



March 17, 2008

I have had the honour of serving as ICUU President for nearly five months now. As I expected, the 'learning curve' has been steep. Being part of the Leadership Conference team was an excellent learning opportunity for me and helped bring some important questions into focus.

As a body, the ICUU is small and mostly

volunteer run. The one exception is the wonderful support and assistance provided by our Executive Secretary John Clifford (pictured). Still, at half-time there is only so much he can do.

So with a small budget – smaller than most mid-sized congregations in North America – the question of priority and direction quickly emerges. We have a clear Mission Statement as you can see here:

The Mission of the ICUU is

- To build relationships through communication and collaboration;
- To develop spiritual community among member groups and their leaders;
- To identify and nurture prospective and emerging groups;
- To foster our U*U faith for mutual inspiration, development, and growth.

The Leadership Conference addressed most, if not all of the points in the Mission, but the Conference required a lot of fundraising work. Other groups have requested such leadership events, but we simply don't have the resources to act on those requests right away. At the same time, our experience in a developing country taught me, at least, that we need to do more to continue to support the growth of our faith in some places. What is needed is different in each land.

Finding ways to get educational materials and opportunities for lay ministers in parts of Africa emerged as an important need. Developing a professional ministry is for the longer term. In lands where church cannot be separated from high unemployment and very difficult economic, political and health conditions, well maybe we need to look at ways of spurring economic development as well.

Of course the ICUU is not set up to be an aid or a development agency. We have not got the skills, the financial resources or the human power to take on that role. It is not a part o our mission. But others do have resources

and expertise. In the name of growing our shared faith, perhaps we can work with these groups to create new opportunities

On our return from Africa some of the conference faculty have started to have conversations with other Unitarian and Unitarian Universalist groups to see what might be done. So far we have only good will and good ideas. Our conversations are just at the beginning. It is far too early to predict what, if any, fruit they might bear. But it is a beginning.

For the last 12 years the ICUU has been an organization feeling its way through a series of beginnings. We have had some real successes and a few –well – not quite so successful projects. But we have learned a lot and we have learned how to keep experienced people close at hand. For example, our Kenyan faculty included no less than four present and past ICUU presidents.

I still think of myself as a relative newcomer to the ICUU, but I have been deeply impressed with the commitment, passion and cleverness of those who have brought the organization this far and who sit in the Executive Committee with me. I have great faith that we can produce great things, given the time and the support.



With Bishop Patrick Magara in Kenya

In a few months we hope to be able to announce some new initiatives and projects that will be effective and inexpensive, creative and productive. As always, a goal will be to create models that are repeatable or adaptable to other situations where our faith is facing similar challenges. It is our mission to foster our Unitarian and Universalist faith worldwide. It's a challenge, but it is also a gift to have the chance to take on that challenge.

Rev. Brian Kiely