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Duane Fickeisen Awarded First Natalie Gulbrandsen Ministerial Scholarship

The first annual Natalie Gulbrandsen Ministerial Scholarship for International Studies has been awarded to Duane Fickeisen. This scholarship was established by Gulbrandsen to further opportunities for ministers and ministerial candidates who seek to engage in academic, interfaith, or social justice purposes in developing countries.

Fickeisen will be traveling to a mountain village near Copan Ruinas, Honduras, this winter to help construct homes as a participant in an interfaith, social justice mission trip.

Ministers and ministerial candidates who wish to strengthen and broaden their international understanding by immersing themselves in a developing country are encouraged to apply.

Submissions must be received by April 1, 2009, to be considered for next year's award. Please visit the Unitarian Universalist Association website at <http://www.uua.org/giving/awardsscholarships/89676.shtml> for complete grant guidelines.

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Anniversary 60 Universal Declaration of Human Rights

"Whereas recognition of the inherent dignity and of the equal and inalienable rights of all members of the human family is the foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world . . ."

How can we know what is good and right? How shall we live and let live? How shall we sponsor the opportunity of all to grow into the full potential of their humanity? How shall we go about loving our neighbor as ourselves? The mere presence of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, passed in the United Nations 60 years ago, December 10, gives us an edge for responding to these questions. Each of the 30 articles of the Declaration has a history often thousands of years old. The religious founders, martyrs through the ages, have testified to their centrality. Enlightenment impulses towards democracy document their foundational validity. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights places our rights at an institutional center of the world. Most nations have given it their signatures. It is honored, often in the breach. The United States has violated various of its provisions. But the fact of its existence in our midst affirms us as being on the right side of history. It will not be in our lifetimes but these inalienable rights must and will prevail. Google the Declaration! Read it! Live it!

Peter T. Richardson

Save These Dates

June 25-28, 2009

The **North American Interfaith Network Annual NAINConnect Conference** will be held in Kansas City, MO. This year's theme is: "Experiencing the Spirit in Education: The Challenge of Religious Pluralism." For more information and to submit a workshop proposal, contact Peter Laurence at: PeterLL@concentric.net.

January 14-17, 2010

IARF U.S. Chapter Conference in Clearwater, Florida

If you would like to help with planning this conference, please contact Rev. Doris Hunter at revdrleen@aol.com or Nyla McCulloch at nylamcculloch@earthlink.net.

September 4-7, 2010

IARF Congress Cochin, India

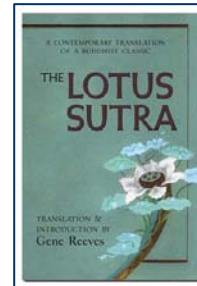
More details following the March Council meeting

Dr. Gene Reeves Publishes Translation of Buddhist Classic

On December 6th, Dr. Gene Reeves was honored by a reception at the New York Branch of Rissho Kosei Kai, a member group of the IARF, for the publication of his book, *The Lotus Sutra, A contemporary Translation of a Buddhist Classic*.

This was truly a work of love since Dr. Reeves has been in Japan working with the international headquarters of Rissho Kosei Kai in Tokyo, Japan for several years.

Dr. Reeves was the Dean of Meadville Lombard Theological School in Chicago before moving to Japan and beginning his translation of



this classical literature of the Buddhist tradition. He has always been an avid supporter of the IARF supporting efforts for international understanding and cooperation.

His book will promote these efforts and will add to a deeper understanding of our Buddhist member groups. Thank you, Gene!

Rev. Doris Hunter

New Council Member

We are so happy to share that Rev. Dr. Doris Hunter has been nominated and appointed to the IARF Council. Rev. Hunter will fill the seat vacated by Rev. Abhi Janamanchi.

Doris has been a steadfast supporter of IARF, has worked on its behalf, and has chaired the U.S. Chapter of the organization for a number of years. She will attend the Council meeting in March 2009 in Japan.

India: A Message

I remember walking down the street in front of the Taj Hotel in Mumbai after passing the Gate of India where the Royalty of England passed through claiming its "Jewel in the Crown" before Indian independence. I remember the sights and sounds of that crowd moving up and down that famous walkway and being offered anything under the heaven (certainly not in heaven) that your body, mind or spirit might want. I remember the colors of cloth and those amazing faces that pressed up against mine and voices saying that it would be impossible to pass up the bargain that they held up before me. I remember getting on a boat to see the famous caves of the God Shiva on one side and in the distance an atomic plant on the other side. I remember thinking that this land of gods and goddesses, of merchants and politicians, of Hindus, Moslems, Jains, Sikhs, Christians was too much...overwhelming all the senses and giving no ground for taking it all in...or to understand it! And then last week came the news about that brutal

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Religious Freedom Notes, Winter 2008/9

Presidential Elections

With the presidential election behind us, it may be time to reflect on politicization of the religious views of the contestants. This was scarily reminiscent of the mediaeval contests when European monarchs were vying for the title of his "Most Christian Majesty."

Future candidates for public office, including the President's should appeal to the voters based on their qualifications for office and their positions on the pressing issues, such as constitutional rights, public education, the Iraq War and the state of the economy, and not use public forum to advertise their religious beliefs.

Especially disturbing throughout his campaign was the fervent tone of Obama's denials of being a Muslim. It is of course in response to misguided allegations of his misinformed critics, but the issue is not that he is in fact a Christian and not a Muslim, but the vehement tone of the denial which clearly indicated his campaign's belief, apparently ubiquitous in the United States, that being a Muslim is a certain dis-qualification for being elected to the public office. We cannot fault President-elect Obama for doing what he felt he must to win the contest, but it is a sad testimony to the present state of affairs that to be a president of the United States one has to be a Christian, and preferably an Evangelical Christian.

Federal Lawsuit Challenges District of Columbia's Funding of Religious Mission

Washington – The ACLU and the Americans United for Separation of Church and State filed a federal lawsuit challenging the District of Columbia's plan to grant more than \$12 million in public property and cash to the Central Union Mission, a religious homeless shelter. The Mission will only admit the homeless into its shelter on the condition of participation in Christian religious activities, including mandatory attendance at nightly church services. Its director has stated, "We are in the business of converting people to Christ. That's what we do."

The Mission only employs Christians and requires all volunteers to declare their church affiliation. "The Central Union Mission has a constitutional right to preach the gospel and recruit disciples for its faith, as it's been doing for 124 years," said Arthur B. Spitzer, Legal Director of the ACLU of the National Capital Area. "But it is a constitutional violation for the District of Columbia to support that preaching with millions of dollars of public money and public property. This is a bad deal for the city, its homeless population and the U.S. Constitution."

ACLU Calls for End to Mandatory Prayer at U.S. Naval Academy

Despite the clear ruling of the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit, (2003), which struck down as unconstitutional "supper prayers" at Virginia Military Institute, the US Naval Academy in Maryland continues to require that all midshipmen participate at the daily "noon meal prayer", a practice that violates their religious freedom and rights of conscience.

"While the First Amendment does not in any way prohibit cadets or midshipmen from praying before, during, or after meals, the Establishment Clause prohibits military institutions from sponsoring such a religious activity" states the ACLU brief. "The government should not be in the business of compelling religious observance, particularly in military academies, where students can feel coerced by senior students and officials and risk the loss of leadership opportunities for following their conscience."

Alex Gibber



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out our website at:
www.iarfus.org



Read the latest
news from the
International IARF
office at
www.iarf.net



RFYN Presentation

On October 23rd, Hillary Kaell, a fourth year PhD candidate in American Studies at Harvard University and Stephanie Derrick, a fourth year student in the Church History program at Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary presented their experiences from the RFYN (Religious Freedom Young Adult Network) conference held in August in Amman, Jordan. Both women were

sponsored by the IARF U.S. Chapter and received funding from the Chapter, the Canadian Chapter of IARF, the IALRW and private donors.

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assault on that city and in that beautiful Taj hotel destroying its lovely artifacts and stores along with so many horrible deaths. I couldn't begin to imagine that scene along with those lovely memories I had safely tucked away in my mind. How could this be!

And then I thought about Gandhi and that tradition of nonviolence preached by the saints of Jainism, Hinduism, and Buddhism. Has that tradition of nonviolence been lost not only in India but also in every corner of our planet Earth? Where are the voices that speak about the way of nonresistance and peace? And the voice of the "Prince of Peace" whose birthday is being celebrated once more this month..."Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God"...where is that being heard? Gandhi told us that nonviolence is a discipline and that we must work to be peacemakers even when violence is all around us. We will out of that discipline then "turn the other cheek, walk the second mile, give the cloak as well." What a challenge to all of us who wish to walk the path of peace. We all need to be those angels in Luke's Gospel singing "on earth peace" and witnessing to nonviolence in our daily lives. Isn't that the essence of our greetings to one another this Christmas Season...peace on earth and good will to all!

Rev. Doris Hunter

**U.S. CHAPTER
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