



PRAIRIE FIRE

"As the prairie stretches out until it becomes one with the sky, let us reach out to touch and be one with the natural world and with one another." (Bond of Union)

February 24, 2006

Prairie Fire is the semi-monthly newsletter of Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society. The two most recent issues may be seen at www.prairie.madison.uua.org

President: Mike Briggs, (608) 835-0914 Consulting Minister: Rev. Jody Whelden, minister@uuprairie.org; (608) 231-9707 Editor: Dan Proud, prairieu@execpc.com; (608) 661-0776

PRAIRIE CALENDAR

Sunday, February 26

- 9:00 Choir rehearsal
- *10:00 a.m. "The History of a Black Family," facilitated by Pat Watkins
- *10:00 a.m. Mystery Friends letter #3 due
- *11:30 a.m. K-2 and 3-5 classes family-teacher OWL orientation
- *11:30 a.m. Natural Step class kickoff

Tuesday, February 28

- 5:00 a.m. Men's Drop-in Shelter Breakfast volunteers at Grace Episcopal Church
- *2:00 p.m. Prairie Elders meet at Oakwood West
- *7:00 p.m. Membership Committee meets at Prairie

Wednesday, March 1

- 6:00 p.m. Meditation Group at Prairie
- 6:30 p.m. Midweek Meal @ Prairie

Thursday, March 2

- 6:00 p.m. WOW potluck at Prairie

Sunday, March 5

- 9:00 Choir rehearsal
- *10:00 a.m. Buddhism: Touching the Earth," presented by Lisa Glueck
- *11:30 a.m. Mystery Friends letter #4 and party
- *11:45 a.m. Book Club meets at Prairie

Wednesday, March 8

- 6:30 p.m. Midweek Meal @ Prairie
- 7:00 p.m. Program Committee meeting at Prairie

NEXT PRAIRIE FIRE DEADLINE: SUNDAY, MARCH 5

Sunday, March 12

- *10:00 a.m. "Spirituality and Health in Uganda," presented by Dr. Cindy Haq
- *10:00 a.m. OWL starts for K-2 and 3-5 classes

Tuesday, March 14

- *7:00 p.m. "Natural Step" class begins

Thursday, March 16

- 6:30 p.m. Spanish Speakers potluck at Prairie

Sunday, March 26

- *11:45 a.m. Annual Service Auction

Friday-Sunday, April 21-23

- *Central Midwest District Assembly 2006 at the Madison Concourse Hotel

Sunday, April 23

- *11:45 a.m. Annual Meeting at Prairie

Wednesday-Sunday, June 21-25

- UUA General Assembly, St. Louis, Mo.

(* = Details follow in this issue.)

DETAILS OF COMING PROGRAMS

Sunday, February 26

It's Black History month, so this program will feature a dose of that history in music, readings, and slides of photos dating from the last quarter of the nineteenth century, facilitated by Pat Watkins and illustrating the history of six generations of a Black family. This program was done at Prairie about 15 years ago and is being repeated by request.

Sunday, March 5

This is the third session of Rachel Long's 6-session lay ministry with Rebecca Malke-Eligenti, "World Religions - Know Your Neighbor." Our guest speaker for will be Lisa Glueck. In her talk, "Buddhism: Touching the Earth," she will describe how Buddhism in her words "saves me every day from the wild excesses of monkey mind." She will share some of the insights of her kind, wise, and generous teachers. Hopefully, there will also be time for a brief sitting and walking meditation.

Lisa is a former Prairie member who is known and much admired by many of us already. She has been studying and practicing Buddhism for 33 years. S. N. Goenka, a Buddhist master in the Thai Forest Tradition, introduced her to the practice while she was traveling in India. Since then, she has studied with teachers from the Zen, Tibetan and Vipassana traditions. Currently, she is involved with a Buddhist group in Madison practicing in the tradition of Thich Nhat Hanh, a Vietnamese Zen master.

Sunday, March 12

We know Prairie member Cindy Haq as a very gracious and caring woman who has often taken her skills as a doctor to needy people in third world countries. She has also served on United Nations advisory boards related to world health. Several times, upon her return, she has honored us with services that open a window to worlds very different from our own. During her presentation, "Spirituality and Health in Uganda", Cindy will reflect on her recent experiences in Uganda.

In a conversation some weeks ago, Cindy noted that although life as a doctor—and just as a person—in Uganda could be quite frustrating, she found that in some ways Ugandans, and she herself, lived a far more spiritually satisfying life than we do here in the United States. Often things don't work as expected there, or at least not how we Americans expect things to work. Yet, there are some surprising rewards that issue from this chronic situation. Besides telling us about her work in that landlocked country in central Africa between the Congo and Kenya, Cindy will share her insights about spirituality and health and her own attempts to retain the practices she found so helpful to her own life while she was there.

Cynthia Haq is a Professor of Family Medicine and Population Health Sciences, Chair of the International Health Advisory Committee, and Director of International Health for the UW Medical School. She has focused her career on improving primary health care, especially for medically underserved populations. She has trained village health workers in Uganda, established family medicine training in Pakistan, served as a consultant to the World Health Organization, and worked to improve medical education in the U.S., Afghanistan, Brazil, China and Iran.

To read more about Cindy and her work, go to <http://www.wisc.edu/> and do a search on her name. You'll get different references when you click the "UW" and the "People" buttons.

OUR SOCIETY

PRAIRIE ELDERS MEETS FEBRUARY 28

Prairie Elders meets **Tuesday, February 28**, 2:00 p.m., in the Second Floor Activity Room, Oaks Building, Oakwood Village West. Topic: Favorite Aphorisms. Facilitator: Warren Hagstrom. Gatherings officially end at 3:30 p.m. with conversation often continuing until 4:00. Bring a small handful of snacks, if convenient.

At January's meeting eighteen of us shared heartwarming stories of treasured friends who changed our lives. We welcome Prairie newcomers who wish to join our sixty-five-plus bunch for mutual support and good times. Other UUs at Oakwood West are also invited. Contact Donna Murdoch, Rosemary Dorney or Doleta Chapru for further information.

PRAIRIE WEB SITES

Society Home Page: prairie.madison.uua.org
News Group: groups.yahoo.com/group/prairienews/
Views Group: groups.yahoo.com/group/prairieviews/
Social Action: socialaction.madisonwi.us
Humanist Union: <http://humanist.madisonwi.us>
Long Range Planning: www.execpc.com/~prairieu/

WHAT IS THE COMMITTEE ON MINISTRY?

The newly-formed Committee on Ministry was established to support the overall ministry and mission of Prairie and be a support to our Consulting Minister. The role of the committee is evolving, in cooperation with our Consulting Minister, the Rev. Jody Whelden.

Some of the evolving roles of our Committee on Ministry, which we are developing using sources from other UUA congregations, include:

- Promote awareness and higher levels of commitment to the congregation's mission and ministry to one another;
- Make itself available to all members and friends of the congregation;
- Continually monitor congregational life and coordinate periodic evaluations to assess the effectiveness of all facets of the congregation's ministry;
- Make all recommendations in a positive way, focusing on potential rather than problems;
- Work to educate the congregation about ministry and clarify the roles of minister and members alike;
- Consult with and support the professional minister, support the planning for professional development, and submit an annual recommendation to the Board;
- Provide a safe, confidential climate in which to bring up concerns regarding the ministry of the congregation.
- One description of the Committees on Ministry suggests they are "designed to track the heartbeat of ministry within a congregation: how the members of a congregation take care of themselves and each other; how the lay ministerial leadership serves a congregation; and how the called minister serves the congregation." (Anne Heller)

We welcome you to talk with any member of the committee about specific concerns or feedback that might help improve the ministry of the congregation. Issues brought to the Committee on Ministry will be dealt with confidentially. The committee meets monthly with Jody to review how things at Prairie

are going in general, share feedback or concerns, and provide support to the Consulting Minister in her work with Prairie. The committee is here to serve the congregation.

The members of the Committee on Ministry, appointed by the Board with the cooperation of the minister, are Orange Schroeder, Andy Swartz, and Aileen Nettleton. The members are appointed to three-year, rotating terms.

CONGREGATIONAL SURVEY ON MINISTRY

We want your feedback. How is Prairie doing in working toward our mission as a religious community? How are we doing in our ministry to one another in the congregation? We are midway through our first year with a professional Consulting Minister. Prairie members took the big step of asking a minister to spend a year with us to explore what we could achieve through this collaboration.

How do you feel our Consulting Minister, Rev. Jody Whelden, has served the congregation? How do you feel about continuing to have a Consulting Minister serve our congregation?

All active Prairie members and friends are being asked to complete an Evaluation of Ministry survey, which you received Sunday or will receive in the mail. The Committee on Ministry needs your feedback to help "assess the effectiveness of all facets of the congregation's ministry." The Board will review the feedback from the surveys to evaluate our ministry as a whole and report it to the Board and congregation. The feedback will also be one part of the evaluation of the Rev. Jody Whelden.

Please take a few minutes to reflect on the evaluation questions and return your survey promptly. We appreciate your thoughtful consideration about the health and direction of our Society. Please contact one of the Committee on Ministry members, Orange Schroeder, 256-8813, Andy Swartz, 243-1923, or Aileen Nettleton, 238-6053 if you have questions.

ANNUAL MEETING SET FOR APRIL 23

Please plan to attend the annual parish meeting at Prairie on **Sunday, April 23**. Details and agenda for the meeting will appear in a future issue of this newsletter.

SERVICE AUCTION NEEDS DONATIONS

Mark your calendar for **March 26** for this year's service auction. The service auction is an important fundraiser for our church. Please begin thinking about service auction donations you can make this year. Send ideas to KK Anderson at AndersonKK (at) yahoo.com. Thanks!

MONEY FOR EARPHONES STILL NEEDED

The fundraising project for four pairs of earphones for the hearing impaired so they can hear our Sunday services has stalled for the moment. If you planned to contribute to this worthy project, please send your check to Dirk Herr-Hoyman at the Prairie address.

WHAT CAN THE NATURAL STEP DO FOR YOUR CHURCH?

I will be leading a 9-week adult RE class for Sustain Dane in the Natural Step at Prairie starting on **March 14**. The Natural Step was used by eco-municipalities in Sweden to achieve amazing results in only 5-10 years toward reducing their CO2 emissions, becoming more energy efficient, reducing their solid waste, and improving their air and water quality.

In 12 years Sweden reduced the amount of oil burned by their district heating systems from 85% to 23%. The Eskilstuna CHP Biomass plant (producing electricity and heat) is 90% efficient in contrast to conventional power plants at 35%. If truckers (and maybe conventional drivers) practice eco-driving, they can reduce their emissions by 20-30%, using the same conventional trucks.

Are you excited by this? Let's think about what we can do in our new church or a remodeled one (in the case of First) as we learn about the Swedish accomplishments. I am very excited to share this information with you.

The class will cost \$30 (\$25 covers the cost of the book). The books are available through the library, and I will look into other ways to obtain them.

Application deadline is March 4, so I can be sure to have enough books.

Please let me know if you are interested in the class.

Judy Skog, 273-4813

THE VIEW FROM MY BRANCH

The Rev. Jody Whelden's column will resume in the next issue of this newsletter.



BOOK CLUB TO MEET ON MARCH 5

The Prairie Book Club is open to all on a drop-in basis. Books are available at a 20% discount at Borders. Just mention that the book is a Prairie Book Club selection. The club meets next on **Sunday, March 5**, after the Prairie service, about 11:45 a.m. Bring food to share.

Behind the Scenes at the Museum by Kate Atkinson is a family story that the author claims is almost impossible to describe because of its complex structure. She does say that this first novel "is the story of Ruby Lennox from birth to the age of 40, her family, and the secrets hidden in the family's story." It also contains flashbacks to other members of the family—in the past—and so builds up a story/family tree that spans four generations. It's about history, time, loss, coincidence, self-knowledge.

Atkinson's favorite authors are "Anne Tyler, Jane Austen, Kurt Vonnegut, Alice Hoffman, Margaret Atwood, Henry James, Donald Barthelme, Robert Coover, F. Scott Fitzgerald. Most influential--Jane Austen and Kurt Vonnegut." (333 pages)

An interesting review can be found at the first URL, with discussion questions at the second:

www.geocities.com/kateatkinson14/contemp.htm

www.readinggroupguides.com/guides/behind_the_scenes_at_the_museum.asp#discuss

DO GOOD, FEEL GOOD, LIVE LONGER

If you'd like to give yourself the chance of experiencing Helper's High through volunteering at the Men's Shelter in the next few months, or through helping with the Interfaith Hospitality Network, please contact Paula Pachciarz at 273-4806 or pachwack (at) sbcglobal.net.

CALL FOR DELEGATES: CENTRAL MIDWEST DISTRICT AND GA

The Denominational Affairs Committee is looking for people to serve as Prairie UU Society delegates at the Central Midwest District (CMwD) Assembly, **April 21-23**, in Madison and at the General Assembly (GA), **June 21-25**, in St. Louis, Mo. Delegates must attend and vote at the District Business Meeting and/or the GA plenary sessions, attend workshops, and report back to the Congregation.

Please contact Nancy Schraufnagel, 273-3195 or schraufnancye (at) hotmail.com, or Larry Nahlik, 274-6870 or lnahlik (at) facstaff.wisc.edu, by **Sunday, March 8**. Thank you.

COMMENTS REQUESTED FOR UUA STUDY ACTION ISSUES

The UUA requests congregations to provide comments on the current Study Action Issues: "Threat of Global Warming" (Statement of Conscience draft) and "Moral Values for a Pluralistic Society." What do you think of the content, wording, and feasibility of the issues? What activities has Prairie done or will do?

Information is available at www.uua/csw and at Prairie on February 26. Please respond to Nancy Schraufnagel, Denominational Affairs, schraufnancye (at) hotmail.com or 608 273-3195.

HUMANIST UNION LOOKS AHEAD TO MARCH MEETING

The Humanist Union has Sunday meetings monthly at Prairie, with a light potluck lunch at noon followed by a presentation and discussion from about 12:20 to 1:30 p.m.

The next program is **Sunday, March 19**. We will review the writing of Mark Twain on topics of interest to humanists. The discussion will be led by Marcia Johnson and Al Nettleton.

SHARE YOUR PASSIONS!

It's the New Year, and even though summer seems far away, the Program Committee is thinking ahead to June, July, and August. The Committee cordially invites every single one of you to offer us your ideas

for stimulating summer services. You could simply suggest topics or, better yet, consider presenting a program.

If you have a passion about something, a concern, a hobby, or something that relates to our principles and UUism, we would like to hear from you. Please let Mary Mullen (mmullen (at) chorus.net or 298-0843) or Susan Herr-Hoyman (250-0559 or herrs (at) danenet.org) know of your interest. By the way, the Program Committee provides considerable assistance if you should want to do a service on your topic of interest.

Susan Herr-Hoyman

GUEST AT YOUR TABLE BOXES ARE DUE

The Guest at Your Table campaign is coming to an end. Please return your boxes or checks to Prairie this month. Checks should be payable to "UUSC." If you return a box, please complete the form on the bottom of the box.

Contributions of \$75 or more will be matched by the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock in Manhasset, N.Y.

Thank you for supporting the work of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC), which is changing the world through these actions:

- Strengthening workers' rights
- Protecting the right to safe, affordable water
- Defending civil liberties and democratic processes
- Preserving the rights of vulnerable people after disasters

Dan Proud

HOUSEMATE NEEDED

Fully furnished (right down to the linens!) 1-2 rooms available to rent in a member's home near Prairie. Includes many amenities... all utilities, cable TV and Internet in room, semi-private bath, kitchen privileges, and more.

One room for \$500/month or 2 for \$800. Will also consider 2 people for a total of \$1000/month. Share with one adult and 2 cats. Photo and more info at <http://madison.craigslist.org/roo/124099132.html>. For more information, call Dorothy at 271-7532.

MEMBERSHIP

MEMBERSHIP COMMITTEE MEETING

On **Tuesday, February 28**, at 7:00 p.m. at Prairie, the Membership Committee will meet with our consulting minister, the Rev. Jody Whelden, to discuss the status of membership activities, to review committee protocol, and to establish the beginning of a strategic plan for the committee. Anyone is welcome.

A BABY JOINS OUR COMMUNITY

Kim Truog would like to share the news of the most recent really new person to join the Prairie community. She brought Samantha Annette Truog into the world at Meriter Hospital at 9:30 p.m. on November 4, 2005. Samantha weighed 7 lb. 6 oz. and was 19 1/2 inches long. Mom and daughter are doing great. Congratulations, Kim!

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

OUR WHOLE LIVES, CHILDREN'S RE CLASSES

In three of our classes, teachers and students are using the Our Whole Lives (OWL) curriculum to learn and think about our bodies, relationships and love. With help from Nobis and Rev. Jody, we talked about love and families in two February services upstairs and now the classes for high school, kindergarten to third grade, and fourth to sixth grade are deepening their understanding.

Of course, several of the kids might already know everything they need about sex, babies, and touching. However, we hope the kids and families will make a commitment to attend all the classes—maybe just to help the others learn. These are challenging topics and the teachers and RE Committee will do anything to help families in the classes, kids who wish they were (or weren't) in the classes, and members and guests who want to find out more.

Maybe we should offer the adult OWL when the current adult RE class finishes!

Bob Radford

THANKS FOR OUR CHOICES

A wonderful card came from Susan Corrado of the Allied Drive Wellness Center thanking the Prairie UU Youth for the cloth bags our team made at the Winter Service Sunday. They will be used for their Welcome Program. Along with cookies and building improvements at the church, these bags were our way to make the world a better place. Way to go!

I've been thinking about jobs, both paid and volunteer, recently. I applied to join a Habitat for Humanity team for a week this summer—I am very excited and hope I get to go. Sometimes, we have to think about choices far in advance. For example, now is the time to find a summer job! Other times, it seems like we understand the choices we've made only by seeing the results of them later.

We got an announcement that the District YRUU Spring CON, this March, is online with information and registration. If you want to find out about youth CONferences and can think about attending, as a youth or adult, now is the time to ask. Check the CMwD Web site and contact the Youth Council to take the next step. The RE Committee continues to meet frequently as we discuss some big questions. Your concerns and ideas are critical to the success of the Children's Program. Is there an activity or lesson you can share with the Prairie kids—maybe by facilitating the as-yet-unscheduled Spring Fling event?

Thank you. See you in church.

Bob Radford, Director of Religious Education

WHAT IS MYSTERY FRIENDS?

It's a chance for kids and adults to get to know each other by sending letters to each other weekly for a month. We have twenty-four people participating this year. The mystery is that they don't know whom they are getting letters from AND whom they are sending letters to! The letters give clues and ask questions. Look on the photo wall for pictures of the mystery people...and a few ringers!

On the day of the fourth letter, **Sunday, March 5**, we party at 11:30 and friends guess each other. We need participants to bring food and games to the party! Other members are invited to join us and help have fun.

DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION STEPPING DOWN

Bob Radford, who has served Prairie as our DRE since August of last year, will be leaving that position as of March 11, 2006. Bob and the RE Committee arrived at this decision together. We would very much like to thank Bob for all the time, effort and spirit he has put into Prairie's RE program, and the great work he has done for the Committee and for our kids.

The RE committee is beginning the search for someone to fill the position. We are reviewing the title and job description, and we will give you more detail about it in the next Prairie Fire. Questions about the decision making process can be brought to President Mike Briggs. Feel free to speak with Bob Radford about this decision as well.

Rachel Long, Chair, RE Committee

UNITARIAN-UNIVERSALIST NEWS

SAVE THIS DATE FOR THE DISTRICT ASSEMBLY: APRIL 21-23

Mark your calendar for **April 21-23** for the District Assembly 2006 at the Madison Concourse Hotel. The keynote speaker will be Rabbi Michael Lerner. Rabbi Lerner founded the Tikkun Community, an international interfaith organization dedicated to peace, justice, non-violence, generosity, caring, love, and compassion.

AFFLUENZA TALK AT FUS

Friday, February 24, 7 p.m., at First Unitarian Society (900 University Bay Ave.), Sustain Dane presents Affluenza: The All Consuming Epidemic—a talk with John de Graaf, co-producer of the critically acclaimed "Affluenza" film that explores the high social and environmental costs of materialism and overconsumption. De Graaf recently co-authored a book with the above title.

For information, call 819-0689 or visit www.sustaindane.org.

WUURLD'S 2006 WHALECOAST ALASKA

One UU eco-cultural summer program in Alaska co-sponsored by five UU Fellowships has sold out, but many spaces in the other two are open, so we are offering a \$100 discount to people sending in reservations postmarked between Feb. 20 and Mar. 20. Five Alaskan UU fellowships are offering a \$100 discount for reservations postmarked between February 20 and March 20 for Summer 2006 UU eco-cultural programs. Limited space left.

Programs include UU homestays and parties in Anchorage, Seward, Fairbanks, Juneau and Sitka, visits with with Tlingit, Inupiat and other Native Alaskans as well as wildlife tours to see whales, sea otters, sea lions, bears, moose, caribou, wolves, puffins and eagles and visit National Parks. Rev. Dick & Mary Weston-Jones, leaders.

Details at www.wuurld.org, E-mail dick (at) wuurld.org, or phone 1-888, 998-8753 toll-free for a brochure.

OTHER NEWS

OUR HAPIST PLANS TO PLAY IN BENEFIT CONCERT

Orange Schroeder will be playing in a benefit concert to raise relief aid. The Madison Satellite of The World Harp Orchestra will perform "The Emerald Harp," a benefit concert for Dane County's Access Community Health Centers and National Salvation Army Worldwide Disaster Relief, at Monona Terrace on Thursday, St. Patrick's Eve, **March 16**, 2006, at 7:30 p.m.

Tickets are \$15. Donation and/or optional additional donation to either one or both [separately] beneficiaries, are welcome. Tickets/info at: (608) 255-4615 and www.harpsinger.com/MadSat.html.

BUDDHIST COUNCIL OF THE MIDWEST: WOMEN LIVING THE DHARMA CONFERENCE

The Women Living the Dharma Conference will be held **March 11** in the De Paul University Student Center, 2250 N. Sheffield, Chicago.

The Buddhist Women's Conference, the first of its kind in the Midwest, offers an opportunity for

Buddhist women of all traditions, both lay and ordained, to look at their lives as women in the context of the Dharma, share their experiences and cultures, and further deepen their spiritual lives. Anyone who is interested in learning more about women and Buddhism is welcome to attend.

Rita Gross, Ph.D., author of *Buddhism after Patriarchy: A Feminist History*, and Professor Emeritus of Religion at the University of Wisconsin Eau Claire, will deliver the keynote speech. In addition, three fully ordained women from the different Buddhist traditions will join together in a special plenary session to discuss Buddhist women and spiritual practice in the 21st century.

They are Venerable Sudhamma Bhikkhuni (Theravada), Abbess of the Carolina Buddhist Vihara, Greenville, SC, Reverend Kyoki Roberts (Mahayana) of the Zen Center of Pittsburgh and the Board of Soto Zen, and Khenmo Nyima Drolma (Vajrayana), Abbess of the Vajra Dakini Nunnery, Bristol, Vt.

Buddhist authors, nuns, priests, and lay practitioners will offer workshops and discussion groups.

Questions? E-mail: [info \(at\) dharmawomen.org](mailto:info@dharmawomen.org) or see our Web site: <http://www.dharmawomen.org/>

Marianne Solome, Vice-President, Buddhist Council of the Midwest and Buddhist Women's Conference Chair

NCC ADVOCATES DIALOGUE OF CIVILIZATIONS

As the worldwide ecumenical community gathers for the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in Porto Alegre, Brazil, under the theme "God in Your Grace, Transform the World," the National Council of Churches USA joins in that same prayer, particularly as the intractable dispute over cartoons depicting the Prophet Mohammad escalated last week into violent protests in many Islamic countries.

We stand in solidarity with North American Islamic Organizations who have exercised disciplined restraint and advocated diplomacy and education. These organizations include the Islamic Society of North America, Council for American Islamic Relations, Muslim Public Affairs Council, Islamic Circle of North America and the ASMA Society.

We strongly affirm the freedom of the press, but are deeply disturbed by the inability of the press to understand and respect the sensitivities of religious people. In the context of a widespread and growing Islamophobia in both Europe and the United States, the offense is not only an affront to deeply held religious convictions, but an irresponsible case of cultural stereotyping. We applaud the Norwegian press for its courage to offer an apology to the world-wide Muslim community and lift up their example for others to follow.

While we strongly affirm the right of Muslim people to protest, we strenuously condemn the violence that has often accompanied such demonstrations, particularly on Danish embassies and are grieved by the lives that were lost in the violence. We are grateful that the large demonstration in London over the weekend was non-violent.

Many have called this controversy a foreshadowing of a "clash of civilizations." The National Council of Churches USA, representing the mainstream Christian community in the United States, a community that attempts to live out our deeply held values of justice and peace among all peoples, calls instead for a "dialogue of civilizations."

A dialogue of civilizations will bring together not only religious leaders, but political, academic, media and business sectors of society. While acknowledging the deep differences among us, such a dialogue will encourage participants to a common table at which we can educate each other about those parts of our faith and life that are most holy and significant. It will also provide the opportunity for people of different faiths to come together on values that unite us.

We support the Global Dialogue of Civilizations initiated at the Parliament of the World's Religions in 2004 and the recent call by the Philippine government to institutionalize interfaith dialogue at the United Nations. Such initiatives, we believe, will help inculcate new rules of civic behavior respectful of other cultures and religions in the growing pluralism and, indeed, interaction of cultures and religions in most metropolitan areas around the world.

[Editor's Note: Occasionally we reprint news releases from the National Council of Churches that provoke thought on salient issues of the day.]