

# Interweave Connect

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August 2011

Don Hoppe, editor

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## Interweave Welcomes New Board Members

*Interweave is pleased to announce the addition of two new members to its Board of Directors:*



**Christine Sermini** is an active member of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado. She's been a UU for 20 years, has served on the board at All Souls, and has been co-chair of her Interweave chapter. Christine works as an Instructional Designer and she is the mother of two teen-aged sons. She is excited to serve on the Interweave board and looks forward to being in community with Interweave members across the country.



**Nisco Junkins** and his wife Marilyn have been instrumental in starting and maintaining the only active Oregon Interweave Chapter at the UU Church in Eugene (UUCE). UUCE's Interweave Chapter provides both education and outreach to the local GLBT and straight community, drawing 25-35 attendees each month, and attracting some community members to join UUCE as a result. Nisco is very excited about recruiting more UU Churches to start Interweave Chapters and raising the necessary funds to enable Interweave Continental to do their good work.



Find us on:  
**facebook®**

<http://www.facebook.com/#!/pages/Interweave-Continental/329134670710>

Interweave has a *new mailing address*:

**Interweave Continental  
156 Massapoag Avenue  
Sharon, MA 02067-2749**

# Experiencing General Assembly for the First Time

I wanted to write something about how I walked into the Charlotte Convention Center and immediately felt at home among thousands of UUs, sharing a community of faith and philosophy, progressive politics and liberal religion. But I couldn't do that. The truth is I did feel alone. It was overwhelming to walk into the large plenary hall, not knowing a soul, and surrounded by thousands of people who all seemed to know what they were doing and where they were going. I had no point of reference for church at that scale, and it was disorienting.

I think it was lunchtime on Friday before I felt like I really landed at General Assembly. I don't often travel by air, and I find it over stimulating and exhausting. The convention center was a maze of enormous rooms and escalators that went in the wrong direction; and being in a large, strange city was all very disorienting for this country mouse accustomed to watching wild turkeys and rabbits poke leisurely across my lawn while I drink my morning coffee and ease into my day.

The first 24 to 36 hours of my GA experience were of trying to get acclimated to a foreign environment, of learning what I needed to do in order to keep my head above water and not simply disappear in the mass of people. Step by step I managed to get my bearings. I had the opportunity to meet in person Interweave board members who had previously only been voices on conference calls. Eric was somehow taller than I had imagined.



**Dawn speaking at the Interweave Banquet at General Assembly 2011**

Don was too. Maryka was profoundly graceful and competent. One piece at a time, the jumble began to take shape and order emerged from the chaos.

I was able to attend GA through a scholarship, so I spent some time in the volunteer office, which was a really great way to meet people and make new friends. I also spent some time at the Interweave booth, which was also a great way to meet people. I was able to wander the exhibit hall and make personal connections with people that I had previously only known through email lists or Facebook. I got a hug from Rev. Sean Denison, got to meet Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed, and Rev. Nate Walker from Philly, hung out briefly with my friend Joani from California, and began to make a ton of new friends.

I was able to find a point of reference for this experience: It felt like pride week, but for UUs. OK, now I understand how this works. Once I got that perspective, I was able to lean into the happy chaos and enjoy the experience. I didn't have to go to EVERY workshop session, I didn't have to rush pell-mell from here to there, I could enjoy the larger experience that is General Assembly, appreciate all of the work that went into each phase, marvel at the skill of the presenters and the thoughtfulness of the participants, taking into consideration that we all have as underlying common ground a set of principles outlined in a covenant entered into by our congregational homes. Our human imperfections shone through as sometimes we did not seem to respect one another's (or our own) inherent worth and dignity, but even as passions rose, there was an over-arching unity of experience: We are Unitarian Universalists. We disagree on lots of things, but we agree on the big stuff. Everyone has worth and dignity. Everyone is allowed to seek the divine in their own way. We play by rules that respect all sides. When it's over, we're all still family. And that's big. Next year will be Justice GA. It will be a different animal entirely. I plan to be there, to witness for justice and to stand in solidarity with ALL those who are oppressed in Arizona. I expect next year I will "arrive" much earlier in the process. I look forward to it.

submitted by Dawn Fortune  
Board Member  
Interweave Continental

# Why Support Interweave?

Our members and friends are working hard to maintain individual memberships and sustain Interweave Chapters around the nation, in a time of economic hardship for many. We are also on the front lines of ministering to those who are facing ongoing oppression and the denial of basic civil liberties. Our Chapters provide a safe respite and a place to simply "be" in the midst of what can often be a difficult landscape to navigate. We are enriched by community and fellowship.

While many of our members celebrate victories in some work, such as Marriage Equality in New York, others face the pain of violence and oppression. Recently, our friends in Colorado Springs faced a City Council that is unwilling to denounce a hate crime, where two gay soldiers were beaten while they were out for a late night snack. In Phoenix, at Pride in April, Interweave members witnessed a hate crime in action as right wing protesters screamed into a megaphone encouraging gay teens to "commit

suicide." Where do we go with our spiritual pain? Our Interweave Chapters are one answer to that question. Once seen as a social group, we are much more than that today.

With your support we can help build alliances, to advocate for those who face oppression and violence. We can continue workshop training at GA and National Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Creating Change conference. We will continue to strengthen our national UU network and work for you in holding accountable the UUA Board of Trustees and GA Planning Committee as we head towards Justice GA 2012, ensuring that those who have historically been marginalized are provided a voice in planning. We will continue our community ministry to those who are isolated with no community of their own. We will continue to build our new website that provides resources as well as forums for our members and friends to connect with each other and discuss topics that are relevant to our lives.

Through our Interweave presence within the larger LGBTQIA network, we are giving people the option of finding beloved religious community, in some cases for the first time ever. Your continuing support makes it possible to do the work that we do. We need one another, now more than ever.

Submitted by Sun Principe  
Vice President  
Interweave Continental



**PEN PALS**  
**CLF Prison Ministry**

As part of their Prison Ministry,  
Church of the Larger Fellowship is  
looking for UUs to  
exchange friendly letters on topics of  
mutual interest with  
BGLTQ prisoners.  
For more information,  
contact  
[PrisMin@clfuu.org](mailto:PrisMin@clfuu.org)

## UU Historian Seeks Same-Sex Marriage Stories

Dr. Jeff Wilson, assistant professor of religious studies at Renison University College, University of Waterloo, is working on a series of articles documenting the history of Unitarian-Universalism and same-sex marriage. Although UUs are widely known as pioneers in this area, very little of the actual history has been conclusively put on the scholarly record.

If you would consent to a brief interview about your experiences

related to UU-ism and same-sex marriage ceremonies, please contact Dr. Wilson at:

[jeff.wilson@uwaterloo.ca](mailto:jeff.wilson@uwaterloo.ca)

Dr. Wilson is interested both in purely religious ceremonies whether or not they were labeled marriage") done in the 20th century as well as UUs' involvement in the fight for legal marriage equality in the late 20th and early 21st centuries. He plans to publish his research in the Journal of Unitarian

Universalist History so that major milestones in our history are not forgotten. He's promised to submit a summary of his research to Interweave Connect too. Here's a little teaser from that forthcoming research: *did you know that Unitarian and Universalist ministers were already performing same-sex marriages in the 1950s, making them the earliest verified such ceremonies?* Many more fascinating details to come!

## Happening at the UUA

### UUA President Applauds New York Marriage Equality Vote

The following statement was issued by UUA President Rev. Peter Morales:

"I enthusiastically applaud the actions of the New York Legislature and the leadership of Gov. Andrew Cuomo in establishing marriage equality in that state. With this action, New York has demonstrated its commitment to the American ideal that all citizens are entitled to equal protections and rights under the law. New York joins Connecticut,

Iowa, New Hampshire, Vermont, Washington, D.C., and Massachusetts in supporting the right of every person to enter into the legal protections, joys, and responsibilities that marriage offers. With this decision, our country takes another step on the long journey toward justice for all.

"I am especially proud of the work of our Unitarian Universalist congregations, ministers, and congregants in New York. These dedicated faith

leaders have fought long and hard for equal rights, and I thank them for their powerful commitment to the cause of marriage equality.

"Today we celebrate this victory. Unitarian Universalists are committed to standing on the side of love until the freedom to marry is the right of all Americans."

(<http://www.uua.org/news/pressroom/pressreleases/185000.shtml>, June 25, 2011)

## In the News

### Pioneering Gay Pakistani Muslim Poet Dies at 64

Gay Pakistani Muslim poet, activist, and Chicago radio show host Ifti Nasim died at a Chicago hospital late Friday July 22, following a heart attack. He was 64.

Nasim said he always knew he was gay, but living openly in his native Pakistan was not an option. He remembered first reading magazine articles about being gay in America and developing his love of fashion by flipping through Vogue. "In Islamic society, gays have no place," he told WBEZ-FM in Chicago. "America sold the gay culture to me back home. They're living happily ever after in America. That's my place, I've got to go to America. I was sold. Completely sold."

Islam forbids homosexuality. While attitudes toward gays have changed among some in Muslim countries, being gay is still considered widely unacceptable and homosexual acts in some Muslim countries are punish-



Gay Muslim poet Ifti Nasim

able by whipping or death. Some of Nasim's family members stopped speaking to him because of his sexual orientation, and he had his share of critics, or people who dismissed him as nothing more than a clown. "They thought gay is something, a passing state," he told WBEZ. "They said—go get married. You'll be fine. A good woman will do a lot of good to you—excuse me, like it's some kind of disease? Take two aspirin, you get up in the morning and you'll be O.K. Honey, it doesn't work that way."

Nasim, who became a U.S. citizen, grappled with LGBT issues in his activism and poetry, which also dealt with global politics and advocacy for Muslims after the September 11, 2001, terrorist attacks. Nasim wrote numerous books of poetry, including one titled "Narman" – a word for hermaphrodite – which was believed to be the first book of gay themed poetry to be published in the Urdu language. He also founded SANGAT/Chicago, a South Asian lesbian, gay and transgender organization. In 1996, Nasim was inducted into the Chicago Gay and Lesbian Hall of Fame for "his courage as an international ambassador of tolerance" and his leadership in the city.

(<http://www.365gay.com/news/pioneering-gay-pakistani-muslim-poet-dies-at-64>, July 26, 2011.)

## Desmond Tutu: Our Glorious Diversity

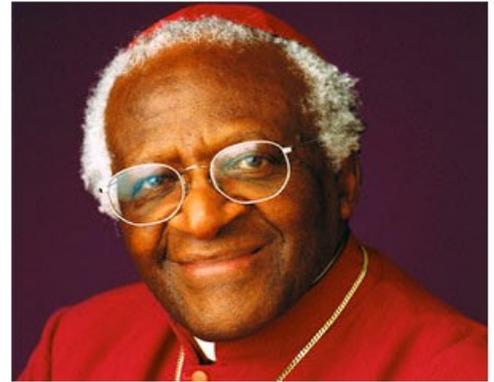
We inhabit a universe that is characterized by diversity. There is not just one planet or one star; there are galaxies of all different sorts, a plethora of animal species, different kinds of plants, and different races and ethnic groups. Even a human body is made up of different organs performing different functions and it is precisely that diversity that makes it an organism. If it were only one organ, it would not be a human body. We are constantly being made aware of the glorious diversity that is written into the structure of the universe we inhabit, and we are helped to see that if it were otherwise, things would go awry.

We are all of equal worth, born equal in dignity and born free, and for this reason deserving of respect whatever our external circumstances. We are created freely, for freedom, as decision-making animals, and so are rightly entitled to respect, to be given personal space, to be autonomous. We belong in a world whose very structure, whose essence, is diversity, almost bewildering in extent. It is to live in a fool's paradise to ignore this basic fact.

We live in a universe marked by diversity as the law of its being and our being. We are made to exist in a life that should be marked by cooperation, interdependence, sharing, caring, compassion and complementarity. We should celebrate our diversity; we should exult in our differences as making not for separation and alienation and hostility but for their glorious opposites. The law of our being is to live in solidarity, friendship, helpfulness, unselfishness, interdependence and complementarity as sisters and brothers in one family – the human family. Anything else, as we have experienced, is disaster. Martin Luther King Jr. said, "Where the law of an eye for an eye obtains, in the end all will be blind. If we don't learn to live as brothers, we will die together as fools."

Religion, which should encourage tolerance, respect, compassion, peace, reconciliation, caring and sharing, has far too frequently – perversely – done the opposite. Religion has fueled alienation and conflict and has exacerbated intolerance and injustice and oppression. Some of the ghastliest atrocities have happened and are happening in the name of religion. It need not be so if we can learn the obvious: that no religion can hope to have a monopoly on God, on goodness and virtue and truth.

We need so much to work for coexistence, for tolerance, and to say, "I disagree with you, but I will defend to the death your right to your opinion." It is only when we respect even our adversaries and see them not as ogres, dehumanized, demonized, but as fellow human beings deserving respect for their personhood and dignity, that we will conduct a discourse that just might prevent conflict. There is room for everyone; there is room for every culture, race, language and point of view.



**Archbishop Desmond Tutu**  
1984 Nobel Peace Prize Laureate

([http://www.huffingtonpost.com/desmond-tutu/our-glorious-diversity-wh\\_b\\_874791.html](http://www.huffingtonpost.com/desmond-tutu/our-glorious-diversity-wh_b_874791.html), June 21, 2011)

**SEND YOUR NEWS TO “INTERWEAVE CONNECT”**

**SOMETHING TO SHARE ?**

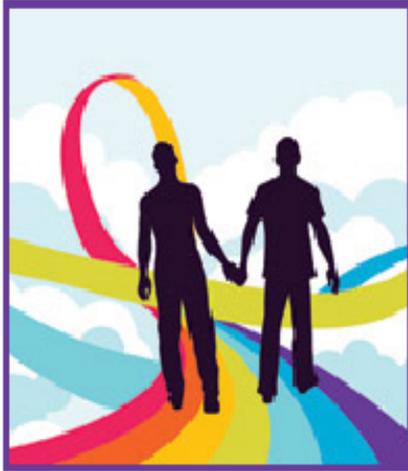
**A MEMBER TO SPOTLIGHT ?**

**CHAPTER ACTIVITIES ?**

**AN OPINION TO VOICE ?**

SEND SUBMISSIONS TO:

[interweave.connect@gmail.com](mailto:interweave.connect@gmail.com)



*"What is straight? A line can be straight, or a street, but the human heart, oh, no, it is curved like a road through mountains."*

Blanche DuBois, "A Sreetcar Named Desire"



## **Interweave Connect**

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Sharon, MA 02067-2749

RETURN SERVICE REQUESTED

### **SAVE THE DATE!**

CONVO 2012/  
CREATING CHANGE  
*Baltimore, Maryland*  
*January 25-29, 2012*



GENERAL ASSEMBLY  
*Phoenix, Arizona*  
*June 20-24, 2012*