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religious freedom
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IARF International Council Meeting Report

by Nyla McCulloch

The 2009 Council meeting of the IARF was held March 9-11 at Tsubaki Grand Shrine in Japan. Council members reviewed the events of the year, shared Chapter reports, discussed plans for the future of IARF, and began planning for the 2010 Congress in Cochin, India. Council President, Thomas Mathew noted that the cooperation and support of the Council has been great and shared his numerous activities on behalf of IARF over the past year.

Rev. Takahiro Miwa, Supervisor of the IARF Secretariat in Osaka expressed his concerns regarding the financial crisis of the organization, with both reserves and contributions from member groups having decreased. Following the closing of the Oxford office and move to Osaka, the organization is in a better financial position, actually showing an increase in total funds in 2008 compared with the previous year. A balanced budget is proposed for this year.

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Tsubaki Grand Shrine, host to 2009 IARF Council

Celebrating the Creation of IARF

[Editor's Note: Although May 25th has passed, recognition of the founding of IARF is important still, thus the message from the Secretariat in Osaka has been included as a way of honoring this important date.]

Much of the violence in our world today has roots in religion-based tension and conflict. The cause for which our organization was founded over a century ago (in 1900, in Boston, Massachusetts, USA) has moved to the forefront of world concern and controversy.

For this reason our President would like all groups to begin commemorating the day on which IARF was formed (May 25th).

Please consider pausing in your day to offer prayers for, or remembrance of, those in numerous countries who do not enjoy the freedom to hold the beliefs of their choice. Here are some reminders to help focus your thoughts and/or prayers:

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Have You Renewed?

Have you renewed your IARF U.S. Chapter membership yet? You should have received a renewal notice. If not, please send your annual dues of \$25 per person or \$40 per household to:

Rev. Richard Kellaway
10 Rosedale St.
Dorchester, MA 02124

We periodically update our membership records, so please add your mailing as well as email address.

You may also renew on line at www.iarfus.org



IARF at Unitarian Universalist General Assembly

The U. S. Chapter will be represented at the UUA General Assembly in Salt Lake City, UT June 24-28th. We will have an informational table in the exhibit hall at the international organizations booth and will host a reception for members and invited guests on Thursday, June 25th 4:30-6pm in the A & W Networking room at the conference center.

(Celebrating IARF - continued from p. 1)

Iran - Seven Baha'i leaders imprisoned in Iran are facing new and extremely grave accusations, after spending a year in jail without formal charges or access to their lawyer, Shirin Ebadi. Their families have recently been told of a possible new charge - 'the spreading of corruption on earth,' carries the threat of death under the penal code of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Egypt - On April 26 the Coptic Orthodox

Diocese of Masrah Matrouh had its services building attacked and demolished by State Security forces, who also assaulted the priests and believers. This is part of a pattern of growing intimidation. A U.S. government report said in September that while Egypt's constitution provides for freedom of belief, the government in practice restricted those rights.

To Celebrate: **India** is opening itself up for a study tour by representatives of the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF),

changing a long-established policy of not allowing fact-finding visits by the U.S. government. Members sent by USCIRF will visit India in June, for the first time, after which a report on the country will be published.

Freedom (USCIRF), changing a long-established policy of not allowing fact-finding visits by the U.S. government. Members sent by USCIRF will visit India in June, for the first time, after which a report on the country will be published.

IARF Secretariat, Osaka

A Shield of Loving Kindness in Lexington, MA

by Ellen Quaadgras

I had the honor on March 13, 2009, to stand shoulder to shoulder with 300 people in a community interfaith effort called the "Shield of Loving Kindness" at the Lexington High School. The "Shield" was a beautifully executed response to the Westboro Baptist Church, who came that day to protest the high school's affirming stance toward its gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender students. We confronted the hateful language of this band of 6 from Kansas with a powerful intentional silence.

The response began long before the group arrived, with the planning and execution

of two "Principles of Nonviolence" trainings by community members who based their training on tactics used by Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

The Westboro group arrived a few minutes before school ended, and was met by two long lines of silent people holding hands, guarding the sidewalk in front of the school.

Police ushered the small group to its assigned spot, who unpacked signs, and the leader began to "preach" her hate-filled homophobic message.

Shortly thereafter, members of the "Shield" turned their backs to the invective to display a message that had been placed on the back of

each person stating: "The Power of Silence." One of the leaders, Dennis Brown, commented: "We turned our backs in a powerful gesture to reject their hate."

The "Shield" held fast until the group finally packed up and drove away. The silence of the group and the encouragement of the leadership to maintain that silence held sway.

We were not pulled down to the level of common invective and helped prevent others from falling into that trap. We made a powerful statement against hatred and homophobia on that day, and think that we, as a community, can be very proud.

Religious Freedom in the USA: Celebrations & Concerns

by Alex Gibber [agibber1@juno.com]

NATIONAL DAY OF PRAYER

President Barack Obama has discontinued an annual prayer service at the White House. This stands in contrast to the George W. Bush administration that invited James and Shirley Dobson and other Religious Right leaders to the White House for an annual government-sponsored prayer service. The relationship appeared to give governmental endorsement to the Dobsons' National Day of Prayer Task Force. However, President Obama says he will sign a Proclamation recognizing the National Day of Prayer, which he is required to do as a result of the Congress' vote. The Rev. Barry W. Lynn, executive director of Americans United for Separation of Church and State, issued the following statement: "Americans don't need the government telling them when to pray and what to pray for. But if the federal government is going to set aside a prayer day, it should recognize the broad diversity of faiths, not just fundamentalist Christians."

CHURCHES AND POLITICS

A small group of clergy in Washington, D.C., angry over a vote by the District of Columbia Council recognizing same-sex marriages performed in other states, threatened to mobilize politically and remove several members of the city council from office. Such church-based partisan politicking is illegal. Religious leaders have the right to speak out for or against same-sex marriage, but cannot use the resources of their churches to elect or defeat candidates.

Federal tax law says: "501(c)(3) non-profit groups, including houses of worship, may not "participate in, or intervene in (including the publishing or distributing of statements), any political campaign on behalf of (or in opposition to) any candidate for public office." In addition, the IRS has announced new efforts to make sure the "no-politicking" rule is followed. In 2008, the IRS issued a press release reminding churches that they may not intervene in partisan politics.

PRAYERS IN SCHOOL

On May 8, 2009, Federal Judge Approves Order requiring school officials in Santa Rosa County, Florida to stop promoting their personal religious beliefs in public schools. Among other things, it prohibits school officials from promoting or endorsing prayers during school functions and organizing school-sponsored religious services.

"The court has ensured that decisions about religion will be left in the hands of families and faith communities and not public school officials" said Benjamin Stevenson, an ACLU of Florida staff attorney. Now, students and their families can feel comfortable holding and expressing their own religious beliefs, knowing that school officials will no longer impose their particular religious beliefs on students at school. This is a truly victorious day for the Constitution and for religious freedom in Florida."



Read the latest news from the international office at www.iarf.net

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Visit the U.S. Chapter Website at www.iarfus.org Where you will find past issues of the newsletter, photos from recent activities, and much more.

Summer Shinto Seminar July 25 – 26, 2009

Yamamoto Yukiyasu Guji teaches us to "live anew, find a new self and enter a new world each day." Let us explore together how to actualize this teaching in our lives during this seminar. Please join us at the Tsubaki Grand Shrine of America in Granite Falls, Washington.

The seminar donation is \$80. Lodging is available at the Shrine for \$35 per night dorm style and limited private rooms for \$50 per night.

To receive a registration form please call (360)691-6389 or email at Kannushi@TsubakiShrine.org



(Intl. Council Meeting continued from p. 1)

The Human Rights Education (HRE) project has been the dominant program of the IARF over the past year in India and the Philippines. In India, programs are being held in some of the most troubled areas of the country. The India Chapter alone organized more than one hundred interfaith programs in various parts of the country. The Philippines HRE program, using "duck raising" as a means of bringing people of different religions together, leads them in human rights education groups. The young adult program (RFYN) leadership is provided by Morse Flores, who continues to advocate

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for young adult representation on the Council. There is an RFYN program planned for Mannheim, Germany in October 2009.

Dr. John Taylor continues to represent IARF at the United Nations in Geneva. Among his many activities were: the celebration of the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights at UNESCO in Paris. In November, Dr. Taylor took part in the discussion of the proposed Decade of Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue, Understanding and Cooperation for Peace.

The relationship between IARF and the UUA was discussed, and concerns were raised about their lack of financial support. It is hoped that this being an election year for a new UUA President may

bring about a renewal of commitment. Members of the IARF plan to meet with the new President.

Two new Council Members were voted on and approved: Rev. Takashi Nishida, the head of Ittoen is the new Vice-President, taking Thomas Mathew's former position, and the Rev. Dr. Doris Hunter is filling the seat vacated by Rev. Abhi Janamanchi. The 33rd Congress will be held September 4-7th, 2010 at the Catholic Renewal Center at Emakulam, near Kochin in Kerala, India. The IALRW's conference which will celebrate the 100 year anniversary of the women's organization will be held September 1-4th at the same venue.

Signs of hope for the organization: Remaining funds are secure in a savings account in England rather than in investments at present; organization and



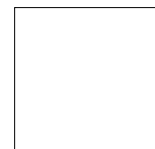
IARF Council Pres. T. Mathew, IARF VP Takeshi Nishida, Guji Yukiyasu Yamamoto, Tsuabaki Grand Shrine High Priest

transparency are being brought to the IARF's finances; Company Secretary, Jeff Teagle, reported that through his efforts the IARF has been granted a sum of 15,000 GBP from the Hibbert Trust; the newsletter and website have been updated; the Council is strong with enthusiasm and planning for the next Congress in India; IARF has been nominated to participate in the "U.N. Decade"; the EME Conference in Belfast (July 2008) was very successful; there have been over 100 SACC meetings and events; Thomas Mathew related that the IARF has had an active role in intervening in religious conflicts in India, and is supporting the work of the HRE programs there; IARF held two programs in the Middle East in August, 2008; there's a goal for each of the Chapters to hold their own conferences regularly; a conference is scheduled for Frankfurt, Germany October 22-25, 2009; and the U.S. Chapter

SAVE THIS DATE! **Jan 14-17, 2010**

"Reconciliation with the Earth, Each Other, and the Stranger" is the theme for the U.S. Chapter Conference, which will be held in Clearwater FL January 14-17th 2010. Dr. Bill Schulz and Dr. Paul Rasor are two of the speakers who will be presenting. The work of IARF around the world will be shared along with preparations for the Congress in India in September 2010. Additionally we will have Circle Groups and time for renewing friendships. Registration information will be forthcoming.

U.S. CHAPTER
INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION
FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM
4429 Oak Bay Dr. W
Jacksonville, FL 32277



IARF INTERNATIONAL COUNCIL MEETING
March 9 - 11, 2009

Tsubaki Grand Shrine, host to the 2009 IARF Council Meeting, Suzuka-shi, Mie-ken, Japan.



(left to right below)
IARF Council President Thomas Mathew; newly elected) IARF Vice President Takeshi Nishida, Director of Ittoen ; Guji Yukiyasu Yamamoto, High Priest of Tsubaki Grand Shrine, Mie Prefecture, Japan.



Newly elected member Rev. Doris Hunter addressing the Council.



Thomas Mathew(India), Rev. Miwa (Japan), Homi Dhalla (India), Robert Papini (Japan office), Esther Korpels (Netherlands), Angelina Grapa (Philippines) enjoying a traditional Japanese meal together at the end of the day's Council meeting.