



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
ASSOCIATION OF CONGREGATIONS
Representing over 1,000 liberal religious congregations

Inspired Faith, Effective Action

weblog of the Advocacy & Witness staff group of the
Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations

Friday, June 6, 2008

U/U Youth Exchange

Unitarian Church in Westchester County, New York, connecting U. S. and German Youth in an International Exchange Program



[The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Briarcliff, Croton & Ossining \(UUBCO\)](#), in Westchester County, north of New York City, is

connecting its youth and families with Unitarian and Freireligioese (free religion group) youth and families in Germany through an international exchange program this summer which they have started with the help and guidance from professional staff of the [Unitarian Universalist Association](#) (UUA), the [Unitarian Universalist Partner Church Council](#) (UUPCC) and the [Deutsche Unitarier](#) (DU - German Unitarians) group. The program was made possible when such a program was discussed among Barbara Beach, Director of UUPCC, Rev. Eric Cherry, Director of International Resources for the UUA, Wolfgang Janz and Antje Paul, officers of the DU, and Shahan Islam, a youth group leader and member of the Board of the UUBCO Fellowship, who was sent by the church board and its minister, Rev. Jim Covington, to a meeting of the [International Council of Unitarians & Universalists](#) (ICUU) in Oberwesel, Germany, in November, 2007.

As a result of the meeting and the connections to German families facilitated by Wolfgang Janz and Antje Paul and to Westchester families by Shahan Islam, Sonya Lewis, Carol Zoernack, Susan Cuccinello, and Cornelia Cotton, ten youths, five from Westchester and five from Germany will be making the trek across the ocean and into each other's country and region to learn about their life, language, culture, faith, and history. The host family will include youth in everyday activities, and take the youth, if possible, to a UU service and meet other Unitarian Universalists. The Westchester youth have also committed themselves to a number of hours of German language study prior to departing on their trip. The UUA and UUPCC are committed to

connecting Unitarians worldwide, recognizing that exchange programs offer youth an opportunity learn about cultures, languages, and life in other countries, indeed, it is well-known that such programs play a VERY significant, positive role in a participant's life.

The young people selected for this program include the following five Americans and five Germans:

- Ariel Islam: Ariel, 14, a tenth grader, is easygoing, performs very well in school, is involved in many youth group activities, wants to go into law or politics; loves swimming, singing, skiing, movies, studying. She is talkative and curious, likes classical and rock music, loves travel, art, literature, history, and would like to learn about German political parties/elections, etc.
- Jonathan ("JJ") Kullberg: JJ is 14. JJ speaks a little bit of French and has been to Canada and Puerto Rico. He plays the guitar and enjoys skiing, skateboarding, rollerblading, and films and is curious, but is shy and humorous.
- Elijah Lewis: Elijah, 14, is a 9th grader, who enjoys the big three American sports – baseball, basketball (his favorite) and football, as well as lacrosse. He likes pop and classical music, playing video games, and playing the trumpet. His favorite school subjects are math, biology, history, and band. Elijah also speaks Spanish. His hobbies are drawing, bicycle riding, hiking, and camping.
- Jake Newman: Jake is 15 years old and has traveled to a number of countries, and speaks some Spanish. Jake plays soccer and is a vegetarian. He likes hiking, swimming, camping, reading and writing, and plays bass guitar. He describes himself as talkative and sociable and enjoys video games, being with friends, listening to music, and he is interested in Germany.
- Nick Pearl: Nick is 16 and has a great sense of humor and quick wit, is very

talented in theater, and plays the trumpet. Nick's mother, Anne, is of Austrian descent and speaks German. Nick is very interested in German culture and would like to learn about German teenage life.

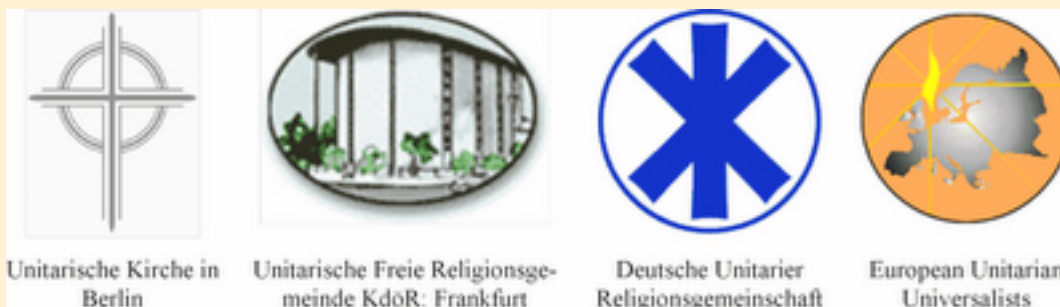
- **Swaantje Stelling:** Swaantje is 17 and has been a youth group leader of her fellowship in Germany. The Stelling family lives close to Frankfurt, Germany. Swaantje has an older brother who is 19 and an older sister, Alke, 21, who will be coming to Croton in the summer. Mr. Stelling works for Deutsche Bank as a director, and Mrs. Stelling is involved in education, working in the field of teaching and advising families with small children. Swaantje's grandparents were among those people, who made efforts to rebuild the denomination, originally founded in Germany in 1876, after World War II. At the age of 20, Swaantje's mother spent two trimesters at the "Thomas-Starr-King-School for the Ministry" in Berkeley as a visiting student, and for the last 28 years has been active in the Unitarian movement as a speaker. She has been working/writing for 27 years for "[Unitarische Blaetter](#)," the membership magazine. Swaantje's father has worked for the "[Unitarische Akademie](#)" for more than 30 years. Swaantje, like her sister, is an excellent student and enjoys movies, reading, skiing, hanging out with friends, and swimming (she has worked as a lifeguard.)
- **Carina Ritter:** Carina is 16 years old and lives with her family in Mannheim, close to Heidelberg. She loves sports and ballroom dancing, kung fu, and hanging out with friends. She is very outgoing, and loves animals – pets. The family goes skiing and camping in Italy/France in the summer, and enjoys swimming and barbequing. Carina would like to "learn a lot about the culture of America." She is interested to learn how American teens spend their free time, and wants to improve her English.

- Saskia Schoettle: Saskia, 17, lives in Pforzheim at the edge of the Black Forest. She speaks English, French, and Italian, and is the head of the church youth group and summer camp, and is also a youth basketball coach. Saskia likes movies, listening to music, swimming, studying, going to museums, and she plays the piano and flute.
- Marc Ritter: Marc, Carina's brother, is 18 and enjoys tennis, soccer, and likes to listen to music, painting/drawing, and meeting friends. Marc would like to learn something about "the real American Way of Life" and "look at the famous sights of New York." He is also interested in learning about American foods.
- Alke Stelling: Alke, Swaantje's sister, is 21, and lives in Friedrichsdorf (near Frankfurt), Germany, with her parents, sister Swaantje and brother Hauke. She has just entered Goethe University in Frankfurt, specializing in teacher training for history, mathematics, and Latin. Alke speaks English, Spanish, and some Swedish, and is also studying classical Greek. Alke enjoys studying, singing, dancing, jogging, skiing, movies, reading (science fiction), and wants to find out about the landscape, culture, and cities in America. Alke also works as a lifeguard and is a member of the German life-saving organization.

Although this is the first year of the exchange program, it is hoped that it will continue in subsequent years and serve as a way for Unitarian and Freireligioese youth and families to learn about each other and their societies, and provide a truly meaningful lifetime experience for all participants and families.

The Unitarian movement in Germany embraces a varied collection of churches, some of which belong to the [Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft](#) (German Unitarian Religious Community), while others (including the "[Unitarische Freie Religionsgemeinde KdöR](#)" in Frankfurt am Main, the "[Unitarische Religionsgemeinschaft Freie Protestanten KdöR](#)" in

Rheinland-Pfalz, the "[Unitarische Kirche in Berlin](#)" maintain their autonomy, and the English-speaking Unitarian Universalist Fellowships in [Frankfurt](#), [Kaiserslautern](#), Munich and Heidelberg are member congregations of the [European Unitarian Universalists](#).



Historically, the German Unitarians developed out of the Free Protestant tradition that originated with the 1876 founding in Rheinhessen of the "Religionsgemeinschaft Freier Protestanten." In 1910, Free Protestant leader and pastor Rudolf Walbaum came into contact with American Unitarians at a Berlin conference of liberal theologians. Consequently, Walbaum added the designation "German Unitarians" to the official Free Protestant nomenclature. The German Unitarian movement was later advanced by Rev. Clemens Taesler, pastor and founder of the Frankfurt church in 1926, who in collaboration with Walbaum formed the "Deutscher Unitarierbund" (German Unitarian Group). To circumvent a Nazi ban, the organization merged with other iconoclastic National Socialist critics to form the "Freie Religionsgemeinschaft Deutschlands" (German Free Religious Community). Since 1945, the German Unitarian congregations have resurfaced with the support of British and American organizations, though more traditionally oriented churches left the renamed "Deutsche Unitarier Religionsgemeinschaft" in 1950.

The Unitarische Freie Religionsgemeinde in Frankfurt am Main describes its religious orientation in the following way: "In reverence for God, the everlasting and undiscoverable, I pay tribute to the worth of humanity and of all life. I strive to learn about myself, to take control of myself and to further develop my Self. I aspire towards understanding and goodness in human co-existence. In full awareness of my spiritual, theological and intellectual freedom, I commit myself to the unitarian religion." Analogously, the Deutsche Unitarier privilege freedom: from dogma; from the belief in a creating God; to encounter the diversity of life and culture; to develop a personal religiosity; of participation and cooperation.

Posted by Rev. Eric Cherry
at [11:44 AM](#)



Labels: [Eric Cherry](#), [Germany](#), [International Resources](#), [Travel](#)

[Newer Post](#) [Older Post](#) [Home](#)

FEEDJIT Live Traffic Map