

AGENDA FOR CHANGE:
ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL – SEPTEMBER 2009
Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator - Rsgilbert@uuma.org

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SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009

October 4: UU Energy Justice Event on Cape Cod – Bob Murphy Murphydalzell@aol.com

October 16-18 - Sustainability Conference - Ithaca – <http://www.wemakeourfuture.org/>

October 31 – November 1: “Birth & Growth Conference – Celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the ‘Conference at Syracuse’” (at which Universalists and Unitarians decided to consolidate)

October 23: “Harvest with Justice” – a Farmworker Justice Symposium First Unitarian Church of Rochester. Contact Alison Clarke at accompost@gmail.com or 585-244-2711.

November 7: “Doing Justice in an Economic Tsunami” - St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council annual conference at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst.

November 22: UUMA/UUSC Guest at Your Table – UUSC Newsletter ATTACHED

March 21, 2010: Interfaith Impact of NYS Briefing – Conscience in Public Life.

April 23-24, 2010: St. Lawrence District Annual Assembly in Syracuse, NY: “Visions of Hope and Promise”

June 23-27, 2010: UUA General Assembly in Minneapolis, MN



**The St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District
Social Justice Council Presents**
DOING JUSTICE IN AN ECONOMIC TSUNAMI
November 7, 2009—9:30am to 4pm
Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst



Theme Speaker – JOHN BUEHRENS

Former President, Unitarian Universalist Association, Minister, First Parish in Needham, MA

John Buehrens brings not only a national perspective on economic justice, but also the understanding of a parish minister. He has been a prominent figure on the national religious scene for years, has served as special advisor to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and is a prolific author. His talk will be **“Maintaining a House of Hope.”**

The economic meltdown at the national and world levels has pervaded the religious consciousness. The recession has not only a social, political and economic impact, but a moral and spiritual one as well. How do we respond as individuals, as congregations, as a religious movement? John Buehrens will outline his views on this troubling topic.

In addition to the theme talk there will be a question and answer period and topical workshops including **health care, religious advocacy, racism and economic justice** and **class issues in liberal religion**. Participation at the conference is sponsored by the St. Lawrence District Youth Adult Committee (YAC). Youth are invited to a sleepover Friday night and then to participate with adults in the Saturday conference. Contact Kelly Masters at Kelly_Masters@hotmail.com.

Conference registration information and a detailed program will be mailed, e-mailed and also available in September on the St. Lawrence District website: www.sld.uua.org. For further information, contact Rev. Dick Gilbert at Rsgilbert@uuma.org or SJC Chair Harsey Leonard at Harsey.Leonard@verizon.net.

Catalyst: To Create Beloved Community Team Members are Available to Assist in Beginning the Work Of Building the World We Dream About

Team members from Catalyst, a working group of the St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council that includes lay representatives, religious educators, and ministers, are available to help congregations further the vision we share of creating anti-racist, anti-oppressive, multicultural congregations within our movement.

Catalyst - Who We Are:

The resolution by which the Social Justice Council (SJC) was formed, as passed in District Assembly, April 23, 2005, included this statement: “Work of this panel (SJC) would be informed by the larger goal of creating anti-racist, anti-oppressive congregations and communities in which we live and work.” Catalyst, accountable to the SJC but autonomous in setting its programs, extends this vision for the work of the Council to include clusters, congregations and district leadership.

Catalyst - What we will do:

Work with congregations, clusters, district leadership, selves, other groups & individuals

- Giving witness/ being present
- Making resources available
- Inviting people into conversation; to learn and do their own work
- Doing our own personal work
- Connecting with other districts’ leaders and organizations doing anti-racism work
- Continue our training & skill-building
- Developing processes and programs

How we will do it:

- Connect with SLD website; include resource materials, links to related websites; conference dates,
- Make ourselves available to clusters on quarterly schedule (two each quarter through 2009-2010). THEY organize.
- Facilitate process within congregations -- on request (train the trainers)
- Start where we are as individuals, congregations, etc.
- Offer opportunities for personal exploration
- Develop consciousness: ignorance vs. insensitivity
- Intersectionality class/race
- Consider worship

READER FEEDBACK

Reader Peter Marino suggests “A book everyone needs to read: *Gringolandia* <http://www.amazon.ca/Gringolandia-Lyn-Miller-Lachmann/dp/1931896496>, a novel about immigration. Contact him at pmarino300@yahoo.com.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

******* See Interfaith Impact of NYS September Newsletter – ATTACHED**

IINYS PARTICIPATION IN STATE HEALTH ISSUES

IINYS participated in a press conference in late July to draw attention to a report on the status of New York State health care. IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith said, “The report clearly shows that adequate health care for every New Yorker is achievable. Now we need the will to make it happen. Health care for everyone is a fundamental moral issue. It is a human right that gets at the very foundation of what it means to be human and live in community.”

NATIONAL ISSUES

New Census Data Hints at Impact of the Recession Coalition on Human Needs Overview ATTACHED

New Census data reveals that the incidence of poverty has increased, as has the number of Americans without health insurance. Median household income sank 3.6% to \$50,303. The number of Americans living in poverty increased by nearly 2.6 million to 13.2% in 2008. Last year’s 39.8 million poor people comprise the higher number of Americans living in poverty since 1960. This is disturbing, since figures do not reflect the impact of the recession this year.

Those without health insurance grew to 46.3 million, rising from 13.7 to 15.4%. The number of uninsured working age adults (18-64 years old) increased from 19.6% to 20.3% between 2007 and 2008, an increase of more than 1.5 million people.

Bucking the trend, the total number of uninsured children dropped from 11% to 9.9%, because many children are eligible for public insurance programs such as SCHIP and Medicaid that are unavailable to most adults. Unemployment averaged 5.8% in 2008 and 9.7% thus far in 2009. The Economic Policy Institutes estimates that, assuming an average unemployment rate of 9.3% in 2009, poverty would increase to 14.7%. Child poverty is expected to rise from 19% in 2008 to 25% this year. The proportion of children living below half the poverty line rose from 6.4% in 2000 to 8.5% in 2008. The poverty line for a family of three is \$17,163. Deborah Weinstein, executive director of the Coalition on Human Needs says, “If poor children were not hidden from most of us – if they could look us in the eye – we would not allow their hardships to continue.”

The Let Justice Roll campaign (of which UUSC is a member) reminds us the federal minimum wage last summer was raised to \$7.25 an hour. “We urgently need your support to continue our work together to raise the minimum wage to a living wage. . . . We know that \$7.25 is not enough. It’s lower than the inflation-adjusted value of the minimum wage of 1956. It’s far lower than the minimum wage of 1968 – the year Dr. Martin Luther King died fighting for living wages for sanitation workers, and all workers. It would take about \$10 to match the buying power of the 1968 minimum wage.” Their program is the “\$10 in 2010 Campaign.” For more information go to www.letjusticeroll.org.

Focus on Health Care Reform: Comparison of proposed legislation ATTACHED

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

Letter on Health Care from Rev. Peter Morales, President, UUA

The current hysteria and rancor in the debate over health care policy are profoundly disturbing. The issues here go far beyond normal public policy debate. Religious principles central to our shared Unitarian Universalist (UU) faith are involved.

The first religious principle at stake is compassion. We must be a strong, persistent voice that reminds our nation and our leaders that compassion is central to all major faith traditions. We must insist that health care reform protects those without political clout: children, the poor, the disabled, the elderly. To stand on the side of love is to stand with those who are on the margins.

The second principle of our faith we must affirm today is our commitment to the democratic process. We are witnessing cynical demagoguery that plays on fear in order to defend privilege. There is no place for intimidation in our public discussion. Demagogues foment fear and panic that lead to violence. As religious people we must oppose intimidation.

True democracy can only exist where each voice is heard, where debate is open and civil, where people can disagree without being threatened. Good people can and do disagree about health care policy. However, we must all join together to demand open, respectful debate.

As religious people, let us insist on two things: We must create a health care system that protects the most vulnerable, and we must insist on a democratic process that is open to all.

Single Payer Health Care: 2008 Action of Immediate Witness

Whereas: Unitarian Universalists are concerned with the worth and dignity of all people;

Whereas: We spend over \$2 trillion for health care in the United States, yet 50 million people are still not covered and another 50 million are denied adequate care by their insurance companies;

Whereas: Health care is a human right, yet the World Health Organization ranks the United States 37th in the world in health care outcomes although we spend nearly twice as much as any other country, enough to cover everybody with excellent comprehensive health care;

Whereas: A bill has been proposed in Congress, HR 676, United States National Health Insurance Act (Expanded and Improved Medicare for All Bill), that outlines a universal, nonprofit national health care program that will provide guaranteed choice, quality affordable health care and prescription drugs to everyone in the country;

Whereas: HR 676 would remove the current prohibition on Medicare against negotiating pharmaceutical prices;

Whereas: More than 15,000 doctors have signed on in favor of this plan, including two former Surgeons General;

Whereas: The National Conference of Mayors unanimously endorsed HR 676 at their 2008 meeting;

Whereas: Under this proposed plan, we can pay for a comprehensive national health care program with the same money we are now spending by removing insurance companies and cover every single person in the United States; and

Whereas: The bill provides money for retraining and giving priority to those whose jobs as administrators in the insurance industry would be lost as a result of this shift;

Therefore, be it resolved: We call on Unitarian Universalist congregations to become informed advocates for universal access to nonprofit health care financing through social action and adult religious education. We call on individual Unitarian Universalists to urge our members of Congress to co-sponsor and pass HR 676, Medicare for All, or its successors, so that our people and our nation can have the excellent and affordable health care system we deserve.

Standing on the Side of Love

The UUA's "Stand on the Side of Love" program is deeply committed to achieving full and equal protection under the law for lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people. We want to be able to say to lawmakers that we know, with certainty, that thousands of Americans share our passion for full equality. The petition below will give us that certainty:

I stand on the side of love in support of full equality for people of all gender identities and sexual orientations.

I believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people deserve equal treatment in all matters of law, including the rights to marry, to adopt children and to serve openly in our country's armed forces. Furthermore, our nation's law should protect everyone who faces violence, intimidation, and discrimination because of their identities.

In signing this petition, I am affirming the full humanity of all people. I am harnessing love's power to stop oppression. I am honoring the spark of the divine in each and every person. I am pledging to uphold love as a guiding principle in my treatment of others.

I call on my lawmakers to do the same by providing full and equal protection under the law for gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people.

Reply to Adam, Standing on the Side of Love at love@uaa.org

Visit the website at www.StandingontheSideofLove.org.

The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

visit www.uaa.org/socialjustice. See *Advocacy News* September 10 (ATTACHED).

Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community (UUJEC)

Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community (UUJEC) was founded in 1994 as a dynamic, independent grassroots affiliate of the UUA. Our mission is to engage, educate, and activate Unitarian Universalists to work for economic justice, recognizing that as people of faith in the struggle for justice, we are supporting and renewing our spiritual lives. Our current focus is The Great Turning, single payer health care for all and an agenda for a new economy. The most recent newsletter is attached. See the UUJEC website at www.uujec.org.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

Hurricane Katrina, Four Years On

Four years ago, on August 29, 2005, Hurricane Katrina made landfall in the U.S. Gulf Coast, forcing over 1.5 million people from their homes, killing more than 1,000, and damaging or destroying the homes of nearly 300,000 families.



The storm's devastation and the breaching of the levees in New Orleans were so extensive that families and communities are still struggling to recover today. Those most impacted are low-income people and people of color. This is an ongoing disaster, and it is not accidental.

Tracing the contours of recovery on the Gulf Coast, we find our society's fault lines of race and class. What we see is that entrenched inequalities based on race and class determined people's vulnerability during Katrina and that these inequalities continue to hinder residents' ability to recover today.

In New Orleans, almost one-third of addresses are still unoccupied -- most are homes in the Lower Ninth Ward or public housing units that remain empty and boarded-up four years on. Compounding the problem, the city of New Orleans recently demolished additional public housing complexes, wiping out over 4,500 affordable housing units. The city plans to replace just 750 of them.

Since Katrina, UUSC and the UUA have jointly partnered with over 40 organizations in Louisiana and Mississippi to provide over \$2.2 million in grants and recovery money to UU congregations, grassroots organizations, and low-income communities and communities of color in support of their efforts to return, rebuild, and remain on the Gulf Coast.

You can take action -- [tell U.S. policymakers to pass the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act of 2009, creating 100,000 living-wage jobs for local and displaced workers](https://secure2.convio.net/uusc/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=179). You can do this online at: <https://secure2.convio.net/uusc/site/Advocacy?cmd=display&page=UserAction&id=179>

Also, express your solidarity by volunteering your time and energy with families and communities in New Orleans who are working to pave a safe road home. The [Greater New Orleans Unitarian Universalists](#) and the [Center for Ethical Living Social Justice Renewal \(CELSJR\)](#) are sponsors of the [New Orleans Rebirth Volunteer Program](#). Individuals and groups are welcome. Information for volunteers and donations is at: <http://www.celsjr.org/>

Submitted by Jack Maniloff, UUSC St. Lawrence District Regional Coordinator,
<jkmf@mail.rochester.edu>

EDITORIAL: HEALTH CARE REDUX – Richard S. Gilbert

(See comparison of health plans as an attachment to this issue)

Health care is **the** issue of the hour. What more can be said about it as the various advocates mobilize their constituencies and line up their votes? **1.** Health care is a moral issue. Profit is not the only reason to do something. Whatever happened to compassion and the common good?

2. American health care is probably the best in quality and the worst in delivery among the industrial democracies. The World Health Organization ranks the U.S. 37th in health outcomes. We already have rationing as 46.3 million Americans have no health insurance and untold millions of others are under or poorly insured. Harvard Medical School researchers estimate that 45,000 deaths per year are due to lack of health insurance. We don't see the other industrial democracies clamoring to adopt the American style delivery of medical care.

3. The scare tactics of the raucous town hall meetings are demagoguery. A demagogue is one who “can rock the boat and persuade everyone there is a terrible storm at sea.” Those tactics persuaded one older woman to tell President Obama that she did not want the government interfering with her health insurance, “keep government hands off my Medicare,” apparently not realizing Medicare is a government program. A recent study indicates a majority of Americans support a public option; a Robert Wood Johnson survey finds 73% of doctors do as well.

4. Economics is the allocation of scarce resources. This is true for health care as well. We have to determine how much our collective health is worth and for whom it is to be allocated. There are no plans for “death panels” in any bill Congress is considering. But reimbursement for the **voluntary consultation** of people with their doctors over terminal care is critical. Most people do not want to persist in a vegetative state. There are other hard moral choices to be made.

5. Politically it is quite clear that single payer universal health care (which I favor) has no chance at present. Nonetheless H.R. 676, the Weiner amendment, is worth supporting just to assess overall support. Even the public option to compete with insurance companies seems doubtful. Some reforms will go through. However, H.R. 3200 allows states to experiment with single payer options at the state level and includes funding for abortion. States, as the “laboratories of democracy” will have to create effective health care as a model before it will ever be adopted at the national level.

6. Congregations seeking important social action projects should immediately ramp up their educational and advocacy programs for health care reform. I call your attention to the 2008 Action of Immediate Witness on single payer universal health care passed by the UUA General Assembly in that year (elsewhere in this issue). It is a useful educational and advocacy tool.

7. Health care must be understood in the context of the total social milieu. Our bloated military spending, our self-indulgent life style and our meager preventative efforts are pitiful. Individuals have a responsibility for health care quite as much as the nation as a total community.

Finally, a word of hope. My friend Father Daniel Berrigan was recently asked if he didn't despair at his futile efforts to bring peace and justice to fruition. Dan responded in his typical quiet, determined and eloquent way: “Despair is a luxury beyond my means.”

VAN JONES – ANOTHER VICTIM OF THE RAUCOUS RIGHT

Editorial Comment by Dick Gilbert

Van Jones, advocate of racial, economic and environmental justice, has become just one more victim of the self-righteous and raucous right, exemplified by Glen Beck and Rush Limbaugh. This “search and destroy” mission is to dis-empower (if not disembowel) everyone who seeks any semblance of the public good. Van Jones was the Ware Lecturer at the 2008 General Assembly. You can read his words at www.uua.org search for Van Jones + Ware Lecture 2008. Interestingly, he said “Y’all are about to mess up and be successful,” meaning the political tides were turning in a favorable direction. Then he warned that those who have critiqued government for years are about to govern. Are we prepared for that? Those words become ironic as, on the brink of a promise of a green revolution, the Obama administration yielded to right wing pressure and caused Jones to resign because of some past statements taken out of context. Perhaps, as one activist suggested, Van Jones will be more effective outside of government dropping the plumb line of justice than in government with all its limitations. We will see. But what a shame for this outstanding leader to fall victim to demagoguery and character assassination.

PASSING THE PLATE FOR JUSTICE IN NYS*

JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a UUA-UUSC partner organization. The St. Lawrence District is an official member and UUs are active on the Board. Robb Smith of our Albany congregation is Executive Director - robb@interfaithimpactnys.org. We encourage individual Unitarian Universalists in New York State to join. We also encourage you to invite your congregation or social action group join as an organizational member. For your convenience a membership form is below.

Phone: (518) 463-5652 - E-mail: interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net

Background information on state issues at www.interfaithimpactnys.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Name and Title: _____

Address: _____

City, State _____ ZIP _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ E-mail _____

Congregation: _____

Address _____

City, State _____ ZIP _____

Affiliation: Protestant Unitarian Universalist Reform Synagogue Other

Membership Dues Enclosed: Individual \$10 \$20 \$30 \$40 Other \$_____

Congregation/organizations \$50 \$200 \$300 Other (amount) _____

Please make checks payable to: Interfaith IMPACT of New York State

and mail to: IINYS, 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203

Your Assembly Member _____ Your State Senator _____

Thank you for your support

*Many congregations use the Sunday morning offering to support one or another charitable or activist organization. Why not dedicate a Sunday offering to justice in New York State?