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## US Chapter Conference 2012

How can each of us take one's own religion seriously while extending more than tolerance to others? That was a question raised more than once during the 2012 conference of the US Chapter of IARF on Hilton Head Island, SC, first by Professor Waleed el-Ansary of Xavier U., who enlightened us on the history and teachings of Islam on interfaith relations. It was raised also, in a Unitarian Universalist (UU) context, by Jay Abernathy's workshop. Another was how to engage more youth in interfaith work, raised at various times by Roy Kaplan's workshop,

Orlanda Brugnola, who stressed young adults' desire to set their own agenda, and in circle groups.

The conference began on Friday evening, February 3, with a lovely reception. Beautiful Hilton Head treated us to balmy weather all weekend, warm even for the South at this time of year. However, the multi-faceted program enticed us indoors most of the time. Friday evening worship was led by Kathryn King and accompanied by her violin. Worshippers from nine religions (and a couple of stand-ins) read short prayers of their faiths, closing with the lighting of a unity candle from

the candles of all the faiths. Not all of the worshippers stayed for the weekend, but having been with that range of faith adherents heartened us throughout the conference. The pace and mood changed when the Cocktails, a delightful a capella women's vocal group from USC, began their set of pop songs of love and connection, including "Come Together" and "Stand by Me."

Saturday we were edified by keynoters. The first, author Kay Lindahl, led us in a workshop on Sacred Listening. We were reminded that listening is [Cont., page 2](#)

## Photos from the Conference



**Above: Sri Kota in the ocean, Hilton Head**

**Panel on International Work**



**Right: Discussion with Waleed al-Ansary**



## TOUR PLANNED

Members of the IARF Japan Chapter visited the US. (see Autumn 2011 issue)  
Will US members return the visit?

Richard Kellaway is organizing a tour to Japan in October 2012, featuring visits to sacred sites of IARF member groups in Tokyo, Kyoto, and elsewhere.

Interested? Contact Richard Kellaway at [ishmaelnb@comcast.net](mailto:ishmaelnb@comcast.net) or at 617-419-5197.

See attached flier.

## Eric Cherry Given 2012 IARF-US Award



Most years since 1972, the IARF US Chapter, by vote of the board, has given an award "to the individual or individuals who have contributed the most to advancing the work of the IARF, with particular

attention to deepening the relations and increasing the level of understanding among people from diverse religious backgrounds around the world." The award has been given to US members such as James Luther Adams, Dana McLean Greeley, Natalie Gulbrandsen, Frank Robertson, and Abhi and Lalitha Janamanchi, as well as international friends. This year the honor went to the Rev. Eric Cherry, Director of the International Office at the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). The primary reason cited was Eric's unfailing support of our chapter and association. In

addition, his office supports Unitarian groups around the world and provides opportunities for many Americans to develop relationships with people from other countries and diverse religious backgrounds. See, for example, <http://international.blogs.uua.org/category/japan/> The Board hopes to find an occasion at the coming GA when the award may be given in front of the accustomed audience. At the conference, people of a wider range of faiths were able to participate. The board will discuss the 2013 award at our next meeting, so send your nominations to any board member! [Ed.]

## Conference 2012, cont.

From page 1

an art, a choice, and a gift. We then practiced silence, reflection, and presence, as we listened to each other in pairs. It seems that it is not so much a type of listening that is sacred, but that all true listening to another is a sacred gift. Second was al-Ansary, mentioned above. Peter Morales, president of the UU Association, was ill and could not present his address. Doris Hunter, member of the IARF Council, and Eric Cherry of UUA staff ably filled in. Eric passed on Peter's regrets and presented a slide show on Unitarian groups around the world, member groups of the IARF. Eric concluded that Unitarians have a low level of success when Americans go out to create



Unitarians in other countries, but a good track record when indigenous people find the Unitarian faith on their own. Doris narrated a show on the inspiring Human Rights Education project of the Southeast Asia Chapter. These slide shows are available to congregations.

At other times, we had choices of workshops presented by Abernathy, Hal French and friends, Kaplan, and Nancy Songer. This reporter was able at French's to try out a half-dozen meditative practices such as walking meditation and tai chi. Kaplan emphasized that despite our common root, hate that has arisen between various religions, especially in fundamentalist wings. He prescribes engaging fundamentalists in dialogue and cooperative efforts, thus reducing hate by reducing the threat we seem to pose. He noted that the younger generation is less rigid, thus their special value in interfaith work. I was not able to attend Songer's

workshop on persecution of Baha'is in Iran, or Abernathy's. Interspersed were meetings of circle groups, religiously mixed groups that became well acquainted through sharing about their lives and their reactions to the presentations. Capping the fine program were the hospitality and worship offered by locals. The Rev. Nan White led inspiring worship on two figures who walked the Sea Islands and who worked for freedom-- Martin Luther King, Jr., and Laura Matilda Towne. The congregation of Low Country UU hosted us for a lavish finger food reception. The program that followed introduced us to Emory Campbell, his Gullah people, and the Gullah-Geechee Cultural Heritage Corridor he is helping establish. The conference closed with reflective worship led by Manuel Holland of the Low Country UU Church. All left with great gratitude to chapter chair Hal French and those who helped him arrange this very worthwhile weekend. [Ed.]

## Living In a Collide-O-Scope?

By Hal French

In the Hindu reckoning of time, we are currently living in the Kali Yuga, an incredibly long period of darkness, filled with natural disasters, wars, famine, a general chaos. The worlds collide. It often seems like that, doesn't it? And internally, at times, we may feel like we're on a collision course with ourselves, having conflicting wishes and desires which don't harmonize well.

But I prefer a different spelling, and I keep a small *kaleidoscope* in front of my computer screen, often training it on different objects around me, transforming even dull images into radiant, colorful patterns.

Can we see the world and all of its creatures that way, marveling at the incredible diversity around us? That's what makes it so colorful, isn't it? The IARF celebrates freedom, and cherishes persons who express their freedom in such fascinating ways! Our recent gathering in Hilton Head was such a celebration, with persons of many faith traditions represented, listening and learning from each other.

There's a hymn that says, "I see glory in each face."

That's what I experienced in our time together. And perhaps that's what a *kaleidoscopic* vision provides us. Maybe, imaginatively, it's a way of seeing the world, recapturing our sense of wonder, awakening us to the beauty of those who occupy this incredible planet with us. Try equipping your spiritual sight with a *kaleidoscopic* lens.

**Circle Group at Conference**



## Board Meets at Conference

The February US Chapter conference was preceded by a meeting of the chapter board, with five board members in attendance (six when Sarah Corbett arrived later) as well as two liaisons and two advisors; thus a wealth of wisdom was tapped.

The board applauded Sri Kota for the fine website, and asked him to send a monthly email reminder to newsletter subscribers to view the site, for which he is planning an upgrade to allow not only dues but also conference fees, etc., to be paid online. In April Doris will attend the IARF council meeting in

Japan, at which the locale for the next International Congress will be selected. Betsy Darr reported that a storm has wreaked damage on the grounds of Tsubaki Grand Shrine Branch in Washington State. The shrine buildings were saved by mid-storm tree work, paid for by an outpouring by shrine supporters.

The board also selected the winner of the 2012 IARF/US Award. See page 2.

Orlanda Brugnola is in a multifaith Doctor of Ministry program. We approved the chapter as the virtual site for her final project—an online course in multifaith understanding for use in secular settings such as workplaces. We look forward to hearing more.

Since we were about to begin a conference, we reviewed its registration—51, close to that of the previous conference. Chair Hal French suggested a different type of venue next time, such as a place where a "pilgrimage" to various faith sites could be part of the program. He would welcome reactions to that idea. Only 76 people paid dues to the chapter in 2011; we hope to do better this year, and began by enrolling all conference registrants for one year.

Read the latest news  
from the international  
office at

[www.iarf.net](http://www.iarf.net)

**It's time to send your  
2012 dues to the  
United States Chapter,  
International Association  
For Religious Freedom**

Renew for 2012 or join!  
Conferees, note: Your  
conference registration  
included 2012 dues.

Visit our website  
[iarfus.org](http://iarfus.org) or send your  
dues to  
Harold French, Dept. of  
Religious Studies,  
University of South  
Carolina, Columbia, SC  
29208

\$30 - Individual  
\$50 - Household  
\$10 - Student

## Doris Hunter: But What Do We DO?

As the US Chapter, IARF, we support a representative to the United Nations in Geneva who advocates for religious freedom, we support an interfaith organization in Jerusalem that provides programs for interfaith understanding among Christians, Muslims and Jews, we support a human rights educational program for young adults in

India that has reached over 1000 participants, and we are one of many chapters on the international scene offering conferences and programs for the cause of religious freedom. We connect folks concerned about religious freedom worldwide through newsletters and websites. Like "Doctors without Borders," we work and witness for religious freedom "without borders."

This April I will be going to Japan to represent our Chapter at our international IARF council. I wish I could take you with me so that you could see the faces around that table and feel the energy and commitment of the members working for religious freedom in countries around the world. It is this dimension of international support we should never forget. THAT'S WHAT WE DO!

## Recent Books by Members

Two of our prominent members have recently published books of interest. Of *Journey Beyond God: Religious Philosophy For Our Time*, the Rev. Peter Richardson says, it "documents the emergence of the Humanist Naturalist

perspective and its power for our living today." It places the subject in the widest global perspective. ISBN-13: 978-0-9741152-7-6 Cost: 24.95 + 3.50 p&h. You can order it directly from Peter, whose email address is [ptemr@aol.com](mailto:ptemr@aol.com). Doris Hunter recommends it.

Kay Lindahl compiled *Women, Spirituality, and Transformative Leadership: Where Grace Meets Power* with Kathleen S. Hurly and Guo Cheen. It is available through major outlets. ISBN 978-1-59473-313-0.

### U.S. CHAPTER INTERNATIONAL ASSOCIATION FOR RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

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