



United Religions Initiative

**Visions for Peace Among Religions**  
Global Inquiry Workbook

“THERE CAN BE NO PEACE AMONG THE NATIONS WITHOUT PEACE AMONG THE RELIGIONS.  
NO PEACE AMONG THE RELIGIONS WITHOUT DIALOGUE AMONG THE RELIGIONS.”

—Hans Kung, *Parliament of the World's Religions*, 1993



# Introduction to the URI's Visions for Peace Among Religions Project

## *What is the 21st Century Visions for Peace Among Religions (VPAR) Inquiry?*

In a world besieged by terror and injustice, the United Religions Initiative holds the promise of a better way. Its purpose, endorsed by thousands of members worldwide, 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 Visions for Peace Among Religions Global Inquiry mirrors the purpose of URI in its goal of creating an interfaith guided conversation about peace that will gather together people's experiences, hopes and dreams for waging peace, seeking justice, and healing conflict among the world's religions. The VPAR Inquiry dares to hold the outrageous hope that it is possible to make a profound change toward peace among the families of faith. Its radical premise is that by making peace among themselves, religions and traditions will become more and more a collective force for peace, justice and healing in our world.

The VPAR Global Inquiry challenges participants to make a sweeping break with history and begin conversations with each other based on the desire to create a new equilibrium based not on conquest over the other but based on respect and cooperation.

The VPAR Global Inquiry will promote peace among religions by:

- ◆ Providing a safe catalyst that frees people to have different more compassionate conversations and relationships.
- ◆ Raising up stories of peace that can remind people who and what they are when they and their religious and spiritual traditions are at their very best.
- ◆ Generating positive shared images of peace among religions, which in turn provides much-needed hope for the future.
- ◆ Provide opportunities for local relationship-building, with a global focus and support.
- ◆ Recording and disseminating these stories, hopes, and dreams throughout the world.
- ◆ Providing opportunities for people to come together to implement the best ideas and practices for peacemaking, that have been generated through the Inquiry.

Several times over the next three years, and at the end of the three-year conversation, documents will be assembled that synthesize the best stories, hopes, dreams, and ideas that we've heard. These documents will serve as catalysts to create a global standard for peace among religions. The documents will have the moral voice of everyone who participated in the conversations. In addition to creating a new global standard for peace among religions, the United Religions Initiative will nurture local peacemaking projects that emerge over the course of the conversation. Such projects might include social action projects, books, works of art, or educational curricula.

In all, when the global inquiry concludes in the summer of 2005, we will all share new relationships with people we would not have known otherwise.

**We look forward to witnessing the power of peacemaking among religions as it is raised up and unleashed throughout the world.**

# Selecting the Right Approach

This Workbook offers several possible approaches for using the Interview Guides, along with possible advantages and disadvantages to each approach. These reflections are based upon the experience of URI Cooperation Circles that have already experimented with the VPAR inquiry. The descriptions are not meant to be a “how to” guide. They are intended, instead, to inspire you. You may choose to combine the different approaches, adapt one, or create something entirely different that is suitable to your local community and culture.

## *Approach #1: Group Inquiry(ies)*

With this approach, a sponsoring organization hosts one or more group inquiries. Each gathering includes as diverse a mix of faith traditions, ethnicities, genders, ages, etc., as possible. During a period anywhere from two hours to two days, participants conduct one-to-one interviews, then work in small groups to make meaning of what they’ve heard and to initiate action with respect to ideas and practices that have intrigued them.

Following the initial gathering, organizers are encouraged to sponsor open reunions, potlucks, and/or other gatherings. The purpose of these gatherings will be to maintain and build the relationships that have been formed through initial conversations. All those who have participated in the group inquiry(ies), as well as others who have expressed interest in the process, could be invited to attend these gatherings.

### ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Promotes two-way interviews and small-group meaning-making, which often create deeper, more sustained new relationships, but it may be more intimidating for some people than a one-to-one conversation.
- ◆ Creates broader opportunities for forming multiple new relationships, but it also takes more up-front organizing: publicity, inviting people, meeting, site, materials, facilitation, etc.
- ◆ Everyone’s in the room together, which may inspire more ongoing collective action but it arbitrarily excludes those who can’t attend on the chosen date and time.
- ◆ May be easier for the organizer to maintain momentum, because of its one-time nature but it may require post-gathering follow-up, to maintain the momentum of self-organized action.

## *Approach #2: One-to-one interviews, taking place over time*

With this approach, members of the sponsoring organization schedule one-to-one interviews with people who are as different from themselves as possible – by faith, ethnicity, gender, age, etc. They meet with interviewees, conduct interviews, and complete summary sheets. Under some circumstances, interviewers may also invite interested interviewees to themselves become interviewers.

Every few weeks, interviewers come together to: share stories, what they have learned and question that have emerged; generate new leads for interviews; and take action to implement ideas or practices that have intrigued them along the way.

Organizers are similarly encouraged to sponsor open reunions, potlucks, and/or other gatherings – as a way of maintaining and building the relationships that have been formed through initial conversations. All those who have been interviewed, as well as others who have expressed interest in the process, could be invited to attend these gatherings.

#### ADVANTAGE/DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ It takes very little up-front organizing but it consists of one-way interviews, which: 1) require interviewers to work harder to create relationships with their interviewees; and 2) may limit the depth and intimacy of the conversation.
- ◆ Creates opportunities for close bonding between interviewer and interviewee, but it may be difficult to maintain momentum: personal conflicts may make it difficult for people to follow through on interviews, show up for meaning making sessions, etc. Also, it does not nurture collective relationship or cross-pollination and it may bring a potentially narrower perspective during the meaning-making phase.

#### *Approach #3: Ongoing dialogue and peacemaking*

With this approach, members of a small, intact group focus on one or two questions at a time, over an extended period. For example, they might respond to one question per week or month, over a period of several months. They may use the questions for one-to-one dialogue, or as a discussion guide for a larger group (6 to 12 people). Throughout the process, they keep track of their responses (through audio or video tape, a peace journal, or some other written record). Also on an ongoing basis, they make collective meaning of what they're hearing.

At some point members of the group may consider possible collective action in service of what they've learned.

#### ADVANTAGES/DISADVANTAGES

- ◆ Fosters intimate, long-term relationships, and a strong foundation for future action but it requires ongoing, long-term commitment on the part of participants.
- ◆ Resulting actions will be based on in-depth analysis of best peace-building practices but there is a risk that participants may come and go throughout the life of the process, which may dilute energy.

# Facilitator Guidelines (for Group Gatherings)

Following is a general outline for a VPAR group gathering. The time spent in each of the activities can be expanded or contracted, depending on the number of participants and length of the gathering. In general you want to: open, interview, make meaning, consider action, and close. Also in general, you want to engage people of different faith traditions and ethnic backgrounds in the interviews themselves, since this is the primary vehicle we have for helping people to know and embrace their differences.

By simply varying the length and complexity of these activities, you can facilitate a gathering that is as short as two hours, and as long as two to three days.

## GENERAL SUGGESTIONS

- ◆ Create a hospitable and inclusive space, complete with comfortable chairs, adequate supplies, and food (provided by the sponsoring organization; culturally appropriate for all attendees). If you are in a strife-ridden area, please choose a site that is both neutral and physically safe for all participants.
- ◆ Rotate your leadership. In other words, have different members of your sponsoring organization (or other leaders) lead different parts of the process. If you are working with a strongly diverse and potentially contentious group of participants, be sure that your leadership reflects the spiritual and cultural diversity in the room. Have some way of capturing and holding on to important stories and themes.
- ◆ You may consider having someone take notes, or using flip charts or audio tapes.
- ◆ Complete set-up before people begin to arrive.

## SAMPLE OUTLINE

**Welcome and Introductions.** Thank people for coming and reinforce the importance of their presence and of the gathering. Give people an opportunity to hear one another's names and to make some sort of connection.

**Opening ritual.** Light a candle, or create a moment of silence. Then, do a guided visualization or something like it to invite people to imagine the future that they're working to create. At the end of the visualization offer up a prayer that will be appropriate for all participants or invite people from different traditions to pray in their own ways.

**Interviews.** They can be conducted one-to-one, or in triads if this diffuses tension within the group. In some cases you will choose to use the same question with a group. Choose as many questions from the Interview Guide(s) as you've time and space for.

**Small group debrief.** Have up to nine people come together (2+2+2+2 or 3+3+3) to introduce their partner(s) and share the highlights of what they heard in their interviews. Begin to extract common themes. Use flip charts and/or audio tapes, as you wish, to capture highlights.

**Whole group meaning making.** Encourage people to hold on to what they heard in the small groups while you set the context for this work. Share more information about the Visions for Peace Among Religions global inquiry project. Help people to see that what they're doing is part of something very large and important. Share stories from around the world . . . from interviews with adults and children . . . from actions that have emerged from the work. Then, debrief the work of the small groups. Begin to capture best stories and quotes, hopes, dreams, and practices for peace – in both conversation and writing. (Take notes, use a flip chart, or use an audio tape.)

**Self-organizing.** Take 10-15 minutes to brainstorm the implications of what you've just discussed: for the global vision for this organization, and for individuals in the room. Then, give people time to connect with people of similar interests – and if possible, to begin planning next steps.

**Closing.** Offer up some sort of prayerful, bonding ritual. The length can vary with the available time.

# The Interview Guides

Following are two different versions of the VPAR interview guide. The first is geared towards adults and teens, while the second is designed for children ages 6-11. Once again, these guides are offered as inspiration, rather than directive. For example, you may select only one or two questions (for a shorter Group Inquiry), or you may choose to use all of the questions for a longer (1 ½ hour) interview. As you plan your interviews, consider that it is probably better to encourage in-depth dialogue around a few good questions than to try to do everything at once.

You may choose to use the questions as-is, translate them, or completely rewrite them. You may conduct interviews one-on-one, or use the questions to spur lively discussion among a small group of people. However you choose to use or adapt the materials, keep in mind that VPAR questions have a particular and unusual structure. Their purpose is more than simple “data collection.” Each question is structured to do three things:

- 1) Provide intimate insights about people’s best experiences of the past. This creates safety and fosters relationships among improbable pairs of people.
- 2) Create positive, hopeful images of the future, towards which people will be drawn. These images counteract the frightening, sometimes despairing images that we are faced with every day.
- 3) Inspire uncommon action in service of the overall Purpose of the global inquiry process.

Before you rewrite, study the original questions carefully to get a feel for the process and flow. Then, if you choose to rewrite the questions, consider the following guidelines:

- ◆ Use simple, straightforward language that is appropriate to participants’ background and experience. Fewer words are probably better.
- ◆ Continue to focus on the best of what has been and what might be. Guide people to draw from their most positive past experiences and images of the future.
- ◆ Encourage storytelling. Use phrases like: “Describe to me . . .,” “Tell me about . . .,” and “Think of a time . . .”
- ◆ Encourage people to make their own meaning of their past experience. Ask questions like: “What does this tell you about . . .,” and “What might that mean to . . .”
- ◆ Help people to visualize first steps that could be taken, in service of their highest hopes and dreams.

Additional supporting materials are available in a downloadable form on the URI web site ([www.uri.org](http://www.uri.org)), or upon request through the URI Global Office. These materials include:

- ◆ Tips for conducting interview
- ◆ Script for setting up interviews (for one-to-one interviews taking place over time)
- ◆ Introductory and closing scripts (for one-to-one interviews taking place over time)
- ◆ Statement of Informed Consent (give interviewers permission to identify interviewees by name)
- ◆ Sample invitation and supply list (for group inquiry)
- ◆ Registration form (for group inquiry)

# Adult and Teen Interview Guide

## *Getting to Know You*

1. Let's begin by talking about who you are.
  - ◇ How would you describe your faith or faith tradition?
2. In recent months, the world has been besieged by appalling acts of religiously-motivated violence . . . more of the same, in a world that has been plagued by such acts for time immemorial. These acts of violence have been viewed by many as a “wake-up call.”
  - ◇ What does this wake-up call mean to you? To your faith community?
  - ◇ What choices does it call people to make? Why?
3. Reflect for a moment upon your tradition's deepest beliefs, teachings and sacred texts – and all the ways in which these feed your spirit and create action in your life. Describe to me a time when your faith or beliefs inspired you to act in service of the greater good.
  - ◇ What were the circumstances?
  - ◇ What was the outcome?
  - ◇ What in this experience most touches and informs who you are today, and your decision to be part of this process?

## WAGING PEACE, SEEKING JUSTICE, AND HEALING CONFLICTS

4. Peace begins at home – with us. Think of a time when you experienced a shift towards a more peaceful state of being – in yourself, your family, your faith community, the wider community, or the world. Perhaps it was a time when you actively worked to create an outcome that was better for all parties, or for groups other than your own.
  - ◇ Tell me the story of what happened, how you felt, and what your role was in this personal shift toward peace.
  - ◇ Describe, if you can, the conversation you had with yourself, prior to this shift. What were all the decisions or choices you needed to make, in order to embrace and actively work towards this peaceful outcome?
  - ◇ How did the experience change you and the other people who were involved?
  - ◇ What are the values (spiritual, ethical, moral, etc.) that have sustained or reinforced the change that has occurred?

5. Now, tell me a story of forgiveness. It may have been a time when you were offended, persecuted, or victimized – but found the grace to forgive the offender; or perhaps, a time when you were forgiven for a wrongdoing of your own. It may have been a story of former enemies – perhaps from different faiths or cultural backgrounds, who found a way to forgive and reconcile with one another.
  - ◇ What made the forgiveness possible? How did they reach across the boundary of their differences to take this heroic step?
  - ◇ How did that forgiveness change the people involved? How did it transform the lives of those around them?
  - ◇ What did their reconciliation inspire them to do together?
6. Describe to me a time when you observed people reaching across religious, ethnic, and economic boundaries to actively wage peace instead of war. It may be something you’ve merely heard about, or something you’ve experienced directly. What was it about the people involved, the institutions, and the surrounding circumstances that made this action possible?
7. What does your spiritual or moral tradition teach you about justice?
  - ◇ How does it inspire you to work for a better world?
  - ◇ What could the world look like, five years from today, if you and many others were to actively follow those teachings?
8. Reflect, now, on all these personal and exemplary experiences of peace, justice, and healing:
  - ◇ What can you imagine doing in your spiritual or faith community that would foster a more positive relationship with any group (either outside your community or even inside it) that you now find yourself in disagreement or conflict with?
  - ◇ What one thing could you imagine doing that would have the greatest impact in healing conflicts among religions?

## DREAMS FOR THE FUTURE

9. Imagine that you are among a group of people of widely differing social, ethnic, and spiritual traditions. Your group has been given the opportunity to create a “peace village” or “peace community” – a bold experiment in peaceful living and working.
  - ◇ Tell me about your community and how it promotes a “just peace” both within and outside its borders (e.g., socially, economically, politically, religiously, environmentally, etc.). What are its most inspiring and exemplary features?
  - ◇ Five years from now, what has been your community’s biggest contribution to creating “cultures of peace, justice and healing for the Earth and all living beings?”

# Children’s Interview Guide (Ages 6-11)

## OPENING

With all the difficult and painful things that have been going on all around the world in the past year or so, people have been wondering how to make peace in a world where hate is so strong. I would like to ask some questions that will help us both to remember times that feel good to us. I would like you to tell me stories about times that feel good to you. Maybe you can teach me a little about what you believe makes peace, justice, and healing possible.

## PEACE FOR CHILDREN

1. Tell me a story about a time when a classmate, friend, or someone else did something really nice for you. Perhaps you weren’t expecting it, and the nice thing they did surprised you. What happened and how did you feel?
2. Now tell me another story about a time when you weren’t getting along with someone—perhaps a sister or brother or another kid. Maybe you were really mad at each other – but then it got better.
  - ◇ What happened?
  - ◇ How did you feel?
  - ◇ What did the other person do that made it better?
  - ◇ What did you do that helped it get better?
3. Peace begins at home with us.
  - ◇ What does “peace” mean to you?
4. Think of a time when you felt yourself to be in a very peaceful place.
  - ◇ Where is your favorite place to find peace?
  - ◇ Describe it, what does it look like and feel like?
5. Pretend that you are now a teenager, and everyone you know, no matter how different they are, is getting along well together. They are all playing and working together nicely. They are learning from each other and helping each other.
  - ◇ What could make that happen by the time you are a teenager?

## FAIRNESS FOR CHILDREN

6. We all like to be treated fairly. Tell me about a time when you made sure that someone else was treated fairly, perhaps because you noticed that they weren’t before.
  - ◇ What did you do?
  - ◇ How did you feel?
  - ◇ What happened after that?

7. Tell me about a person who taught you about being fair—just by the things you saw them do. That person could be a member of your family, a teacher, a friend, or someone you met only once.
  - ◇ What kinds of things did they do?
  - ◇ What did you learn about fairness from them?
8. Many people say that peace and fairness go hand in hand, that lasting peace cannot happen without fairness. Tell me about a time at home or at school when you noticed that things became more peaceful when the situation was made more fair.
9. Do you or your parents go to a church or mosque or synagogue? Is your family part of any kind of community for sacred ceremonies or prayers? If so, what have you learned there that if we all lived that way would make the world a better place—more peaceful and more fair?

#### HEALING CONFLICTS FOR CHILDREN

10. None of us like others being mean to us, but sometimes when it happens, we learn something or things change for the better afterwards. Tell me about a time when somebody picked on you or was mean to you, but you forgave them—you weren't mad anymore and maybe you played with them again.
  - ◇ What made that happen?
  - ◇ How were things different after that?
11. Now, tell me about a time when you did something wrong or not nice to someone else, and they forgave you.
  - ◇ What did you do?
  - ◇ Why do you think the person forgave you?
  - ◇ How did you feel when that happened?
12. Finally, tell me about two people you know who were really mad at each other, but were able to forgive each other.
  - ◇ What do you think made that possible?
  - ◇ How did they get along after that?
  - ◇ How did it affect people around them?

#### CLOSING

13. Suppose for a moment that we were creating a Peace Village – a place where lots of different kinds of people live together peacefully.
  - ◇ What is life in that village like for children (for example, schools, play, families, work, etc.)
  - ◇ How would your mom, your dad, and other grownups you know be different from how they are today?
  - ◇ What is different about this Peace Village, from the world you live in today?

# Interview Summary Sheet

to be completed within 24 hours of the interview

Please take a few minutes—soon after your interview—to fill out or create an Interview Summary. Fill out one Summary for each interview or as highlights from a group process. **Only answer the questions that are meaningful to you.** If you wish to create a different format for reporting, please feel free to do so. **Create and use as much space as you need.** You may send your report by email as well. Please keep a copy of what you've written, and mail, fax or email the original to:

Nancy Nielsen  
Project Manager—VPAR  
United Religions Initiative  
P.O. Box 29242  
San Francisco CA 94129  
Fax (415) 561-2313  
nnielsen@uri.org

DATE OF INTERVIEW: \_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWER'S NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

INTERVIEWEE'S NAME & CONTACT INFORMATION:

\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

Did the interviewee give permission for us to quote him or her? (Circle one.)    Yes    No

Please create and use as much or little space as you need, in order to answer each question.

1. What was the most inspiring, informative or uplifting story you heard during this interview or dialogue?



# United Religions Initiative

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.

## *Creating the Initiative*

A vision emerged in 1995 out of an interfaith service held in San Francisco to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the United Nations. The vision was to create an initiative whereby people of diverse faiths could work daily for peace.

Today the United Religions Initiative is a growing, global community dedicated to creating peace among religions. With members representing over 15,000 people from more than 88 faith traditions in 47 countries of the world, URI provides a forum for unprecedented dialogue among people of diverse religions, spiritual expressions, and indigenous traditions through which new models of peaceful and meaningful coexistence can be realized.

## *The People of URI*

United Religions Initiative is inclusive, community centered, and decentralized. At the heart of URI are Cooperation Circles (CCs), self-organizing groups with seven people or more from at least three religions, spiritual expressions or indigenous traditions. Established organizations—such as interfaith councils—and new associations are equally welcome.

Our CCs make URI's vision a reality. Every day and throughout the world URI members are engaged in community-based initiatives: peacebuilding in Uganda, women's interfaith dialogue for peace in Israel, youth leadership work in the UK, interfaith education for children in Argentine and HIV/AIDS prevention in Asia, Africa and the US.

Women and men, elders and youth, people from different faiths, ethnic backgrounds and nations—all who are committed to the values of URI's Charter are welcome.

## *What does URI do?*

- ◆ Creates safe opportunities for dialogue, sharing and action
- ◆ Pilots innovative approaches to peacebuilding
- ◆ Supports youth and leadership development
- ◆ Contributes seed funds for local initiatives and encourages indigenous philanthropy
- ◆ Produces and distributes interfaith educational materials
- ◆ Convenes regional and global interfaith gatherings to exchange best practices
- ◆ Provides a global network for communications and knowledge sharing
- ◆ Offers a community of hope and a positive vision for the future



## United Religions Initiative

**FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:**

United Religions Initiative

P.O. Box 29242

San Francisco, CA 94129-0242 USA

1.415.561.2300 (voice)      1.415.561.2313 (fax)

[office@uri.org](mailto:office@uri.org)

<http://www.uri.org>