North American Region

Invitation to Join URI Action Agenda Conference Calls

CC Contact Persons: Please share this invitation with all of your CC members, as appropriate.

Cooperation Circle Activities

1. International Day of Peace
   1. New York City, New York
   2. World Peace Sanctuary, outside Amenia, New York
   3. Los Angeles, California
   4. Asheville, North Carolina

2. North America Sub-Regional Interfaith Retreats
   1. Nurturing Interfaith Opportunities: From Southern California, To the World
   2. URI-NA Coordinator visits the Pacific Northwest Gathering of Organizations

3. Resources for CCs and Affiliates
   1. URI Contributes to New Peacebuilding Book
   2. URI News & Information on the Internet
   3. Global Support Staff Contact Information

A Note on Newsletter Distribution

This newsletter is intended for everyone and anyone interested in URI Cooperation Circle activities in North America. Though it is initially sent only to CC contact persons, it is hoped that they will pass it along to other members in their organizations. Please also feel free to submit (short) articles on your organization's activities and events. Send these to editor@interfaithnews.net.

North American Region

Invitation to Join URI Action Agenda Conference Calls

CC Contact Persons: Please share this invitation with all of your CC members, as appropriate.
Over the next month we have scheduled five conference calls on topics of interest to many URI members. These calls are designed to provide opportunities to share your experience, ideas, and questions with other CC members and URI affiliates in North America on the topic of the call.

- We will be using the free Easy Conference service.
- Each participant will pay for his or her own long distance charges.
- Each call is scheduled for one hour, but the participants are free to extend the call if they wish.
- Each call can include up to 30 people. If you would like to be on the call, e-mail the contact person for that call to let them know, then just follow the instructions below to dial into the call.
- You are free to join any call that you feel drawn to, even if only to listen.
- Each call is co-led by 2-4 people from different CC's, global council reps, and /or support staff who have personal experience and insight to share regarding the topic or the call.

Join us to share your insights, experience, ideas, hopes, questions, and success stories! Here is the schedule of conference calls (dialing instructions are listed after the information on the fifth conference call below).

1. **Youth Engagement in Interfaith and URI, Monday: September 29th, 5 pm PST / 8 pm EST** - Featuring:
   - Joan Riback, International Institute for Global Studies CC, Forestville, CA, coordinator
   - Gerardo Ojeda-Ebert, Interfaith Council of WA CC, Seattle, WA, coordinator.
   - Rambhoru Brinkmann, City of Angeles CC, Los Angeles, CA
   - Sarah Talcott, URI Global Support Staff, San Francisco, CA
   - Contact: Barbara Trites, b.trites@comcast.net

2. **Ecological Sustainability and URI Resource Generation: Global Healing.net: Generating Resources for the URI Regionally and Globally: Tuesday, September 30th, 5 pm PDT/8 pm EDT** - Featuring:
   - David Randal, URI CC, Salt Lake City, UT
   - Brock Doxey, Digital Saga (technical components)
   - Kristy Swapp, Network Development & Training for Global Healing.net
   - Contact: Steve Fitzgerald, URI-NA Regional Support, stevefitzg@comcast.net

3. **Resource Generation - discussing a quick and easy interfaith educational CC fundraiser - selling 2004 Multifaith Calendars to your community!: Monday October 6th, 5 pm PST / 8 pm EST**
   - Contact: Barbara Trites, b.trites@comcast.net
4. Technology and Communications - discussion on effective use of lists, web sites, and other technology for interfaith communication and support: Thursday, October 9th, 5 pm PDT / 8 pm EDT - Featuring:

- Stephen Fuqua, Internet and Information Technology CC, coordinator
- Kristin Lee-Swenson, URI Global Support Staff
- Contact: Barbara Trites, b.trites@comcast.net

5. Peace Building: Creating Departments of Peace in the U.S. and other Countries: Tuesday, October 14th, 5 pm PDT/ 8 pm EDT - Featuring:

- Jerry Chang, Establish Departments of Peace in the US and Globally URI CC
- Dr. Linda Groff, Establish Departments of Peace in the US and Globally CC
- Gerry Eitner, President, The Master's Group
- Contact: Susanna McIlwaine, smcilwaine@starpower.net

INSTRUCTIONS FOR JOINING ANY OF THE ABOVE CONFERENCE CALLS:

**Dial: 1-603-912-0333 x 837.**

The first person to arrive and enter the three-digit code assigned will hear a prompt to "press one to create the conference room." All other conferees will simply enter the room. This is a very quiet bridge so please introduce yourself when you enter the room when there is a break in the conversation so that we know you have joined the call.

Note: You can press 5 on your phone to "mute" your own phone (e.g. to screen out background noise) and 4 to "unmute" your phone.

For several of the conference call topics, there are minutes from prior calls and/or other background materials. These are available from the contact person for the call by email request if sent at least several days in advance of the call. Please email your request to the contact person for the call you are interested in.

Return to Table of Contents

Invitation To Join Monthly Conference Call With URI-NA Global Council Trustees

All members of URI CCs and URI Affiliates in North America are welcome to join the monthly conference call with the URI Global Council Trustees from our region (Heng Sure, Kay Lindahl, and Don Frew) and our regional coordinator (Steve Fitzgerald). Other global council members who are based in North America region (e.g. Yoland Trevino), and members of the regional support team (Janet Dhutti, Carolyn Knaus, Susanna McIlwaine, Barbara Trites, and Eric Wenzel) also join the call when they can. The trustees share information on the activities of the various committees that they serve on in
the URI Global Council (e.g. organizational development, communications, member support). The regional coordinator provides updates on activities, questions, etc. from CCs in our region. You are welcome to join the call and listen in to what’s going on with URI in our region, and/or to bring and offer your questions, ideas, and/or suggestions. If you have a topic that you would like to add to the agenda for the next call, please email your request to Steve Fitzgerald.

The call is held on the first Tuesday of each month at 5 p.m. Pacific time. The next call is set for Tuesday, October 2, 5 p.m. PDT. Please dial in to the following number for each month’s call: 978-431-1111, extension 797.

2004 Multifaith Calendars for Fundraising

Announcing that the 2004 Multifaith Calendars are now available as a URI-CC fundraiser! Thanks to Global Council member Jonathan Rose from Mexico and Project Coordinator, Barbara Trites in Seattle, WA, interfaith calendars will be for available as an easy to sell, educational fundraiser for Cooperative Circles.

Each calendar includes an introduction to this year's theme of spirit and the environment; accurate dates and explanations of significant religious holidays and festivals alongside each month's calendar; concise information about 13 religions present in North America; essays on the religious uses of calendars and lunar cycles; and compelling photos and graphics.

Besides your friends in interfaith work, calendars sell quickly to members of various faiths who want to keep track of festival dates, schools, places of work with religiously diverse populations and at on-going or one time interfaith events.

Available with your purchase is a short "How To" handout giving suggestions on ways to create a successful fundraiser. Each calendar will include an information sheet spotlighting the work of URI and the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions.

Calendars retail for $10 and may be purchased in bulk quantities for:

- 10 - 24 = $9 each
- 25 - 49 = $8 each
- 50 + = $7 each

Shipping is included in the per calendar price. This means that from the sale of a carton of 50 calendars, your Cooperative Circle will net $150 for one of your own special projects.

To order, contact: Barbara Trites at 206.985.4476 or b.trites@comcast.net.

Note: The Monday, October 6th conference call will include a discussion for marketing Multifaith Calendars. Please join us!
Bridge-building at NAINConnect 2003

By Paul Chaffee of the Interfaith Center at the Presidio

NAINConnect 2003, the annual gathering of the North American Interfaith Network, met this year in Columbus, Ohio, August 9-12. Central Ohio was hot and muggy, but the program was inspired and the buildings air-conditioned.

Rita Gross, a Buddhist who has made important contributions to Buddhist-Christian dialogue, and Paul Knitter, a major Christian voice in the theology of interfaith relations, did superbly with keynoting responsibilities, setting the tone for a lively series of workshops.

NAINConnect tends to attract staff and board members of grassroots interfaith efforts across Canada and the United States and is working to generate participation from Mexico. Jonathan Rose from Mexico City sits on the NAIN board and URI's Global Council. Kay Lindahl, chair elect of NAIN, is also on both boards, and Paul Chaffee, recently of the URI board, was elected treasurer of NAIN in August. NAIN has similarly strong ties with the Council for a Parliament of the World's Religions.

The net result is that North American interfaith leaders in a variety of settings are getting better acquainted and learning to promote each other's activities. It was gratifying to see theological educators paying more attention to grassroots activity; Grove Harris from Harvard's Pluralism Project and Lee Hancock, dean of Auburn Theological Seminary, were among a number of academics who came to Columbus.

In the same bridge-building spirit, next year NAINConnect in New York City will fall on July 24-27. It will overlap with the annual meeting of NAEIS, the National Association of Ecumenical and Interfaith Staff, an organization which shares most of NAIN's interests.

Best resources discovered at NAINConnect: (1.) A 14-page curriculum on a "Do-It-Yourself Golden Rule Workshop" can be downloaded at http://www.scarboromissions.ca/. (2.) Martin Forward's Inter-religious Dialogue--A Short Introduction (Oneworld Publications, Oxford, 2001), is an excellent introduction to a field which is so large that it is hard to know where to start.

For this participant, the high-point of NAINConnect 2003 was Professor Gross' keynote, and my notes of her presentation are attached to this report. Enjoy!

Learning How to Live in a Religiously Plural World

Summary notes from Professor Rita Gross' NAINConnect keynote, August 10, 2003.
professor gross began with five claims:

1. Religious diversity is a permanent global fact at both interfaith and intrafaith levels, and the sooner people start living with that fact the better. Exclusivist claims are beginning to sound like "the earth is the center of the universe" contentions.
2. Religion is no longer monolithic and is not likely to ever be so again.
3. Religious exclusivism has caused huge suffering.
4. Religious diversity is a resource, not a problem, a benefit with endless variations of meaning and experience utterly unavailable until we enter into dialogue and relationship with the religious other.
5. It's up to each tradition's theologians and wise ones to align their own traditions with living in a diverse theological world. they need to prepare their own for respectful, engaged interfaith dialogue, focusing on listening skills and the ability to talk about one's own tradition clearly.

After setting this framework, she suggested that religious leaders badly need to be well-educated about world religions. She said authentic interreligious education depends on treating other religions as serious options, not straw tigers. Studying religious alternatives seriously levels the playing field. We discover, for instance, that authentic religion doesn't require deity and that theism doesn't require monotheism.

Keying on the max muller quote "to know one religion is to know none," she suggested an interfaith perspective for religious education with two important goals: (a) achieving factual accuracy and (b) developing empathy for the religious other (comprehending why and how the follower gets coherence from his or her worldview).

Dr. Gross warned against drawing too much from religious similarities. Becoming reductionistic tends to create generic conceptions which exclude much of what we share and what makes each of us unique. An important exception can be made for ethics, which she said is a good place for discussions of convergence. She mentioned "Eastern compassion & Western justice" as a interesting, useful study topic.

She concluded by noting that genuine pluralism means learning to develop our comfort zones with each other. approaching religious diversity as a fact and a resource allows you to see that no tradition has all the answers or all the questions.

Notes by Paul Chaffee, who takes responsibility for anything that isn't clear or accurate. Rita's presentation was like crystal.

Return to Table of Contents

New Cooperation Circles in North America

From North America, we welcome the Rothko Chapel CC in Houston Texas, USA. The contact persons are longtime URI supporter P.K. McCary and Suna Umari, the Chapel's
Executive Director. The Chapel has existed for over 30 years. It is a place alive with religious ceremonies of all faiths, and where the experience and understanding of all traditions is encouraged. The Chapel also serves as a rallying place for all people concerned with human rights throughout the world. They hope to introduce a new generation to the work of URI and the Rothko Chapel. Their board members' diversity includes Christian, Muslim, and Jewish, but their organization represents people from a wide diversity of faiths. To learn more about the Chapel, contact P.K. at perri@rothkochapel.org and visit them at http://www.uri-na.org/.

In the last newsletter, we mentioned a new CC called the Spiritual and Religious Alliance for Hope (S.A.R.A.H). We thought you might find CC Contact Sande Hart's words interesting and inspiring:

"I have come to find something of a magical existance amongst the interfaith society that have been a part of since the inception of S.A.R.A.H and our relationship with the URI. To imagine a culture where everyone is embracing, all hearts focus on the same common goal of love and peace and there is no deceit, territories, or jealousy is what I call "Peace". It is this peace that I vision when I pray.

At SARAH, we all agree that as women, it is our God given responsibility to give life, nurture life, and to protect life. When faced with difficult times, women seek the companionship of other women and naturally take the most direct route to fixing the problem. We realize that we need to create a belief system that effects a behavior system so that our future generations don't repeat history and make the same judgement mistakes that have been made for centuries. I am constantly surprised at how easy it is to make an impact on the world and to impact the level of "Peace" around me. It's the easiest thing I have ever done. When you come from the heart, magic happens."

Return to Table of Content

Cooperation Circle Activities

International Day of Peace

New York City, New York

September 22, 2003

Dear Friends in the URI Community,

With a heart filled with joy, inspiration and challenge, I want to share with you the extraordinary observances of the International Day of Peace I was privileged to participate in.
On Friday, September 19, 2003, I attended the observance of the International Day of Peace at the United Nations organized by the UN Department of Public Information (DPI), the Executive Office of the Secretary-General, Pathways to Peace and the World Peace Prayer Society. Since URI is an NGO affiliated with UNDPI and has close ties with both other organizations, it felt from the beginning as if I were at a family gathering, especially seeing the strong and creative leadership of Deborah Moldow and Monica Willard.

Because of winds associated with hurricane Isabel, we gathered in a wide hallway, behind a mass of media people and young people from around the world carrying the flags of the nations in the United Nations, looking through a glass wall to a garden where the peace bell sits. As Secretary-General Kofi Annan would later explain, the peace bell was cast from pennies sent in by children from all over the world. It is rung each year to commemorate the International Day of Peace. As we awaited the arrival of the Secretary-General, we listed to a group of talented young musicians whose repertoire included "Let There Be Peace On Earth" and "Amazing Grace".

The Secretary-General arrived with an entourage that included his wife, Nane, representatives of different UN peacekeeping missions and a group of UN Messengers of Peace - Jane Goodall, Michael Douglas, Anna Catadali, Muhammed Ali, and Eli Weisel. In a moving moment, Mr. Annan dedicated this 21st observance of the International Day of Peace, a day that calls for global ceasefire, to the UN colleagues who a month before had been killed in a terrorist bombing of the UN headquarters in Iraq. He observed that they had put their own lives at risk to support the right of all peoples to live in peace. After brief remarks from the heads of two UN peacekeeping missions, Mr. Annan led the whole group outside into the windy, sunny garden where, with the world's nations represented by the young people carrying flags, he struck the bell three times, sending the vibrations of peace over a still and somber crowd.

Following this brief but moving ceremony, the young people led a procession to a conference room (it happened to be the same conference room where Bishop Swing had spoken to the religious NGOs about the vision of a United Relgions in October 1995) where the morning's program was to be held. The conference room was filled with young people from around the world who would be leaving later that afternoon for the "Share the Spirit of Youth Peace Summit" at the World Peace Shrine at the World Peace Prayer Society's headquarters in Amenia, NY, and with representatives of different NGOs. We were joined by webcast by groups gathered in Sierra Leone, the Syrian Golan Heights, Afghanistan and Kuwait.

The first part of the program had young people making brief statements and posing questions to the Messengers of Peace. Tiffany Lewis, a young African American woman from New York spoke movingly about how her involvement in Jane Goodall's organization, Roots and Shoots, had changed her life. Beaming, Ms. Goodall responded by talking about how her experience living with chimpanzees had changed her life, showing her how blurred the line was between humans and other species; and how her realization of the rapid destruction of the chimpanzees' habitat had called her to leave that
life she loved and dedicate herself to traveling the world spreading the message of care for the environment as a path to peace. She stressed the need for humanity to destroy weapons not habitat.

Alex Dixon, a former child soldier in Sierra Leone, asked Michael Douglas how he felt war should end. Mr Douglas applauded UNICEF’s work with child soldiers while lamenting that the funding for this important work was threatened. He noted that 1/3 of all small arms on Earth are in the United States; and called for their destruction.

Easily the most moving moment of the morning came when Jacqueline Murekatete, a refugee from the genocide in Rawanda now living in the US, addressed Holocaust survivor and Nobel laureate in literature, Elie Weisel. She spoke of how powerful it had been for her to read his book Night because she had lived through the same experiences. A hush settled on the room as she described how, as a young girl, she had in the space of a day gone from having a happy childhood to being the enemy simply because she was a Tutsi. Suddenly, her people were called insects to be exterminated. Her mother, father, four brothers and two sisters were murdered. Why did this happen, she wanted to know.

People throughout the room wept as Mr. Weisel spoke to her, recounting his 1999 Millennium Lecture, "The Perils of Indifference," delivered at the White House. As he finished speaking, a young woman from Rawanda asked him, "What do you have to tell me about indifference?" He turned to President Clinton and said, "Mr. President, you'd better answer that."

The President was painfully silent for a moment, then said, "We could have prevented it, but didn't."

"I don't understand," Mr. Weisel continued, once again addressing Jacqueline. "We knew about it and we did nothing. Indifference is never the answer. Indifference to evil is evil."

He paused. "Indifference is never the answer. Nor is despair. You must write your story," he told Jacqueline. "I will help you write your story. I pledge that today before your friends and mine."

He went on to speak of testimony as the art of truth and faith; of the hope many felt at leaving the awfulness of the 20th century behind, hope that has been crushed in the first years of the 21st century. He decried the violence in American society and the media's glorification of violence. He challenged Michael Douglas to use his influence to make a great movie about peace.

After the presentations and a time of questions and answers finished, the young people led the gathering in a peace prayer ceremony, praying for peace for all the peoples of the Earth. One by one, the flags of the nations of the world were presented, evoking a prayer that the people represented by that flag might live in peace, that peace might prevail on Earth. If this ceremony were repeated all over the world every day, the world would change for the better.
Love, Charles Gibbs

**World Peace Sanctuary, outside Amenia, New York**

What a magnificent International Day of Peace, celebrated across the globe!

The World Peace Festival was also a great success. We had about 5,000 people in attendance (which is very good for a corn field two hours from New York City, while 100,000 were listening to the Dalai Lama in Central Park!). It was a perfect day, with many joyful things to see and do, stirring music by great performers, many creative activities, and people of all ages and backgrounds coming together in peace.

The URI had excellent representation, with the URI of the Hudson Valley led by Betsy Stang organizing a beautiful interfaith celebration in the Sacred Grove, featuring none other than our beloved executive director, Rev. Charles Gibbs.

The highlight of the day was a glorious World Peace Flag Ceremony with prayers for every country and a rousing musical refrain of "May Peace Prevail on Earth." At the end of the ceremony, a boy from the Middle East came on stage with the flag of Palestine, and a girl from Israel carrying her flag rushed on next to him, and they embraced. Everyone was weeping with the real hope of peace!

Both of these young people were from the Share the Spirit of Peace Youth Summit, which brought together young peacemakers from more than 20 countries. The Summit began at the UN on Friday, as Secretary-General Kofi Annan rang the Peace Bell, and continued with peace-building workshops all day on Saturday before the Festival celebration on Sunday.

In Mozambique, in Pakistan, in so many other places, we all had an unforgettable experience of peace - a building block for the Culture of Peace we are manifesting together around the world. Warm thanks to all URI friends who participated, whether by organizing a special event in your part of the world or simply by holding a prayer for peace in your heart.

May Peace Prevail on Earth!

Love,
Deborah Moldow

[Return to Table of Contents]

**Los Angeles, California**

Thanks to the heroic efforts of Norma Foster, founding member of City of Angels URI-LA, president of the Interfaith Council of the United Nations, Los Angeles, and president of the Pacific-Los Angeles Chapter of the United Nations Association, California Governor Grey Davis, City of Los Angeles Mayor James K. Hahn have joined the
governors of 13 other states and 10 other U.S. cities in declaring September 21st the International Day of Peace each year, from henceforth, as requested by UN General Assembly Resolution 55/282. Representatives of Governor Davis and Mayor Hahn presented the signed proclamation at the annual meeting of the Pacific-Los Angeles Chapter of the United Nations Association, hosted by SGI-USA at their beautiful Friendship Center in Los Angeles. The proclamation, in part, "Declares that the International Day of Peace shall henceforth be observed as a global day of ceasefire and non-violence," and invites "all nations and peoples to honour a cessation of hostilities for the duration of the day." In addition to the proclamations, the meeting included international musical performances, the ringing of a Peace Bell, and a presentation by Katie Scolari Borden, West Coast General Manager for UNICEF, on UN advocacy issues, including "The State of the Children of the World as Victims of War, Poverty, and Disease."

Return to Table of Contents

Asheville, North Carolina

The Greater Asheville URI CC in North Carolina, USA, had a wonderful storytelling event in observance of the International Day of Peace. We had 8 storytellers sharing stories of peace from the following faiths and spiritual traditions: Judaism, Buddhism, Baptist Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Celtic Pagan, Bahai, and Catholic Christianity. We were hosted by one of the Catholic churches in our area. I wish you could have seen the 85 people in the audience following an 8 foot Buddha puppet in a silent mindful walk around the sanctuary! The people of the Catholic church were gracious hosts and the sanctuary was a beautiful setting with its newly finished fresco representing the Communion of Saints.

Peace was alive in Asheville, NC on September 21.

Robin Wells

Return to Table of Contents

North America Sub-Regional Interfaith Retreats

NURTURING INTERFAITH OPPORTUNITIES:
From Southern California, To The World

California Regional
Pre-Parliament Retreat at Hsi Lai University, Rosemead, CA
August 22-24, 2003

Members of the Alliance for Spiritual Community CC in Laguna Niguel, CA, and of City of Angels URI-LA in
Los Angeles, joined together with Rev. Jeff Utter, a regional leader for the Council for the Parliament of the World's Religions and others involved with the Parliament and other interfaith organizations in Southern California to plan, design, and produce a regional interfaith retreat that would serve to lift up and celebrate the work being done by all interfaith organizations in the region, develop and deepen our relationships and awareness of each other's work, and generate awareness and excitement about the fourth Parliament of the World's Religions being held in Barcelona in July, 2004.

The planning team worked together for almost a year in planning the retreat. The process of planning itself helped build relationships among us, and introduced new people to interfaith. We had two young people on our team as well, both named Jason! And people from all five Southern California counties (Los Angeles, Orange, Riverside, San Diego, and Santa Barbara). The retreat served double duty as a sub-regional retreat for the URI, with members of all 5 URI CCs in our region participating, and offering service or leadership for the event.

In a wonderful act of trust, non-URI members of the planning team (more than _ of the membership), empowered Steve Fitzgerald and Kay Lindahl to model the retreat after the design that was used for the URI North America regional summit in Salt Lake City. Yoland Trevino, chair of the OD committee of the URI global council, co-facilitated the retreat with Steve and Kay. It was a wonderful opportunity to offer the richness of our experience through URI as a gift to the Parliament and to the entire interfaith community in our region.

The results far exceeded our expectations. "It was magical." "This is the best interfaith retreat I've ever been to." "I didn't know what I was coming to at this retreat, but discovered that this is my community." "Let's do this again next year!" These are some of the comments that we heard as we came to the end of our weekend together. For Steve Fitzgerald, "it was the most exquisite appreciative inquiry summit that I have ever experienced!" Pictures, the design for the event, participants' output and comments from the sessions, and more are being posted by Tim Helton on his personal website as a learning resource for others around the world who might like to hold an interfaith retreat of their own.

Through our retreat, something happened:

Standing outside on the grass an opening blessing by the Tongva people of the Gabrieleno Nation
Early morning sacred practices each day and the sacred blessings at meal times
Creating an interfaith wall of wonder from 1893 to 2004
Bonding through the Appreciative Inquiry format
Aztec dancers in the courtyard, Equadorian musicians during a dinner provided by three of the faith communities
Taiko drummers leading to the celebration and recognition of interfaith work in Southern California
The possibility of Barcelona and attending the Parliament in 2004
The myriad of connecting conversations
Outreach to young people drew a dozen youth from different communities
Walking of the labyrinth by candlelight
An abundant outpouring of musicians, artists, and people of many faiths and cultures
offering gifts of music, poetry, flowers, food, facilitation, and humble service for the good of all

Something happened, and interfaith in Southern California will never be the same.

It's hard to describe exactly what happened. Strangers became friends in our discovery of who we are and what gifts we brought, not only personally, but as members and participants in interfaith. We had the opportunity to dream of a future for interfaith in Southern California, what might that look like? Then we designed a plan of how we might get there. What resources do we already know, what do we need, what steps can we take right now. Finally we looked at our destiny and made commitments, requests or made offers. That was the structure.

What happened was really quite amazing. There is a group dedicated to creating a Southern California Interfaith Network. Another group is committed to involving young people in creating a youth interfaith retreat. Others are working on interfaith education for all levels from K-12 through college. Another is focusing on environmental issues and another on peacemaking, including the creation of a Department of Peace in our government. None of these issues is new. What is new is that now these groups are connected with people from throughout the region who are now their partners in this work.

One woman, who has been involved in peace and justice issues for years, told me that she was really glad that she had come. When I asked her what she found most valuable, she said: "I've been re-energized." One of the men who has been working in interfaith for years finally felt that there was a two way street of communication among the interfaith groups. He was just glowing.

Another woman said: "We came up with ideas that we never would have on our own, and we came together as we never would have on our own." She particularly acknowledged the facilitation.

We are creating a listserv to communicate with each other. There is great interest in finding a way for us to connect at the Parliament in Barcelona, and possibly holding another retreat next year.
It was a sacred journey.

Rev. Kay Lindahl and Dr. Steve Fitzgerald

For (larger & more) pictures of the retreat, the program, participants’ comments, and more, visit: http://www.timhelton.com/SoCalInterfaithRetreat/

URI-NA Coordinator visits the Pacific Northwest Gathering of Organizations

It was the pleasure of four different Cooperative Circles to meet with Steve Fitzgerald during his July visit to the Seattle-Vancouver, B.C. area. Steve attended the First Interfaith Summit at Camp Brotherhood and joined more than 110 participants from 50 different interfaith and spiritually based organizations for a day of sharing our missions and stories.

The event was organized by a group of five people from different organizations who decided that we needed to better understand what other community groups were doing. It was a venture put together via e-mail invitations with three weeks of notice. "The response was remarkable," said Barbara Trites, a member of the planning team. "People just seemed hungry to know who else was doing similar work." The greatest outcome resulted with new friends collaborating on future projects. Hopefully these ripple effects will keep going until the 2nd Annual Summit returns next spring!

From left to right: 1) Father Appavoo, president of the Clergy for Compassion and Harmony CC (Vancouver, BC) with special guest, Steve Fitzgerald; 2) Gerardo Ojeda-Ebert, youth director for the Interfaith Council of WA CC (Seattle) with his sister, Marisol, visiting from her Mapuche Nation in Chile; 3) Father Treacy, who as a Catholic priest along with a Jewish rabbi, co-founded Camp Brotherhood over 35 years ago as a center for religious understanding.
Greetings of love and peace. On Sept. 16, I was privileged to participate in an interfaith house frame raising celebration in Washington, D.C.--"Representatives of many faiths coming together to take a leap of faith and work together to build a home with a family in need." The house that will be built is a project of Habitat for Humanity in partnership with the United Religions Initiative and the InterFaith Conference of Metropolitan Washington.

Representatives of many faiths gathered around the concrete pad that will serve as the floor for two houses to raise the frame for the first wall of this new house in a poor, predominantly African American area of Washington. The future owner of the house, Nicole Townes and her family, were there. They will put in 300 hours of "sweat equity" before the house is finished.

The ceremony began with a spirited performance by the Drill Team, Drama Club and Choir of the neighborhood elementary school. Then the faith leaders, led by banners of many faiths, processed from inside a house being built next door out to the concrete pad. Then came opening remarks by two representatives of Habitat for Humanity, Charles Gibbs and Clark Lobenstine, Executive Director of the Interfaith Conference. Each speaker stressed the power of this moment of hope--hope for a better future for a family; hope for a new level of interfaith cooperation in Washington; hope that this project might serve as a model for similar cooperative efforts in other parts of the world!

Then Nicole Townes spoke movingly about what it meant for her to become a homeowner, something she had imagined was beyond her reach. She thanked everyone profusely, then began to weep with the powerful emotions of this moment. Many in the audience joined her.

When Nicole finished, representatives of fifteen different faith communities raised the frame of the side wall of the house. Once it was fastened into place and braced, the representatives, one by one, offered a blessing for the house, those who would work on it, and the family that would live in it. People spoke movingly about the importance of home, of other home building projects they had been involved in, and the importance of this project as a concrete expression of interfaith cooperation and respect.

The ceremony concluded with a song and a final blessing before everyone moved next door and shared a meal of celebration and commitment.
There is a great deal of work, including fundraising, still to be done. But when it is complete, a family will have a home; an interfaith community will be energized and strengthened; and a new light of hope will shine in the world.

Return to Table of Content

**Resources for CCs and Affiliates**

**URI Contributed to New Peacebuilding Book**

Greetings of Love and Peace.

It's a pleasure to announce the publication of an innovative and inspiring book, Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding: A Resource for Innovators, to which URI has been a key contributor over the past two years. This book is edited by Cynthia Sampson, Mohammed Abu-Nimer, Claudia Liebler, and Diana Whitney.

URI members' initial role in the creation of this work was in sponsoring, and attending the Positive Approaches to Peacebuilding conference in late September 2001. Many of us further engaged in the work of bringing Appreciative Inquiry and peacebuilding practices together at EMU's Summer Peacebuilding Institute in May 2002, and again at our Global assembly and pre-Assembly peacebuilding course in August (one year ago!!). Charles and I have contributed a chapter on URI to this book, in Section IV on Designing Organizations for Peacebuilding.

I invite you to read the notice below, and especially to follow the link [http://www.pactpublications.com/](http://www.pactpublications.com/) to read the book's Table of Contents and inspiring Introduction. We are in good company!

In peace,

Barbara Hartford


Return to Table of Contents

**URI News & Discussion on the Internet**

Confused by the profusion of e-mail lists and sources of news and information about the URI? You're not alone. Let this quick guide help you find the right sources for the information you want.
News

- InterfaithNews.Net: positive spiritual, religious, and interfaith news. Website, at http://www.interfaithnews.net/, is updated monthly. Bi-monthly reports distributed via e-mail; send a message to join-uri_interfaithnews@mailhost.groundspring.org to subscribe. News covers URI and other interfaith and religious organizations.
- URI eUpdate: bi-monthly e-mail with brief updates on URI activities around the world. To subscribe, send a message to mailto:join-uri_interfaithnews@mailhost.groundspring.org.
- North American regional newsletter: this newsletter. Produced quarterly and distributed to CC contact persons. Send a message to editor@interfaithnews.net to be added or removed to the distribution list.

Discussion Lists

- CC list: formerly at uricc@yahoogroups.com, now uri-contacts@uriglobal.org. Worldwide discussion lists for cooperation circles to share their stories, concerns, and other topics of discussion. All are welcome, though CC contact persons are particularly encouraged to participate. Subscribe by sending a blank message to uri-contacts-subscribe@uriglobal.org.
- General URI list: currently at unitedreligions@yahoogroups.com, sure to be transitioned to uriglobal.org in the near future. This list is intended for general discussion on interfaith and the United Religions Initiative.
- URI Youth list: Sarah Talcott is leading the effort on the new Global Youth e-mail exchange, a space to empower and connect youth-led interfaith dialogue and initiatives around the world. Participants include young people (and youth advocates!) already involved in the United Religions Initiative, or may be interested in getting connected for the first time. The goal for this e-mail exchange is to spark interfaith conversations around a range of topics, and to hear from everyone about the interfaith activities they are involved in or wish to be a part of. The list address is uri-globalyouth@uriglobal.org. Subscribe by sending a blank message to uri-globalyouth-subscribe@uriglobal.org.

Global Support Staff Contact Information

The following contact information for the San Francisco office and staff is up-to-date as of 9/23/2003.

Main Office
office@uri.org
Phone: 1-415-561-2300
Fax: 1-415-561-2313

Executive Director
Charles Gibbs · charles@uri.org · 1-415-561-2301

Communications & Technology
Cory Robertson · crobertson@uri.org · 1-415-561-2311

Kristin Swenson · kristin@uri.org · 1-415-561-2302

Financial Management
Ray Signer · rsigner@uri.org · 1-415-561-2305

Membership & Organizational Development
Sally Mahé · sally@uri.org · 1-415-561-2304

Office Management
Victoria Smiser · office@uri.org · 1-415-561-2300

Peacebuilding & Human Resources
Barbara Hartford · barbara@uri.org · 1-415-561-2302

Philanthropy & Global Fundraising
Alice Kawahatsu · akawahatsu@uri.org · 1-415-561-2320

Jennifer Kirk · jkirk@uri.org · 1-415-561-2307

Rick Murray · rmurray@uri.org · 1-415-561-2319

Sarah Talcott · sarah@uri.org · 1-415-561-2308

Return to Table of Contents

Copyright © 2003, United Religions Initiative. All rights reserved. Published by Daystar Productions.
For more information on the URI in North America, contact Dr. Stephen Fitzgerald at stevefitzg@comcast.net.