

“Intentionally International”
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Monte Vista Unitarian Universalist Congregation
November 21, 2010

1968 was a momentous year. French students rioted in the streets. “Spring” in Prague, Czechoslovakia came to an end when Soviet troops invaded. The USS Pueblo was captured by North Korea. The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and Bobby Kennedy were killed. Violence occurred at the Democratic National Convention in Chicago, and Richard Nixon was elected. Far away from the spotlight in suburban Wisconsin, I was in sixth grade, being taught how to think about other countries.

Our assignment was to choose a country and write a report about it, covering climate, topography, agriculture, industry, exports, transportation, education, government, language, clothes, entertainment, and customs. Scotland was my choice, and I delved into everything from Scotch whiskey to Manx cats. [Show the report.] The page about Scotch whiskey reads, “The Scots are very proud of their whiskies. All of these pictures were cut out of Sports Illustrated magazine. Please don’t get any ideas about me.”

Regarding entertainment, I included this news report of seven Wisconsin otters that were transported to Scotland to star in a movie. The trained Wisconsin otters, it turned out, were veteran film stars with numerous previous screen credits. The owner reported that the otters enjoyed acting but were uneasy about air travel.

There are many teachers in this congregation, and they would know about age-appropriate ways to teach students about other countries. It may be that teaching about a country’s climate, topography, agriculture, industry, exports, transportation, education, government, language, clothes, entertainment, and customs is indeed the way to go for sixth grader.

However, thankfully, we do not remain sixth graders for life. We must keep evolving in our understanding of other countries and the people who live in them. Methods of engaging with other countries that are all about external, quantifiable facts and figures do not allow us to grow in empathy and maturity. So long as we view other countries and their people as objects, it is

easy to view them as obstacles to achieving our objectives or as accomplices in achieving our objectives.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee helps us to grow into mature, intentionally international, religiously liberal people. For religious liberals as well as for other people, there are barriers to empathy. We can be so caught up in our position of privilege that we choose not to engage with people in other countries. We can also be so self-conscious about our position of privilege that we do not want to risk empathizing with people in other countries.

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee holds our feet to the fire, and I encourage everyone here to support it. Individual annual memberships are just \$40, and gifts of \$100 or more will be eligible to be matched by the UU Shelter Rock Congregation in Manhasset, New York. The UUSC is not financially supported by the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. The UUSC raises its own money.

Cooperation between the UUA (www.uua.org) and the UUSC (www.uusc.org) has increased in recent years and is likely to increase even more in the future. Bill Schulz, a former UUA president and former president of Amnesty International, has just been named president of the UUSC. This month, the UUA and UUSC collaborated on a joint trip to Uganda. This “Witness to a Return Home” was an experiential learning journey to an area of the world struggling to recover from war and political unrest.

One of the advantages of growing into intentionally international people through Unitarian Universalism is that the UUA’s International Office has interesting tools and resources. For example, here is a presentation on “The Theological Grounding for UU International Engagement.”¹ [I showed the PowerPoint presentation and walked through the questions for reflection.]

¹ See http://www.uua.org/documents/internationalresources/fwb/uu_theology_internatl.pps for the PowerPoint presentation and http://www.uua.org/documents/internationalresources/fwb/uu_theology_internatl.pdf for the document.

In closing, may we continue growing into intentionally international world citizens. May we grow through action and reflection – not shortchanging either action or reflection. May it be so!