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United Religions Initiative

Religiously Motivated Violence Can End. Be a Peacebuilder! uri.org

Creating Cooperation Circles

A Practical Guide



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Global Staff and CC Services

Global Staff, based in San Francisco and seven geographic regions, help to provide services and promote effective communication among new and existing CCs.



CCs are provided opportunity to communicate with one another using a special websites and listservs. CC activities and events are highlighted in global newsletters and bi-monthly e-bulletins sent to all CCs. CCs are invited to participate in URI regional and global assemblies and are encouraged to organize gatherings locally with other CCs for mutual support and exchange of information.



Introduction

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



The United Religions Initiative is a growing global community dedicated to cooperative action for a better world. It is being created by people on five continents and from a multitude of faith traditions who share a common vision: that our religious and spiritual lives - rather than dividing us - can guide us to build community and respect for one another.

The URI is composed of self-motivated and self-organizing groups called Cooperation Circles (CCs). Currently there are over 250 Cooperation Circles in fifty countries. CCs pursue their own purpose that has local impact and is globally connected through the URI network. Through this network, every CC exchanges its experience and knowledge - inspiring and encouraging others.

Your participation in initiating and developing a Cooperation Circle contributes to the URI's ability to be an extraordinary force for good in the world.

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The GC is responsible for developing financial and other resources to meet the needs of the URI. The GC accepts eligible applicants for membership to the URI and manages its business affairs.

Global Council Trustees

As many as 41 individuals serve as Global Council Trustees. The Trustees are exemplars who manifest the vision and values of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles, and who model leadership and service by their actions. They have a deep commitment to serve the whole of the URI community. Every three years, Cooperation Circle members elect trustees to serve on the Global Council.

Global Assembly



A Global Assembly is scheduled to occur every three years, in different places around the world. The Global Assembly magnifies the capacities of its members to carry forward their dreams and initiatives. It aligns people's strengths and offers a forum for speaking as a collective voice. Cooperation Circle members are invited to participate in the Global Assembly.

URI Worldwide Community

Cooperation Circles join with Affiliates, Supporting Members, Global Council and staff to form the URI worldwide community.

Affiliates and Supporting Members

URI Affiliates and Supporting Members are individuals, groups or organizations who support the values expressed in the URI's Preamble, Purpose and Principles and desire to be included in URI communication and activities, but do not desire the rights and responsibilities of belonging to a Cooperation Circle.

These members receive the URI newsletter, e-update and invitations to URI local, regional, and global gatherings, and may participate in an online community to share ideas and possible collective actions.

Global Council

The Global Council serves as the Board of Directors for the URI. The purpose of the Global Council (GC) is to support the membership in practicing the vision and values of the Preamble, Purpose and Principles. The Global Council's central spirit is not one of control, but rather one of service. The GC inspires and supports the URI worldwide community in cooperative global action. Their actions reflect a yearning to help people of the URI fulfill their aspirations to be a positive force for peace, justice, and healing in the world.

Creating Cooperation Circles

Inspired by the vision and hope of interfaith cooperation for a better world, people on five continents are creating Cooperation Circles. A Cooperation Circle is formed by people who come together to initiate acts of interfaith cooperation. Cooperation Circles serve a myriad of purposes, including: to share stories and perspectives from different faith traditions; to foster local peacebuilding; to offer humanitarian relief; to organize an interfaith music festival; to offer hospice counseling; to develop educational programs; to create opportunities for intercultural encounter and interfaith reflection.

- **Imagine** a growing global community of Cooperation Circles. Then join with others and imagine yourself as a part of that community.
- **Imagine** how a URI Cooperation Circle could take root where you live to address a particular community need or interest.
- **Discuss** how such a group could develop from the passion, determination, creativity and resourcefulness of the people in the group.
- **Explore** why an existing group to which you already belong might desire to engage as a URI Cooperation Circle as part of its work.
- **Discuss** the benefits of sharing in a relationship with similar groups around the world.
- **Imagine** what your CC could do to serve the worldwide community.

Existing Groups and Organizations

An existing group may choose to become a Cooperation Circle. For example, existing interfaith organizations join the URI as Cooperation Circles because they desire to be part of a global interfaith network for collective action.



Some faith communities may also choose to form an interfaith group and participate in the URI. Forming a Cooperation Circle is an opportunity to reach out to others and connect with like-minded groups and organizations around the world who are dedicated to positive change through cooperation.



4. Choose the decision-making processes that will be used
Cooperation Circles have a right to self-organize. Their deliberations and decisions must be made by methods that fairly represent the diversity of affected interests and are not dominated by any.

- Discuss the ways your group would like decisions to be made. What processes will your CC use to make decisions?

5. Discuss rights and responsibilities of members

The rights and responsibilities of members are listed in the Charter. They are the agreements that unite the members of the URI together in one shared community.

- Share any questions or needs for clarification your group have about the rights and responsibilities of membership.

6. Give a gift to the URI

Cooperation Circles have the responsibility to develop financial and other resources to help meet their needs and help meet the needs of other parts of the URI. In order to help support the worldwide URI community, Cooperation Circles are asked to offer a financial gift or make a contribution of service that reflects their own desire to care for the URI and all its members.

- Discuss what kind of gift or contribution of service your CC would like to offer to serve the URI community.

7. Apply for Membership

Groups interested and forming a CC should apply to the URI Global Council for membership. Application forms to become a Cooperation Circle member are available from the URI office or website, www.uri.org.

Guidelines for Creating CCs

1. Meet the eligibility requirements

- Cooperation Circles have a minimum of seven members.
- Cooperation Circles welcome and honor diversity. CCs include people from at least three different religions, spiritual expressions, or indigenous traditions.
- Individuals, associations and organizations can join a Cooperation Circle.

2. Decide the name and purpose of your Cooperation Circle

Understanding that all Cooperation Circles share the URI's Purpose, CCs are encouraged to create a more focused statement that reflects their unique sense of purpose.

- What purpose expresses the primary reason your group is gathering?

3. Decide who will participate in the CC

The URI welcomes diversity and includes voices that are not often heard.

- What diversity will your CC reflect? How many people will participate? Will you invite organizations to participate as well as individuals?



Suggested Steps to Get Started

1. Gather People Together

Who would you invite? You might begin with people you already know. Then you might extend your invitation to include people from different religions, spiritual expressions or indigenous traditions.

If you think that a group or organization to which you belong, might benefit from becoming or creating a Cooperation Circle, plan a time to introduce the URI. Ask your group or organization to consider how the URI might benefit from its work and what the group/organization might bring to the URI community. A new video/DVD that introduces the URI is available.



2. Appreciate One Another's Abilities and Values

Begin by getting to know one another. An appreciative interview is one way for people to bring their hopes, values, experiences and talents to the circle.

You might begin the initial gathering with reflection, meditation or prayer and invite people to participate in appreciative interviews (example is on next page).

Suggested Steps to Get Started

Appreciative Interview

Ask people to form pairs. Invite each pair to engage in an appreciative dialogue, asking questions such as the following:

1. Insights from important interfaith encounters:

As the world gets smaller, most of us experience more and more encounters with people from other spiritual traditions or religions. Can you share a story of an interfaith encounter that was especially memorable or meaningful, where you were surprised or humbled, where there was a genuine experience of respect and friendship?

2. Experience with cooperative action:

We have all been part of efforts where we have joined with others and brought dreams of a better world into being. Reflect on a high point in your life experience – a time when you were involved in something significant or meaningful, when visions of a better world were actually brought into being. Please share a story about how this experience unfolded.

3. Vision of a better world:

Cast your thoughts about thirty years into the future. Even though the future is in many ways a mystery, begin to visualize the kind of world you feel you are being called to realize, a better world, a world you really want. What do you see in your vision of a better world?

4. Interfaith cooperation:

Imagine ways that interfaith cooperation can help create a better world. What might happen in your local community when people of different faith traditions work together? Imagine how your work, linked to a global network, might serve as a force for good in the world. What would you do to make this vision come alive through action?

Suggested Steps to Get Started

3. Reflect on the Preamble, Purpose and Principles

The URI is made up of people from many parts of the world who find meaning and common purpose in the values that are embodied in the URI Charter. Here are some suggestions for introducing people to the Preamble, Purpose and Principles of this founding document.



As a group, read the Preamble, Purpose and Principles aloud. You might read the Preamble and Purpose in unison; then go around the room with a different person reading each Principle.

Reflect upon what is inspiring, significant, or challenging. When in your life have you been part of something that reflected the values expressed in these words? How might your group or organization embody these Principles, in pursuit of the Purpose?