

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE:**  
**ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL – OCTOBER 2009**  
Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator - [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009**

**October 23: “Harvest with Justice” – a Farmworker Justice Symposium - First Unitarian Church of Rochester. Contact Alison Clarke at [acompost@gmail.com](mailto:acompost@gmail.com) or 585-244-2711.**

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

**November 7: “Doing Justice in an Economic Tsunami” - St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council annual conference at the UU Church in Amherst (see flyer below and ATTACHMENT).**

**November 22: UUMA/UUSC Guest at Your Table – See UUSC Corner and ATTACHED UUSC Newsletter**

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



**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 in the Saturday conference. Contact Kelly Masters at [Kelly\\_Masters@hotmail.com](mailto:Kelly_Masters@hotmail.com).

Conference registration information and program is ATTACHED and on the St. Lawrence District website: [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org). For further information, contact Rev. Dick Gilbert at [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or SJC Chair Harsey Leonard at [Harsey.Leonard@verizon.net](mailto:Harsey.Leonard@verizon.net).

## **EDITORIAL: When the Invincible Young Become the Vulnerable Old: Health Care and the Common Good by Richard S. Gilbert**

Listening to the *Diane Rheme Show* the other day I heard a phrase that resonated. The panelists were discussing health care – what else? One among them was noting that many of the “invincible young” were not about to accept the notion that they should buy health care insurance to support others. Through my mind danced the question: What happens when the “invincible young” become the “vulnerable old?” as surely they will.

That unwillingness to think beyond self-interest is one of the most disturbing features of our so-called debate on health care this fateful autumn. It permeates thinking not only about health care but also about virtually every other issue. Americans, opines bio-ethicist Daniel Callahan in the October 9 issue of the Catholic journal *Commonweal* (“America’s Blind Spot,” Volume CXXXVI, Number 17) don’t really have a developed understanding of the common good. That is passing strange since conservatives among us so honor the U. S. Constitution which pointedly charges the government with such radical notions as “establishing justice,” promoting the “general welfare of the people.” Sounds like “socialism” to me, except those who facilely lay down the charge of “socialized medicine” haven’t the foggiest notion of what socialism is – government ownership of the means of production.

I’ve been reading *Washington Post* correspondent T. R. Reid’s brilliant book on *The Healing of America: A Global Quest for Better, Cheaper, and Fairer Health Care* (New York: The Penguin Press, 2009). He lays out in interesting and surprising detail how the nations of the industrial democracies (except the U.S.) have provided universal health care for their citizens with better results at substantially lower costs than the U.S. But don’t confuse the nay-sayers with facts, their minds are already made up. What is interesting is how Reid takes his own bad shoulder inside the medical systems of France, Germany, Japan, the U.K. and Canada to see just how it is to be a patient. What is surprising is the imaginative mix of public and private which differs from nation to nation, but works with active government involvement, not domination. But our carping critics of substantial health care reform couldn’t be bothered with that kind of research – too upsetting of their *faux* argumentation.

The dogmatic and knee-jerk reaction against government involvement conveniently ignores the fact that about half of health care in the U.S. is government-sponsored: Medicaid, Medicare, the Veterans Administration, and, oh, yes, the Congressional version of socialized medicine which some wish to deny to the rest of us. American skepticism, if not outright hostility, to government is another example of “American Exceptionalism,” which dooms not only much of our foreign, but also much of our domestic policy, suggesting we are not only different but better.

At root is our apparent inability to think in terms of the common good. And yet we pride ourselves on being the most religiously observant nation on earth. Unquestionably, America is the most pious nation if one listens to our politicians. However, when it comes to Micah’s idea of “doing justice” or Jesus’ concern for “the least of these” we are found badly wanting.

Our health care debate is not just about health care delivery and financial support; it is about whether we can begin to understand what the common good really means.

## **You Didn't Get Mad: Source Unknown**

When the Supreme Court stopped a legal recount and appointed a president.  
 When Cheney allowed energy company officials to dictate energy policy.  
 When a covert CIA operative got outed. When the Patriot Act got passed.  
 When we illegally invaded a country (Iraq) that posed no threat to us.  
 When we spent over 600 billion (and counting) on said illegal war.  
 When over 10 billion dollars just disappeared in Iraq. When you saw the Abu Grahیب photos.  
 When you found out we were torturing people.  
 When the government was illegally wiretapping Americans.  
 When we didn't catch Bin Laden.  
 When you saw the horrible conditions at Walter Reed Hospital.  
 When we let a major US city drown. When the deficit hit the trillion dollar mark.  
 You finally got mad when the government decided that people in America deserved the right to see a doctor if they are sick. Yes, illegal wars, lies, corruption, torture, stealing your tax dollars to make the rich richer, are all okay with you, but helping other Americans . . . well, forget that. You didn't get mad

## **NEW YORK STATE ISSUES**

### **Health Care and New York State**

“According to the U. S. Census Bureau 2.7 million people in New York State do not have health care insurance. These are people who are unemployed, working but uninsured, or have been deemed “uninsurable” by their former insurance company and have been dropped. The percentage of uninsured adults too young to qualify for Medicare in New York is 19 percent. These figures only count individuals who were without insurance for an entire year. So if you were out of work and without coverage for six months, you would not have been factored into this figure. From the on-line newsletter of Congresswoman Louise Slaughter 10/7/09.

### **Domestic Workers in New York Getting Closer to Their Own Bill of Rights**

For five years the Domestic Workers' Bill of Rights has been battling its way through the New York State legislature. It would provide protection for the estimated 200,000 nannies, housekeepers and eldercare-givers who work in New York State. Backed by a diverse coalition of labor and religious groups and even employers, it calls for severance and overtime pay, advance notice of termination, one day off a week, holidays, healthcare and annual cost of living increases. Expected to pass in June, the epic power struggle in the New York State Senate sidelined this issue along with many others. For further information see *The Nation* article by Lizzy Ratner at <http://www.alternet.org/story/142586/>.

### **Dignity for Farmworkers Today**

New York's 80,000 farm workers are also waiting for action from the New York State Senate. The Farm Workers Fair Labor Practices Act would protect their First Amendment freedom of association rights, allowing them the right to talk about and form unions. It would also give them tools needed to advocate for basic protection and livable working conditions. Currently, the state's labor laws do not apply to farm workers. They're not entitled workman's compensation if injured, to overtime or disability pay or a day off once a week. Contact your senators about this legislation even if the Senate does not convene until January.

## NATIONAL ISSUES

### HEALTH CARE AND WOMEN'S HEALTH

Women's reproductive health care is one of the most contentious issues in the current debate over health care reform. The Rev. Carlton W. Veazey of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice represented many religious leaders, including UUA President Peter Morales, in presenting their concern to Senate Majority Leader Harry Reid and other senators. The statement urged Congress to preserve the current standard of reproductive health care – including abortion services – in any health care reform legislation. “The voices of moderate and mainstream religious leaders have been drowned out by the massive misinformation campaign conducted by Washington lobbying institutions such as the council of Catholic bishops, National Right to Life, and the Family Research Council. The RCRC statement represents the view of clergy who are denomination heads, theologians, and leaders of religious organization and whose traditions support access to the full range of reproductive health services. They are speaking out for a health care system that is inclusive and respectful of diverse religious beliefs and decisions regarding childbearing. A health care system that serves all persons with dignity and equality will include comprehensive reproductive health services.” For further information go to <http://www.rcrc.org>. Contact your representatives about this issue.

### 10/24, 350 AND YOU

On October 24 many groups will sponsor an International Day of Climate Action in preparation for the U.N. Climate change Conference in Copenhagen, Denmark. The number 350 has been chosen as a rallying point as that is the maximum safe level for carbon in the atmosphere, at least if we want to have a planet “similar to the one on which civilization developed and to which life on Earth is adapted.” (Al Gore). For further information go to <http://350.org> and find an event in which to participate.

### ACORN, BLACKWATER AND THE MILITARY-INDUSTRIAL-MEDIA COMPLEX

ACORN, the Association of Community Organization for Reform Now, has come upon hard times. Clandestine videos of ACORN staffers advising presumed clients how to set up a house of prostitution, etc., have caused the withdrawal of individual and foundation grants. The U. S. Congress angrily voted to defund the organization (a relatively small part of ACORN'S budget). ACORN officials and supporters concede the presence of bad practices past and present, while defending the essential mission of this successor of George Wiley's National Welfare Rights Organization. While criticism has spilled all over the media there have been defenders like correspondent Jeremy Scahill who wrote “To Democrats Who Voted to ‘Defund ACORN’: Where's the Defund Blackwater Act?” referring to a private quasi-military business which has been under considerable scrutiny for unethical action in Iraq, though continues to receive government funding. Ryan Grim at *Huffington Post* believes the Defund ACORN Act of 2009, passed by both House and Senate, is written so broadly the legislation “could plausibly defund the entire military-industrial complex.” For further information go to <http://www.alaternet.org/module/printversion/142812/> or <http://www.alternet.org/bloggers/www.alternet.org/142841/> or <http://www.alternet.org/story/142865/>.

## UUA SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWS AND VIEWS

### STANDING ON THE SIDE OF LOVE TALKING POINTS

Please use the talking points suggested below for interviews and to draft op-eds, letters to-the-editor, media advisories, press releases, and other materials for public distribution.

#### GENERAL CAMPAIGN

Right now, both love and fear are rising up in our nation. We stand on the side of love. We want to harness love's power to stop oppression, exclusion, and violence.

Our local and national leaders have a responsibility to unify and advance our communities, not to divide us from our neighbors simply because of who we are.

We are all created in God's image. People of every faith are called to honor God by honoring all of God's creation. We are called to love our neighbors and welcome the stranger.

#### GLBT

We believe that homophobia, not homosexuality, is a sin.

Love is a gift from God. No loving God would give anyone a gift in order to punish or humiliate them.

The covenant of marriage is a sacred trust between two individuals. Any couple able to forge that bond deserves the legal benefits of marriage as well as the ability to express that sacred trust freely and equally in our society.

#### IMMIGRATION

Our immigration system is taking children from their parents and tearing our nation apart. Any system which breaks up families is, itself, broken.

Hospitality is central to spiritual life. The inhospitality and cruelty shown to immigrants today weakens our nation's soul.

As people of faith, we are called to stand with the vulnerable and the oppressed. We are called to welcome the stranger.

As neighbors, we must offer refuge to weary travelers, not declare that there is no room at the inn.

### Social Witness for Your Congregation Now: Two Important Actions

**1. Peacemaking – An Extra Year of Focus:** GA 2009 referred the Peacekeeping Draft Statement of Conscience for one more year of study and action; continue working on this important topic; begin implementing in your congregation

**2. Conduct 2<sup>nd</sup> Year of Study/Action on Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice**  
Use Study Guide for ideas and resources; share your progress reports and comments online by March 1, 2010. To find out how to get involved – Visit [www.uua.org/csw](http://www.uua.org/csw) for resources and forms. Join listservs to share ideas at <http://lists.uua.org> - The Peacemaking Network - The Ethical Eating Network.

### Unitarian Universalist Military Handbook

The UUA plans to publish and distribute 20,000 copies of a resource book to be available at military outlets. It will contain a mix of readings, prayers, hymns and worship resources. Call toll free 1-888-792-5885 or go to [giftinfo@uua.org](mailto:giftinfo@uua.org) to contribute.

### The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

Visit [www.uua.org/socialjustice](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice). See *Advocacy News* October 15 (ATTACHED).

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

### *Guest at Your Table 2009-2010*

This year, join UUs around the country - and around the world - in welcoming a *Guest at Your Table*!

For more than thirty years, the *Guest at Your Table* tradition has helped us build lasting connections to UU principles and support the movement for universal human rights and social justice. It is a simple and meaningful way to incorporate "faith in action" into your life.



*Guest at Your Table* is for everyone! It includes a meaningful worship experience, religious education, and at-home learning for people of all age groups.

#### **When Do We Celebrate *Guest at Your Table*?**

Most congregations will begin their *Guest at Your Table* celebration on November 22, 2009 - the Sunday before Thanksgiving. But please check your congregational calendar for your date.

#### **Sharing with Your Guests**

During *Guest at Your Table*, participants keep a colorful *Guest at Your Table* box - with photographs of special guests from around the world - in a prominent place in their home, like the dining room table. You and/or your family may make daily contributions to your *Guest at Your Table* box, as if sharing with your special guests. When human-rights supporters share their blessings with UUSC during *Guest at Your Table* they ensure that UUSC's vital work to advance social justice continues, year after year.

You and your family members can also have UUSC membership by giving at the membership level. Membership donation levels are on your *Guest At Your Table* box.

#### **Where do our donations go?**

UUSC translates our donations into tangible projects to advance human rights and social justice around the world. You can learn about these projects at [www.uusc.org/guest\\_donations](http://www.uusc.org/guest_donations).

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

# Social Justice Programs Offered to St. Lawrence District Congregations

Listed below are brief descriptions of social justice workshops, sermons, talks and consultations I can offer to SLD congregations and clusters (and others). For more details go to [www.sld.uus.org](http://www.sld.uus.org) – Social Justice - Dick Gilbert

### WALKING THE TALK: A BASIC WORKSHOP IN CONGREGATIONAL SOCIAL JUSTICE

Unitarian Universalists are eloquent in talking about peace and social justice. However, we have our problems in “walking the talk.” This workshop will explore the spiritual roots of social action, a perspective on the unique UU mission, organizational tools for a congregation and a practicum on planning for change. Participants are asked to come with a Congregational Self-Analysis Survey completed. This workshop is designed as a fundamental orientation to congregation-based social action.

### “GIVING LIFE THE SHAPE OF JUSTICE”: A LEVEL TWO WORKSHOP

These words from our Unitarian Universalist Anthem, “Spirit of Life,” are central to the task we face as justice-makers. This workshop is designed for congregations which have developed social justice programs, but would like to evaluate and expand them. This workshop is in effect a consultation.

### BEING THE CHANGE WE WANT TO SEE: A WORKSHOP ON SPIRITUAL GROWTH

Ghandi once said that we have to be the change we want to see. In working on society, we first work on ourselves – what does that entail? This workshop will explore the process of spiritual growth through peace and justice work. Participants will be invited to tell their stories and gain perspective on their personal narratives. What do I want to change through my social justice work and how do I want to be changed?

### THE PROPHETIC IMPERATIVE: ORGANIZING FOR CHANGE

An exploration of the history, theology, ethics and sociology of social change through Dick Gilbert’s book, *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice*. This program requires a full weekend.

### FROM PRINCIPLES TO POLITICS WITH JUSTICE

A workshop on religious advocacy. How does advocacy differ from lobbying? How do we mobilize our people to apply our ethical principles to the social order? What are the pitfalls? Should we do it at all? How do we respond to the effective advocacy of the Religious Right? We'll talk about how to mobilize the congregations in our district for more effective social action - through New York State Interfaith Impact.

### SHOULD THE CHURCH SPEAK OUT?

One of the most common and most controversial issues in faith-based social action is the corporate role of the church in the public square? Should a congregation take a stand? Does it violate individual conscience? If it does speak out, how? This workshop is a discussion of the pros and cons of speaking out and different ways to approach the problem.

## REQUEST FOR SERVICES FORM St. Lawrence UU District Social Justice Program

Requested Date(s): \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Congregation or Group: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Contact Person: \_\_\_\_\_

Contact Information:

E-Mail: \_\_\_\_\_ Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: (Street) \_\_\_\_\_

(Community) \_\_\_\_\_ (Zip): \_\_\_\_\_

Type of Service: (See above or specify your request)

Sermon (topic) \_\_\_\_\_

Workshop (theme) \_\_\_\_\_

Lecture (topic) \_\_\_\_\_

Consultation (purpose) \_\_\_\_\_

Financial arrangements according to District policy: One-day consultation \$250 plus expenses; congregations are encouraged to utilize clusters to share expenses.

Comments: \_\_\_\_\_

**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](mailto:interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net)  
Background information on state issues at [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://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

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\*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?