



The Global Chalice

ICUU Newsletter www.icuu.net

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Leadership Conference in Nairobi, Kenya, February 2008

In this ground-breaking conference the ICUU brought together over 50 people from six African nations as well as the US, UK, and Canada.

Lessons given and received went both ways. The participants learned a little about 'first world' UU practices, history, theology, church structure, worship, and conflict resolution. In turn we learned about the unique challenges their version of our shared faith encounters.

If some of us had a difficult time imagining an evangelical and Biblically based Unitarianism, we don't now. In lands where there is terrible poverty and rampant unemployment, where the threat of political and ethnic violence is a real possibility, these folks live a kind of faith that puts us to shame. With no money, many run orphanages for AIDS orphans, often taking them into their own very modest homes. They run cooperative programs and, most recently many in Kenya have been sheltering the people displaced in the recent political violence.

The faculty may have taught them some things about the basics of our faith, but participants taught us about living that faith on a daily basis.

Our presence also gave them a sense that they belonged to the worldwide UU family. These fledgling groups felt noticed, that they belonged to something greater than their small village churches. That seemed to matter a great deal.

Did we achieve anything constructive? Apparently we did. These Unitarians were hungry for what we had to offer and hungry to meet with other African Unitarians to start building networks of support.

-Rev. Brian Kiely, ICUU President

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.

From the Welcoming Speech by Benard Macharia, Kenya UU Council



This leadership conference...comes at a time when our country has witnessed and is still witnessing violence of unprecedented proportions. Even as we meet to share ideas on the future of UUism in the world, an estimated more than 1,000 Kenyans have lost their lives in the senseless slaughter that marked the aftermath of the disputed December 2007 elections.... At some stage even we were getting doubtful that the meeting would take place.

On a more positive note, we wish to inform all gathered here that Kenya enjoys freedom of worship and assembly as well as the freedom to hold ideas and these are entrenched in our Constitution. This is manifested in the myriad religions and faiths that exist in this country. Although the country is predominantly Christian, all faiths enjoy this freedom of worship and we all cherish it. In fact, most of our members ...became UU members after hearing about UUism from different sources and becoming attracted to the principles that it espouses. With Kenya being a democratic state that guarantees the freedom of worship and association, UUism has a bright future in this country.

My dear brothers and sisters, this leadership conference takes place in the backdrop of what happens when brother turns against brother and people who have lived together suddenly turn against each other in a senseless orgy of violence. It is our hope that this conference will attempt to explore the role of UUism in engendering equity and lasting peace among the peoples of the world, that it will live up to our principle of promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person; justice, equity and compassion in human relations. We pray that as we continue with our search for truth and meaning, we shall get nearer to our desired goal of a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, words that are echoed in our national anthem.

As we share in our fellowship, let us spare a thought for all displaced Kenyans, especially the most vulnerable, the women and children....It is our prayer that when the dust has settled and this country reclaims its pride of place in the community of nations, you will be able to come back and savour the gifts of nature that God has so generously bequeathed our country.

Participants Value Conference Teachings and Atmosphere

Evaluations of the conference by the participants were overwhelmingly positive. To the question "What session(s) did you find most useful?" more than half of the respondents replied that all the sessions were useful. Covenant groups were mentioned by about 30% as being especially fulfilling; several people mentioned that they had never before had such an opportunity to speak honestly about experiences and insights. A few remarked that for them as African men, it was quite a revolutionary idea, and for the women, it was affirming to understand that their sharing was valued and respected. Other sessions that received special mention of usefulness included conflict resolution, qualities of a religious leader, and worship services prepared by the different groups.

Below are some of the personal comments received by conference organizers:

"In a place struggling to manage differences and where people were being killed on tribal grounds, I could not help but think of that conference as a sign of hope for Africa in general and from Kenya as a country. I feel obliged to mention that Kenyan Unitarians who organized the conference were from different tribes and a living sign that Unitarianism has something to offer to this part of the world...[O]ur gathering was just a fulfilment of a dream that many of us have held for so long....[A]ttendees were happy and eager to learn even more than what was covered in that short period of time. The time we spent every day in worship, in classes, covenant groups and the conversation we had with different people were all learning moments.

This was also a time for the individual groups to think about plans for the future and what they need as groups to grow in vital and viable congregations. What is needed is follow up on part of the ICUU and the global UU family of the momentum created in Kenya. The time to nurture these congregations is ripe and hope is permitted."

-Fulgence Ndagijimana, Burundi

"All the sessions throughout the programme are very interesting, educative and wonderful that left me thinking about how wonderful and lucky I am to have such religion that preaches love, peace, indiscriminate and unity till this moment and forever will I remain a Unitarian Universalist. I pray everyday for my children to embrace same religion and believe."

-Olafemi Matimoju, Nigeria

"All of us really benefited alot especially in issues related to conflict management and other areas which are part of our daily encounters. Now we have a broader understanding of ways to execute our services effectively, while ministering. We also look forward to having a well co-ordinated UUism across Kenya, Africa and the world after learning sooo much in that conference. Once again I want to say THANK YOU."

-Josphat Mainye, Kenya

Faculty Members' Reflections

see also blogs from Brian Kiely <http://uuwithoutborders.blogspot.com/>
and Rosemary Bray McNatt www.revrose.com

There are longstanding Unitarian causes in South Africa (founded in 1867) and Nigeria (1919), but a combination of personal contact and access to the Internet has meant that within the past five years Unitarianism has blossomed in places never previously imagined—Burundi, Republic of Congo, Kenya, Tanzania and Uganda.

The faculty (including all four presidents of the ICUU, past and present) taught Unitarian history, worship theory and practice, governance, social witness and other congregational skills. In return, the Africans taught enthusiasm, commitment and the reality of living one's faith in frequently difficult economic and social conditions. Though all of them have their own financial struggles, all the money they raise for their congregations goes towards various social projects. They have started orphanages for children whose parents have died of HIV/Aids. They dream of establishing schools, medical clinics, developing micro-businesses which will make them and their communities independent.

And they have grand visions for the future growth of Unitarianism. In Kenya, for example, they are imagining all of Kenya becoming Unitarian. And why not, they ask? Why would people not want a faith which gives them freedom to believe according to their own conscience, and which preaches inclusiveness and peace? -David Usher



The conference design followed closely our previous trainings in Europe, India, and South America. Each ICUU conference strives for two basic goals: to bring people together from different countries so that they can meet each other, learn from each other, and begin to build relationships; and to provide an overview of U-Uism in our various member groups so that new and emerging groups might find similarities and/or models they want to follow. Whatever teaching takes place is done with a deep respect for local cultural practices, history and assumptions. The African leadership conference leaned heavily on these two goals, and they provided the central dynamics for our work together.

This conference also marked the most successful fundraising appeal in ICUU history. An initial grant from the UUA's International Funding Panel was supplemented from the ICUU's own operating budget and by contributions from dozens of congregations, groups, and individuals in the US, UK, and Canada. A complete list of donors is posted on the ICUU website. -Jill McAllister



I became a member of the Cape Town Unitarian Church five years ago and, before traveling to Nairobi, I had only ever known one Unitarian minister and one congregation. So the African Leadership Conference was a delight, an inspiration and a confirmation all in one. I was inspired by the amazing lengths to which people went to live according to the principles of their faith. And in the company of cool, principled people I felt a reassuring confirmation that I belonged. That I had chosen well. That this is my spiritual home.

I met people who engaged with life's questions earnestly, yet lived with a light touch. People who were truly committed to learning how to be better leaders. For, though sheltered in the seclusion and quiet of the Methodist Guest House, we were ever mindful of the realities of the Kenyan situation and this contextualized the import of what we were doing.

My work and my passion have always been to develop leadership capacity together with my peers in South Africa and now, thanks to Unitarian Universalism, I have means to do this together with my brothers and sisters throughout the continent. We are motivated, we are inspired and now we are networked—watch this space. -Leigh Meinert



Order ICUU books online!

The Home We Share, collected papers presented by lay and professional theologians at the **2006 ICUU Theological Symposium**, is now available online. Search www.uuabookstore.org for “Home We Share” or “International” and this book can be ordered with a credit card for delivery anywhere in the world. Thank you, UUA Bookstore!

ICUU Member Groups

Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Association
Canadian Unitarian Council
Religious Society of Czech Unitarians
Danish Unitarian Church
European Unitarian Universalists
Unitarian Universalist Society of Finland
Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft (Germany)
General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (Great Britain)
Unitarian Church in Hungary
Indian Council of Unitarian Churches
Jemaat Allah Global Indonesia
Unitarian Brotherhood Church and First Unitarian Church of Nigeria
Unitarian Universalist Christians of Pakistan
Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines, Inc.
Unitarian Church in Poland
Transylvanian Unitarian Church (Romania)
South African National Association of Unitarians
Unitarian Universalist Society of Spain
Unitarian Universalist Association of Sri Lanka
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (USA)

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Member Groups' Websites

The first eight sites are in English, afterwards in other languages with English options as noted.

www.uua.org Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (USA)

www.unitarian.org.uk General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches (Great Britain)

www.cuc.ca Canadian Unitarian Council

www.anzua.org/anzua_alt Australian and New Zealand Unitarian Association

www.euu.uua.org European Unitarian Universalists

www.unitarian.co.za South African National Association of Unitarians

www.uuphilippines.org Unitarian Universalist Church of the Philippines

www.uu-uno.org Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office

www.unitarius.hu Unitarian Church in Hungary—enter in Hungarian or English

www.unitarius.ro Transylvanian Unitarian Church—enter site by clicking on belépés, then click on the US flag (not working at press time)

www.unitarisme.dk Danish Unitarian Church—click on “info in English,” left column.

www.unitarier.de Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft (Germany)—select English at top left

www.unitaria.cz Religious Society of Czech Unitarians—click on “Praha” for the Prague congregation’s site, which has some English content

<http://uuespana.googlepages.com/home>
Unitarian Universalist Society of Spain—readers of Spanish will also want to visit www.uuhispano.net

www.netlife.fi/users/antti.pelkola/uu Unitarian Universalist Society of Finland

The Global Chalice is a publication of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, an association of Unitarian, Universalist, and Unitarian Universalist organizations and congregations in more than 20 countries. Learn more about the ICUU on our website, www.icuu.net

Officers and staff of the ICUU and its member groups may submit material for this newsletter by contacting the editor, Lorella Thomas Hess, newsletter@icuu.net