th anniversary gathering of the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN), July 24-28, 2008, in San Francisco. If you care about grassroots interfaith activities in North America, please consider attending.

NAIN had its first conference in 1988 in Wichita, Kansas, drawing 235 representatives from 12 different religions to start an interfaith conversation. *The New York Times* covered the event. “From Wichita to the World, a Vision” reported that the meeting was “the first of such nature and scope on the continent since 1893, when a World Parliament of Religions was held in Chicago.”

In the 20 years since the Wichita “Connect,” the centennial of the initial Parliament was celebrated, the URI Charter was signed, the Pluralism Project was initiated at Harvard, and thousands of interfaith groups have been organizing across North America and the world.

In 1988, multifaith relationships was a new idea. Today the religious fabric of our neighborhoods and cities is utterly changed. Never in human history have so many followers of so many faiths lived so closely together, or had a better opportunity to understand and get to know each other. How do we live into this challenge? What do we do next? These questions will be explored at NAIN’s 2008 Connect through three subthemes:

► Multifaith Challenges We Face
► The Gifts We Bring
► Making a Difference

Two dozen workshops, many of them interactive, will be offered, and an afternoon of Open Space workshops will allow attendees to organize sessions around their own issues. Half a dozen exemplary grassroots multifaith organizations, succeeding in new ways, will be profiled. “How-to” sessions are popular at NAIN and will be available next July as well. Meditation and devotion will be offered by leaders from different traditions.

*Embracing an Interfaith Future* will be held at the University of San Francisco, a Jesuit institution in the heart of the the city. A program outline and registration forms will be available by this December. And before the end of the year, we plan to have a new website up that features each of the July workshops—with a chance for you to make observations and suggestions, add links, and otherwise respond to the material that will be discussed at the Connect.

For more information or to receive registration forms when they are published, contact: paul@interfaith-presidio.org.
Staying Clear About Interfaith Commitment
One Person's Opinion

From Hamlet to Megalopolis, interfaith activities are emerging spontaneously across the American landscape, a gift and blessing for us all. As we begin to institutionalize and build local-global connections in the next few years, we will be tempted to let our commitment to multireligious relationships morph into commitment to ‘our’ organization. Then we compete rather than collaborate, and the cause becomes splintered and conflicted.

If interreligion is to help transform a culture of violence into a culture of peace, we must learn to be interconnected and mutually supportive. If the cause we share—developing healthy, vital relationships among people from all religious, racial, and cultural backgrounds—becomes less important than organizational loyalties, everything is compromised. We find ourselves back in the land of winners and losers, betraying our commitment to inclusivity.

In short, we need each other.

The interreligious community needs everyone willing to reach out in friendship to the stranger to be part of the larger circle. Sure, we can’t go to every meeting. There is no need to join every group. But we can appreciate, benefit from, and be supportive of each other’s gifts and successes. Similarly, our organizations can promote and encourage each other’s activities and resources.

In the late nineties, a number of people active in both URI and the Parliament of the World’s Religions saw how these two young international interfaith organizations could end up competitors. So they created The Bridge Cooperation Circle to promote URI-Parliament interaction and mutual support. Many wonderful results came from that first collaborative step, including the invitation at the Barcelona Parliament in 2004 for URI to design a day of group dialogue for all attendees. Instead of competitors, the Parliament and URI became partners.

Whenever we work with each other, interfaith bridge-building is advanced. The task is too large, the challenge of peacemaking too daunting, to rely on any single group or network. We need the synergies that come from sharing.

So I hope you attend the NAIN 20th anniversary gathering in San Francisco, next July, and that you consider attending URI’s next Global Assembly in India in November of 2008, as well as the Melbourne Parliament in late 2009.

Grassroots multi-religious relationship is about inclusivity, respect, and engagement. May our communities and organizations extend the same values to each other as we seek a transformed world.

- Paul Chaffee, Executive Director of the San Francisco Bay Area’s Interfaith Center at the Presidio

SARAH CC Shows Award Winning Film, On Common Grounds

BY SANDE HART

Following the events of September 11th, 60 members of the Jewish, Muslim, and Christian faiths came together to demonstrate our common values. We had agreed to go to Mexico to build a home for a needy family. Someone had the great idea to bring along a documentary filmmaker to chronicle our day.

Over the course of several months, most of us had the opportunity to meet one another in the safety of a controlled dialogue, sponsored by the Orange County Human Relations Commission. We shared who we were, what our thoughts and fears were, and what shaped us to become the religious citizens of our community. When we agreed to go to Mexico together, we brought members of our congregations who had never met one another.

From my personal filter, it was a picnic. Everyone was getting along, there were no obvious divides, I couldn’t even tell who belonged to what faith. We were just building a home for a needy family.

It was not until lunchtime—where we gathered in a local elementary school playground—that I noticed an acknowledgment of our diversity. However, it did not come from one of the Abrahamic faiths there that day to prove something. It came from the people of the community we were there to help. They had prepared us all a lunch of home made tortillas, salsa, lettuce, and tofu! The last place I expected respect and acceptance of our dietary needs was in a poverty stricken third world country. But why not?

However, also at lunchtime I was first made aware of some tension amongst us. I was speaking to an Israeli Jewish man from my congregation who let me know how upset he was to see a Muslim wearing a medallion of a map of Palestine. He was not so upset by the medallion, but the actual map of Palestine, in his view, was a lot bigger than the Palestinian territory he knew. Being a commander in the Israeli army, he did not agree with the geography lines etched in gold. It was the first time politics played a factor in our divide that day. Luckily, it was the only tension that arose.

The film, On Common Grounds, captures the essence of the spirit of intension and hope to come together to focus on the things that we have in common.

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Laced with dialogue of three women (filmed at our follow-up picnic 2 weeks later), the film demonstrates that it’s not our faith that divides us, but our politics. The women in the film share their fear, impatience, and resolve with the condition of the world.

“It’s time we take a stand and stop this cycle of violence that does nothing but promote someone else’s political gain,” says Dassie Feingold.

“When are we going to live our values and stop acting like animals?” cries Nadia Ali.

“It’s time for the Christian community to come together and reach out and accept our challenges as the majority of this country and make a difference,” says Jackie Marshall.

These 3 women went on to be the first members of Spiritual And Religious Alliance for Hope (SARAH).

*On Common Grounds* is more than a film showing Jews, Christians, and Muslims getting along. It is an example that we can build something together rather than tear something down. It is not our religion that creates hatred and fear. We can rise above the politics to see our common ground.

With commentary by an Imam, a Rabbi, a Reverend, and members of the interfaith community, the story is well balanced and carefully told. It recently won Best Documentary at the first Muslim Film Festival in Pakistan and appears on the Hallmark Channel periodically.

Both Women in Transition and Women’s Interfaith Solutions for Dialogue and Outreach in Metro-Detroit (WISDOM), the two groups most like SARAH in intention, provided us with many new ideas and a model of organization. We have since implemented some methodology that makes sense to our group and we were able to adapt these changes without losing our own spontaneity and spirituality that makes us who we are. We were empowered to move forward with our work and encouraged to reach out to new communities as well as to step up our efforts in interfaith reconciliation. Some of those changes include becoming a non-profit and implementing an Advisory Council.

It was simply fascinating to me to experience the great minds of these women and to see how they processed and conceptualize the mechanics of the Women’s Interfaith Groups of America. By the way, there were only three groups that looked like SARAH—women of the community dedicated to coming together monthly to dialogue and also reach out into the community.

I am so very grateful to the Pluralism Project, Dr. Diana Eck and Kathryn Lohre, and everyone else who participated. It was an honor to be included in this seminar and SARAH is now empowered to be the organization that she is ready to become because of the information and inspiration that I received while at Radcliff.

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SARAH’s Experience at Radcliff

My experience while participating in “The Women’s Interfaith Initiatives Post 9/11” conference in September has had an extraordinary impact on Spiritual And Religious Alliance for Hope (SARAH).

The Pluralism Project of Harvard University’s Radcliff Institute has profiled SARAH for Advanced Research for about two years. For a conference in September, they brought together several women’s groups with goals similar to those SARAH.

After spending two days with other grassroots groups as well as those from the world of academia and research—Many women, senior lecturers, professors, and research analysts from organizations in Washington—I left with a broader understanding of the relationship between the institutions involved and felt that we bridged some of the gap between these vital groups.

Before this conference, my continual question had been “How do we move the critical mass if we are not always on the same page as our leadership?” Having worked at the ground level mobilizing communities through passion and creativity, I felt a breakdown in support in a bi-lateral way and realized at this conference that The Pluralism Project has brilliantly provided a solution so that we may both be most effective in our work.

SANDE HART, Co-Founder—SPIRITUAL AND RELIGIOUS ALLIANCE FOR HOPE CC
The Best Kept Secret In Henderson County

Co-convener of URI of Henderson County, North Carolina displays how her group has become a beacon of interfaith growth and leadership.

BY SANDY WESTIN

2008 will find the URI of Henderson County in its 10th year as an active CC. It is also the second year of offering the Academy for Peace—our program of events, workshops, book studies, and other interfaith activities. As is true of any dynamic, living thing, our CC is encountering issues of change and growth, redefinition and continuity.

ABOUT OUR CC:

Henderson County has a year-round population of approximately 98,000 spread across its 375 square miles, with around 12,000 of those living in its county seat of Hendersonville. For its size, our area has an impressive variety of social, cultural, and activist organizations. URI was established here in 1998 through the initiative of Mary Page Sims, who is still an active, vital force in the leadership of our CC. The vision statement of our CC was early established that we are a peace organization which serves to promote peace by promoting understanding among the religions present in our community, as well as cultivating peace inwardly, locally and globally. Our mailing list includes 182 addresses, with approximately 20 individuals from some six faith traditions being actively involved in URI committees and program leadership. Our events and programs typically have 15 to 30 in attendance, with 250 attending our annual mid-winter Interfaith Celebration of Peace.

COLLABORATIVE RELATIONSHIPS:

In recent years, our CC has had the good fortune to build collaborative relationships with a number of organizations in our local area which are working towards ends compatible with those of URI. Together, we are finding ways to further their work and they, ours. With some, we are producing joint programs included in our 2008 Academy for Peace brochure. Representatives of others sit on one or more of our planning committees to provide valued input and facilitate cooperative action. All directly assist us in getting the word out to the community about URI and its programs.

This illustration shows the relationship we see between the several focus areas of our CC (inner circle), the organizations we ally with (second circle), and the programs we are producing in our Academy for Peace (outer circle).

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Moving Beyond Having URI be the “Best Kept Secret In Town”:
The Circle of Trustees met in early September to address the topic of the growth of our CC: What that means to us, how we wish to grow, and what we are prepared to do to help make that growth possible. Building on the outcomes of that discussion, we are taking steps this fall to become more actively inclusive of youth, and the Hispanic and Black communities in our area. We’re also placing a general brochure about URI in our local Visitors Center and the public library to help us be more visible and accessible to those new to the area and new to working for Peace. We’re aiming to keep our growth organic (attracting, not promoting) and sustainable (not bringing in too many, too fast). We also took the step this year of getting a Post Office box for our CC. While we may not have an office or building for our “Academy”, bit-by-bit we are working to establish a more professional, viable presence in our community.

Growing New Leadership:
We’re currently grappling with a challenge others also face, namely how to bring a new generation of leadership into our CC while keeping our rudder deep in the founding principles. Mary Page Sims has actively encouraged this transition by encouraging individuals such as myself to step up to the plate, while providing much-needed coaching and support. We always begin our events and committee meetings by lighting a central candle, sharing a moment of silence, and reading the Universal Prayer for Peace. In doing so, we find all involved are helped to center on who we are, and what we’re about—the core of our continuity.

Hopes for the Future:
A year from now, we hope to make it possible for one or two from our CC’s leadership to attend the Global Congress in India. We’ll be putting an appeal for contribution of frequent flyer miles into our Academy for Peace mailing this fall, hoping to cover much of their travel cost that way. Closer to home, we’re also hoping to be able to take part in another sub-regional URI gathering to follow up on the one held in Virginia last April. That weekend provided much inspiration and insight to those of us who were able to attend—a truly memorable experience.

An Invitation:
Our new Academy for Peace brochure should be ready for distribution by the first of December. If anyone would like to receive a copy to see what programs we’re offering and how we are publicizing them, just drop me a line at swestin@charter.net, or call 828.749.3581. I’ll be happy to send you a copy. Best wishes for your own continuing success. Together we make a difference.

URI Receives Organizational Development Award
On October 23rd in Baltimore, Maryland, Charles Gibbs accepted an award on behalf of URI. The award was given by the Organizational Development Network (ODN) recognizing the global work being done by URI.

The ODN is an international professional association of organization development practitioners. Its members come from the USA, Canada, Mexico, Puerto Rico, and around the world. The ODN believes in a world in which organizations and communities are productive, effective, healthy, and sustainable.

The ODN has been observing URI in action for many years. Each year they have a large national conference. This year it was in Baltimore. Within the conference there is an Awards Program that recognizes groups and individuals who exemplify the values and practices of organizational development.

I accepted this award on behalf of all of those who are working tirelessly together to create a vibrant, strong, and effective organization.

- Charles Gibbs, Executive Director URI
Revitalizing North American

From October 12-14, an exciting and important retreat for the URI North America Region took place in Colorado. Nine people who have been active in URI in various capacities for many years met at the home of Anne and Bill Roth to discuss a new structure for NA, the 2008 NA Work Plan, and to lay the groundwork for moving forward with new energy. Those attending were Anne Roth, Bill Roth, Margi Ness, Lisa Marie Main, P.K. McCary, Kathy Sandoval, Rachael Watcher, Gurudev Khalsa, and Susie Verde.

A full report asking for CC participation will be on the web soon, but for those who don’t access the web and to get this important information out to as many as possible, I am providing this brief outline of the retreat.

Together we:

✅ Constructed an historic timeline of URI and the NA region and our own involvement with URI
✅ Looked at where we are now
  - Reviewed comments sent in by CC members
  - Reviewed structures of other URI regions (MENA, Europe, SE Asia/Pacific)
  - Reviewed global and NA staff vision from the Global Assembly in Antwerp
  - Reviewed proposed structure developed at the 2001 SLC Assembly
✅ Did mini-appreciative inquiries and came up with a few definitions of our purpose, vision, and structure.
We purposely did not try to come up with one, but broke into groups and developed several definitions as places for all CCs to begin discussion
✅ Common themes were:
  - Need to focused on PPP’s and relationship building
  - Need for regional autonomy
  - Need to strengthen foundation with regional funding and staff
  - Need for sub-regional work and sub-regional coordinators
  - Need for more communication, including face to face meetings

The group then charted what needed to be done, by whom, and when, in order to ensure the process would continue to move forward. A full report will be put on line with a bulletin board identifying issues that need to be resolved and Appreciative Inquiry questions to help CCs get input from everyone. Follow up calls and possibly visits will be made as necessary.

In approximately six months, this group will be expanded with other interested CC members to form a proposed interim NA board of directors. The proposed interim board will meet in Colorado to further flush out the structure based on input received and will develop the next steps. Colorado was proposed as the headquarters for North America because it is/has:

- Removed physically from SF hub and helps us form our own identity
- Centrally located with easy access
- Good energy!

We left the retreat reignited and re-infused but real movement will only happen with active participation from the CCs. An email will be sent to NA Air (to CC contacts) when the full report with the survey is available. The retreat committee invites you to share our excitement and help URI NA bring Peace on Earth.

The ideas developed by this happy, hard working retreat group will be shared with North American CCs for consideration. Front row: Lisa Main, Kathy Sandoval (Global Council Trustees for NA), Rachael Watcher, and Anne Roth. Back row: Gurudev Khalsa, P.K. McCary (Global Council Trustees for NA), and Margi Ness (NA Coordinator). Not shown, Susie Verde and Bill Roth.
Our Google Group email list is up and running!

URINorthAmericaConnect@googlegroups.com  A connection place for CCs in North America

A place to share what our CCs are doing, what we want to do, how we are doing and how we can support each other.

- A place to share ideas about collaboration, funding, resources.
- A place to connect our own work with the region as a whole – to find out what is happening in global URI and in North America that affects us.
- A place to listen to each other and build our community.

Through this Google Group, we can also create our own small website, manage our own memberships, and include other members of our CCs. We can create an archive, a resource we can share with new CCs and new list members. Please check out the features (you can post documents, upload pictures, etc.) You will have to do only a simple Google registration to do that, so please look and use it!

http://groups.google.com/group/URI-NorthAmericaConnect.

Please invite others in your CC to join the conversation. Please always identify yourself, your CC, and location when you post. If you have any questions or if you have trouble posting, please feel free to contact me.

- Susanna McIlwaine, Interfaith Explorers CC of Northern Virginia
  smcilwaine@verizon.net

Contribute to this Newsletter!

In order for interfaith communication to be as effective as possible, it is necessary for many voices to contribute to the collective whole. This newsletter seeks to project the voices of URI’s many CCs. Please submit anything from book or movie reviews, to community success stories, to challenges you’re facing, to organizational and fundraising efforts, to valuable lessons learned. We are all in this together. All of our voices must be heard.

In addition, it is through no small effort that you are reading this newsletter. Many people have put in a great deal of effort. In order for this newsletter to reach it’s full potential, WE NEED YOUR HELP!

For inquiries, to submit material, and to learn how you can become a part of the Editorial Board, contact Bailey:
bailey.barnard@gmail.com

Gandhi shares a laugh with his granddaughters.