



United Religions Initiative | eUpdate

URI eUpdate for February 2005

Our Monthly Electronic Newsletter

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1. URI Gala Fundraising Dinner Honors Board Chair Rita Semel

On February 5, 2005, 180 people gathered at URI's second Circles of Light dinner to honor Rita R. Semel, chair of the Global Council, for her long-time service and leadership in the interfaith community in San Francisco and around the world. The evening's inspiring setting, high above the lights of San Francisco, was beautiful with glowing candles surrounding fragrant wreathes of bay laurel and gardenias.

In an opening invocation that communicated the spirit of URI, interfaith leaders lit candles and offered prayers that peace prevail on Earth. Accompanying these words, photos of URI members from around the world flashed on a large screen bringing the beauty of Earth's diverse humanity into that beautiful setting.





Rita's many contributions to the interfaith community were recognized by the four speakers who honored her. Her daughter, Elisabeth Semel, spoke movingly of her family's commitment to social justice; Jim Donahue, President of the Graduate Theological Union, spoke of Rita's commitment to partnership and education; Rabbi Stephen Pearce of Congregation Emanu El highlighted Rita's warm spirit and joyful presence; and Bishop William Swing, President of URI, told the guests of Rita's leadership in bringing the URI into existence. Bishop Swing also presented Rita with a hand stitched prayer shawl, a beautiful crystal paperweight from URI Korea, and a memory book filled with stories, good wishes, and photos from URI members around the world.



It was a magical night! The Circles of Light dinner reflected the circles of light shining around the world through Cooperation Circles, and raised \$47,000 in support of URI global activities.

2. Executive Director February Letter

Greetings of love and peace.

As URI's global community grows as a force for peace, justice and healing, we and all of humanity owe a debt of profound gratitude and support to the visionary founders of

the United Nations and to those people who devote their lives to its success. A strong and effective UN is critical to humanity's future. The UN inspired the birth of the URI and URI is formally affiliated with the UN through the Department of Public Information. There is a URI Cooperation Circle at the UN and many URI CCs around the world have partnerships with local UN groups. In support of the UN and in the spirit of global solidarity, I invite you to join your brothers and sisters all over the world in three major United Nations' observances in 2005, one of which is also a major observance for URI:

- June 5th, World Environment Day
(www.wed2005.org)
- June 26th, 60th Anniversary of UN Charter
(www.un.org/aboutun/charter/) and 5th Anniversary of URI Charter
- September 21st, International Day of Peace
(www.uri.org)

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[3. Realizing the Vision - URI CCs recognized as a presence for positive community action.](#)

Over the past five years, URI Cooperation Circles have sown the seeds of interfaith respect and trust on a daily basis. They have created strong networks for constructive action. Many have established themselves as a trusted presence to be called on by community and government leaders in critical times. Here are three examples of how URI circles in The Philippines, Brazil, and Israel are leading efforts to build, out of the division and destruction of the present, a more hopeful future.

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[4. Four URI Regional Assemblies are planned for 2005](#)

ASIA – “Religions for Peace”

Planning for spring 2005 – Peace Train Pilgrimage from Delhi, India, to Lahore, Pakistan, followed by URI sub-regional Assembly in Multan, Pakistan. One hundred participants are expected from Pakistan, India and other Asian countries.

PACIFIC AND SOUTHEAST ASIA– “Creating a Common Ground of Friendship and Peace”

February 24-26 2005. Manila, Philippines. Twelve URI leaders from the Philippines, Indonesia, Cambodia and New

Zealand will work together.

EUROPE – “Overcoming Prejudices and Irritations between People of Different Cultures and Religions in the Process of European Unification”

September 22-25 2005 Assembly - Brussels, Belgium. One hundred participants are expected from Belgium, Germany, United Kingdom, Denmark and other countries in Europe.

NORTH AMERICA – URI NAIN Connect 2005 – “Hospitality, Gratitude and Sharing: Interfaith Action in our World,” a joint gathering with the North America Interfaith Network (NAIN)

August 12-16 2005 Assembly - Las Vegas, Nevada, US. Five hundred participants are expected from the USA and Canada.

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5 . Jordan's Quested Peace Cooperation Circle Delivers School Supplies to Needy Girls and Boys in Rihab

On January 8, 2004 eleven dedicated members of the Quested Peace CC gathered at the URI regional Office in Amman to prepare 30 bags filled with school supplies. The next day seven members drove 460 KM to the remote village of Rihab. While in Rihab we visited the one public school and consulted with its manager to determine the 30 most needy children who would receive the School Bags.



We then went out in the village to find these boys and girls to give them with their School Bags. During our visit we talked to the children and learned their problems. We then encouraged them to study hard for a better future.

Read More stories of URI Cooperation Circles around the world

6 . URI Global Elections

Cooperation Circle member groups in the URI network have submitted nominations and are now in the process of voting for three Global Council Trustees from each region. The process will be completed April 4, 2005. The newly elected Trustees will join the current Global Council and Global Staff at a meeting in June in Seoul, Korea. The transition from the first to the second elected Global Council will be celebrated and work undertaken will powerfully launch the URI in its next three years of action, reflection and growth. The Trustees will also make a powerful symbolic statement for peace during an interfaith prayer vigil at the DMZ dividing North and South Korea.

7. Your Gift Makes a Difference!

Please contribute to URI's vital peacebuilding work. URI needs your financial support! Your gifts ensure we can continue our work for peace, justice, and healing throughout the world. URI accepts gifts of cash, stock, property and service. You can make a donation online or mail your gift to United Religions Initiative, P.O. Box 29242, San Francisco, CA 94129.



Contact URI

United Religions Initiative
P.O. Box 29242
San Francisco, CA 94129
USA

Web: www.uri.org

Phone: +1.415.561.2300

Fax: +1.415.561.2313

Email: office@uri.org

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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.