



COOPERATION CIRCLE PROFILE

Unity-and-Diversity World Council

Faiths /Traditions Represented: Christian, LDS, Unity, Muslim, Hindu, Buddhist, BaHai, Earth Based, Sikh, Jewish.

Location of CC: Los Angeles, CA, The United States of America

Key Areas of Focus: Education, Interfaith Celebrations, UN efforts

Summary:

Unity-and-Diversity World Council CC is a nonprofit organization located in Los Angeles, CA. It was originally formed to develop the ideals and activities to be undertaken during 1965, voted into being by the General Assembly of the United Nations as International Cooperation Year. The CC's primary focus is to foster the coming together of all ethnicities, cultures and religions into communities that respect unity and diversity both locally and around the world. Notable CC activities include a General Assembly, Interfaith Celebrations, Annual Peace Sunday, and Interfaith Services.

1. What is the current religious/cultural/social context in the area where your CC is working?

There are 18 different interfaith coalitions in Los Angeles, but they do not all cooperate and collaborate. It is relatively easy to get people to interfaith activities; however, it is difficult to attract interfaith action around human rights or social issues in Los Angeles.





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2. *Why is interfaith/intercultural bridge building needed in the area where your CC is working?*

Although tension is not obvious in this community, political tension is on the rise because of current events in the Middle East. Most work at UDC is around education and honoring the common values of all paths of faith so we know and are better prepared for crisis as well as creating a culture of peace.

3. *Can you please briefly describe the main activities or programs your CC is doing this year?*

In 2014, our CC participated in Peace Sunday and the Interfaith Celebration of Light held in December. This last event is focused on light, and different traditions shared how they each relate to light. We also run the Interfaith Ministry Ordination, where we train and ordain ministers based on a study of all religions and many spiritual groups, the relation of science and religion, and the practical aspects of the ministry. Chair of the URI Global Council, Kiran Bali is an Ordained UDC Minister. From 2012-2013 we had a Culture of Peace series, which has tapered off more recently but we are hoping to start it up again.

4. *Between which specific religions or cultures are bridges being built?*

We are building bridges between all traditions, including indigenous. The IMAM Center (Iranian Muslim Cultural Center) has played a large role to engage more Muslim cooperation and is a major supporter of UDC by giving free use of their spacious facilities. Also very active are the Vedanta Center, Baha'i Community, and Unity Church. However, we do not have much active Jewish participation.

5. *Please explain the method or strategy that your CC uses to bring together people of different cultures and faiths that would otherwise not interact or cooperate with each other.*

We face an ongoing challenge to bring new faces to events. Every Sunday we have a Gathering of Creative Community, a place for those who identify with a specific faith or none at all but who are open to each other and looking for spiritual community and exposure to all paths. This is a natural place to share the UDC Peace Wheel which incorporates all sectors of society in categories such as Implementing New Civilizations, Communicating New Realities, Researching Universal Principles and Developing Universal Persons.

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*A Synergistic Model
for Individual and Organizational Cooperation*

6. Given the current context you described, what does your CC hope to achieve?

The vision of UDC is twofold:

1) To create a people's equivalent of the UN: which would include a worldwide General Assembly that includes groups, networks and individuals. In our world, we have a lot of groups doing a lot of things but the one thing that is missing is a central place for us to gather. We are working toward an ongoing, daily cooperation for networks, groups and individuals – not just limited to religion but to the environment, education, etc. The idea is that democracy starts with people – not with nations! Nations are to serve the people. Democracy really implies interfaith because if we don't have the connection between faiths going on then there isn't really much democracy happening.

Creating a people's equivalent of the UN has been a longtime vision of UDC, which has had more or less energy behind it at different periods of time. This vision builds on what UDC already is, which is a network of networks.

2) To create space for the birth of a new society/global civilization where there can be a new religious identity of interfaith. Up until now, there has been no real place



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that a person in our society could go if they identified as “interfaith” rather than a particular faith. So, people like myself have had no place to go.

We are working toward creating this space with the Gathering of Creative Community (see question 5), which has been an important part of our work, and we hope to continue building on it. We also have the Unity and Diversity Chaplaincy (see question 3), which has 30-35 graduates who have been educated in interfaith ministry.

In 2015, we are celebrating our 50th anniversary! So we have been moving towards these dreams for 50 years.

7. *How do you see your CC’s work improving cooperation among people of different traditions?*

We are reminding everyone of our common humanity. We encourage people of different faiths to be involved, we have the Sunday morning gatherings called Gatherings of Creative Community (see question 5) where we light candles, have original prayers from people who attend, etc.

We also have two interfaith celebrations that happen roughly once a month, one is in Los Angeles one is in the Inland Valley.

8. *What are some indicators/observations you see that relations are improving between people of different faiths/cultures in the area where your CC works?*

The fact that there are 18 interfaith groups in Los Angeles is a pretty good indicator of that! This is quite an interfaith area; there are all kinds of different faiths here and it is also very culturally diverse. There have always been a lot of different faiths in this area but the interfaith movement has come up in the past 50 years with the Festival of Faith in 1965.

9. *Do you have a specific short story you can share about your work that might inspire other CCs or teach us a lesson about interfaith?*

Dr. Linda Groff did some research on interfaith and discovered that there are 5 different levels of interfaith all the way from different religions talking to each other but staying within their own religion, to people not identifying with one particular religion but rather, identifying as “interfaith.” We have seen this over the past 60 years or so and Cooperation Circles have played an integral part in that. I’d love to talk more with anybody about this idea!



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10. How is your CC's work helping to achieve the mission of URI?

We've been around for even longer than URI and are really looking for two-way cooperation. We are helping to achieve the mission of URI through hosting events such as Peace Sunday every year and also in modeling a United Nations for the people (see question 6). In our area, we are also in our working towards getting groups to collaborate with each other.

11. Within your CC, you have members from several different faiths and cultural traditions. How would you describe cooperation among your CC's members? What are the challenges?

This is why we need the General Assembly (see question 6), because it is a way of working together over time. We need to focus on ways of getting people together who are ready to cooperate. We do this already with our Geographic Councils and Specialized Affiliates but I am hoping to have a more action-based aspect of our work throughout the year that will manifest itself in something like the equivalent of the Security Council.

One of the challenges is that people have so much going on with their own work that it is challenging to get them to see we also need cooperation and collaboration. That is not always an easy sell. One time when we organized a large event, a group in attendance said, "That was great! We'll see you next year." But that's not what we want – we want daily, ongoing collaboration.

14. How can URI better support your CC in reaching its goals?

URI can help us promote the Interfaith Ministry better, which trains and ordains interfaith ministers. I would love to see more URI activity in the Los Angeles area.