



The Newsletter of Asian/Pacific Islander Unitarian Universalists and their Allies

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Members and friends of Spiritual Seekers Society in Hong Kong during a march for Universal Suffrage, December 2005. The author is second from left.

UUs Organize in Hong Kong

by Alexander Lok-tin Szeto (Spiritual Seekers Society, Hong Kong)

I was an evangelical Christian when I began to raise questions about my faith and the world around me. Why, for example, my physics and biology classes at high school presented pictures of our Universe which are so different from the pictures in the Bible? My church taught me that the Bible is the Word of God and hence every bit of it must be factual. My conscience could not agree with my church.

One day, I came across Liberal Theology in a book and immediately discovered that I am a liberal. There was, however, no church in Hong Kong for liberals. I have to do my religious exploration alone and the Internet is a heaven for

(see Seekers, 3)

Busting A/PA Media Stereotypes

by Young Kim (UU Church West, Brookfield, WI)



The Media Action Network for Asian Americans (MANAA), a nonprofit organization based in Burbank, CA, was created to advocate for fair, unbiased portrayals of Asian Pacific Americans in all facets of the media. Recently I stumbled upon their “Memo from MANAA to Hollywood: Asian Stereotypes.”

The memo begins with the explanation: “Too often, an Asian face or accent is presented as a shorthand symbol for anything antithetical to American or Western culture ... no distinctions are made between Asian Americans – acculturated US citizens with deep roots in this nation – and Asian nationals who may or may not have any loyalty to the United States. Too often, the media insinuate that Asian Americans do not belong in their own country.”

The memo authors proceed to list the restrictive Asian portrayals that are constantly repeated in the mainstream media – the perpetual foreigner, the model minority, the inherently predatory Asian, clichéd Asian American professions, the “China Doll” syndrome ... it is as complete a list as I have ever seen. (see Media, 6)

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APIUU Artist Paints Minister's Portrait

by Jennifer Ryu

This May, after 22 years as minister of the Mt. Diablo UU Church, Rev. David Sammons retired from active parish ministry.

To commemorate his service, the congregation commissioned a portrait of Rev. Sammons by church member and accomplished artist, Aiko Damrow. The portrait captures the warm-hearted personality of her minister in a colorful and richly textured painting. The deep dimensions of the painting were created by Aiko's own technique of using artist tape and multiple layers of acrylic paint.



Aiko graduated from Tokyo's Joshibi University of Art and Design in the 1970s and moved to the United States in the late 80s. She continues to study and create all types of art. Painting is her hobby, she says, but portrait painting is her passion. She enjoys the process of feeling who the people are, then depicting their character onto the canvas. Her painting is now a part of this church's history and will be treasured for many decades.

Something Different, Something More

by Catie Chi Olson (White Bear UU Church, Minneapolis, MN)

While we always feel welcomed and accepted by the Asian/Pacific Islander Caucus (A/PIC), both co-chairs of MultiRac, Kelli Eng and Catie Chi Olson claim a heritage that is 'mixed'. Kelli is the daughter of Karen Eng and comes by her organizing skills through a strong matrilineal line. Catie's heritage is the result of the Korean 'police action'. Her father tasted the American dream while working with our forces and immigrated to Minnesota.

People of mixed race are often asked "What are you?" We know many answers to that question – they are as varied as all the people who cannot check only one box

on a census form. Not that long ago, "other" was the only option to describe us. MultiRac is young, having formed at the 2005 GA and welcomes all people of mixed identity. We know we belong to the human race, but until everyone knows in their bones that we all belong to each other, MultiRac can help provide community within the UUA.

You can join MultiRac's email list by contacting Catie Chi Olson at catiechi@ix.netcom.com or send an email to MultiRacUU-subscribe@yahoo.com.

MultiRAC Programs at General Assembly

- ◆ Luncheon on Thursday 12 - 1PM (location TBA)
- ◆ #2060 Creating Respectful Community with Story Thursday 1:00 p.m. - 2:15 p.m.
America's Center 227 [275]
AMAZE's Families All Matter Book Project (FAM) uses children's literature about family to explore diversity issues with children. Using an anti-bias framework, the project promotes knowledge and skills for getting along respectfully across many differences, a foundation for right relations in our congregations and broader communities. This program repeats on Saturday at 8:30 a.m.
- ◆ #5006 Multiracial Families – A Growing Experience
Sunday 12:00 p.m. - 1:15 p.m.
America's Center Ferrara Theater [1411]
Living at the crossroads of race helps to make Matt Kelley's message inspiring to all. His informative and entertaining style combines personal anecdotes with his extensive knowledge of the multiracial movement to create a presentation that is thoughtful and moving, as well as inspirational and inclusive.

Matt will be meeting with DRUUMM YaYA (Youth and Young Adults) in a closed event after his talk to the wider UU community. Matt is a transracially-adopted Korean who began the MAVIN foundation while he was still in college. Dr. Maria Root writes about this experience in detail, including a Bill of Rights of Multiracial people. Together, they created The Multiracial Child Resource Book, available at the DRUUMM table at GA along with MAVIN's movie "Chasing Daybreak" and other items.

Among Ourselves

- ◆ Weighing in at 8lb 13oz and 21 inches long, Miyka'ela emerged into the arms of her parents Aimee and Joseph Santos-Lyons on April 21st at 1738. Miyka's older brother remarked at how purple she was, but her color, features, and affect have changed daily as she adapts to life on the outside. Aimee had a successful VBAC (Vaginal Birth After Cesarean) without intervention, and is in excellent health, Miyka continues to smile, enjoy 'tummy time', and get to know her Kuya (older brother) Gabriel and Lola (grandmother) Santos better. The whole family will be relocating to The Philippines in September 2006.



- ◆ An in-depth interview with Rev. Manish Mishra by Nandini Pandya was published in April 2006 in *Desi-Journal*, an online weekly magazine for Indians, primarily those living in the United States. Entitled "*A coming out of sorts: A profile of Rev. Manish Mishra*", the complete interview can be found at <<http://www.desijournal.com/article.asp?ArticleId=304>>
- ◆ Joseph Santos-Lyons' thesis, entitled "*25 to 1: Experiences of People of Color in Unitarian Universalism from 1980-2005*", discusses the sociological context in which People of Color exist within the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations, and chronicles some of the accomplishments and challenges of UU People of Color ministry. Included are voices from the survey of 91 People of Color conducted in 2005, and a historical account of the major or-

ganizations of People of Color over the last 25 years. You may view the thesis online at <<http://radicalhapa.typepad.com>>

(*Seekers* — from page 1)

the spiritual seeker in me. In 1996, I found out about Unitarian Universalism (UUism) on the Internet but, being aware of the plethora of heresies and cults, I was skeptical at first. After some research, I learned that UUism is a safe mainline denomination with a long history. Most importantly, it provides the freedom I have been longing for. I joined the Church of Larger Fellowship and the high quality open-minded sermons in its newsletter *Quest* never fail to feed my spiritual needs, in contrast with Christian publications which never fail to stifle my exploring mind. The more I learn about UUism, the more I identify with it.

I shared UUism with my "brothers and sisters" in my church but they responded by saying that there are a lot of heresies floating around! I think my questioning itself has already rendered my faith being "not so firm" or "problematic" in their eyes. I looked for a local church with like-minded liberals but I found none.

I knew there must be some lonely, isolated liberals scattered in different Christian churches out there, so I began sharing my liberal views on various Chinese evangelical forums on the Internet but I often found many of my posts (even my accounts) disappeared overnight! I finally made up my mind to set up a Hong Kong Liberal Christian Forum so that my best thoughts will not be lost. Eventually, a few open-minded Christians gathered around that forum and I thought it would be a good idea to provide them with a physical fellowship, a fellowship for liberals, the first of its kind in Hong Kong. We had our first dinner in 2004 to meet one another face to face. Since that first gathering, we have been meeting twice a week at the Hong Kong Christian Institute, a Christian activists group. We did Bible studies (mainly the Gospels) led by a liberal-minded Anglican minister. We read and discussed the pamphlets from both the UUA (UU Views of God, Jesus, Bible, Prayer, etc.) and the Center for Progressive Christianity (<http://tpec.org>). (see *Seekers*, 4)

Milestones

- ◆ Rev. Manish Mishra was called unanimously to serve the Unitarian Universalist Church of St. Petersburg, FL on April 30, 2006. Manish is excited about serving them, noting that they are an urban church, in the midst of exciting efforts to revitalize the downtown center. Already, during candidating week, Sunday church attendance was almost double what it usually is — the community is very excited and enthusiastic about Manish's ministry. As he begins his adventure in the Tampa Bay area, Manish will be joining in the region another one of our A/PI ministers, Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, who serves the nearby Clearwater church. Our joy and good wishes are with Manish.



Manish (left) receiving the right hand of fellowship from Abhi during his Ordination in October 2005 at All Souls Church Unitarian in Washington DC.

- ◆ Jennifer Ryu has been called to her first settled ministry after having graduated from Starr King in May, 2005. Jennifer and her husband Preston Moore will serve as Co-Ministers at the Unitarian Universalist church in Williamsburg, VA. This 17-year-old congregation has 235 members. Jennifer will be joining Rev. Leslie Takahashi Morris, our other A/PI UU Minister in Thomas Jefferson District.
- ◆ Joseph Santos-Lyons returns west from Boston, MA after finishing his Masters in Divinity and

Secondary Education Licensure at Harvard University June 8. This summer he will be working at Providence Hospital as a student chaplain and then leaving with the whole family for Manila Sept 15 for a UU ministerial internship.

- ◆ Catie Chi Olson has been accepted as a candidate for UU Ministry by the Midwest Regional Sub-Committee on Candidacy. Our blessings and best wishes go to Catie as she continues on her path towards becoming a UU Minister!

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We also used articles from *Quest* and *GoodNews*, the newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Christian Fellowship. I bought the hymn book *Singing the Living Tradition* and two CDs from the UUA Bookstore and we started singing UU hymns along with the CD. It was probably the first time UU hymns were sung in China! Other activities include joining parades for democracy, hiking and ball games. We are becoming a fellowship.

My original plan was to establish a Hong Kong Liberal Christian Fellowship and did not dare to push for a UU group, fearing that many Christian participants might not be comfortable with a non-Christian religion. But there were also a few non-Christians in our group and hence we ought to be more inclusive, accommodating non-Christians as well as Christians. UUism seemed to be a good candidate. I also have a dream that a UU group can pioneer free religion in Hong Kong. I managed to put together an executive committee of four members, all of whom embrace UUism. After a period of searching for our route and name, we decided that the inclusiveness of UUism enables full freedom of religious quest for our members and that following a tradition of long history is safer than starting from ground zero. A name conjugated from “double heresies” (the words “Unitarian” and “Universalist”) however, may invite witch-hunt from conservatives. So we brainstormed for a name and came up with “Spiritual Seekers Society” (SSS),

(see *Seekers*, 7)

Debunking A/PI Myths —

The Case for Why A/PIs are Prime Candidates for UU Evangelism

by Vivien Hao (Pacific Unitarian Church, Rancho Palos Verdes, CA)

As a UU for more than a dozen years, I have long been struck at how few of “us” there are in UU churches—even those that serve communities, such as Los Angeles where I live and go to church. Here the Asian/Pacific Islander population is 10 % county-wide (compared to 4% nationwide) and as high as 60-70% in communities like Monterey Park, known as the “Chinese Beverly Hills.”

In the city where my UU church is located, Rancho Palos Verdes, the affluent, highly-assimilated A/PI population amounts to almost 30%. Yet there are only a handful of “us” in the pews.

Why? There are many myths and misunderstandings in the UU community about this. Here are some of the most common misconceptions that often serve as excuses for UUs **not** to do more outreach to our A/PI neighbors, colleagues, friends, and relatives.

Asian/Pacific Islanders are too conservative politically or socially.

While there is no ready data on current party affiliation of A/PIs in the U.S., a 2004 survey found that Asian Americans preferred Democratic candidate Kerry over Republican Bush by a wide margin.

http://news.ncmonline.com/news/view_article.html?article_id=318ff90e5420209eaa2f8aa20e65d592

It’s likely that, just as American voters as a whole are split depending on the issues involved, the part of the country where they live, and the nature of the election, that there are significant numbers of A/PI Americans are sympathetic to progressive, liberal and humanitarian causes and candidates. We have no evidence to suggest that A/PIs would be less interested than any other group in the affirming, inspirational and transformative message of Unitarian Universalism.

Asian/Pacific Islanders aren’t open to UUism because they are Buddhist or Hindu or Christian.

20% of Asian Americans in a 2001 study of 50,000 US households said they were “agnostic or had no religious



affiliation.” This is contrasted with 21% Catholic, 10% Protestant, and only 9% Buddhist. Surprised? I was. The largest group of Asian Americans is people who came from China or whose ancestors came from China. For generations, China has been a churchless nation, where religion has been prohibited and where even educated citizens have little or no knowledge of world religions or spiritual issues. These are people who don’t need to be “converted”—they just need to hear about a faith community that welcomes seekers and does not ask them to check any of their existing spiritual beliefs or critical thinking skills at the door. (Source: <http://www.asian-nation.org/religion.shtml>)

We can’t attract Asian/Pacific Islanders unless we translate our services into their home language.

While 52% of A/PI Americans today are foreign-born, virtually all of them will become naturalized U.S. citizens only after proving their knowledge of English and U.S. history. ESL classes are prevalent in all immigrant communities, and in Asian countries, English language instruction is a mandatory part of standard elementary and secondary school curricula. The majority of A/PIs are either English-dominant or bilingual.

We’ll have to change our services and programs to make Asian/Pacific Islanders feel comfortable.

A/PI Americans are, by necessity, well-versed in mainstream American practices and customs. They are often extremely familiar with Western music, art, literature, and media, and able to straddle both their ancestral and current cultural worlds. Moreover, A/PIs are, on the whole, better educated with higher household incomes than their white counterparts, putting them socio-economically in the mainstream of the UU world.

Asian/Pacific Islanders just want to “stick to their own kind.”

As the number of A/PIs who marry “out” increases, interracial couples and their bi-racial children are becoming one of the fastest-growing segments of UU newcomers. Soon, we will all be “one kind”—multi-racial!

I invite you to learn about the many paths that UUs of Asian/Pacific Islander descent have taken to come to Unitarian Universalism. Visit <http://apiuu.org/brochure.pdf>

We are here. We invite you to join us!



Young Adults at the 32nd Congress of IARF in KaoHsiung, Taiwan

IARF Young Adults Work for Peace

by Linda Hsieh (*First Unitarian Society, Denver, CO*)

The 32nd Congress of IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom) was held this year in KaoHsiung, Taiwan, during the last week of March. Many young adults from all over the world arrived a day early for specific programming and preparation. Attendees from various religious backgrounds came together to share stories of struggle, success, and spiritual connections.

A late arriving attendee from Nepal explained that the religious intolerance he experiences is so intense that ceremonies can only be held after dark with no more than ten people present. These late night gatherings are considered illegal and heavily persecuted. This courageous man not much older than myself was putting his life at risk by practicing his religion. Stories such as these are hard to comprehend for many of us in countries where religious intolerance takes less overt forms.

Very often, it is simply the majority dictating the acceptable norms for a society that marginalizes other views or practices. In the U.S., the religious right's political activities violate our constitution's guarantee of separation of Church and State. Similarly, in the Philippines where the majority is Roman Catholic, Unitarians and indigenous faiths

are persecuted for their practices and beliefs. It is one of the goals of IARF to foster understanding and peace across political and religious differences.

Through projects that bring together youth and young adults from different countries and religious backgrounds, the IARF and the Religious Freedom Young adult Network (RFYN) strive to organically develop bonds and multicultural understandings between young people in the hope of cultivating peace and harmony. An international interfaith project in Gujarat, India, brought young adults together to rebuild a mosque in a Muslim village and a temple in a Hindu village destroyed by a massive earthquake. Endeavors such as these aim to promote interfaith cooperation, to bring awareness of different cultural traditions and to provide opportunities to reflect on issues of religious freedom.

Some project ideas evolving from the latest congress involve home stay exchanges between Unitarian Universalists in the U.S.A. and Unitarians from the Khasi Hills in India, Unitarian Universalists from the Philippines, as well as similar exchange projects in the Middle East. To find out more about the IARF and how you can get involved please visit <http://www.iarf.net> or contact Linda at hsiehchilin@gmail.com.

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What sets this list apart is that it is not intended as a bunch of “thou shalt not” commandments to stifle creative imagination. Instead, each stereotypical portrayal is followed by a “stereotype buster” — concrete suggestions designed to get Hollywood writers to embrace a more inclusive vision of the human community, one that includes Asians and Asian Americans in all their diversity.

To read the complete “Memo to Hollywood” go to <http://www.manaa.org/articles/stereoBust.htm>

On Diversity: What is “Engaged Presence”?

by KokHeong McNaughton (Unitarian Church of Los Alamos, NM)

In her contributing article from the book “Soul Work: Anti-Racist Theologies in Dialogue”, Rev. Rebecca Parker, President of Starr King School for the Ministry, described a cross-country road trip that she and a friend took in unfamiliar back country roads on their way to seminary.



All around them they saw signs warning of floods. They saw signs of previous flooding: fields of standing water, roads closed, muddy bridges, sandbags. They drove on with a little trepidation, but *Hey, the road is clear now. There is no flood now. It was all in the past.* Then all of a sudden, it hit them! As the car rounded a corner, a sheet of water covered the roadway, and it was rising FAST. They scrambled out of the car and ran for higher ground, abandoning the vehicle. Luckily, besides being soaked and baptized into reality by the cold water, they escaped unhurt.

Being white in America is like traveling ensconced in a secure vehicle. There are clear signs of racism all around us, but as long as our privileged life is not being challenged by it, it is not real to us. Only when it hits us, or hits someone close to us that we wonder, like Rev. Parker and her friend did, how we could have been so blind. And we wonder, “Where have I been all my life?”

UU Minister Rev. Anita Farber-Robertson challenges us that “not knowing” how whites participate in sustaining racism is achieved through the lens of a psychological screen called “designed blindness”, which is the capacity to remain unaware of that which is knowable by screening out information that we do not want to know or that conflicts with our map of reality. It allows us to accept contradictory truths and shields us from the pain of anti-racism anti-oppression work, often referred to as ARAO work.

How can white allies help? One way is by practicing “Engaged Presence”. Rebecca Parker wrote, “*Racial injustice is perpetuated by the passive absence of whites who are numbly disengaged with the social realities of our time. Conversely, racial injustice will fail to thrive as more and more of us show up as present and engaged citizens.*” That translates to mean self-education, social actions, engaging in difficult dialogues, public witnesses.

A new caucus of DRUUMM called *UU Allies for Racial Equity* has formed to help white allies become more engaged and to support one another in the ARAO work of our denomination. Please visit <http://uuallies.org/> to find out more.

(*Seekers* — from page 4)

which faithfully captures the spirit of UUism yet avoids the heretical name. Also, adopting an independent name provides some congregational freedom for us. Appreciating the structure of a UU Christian Fellowship within the UUA, a Progressive Christian Fellowship was formed within the Spiritual Seekers Society to serve the spiritual needs of Christians in the Society.

With a clear UU route in mind our activities are now geared towards our UU identity. We have just completed a six-session UU history course, *Our Unitarian Universalist Story*. A long-time UU from the States, now a professor at a University in Hong Kong, joined us after finding us on the Internet, and has just delivered two terrific UU sermons. Another course, *Building Your Own Theology (BYOT)* is being planned.

We are trying our best to publicize ourselves so that we can serve more free religionists who are looking for a community. A website is a must to present our principles and to announce our activities. But we also aim to keep the group’s expenses to a minimum — we think spiritual seekers should aim at a simple life. Together with the concern of ease of use, we opted to set up our first website at

(see *seekers*, 8)

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a free web hosting service — the Tripod. The webpage is largely created and maintained by me. Please visit us at <http://ssshk.tripod.com>.

Besides the website, the Hong Kong Liberal Christian Forum <<http://liberalhk.tripod.com/>> continues to be a great way to publicize ourselves. Recently, a Chinese UU in Australia found us through that Forum and offered help by translating important UU pamphlets into Chinese language (see <http://uuhk.tripod.com/>), an invaluable assistance to us. Returning from the virtual world, we have just participated in the Religious Blessing Session of the International Day Against Homophobia Parade, a good opportunity for media coverage.

We have no formal membership system yet. About 10 attend regularly enough to be counted as “members” of our group. I am looking for a decent-looking membership book and I hope that formal membership registration can be started shortly.

SSS is listed in the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) as an emerging group. We aim to become a full member of ICUU. We know that it is a long road but at least we have a clear goal. First and foremost, we have to build up membership through exposure on the Internet and personal contacts.

Friends in the United States may help us with raising awareness of our existence by talking about us in your local churches, District Gatherings, Internet communications, and events like the General Assembly. What I am dreaming for at this moment is a minister. A volunteer minister is certainly the best but I think our small group can afford to pay for a part-time minister. To sum up, I appreciate the basic principles of UUism — freedom, tolerance, and reason — and hope that a religious community built around those principles can grow in Hong Kong to serve more like-minded but lonely souls.

And if you happen to visit Hong Kong ... look us up!

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