



URI eUpdate for December 2006

Our Periodic Electronic Newsletter

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1. Executive Director Reflections - Birth of love and healing light at Advent



Rev. Charles Gibbs & Staff receive Peace Prize from Ethiopia IPI CC

Dear Friends,

Greetings of love and peace.

As I write this, many Christians around the world are observing the season of Advent, a time of preparation and expectation for the birth of love and healing light into the world on Christmas.

Here is a line from an Advent hymn that has always called to me and inspired me:

And let each heart prepare a home where such a mighty guest may come.

Each Advent, I meditate on how I might best prepare my heart for the birth of new love and healing light within me and in our world. How do I best cleanse myself of fear, of animosity, of doubt, of a feeling of woundedness, and open

myself anew to the life transforming gift of divine love and healing light?

This year I am privileged to have as part of my preparation a week participating in the first session of a groundbreaking URI peacebuilding program based on a remarkable book called *The Moral Imagination*, by John Paul Lederach, noted theoretician, teacher and practitioner in the field of global interfaith peacebuilding.

URI's program, which will last for over a year, will bring together leadership teams from CCs actively involved in peacebuilding work in Uganda, India, Ethiopia and the Philippines. In addition, these teams, leaders/participants include John Paul Lederach; his colleague Herm Weaver; visionary peace practitioner, Libby Hoffman; global staff support, Barbara Hartford, Sally Mahé, Charles Gibbs.

In the beginning of his book Dr. Lederach asks this core question: How do we transcend the cycles of violence that bewitch our human community while still living in them? The answer, his years of reflection, teaching and experience have led him to believe, lies in the moral imagination, which he defines this way: the capacity to imagine something rooted in the challenges of the real world yet capable of giving birth to that which does not yet exist.

Those of us privileged to participate in this year-plus pilot project, which will include meetings hosted in the home countries of some of the participating groups, will be exploring Dr. Lederach's core question, with a special emphasis on how we can best activate the moral imagination in our efforts to end religiously motivated violence and create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. We will be participating with the intention that this work will support the on-the-ground efforts of URI's CCs in Uganda, India, Ethiopia and the Philippines; and support the work of the entire URI network to fulfill our Purpose.

Personally, I can't think of a more appropriate way to prepare myself for the birth of love and healing light within me and in our world. And, as part of my preparation, I pledge to share my experience in this extraordinary project with the URI network.

In return, I invite you to keep the participants in your prayer and meditation.

In the meantime, may each of us find new ways to prepare a home in our heart for the birth of love and healing light within us and in our world.

It is a privilege to be with you in this preparation and to share this journey with you.

Love,
Charles

2. New Cooperation Circles come from five different regions

We are delighted to introduce and welcome the newest Cooperation Circle members of URI. They share their purposes, dreams and intentions in [Global](#)

[CC News.](#)

Jordan Seeds of Peace CC members held a workshop on Effective Communication Skills

AFRICA - Escola Ntwananu Matola- Rio, Mozambique

ASIA - Bangalore South CC, South India and Seeds of Peace, Pakistan

EUROPE - Unitheum e.V , Germany

MIDDLE EAST & NORTH AFRICA - Jordan Seeds of Peace, Jordan

MULTIREGION - Trail of Dreams World Peace Walk

3. URI's Founder Rt. Rev. William E. Swing retires into fulltime work for URI



Bishop Swing, Founder and President of URI, has joined the staff in our San Francisco office, working on a daily basis to ensure the success of URI. In the face of the fact that religiously motivated violence, throughout the world, has dramatically changed life in the 21st century, Bishop Swing believes that "the one immediate hope for change is to engage

grassroots people of the world's religions, indigenous traditions and spiritual expressions in peacemaking at local levels."

[Read Bishop Swing's invitation](#) for you join him in being a vital part of the dramatic change in peacemaking undertaken by the United Religions Initiative.

[Read stories of the struggles and successes of our Cooperation Circles](#) (under In the News) - small groups of historic enemies who choose to make peace while engaged in practical agendas of their own choosing.

4. Healing the Earth – Join in the UNEP Billion Tree Project

The URI Global Council Trustees representing our URI grassroots network has declared support for a remarkable project that everyone in the world can do together. We invite you to participate in the UN Environmental Program

campaign to plant a billion trees in 2007, inspired by Nobel Peace Prize Laureate Wangari Maathai.

The campaign is open to all individuals, children and youth groups, schools, community groups, non-governmental organizations, farmers, private sector organizations, local authorities, and national Governments. Each pledge can be anything from a single tree to 10 million trees.

Under the Plant for the Planet: Billion Tree Campaign, people and entities from around the world are encouraged to enter pledges on a [web site](#). Tree planters will receive certificates and will be able to see who their partners are and where in our world trees are being planted.

[Read more about the Billion Tree Campaign](#)

5. Philanthropy – Your financial contribution goes an extraordinarily long way at URI

URI has perhaps the simplest, least expensive administrative structure of any nonprofit around.

Virtually all of URI's direct services are performed by volunteers—everyday people of different faiths collaborating to end religious conflict and transform the world. Their dedication is stunning.

- In Malawi URI volunteers, Christian and Muslim village elders, spend their days biking across the countryside bringing comfort and whatever meager medical care they can to people with AIDS.
- In India, Christian, Hindu and Muslim university students—already overloaded with studies, paid work and family duties—find time to be trained as URI interfaith peacebuilders.

Supporting more than one million URI volunteers like these are seven full-time and 19 part-time staff. Most of the part-timers work for tiny stipends or for free. The rest of our support structure—telecommunications systems, public events and trainings, publications, etc.—is equally modest.

What does this mean for you? That your financial contribution goes an extraordinarily long way at URI. A gift of \$50, \$150 or \$500 from you now will help us to:

- Fully fund our groundbreaking new program to strengthen URI volunteer teams from conflict zones in Ethiopia, India, the Philippines and Uganda;
- Bridge the digital divide in our network, so that URI volunteers in Sierra Leone and San Francisco have the same access to the resources on our electronic network;
- Continue a program launched this year in Cyprus to unite young adult peacebuilders of different faiths from the Mideast and Eastern Europe to heal the wounds of war in themselves, their communities and the natural environment.

It's easy to give to URI. [Click here](#) to make an online credit card gift now.



Contact URI

United Religions Initiative

`\${account.address}`

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.

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