

Partners in Leadership

United Religions Initiative



Best Practices that Exemplify URI Values and Enliven Leadership 2007

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URI PARTNERS IN LEADERSHIP

Organizational Practices that Exemplify URI Values

During the last several years the URI community has enjoyed an array of effective practices, lessons and experiences that have advanced our work and enlivened us as a community. Building from the experiences at URI global summits, regional assemblies, CC initiatives, and the experiences of like-minded groups, we have collected some of the best practices that exemplify the values and purpose of URI. This collection is primarily a collection of the talent provided by the URI community.

On every continent there are URI leaders with experiences and expertise in the areas described below who are willing to help others. Please contact the URI office in San Francisco or your regional URI coordinator and we will help connect you with resource people.

1. Appreciative Inquiry

In the URI context, Appreciative Inquiry (AI) has proven itself, again and again, to be a powerful tool for bringing people together from diverse backgrounds. Grounded in a belief that calling a group to focus on a problem creates a practice of deficit thinking and ties people to what has failed in the past, AI asks people to recall and share the best of their past experiences. At the start of regional gatherings and global summits, participants were invited to form pairs and engage one another in conversation. Each pair were given questions and asked to interview one another. Interview take about 30 minutes per person. Sample questions are:

We have all been part of efforts where we have joined with others and brought dreams of a better world into being. For the moment I would like you to reflect on a “high point” in your life experience -- a time when you were involved in something significant or meaningful. Reflect on a time when perhaps...

- *your deepest energies were called upon;*
- *you gave your whole best self to something;*
- *you were listening, perhaps with a spiritual ear, to what the world was calling for from you and others;*
- *whole new paths or possibilities emerged;*
- *changes, small or large, were made that at first seemed impossible;*
- *visions of a better world were actually brought into being.*

Please share with me the story and how it unfolded. Without being too humble, please share what you contributed to this effort. Are there lessons that might be brought to this gathering?

Each of our communities of faith has special gifts -- traditions, beliefs, practices, values -- to bring to the arena of interfaith cooperation and action. As you think about your community of faith, what are some of its most positive qualities or gifts that make it capable of working cooperatively with others of different faiths to create a better world for all people?

- *Are there special texts or passages or quotes that stand out for you?*
 - *A story or parable?*
 - *Historical experiences?*
 - *Capabilities, commitments, or values?*
- Please share these with me.*

The personal experiences and the valuing of our diverse traditions such questions evoke, and the relationships that are created as the answers are shared in one-on-one interviews and then in small groups, provide a foundation of trust, mutual respect and a recognition of common ground in the midst of diversity. They create a climate of careful listening and a spirit of cooperation and inquiry. Building on this foundation, participants co-create a positive vision of a shared future powerful enough to motivate the cooperative action necessary to transform the past.

In discovering Appreciative Inquiry, the URI found a process for creating an organization that reflected the values we felt the organization should embody. At the center of those values was a belief in the essential nature of interfaith cooperation that honors, indeed celebrates, diversity and yet constantly strives to discover common vision leading to shared action for a better world.

2. Welcoming the Gift of Diversity - Valuing Voices That Are Not Often Heard

Since the first Global Summit in 1996, the URI has engaged people in global inquiries about the values, visions, and potential of the URI. During the first years of inquiry that included people on every continent, a consensus emerged that the URI should “value voices that respect others” and “listen to voices that are not often heard.”

These values have been reflected at URI regional conferences and global summits by an enduring commitment to seek out a broad diversity of people and to provide scholarship monies for people who need it.

A “maximum mix” of participants who have a stake in the vision of the URI have brought vitality to URI gatherings and an unlimited potential for cooperation. Young adults, an equitable number of women to men, professionals from different sectors of society such as business, the arts, education, and the media have been consciously sought out and invited to participate in the URI gatherings.

Because of the history and present practice of oppression and persecution of native peoples around the world, and because it is especially important in this time of environmental crisis that their spiritual wisdom about Earth be part of the conversation, the URI has made a special effort to invite indigenous peoples to the URI regional conferences and global summits.

Invitations to a maximum diversity of people, money set aside for scholarships, and inclusion of people whose voices are not always heard has continued to strengthen the URI in pursuit of its Purpose.

URI has also kept a close eye on translation needs, seeking to provide one-on-one translation for participants who need it. For the 2002 Global Assembly in Rio de Janeiro, URI set up simultaneous translation capacity (into Portuguese) for the plenary sessions and also invited volunteer translators to attend and provide translations for individuals.

3. Shared Leadership

From the beginning, URI conferences and summit gatherings have been planned and implemented by an expanding circle of leaders. With initial and on-going help of Professor David Cooperrider, Diana Whitney and PhD students at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland Ohio, and URI leaders from every continent, the URI continues to learn the art of sharing leadership. URI conferences require many talents: to manage logistics, organize participant's travel needs, plan conference space and decoration, coordinate religious services and practices, plan the agenda for the conference, and lead and facilitate sessions, just to name a few.

Rather than delegating all of these responsibilities to professional and paid staff, the URI has benefited by an increasing number of extraordinary leaders from diverse backgrounds, ages, religions, and expertise who often volunteer to take responsibility and share leadership. Before the conference, planning teams usually share information via email for several months and then meet together for one full day directly before the start of the conference to organize the final details.

4. Open Space Technology

While it is customary at regional or global assemblies for one or two honored speakers to give speeches or for a panel of knowledgeable people to share their perspectives, leadership within the URI has been significantly advanced by an organizational process called Open Space. This process creates space and time for any participant at an assembly to host a discussion around a subject that is dear to their heart or for which they have a particular expertise. Any participant who wishes to host a discussion is invited to make a sign stating the topic. One by one, they offer a short "promotion" for their session. A room assignment and a meeting time is assigned to each presenter and placed on a large grid that can be seen by everyone. Assembly participants choose what sessions they would like to attend.

In the URI where there are many leaders and many exciting and new ideas to share, Open Space has proven to be a useful process that gives many people an a chance to share their ideas and become a leader in their favorite topic for a session.

Open Space Technology was developed by Harrison Owen as a means for large groups to deal with varied and complex issues in a short period of time entirely through self-organization. Like Appreciative Inquiry, it is both an organizational methodology and an approach to accessing leadership inherent in any group toward coherent planning without a superimposed hierarchical structure. As such it has many implications for how to be a leader that embodies these values and practices. One of Harrison Owen's latest books is, The Spirit of Leadership: Liberating the Leader in Each of Us.

5. World Café

The World Café is an intentional way to create a living network of conversations around questions that matter. It is a creative methodology for hosting authentic conversations in groups of all sizes. You join several other people in a café style table in a small conversation cluster exploring a question or an issue that really matters in your life, work or community.

Others are sitting nearby exploring similar questions at the same time. You won't be sitting for too long however, because half of the excitement of being a part of the World Café is the opportunity to move to another group, visit with new people and cross pollinate ideas and insights. As the conversations connect together, collective knowledge grows and evolves. A sense of the larger whole becomes real. The wisdom of the group becomes more visible.

World Café Operating Principles

1. Create Hospitable Space
2. Explore Questions that Matter
3. Encourage Everyone to Contribute
4. Connect Diverse People and Ideas
5. Listen Together for Insights, Patterns, and Deeper Questions
6. Make Collective Knowledge Visible

To learn more, go to the web site: www.theworldcafe.com

*from A Resource Guide for Hosting Conversations That Matter at the World Cafe, copyright 2002 Whole Systems Associates

Another resource: Turning to One Another, Conversations to Restore Hope in the Future, by Margaret J. Wheatley, author of Leadership and the New Science

6. Hospitality - Creating Safe Space

One of the most important lessons in evidence in all URI gatherings is the power of hospitality, the importance of making all who attend feel welcome and valued.

An important part of hospitality is creating a safe space for all participants. At minimum, safe space means that each person can be fully present and participate in a respectful way that honors what they hold dearest. Many of the Principles in the Charter point to practices that help create safe space. For instance, "listen and speak with respect to deepen mutual understanding and trust" and "members of the URI shall not be coerced to participate in any ritual or be proselytized."

Over the years we have come to recognize that safe space is not the same for all people. What might feel natural and comfortable for some may be uncomfortable for others or even a violation of a religious practice or principle. For example, for some people hugging is a natural form of greeting, for others hugging is a violation of cultural sensibility and/or religious vows. For some alcohol is a part of their religious observance and a welcome component of social gatherings, for others the consumption of alcohol is avoided for health reasons and/or prohibited by their religion.

As we seek to understand what makes a safe space, it is important to recognize that to create a safe space is not a guarantee that no one will ever feel uncomfortable. Sometimes feeling uncomfortable is necessary for positive growth and change. There is a profound difference between being uncomfortable because we are being challenged to see the world or another person in a new way, and a feeling that something precious to us is being violated. As a community, the URI is committed to become ever more skillful in creating safe space that

protects us from violation and enables us appropriately to risk growth that initially might be uncomfortable.

7. Religious Ceremonies and Sacred Practices

In the same way the URI continues to learn what it means to create safe space, we also continue to learn what it means to be a bridge building organization that respects the sacred wisdom and differences among religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions.

One way to deepen understanding and respect has been to integrate a diversity of religious ceremony, prayer, meditation or sacred practices into regional assemblies and global assemblies. Usually, about an hour is set aside in the early morning for meditation and prayer practices. Participants from different faith backgrounds lead these practices that have included silent and movement meditation practices from various religions, sacred ceremony, and song and dance.

In addition, participants from different faith traditions are invited to self-organize a brief program that shares something from their religious teaching, prayers or practices with the entire gathering at the start of every morning and afternoon session. Sikh chanting, Raja meditation, Shabbat services, Islamic teachings, Christian agape meal, Hindu music and chanting, and a Wiccan ceremony are some of the expressions that have been offered at URI gatherings for the benefit of all. Participants are invited to experience and share in these kinds of events but are not coerced in any way to participate.

8. Dreaming the Future - Imagining the Possibilities

The United Religions Initiative began as a vision - a global dream on the eve of the new century and millennium of what was possible. Through a series of activities that asked people to vision their dream of a better world, a collective purpose emerged for the URI: *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.*

In pursuit of this purpose, dreaming has continued. At URI assemblies, participants are invited to take part in dreaming exercises. “Imagine that it is 30 years in to the future. Imagine the URI is changing the world; imagine the types of contributions being made; imagine how the URI is growing as an organization; and, imagine a world where the people of different faiths are living together in peace for the good of the Earth.”

At the North America Regional Assembly in June of 2001 participants were asked to create a “Dream Book.” Small groups worked together to share their dreams of the URI making a difference in the world. Each group created a large poster image of their dream which then was bound as a large book and offered as a gift to other regional assemblies. “Dreaming activities” can take many forms like the creation of a dream book or declarations, or an assortment of skits, imaginary news shows, or collages. What is constant in all of these differing activities is the sense of value Einstein described when he said, “imagination is more powerful than knowledge.” The URI is learning that it is in people’s dreams and the sharing of those dreams with one another that action is inspired and positive change begins.

9. Engaging the URI Charter to Deepen Understanding

Background

Since June 1996 thousands of people have shared their visions and worked together to create the URI. It is an organization for global good rooted in shared spiritual values. People from many different cultures and perspectives are working to create an organization that is inclusive, non-hierarchical and de-centralized; one that enhances cooperation, autonomy and individual opportunity. This co-creative work offered by people of many cultures is producing a unique organization composed of self-organizing groups which operate locally and are connected globally.

The URI's Charter has been spoken into being by a myriad of voices from around the world. Its essential spirit, values and vision are expressed in the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. Together, they inspire, ground and guide all URI activity. The Charter includes:

- Preamble** - the call that inspires us to create the URI now and continue to create it everyday;
- Purpose** - the statement that draws us together in common cause;
- Principles** - the fundamental beliefs that guide our structure, decisions and content;
- Organization Design** - the way we organize to enhance cooperation and magnify spirit;
- Guidelines for Action** - an action agenda to inspire and guide our worldwide URI community.

Engage the Charter

You are warmly invited to participate in our growing community and become part of this extraordinary force for good in the world. This Charter is your invitation to participate in its on-going creation. Read our Charter and then plan to engage others in conversation. Here are some ideas:

a) Create Conversations

Preamble and Purpose

Ask people to read aloud the Preamble and Purpose. Take turns reading each paragraph. Then, ask the group to reflect on the following question:

When in your life have you been a part of something that expressed the same values expressed in this vision? Please tell the story of what happened. What was it that you valued deeply? What difference did your experience make in your community? In your own life? Thinking back to the Charter, what words especially resonate for you and illuminate the experience you just described?

Principles

Ask people to read the principles, each person reading one principle. Then, ask the group to reflect on and discuss this question:

Which of these principles stand out for you as offering powerful guidance for a better way? How might we change if we lived these principles in pursuit of the URI purpose? How might living these principles change our communities and our world?

Organizational Design and Guidelines for Action

Ask people to work with the different sections: the Organizational Design, Global Council, Global Assembly and Guidelines for Action. (You might form pairs or small groups - each group might work with one of these sections.) Ask each group to reflect on and discuss the following questions:

What inspires you about this plan? For you, is there an image, a metaphor, or a gift from nature that helps you describe or better understand the ideal qualities expressed in this organizational plan?

Action Agenda

As you imagine becoming a part of the living United Religions Initiative, what shared action for a better world would you like to be involved in? Which Action Area is most compelling for you? Have you already taken part in activities or projects that seek to live into any of these Action areas? Please describe your experience.

Building the URI Together - A View of the Vision

The (funny looking) bubbles and circles on the last page of the Charter show a picture of the different kinds of structures that make up the URI. Begin with Cooperation Circles and read to the left! In pairs or small groups imagine and discuss why you might want to participate in a Cooperation Circle, or become an Affiliate.

Imagine a growing global community of Cooperation Circles. Imagine how one might take root where you live or around a particular interest. Imagine how such a group could spring into being from the passion, determination, creativity and resourcefulness of the people in this group. Having ideas does not mean you must act on every one! What ideas from your group seem most needed?

Explore why might a group you already belong to desire to foster a Cooperation Circle as part of this work? Imagine what are all the benefits you might receive by being in touch with similar groups around the world? Imagine how would your actions benefit the worldwide community?

Affiliates support the URI but do not desire the rights and responsibilities of Cooperation Circles. What groups or organizations do you know that might consider becoming affiliates? What individuals might you invite to become an affiliate? Would you consider becoming an affiliate yourself? How might you tell others about the URI and its global vision for cooperation and peace?

10. The Circle

THE CIRCLE

*Every thing the power of the world does is done in a Circle.
The sky is round, and I have heard that the
earth is round like a ball, and so are all of the stars.*

*The wind, in its greatest power, whirls.
Birds make their nests in Circles,
for theirs is the same religion as ours.
The sun comes forth and goes down again in a Circle.
The moon does the same, and both are round.
Even the seasons form a great Circle in their changing
and always come back again to where they were.
The life of a person is a Circle from childhood to childhood
and so it is in everything where power moves. Black Elk*

Meeting and inquiring in a circle is a simple and powerful way to bring people together that invites a deeper listening, a sacred presence and a voice of spirit/soul to be heard. People gather in a circle with the intention to ease the pain around the world and envision a better way, a way that brings peace instead of more war and violence, and mutual support for creative and effective new actions.

11. Teleconference Calls by Topic

In 2002, Dr. Steve Fitzgerald, regional support staff for North America region, designed a series of conference calls to provide opportunities for CCs in North America to share experiences, ideas, and questions with other CC members and staff.

Steve believes that conversation is a vital source of inspiration, relationship building, and organizational innovation. Steve discovered that CC members are renewed when they connect with others to exchange views, information and good ideas about topics that interest them. Calls provide staff an important opportunity to listen to CCs first hand experiences.

Calls focused on different topics. Steve asked different CC leaders and URI staff to coordinate the different calls. Each call coordinator planned an agenda for the call in advance, including preparing an opening meditation or prayer.

All CCs in N. America received information about how to connect with the call. An inexpensive telephone service was used. Each person paid for their own long distance charges. Most calls lasted 1 1/2 hours, and 6-10 people participated in each call. The average cost was about \$5 or less per participant per hour.

Brief summaries were written after each call and posted to the CC website.

Teleconference: Topics included:

1. Leadership Development
2. Peace-Building
3. Communications
4. Youth Engagement in Interfaith and URI
5. Resource Generation within CCs, URI-NA, and Globally

North American CC members received the following instructions for participating in the calls:

- Each participant pays for 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, email the contact person for that call to let them know, then follow instructions 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 CCs, global council reps, and/or support staff who have personal experience and insight to share regarding the topic of the call.

12. URI Home Gathering

Partial information about the Home Gathering is included below. For a complete Home Gathering packet, go to the URI website: www.uri.org. Home Gathering materials were prepared by Kay Lindahl, URI Global Council member and Sally Mahé, URI staff.

Background:

The URI is a grassroots organization. It calls forth people, as Mahatma Gandhi said, “to be the change they want to see in the world.” URI calls people to use their creativity and resourcefulness to promote interfaith cooperation, peace building and respect wherever they are.

This guide offers information about how to encourage people to support this vision and join the URI by inviting them to an Interfaith Home Gathering. (a person’s home provides a lovely context of hospitality but interfaith Home Gatherings can take place just about anywhere.)

Purposes of a URI Interfaith Home Gathering:

- To engage people in sharing the vision of the URI in a way that draws upon their own sense of meaning, creativity and commitment.
- To enjoy getting to know people better from a variety of backgrounds.
- To invite people to consider joining the URI, an expanding community of people from around the world who are committed to making their vision for inter-religious peacemaking and cooperation real.

Various outcomes of an Interfaith Home Gathering:

- People may want just to affirm their commitment to this vision - to reach out to people of different faith backgrounds with respect and acceptance.
- People may want to meet again in an informal way to continue getting to know one another better.

- Some people may wish to become affiliates of the URI or they may want to form a URI Cooperation Circle. URI Cooperation Circles are groups of diverse people, associations and organizations who are committed to the URI purpose and want to pursue the URI vision and purpose in their own unique ways.

How to Host an Interfaith Home Gathering:

- Invite 8-12 people from different religious, spiritual and cultural backgrounds. (Ideally, you might invite some people who know about the URI already or who have experience with interfaith activity and others who are hearing about interfaith work for the first time.)
- Become familiar with the Guidelines contained in the Home Gathering packet. Packet includes:
 1. An invitation letter
 2. A proposed schedule for a three hour gathering
 3. Directions and guidelines for leading a gathering
 4. An appreciative interview exercise
 5. Next steps

Coaching is available. If you would like assistance in hosting a gathering, please call the URI office. In addition to the San Francisco office, there are active URI Cooperation Circles in many parts of the world. Contact URI San Francisco office to locate people near you who could help. 1.415.561.2300.

For a complete URI Home Gathering packet, please go www.uri.org/resources

13. Observance of International Day of Peace, September 21

Offered by Gerardo Gonzalez, convener of the Spiritual Forum of Santiago for Peace CC and URI Global Council trustee 2002-2005, Latin America.

Reflection:

Our celebration of the International Day of Peace, honored every year by the United Nations on September 21, was spread over three days and organized around three different kinds of events. The three different programs allowed people to join together in solidarity for peace and offered different ways of people from different faith traditions to feel comfortable joining together in pray.

People who preferred to pray in their own faith home were welcome to do so and still participate in the event; people in schools had the opportunity to offer prayers for peace appropriate for multi-cultural and multi-religious school settings; people who wanted to participate in interfaith prayer in the same place with people from various religions and traditions were welcome to pray for peace in that setting.

The format for this event gave full respect to people's preferences while still honoring the act of praying together for peace.

Each year CCs can share what they plan to do on the occasion of the UN International Day of Peace. By sharing ideas and proposals, we learn together and consolidate URI as a network of local interfaith organizations.

Submitted by Dr. Gerardo Gonzalez, Coordinator of the Spiritual Forum of Santiago for Peace, URI Global Council Trustee, Latin America.

Different Levels of Engagement

This event took place over three days and included three components:

1. Day One: Prayers for Peace by Faith Communities:

Faith communities belonging to diverse religions and spiritual traditions were invited to gather in their own places of worship (churches, temples, synagogues, mosques, etc.) using prayers and practices from their own traditions. Each faith community was aware that other faith groups were doing the same throughout the city of Santiago on the same day. (September 20)

2. Day Two: Prayers for Peace at the Schools:

Private and public schools were invited to celebrate the International Day of Peace by offering prayers which were of an ecumenical or interfaith character. (September 21)

3. Day Three: Prayers for Peace at a Central Location:

A central Ceremony of Interfaith Prayers for Peace in the World, presented the evening of September 22nd at a huge hall of Catholic University, was the closing event. Forty flags from different countries brought together all the peoples of the world. Representatives from thirteen religions and spiritual traditions (including Christians, Jews, Moslems, Buddhists, Sikhs, Sufis, Baha'i and Mapuches) were seated in a circle at the center of the hall surrounded by a multi-religious audience.

The leaders prayed one by one, using their own language, songs and rituals. At the end of each prayer, a flower was deposited in a flower vase at the very center of the circle. Thus, at the end of the round of prayers, a beautiful bouquet of flowers emerged, representing "our unity in diversity."

A minute in silence after each prayer allowed all the people attending the ceremony to pray simultaneously for peace. The event ended with all the participants reading in loud voice a "Declaration for Peace in the World" and singing for peace.

14. The Peacemakers' Interfaith Youth Circle Lesson

Offered by Marites Guingona-Africa and Shakuntala Moorjani-Vaswani, co-conveners of the Peacemakers Circle CC in Metro Manila, Philippines.

Reflection:

In today's world where news of violence is daily fare on television, and where movies like *The Terminator*, *The Matrix Reloaded*, *X-Men* and *Star Wars* invade our consciousness, I have wondered how matters of faith, religion and peace are being perceived by our younger generation.

As our response to this concern, we at the Peacemakers' Circle took time to plan and organize an interfaith dialogue program for the youth. Below are two accounts of how we fared in our endeavors to reach out to youths of diverse cultures and beliefs in Metro Manila. They have responded overwhelmingly well to our invitation and have come, in their diversity (to the common ground we prepared for them), with willingness to dialogue with one another and to share with each other their visions of peace concerning their future.

We are heartened by this outcome. In their passionate responses and their eagerness to stay overtime to continue with the dialogue we saw the seeds of hope in the youth. This experience is encouraging us to continue our work with them and to carry on nurturing the seeds of hope in their hearts with our presence and guidance, our enthusiasm, and our support. We pray that those seeds will grow and bear good fruit in the generations to come.

Marites Africa

Overview:

Number of Participants: 33 (with ages ranging from 18-35)

Religions/faith traditions: Christianity (Roman Catholic), Islam, Hindu, Shinji Shumei Kai (a spiritual expression of the Shinto tradition), and various indigenous traditions of the Philippines

Topic: Questions on Religion and Peace

Facilitator: Mr. Marco Gutang, a college professor of Peace Education

Description:

The session started late because of the rain. While waiting for others to arrive, I encouraged those present to converse with their neighbors and get to know one another informally. Because of limited space, we sat around an inner and an outer circle with chairs in the outer and cushions on the floor in the inner circle. When most of the youths arrived we started formal introductions. They stated their name and what school/university they attended and what religion they practiced. As Executive Director of the Peacemakers' Circle, I welcomed them and briefly shared my story about how I came to know about the interfaith movement through the URI, and how I was inspired

to pursue the vision of peace among religions, and to commit myself to helping to realize it.

I showed them a video on URI that included interviews with people from diverse faiths who helped give birth to the URI. I also showed the video on the first URI Global Assembly held in Rio last year. We observed reactions to the videos. We saw how eager they were about what was being said. After the video many expressed their enthusiasm for the URI vision and purpose!

After hearing feedback about the video, Marco Gutang facilitated the workshop. He offered 7 questions to the group. Before each question, the participants were asked to find a partner (a person whom they did not know) and take turns with that partner in responding to the questions asked. After 5 minutes, a chime signaled them to return to the big circle and share their responses with the big group. This went on in the same manner for the six other questions. After the 7 rounds, the youths not only had been able to share their thoughts and feelings concerning the questions asked, they also had the chance to meet 7 different people around the circle!

Here are the "tough" questions asked by Marco:

1. Who is Allah/God/Buddha/Supreme Being? How do I experience God/Allah/Buddha in my life?

2. I see my religion/faith tradition as...

I see other religions/faith traditions as...

3. Other religions/faith traditions see my own faith as...

My own religion/faith tradition sees other religions as...

4. My parents taught me that my religion is...

My parents taught me that other religions are...

5. My religion taught me that my religion is...

My religion taught me that other religions are...

6. My idea of peace is...

My religion's idea of peace is....

One bright young man later exclaimed that those questions were provocative and could not all be answered in one day! But Marco wanted to break the ice and get them all warmed up for the next session. I think his strategy worked. Many asked to extend the time or come together in the circle again at another date to continue the conversations. As the rounds went on and partners were changed at the strike of the bell, Shakun, Pal Kashim (a Muslim mother) and I watched from the sidelines. It was amusing to see the young people preferring to huddle

together in small circles rather than opting to move to the adjacent rooms for more space to breathe! They obviously liked to be herded close to one another despite the babble of voices around them. It was a wonder how they could hear each other's voices above the din!

Finally, they were called back to the big circle where thoughts and sentiments were shared about the experience. One Muslim woman (a real-life princess!) expressed the uneasiness she felt at the beginning of the exercise. She said that she was not used to talking about their religion with non-Muslims.

Although she had been co-facilitating interfaith dialogue workshops with fellow youths before, this was the first time she was actually experiencing being a participant. This was a new experience for her and she felt rather uncomfortable. In the end she acknowledged that it was interesting for her and proceeded to join our photo sessions with gusto.

Another point that elicited passionate responses from various quarters was the one raised by an indigenous, *Datu*, a bright tribal youth leader. He said that *God allowed wars to happen so that we can know the meaning of peace, and continue to strive to attain it.* Almost immediately, hands went up and voices were heard to qualify that statement or to refute it. Another member of the tribal youth group quoted the song, *Imagine*, by John Lennon, saying that perhaps we should *"imagine a world with no religion....perhaps then peace can come about."* Hands started to come up and a chorus of voices ensued either in laughing protest, or in tentative agreement. When openly chided by some of his friends about this comment, the young man calmly said, *"Well, I am only saying IMAGINE...and WHAT IF...?"*

Conversations went past the 6 p.m. and many wanted to continue with the dialogue. We ended with the promise of getting together again next month.

15. Visions of Peace Among Religions Workshop Design

Offered by the Peacemakers' Circle CC, Metro-Manila, Philippines

Reflection:

This is a 3-hour interfaith dialogue workshop program designed for high school and college level students. Its purpose is to help the youth participants become aware of the need for people of faith from diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions to reach out to one another in the spirit of true dialogue for peace and the common good. It is hoped that through the experience of dialogue mutual respect, understanding, cooperation can come about and help foster bonds of friendship among its participants. It is also hoped that these friendships will lead to mutual sharing of visions of peace, and to the collective endeavor of exploring ways in which collaborative work is possible in realizing shared visions.

Program Outline:

A. Opening Chime

Lighting of Peace Candle - Silent Prayer - Introductions

B. PowerPoint slide show presentation: Are We Reading the Signs of the Times?

-Images of conflict and war in the world.

-Religion is involved in virtually all the wars.

-Religion has a clear moral responsibility to act for peace...

C. The message of Peace in My Faith Tradition: a 5-minute sharing by:

Reverend Fr. Leonardo Mercado, SVD - Executive Secretary of the Episcopal Commission on Inter-religious Dialogue. Prof. Alireza Kunting - Founder and President, Islamic Relations Rev. Talampitiye Sumangala Thero - Buddhist Monk from Sri Lanka Dr. Shakuntala Moorjani-Vaswani - Board Member, The Hindu Temple D.

D. Small Circle Discussion (10 minutes):

a. What struck you about the video presentation and/or sharing of the representatives of the different faith traditions?

b. What questions are in your mind now after having heard the different faith representatives?

E. Big Circle Sharing (30 minutes)

F. Creative Visualization exercise: IMAGINE A WORLD AT PEACE (5 min)

G. Individual Reflection (10 minutes)

1. My vision of a world at peace is...

2. What are my personal blocks that hinder me from helping to make this vision a reality?

3. What can I do to overcome those blocks so that I can begin to realize my vision?

H. Big Circle Sharing (20 min)

I. Explore ways of helping each other realize the vision: Draw/create personal visions (artwork) in small groups.

J. Group Presentation of artwork

K. My Commitment to Peace (a one-page form participants fill out individually)

L. Closing Silence: The Peacemakers' Prayer

Evaluation:

The workshop was well received by the students. They seemed to engage themselves quite eagerly in the activities. Questions raised at the open forum were simple and forthright. There were a couple of sensitive moments when one student questioned our Buddhist monk about the statement he made regarding the Buddhists non-belief in God. The perplexed girl asked the kindly monk, *"Is it not said somewhere that one who does not believe in God is a fool?"* For one brief moment a stunned silence fell upon the assembly of 70. I had to intervene and ask to rephrase the question so that my Buddhist friend could respond with his usually kindly manner. Another unsettling question was asked about the Islamic Hamas and the human bombs in Palestine: *"Why do Muslims seem to glory acts of violence?"* one bright girl asked. I heaved a sigh of relief as my Muslim brother Ali responded to that with a sweet smile. Without batting an eyelash he said that not all who claim to be Muslims are true Muslims. There are those do not know the teachings well. But Ali candidly pointed out that in Islam, Muslims are also taught to fight when they are oppressed or victimized by acts of injustice.

The workshop proceeded well and ended beautifully with colorful visions of a world at peace 30 years from now drawn in white sheets of paper. Each group of students presented their vision to the assembly amid lively bantering and hoots of laughter at the various antics made by each group of presenters. Shakun whispered in my ear, *"Marites, this is our dream come true...to reach out to the youths!"* I said "amen" to that.

The workshop was the first step, the beginning of our campus tour. *Inshallah*, in September we will be traveling outside Metro Manila to bring this workshop to 170 students at the University of Cebu. Sister Sandra Clemente, in charge of the student affairs program of that university, is helping to make our workshop possible. Sister Sandra is also the founder of the *Kalinaw URI CC* based in Cebu (a city in the Visayas region of our country). There are many possibilities for this workshop to be shared in various colleges and universities around the country and much to look forward to!

Marites Africa and Shakun Moorjani-Vaswani

16. United Religions Initiative Global Council Endorses Darfur Unity Statement: A Model for Collective Action

Submitted by Stephen Fuqua, initiator of Darfur Project and Regional Coordinator for North America Region

What follows is a description of how a small, international group of individuals active in the URI came together in response to a global crisis and agreed on two responses in keeping with the URI charter. These responses resulted in Global Council support for the Darfur Unity Statement, an unknown number of individuals and groups contacting their government representatives to support international intervention, and three independent articles mentioning URI actions with respect to Darfur.

Sometime in early 2004, tribal warfare in eastern Sudan's Darfur region began to unfold into what most would call out-and-out genocide, perpetrated by government backed "Arab" militias against the "African" Darfurians (both are Muslim groups). In January 2005, the U.N.'s International Commission of Inquiry on Darfur issued a report to the Secretary General that included the following assessment:

“Based on a thorough analysis of the information gathered in the course of its

investigations, the Commission established that the Government of the Sudan and the Janjaweed are responsible for serious violations of international human rights and humanitarian law amounting to crimes under international law. In particular, the Commission found that Government forces and militias conducted indiscriminate attacks, including killing of civilians, torture, enforced disappearances, destruction of villages, rape and other forms of sexual violence, pillaging and forced displacement, throughout Darfur. These acts were conducted on a widespread and systematic basis, and therefore may amount to crimes against humanity.”

Around the same time as this report, URI members began to express their concern at the lack of international action to halt these “indiscriminate attacks.” A small group out of the many concerned individuals came together and mobilized a special effort to provide appropriate action responses to the conditions in Darfur.

Members of this group organized a special-focus e-mail listserv and invited members of CCs to join. They proceeded to research and share various kinds of information about Darfur and considered various effective ways URI members might respond. One that emerged from the discussions was a request that URI add its organizational name as a signatory to a Unity Statement written by the Save Darfur Coalition (www.savedarfurcoalition.org).

Representing URI members from across the United States and from Brazil, Israel, Ethiopia, Nepal, Pakistan and Chile, the group requested that the URI Global Council show its solidarity and desire for peace by endorsing the Unity Statement. Though the URI Global Council cannot make policy pronouncements on behalf of URI members, it can speak for itself. Reporting on the Council's agreement to support the Unity Statement, URI Executive Director Charles Gibbs said “the Standing Committee enthusiastically supports having URI be added as a signatory to the Unity Statement. A key factor leading to the committee's support was that the request came from our grassroots representatives and members who had been seriously considering this issue.”

A second outcome of the group's deliberation was the crafting of a letter to interfaith leaders throughout the United States requesting their support for a campaign to encourage passage of the Darfur Accountability Act in the US Senate. The Accountability Act would have provided additional American aid in the region and work to secure additional African Union and UN peacekeeping troops specifically for Darfur. (Incidentally, a weaker version of the Darfur Accountability Act passed Congress in late 2005, though funding for its provisions was later removed from the budget).

Though the letter-writing campaign did not generate any responses from other religious leaders, a press release (www.interfaithnews.net/wp/2005/04/07/urigc-darfur/) discussing both actions did prompt responses from several media outlets and blogs, who mentioned the URI in articles on faith-based responses to Darfur (these included *The Philadelphia Tribune*, *Christian Today*, and *The Christian Post*)

Deborah Moldow beautifully summed up the group's sentiment in saying, “...*We don't have the answers to how to make a genuine difference in the suffering in Darfur. But the URI is beginning to grapple with the question, which is part of a larger question essential to our future in the world...it is time for the United Religions Initiative to stand up and be counted.*”

Steps taken in response to the genocide in Darfur:

1. Concerned individuals came together on a dedicated e-mail list.
2. The convener asked several individuals to research the work of specific organizations and news reports, and to bring their findings back to the group.
3. Two separate group actions were decided upon:
 - a. Support passage of the Darfur Accountability Act in the United States with a letter-writing campaign to religious leaders.
 - b. ask the Global Council to become a signatory to the Darfur Unity Statement.
4. A press release was written and distributed via Religion News Service.
5. The mailing list was kept open after this action to help disseminate up-to-date news and research to all who wished to stay informed.

17. “Circles of Ten” Reflection and Dialogue Activity

“Circles of Ten, Women for World Peace” envisions a world community whose women, men and children are actively living in peace. Their mission is to make visible the worldwide culture of peace by gathering in circles to identify what peace means to them and to translate that vision into acts of courageous peacemaking in their personal lives, their communities and their world.

Recently, Margi Ness, a member of Circles of Ten, joined the staff of URI and shared this profound activity that inspires heart to heart speaking and listening.

In Circles of Ten, the women meet regularly, often in cafés or in people's homes, in small groups of about 8 -10. They go around the circle and contribute their own responses to these open-ended sentences. Each person responds to number one and then to number two... and so on.

1. I feel peaceful when...
2. I don't feel peaceful when...
3. Peace for me would be...
4. In the name of peace I commit to this one courageous act before we meet again...

URI is grateful to “Circles of Ten, Women for World Peace” to be able to share this elegant and profound reflection and dialogue activity that is so suited to Cooperation Circles and intimate small group conversation. This idea may be useful to begin or end meetings or simply as a focus for interfaith conversation. For more information about “Circles of Ten, Women for World Peace” or to join the mailing list, please go their website: www.peacecircles.net/. For a free peace circle leader’s guide, email info@peacecircles.net .

18. Action to Connect Interfaith Work and Civic Recognition

Many thanks to The Abrahamic Reunion CC for this superb idea. It provides a Proclamation to be issued by legal representatives of a city, town, or village.

The Abrahamic Reunion, a URI Cooperation Circle (CC) in the Middle East and North Africa region, includes a support network in the United States and in several other locations across the globe. Recently this CC held a 12-hour poetry and music marathon as a fundraiser.

In support of this effort, they asked the City of Sarasota, Florida, to issue a Proclamation in support of global interfaith peace efforts, specifically citing the Abrahamic Reunion.

They invite you to organize local interfaith activities, to use their proclamation as a model, and to ask civic representatives to get involved by issuing this [Global Interfaith Peace Day Proclamation](#). For more information, contact Andy Blanche, Akblanch@aol.com.

PROCLAMATION

WHEREAS, the (name your project or CC) is a project involving residents of (name the city or town) and religious leaders and peacemakers, including men and women from (name various religions involved); and

WHEREAS, peace building activities that incorporate prayer, meditation and spiritual practice can play a vital role in bringing global peace and religion can be a force for peace rather than violence; and

WHEREAS, bringing people together in dialogue and giving them opportunities to connect with people of other faith traditions is a first step towards building harmonious relationships; and

WHEREAS, spiritual peacemaking begins in individual hearts and in local communities, but has global significance; and

WHEREAS, may each one of us become an instrument of peace, respecting our differences, continuing to honor past service and sacrifices, now prepared to better our community, our nation, and our interdependent world,

NOW, THEREFORE, the City Commission of the City of (name your city or town), on behalf of the citizens of our community, take great pride in recognizing this day (give date) as "Global Interfaith Peace Day" as a day of special importance and worthy of the recognition of the citizens of the City of (name of your city or town).

19. Take Healing and Reconciliation into the Community

URI is grateful to Sarah Talcott, URI young adult leader and contact person for the URI Global Youth CC, who developed this activity as part of the Interfaith Leadership Retreat that she led for young adult interfaith leaders in Cyprus in June 2006. This activity is recommended for URI CCs groups or for any group that comes together from different faith backgrounds to make a positive difference. This activity explores the possibilities and limits for interfaith healing and reconciliation.

Purpose:

To explore possible contributions of an interfaith group to healing in the community.
To increase the commitment to promote healing in practical ways.

Directions:

1. Small Group Work

In small groups of three or four, please discuss the question:

How can we as an interfaith group contribute to the healing of our communities?

Identify three or four situations in the community where healing and reconciliation are needed. Preferably, the situations would be those in which group members themselves feel some need for healing.

Brainstorm activities that can be helpful in starting new or supporting existing processes of reconciliation and healing, including symbolic acts as well as practical actions. It may help inspire thinking for the facilitator or for members of the small groups to begin by sharing examples from other conflict areas or contexts.

Prepare suggestions on large sheets of paper to present to the whole group.

2. Large Group Discussion

Reconvene as a large group and ask each small group to present their suggestions. Use lists recorded on the large sheets of paper.

When all groups have presented, ask large group to evaluate the list of possible activities according to the following criteria.

Willingness: How willing are the members of the interfaith group to engage in a healing and reconciliation activity in the community?

Experience: Do any of them have experience with this type of activity?

Time: How long would an engagement be likely to take?

Resources: Does the interfaith group have the resources to carry out an activity in the community?

Risk: How risky is the specific activity being considered (emotionally, politically, for security, etc.)?

Cooperation with other groups: Are there other groups inside the community or out who are conducting or might be interested in cooperating on this type of activity?

Caveats:

Organizing and carrying out an interfaith activity for healing and reconciliation is a major step in the life of many groups. It is essential that the group be patient and allow the time and space to reach an appropriate level of comfort and confidence in moving forward.

If the group decides to become active in the community, there are some basic conditions for successful action:

The group should carefully prepare the ritual, event, or action and role play or rehearse it at least once ahead of time

Avoid obligatory participation for any shared religious rituals or practices.

Balanced and fair participation is an important principle in whatever is undertaken. The wider the representation of different faith traditions in the activity, the more likely it will convey the desired message of healing and reconciliation.

20. Ideas for the International Day of Peace - September 21

Every year, URI CCs are encouraged to join a global effort and participate in the International Day of Peace, inaugurated by the United Nations. If you are just beginning to plan or if you are looking to complete your planning, the following ideas are meant to give you a boost. URI is most grateful to Father James Channan and members of the URI Cooperation Circles (CCs) in Pakistan and to Mussie Hailu and members of the URI International Peace-building Initiative in Ethiopia. Their planning inspired the following ideas.

Influence Legislation - invite your group or class to write letters to the appropriate government officials to declare the International Day of Peace as a national holiday in your country and to organize programs at a national level to celebrate this day each year. For more information about the International Day of Peace go to http://www.uri.org/United_Nations.html

Peace Walk - arrange for your group or class to take a special walk or to become pilgrims for peace. Walks can be as simple as walking around the block or around a few city blocks or as extensive as a pilgrimage connecting different faith communities in your area. Group should be instructed to model peace as they walk - they might choose to walk in silence, to sing, to share prayers as they walk, to carry simple signs for peace, and to be respectful and caring to all who they meet along the way.

Personal Pledge for Peace and Non-violence - invite your group or class to read and sign the following personal pledge for peace. Before signing, ask individuals to share the one activity from the list below they pledge to do more in their daily life. If you are not members of the URI, insert the name of your group in the pledge, or make the pledge as an individual.

We, members of [United Religions Initiative], acknowledge that world peace is only possible when we start to make peace within ourselves, our family and in our respective communities. Therefore on this International Day of Peace each of us commit ourselves as best as we can to become peaceful and a non-violent person. To this effect, we pledge:*

- * To respect ourselves, to affirm others and to avoid uncaring criticism, hurtful words, physical attacks and self-destructive behavior;

- * To share our feelings honestly, to look for safe ways to express our anger, and to work at solving problems peacefully;

- * To listen carefully to others, especially those who dialogue with us, and to consider others' feelings and needs, rather than insist on having our own way;

- * To apologize and make amends when we have hurt another, to forgive others, and to keep

from holding grudges;

- * To treat the environment and all living things, including animals, with respect and care;
- * To avoid entertainment that features violence;
- * To challenge violence in all its forms whenever we encounter it, whether at home, at school, at work, or in the community;
- * To accept the Golden Rule (to treat others as we wish others to treat us) as our motto and principle in life;
- * To promote a culture of peace, dialogue, and interfaith cooperation;
- * To respect and uphold the Universal Human Rights Declaration;
- * [To live by, uphold and guide by the Preamble, Purpose and Principle of the Charter of United Religions Initiative.]

Art Competition - Invite a school class or a community or faith group you know to set aside time to participate in a Peace-Pal Art Competition and Exhibition. The theme can be: "Living Together in Peace and Harmony" with the message of "May Peace Prevail on Earth." Provide art supplies, lead class or group to reflect on what living together in peace and harmony would look like to them. You might read inspiring quotations and stories, provide group time to complete artwork and time to share their creations. If desired, you might organize a contest or an exhibition. An impromptu "peace gallery exhibition" could be set up in a school hallway or a community gathering place where the artwork would be on display.

Visiting Orphanages/hospitals - Friends or groups can decide to visit children in orphanages or hospitals as a gesture of solidarity and care. They can donate books, pens and other useful materials. They can attach messages of hope, caring, and renewal to the materials.

Tree planting - a tree can be donated and a meaningful place chosen in your community to plant a "peace trees." A durable sign can be made and placed near the tree to commemorate the International Day of Peace and name the donors

Peace Awards - peace awards for individuals who have contributed to the creation of a culture of peace in an outstanding manner can be chosen by your group. Awards can be made and sent to these people with a letter of appreciation and recognition.

Create a Peace Proclamation - Present it in an assembly or program you are organizing for the International Day of Peace. Or, if you are not involved in a program or presentation, set aside time with your group to read the Proclamation together and invite people to sign it. You might print copies of the Proclamation for each person to take home, frame a copy of the Proclamation and present it as a gift, ask people to reflect on which words or phrases of the Proclamation touch them in a meaningful way and discuss these reflections with a partner, or create a signature page and ask each person to add their signature to the proclamation then frame the Proclamation and signatures. An example of URI's Peace Proclamation may be seen at: [URI IDP Peace Proclamation](#).

21. Sharing Global Voices of Pain, Faith, Wisdom

Dr. Taleb Al Harithi, a leader of the Palestinian and Peace Society CC requested that one idea for the International Day of Peace focus on the Middle East. Eloquent voices from the URI community are heard in the midst of violence. URI members share their prayers, their suffering, their wisdom. This idea shapes these personal and poignant offerings so that they can be used as resources for solitary reflection, in prayer vigils, in special programs, or as part of your faith community's practice, to inspire and motivate wise action.

These offerings are just a sampling of communications in the URI list serve. They speak of the power of prayer, the power of personal action, the power of resolve to live as a deeper human being at times like these.

Please feel free to look for other offerings that touch you and add to this collection. Create a plan for how you can spread these powerful voices farther and let them speak to others as well as yourself.

Ideas:

- a) Use one of these offerings each day as a focus for reflection and prayer;
- b) Send one each day by email to your friends or email networks;
- c) Weave them together as focus pieces for a vigil, a program, or a gathering;
- d) Work with your faith community to integrate them into regular services.

More resources: The Interfaith Relations ministry of the National Council of Churches USA has launched a new Web site -- www.seasonofprayer.org. The website compiles prayers, scripture texts, hymns, litanies, poems and other prayer aids from many religious traditions, appropriate to the current crisis in the Middle East. It includes prayers from Sikh, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, Buddhist, Hindu, and other faith traditions as well interfaith prayers.

a) Excerpt from a letter from Ariana, a young adult living in Cyprus who participated in recent URI Interfaith Leadership Retreat

Dear Friends,

I am writing simply to remind you as I have been reminding myself, not to be desensitized by the continual bombardment of violence that we are surrounded by. There are thousands of terrified people dependent upon the pressure of the international community to stop what is happening in the Middle East. Let us not go about our days, our programs, our schedules and jobs without thinking about the fate of these people, our friends, our neighbors, our fellow human beings. We may not be experiencing their pain but we need to keep our eyes and hearts open to them in these moments of struggle and suffering. Please speak up. Talk to friends. Talk to politicians, voice your compassion and concern for the people of Lebanon and Israel that are caught in the middle of this conflict.

I know that you all have different belief systems and spiritual paths, but I truly believe, and I think many of you will support me on this one -- that one way we can help is through prayer. In my faith we say that even if the recipient of the prayer cannot feel its effect, there is a strong

and lasting effect when we utter a prayer -- whatever ones religious or spiritual orientation.

This letter is a request that you all take a few moments out of your busy days to say at least one heartfelt prayer for this situation to be dealt with immediately before any more destruction takes place -- before any more innocent people are killed by war games. The power of spiritual support is just as strong as physical and political action and we should not undermine its effects. So I ask you -- in the US, in the UK, in Africa, in Greece, in Cyprus, in Italy, in Portugal, and all the other countries where you live at this moment to take a few moments and reflect on our common humanity. On our common world, and on our individual responsibility and power to effect change in this world. It might be small, but individuals can and do make a difference, and the more of us that are pushing for positive change, the faster it will come.

b) Open Heart Prayer by Nadia, URI coordinator, Africa

“The heart is like a flower—unless it is open it cannot release its fragrance into the world. The fragrance of the heart is made up of the qualities and virtues of our spirit. Most of us have learned how to keep our heart closed in a world that would trample all over us if we let it. Being open hearted today seems to require tremendous courage. It is a courage which comes only when we realize that no one can hurt us, no matter what they say or do. They may hurt our body, but if we have realized we are spirit, nothing outside can touch us, if we so decide. Little by little, practice opening your heart to those you think have hurt you. Realize it wasn't them that hurt you, it was yourself. And it taught you not to trust and you closed your heart. A closed heart is in need of opening. And when you do, you will have begun to heal yourself.”

c) CHALLENGING TIMES by Maria, URI global staff, Argentina

Oh Lord!

Here we are together again

Listen our prayer, see how we feel:

Passionate to do something that can make a difference,

Enthusiastic to share passion with others

Afraid because the challenge is too big

Called to give the most of us

Enlightened by the wisdom of a common Spirit.

Illuminate our path as we walk, we

Need your help

Touch our tongue so that we say what it is needed, our

Hands so that we give our time and tenderness with generosity, our

Ears so that we listen with an open heart.

We want to serve,

Orient us

Reconcile us

Love us

Dynamize our good will AMEN

d) You Are A Marvel. You Are A Miracle by Pablo Casals, musician.

Each second we live is a new and
unique moment of the universe,
a moment that will never be again...
Well, then...what do we teach our children?
We teach them that two and two make four, and that Paris is the capital of France.
When will we also teach them what they are?
We should say to each of them:

Do you know what you are? You are a marvel.
You are unique. You are so miraculous.
In all the years that have passed,
there has never been another child like you.

Your legs, your arms, your clever fingers, the way you move.
You may become a Shakespeare,
a Michelangelo, a Beethoven.
You have the capacity for anything.
Yes, you are a marvel. And when you grow up can you then harm another who is, like you, a
marvel?

You must work, we must all work,
to make the world worthy of its children.

You were not born to kill and be killed.
You were born to love.
Therefore, please don't harm other people, and don't go to war.
If the mothers all over the world
can tell this thing to their children sincerely, surely, conflict will disappear from the world.
The world will change.
I believe that the children will surely
make a peaceful world.

And, I hope the music and the art can change the world.

e) When the world will wake up? By Safaa, CC leader, Jordan

When the world will wake up? Good question, how can any human being today, anywhere in this world, not be fearful and angry? We have turned into a society where hate is a primary emotion. There are People killing and nations destroying; it seems as it's a never ending conflict. Have not all leaders throughout the world, realized yet that terrorism creates terrorism? Hate creates hate? Actions create reactions, whether positive or negative? The world has become a free for all in which there is no sense or judgment anymore, and where the victims are children and civilians. I think we all hope that our children, Christian, Jewish, and Muslim, will grow up a little less afraid of today and tomorrow and the more important is to be a little bit safer. The world really must walk up and call for peace, respect and justice. God bless you all.

f) Jerusalem, song by Steve Earle, USA songwriter

I woke up this mornin' and none of the news was good
And death machines were rumblin' 'cross the ground
where Jesus stood
And the man on my TV told me that it had always been that way
And there was nothin' anyone could do or say

And I almost listened to him
Yeah, I almost lost my mind
Then I regained my senses again
And looked into my heart to find

That I believe that one fine day all the children of Abraham
Will lay down their swords forever in Jerusalem

Well maybe I'm only dreamin' and maybe I'm just a fool
But I don't remember learnin' how to hate in Sunday school
But somewhere along the way I strayed and I never looked back again
But I still find some comfort now and then

Then the storm comes rumblin' in
And I can't lay me down
And the drums are drummin' again
And I can't stand the sound

But I believe there'll come a day when the lion and the lamb
Will lie down in peace together in Jerusalem

And there'll be no barricades then
There'll be no wire or walls
And we can wash all this blood from our hands
And all this hatred from our souls

And I believe that on that day all the children of Abraham
Will lay down their swords forever in Jerusalem.

g) Excerpt from Letter from Kathy, URI Global Council trustee, USA

...One day while giving a message at the healing service, I realized that if we were for a moment set aside our beliefs and our heritage like being Irish or Native American or Italian and acknowledged our common heritage how powerful this would be. We have a common heritage. We were created by the same energy, that which moves through all life and is life itself. We were molded and shaped and breathed into to do something very beautiful: to reflect that very energy that created us. In its simplicity I realized this is why we are here. This is why we are all different because this beautiful energy that created you and me is infinite possibility.

I believe the fray of war and hatred and disregard for human life is a huge distraction of this very powerful realization. It is as if it is too much for us to accept. We cannot be that beautiful, that powerful, that simple.

Even in our arguments against anything we forget who we are. When we speak against we must muster up that energy of force of putting our ideas over someone else's: this is a form of war. Placing blame is a form of war. A blame seed when watered can grow into a world war.

We have evidence of this in our histories for centuries.

All of you who have chosen to be part of the URI, I ask you to read the PPP's daily. In this you may discover there is another way to react, another way to be that is so amazing I think even URI as an entity forgets it. We are an energy - an energy that will shift this world into another place... It is the energy of speaking for. Speaking for peace, speaking for compassion and justice, speaking for women and children and the dignity of all human beings, speaking for our Earth as a living and vibrant Being. SPEAKING FOR ALL LIFE IS SACRED. It is just adjusting our perspective on life itself perhaps even just a little bit.

...Our compassion and forgiveness must be at the tips of our fingers and the tips of our tongues. It must be in our eyes as we reflect to one another the divine energy that gave us our very lives. May Peace prevail in our mouths, our hearts, and hearts so that it will emanate out to the WHOLE EARTH.

h) Prayer by Karimah, URI coordinator, Europe

May peace with justice/balance prevail in Lebanon, may peace with justice/balance prevail in Israel, may peace with justice/balance prevail in the Palestinian Territories, may peace with justice/balance prevail on Earth.

22. A “Peace Presentation” for the International Day of Peace.

[This model was adapted from the material that was used to launch the Celebrate Peace! program sponsored by Peace Cereal. URI is grateful to Jeff Klein, Karen Zacharias, and Patricia Smith Melton for permission to adapt their creative script. Please see website links below for more information about Peace Cereal and Peace x Peace]

If your group is organizing a presentation with speakers and/or performance event for the International Day of Peace, this creative model might work for you.

It is a model script/program that integrates on stage reading of quotations and presentations by speakers, musical performance, and interfaith blessing. Please adapt this program to serve your specific needs.

Program opens with five “citizens of the world” on stage. They mingle on stage.

There is a sense of conversations among them - the audience perceives them as a base of cooperation, change, community.

(One by one they step forward, face audience and read or recite one quotation.)

Section A

“Peace is a decision just as violence is a decision.” Barbara Marx Hubbard

"Despite the impulses in the world towards separation and destruction, there is another impulse, the impulse towards wholeness, connectedness, and healing." Patricia Smith L Melton

"Peace is a skill. Like other skills peace develops through practice and spreads by example."
Jeff Klein

"Peace is a daily process, gradually changing opinions, slowly eroding old barriers, quietly building new structures." John F. Kennedy

"Peace is still the center of the loving heart. It is the space between breath and heartbeat that always welcomes us." Nina Utne

(Citizens take a seat on stage.)

Opening welcome by program host.

Host introduces program and gives explanation of theme and intention, etc.

Music - song about peace.

Section B

(Citizens again step forward one by one and recite a quote.)

"I googled the word Peace. 84 million web pages contain this precious word. Wow. Then I decided to google the word War. 189 million web pages came up. 54 million for terrorism. 62 million - fear. 15 million - anger. Compassion sprang up 9 million times. Forgiveness appeared 4 million times. 189 million web pages about war. 4 million about forgiveness - maybe we can reverse that." Author unknown

"I am only one person, and I cannot do everything, but just because I cannot do everything does not mean that I will refuse to do what I can." Helen Keller

"Treaties are negotiated by governments. Peace is made by people." Reverend Mary Wilson

Seven centuries ago by Sa'di, one of Iran's greatest poets: "The children of Adam are limbs of each other, having been created of one essence. When the calamity of time afflicts one limb, the other limbs cannot remain at rest. If thou has not sympathy of the troubles of others, thou are unworthy to be called of the name of man." Sa'di

Speaker is introduced. Key note speaker.

Music interlude

Section C

(Citizens again step forward.)

"I slept and dreamt that life was joy. I awoke and saw that life was service. I acted and behold, service was joy." Rabindrath Tagore

"If we worry about the big picture we are powerless. So I do whatever little work I can do. I try to give joy to one person in the morning and remove the suffering of one person in the afternoon. If you and your friends do not despise small work, a million people will remove a lot of suffering." Sister Chan Khon

"My image of peace is like tranquility of an enchanted garden. We all came to it - from different paths. Each of us sees the garden from the path we came from, but in the end, we're all in the garden playing together and it doesn't matter where we came from." Patricia Smith Melton

"Peace is a deep breath that slows me down enough to realize all the blessings in my life. Peace is flowing in divine music and singing praises of the spirits in each of us." Satnam Kaur

Musical presentation and/or interactive activity with audience is offered.

Section D

(Citizens again step forward.)

"Peace starts and ends with connection. When we connect we learn about the other. It's not just tolerance, but understanding, acceptance. In connection, everything starts to happen." Barbara Marx Hubbard

"Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread in it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect." Chief Seattle

"Non-violence means avoiding not only external physical violence but also internal violence of the spirit. You not only refuse to shoot a man, but you refuse to hate him." Martin Luther King Jr.

"Citizens of all cultures rising together are the most powerful force in the world to bring us to wholeness, to healing, to the place where we experience at every moment that we are one family." Author unknown

Closing: A closing blessing or invocation is offered by leaders representing different faiths or different backgrounds. Each leader gives a one-minute blessing or invocation for peace. A song is offered to close program.

Websites to contact for more information about their work:

Peace by Peace www.peacexpeace.org

Peace Cereal: www.peacecereal.com "Celebrate Peace" is a trademark of Golden Temple of Oregon, Inc. All rights reserved."

23. Interfaith Prayer Ceremony

In the Northern Hemisphere, May signals a time of flowering. Enjoy this interfaith ceremony wherein prayers from many traditions are shared and gathered together in one floral bouquet. This idea was adapted from a Candle Lighting Interfaith Service created by the URI CC of Henderson County, Hendersonville, Tennessee, USA.

Out of Many, One

Speaker 1

We create this bouquet of flowers to honor the Sacred of many names.

Speaker 2

We offer this flower representing the Hindu Tradition:

Oh God, lead us from the unreal to the Real.

Oh God, lead us from darkness to light.

Oh God, lead us from death to immortality.

Shanti, Shanti, Shanti unto all.

Oh Lord God Almighty,

May there be peace in the celestial regions.

May there be peace on Earth.

May the waters be appeasing.

May herbs be wholesome,

And may trees and plants bring peace to all.

May all beneficent beings bring peace to us.

May Thy Vedic Law propagate peace

All through the world.

May all things be a source of peace to us.

And may Thy peace itself bestow on all,

And may that peace come to me also.

Speaker 3

We offer this flower representing the Buddhist Tradition:

May we all be filled with loving kindness

May we all be well

May we all be at peace within ourselves and in our world

May we all be happy.

Speaker 4

We offer this flower representing Confucianism:

What you do not wish done to yourself, do not do to others. (Confucius)

and Taoism:

There is a being, wonderful, perfect:

It existed before heaven and earth.

How quiet it is!

How spiritual it is!

It stands alone and it does not change.

It moves around and around, but does not on this account suffer:
All life comes from it.
It wraps everything with its love as in a garment, and
Yet it claims no honor, it does not demand to be Lord.
I do not know its name, and so I call it Tao, the Way
And I rejoice in its power. (Lao Tzu)

Speaker 5

We offer this flower representing the Jewish Tradition:
“Hear O Israel, the Lord our God, the Lord is One.”

“Let the day come when we turn to the Lord of Peace, when all are a single family doing His will with a perfect heart. O source of peace, lead us to peace, a peace profound and true; lead us to a healing, to mastery of all that drives us to war within ourselves and with others. Lord of peace, bless us with peace.”

Speaker 6

We offer this flower representing the Christian Tradition:
Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace.
Where there is hatred, let me sow love.
Where there is injury, Pardon.
Where there is doubt, Faith.
Where there is despair, Hope.
Where there is darkness, Light.
Where there is sadness, Joy.
O Divine Master,
Grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled, as to console;
Not so much to be understood, as to understand;
Not so much to be loved, as to love.
For it is in giving that we receive.
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned.
It is in dying that we awaken to eternal life. (St. Francis of Assisi)

Speaker 7

We offer this flower representing the Islamic Tradition
Oh God,
You are Peace.
From You comes Peace,
To You Returns Peace,
Revive us with a salutation of Peace,
And lead us to your abode of Peace. Salaam.

Speaker 8

We offer this flower representing the Baha’i Tradition:
O Thou kind Lord! Unite all. Let the religions agree and make the nations one, so that they may see each other as one family and the whole earth as one home. May they all live together in perfect harmony.

Speaker 9

We offer this flower representing the Unitarian tradition:
We affirm and promote respect for this interdependent web of all existence of which we are a

part.

Speaker 10

We offer this flower representing the Native American Tradition:

O Great Spirit let us know peace.
For as long as the moon shall rise,
For as long as the rivers shall flow,
For as long as the sun will shine,
For as long as the grass shall grow,
Let us know peace. (A Cheyenne Indian)

Speaker 11

We offer this flower representing the Sikh tradition:

God will not ask of what race is a man or woman but what he or she has done.

Speaker 12

We offer this flower representing the Shinto tradition:

Do not forget the world is one great family.

Speaker 13

We offer this flower representing all faiths not included here and yet to come:

Help us to beat our swords into plowshares and our spears into pruning hooks, so that we may be able to live in peace and harmony, wiping away the tears from the eyes of those who are less fortunate than ourselves. And may we know war no more, as we strive to be what You want us to be: Your children. (Bishop Desmond Tutu)

24. Interfaith Dialogue - Creating Safe Space

An effective way to create a safe space for interfaith dialogue is to agree to a set of guidelines and read them aloud at the beginning of every dialogue session. The following Interfaith Dialogue Guidelines were created by members of the URI San Francisco Peninsula CC. This great idea comes to you with gratitude to the members of this CC who refined these guidelines over several years of monthly meetings.

Suggestion for URI Cooperation Circles and other groups involved in interfaith dialogue:

To create safe space for interfaith dialogue, begin Dialogue Session by reciting prayer and your choice of some of the following 12 principles.

ANNOUNCER:

We are gathering here 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.

PRAYER:

May we widen our paths to understanding, listen to those of other faiths, and jointly, seek channels to peace. May God grant us Courage to change the things we can change; Strength to

accept the things that we can never change, the one and only truth, and Wisdom to know the

Then, read together in sequence (slowly) any 3 or more of the following 12 principles of agreement.

AGREEMENTS:

1. Recognizing that the essence of us is love, we agree to honor and respect one another, we recognize that each of us and each of our belief systems are of equal value.
2. We are here together to learn about different belief systems and to share and experience a personal growth process.
3. We recognize that love is listening, and we agree to listen with an open heart, to give mutual support and to practice non-judgmental listening and sharing.
4. We realize that when we have love and compassion for ourselves, then we are able to extend that same love and compassion to others.
5. We are here to learn, not to give advice or to change anyone's beliefs or behavior.
6. We share from our own experience by risking and exposing our own emotional state; in this way we find common experience for joining.
7. We respect ourselves and each other as unique, and we recognize that each person's process is important, not our judgment of it.
8. The roles of student and teacher are interchangeable, and they fluctuate from one to the other regardless of age or experience.
9. We agree that we have a common goal of inner peace, and that it is from that place of peace that we come together to find the best answers for the work we are carrying out.
10. We are willing to risk exposing our feelings openly and honestly without attacking others in order to create a space where clear communication is supported and joining can be experienced.
11. We agree to keep in mind that we always have a choice between peace and conflict, between love and fear.
12. We agree to confidentiality regarding what we share here. What is said during this very sensitive process must stay among the participants.

25. Media Can Help!

This idea can help you harness your local home paper to carry more interfaith perspectives on religious, spiritual and current topics. Instead of waiting for a local newspaper journalist to call you...go to them and suggest this idea.

Nicole Neroulis, a staff writer and religion page editor for the San Mateo County Times, a local home town newspaper in San Mateo CA, is instituting a great idea. In response to readership asking for more religion coverage, she launched an interfaith column.

She invited four leaders from different faith traditions to contribute a 500 word article once a month to the Faith page. She says that most often each writer chooses his or her own topic and writes very well. She assists with topics and some editing as needed. Currently, a rabbi, a Muslim community leader, a Catholic priest, and an Evangelical minister volunteer to write once a month for the column. Nicole researched leaders popular in the community, interviewed them and asked for a writing sample. Nicole says sales have gone up when the Faith page runs. She says if you want newspapers to be more proactive with interfaith news - write letters to the editor and find ways to show them that higher sales result.

Many thanks to Iftekhar Hai, URI representative and founder of United Muslims of America Interfaith Alliance, who is one of the writers to the Faith page and wanted to share this idea.

26. Bridging Chasms - Creating Music and Sharing Songs

Herm Weaver is described by his friend John Paul Lederach, in the book [The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace, this way:](#) {For his PhD thesis} *“he (Herm) embarked on a journey to take his music as seriously as he took his intellectual studies and to focus more on music in the process of healing and reconciliation. In essence, he wrote songs and paid attention to how the creative process might be related to the process of healing.”*¹

The fruit of Herm’s explorations was enjoyed recently at the opening session of a special institute led by John Paul and Herm to help URI CC members become more effective as peacemakers in conflict zones and to invite CC members to “grow in character, personhood and vision” as they pursue the purpose of URI.

Part of the seminar was spent creating music and sharing each other’s songs. A new song each day set the context for making room for creativity in learning about peace building. Each group was invited to teach a favorite song from their culture or faith tradition. The words of the song were written on a flip chart for all to read together. People mimicked the lead singer, learning words - often in new languages, and learning often foreign sounding melodies. A few drums and rhythm instruments were close by to be used as the spirit moved. Patiently, with practice, the entire group warmed to each song. Songs already learned were practiced every day and a new song was introduced. Timid starts soon gave way to uproarious “home-made” music and fun.

Songs were usually simple, sometimes sacred, sometimes fun, and often rooted in the story of a particular culture. By the end of the week, feelings of respect and appreciation, bonds of joy and unspoken meanings were effortlessly shared by this group of religiously diverse people

coming from Northern Uganda, South India, Ethiopia, the Philippines and the USA.

* * * * *

Whatever YOUR purpose is in bringing diverse people together, the same insight applies: creating music and sharing songs can bridge chasms of difference and build sincere and seemingly unbreakable bonds of mutual respect, friendship and care. Creating music together helps people heal and live into new and brighter visions.

Herm offers six elements that music can offer in opening pathways between art and reconciliation. In setting the context for creating music and sharing songs as a regular CC activity, feel free to keep in mind Herm's insights:

1. Music is to be guided by an internal standard rather than external.
2. Music is to be honest.
3. Value simplicity
4. Make space for the listener to participate
5. Create music that arises from the heart as much as from the head.
6. Be committed to having fun! 2

1. [The Moral Imagination, The Art and Soul of Building Peace](#), John Paul Lederach, Oxford University Press, New York, New York, 2005. p.159.
2. For more information about the work of John Paul Lederach, go to: http://kroc.nd.edu/faculty_staff/faculty/lederach.shtml

27. Reflection from Charles Gibbs, Executive Director of URI, April 2006

How do we, as a species, develop the skills and the will to deal with difference in ways that allow us to resolve conflict without resorting to violence, so that we might liberate the resources squandered on violence to build a better future for all?

I followed the question with this statement and invitation:

URI is a living attempt to provide answers to that question. The answers we develop - beginning with us as individuals and expanding to include the entire human community - are an offering to help change this tragic dimension of human history [where difference again and again and again has led to division and destruction.].

As food for our journey together, I urge you to discuss any answers or insights that you may have found as part of your CCs meetings, on the URI list serve or as part of on-going community conversations.

As my contribution to what I hope will be ongoing exploration, I want to focus on URI's Charter and the answers I believe it offers for how we can live with difference without resorting to violence.

First, a few words about the URI's chartering process for those who may not know its history. In June 1996, 55 people of diverse religions, cultures, vocations and nationalities gathered in San Francisco for a week to chart a course for the creation of a charter for the global United Religions Initiative to be signed on 26 June, 2000. Key understandings from that first global summit included:

- that the URI would be built from the grassroots up;
- that it would not be limited to recognized major religions, but would include people of diverse spiritualities as well;
- that the URI would value the leadership of women as well as men;
- that the URI would engage people of diverse faiths from around the world in creating the Charter so it would be informed by diverse worldviews and wisdom, and would speak with myriad voices.

Over the next four years, URI convened regional summits and consultations all over the world, set up an internet system for ongoing consultation about the emerging organization, and held annual global summits to consolidate each year's learnings and to launch a new year of deepening exploration and community building. During this time, thousands of people shared their visions of what the purpose of the United Religions Initiative might be, of who would belong

During this time, URI gained a great deal of experience in how to deal effectively with difference, because we were regularly bringing together extremely diverse groups of people. We learned that hospitality, appreciation and mutual respect are critically important to creating a safe space where people can move from being suspicious or fearful of difference to being able to appreciate and celebrate difference.

We learned, in this context, that asking questions that put people in touch with their deepest values and highest aspirations and then asking them to dream and plan together helps to enrich and strengthen the emerging friendships and working relationships that are necessary for an interfaith community to thrive.

We learned that, in addition to asking good questions, practicing appreciative listening is critical. Nestor Muller, an early URI leader from Brazil, articulated an important rule during the global summit in 1999. He said that if he was in a group of eight people, he should listen seven times and speak only once. Nestor's wisdom could only have emerged if others were listening appreciatively to him.

And, perhaps most importantly, we learned that in and through all we are and do together, it is critically important to share experiences of the sacred. In this sharing, we were always clear about the importance of honoring the uniqueness of each expression of faith. But, again and again, we experienced how people of diverse faiths can stand together on sacred ground, each honoring the sacred in their own way, and from that sharing work together far more effectively.

I've often said that there were two ways we could have gone about creating URI's charter. In one way, a small group of people in San Francisco could have written a charter and then gone

around the world trying to get others to sign on. In the other way, we could have gone around the world inviting people to help us write the charter, trusting that when we were done we would have a document and the beginnings of an organization that people felt was their own and would want to continue to be a part of. Wisely, I believe, we chose the second path.

It is as if we faced the choice of two ways to build a house for people to share. In the first model, a small group would design and build the house and then hope to entice others to come and live in it. In the second, a diverse group of people would be gathered and, together, they would design the house they would then live in together. Again, wisely, we chose the second way.

So, URI's charter not only speaks with diverse voices, it was developed through a four year experience that taught URI a great deal about inviting and celebrating difference, and a good deal of what we learned along the way is expressed in the words of the charter.

It is fitting that the charter begins, "We, people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions and indigenous traditions throughout the world..."

I believe that these words, and, more importantly, the process of getting to these words have something of great value to offer a world desperately in need of models of how to deal positively and nonviolently with difference.

What do you think?

Love,

Charles