

Mother Africa and Unitarianism

Unitarianism has existed in Africa since 1867 when the Cape Town, South Africa, Congregation was established. In South Africa there also are active fellowships in Durban, Somerset West and Johannesburg. Nigeria has had a thriving Unitarian presence since 1919 and both countries are members of the ICUU.

In recent years there has been a growing interest in Unitarianism in other African countries. New fellowships have been established in Bujumbura, Burundi and Brazzaville, Congo. These are in the early stages of becoming members of the ICUU. More recently there has been a rapidly growing interest in Unitarianism in Kenya and Uganda.

With these factors in mind, the ICUU Executive Committee in 2007 sent then ICUU President, Rev. Gordon Oliver of Cape Town, South Africa to Central Africa to meet with Unitarians and Universalists in Nigeria, Uganda, Kenya, Burundi and Congo (Brazzaville).

The purpose of this visit was to explore the culture and vigour of Unitarian and Universalist groups in Africa, to explore with them their needs and goals, and to move toward development of strategies for support, self-sustainability, and growth.

Following the receipt of Rev. Oliver's report, the ICUU began to plan a major Leadership School which was held in Nairobi, Kenya, in February, 2008. Over 40 leaders from the above mentioned nations attended to study theological and practical matters and to build pan-African networks.

African Unitarianism has many flavours, partly due to the lingering and differing colonial influences, partly due to tribal traditions and partly due to linguistic differences. In Kenya, the church is growing rapidly, while in other nations where political instability make caution necessary, the churches are growing more slowly.

One common trait, however, seems to be the devotion to service. To ask an African about her or his faith is to invite stories about AIDS orphanages, collective volunteer run schools, shared farming and business projects and other social service activities. Seldom do they discuss membership numbers, church committees or buildings.

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