The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring interfaith communication with the intention of ending religiously motivated violence in order to create cultures and communities of peace and understanding for all the living beings of Earth.

URI Proclaims September 21 International Day of Peace

June 27, 2006

The Tripartite Forum on Interfaith Cooperation for Peace invites you to a
HIGH-LEVEL CONFERENCE ON INTERFAITH COOPERATION FOR PEACE

Interfaith Dialogue and Cooperation for Peace: Contributing to Peacebuilding and Development

21 September 2006
The International Day of Peace
UN Conference Room 3

For more information, visit the website of the Tripartite Forum www.tripartiteinterfaithforum.org

Once again the URI Global Council is asking all Cooperation Circles to consider planning or participating in activities in commemoration of the International Day of Peace, held each year on September 21. This day has been designated International Day of Peace (IDP) by the United Nations. Events might be held on the 21st or on another day around that time. By participating in IDP activities, you will be acting in solidarity with URI Circles, UN supporters, and others around the world. Read on for further information regarding the IDP and the URI Peace Proclamation.

As an outcome of their recent annual meeting, the Global Council, led by Vice Chair Mussie Hailu, created a Peace Proclamation. As a message of cooperation and support, by this proclamation the URI joins the UN in declaring the 21st of September “International Day of Peace” and urges “all our members to encourage all citizens of this world to work together to create peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings.”
Humanitarian Crisis in the Mid-East; Be a Peace builder

July 20th, 2006

Members of URI Cooperation Circles around the world have been engaging in a dialogue that has been tense, yet constructive with regards to the current war and humanitarian crisis in the Middle East. All perspectives are represented — some sympathize more strongly with the Palestinian and/or Lebanese suffering, some with the Israelis having to live with the daily threat of terrorists’, suicide bombs and rockets. The one thing that seems to be clearly uniting us is the need to recognize the humanitarian crisis on the ground and, more importantly, to react to it. We must be peace builders on the ground, helping those directly in need.

There are now hundreds of thousands of internally displaced persons (IDPs, or refugees) in Lebanon. Innocent civilians in Gaza are locked into their small strip of land with a shattered infrastructure and little in the way of supplies. While foreign nationals stream out of Lebanon, the citizens are left with bombed out roads, collapsed bridges and their international airport destroyed.

More than a dozen URI Cooperation Circles are already working in Israel, the occupied-territories, and Jordan — working to forge a shared vision of peace amongst the diverse factions. But what can peace lovers in the U.S. and other countries do? Perhaps the most immediate way they — you — can be of help is by donating to the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), who is already working with their Lebanese counterparts to bring relief supplies into Beirut. The ICRC has also been active in Gaza and the West Bank for several decades, along with their counterparts in the Red Crescent. In Gaza, their recent activities have included fuel distribution and coordinating ambulances and nurses.

Another well-reputed international aid organization working in the region is Oxfam. In a letter to Anne Roth of the Interfaith Council of Contra Costa County, an Oxfam representative wrote:
“In Gaza, Oxfam and our local partner organizations are providing food, hygiene supplies, and other relief materials, as well as funding for two emergency mobile medical teams. We are helping replace water and sewage equipment damaged by the conflict and, in order to keep essential water and sewage facilities running, we are also supplying diesel generators for electricity.”

Member of the URI believe that a long-term goal of peace in the Middle East is attainable, but not without creating profound connections between people and not without building bonds of unity between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. Interested in supporting this movement? Then be a peace builder by joining a URI Cooperation Circle or donating to the URI (for more information, visit www.uri.org/Ways_to_Give.html).

Late-breaking news: URI members bridge differences, issue *Interfaith Statement of Support for Middle-East Ceasefire*. www.uri.org/Features/Features_Main/cease.html

**CC News and Activities**
**Utah Cooperation Circle Pursues Diverse Facets of Interfaith Communication**

August 22, 2006

In their pursuit of breaking down the barriers of interfaith dialogue, Utah (USA) URI CC has engaged itself in a variety of communication building activities:

- The CC has been working with the Department of State, who has had a great deal of dignitaries come through Salt Lake City, primarily Islamic groups. As a model for interfaith cooperation elsewhere, the CC meets with them in order to display how religions are able to work together and bond here in the states.
- Recently, the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints put on “big show” and luncheon for all the interfaith groups in the SLC area, roughly 50 people attending.
- Reverend Mpambani and his wife Yolissa from Cape Town South Africa came to visit the U.S. after many from Utah had met with him at the Parliament of World Religions in Barcelona. He came to Utah in order to communicate with others from URI and the Interfaith Roundtable.

Marsha Pilgeram of the Utah (USA) URI CC, who has done postgraduate research in conflict resolution and interfaith work in India, had the pleasure of meeting Father Centurio Olaboro of the Uganda Martyrs Orphan's Project in Brazil (www.ugandamartyrsumorphansproject.org). Marsha went to Uganda to meet with peace and justice committees, interacting with high-ranking catholic clergy and to work in IDP camps.
When Father Centurio came to Utah, he received an award from the Kashi Foundation CC via their River Fund project. They had a fundraiser for $5,000 that went towards a well in order to help the hundreds of orphans who Father Centurio works with. A donation was also made for the Goat Project (a micro-grant) to help women in Uganda, sending computers and technology over through Kashi.

The Fundraiser worked because there was a specific cause to build on.

“People will come forward for a need,” said Marsha Pilegram in regards to the effort of her CC and many like it. “Father Centurio needed a well, the Girl Scouts of America needed a Rabbi. If you have the connection, people are willing to come to you. We need bonding and diversity. Once a need arises, you need to be willing to recognize the need and step out. People are willing to do that if they feel in the heart that this will help.”

Make the connections! Make friendships all over the place and people will come. Invite people into your home. One must establish real personal relationships in order to truly know people. Cards with URI’s name and purpose statement on them are helpful; leave them with everyone you meet. At the same time, be aware of cultural distinctions (i.e. different ways of giving, different perspectives on dancing and singing, dietary restrictions).

For more information about Father Centurio and the River Fund Project please visit: www.riverfund.org/programs/uganda_orphanage.htm

Welcome New CCs!

Three groups in North America have been accepted as Cooperation Circles in 2006: Common Ground (Irvine/Riverside area of So. Cal.), Interfaith Cooperation Circle of Charlottesville, VA, and the Case Cooperation Circle based at Case Western Reserve University in Cleveland, OH. To get contact information for any of these new CCs, contact Stephen Fuqua (info on back).

Common Ground CC
_Irvine, CA_

**CC Purpose:** Interfaith reconciliation within Abrahamic faith in the community and the world

**CC DREAM:** Provide dialogue opportunities, support and/or sponsor community events and

Interfaith Cooperation Circle
_Central Virginia_

**CC PURPOSE:** Our purpose is to foster a culture of peace and understanding by creating opportunities for interfaith community, exploration,

Case Cooperation Circle
_Cleveland, OH_

**CC PURPOSE:** To develop opportunities for interaction, experience, and education of various religious traditions.

**CC DREAM:** To educate
CC HIGHLIGHTS: Sponsored an interfaith trip to Mexico to visit an orphanage – spoke on a panel to the Arab and Jewish students at UCI – sponsored a viewing of “Common Ground” documentary.

CC DREAM: Our dream for making a difference is to nurture the understanding that we are all ONE, and can live together in peace. We intend to realize this dream through activities that recognize the divinity in our diversity.

CC HIGHLIGHTS: For the past two years we have successfully created, a daylong, public event/gathering called “Sulha” (reconciliation) comprised of workshops, interfaith worship, listening circles, children’s programs, cultural events, music, and Dances of Universal Peace.

URI of Henderson County Hosts Course on Non-Violent Communication

February 23, 2006

For twelve weeks every Sunday afternoon for two hours the URI of Henderson County (North Carolina, USA) hosted a course in Nonviolent Communication (NVC), a tool created by Marshall Rosenberg, Ph.D. He decided to create this tool to help people learn how to "do love" for the word "love" is found in all religions.

The purpose of NVC is to understand how to communicate with others by more effectively learning how to communicate with ourselves. NVC strengthens our ability to communicate from the heart and to connect with ourselves and others in a way that inspires compassion. NVC guides us to reframe how we express ourselves and hear others by focusing our consciousness on what we are observing, feeling, needing and requesting. It is from this deeper understanding of our own personal feelings and needs that we learn how to hear others in terms of feelings and needs.

“In eight years of offering educational programs to our community, with the desire to promote peace,” said Mary Page Sims, an active member of URI Henderson County, “this is by far the most powerful and, I think, enduring study.”
During the twelve training sessions, Rosenberg’s book, *Practical Spiritually: Reflections On The Spiritual Basis Of Nonviolent Communication* is used as well as twelve training videos – four basic, eight intermediate. During the sessions in Henderson County, a female member of the CC stated that she believes she could have saved her marriage if she had understood and been able to practice these skills.

“I found myself in tears,” said Mary Page Sims, “as I felt the truth in my life regarding such a statement. If the critical voice within separates you from the beauty of yourself,” Sims went on to say, “you are also separated from the Divine which is the source of your being. Rosenberg's goal is to provide us with a tool that helps us connect with ourselves and one another in a compassionate way. When people can communicate need to need, compassion is inevitable. We realize that everything anyone does is only in order to meet certain needs, consciously or not. NVC teaches us to become more wholly aware of these needs.”

Through this emphasis on truly listening to ourselves and to others, NVC fosters respect, attentiveness, empathy and engenders a mutual desire to give from the heart. To understand oneself is to know one’s own needs. To understand another is to be compassionate towards theirs. The form is simple, yet powerfully transformative.

More information can be found at [www.nonviolentcommunication.org](http://www.nonviolentcommunication.org).

**Report on Alice and Mas Kawahatsu’s visit to Peninsula/S.F. CC**

April 13, 2006

Dear URI friends,

Hello, I want to introduce myself, my name is Alice Kawahatsu and I serve at the URI Global Staff office here in San Francisco. I work with Mary Kelley in the development office as a part-time Development Assistant. I also happen to be married to a minister of the Konko faith who serves at the San Francisco Konko Church located in San Francisco’s Japan Town. His formal title is Rev. Masato Kawahatsu, Senior Minister. However, since many people have trouble pronouncing his last name, he usually asks people he meets to call him Mas or Mas Sensei (Sensei means "teacher" in Japanese and in the Japanese culture, ministers and teachers are called "Sensei").

I wanted to share insights from a recent visit my husband, Mas, and I made to the San Francisco Peninsula CC. Overall, the diverse representation and openness to understand various faith traditions was amazing. I felt that though people came from many different backgrounds, there was this deep intent of each member to really listen fully with an appreciative and open heart.
Everyone was really intrigued with the talk Mas shared about gratitude and the 1,000 thank yous a day which is part of the Konko Church practice. I recall that a gentleman from the Shinyo En temple was there and he said that the first step toward enlightenment in his faith tradition is the expression of gratitude.

There was a gentleman from the Christian faith who asked the question of how Mas employs gratitude into the counseling/mediation work that he does at church. Mas replied that the balance of understanding and expressing three things are very important in helping people spiritually. The three are: Appreciation, Apology, and Request.

This person was a minister in a church, but was going to seek to help people as a hospital chaplain and he was very comforted to know that Konko had some universal themes that carry out to many religions. One of the things that Mas also stressed to this person was that helping people “let go” of their own selfish desires and understanding the desire of God or the Universe was a major force in helping people to heal, whether it was from a bad relationship or when someone passes on.

Many of the members thanked Mas for sharing what Konko faith is and most importantly, how he came to realize his calling, and how, through this, he is able to help so many people. I think that Margaret Jones, who is the coordinator for this CC opened up the evening wonderfully by having someone read the URI principles for dialogue and also sharing a teaching from their faith tradition. This reminded me of how we begin our meetings here at URI and it sets the tone for a safe place to share with each other. As the meeting came to an end, Mas was able to close the session with everyone chanting "Arigato gozaimasu".

At the end of the evening, we both felt so thankful to be in the URI community and very comfortable and accepted. This remarkable group is a true model of how a CC can serve their own participants while maintaining a deep intention to educate clergy and lay members from the wider community. Margaret's passion for peace, justice, and healing has made her a wonderful leader for this CC as she is so focused on issues of the world today and takes command of organizing ways for people to come together in very meaningful and spiritual ways.

Mas and I applaud the Peninsula SF CC for all their great work. Margaret mentioned to the group that URI was going to put their principles for dialogue on the URI website as a model CC for others to use. Thank you to all the CC's out there in our URI global community that do powerful daily work towards peace, justice, and healing.

**Interfaith Resources**

**Why and How to Join the United Religions Initiative**

**June, 2006**
A presentation for NAIN Connect 2006 in Vancouver, British Columbia, Canada: Learn the steps for a new or existing group or organization to become a member of the United Religions Initiative (URI). This slideshow/presentation briefly covers:

- History of the URI,
- Why New Groups Form,
- Why Existing Groups Join,
- Membership in the URI,
- Cooperation Circles,
- Rights of Members,
- Responsibilities of Members,
- and Application for Membership

Download in either PDF or PowerPoint at www.uri-na.org/wp/presentation/.

Building the Interfaith Youth Movement

May 7, 2006

Building the Interfaith Youth Movement is a new book edited by Dr. Eboo Patel and Dr. Patrice Brodeur. Eboo is the Executive Director of the Interfaith Youth Core; Patrice is Canada Research Chair on Islam, Pluralism, and Globalization at the University of Montreal. The book features a forward from the Pluralism Project’s Diana Eck:

Violence committed by religious young people has become a regular feature of our daily news reports. What we hear less about are the growing numbers of religious young people from all faith backgrounds who are committed to interfaith understanding and cooperation. Building the Interfaith Youth Movement is the first book to describe this important phenomenon. Contributions include concrete descriptions of various interfaith youth projects across the country—from an arts-program in the South Bronx to a research program at Harvard University to a national organization called the Interfaith Youth Core based in Chicago—written by the founders and leaders of those initiatives. Additional chapters articulate the theory and methodology of this important new movement. This book is a must-read for college chaplains, religious leaders who work with youth, and students and scholars of contemporary religion.

Reflecting on the URI Charter

Principle 9

"We practice healing and reconciliation to resolve conflict without resorting to violence." The URI Charter actively calls its membership to agree to a non-violent approach to the interfaith cooperation and Peacebuilding enjoined in the Purpose statement. What does it look like, what does it sound and feel like, to work for
healing and reconciliation without resorting to violence? Does violence refer to physical actions alone, or is it meant in reference also to the words we use – the language in which greet each other, argue with each, cajole and comfort each other? In reflecting on this principle, I am reminded of the “eightfold path” of Buddhism, particularly where the Buddha calls his followers not only to right action, but also to right speech.