

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER
ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT
DECEMBER 2007**

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(Deadline for January issue is December 31)

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Social Justice Events Calendar

(See UUSC Corner for other dates)

January 9: State of the State Message by Governor Eliot Spitzer
February 1-3: Allies for Racial Equity (ARE) Annual Conference Memphis, TN.
March 16: Interfaith Impact of NYS Briefing in Rochester: "Marriage Equality: Love, Leviticus and the Legislature" – Contact Judy Swartz at schwartz179@earthlink.net
April 26: St. Lawrence District Assembly in Binghamton/Owego. Assembly Theme: *Sustainable Earth – A Call to Action*. There will be a Social Justice Council Workshop on *Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election* - what churches can and cannot do in the campaign; voter registration; moral dimensions of political issues.
April 28: Interfaith Impact of NYS Advocacy Day in Albany.

EDITORIAL: THE WORK OF CHRISTMAS BEGINS

Richard S. Gilbert

The great black preacher/poet Howard Thurman's words always move me at Christmas time. And so I add hard prose to his poetry with the "work of Christmas" to which we are called:
"When the song of the angels is stilled" – stilling the rumble of war drums in our land.
"When the star in the sky is gone" – cleaning earth and sky of our pollution
"When the kings and princes are home" – instilling humility in our leaders
"When the shepherds are back with their flocks" – granting animals a moral right to be
"The work of Christmas begins." – When does it ever end?
"To find the lost" – the refugees of Iraq – 3 million of them driven from their land
"To heal the broken" – those maimed in body and spirit by war
"To feed the hungry" – at home and abroad – hunger is a moral scandal in our time
"To release the prisoner" – and still the vindictive spirit in the American psyche
"To rebuild the nations" – not by "nation-building" but helping build a peaceful world order
"To bring peace among people" – by launching a pre-emptive peace initiative
"To make music in the heart." – we are called to this joyous struggle.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER



UUSC JustWorks camps are short-term projects that help volunteers examine and understand the causes and damaging effects of injustice. Participants work directly with people in the communities they serve, experiencing social justice struggles firsthand.

While learning about human rights issues and promoting intercultural understanding and reconciliation, volunteers are taught advocacy skills to address issues of poverty, discrimination, and racism. Participants may then make use of these skills in their congregations, campuses, and communities. The JustWorks experiential learning program is an important element in UUSC's mission to advance justice and protect human rights in the United States and around the world.

2008 JustWorks Camps:

New Orleans Alternative Spring Break Camp (youth 14-18),
March 15-21, 2008; New Orleans, LA; Fee \$400.

Participants will work with a partner organization to repair and rebuild homes and neighborhoods damaged by Hurricane Katrina. All skill levels are welcome.

Legislative Action Day (youth up to 18)
April 22, 2008; Boston, MA; Fee \$10.

This one-day event will include discussions, issue education, legislative trainings, and a trip to the State House to advocate on the issues discussed. This event will include all meals and an ice cream sundae!

UUA General Assembly (youth and young adults)
One-day camp; June 28, 2008; Fort Lauderdale, FL; No Fee.

Join us for an all-day social justice project while at GA (limited to 75 participants).

Freedom Summer 2008: A Civil Rights Journey (intergenerational 14+)
July 12-19, 2008; Atlanta, GA; Birmingham, Selma, and Montgomery, AL; Fee: \$500

Water Justice Camp (ages 18-25)
August, 2008; Los Angeles and Sacramento, CA; Fee: \$300

JustWorks and the UU Legislative Ministry California are creating an experience for young adults to learn about the water crisis in California. Working in collaboration with community-based groups in the region, participants will gain an in-depth understanding of one of the most important natural resources in the world. The camp will include a

number of training sessions and activities that will prepare participants to take action in their own communities.

For more information and to request an application, please contact JustWorks staff by calling 800-388-3920 (Shayla Reid, ext. 227, Nguyen Weeks, ext. 201, and Kim McDonald, ext. 217) or e-mail justworks@uusc.org. Also, visit www.uusc.org for updates, camp and application information (including scholarships), and video and news stories from last year's camps.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION ACTION

Call for Peacemaking Stories: Has your congregation or social justice committee had a successful program reaching out to your community in peacemaking? We'd like to hear about it. We are compiling a 'storybook' of concepts for UU congregations across the continent. We want your experience included. Some information that would help readers would be: *How large is your congregation? What allies in your community did you work with? What was your planning process? What contributed to the success of your initiative?* Send your story to rev.carpenter@fuse.net and gking@ants.edu with 'success story' in the subject line. (They have a form which you can use).

New Social Witness Process: The Congregational poll for issues to be addressed by the UUA is now open. From November 15 to February 1 congregations can register their opinions as to which Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs) will appear on the GA 2008 agenda. To begin, just go to www.uua.org/csai. There you will find links to: the ballot itself, a Guide to Voting in the Congregational Poll, a Summary of the Process for Selecting a Congregational Study/Action Issue, and the texts of the two proposed CSAIs that appear on the ballot: "Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice" and "Nuclear Disarmament." You'll also find these basics in the December UUA mailing, which should have arrived on the desk of your congregation's administrator in the first week of December. Your vote matters more than ever because a 25% quorum of all certified congregations is now required for our social witness process to move forward. Let's respond with 100% and demonstrate our faith in the democratic process by using it. If you have further questions, just e-mail socialwitness@uua.org or go to www.uua.org/socialjustice. We're counting on your participation. Washington Office for Advocacy

Peacemaking Statement of Conscience: The Congregational Study Action Issue (CSAI) for 2006-2010 is "Peacemaking." The issue has been defined in these words: "Should the Unitarian Universalist Association reject the use of any and all kinds of violence and war to resolve disputes between people and nations and adopt a principle of seeking just peace through non-violent means?" For more information go to www.uua.org/csai.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

Welcome to Project Sunlight

Project Sunlight is a project of NYS Attorney General Andrew Cuomo to open the political process to more New Yorkers. Developed by Blair Horner, formerly a NYPIRG activist who has joined the AG staff, it is designed to provide up to date information on legislation and other state business. The website is www.sunlightny.com.

IINYS Statement On NY Health Plus For Press Conference

IINYS was invited to submit a quote for possible inclusion in the press release announcing Assemblyman Richard Gottfried's plans to release his New York Health Plus report. Robb Smith, Executive Director of Interfaith Impact of NYS, said: "Universal health insurance coverage for all New Yorkers is a fundamental justice issue. New York Health Plus is a powerful concept, well thought through and backed by thorough research. It recognizes the realities and magnitude of the historic change needed. It will take persistence, courage and political will to arrive at a system that is truly comprehensive, equitable, and sustainable, but this report shows that it can be accomplished. We strongly recommend the New York Health Plus report to Gov. Eliot Spitzer." Robb was assisted by Donna Dorn in the preparation of this statement. **A full description of this proposal is attached.**

Public Assistance Challenge: Can You and Your Family Live on a Public Assistance Grant for a Week?

The Hunger Action Network of New York State (HANNYS) challenges families to live on a welfare grant that has not been increased for 17 years. Families dependent on public assistance are asked to survive on a grant that is less than half the federal poverty line. In order to bring public attention to the plight of New York's poorest families, we are asking public officials, clergy, media personalities, and others to try to live for one week spending no more than the amount allowed by the public assistance grant. Then advocate for an increase with your representative and the governor. For more information write Dunleamark@aol.com or go to the website www.hungeractionnys.org.

INTERFAITH IMPACT OF NEW YORK STATE WINTER NEWSLETTER Contents

Advocacy Day 2008
Raising the Welfare Grant
Universal Health Care
Healthy Teens
Church-State Separation
Marriage Equality
Environment
Criminal Justice
"Conscience in Public Life" forum in New York city
Special Giving Opportunity

If you would like to become more involved in year-round development of issues and strategies, consider joining the IINYS Legislative Action Committee. For more information, e-mail Robb@interfaithimpactnys.org or call Robb Smith at 518-441-3231.

The Winter Newsletter is attached

NATIONAL ISSUES

Confused About SCHIP? Try Our New Interactive Tools!

Children's Defense Fund www.childrensdefense.org

Between Thanksgiving and Christmas Congress will resume efforts to negotiate a veto-proof compromise on the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP). These ongoing negotiations over the last few months have resulted in a lot of confusion over an already complex issue. In an effort to provide more clarity, CDF recently unveiled two new interactive tools on its website that explain the current status of SCHIP and to provide a context for recent legislative actions and their projected implications for children's coverage.

The interactive tools include an SCHIP reauthorization timeline and a map of states projected to experience SCHIP shortfalls unless Congress increases funding. We'll continue to update these tools as negotiations proceed and we hope you find them useful in understanding this complex issue and in fighting to ensure that all children in America receive the health coverage they need to survive and thrive!

Last year, an uninsured child was born every 47 seconds, and approximately 1,900 children were born uninsured every day. Unfortunately, as unsettling as these statistics are, the situation seems to be getting worse for our nation's children. CDF's new analysis of the most recent Census data indicates that now every 41 seconds a child in the United States is born without health coverage — more than 2,100 children every day.

CDF's website features a counter that tracks the number of uninsured children born since the 110th Congress was called to order on January 4, 2007 — a Congress that was convened "for all of America's children." Today, that number is nearly 700,000. The counter is an up-to-the-minute measure of the effect of Congress' and President Bush's failure to provide health coverage to all of our nation's uninsured children and pregnant women.

Standing in the Way of Stem Cell Research

by Alan I. Leshner and James A. Thomson

© *The Washington Post*, December 3, 2007

A new way to trick skin cells into acting like embryos changes both everything and nothing at all. Being able to reprogram skin cells into multipurpose stem cells without harming embryos launches an exciting new line of research. It's important to remember, though, that we're at square one, uncertain at this early stage whether souped-up skin cells hold the same promise as their embryonic cousins do.

Far from vindicating the current U.S. policy of withholding federal funds from many of those working to develop potentially lifesaving embryonic stem cells, recent papers in the journals *Science* and *Cell* described a breakthrough achieved despite political restrictions. In fact, work by both the U.S. and Japanese teams that reprogrammed skin cells depended entirely on previous embryonic stem cell research.

At a time when nearly 60 percent of Americans support human embryonic stem cell research, U.S. stem cell policy runs counter to both scientific and public opinion.

President Bush's repeated veto of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act, which has twice passed the House and Senate with votes from Republicans and Democrats alike, further ignores the will of the American people.

Efforts to harness the versatility of embryonic stem cells, and alleviate suffering among people with an array of debilitating disorders, began less than 10 years ago. Since then, scientists have continued to pursue embryonic stem cells because of their ability to transform into blood, bone, skin or any other type of cell. The eventual goal is to replace diseased or dysfunctional cells to help people with spinal cord injuries, neurodegenerative disorders, cancer, diabetes, heart disease and other conditions.

Since 1998, many strategies for addressing sanctity-of-life concerns have been pursued. While commendable, these efforts remain preliminary, and none so far has suggested a magic bullet. In the same way, the recent tandem advances in the United States and by Shinya Yamanaka's team in Japan are far from being a Holy Grail, as Charles Krauthammer inaccurately described them ["Stem Cell Vindication," op-ed, Nov. 30]. Though potential landmarks, these studies are only a first step on the long road toward eventual therapies.

Krauthammer's central argument - that the president's misgivings about embryonic stem cell research inspired innovative alternatives - is fundamentally flawed, too. Yamanaka was of course working in Japan, and scientists around the world are pursuing the full spectrum of options, in many cases faster than researchers in the United States.

Reprogrammed skin cells, incorporating four specific genes known to play a role in making cells versatile, or pluripotent, did seem to behave like embryonic stem cells in mice. But mouse studies frequently fail to pan out in humans, so we don't yet know whether this approach is viable for treating human diseases. We simply cannot invest all our hopes in a single approach. Federal funding is essential for both adult and embryonic stem cell research, even as promising alternatives are beginning to emerge.

Unfortunately, under the policy President Bush outlined on Aug. 9, 2001, at most 21 stem cell lines derived from embryos before that date are eligible for federal funding. American innovation in the field thus faces inherent limitations. Even more significant, the stigma resulting from the policy surely has discouraged some talented young Americans from pursuing stem cell research.

Discomfort with the notion of extracting stem cells from embryos is understandable. But many of the life-changing medical advances of recent history, including heart transplantation, have provoked discomfort. Struggling with bioethical questions remains a critical step in any scientific advancement.

A solution that might be more comfortable for many people already exists but cannot be pursued unless the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act becomes law. Some percentage of the hundreds of thousands of frozen embryos from fertility clinics will eventually be destroyed. American couples meanwhile are not being given the choice to donate their frozen embryos to federal research to help others through stem cell advances.

It remains to be seen whether reprogrammed skin cells will differ in significant ways from embryonic stem cells. We remain hopeful, but it's too early to say we're certain.

We hope Congress will override the president's veto of the Stem Cell Research Enhancement Act. Further delays in pursuing the clearly viable option of embryonic stem cells will result in an irretrievable loss of time, especially if the new approach fails to prove itself.

Alan I. Leshner is chief executive of the American Association for the Advancement of Science and executive publisher of the journal Science. James A. Thomson is a professor of anatomy at the University of Wisconsin School of Medicine and Public Health. He was the first scientist to create human embryonic stem cells and is the senior author on the recent Science paper describing a method for reprogramming skin cells. Posted by Rabbi Dennis S. Ross, Director, Concerned Clergy for Choice, Albany, NY dennis@fpaofnys.org.

Action Alert: Support the Omnibus budget resolution to support human needs funding – Reps. Reynolds, King and Kuhl are especially important to contact. For information go to www.chn.org/takeaction.

Last Chance to End the Global Gag Rule

NARAL Pro-Choice America can@ProChoiceAmerica.org

President Bush is trying to force Congress to back down on several choice-related issues as Congress finishes its business before the end of the year. That's why we need your help to tell Congress we've come too far to give up. Our legislative agenda this year is simple: repeal the global gag rule, increase funding for family-planning programs, and improve "abstinence-only" programs so they'll be less harmful to teens. While we keep working hard lobbying Capitol Hill, will you help us by sending a message to Congress, urging lawmakers to stand firm for these commonsense policy goals? But President Bush is threatening to veto legislation over these issues, and while leadership in Congress is (thankfully) now in pro-choice hands, the numbers are still stacked against us. Members of Congress need to hear that people like you care about these issues.

Also urge your representatives to support the Prevention Through Affordable Access Act, which will make contraceptives more affordable.

Visit the web address below to tell your friends about these urgent action alerts.

Nancy Keenan, President, NARAL Pro-Choice America www.naral.org

AGENDA FOR CHANGE MAILING LIST

If you would like to be on the Electronic Activist List, or if you change you address or if you have newsletter items, please contact Dick Gilbert at Rsgilbert@uuma.org.

SERVICES OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

In addition to an annual social justice conference and the newsletter *Agenda for Change*, the Social Justice Council offers the services of Dick Gilbert as preacher on justice issues and social justice workshops. Contact Rsgilbert@uuma.org

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.

(Note: year end contributions can be especially helpful to IINYS and your tax status. For details, see *Covenant for Justice* 2007 End-of-the-Year Update)

Congregation/organization donation (suggested): \$50 - \$100 - \$300

Individual donation (suggested): \$10 - \$25 - \$50

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:

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