

United Religions Initiative  
2005 Year in Review  
INTERFAITH  
COOPERATION  
FOR PEACE,  
JUSTICE AND  
HEALING

Dear Friends:

Welcome to the United Religions Initiative (URI) Year in Review—2005.

As 2005 began, the world and URI were launching a massive response to a devastating tsunami. By year’s end, we were delivering blankets to earthquake victims on the mountaintops of Pakistan and giving comfort to hurricane survivors in America’s south.

In between, thousands died in Iraq in what many fear has now become a sectarian civil war. We lost a hugely popular pope and a newly centrist Israeli prime minister. And we debated the meaning of “genocide” while thousands died in Darfur.

It was in many ways a tough year for the Earth and all who live here.

Looking beyond the news coverage, however, we saw glimmers of hope and signs of progress toward a more peaceful and just world. A great deal of that light—far more than you might realize—emanated from URI.

Members of URI’s interfaith Cooperation Circles brought medicine and dignity to thousands of AIDS patients in southern Africa. They organized school exchanges where Israeli and Palestinian kids became friends. They helped negotiate a cease fire between rival religious sects in Manila and took guns off the streets of Rio de Janeiro.

Through thousands of projects like these, URI engaged more than one million people from 120 faith traditions last year to promote interfaith cooperation and to create cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings. In a difficult year, we held fast to our faith in the power of interfaith partnership to transform our common future.

Standing in solidarity with us were hundreds of financial supporters. With gifts ranging from one dollar to several hundred thousand dollars, they secured the network that links the people of URI across 60 nations and six continents.

They provided the resources to help found 36 more Cooperation Circles. Brought internet access to our indigenous volunteers in remote parts of Argentina. Funded a coordinator for thousands of indefatigable African volunteers. Underwrote leadership training for young interfaith activists in the Mideast and Europe. Enabled 70 Muslims, Christians, secularists and others in Europe to engage in intensive discussions on overcoming religious and ethnic prejudice. And much more.

If you are among those supporters, we honor your investment and we hold you in our hearts. Please read this Year in Review with pride in all that you have helped make possible. In a dark year, you have been a bright and shining light.

If you have yet to invest in URI, we invite you to join us today. Whatever the television news might say, wonderful things are happening to propel us to a more peaceful, just and healthy world. You deserve to share this joyful journey with us.

With care and gratitude,

The Rev. Canon Charles P. Gibbs  
Executive Director

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URI is a vital community of people around the world who give their time, their hard work and their resources to create a more peaceful, just and healthy world. Volunteers contributed hundreds of thousands of hours to URI in 2005, and we are deeply grateful. We also acknowledge those who made financial gifts to URI through the Global Support Office in San Francisco in 2005. For your generosity and commitment, we thank you all.

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Malawi, a landlocked African country of 13 million, is one of the least developed nations on earth. Long impoverished, it has been ravaged by HIV/AIDS; nearly one million Malawians are now infected.



But Malawi has great riches, too. Nearly half of its people are under age 15, a vast resource of energy, hope and creativity. URI Cooperation Circles in Malawi focus on helping these youngsters grow into healthy and hardworking leaders of a peaceful and prosperous land. On their own time and often with their own funds, URI volunteers shelter and educate orphans, care for young AIDS patients and teach youth how to avoid contracting the HIV virus.

In 2005 children were the heart of URI Malawi’s celebration of International Day of Peace, entertaining hundreds of guests with songs, dances and poems about peace.

URI Cooperation Circles have helped give these children—and their loving and faithful elders—the hope to transform the future of their fragile land.

SOME PEOPLE ASK ME, “IS PEACE REALLY POSSIBLE?” BECAUSE OF MY INVOLVEMENT WITH INTERFAITH DIALOGUE I TELL THEM, “WELL, WE’RE DOING IT NOW.”

—MARCO P. GUTANG, MEMBER OF THE PEACEMAKERS COOPERATION CIRCLE OF URI, MANILA



## Year in Review 2005

URI officially turned five in 2005. But 2005 might be remembered as the year when URI grew up.

Of course, like a child who is "suddenly" a foot taller, URI had been growing all along. In 2005 we simply saw the results of that growth as never before.

Last year URI volunteers established 36 new Cooperation Circles (CCs)—self-sustaining, grassroots groups of volunteers from three or more faith traditions who come together to address urgent local, national or global needs. For the first time, the total number of CCs grazed 300. In one country—India—the number passed 50.

Newcomers include:

- Interfaith Students Movement CC, India
- Planet-E CC, Egypt
- Interfaith Dialogue Utrecht CC, The Netherlands
- Pakigdat of Mindanao CC, Philippines
- Women's Self-Help CC, India
- Prayer for Peace CC, Kenya
- Palestinian Peace Society CC, Palestine
- Education for Peace CC, Pakistan

Meanwhile, more established CCs flexed their muscles on the front lines of the global struggle for peace, justice and healing.

- In the Philippines, amid sporadic gunfire between rival religious clans, members of the Peacemakers Circle CC stepped in to avert outright war, heal the deep rift between rival leaders and help negotiate a peace agreement.
- Members of the Press for Peace CC in Muzaffarabad, Pakistan, were the first NGO responders to help their community after the devastating earthquake. Muslims, Christians and Bahais worked together to bury the dead and shelter the living when there was no other help to be found. Within weeks, Pakistan's Multiple Cooperation Circle had organized a more comprehensive relief effort, with opportunities for the entire URI global family to participate.

Also in 2005 URI's international leadership became more international than ever, as we transitioned from our first Global Council (board of directors) to our second.

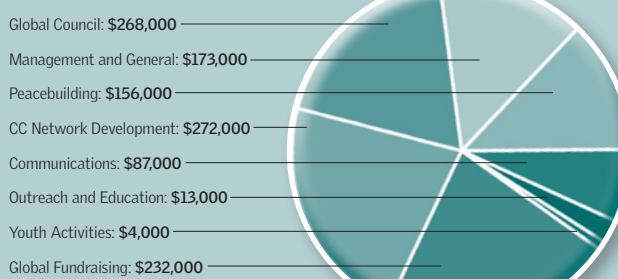
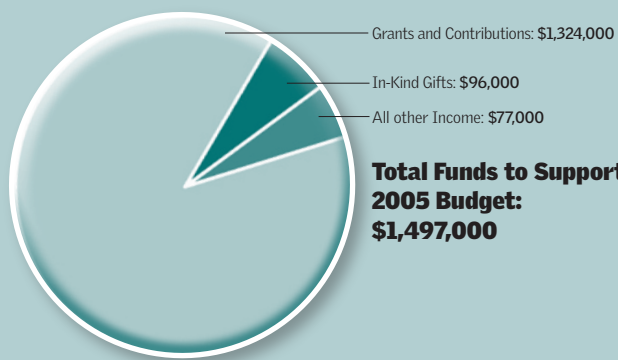
After nine years of brilliant leadership by San Franciscan Rita Semel, our new Global Council elected a new chair, Yoland Trevino, an equally brilliant Mayan woman originally from Guatemala. Our vice chair is Mussie Hailu, a 34-year-old Ethiopian man with strong relationships in the African Union and the United Nations. Representing 18 countries and 15 faiths, our trustees include a Sufi sheik, a Jewish rabbi, and a Catholic nun who was once a guerrilla fighter and is now a peace activist.

Contributions to URI grew 17% in 2005. This doesn't include our largest-ever programmatic grant—an anonymous commitment of \$360,000 over two years to support a groundbreaking peacebuilding program based on the writings and on-the-ground experience of John Paul Lederach, a world renowned leader in the field of interfaith peacebuilding. This program will include training and on-the-ground support to teams of interfaith activists working to resolve conflict in hot spots around the globe.

## Funds Received/Funds Spent 2005

Figures rounded to nearest thousand

AUDITED FINANCIAL STATEMENTS AVAILABLE UPON REQUEST.



In addition to these funds for the global URI, our Member Circles raise hundreds of thousands of dollars annually to support their local efforts.



### Africa: Ugandans Unite for Peace and Healing

The Lord's Resistance Army, a brutal, quasi-spiritual rebel force, has terrorized northern Uganda since URI-Uganda coordinator Despina Namwembe was a pre-teen, conscripting some 20,000 children and driving 1.7 million people from their homes. In the meantime, more than one million Ugandans have died of AIDS. With Despina's support, the members of Uganda's 12 URI Cooperation Circles (CCs) rescue child soldiers, care for AIDS- and war-orphaned, collect supplies for refugees, and study conflict resolution skills in preparation for training other activists. A full-time AIDS educator, Despina coordinates these efforts on URI's behalf for free.



### Asia: URI Youth Help Clear the Air in Delhi

More people die prematurely because of bad air quality in India than anywhere else on earth. Delhi is among the world's most polluted cities, with airborne toxins exceeding legal standards by 1,000%. In 2002, the children in Delhi's Salwan Public School Cooperation Circle (CC) took action, planting saplings across half a kilometer of central Delhi. Grown strong under the children's care, the trees now cool the streets and filter the air. In 2005, after authorities granted the CC another barren expanse, the children spent six months clearing trash and planting 1,000 saplings. Having nurtured these into towering sources of fresh oxygen, they'll start again, healing Delhi's environment sapling by sapling, empty lot by empty lot.



### Europe: Danish CCs Makes Friends in the Muslim World

Until 2005 few people outside Denmark, or outside Europe at any rate, envisioned interfaith conflict in Denmark. Then a Danish newspaper lampooned Mohammed, outraging Danish Muslims, igniting an international firestorm and illuminating deep distrust between devout Muslims and western secularists. Now members of Denmark's two URI Cooperation Circles—Bahais, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs and others—are working to heal the rift. While recruiting Danish Muslims, who are friendly but overwhelmed with duties to their immigrant community, they are visiting interfaith groups in Tehran and Punjab, deepening their knowledge of the Muslim world and presenting a kinder side of the west.



### Middle East and North Africa: Making Friends across Religious Lines

Of URI's twelve CCs in Israel, three focus on gathering college-aged Jews, Muslims, Christians and Druze for interfaith prayer, fellowship and discussion. For many, this is their first chance to befriend a peer of another faith, and the experience is exhilarating. Palestinians tell of breaking curfew, dodging checkpoints and slogging through muddy back lanes to attend a URI retreat. "We [take] gigantic risks to be here," says a boy from Hebron. In 2005, youth members of the Environmental Interfaith Encounter CC met regularly to discuss a faith-based approach to environmental stewardship. Finding a common theme of respect for the Earth in all their scriptures, they issued a joint appeal "to save water, treat it with sensitivity and keep it pure."



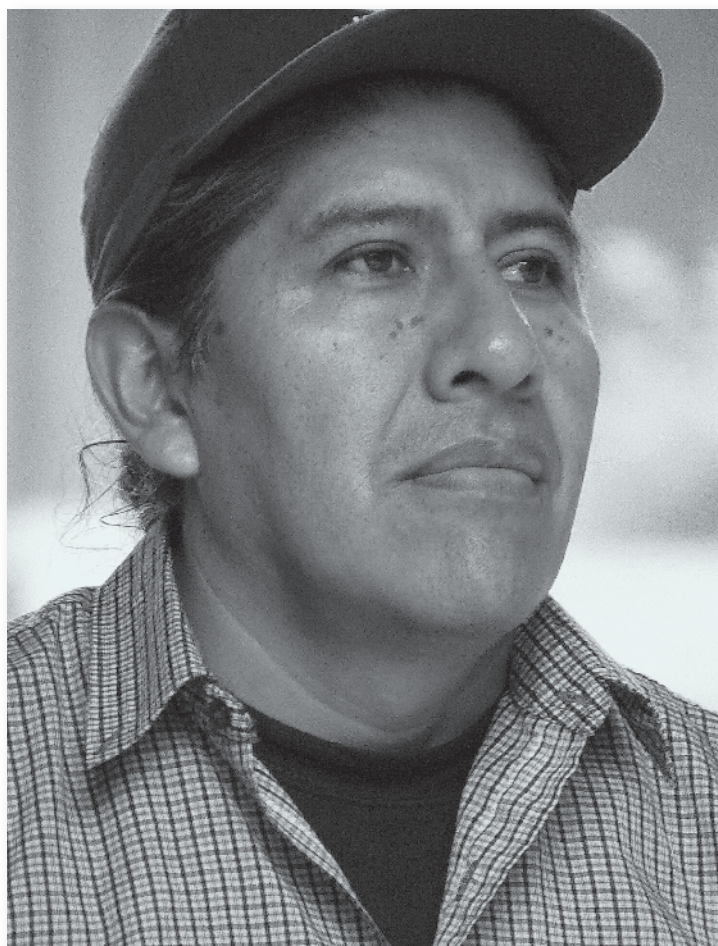
### Multi-Region: Carrying a Message of Peace to the Top of the World

In 2005 the Everest Peace Project CC edged closer to its goal of becoming the first team of interfaith peace activists to scale Mt. Everest. The CC was born in 2002 when trekker Lance Trumbull received a vision calling him to organize an Everest Climb for Peace. In 2005 Lance and his multi-faith team carried the U.N. flag to the top of Mt. Kilimanjaro, Africa's highest peak. In 2006 they plan to wave a URI banner from the top of Mt. Everest—proving the power of interfaith cooperation to carry us as far as we can dream of going.

# MORE THAN 300 GRASSROOTS INTERFAITH COOPERATION CIRCLES



## WORKING FOR PEACE, JUSTICE AND HEALING ACROSS THE WORLD



### Latin America: Celebrating Indigenous Spiritual Wisdom

URI was perhaps the first international interfaith association to seek out Indigenous people as full participants. Raul Mamani, a grassroots representative of Argentina's Kolla people, joined URI's Global Council in July 2005. Dedicated to reviving Indigenous spiritual values after centuries of colonial oppression, Raul has defended Indigenous rights in South America for a quarter century. In 2000, a Catholic priest invited this celebrated activist to join URI. Since then Raul has organized a Multiple Cooperation Circle for Indigenous Peoples and traveled throughout South America encouraging other Indigenous people to join. Today, as a member of the Qewna CC, he teaches people from many spiritual backgrounds about the Kolla tradition of care for Mother Earth.

### North America: Crossing Boundaries, Sharing Solutions

Spread across six continents, URI volunteers rely primarily on electronic communications to stay connected. But periodic regional, national and global gatherings offer what telephones and the internet cannot: opportunities to surmount cultural barriers, share skills and experiences, and bring projects to scale. To manage costs, avoid duplication and strengthen the broader interfaith community, URI's North American volunteers organized their 2005 continental assembly in cooperation with the North American Interfaith Network (NAIN). Over three days of intensive meetings and workshops, some 80 volunteers from URI and NAIN brainstormed new ways of engaging faith communities in peacebuilding, environmental stewardship and community development.



### Southeast Asia and the Pacific: URI Responds When Fire Ravages a Village

In July 2005, fire raged through impoverished Maharlika Village in the Philippines, leveling virtually every home. Because of the area's reputation for violent drug trafficking, relief workers were initially afraid to enter the community to help families left homeless by the conflagration. So the URI Peacemakers CC, in cooperation with other nonprofits, collected food and emergency supplies, recruited more than 100 physicians, and convoyed into Maharlika. Their volunteer corps of Muslims, Christians, Hindus and others cared for more than 500 malnourished children and 270 families in one day. Later that same day, months of outreach by the Peacemakers Circle concluded with the Philippine Office of Muslim Affairs signing a formal agreement to collaborate on interfaith relations with the URI CC.



## URI CC List by Region

REGION	COUNT
<b>AFRICA</b>	<b>57</b>
Angola	1
Benin	1
Ethiopia	2
Gabon	1
Gambia	1
Kenya	3
Liberia	1
Malawi	10
Mozambique	12
Nigeria	3
Senegal	2
Sierra Leone	1
South Africa	1
Swaziland	3
Uganda	12
Zambia	2
Zimbabwe	1
<b>ASIA</b>	<b>101</b>
Bangladesh	2
China	1
India	59
Korea	12
Nepal	1
Pakistan	23
Sri Lanka	2
Taiwan	1
<b>EUROPE</b>	<b>22</b>
Belgium	2
Bosnia	1
Denmark	2
Finland	3
Germany	4
The Netherlands	2
Romania	1
Russia	1
Spain	1
Tajikistan	1
Turkey	1
United Kingdom	3
<b>LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN</b>	<b>21</b>
Argentina	7
Bolivia	1
Brazil	6
Chile	1
Haiti	1
Mexico	1
Panama	1
Peru	2
Venezuela	1
<b>MIDDLE EAST &amp; NORTH AFRICA</b>	<b>24</b>
Egypt	2
Iran	1
Israel	13
Jordan	4
Palestinian Authority	4
<b>MULTIREGIONAL</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>NORTH AMERICA</b>	<b>46</b>
Canada	2
United States	44
<b>SOUTHEAST ASIA, INDONESIA &amp; THE PACIFIC</b>	<b>13</b>
Australia	1
Cambodia	1
Indonesia	2
Malaysia	1
New Zealand	1
Philippines	5
Vietnam	2
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>305</b>

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

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