The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the earth and all living beings.

The United Religions Initiative is active in:

Algeria, Angola, Argentina, Australia, Bangladesh, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Cambodia, Cameroon, Canada, Chile, China, Democratic Republic of Congo, Denmark, Egypt, Ethiopia, Finland, France, Gabon, Gambia, Germany, Haiti, India, Indonesia, Iran, Israel, Italy, Jordan, Kenya, Korea, Liberia, Malawi, Malaysia, Mexico, Morocco, Nepal, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nigeria, Pakistan, Palestine, Panama, Peru, Philippines, Romania, Russia, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Singapore, South Africa, Spain, Sri Lanka, Switzerland, Syria, Taiwan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Uganda, United Arab Emirates, United Kingdom, United States, Venezuela, Vietnam, Zambia, Zimbabwe
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Congratulations to:

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FOR THE LAST TWO YEARS through a special grant from Catalyst for Peace and program partner Libby Hoffman, URI has piloted a new program in peacebuilding. Under the leadership of John Paul Lederach, professor and mediator from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, teams from Cooperation Circles in the Philippines, Uganda, Ethiopia, and India have worked with a URI leadership team to learn and practice a transformational grassroots methodology to build peace in conflict-ridden communities.

Since the beginning of the pilot project, the Peacemakers’ Cooperation Circle in the Philippines has developed an unprecedented interfaith dialogue with priests and imams in Manila, and the Acholi Religious Leaders Cooperation Circle in Uganda has made significant headway in peace negotiations and reconciliation work with the Lord’s Resistance Army. In southern India, peacebuilding trainings are now being given in the newly built interfaith peace center in the community of Tiruvalla; in Ethiopia, young leaders have expanded the development of committed interfaith youth leaders in the local school system.

The Moral Imagination is an action/reflection learning process in which capacities are developed over time. It consists of ongoing community actions sparked by periodic face-to-face reflection and learning seminars in which all the participants deepen their abilities, both as individuals and as teams, to generate creative responses to the conflicts in their communities. Field site visits have also been made to each of the Cooperation Circles on the ground in their local community to further understand the challenges that each one faces by “walking in their shoes.”

The impact of this work on the four Cooperation Circles has been immense, and already has begun to enrich the larger URI and beyond. We will be harvesting the fruits of this project for years to come, beginning with the Global Assembly in Mayapur.

**URI Trustee Selection Process**

Each time the URI World community participates successfully in a trustworthy, democratic process that crosses national, religious, and cultural boundaries to elect its trustees, the URI is practicing the values articulated in its Charter.

In 2007 URI began a year-long process to nominate and elect new Global Council members from each region, from our Cooperation Circles. The process is complicated in many instances by lack of a common language and lack of a thorough grounding in the democratic process.

Despite the administrative difficulties, URI successfully completed the elections. Our new 2008 Global Trustees are, as you might expect, a varied group: 10 are women, 14 are men. Seventeen of the 24 are new trustees who will serve their first term, seven are current trustees who will serve another term. Five of our new trustees are active in URI’s young leader program.

Our trustees come from 17 countries and eight religions, spiritual expressions, indigenous traditions, and represent significant diversity within the eight regions.

Through URI’s lengthy election process, we strengthen our ability to pioneer effective global governance and to contribute to a bold new model of global participation and leadership.

**Peacebuilding: URI’s Moral Imagination Project**

For the last two years, through a special grant from Catalyst for Peace and program partner Libby Hoffman, URI has piloted a new program in peacebuilding. Under the leadership of John Paul Lederach, professor and mediator from the Kroc Institute for International Peace Studies at the University of Notre Dame, teams from Cooperation Circles in the Philippines, Uganda, Ethiopia, and India have worked with a URI leadership team to learn and practice a transformational grassroots methodology to build peace in conflict-ridden communities.

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URI Africa
URI Africa currently has 81 Cooperation Circles. The many projects organized by the cooperation circles include contributing to post-war community reconciliation in Uganda; providing conflict resolution training to young adults in Ethiopia; and offering HIV/AIDS, health and orphan care in Malawi and Mozambique. Here is one account of URI’s work in Ethiopia:

Addis Ababa, Ethiopia. A number of religious faiths in Ethiopia and URI Cooperation Circle, the Interfaith Peace-building Initiative (IPI), have joined together to establish the National Interfaith Peace Council to heighten their existing peace efforts in promoting a culture of peace and interfaith cooperation. The IPI spearheaded the creation of the council in conjunction with representatives from the Orthodox Church, the Islamic Supreme Council, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical Mekane Yesus Church, and the Bahá’í Faith. The result of many months work, a Memorandum of Understanding was completed on July 24, 2008. The IPI will serve as the coordinator of the newly established Peace Council. The purpose of the Council is to promote a culture of peace, improve interfaith cooperation, and to establish trust and good relationships, and help resolve conflicts in a peaceful way at the national level. We look forward to hearing about the Council’s future accomplishments.

Asia has 134 Cooperation Circles — more than any other region in URI. Their work ranges from Peace Camps for children, to an old age home, a community Peace Center, musicians promoting interfaith music, and translating the URI Charter into many local languages. URI Asia is particularly active in Bangladesh, India, Sri Lanka, Korea and Pakistan. Here is one example of URI’s work in Asia:

Lahore, Pakistan. On June 27, 2008, The Bright Future Society of Pakistan honored URI Coordinator for Pakistan, Father James Channan, with the “Patriotic Award for Exemplary Services 2008.” The ceremony took place at the Christian Study Center in Rawalpindi, and His Excellency Mr. Zhao Qiaoliang, Councilor of the Embassy of China to Pakistan, was the one to hand the award to Father Channan, given in recognition and appreciation of the peace and interfaith harmony work he is doing in the country and elsewhere for the past several years. A large number of participants from various religions were present for this ceremony.

Lahore, Pakistan. Just a week following, on July 5, 2008, Sawan International, Pakistan awarded Father Channan with a Gold Medal in recognition of his tireless efforts and devotion to promote dialogue and peace among religions and cultures. The award was presented by Mr. Bryan D. Hunt, Principal Officer of the Consulate of the United States of America, and took place at the Children’s Library Complex in Lahore. There were more than 300 participants to give testimony to this ceremony, which included political leaders, clergy, members of URI, interfaith leaders, as well as several guests from the United Kingdom and The United States.
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URI Europe

URI Europe currently has 26 cooperation circles, whose work ranges from developing interfaith urban mediation expertise; launching national platforms for interfaith dialogue; maintaining decades of Muslim, Christian and Jewish dialogues; sensitizing municipal government workers to religious practices; and pioneering interfaith hospital chaplaincies, interfaith music festivals and cross-cultural youth organizations.

URI Europe was honored this past year by the European Commission as a recipient of one of the 10 Golden Star of Active European Citizenship Awards, given annually to projects that receive funding from the Europe for Citizens Forum.

Berlin, Germany. An important part of URI Europe's work is the annual Peace Prayer gatherings that occur in Berlin and Bonn in Germany. The gathering in Berlin occurs annually on April 30th in the “Mauerpark,” which connects parts of East and West Berlin. The event rose out of the violence that would erupt surrounding Walpurgis Night, a traditional celebration in Central and Northern Europe that is derived from both Pagan and Catholic holidays. Originating as a prayer for peace on that night in the park involving Christians, Muslims, Bahá’ís, Sikhs and many other groups, it has evolved into a peace prayer for all of Berlin. The annual gathering has led to a dramatic reduction in the level of violence in the park.

Bonn, Germany. The gathering in Bonn took place on June 22nd of this year at Namedy Castle. Hosted by Princess Heide of Hohenzollern (a royal family that boasts the last King of Prussia and Emperor of Germany), the event has involved DMLBonn Cooperation Circle since its inception. The celebration is held in concert with the week-long “Art in the Park” festival and brings families of many different faiths together for a celebration of Peace and Art with music, games, snacks, etc.

URI Europe is truly doing great work to help Europe move forward as a community that recognizes the importance of all the different cultures and religions that comprise it.

URI Latin America and Caribbean

URI Latin America and Caribbean has 24 Cooperation Circles, whose work ranges from interfaith dialogue, to community centers, micro-credit programs and advocating for the rights of indigenous people. Here is one story of URI’s work in Latin America:

Buenos Aires, Argentina. Created to promote interfaith dialogue among ordinary people, “Learning to Co-exist” is an open weekly gathering from Escuela de Amor Cooperation Circle. It is a stable group of more than twenty people including Indigenous and those who are nonreligious. During an hour and a half, participants utilizing religious texts reflect on a pre-determined subject (such as helping others, love, faith, transformation, identity, dialogue, peace,) and share personal perspectives on faith and tradition. Escuela de Amor publishes the fruit of their study in an Interfaith Paper produced twice a month.

The “Learning to Co-exist” group is often invited to visit schools to speak about religious identity and interfaith cooperation. Through panels and workshops, students at the primary, secondary and university levels work together to learn about our different identities as well as the huge possibilities that respect and cooperation can bring.

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URI Middle East and North Africa (MENA)

URI Middle East and North Africa has 33 Cooperation Circles many of which are focused on building bridges between cultures and developing a grassroots consensus for peace in a region that has a history of violence and has grown increasingly cynical of any peace process.

Here is one story of URI’s work in Israel:

Jerusalem, Israel. The first phase of the TRUST-Emun TeenTalk project involves a group of teenage Israeli girls coming together to learn about Islam and Christianity and concurrently a group of Palestinians to learn about Judaism.

After these initial meetings, where the participants meet amongst themselves to learn about the different aspects of other religions, the groups come together to discuss issues of concern for teenagers from the perspective of the three Abrahamic holy books – The Hebrew Bible, The Koran, and The New Testament.

Michael Weiner, the TRUST-Emun Youth Coordinator, sums up the promise of this program:

“I cannot imagine another situation in which these young women would have the opportunity to ask about their sister religion in such a comfortable setting. Where else could young Jewish women read from the Koran and discuss it’s relation to Christianity and Judaism? I felt as though a few more slats had been added to the bridge we are trying to build between our different cultures. Hopefully, we adults will be able to follow the light of our youth and to find our way to trust.”

May his words prove prophetic and may this program continue to have success as they move forward in building relationships of trust between these embattled communities.

URI Multi-Region

There are 25 Cooperation Circles in the Multi-Region, which consist of Cooperation Circles that span more than one region, often because they are “virtual.” Here’s one story of URI’s work in the Multi-Region:

Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Begun in October 2005 in Atlanta, the Trail of Dreams World Peace Walk is a 3-year global outreach effort as walkers journey around the world to promote world peace. Since their departure in 2005 the Trail of Dreams World Peace Walkers have traveled through the American Southwest, Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia, India, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Holland, Spain, and Morocco.

Walkers have given hundreds of presentations to thousands of people on conflict resolution, working on sustainability projects, and engaging indigenous communities and wisdom keepers in dialogue. These are just a few of the activities that these inspired visionaries have taken part in as they travel the world one step at a time in the name of peace.

The World Peace Walk provides an opportunity to inform, engage, and activate partnerships for peace, through the walk itself; a touring eco-village that travels with the walk demonstrating different methods of reducing our footprint on Mother Earth; peace education forums; partnership building opportunities; and art exhibits, concerts and film festivals along the way. It’s an opportunity for individuals, organizations, and communities to join in the Walk-A-Long not only by joining the walk itself but through the events that surround it.
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URI Middle East and North Africa has 33 Cooperation Circles many of which are focused on building bridges between cultures and developing grassroots consensus for peace in a region that has a history of violence and has grown increasingly cynical of any peace process.

Here is one story of URI’s work in Israel:

Jerusalem, Israel. The first phase of the TRUST-Emun TeenTalk project involves a group of teenage Israeli girls coming together to learn about Islam and Christianity and concurrently a group of Palestinians to learn about Judaism.

After these initial meetings, where the participants meet amongst themselves to learn about the different aspects of other religions, the groups come together to discuss issues of concern for teenagers from the perspective of the three Abrahamic holy books – The Hebrew Bible, The Koran, and The New Testament.

Michael Weiner, the TRUST-Emun Youth Coordinator, sums up the promise of this program:

“I cannot imagine another situation in which these young women would have the opportunity to ask about their sister religion in such a comfortable setting. Where else could young Jewish women read from the Koran and discuss its relation to Christianity and Judaism? I felt as though a few more slats had been added to the bridge we are trying to build between our different cultures. Hopefully, we adults will be able to follow the light of our youth and to find our way to trust.”

May his words prove prophetic and may this program continue to have success as they move forward in building relationships of trust between these embattled communities.

URI Multi-Region

There are 25 Cooperation Circles in the Multi-Region, which consist of Cooperation Circles that span more than one region, often because they are “virtual.” Here’s one story of URI’s work in the Multi-Region:

Atlanta, Georgia, USA. Begun in October 2005 in Atlanta, the Trail of Dreams World Peace Walk is a 3-year global outreach effort as walkers journey around the world to promote world peace. Since their departure in 2005 the Trail of Dreams World Peace Walkers have traveled through the American Southwest, Hawaii, New Zealand and Australia, India, Egypt, Turkey, Greece, Holland, Spain, and Morocco.

Walkers have given hundreds of presentations to thousands of people on conflict resolution, working on sustainability projects, and engaging indigenous communities and wisdom keepers in dialogue. These are just a few of the activities that these inspired visionaries have taken part in as they travel the world one step at a time in the name of peace.
There are 51 Cooperation Circles in North America demonstrating a rich and diverse approach to interfaith peacebuilding, from the Peace Academy in North Carolina, to the San Francisco Interfaith Council, and SARAH, which is described below.

Orange County, California, USA.

On May 1st, the Spiritual and Religious Alliance for Hope (SARAH) Cooperation Circle, received a Community Leader Award from the Orange County Human Relations Commission. Inspired by a trip to Mexico, founder Sande Hart spearheaded the formation of SARAH to bring together women of different faiths for dialogue, community service, panel discussions, guest speakers, and book discussions.

One of the many faces of SARAH is the Peace Tapestries project. Created at different community events, the Peace Tapestries consist of squares made by individuals of all ages, cultures and religions as they visualize what peace is to them and then instill that spirit in the square they create. After their creation each tapestry is usually displayed publicly for 6 - 8 months and then presented to another group.

The goal of the project is to create a web of love around the world as the tapestries travel from group to group. Tapestries have been created at a variety of events including the Crop Walk, Mayor’s Annual Prayer Breakfast, 2007 Interfaith Gathering of Women, and the Joyful Child Foundation’s Erin Runnion Children’s Art Festival.

Cebu City, the Philippines.

Cebu City, the jewel city of the Philippines, played host to the 4th annual Southeast Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of the URI Cooperation Circle Leaders/Representatives and Trustees, held on June 5 – 9, 2008. This year’s theme was: “Strengthening Leadership in the SEAP Region.”

The work took place on many levels: community building, interfaith dialogue, acquainting participants with the world-wide efforts of URI, and electing a new leadership team. A highlight of the meeting was the launching of the Interfaith Sector of Cebu City at the historic Fort San Pedro of Cebu. In the presence of the city mayor, representatives from the Catholic Archbishop of Cebu, United Council of Churches, Office on Muslim Affairs, the other distinguished guests and the local interfaith community — the delegates were honoured to participate in the momentous occasion which was envisioned to inspire the active role of interfaith cooperation in the next 10 years of the city. Without many years of hard work on the part of URI, this level of interfaith interaction would never have taken place. May peace prevail in the Philippines! 
URI North America

There are 51 Cooperation Circles in North America demonstrating a rich and diverse approach to interfaith peacebuilding, from the Peace Academy in North Carolina, to the San Francisco Interfaith Council, and SARAH, which is described below.

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URI Southeast Asia–Pacific

There are 21 cooperation circles within this region doing vastly different work: meeting with local and national government leaders; training young adults for peace leadership; Vietnam farmers managing a vegetarian restaurant for poor people; community organizers helping Muslims and Christians work together for the first time to improve their communities.

Here’s one account of URI’s work in the Southeast Asia-Pacific:

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A Community of Donors

United Religions Initiative thanks the following donors for their generous support. Gifts from the community constitute a vital resource for URI and we are grateful for each and every one. These gifts and donations were received between January 1, 2007 – June 30, 2008.*

* Please accept our apology for any omissions. Please advise Ms. Rory Brown at 415-561-2300 or rbrown@uri.org to correct our records.

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The purpose of the United Religions Initiative is to promote enduring, daily interfaith cooperation, to end religiously motivated violence and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the earth and all living beings.