



International
Council of
Unitarians and
Universalists

President's Report to the Council August, 2009

Rev. Brian J. Kiely

To begin on a personal note, this has been two of the most remarkable years in my life. The work of the ICUU has taken me places I had never hoped to visit and taught me more about the workings of the world and our faith than I ever would have imagined. Most importantly I have discovered that Unitarianism and Universalism in all their variations is not a single faith, but rather a collection of local expressions of passion for religious freedom, the celebration of the human spirit and devotion to God and/or the highest principles of living. Probably the best part of Council Meetings is the opportunity for each of you to experience this 'international chemistry' first hand, to meet people with different understandings of our liberal religion, with different beliefs. I know it is something to which I am again eagerly anticipating.

It has been a two year gift for me to experience some of these global expressions and an honour to serve the ICUU. As we enter these meetings I look forward with excitement to two more years as President.

I would also like to thank my colleagues on the Executive for their tremendous hard work and support and especially our retiring Executive Secretary John Clifford. In addition to all his other duties, he willingly gave a considerable amount of time over to the education and hand holding of a President with a great deal to learn.

The State of the ICUU

The ICUU stands at the edge of a new era. At the age of 15 we are rather like a teenager preparing to take on the responsibilities of adulthood and excited by the prospect. But like that teenager, we may not yet have all the resources and developed skills needed to assume that role, but we do have three important things: a draft Strategic Plan, a new model for Staffing and a great deal of enthusiasm.

If the ICUU is to successfully complete this transition to the next phase of its operations, we will need the goodwill and support of our national and strategic partners. The ICUU thrives only when it is a living network of cooperation and collaboration between members in service to our shared goals. The ICUU alone is almost meaningless. It only makes sense when it stands in partnership with these groups, working together to realize our shared goals, shared hopes, and shared commitments.

If you sense a message to each of you personally, then you are right. Many delegates, especially first-timers, come and experience an interesting gathering, and that's wonderful. But when the

week is over, each of you will return home with a responsibility for these international partnerships. The fact that you have made the effort to travel here, and to take part in the learning, planning, deciding and community building that is a Council Meeting presents you with the opportunity to become an ambassador for international U-Uism. In a real sense YOU are the ICUU. For the ICUU to be successful we need you to speak of your experience and to advocate for international concerns where you can, locally, nationally or on bodies that you may represent.

For that reason alone, it is especially gratifying to know this 2009 Council Meeting will see the presence of newly installed national leaders from the U.S., Transylvania, Canada, India and the Philippines. Let us all learn from one another this week. Let us worship together this week. Let us each expand our horizons and deepen our understanding this week. And then let us take this experience home to influence our actions in the months and years to come.

The ICUU is on the edge of adulthood with new resources and renewed – and achievable – plans. Let us work together – as individuals and as national groups - now and over the next two years to make them a reality.

Accomplishments/Activities

Executive Secretary and Program Co-Ordinator

Knowing that John Clifford was retiring made the search for a new Executive Secretary a priority for the Executive this year. The Search Committee was led by Pauline Rooney supported by Jaume De Marcos and Brian Kiely.

The fact that there were 19 applications from around the globe all deserving serious consideration demonstrated that the ICUU is indeed coming of age.

In the end two candidates stood out, each with the strengths and skills to do the job very well, but different enough to each bring something unique to the role. In the end the Executive decided – with the full co-operation of the two candidates - that this presented us with a remarkable opportunity in a time of transition. So both were hired!

Rev. Steve Dick as Executive Secretary, brings tremendous organizational wisdom and technical skill to the job. Rev. Jill McAllister in the new role of Program Co-ordinator brings extensive experience of envisioning, developing and leading ICUU programs and development since she helped found the organization 15 years ago.

Together they will become the professional face of the ICUU, and we couldn't be in better hands.

Finance

In the past two years, the ICUU has made significant strides towards streamlining and consolidating the handling of multiple currencies and accounts in several countries. The result has been a substantial improvement in our ability to track our income and expenditures and an equal improvement in our ability to develop and manage a realistic and detailed budget. Our Treasurer David Shaw (ably assisted by Bookkeeper Liz Shaw) have put in countless hours getting us on track and organized.

Strategic Plan

Another major Executive priority over the last year has been the development of the draft Strategic Plan now in your hands. It represents the best thinking of the elected leaders, but it is meaningless unless the delegates and the members of the ICUU support both the overall vision and the more detailed plans. For that reason your discussion and decision-making about the plan is a major focus of our work this week.

The draft plan is a departure from past practice. Two years ago there was an attempt to create a whole plan during the Council Meeting that met with limited success. The Executive decided to try doing some advance work this time and give delegates and attendees something solid to consider. The Executive is excited by what we produced, but there is NO intention to hand this to the delegates simply to rubber stamp. In the spirit of partnership, we need your ideas, and input and your help to make it come to life.

New Look

This year the ICUU adopted a new look, both in the design of our logo and our website. 2007 Council Meeting attendees may recall that under the copyright laws of the Czech Republic, we were only able to afford to lease the rights of our old image. The lease period was expiring. We felt that the artist was demanding far too high a price for renewal. For a fraction of this cost, an Australian firm was able to produce the beautiful new green globe image we started using this Spring. Thanks to Pauline Rooney for finding the firm and leading the design process.

For the last several years the ICUU has depended on Polly Guild as our volunteer web site coordinator, but Polly indicated that it was time to pass on the responsibility. She welcomed the idea of a complete redesign of the icuu.net web site. The new site was launched late in 2008 with more features, resources and images. It is still a work in process.

The two-fold goal is to make U-Uism accessible to those searching for information about our faith globally, and also to provide a site where national groups and delegates can easily find whatever ICUU documents and resources they need. For the first time, most of the documents for this meeting have been posted to the web in advance, and we are experimenting with video feeds of certain conference events. These will be available through links to YouTube.

We have steadily improved the timeliness of the website, but there is more to be done. With the help of the new staff team we expect to add video clips, more resource pages and other elements like social justice news and initiatives.

Programs

African Leadership Conference

The February, 2008 African Leadership Conference was the major program event of the last two years. Over 30 participants from six African countries worked with faculty from three continents to deepen their understanding of our faith and develop new skills and resources. With the exception of Nigeria and South Africa, U-Uism is quite new to Africa. It is exciting to see the passion with which our new co-religionists are embracing and growing the faith, and stepping up

to participate at an international level. I am pleased that we have again been able to sponsor several representatives from these groups and have them at these meetings.

Leadership training in Asia is in the planning stages for 2010-2011.

International Ministers Conference and Theological Symposium

In 2006 the ICUU hosted its second theological symposium here in Koloszvár. From July 9-17, 2010 the third symposium will be held in near Eindhoven in the Netherlands. The theme will be “Belonging” and we will focus on the essential relations of our lives – to self, others and Life itself. The symposium will be preceded by the first-ever gathering of U-U ministers from member groups to focus solely on ministry and our international collegial relations.

Ministerial Education Task Force

With so many expressions of our faith around the world, and so many differences in the ability to access theological training, it has become clear that the ICUU has a role in facilitating access to ministerial education and training opportunities. This year, thanks to the leadership of Jill McAllister, and funding from the International Fund of the UU Funding Panel in the United States, we have begun to take the first steps. The Task Force will have significant program time this meeting, so more need not be said here other than this is an exciting step forward for us all.

Programs for Youth and Young Adults

In January, 2006 the ICUU sponsored a spiritual development program in the Khasi Hills of India and many of the participants were young adults. Emerging priorities have prevented ICUU from launching programs specially targeted at youth and young adults since the last Council Meeting. Serving youth and young adults remains a goal of the ICUU, and the EC welcomes suggestions for programs in this area and offers of funding toward youth program-related costs.

Membership Policy and UUA MoU

The Executive Committee is taking steps to refine and define our policies on various categories of affiliation with the ICUU. We also worked with the largest group, the UUA, to develop a Memorandum of Understanding outlining the responsibilities and expectations of that body and the ICUU. We anticipate that this will form a template for starting similar discussions with other national groups over the next two year cycle. Although this may seem a dull administrative detail, it is a significant step in the maturation of the ICUU.

Applications for various kinds of member status before the meeting

We're growing! The ICUU is being noticed! More and more people are looking seriously at our religion and wondering if it could find a place in their land. We continue to receive many enquiries from new countries and places where our religion has never had a presence before.

Conclusion

The last two years have been at one and the same time, a period of developing greater stability and grounding in finance, policy and planning and still a time of explosive growth in capability, credibility and partnership. There are exciting possibilities ahead for the ICUU. The challenge will be to turn those possibilities into real accomplishments.

