

AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT OCTOBER 2008

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(Deadline for November issue is November 6)

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SOCIAL JUSTICE EVENTS CALENDAR

November 9: Interfaith Impact of New York State (IINYS) Forum: “Progressive Religious Values in the Public Policy Arena” - a free Conscience in Public Life Forum at the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany on Sunday afternoon, Nov. 9th, from 3:00 - 5:30 p.m. Focus is on how individual conscience moves out into public life. Panelists will discuss how their conscience - informed by their religious traditions and experience - moves them to take on a particular issue and speak out in public. The panelists will answer questions; there will be small-group breakout sessions. Issues include sex education for teens, universal health care, same-sex marriage, and welfare concerns. IINYS is a statewide organization of Protestants, Reform Jews, Unitarian Universalists and others working for the common good through progressive religious advocacy. For more information, contact Robb Smith at rsmith66@nycap.rr.com or call 518-441-3231.

March 22: IINYS Forum – “The Health Teens Act” – First Universalist Church of Rochester

ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL NEWS

Agenda for Change issues, current brochure and more are posted on the St. Lawrence District website: www.sld.uua.org. To access “The Real Rules” on what churches can and cannot do in the 2008 election, go to: www.uua.org/documents/washingtonoffice/real_rules.pdf.

The Traveling Justice Sunday Service

The Committee on Criminal Justice and Prison Reform of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Albany will bring a Justice Sunday Service to your congregation, at your invitation. We have two options available: (A) “with Liberty and Justice for Some” features local formerly incarcerated people describing their journey from lawbreaker to successful community member. (B) “The Visitors,” featuring a screening of the documentary by the same name, follows NYC families as they travel on a chartered bus to visit their incarcerated loved ones in upstate prisons. Either service can be tailored to your needs. Available beginning in January 2009. For details or to arrange a date please contact Judith Brink (518-482-2029) jbrink@nycap.rr.com.

The Re-Creation of a SLUUD Trauma Response Team

Carol Schneider

I am working to establish a district trauma response team of ministers and lay people to respond to emergency situations within the district. The aim is to provide spiritual assistance to those who are affected by the emergency situation, be it natural disaster, fire, or accident.

Are you or any of your congregants interested in this endeavor? I know from Tom Chulak that there were some people on a previous team. Are those of you who were on this team still willing to participate? I would appreciate any recommendations you have for members of your congregation. If you are willing to ask them, I would appreciate it. If not, please give me the names and a way to contact them. I will then do the recruiting.

If there is anyone interested, there is a training in Wooster, MA On Saturday, Nov. 22, 2008. Rev. Aaron Payson, a member of the UUA Trauma Ministry is conducting a workshop Training For Congregations. This workshop will help participants create an emergency response plan for their congregation including issues such as command structures, communications, resource development, and important issues related to disaster management within a faith-based community. The District is willing to pay for up to 5 people who are willing to be part of the district team to attend this workshop.

If you are interested or have any questions, please contact me: Carol Schneider, 4 Tina Lane, Queensbury, NY 12804 (518-761-4077) cschneider2@roadrunner.com.

Social Justice Conference in Schenectady: A Report

Some 35 UU's gathered in the First Unitarian Society of Schenectady Saturday, October 4, for a discussion of "Politics and Liberal Religious Values in the Wake of Knoxville." Blair Horner, Legislative Director of the New York Public Interest Research Group, reminded us of the upcoming census and the resultant redistricting: "Rigging the System: How Lawmakers Choose Their Constituents." The politicians of the legislature actually are empowered to draw the lines of their districts; the result is a hodge-podge of crooked lines, non-contiguous districts and strange shapes which bear no resemblance to fair, proportional and contiguous districts. Some districts suggest the shape of a Rorschach test. The New York State Legislature is infamous for drawing gerrymandered district lines in such comical shapes as "Abraham Lincoln Riding a Vacuum Cleaner" and "Bug Splattered on a Windshield." NYPIRG is pushing for a constitutional amendment to create an independent redistricting commission, ensuring that legislative districts are drawn to best represent New Yorkers, rather than improve a legislator's shot at reelection.

Horner also led workshops on the Project Sunlight (www.sunlightny.com) which he designed at the request of Attorney General Andrew Cuomo, a website at which voters can access information on state government. The Rev. Richard Gilbert, SLD Social Justice Coordinator, reminded his workshop that churches can legally work on election issues, but cannot engage in partisan politicking. The Rev. Deane Perkins discussed violence in our congregations and the question of the extent to which we are – or are not – a peace church. Kevin O'Connor pointed out the elephant in the room – the role of poverty and class in our movement and in society. Quaker/Catholic Linda LeTrendre detailed the role of non-violent resistance as an instrument of

social change. Robb Smith, Executive Director of Interfaith Impact of NYS, briefed workshop attendees on the role of conscience in public life, a series of programs planned across the state in the coming year. Members of the Albany congregation presented a case study on their work in criminal justice reform. The Rev. Aaron Payson, of the UU Trauma Response Ministry, gave an eye-witness account of the healing process after the tragic shooting in the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church (see article elsewhere in this issue). The Rev. Priscilla Richter of the Schenectady congregation led opening and closing worship services. A video of the conference will soon be available.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

UUAWOA has initiated an Action of the Month on which its newsletter will focus. The September focus was Tents of Hope for Darfur; its October focus is Publish for Peace with Iran. The Office also announces an Election 2008 website with in-depth resources for congregationally-based election work: www.uua.org/election2008.

From the Washington Office: Whatever the outcome of the elections, the UUA's Legislative Objectives for the 111th Congress: 2009-2010 won't change. See if your congregation's leaders want to work together on one or more of these important steps forward. If you would like to receive weekly action alerts and progress reports, sign up for Advocacy News or the monthly SAC-News or the JTW-News (Journey toward Wholeness). www.uua.org/socialjustice.

UU Peacemakers Network Launched - Max Goekler and Judy Morgan – conveners Growing out of the Commission on Social Witness process for statements of conscience by the UUA General Assembly, a Peacemaking Ministry Network has been launched. The main purpose of the new network is to institutionalize peacemaking throughout the denomination, while linking all the ongoing peacemaking efforts. This will provide a central place to share peacemaking resources. There will be periodic conference calls, plus a website created by John Schaibly: www.uupeacemakers.org. In addition Judy Morgan has just created a Yahoo group uupeacemaker@yahoo.com or Max at mgoekler@neo.rr.com. The group will utilize a “hub and spoke” system – allowing a group which wants to work on a particular segment of peacemaking to do so collaboratively. The Peacemakers Newsletter is soliciting articles of 200 words or less. Please e-mail them to john@schaibly.com.

Grants Available to Congregations

Congregational Justice-Making: (Contact Diane Martin at 617-948-6461) or dmartin@uua.org or see <http://www.uua.org/news/congpacket/mar2005/juust.pdf>.

Whitney M. Young, Jr. Urban Ministry Fund Grants – these grants increase access to building leadership, strengthening capacity, and applying anti-oppression knowledge through the JUUST Change Anti-Oppression Consultancy.

Fund for Unitarian Universalist Social Responsibility – makes grants to projects that increase UU involvement in social responsibility. uufp@aol.com.

Unitarian Universalist Women's Federal Grants Program for projects that directly affect women or girls, that deal with gender oppression or honor women's achievements. Contact uuwf@uua.org or 617-742-2100 X 692.

EDITORIAL: The Morals Behind the Headlines: Election 2008

Early in my ministry I launched a quadrennial series of adult education discussions of the presidential election, "The Morals Behind the Headlines." The title was inspired by a Sunday radio program of the same title I listened to in my youth, sponsored by the Roman Catholic Diocese of Rochester. In it a priest would discuss current topics from a Catholic perspective. While I often did not agree with that perspective, I did like the process.

Looking at the 2008 campaign through that lens several things stand out: (1) Taxation: both major party candidates trumpet the tax cuts they will give. I am curious about John McCain's slogan, "country first," in this connection. He seems to be saying that to put country first one must accept a tax cut – even if one is already wealthy. It would seem, given our economic crisis, that the wealthy (and maybe some of the rest of us) might be willing to "sacrifice" that largesse for the good of the nation – and the world. But, no, tax cuts are dogma of left and right. Obama would give a tax cut exempting the wealthy (\$200,000 for an individual; \$250,00 for a couple.) What is missing is the underlying philosophy of taxation. UU Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes, Jr. (1841-1935) once said that taxes are the price we pay for civilization. No mention was made of the issue of fairness – taxes based on ability to pay. Both current major party candidates neglect to state the moral values behind taxation.

(2) Poverty: "Middle class" seems to be the mantra of both campaigns. It is middle class tax cuts; it is relief for the middle class; it is middle class icon Joe the plumber. Of course that is where the votes are. Yet, from a moral perspective, where is the passion for ending poverty in the midst of plenty – LBJ's "war on poverty" (though I dislike the war metaphor)? Where is the passion for justice for the poor envisioned in virtually every religious tradition? That is why I believe religious communities, including this one, are not lobbyists, but advocates. Lobbyists work for the self-interest of their group, which is certainly appropriate in a democracy. Advocates work for the common good, especially for those who cannot advocate for themselves. We need a president who can give that kind of advocacy.

(3) Eco-justice: While both candidates have spoken extensively of the environment and the need for energy independence, they have not really connected the dots on the relationship between justice as fairness and the environment and sustainability. For example, no politician discusses the carrying capacity of the planet itself. Many ecologists and others have concluded there is an optimum global population, and we have already passed it and are still growing. The "gag" rules of Ronald Reagan and George W. Bush have handicapped international family planning agencies by denying not only abortion services, but even discussion of them. For the first time in my life I am worrying about the sustainability of this earth I love. Global warming, drought, diminishing rainforests, among other problems, are seriously challenging our capacity to sustain the population we now have, to say nothing of the fact of its growth.

It would be nice if such discussions would mark our political campaigns, but, alas, I am not holding my breath. However, if the politicians do not dare to raise such fundamental issues, it is up to religious communities to do so – and not just at election time. That is our task. That is our mission. - Dick Gilbert

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

From the UUSC: Guest at Your Table is a meaningful and simple way to incorporate faith in action into your congregation's worship experience, or into your family's life.

The suggested date for opening Guest at Your Table worship activities is always the Sunday before Thanksgiving. This year it is November 23, 2008. Most programs will run for four to eight weeks. During this time, families keep a Guest at Your Table box in a prominent place in their home and get to know their special Guests through Stories of Hope. Leaders and members of your congregation will make announcements and publish brief articles, keeping Guest at Your Table at the forefront of your congregational activities. You can find resources to guide you through the program by accessing the UUSC website www.UUSC.org.

All program and planning resources are available online. Planning kits have been mailed to all congregations, UUSC local representatives, and Guest at Your Table program coordinators. Order your program resources, including boxes and Stories of Hope, via the UUSC online order form or by mailing in the order postcard included in the planning kit.

This year's Guest at Your Table and Justice Sunday programs will celebrate the 60th anniversary of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. We will make human rights accessible, connecting the underlying values of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights to UU values. Through Stories of Hope, written for children, young adults, and adults, you will learn how this powerful document is helping to guide activists, and how your support is helping to win struggles.

Guest at Your Table is for everyone. UUSC provides a complete intergenerational program with worship and religious education resources, colorful boxes, and Stories of Hope, which connect UUs to real people whose lives have been touched by the collective struggle for human rights. Families and individuals learn about UUSC's global human-rights mission, which puts our shared principles into action. Sharing our blessings through the Guest at Your Table box ensures that this human-rights work continues, while building UUSC membership. Our members and partners are the moral levers through which we move the world.

The Guest at Your Table tradition has built lasting connections to UU faith in action for more than thirty years. Join nearly every congregation in the country - and around the world - in welcoming a Guest at Your Table.

-Material from the UUSC Website

For assistance with this program, please go to the UUSC website www.uusc.org or call 800-388-3920.

Services Offered by the Social Justice Council 2008-2009

Contact Rsgilbert@uuma.org or 585-244-7403 for further information:

Listed below are brief descriptions of social justice workshops, sermons, talks and consultations I offer to SLD congregations and clusters. Unless otherwise stated, these programs can be formatted for an entire day or a half-day.

Up to Our Steeples in Politics

What is the proper relationship between church and state? Politics and religion? Faith and social action? For this election year and beyond, congregations ought to know the “real rules” of what churches can and cannot do in the public arena.

Walking the Talk: 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 explores 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 song “Spirit of Life,” are central to the task we face as justice-makers. The 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 explores 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.

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.

Issue-Oriented Workshops and/or Sermons/Talks

- Politics in the Pulpit – Possibilities and Pitfalls
- Up to Our Steeples in Politics: Campaign 2008 and Beyond
- Does the Earth Have Moral Rights? An ethical exploration of environmental justice.
- How Much Do We Deserve? An Exploration in Distributive (Economic) Justice
- Politics in the Pulpit – Possibilities and Pitfalls – The Real Rules for Campaign 2008
- What Is a “Just War” – a UU Perspective on War and Peace
- The Eighth Day of Creation: Darwin, Evolution and “Intelligent Design” – A Conversation with the Religious Right
- Growing People of Prophetic Power: Social Justice and Religious Education
- Building the Beloved Community – in the Congregation and Beyond
- The Jonah Complex: Why Should I Be Involved?
- “War Is a Force that Gives Us Meaning” – and Peace?
- Justice-Making in the Empire State: Applying UU Values to NYS Issues
- Martin Luther King, Jr. – Shaping the Conscience of the Nation
- Meriting the Wind We Inherit: A History of UU Peace and Justice Work
- The Social Gospel According to Jesus
- The Moral State of the Nation: January 20, 2009 and Beyond
- “No Consorting with Angels” – the Religious Life of Susan B. Anthony
- Gentleness in Living: What Knoxville Can Teach Us
- Reproductive Choice: Where Do We Go from Here?

REQUEST FOR SERVICES FORM - St. Lawrence UU District - Social Justice Program
Please complete form and send to Dick Gilbert, SLD Social Justice Coordinator, at Rsgilbert@uuma.org or call 585-244-7403 for further information

Requested Date(s): _____

Name of Congregation or Group: _____

Name of Contact Person: _____

Contact Information: E-Mail: _____ Phone: _____

Address: (Street) _____

(City or town) _____ (Zip): _____

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

Sermon topic _____

Workshop (theme) _____

Lecture (topic) _____

Consultation (purpose) _____

Financial arrangements according to District policy (\$250 a day – SLD covers expenses):
Congregations are encouraged to utilize clusters to share expenses.



JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!
Individual and Congregational Memberships Welcome

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

Please print or type:

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
