

Dear Friend,

We take the liberty to send you the first of a bi-monthly internet service that will report on creative insights, ideas and experiences that offer directions to deal with the enormous social and ecological crisis we are faced with worldwide. The Meeting Rivers platform will be responsible for this service which will be inter-cultural, inter-religious and multi-disciplinary. We are hopeful that the Meeting Rivers bulletins will help contribute to the growing search for sustainable solutions. Our first dispatch, which follows below, will introduce the Meeting Rivers program.

If you have material which you would like to diffuse in this series please do not hesitate to send it to us. You can address the email to: Siddhartha (coordinator, Meeting Rivers) at the following email ID: meetingrivers.fireflies@gmail.com

With warm regards,

Trent Schroyer (Ramapo College, New Jersey, USA)

John Clammer (United Nations University, Tokyo, Japan)

Siddhartha (Fireflies Intercultural Centre, Bangalore, India)

Meeting Rivers

global peace forum of inter-religious and secular initiatives

Meeting Rivers is a global platform of religious, spiritual and secular actors who bring fresh understandings, experiences and solutions to the inter-related challenges of personal change, social transformation and ecological engagement.

This is a program of the Charles Leopold Mayer Foundation for the Progress of Humankind and Pipal Tree.

In today's global village the different religious traditions seem ill-prepared to face the personal, social and ecological challenges that lie ahead. While all religious and spiritual traditions show considerable potential to promote pluralism and social concern we are nevertheless witnessing alarming trends towards fundamentalism in several parts of the world.

The secular impetus, while it has helped to extend democracy and human rights, has been substantially co-opted by the values of the market. There are however signs that 'secular exclusivism', a version of secularism that rejects all truck with the spiritual dimension, is no longer sure of itself. On the positive side many secularists of the 'inclusive' variety have always shown eagerness to dialogue with spiritual and religious traditions.

It is our conviction that when religious, spiritual and secular actors come together to search for answers to our common problems they may avoid the usual doctrinal

diplomacy and skirmishes that a purely inter-religious gathering might often get bogged down with.

In such a plural context, religious people and organizations also realize that they have much to learn from the secular and spiritual activists, and vice versa.

The Meeting Rivers program has the following objectives:

1. To renew religious, spiritual and secular traditions so that the urgent challenges of personal change, social transformation and ecological engagement are addressed.
2. To harness the motivation and values of people from different religious and spiritual traditions to help solve problems related to religious fundamentalism, social exclusion, women's rights, participatory democracy, governance and environmental degradation.
3. To form a common platform of people and organizations from *the religious, the spiritual and the secular traditions*. It is clear that when religions are not in active social solidarity with people from secular and other spiritual backgrounds they cannot achieve much success in carrying out their social and environmental objectives.
4. *To give the same importance to personal change as one gives to social and ecological change. This means to further deepen changes in attitudes, values and beliefs.* The human mind has been deeply influenced by the commercial values of the present-day market (which obviously need not be the only market model), personal profit over everything else, and the bombardment of images from the media, television and advertising. Unless there are serious efforts to shift the emphasis from varieties of narrow individualism and consumerism to a mind-set that is more other-oriented and compassionate we may not succeed in mobilizing the conviction and commitment necessary to bring about the far-reaching social and ecological changes we seek.
5. To promote the experience of "**Communities of Faith and Action**", a program that attempts to combine prayer and meditation with ethical conduct and social action.

Forthcoming Publications:

- Buddhism, Human Responsibilities and Social Renewal. By Nalin Swaris, Meeting Rivers Press, February 2008. 140 pages.
- Socially Engaged Religion, Edited by Siddhartha, Meeting Rivers Press, April 2008. 250 pages.

Web journal: There will be a web journal of Meeting Rivers by April 2008. This would be an important contribution to the global inter-religious and secular debates on the search for alternatives.

An international conference on "Workable Global Alternatives" is being planned for November 2008. The theme coincides with the FPH objectives of ethics, governance and sustainable development.

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