

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER
ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT
SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL – DECEMBER 2008**

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(Deadline for January issue is January 5)

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SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR

January 12, 2009: Women’s Health Matters: A Day of Action in Albany (Family Planning Advocates of NYS – www.fpaofnys.org)

January 22, 2009: 36th anniversary of the Roe v. Wade decision.

March 21-24, 2009: Sexuality Education Advocacy Training in Washington, DC. Registration deadline is January 5. To register or for information go to www.uua.org/SEAT.

March 22, 2009: Interfaith Impact of NYS Forum – “The Healthy Teens Act” – First Universalist Church of Rochester – Registration information in the next issue

April 1-5, 2009: Re-envisioning Economic Justice in the New Era (20th Anniversary Conference of Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community). Rowe Camp and Conference Center. For information call Marcia Meyers (503-665-3957) or visit web site at <http://www.uujec.org>. To register go to <http://www.uujec.org/register.pdf>.

April 24-26: St. Lawrence District Assembly, Albany. Social Justice Council workshop TBA

April 28: Equality and Justice Day in Albany – Empire State Pride Agenda ([www.prideagenda.org/Our Programs/Equality and Justice Day/](http://www.prideagenda.org/Our_Programs/Equality_and_Justice_Day/))

June 24-28: Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly – Salt Lake City, Utah

ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL NEWS

If you have district social justice news or ideas, please contact harsey.leonard@verizon.net or Coordinator Dick Gilbert at Rsgilbert@uuma.org.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

Peacemaking Congregational Study/Action Issue Resources

DVD – “Peacemaking: A Commitment to Study and Action” 18 minute video.

Curriculum Guide – “Peacemaking in Congregations: A Guide to Learning Opportunities for All Ages” – Order from Alex Winnett c/o UUA Washington Office for Advocacy, 666 11th St. NW Suite 800, Washington, DC 20001 – a \$15 donation is encouraged, payable to the UUA.

The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

UUAWOA selects an Action of the Month on which its newsletter will focus. December’s focus is Peace Tree. Sign up for Advocacy News or the monthly SAC-News or the JTW-News (Journey toward Wholeness). www.uua.org/socialjustice.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

For information on reproductive choice: Rabbi Dennis Ross, Concerned Clergy for Choice, at dennis@fpaofnys.org.

To endorse the Open Letter to Religious Leaders on Marriage Equality visit:

<http://www.religiousinstitute.org/marriageextra.html>. An article from the Empire State Pride Agenda is attached to this newsletter. Also **attached** is a letter to the editor from IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith in the December *Covenant for Justice*, as well a **statement on marriage equality** from the Empire State Pride Agenda.

For information on universal, single-payer health care: Citizen Action of New York:

mail@citizenactionny.com, Rebecca Elgie at relgie@earthlink.net, www.siglepayernewyork.org or go to the IINYS website at www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

For information on a single payer Albany event write Andy Coates at pnhpcapitaldistrict@gmail.com.

For information on the NYS budget go to Governor David A. Paterson’s new website,

www.ReduceNYSpending.gov. For further information go to the Citizen Action of NYS website See Citizen Action of New York’s response at www.FIGHTtheCUTS.org. See also the detailed discussion of the budget by the Fiscal Policy Institute www.fiscalpolicy.org/.

To participate further in the discussion of budget priorities: contact the New York State Council of Churches, which invites stories about the poor and those trying to help them. Send to nyscoc@nycap.rr.com or nyscoc@aol.com. A helpful subject line would be “commitment story.” Also see the **attachment** from a press conference held by the **Hunger Action Network** of NYS, Interfaith Impact of NYS and other anti-poverty groups.

Interfaith Impact of NYS Action Alert More Help for the Poor Needed in Governor's Budget

As Governor Paterson puts the finishing touches on his budget, IINYS is working with the Faith and Hunger Network (FHN) to maintain pressure for more help for the poor. IINYS took part in

a FHN press conference at Emmanuel Baptist Church in Albany, which hosts the FOCUS Churches Food Pantry, and a Prayer Vigil in front of the Governor's office. Over the past several months, IINYS and other FHN members have met with David Hansell, Commissioner of the NYS Office of Temporary and Disability Assistance (public assistance), and with the Executive Chamber's budget analysts for health and human services. IINYS and other Faith and Hunger leaders met on Dec. 9th in the Executive Chamber with Joe Baker, the Governor's Deputy Secretary for Health and Human Services, and Dennis Whalen, the Governor's Director of Operations. While they could not give details of the budget, they did acknowledge that help for the poor was both a NS Constitutional issue and a moral issue. Bringing moral discourse to budget issues does make a difference, especially in this climate of austerity.

You may add your voice by calling Governor Paterson and urging him to support an increase in the state welfare grant. (Background: The overall welfare grant is now less than 50% of the federal poverty level. The basic welfare grant of \$291 a month for a family of 3 has not been raised in 18 years.) The Governor will be releasing his proposed budget on Dec. 16th. Once the budget is released, there is a 30 day comment period, and your phone calls make a difference. The usual comment line in Albany at 518 474-8390 though the Governor and his top staff usually work out of his NYC office at 212 681-4580. Tell the person who answers the phone that you want the Governor to raise the basic welfare grant in the State budget. Normally the person who answers the phone writes down the issue and ask for your zip code. These calls are reported to the key policy makers working on an issue. They add up and can help push an issue over the top.

For up-to-date information on the welfare grant deliberations and other issues go to www.interfaithimpactnys.org and click on the "Bulletin Board" link. The posts can be read without registering. To post a comment, register, following the directions on the bulletin board home page. If you have questions, e-mail IINYS Executive Director Robb Smith, robb@interfaithimpactnys.org, or call 518-441-3231.

New York City Council Hears Testimony on Clinic Access Bill

From Rabbi Dennis S. Ross, Director, Concerned Clergy for Choice, The Education Fund of Family Planning Advocates of New York State, 17 Elk Street, Albany, NY 12207, 518-436-8408 ext. 238 dennis@fpaofnys.org

RHRealityCheck.org, November 18, 2008, by Emily Douglas

The New York City Council today heard testimony on a bill that would improve access to women's health clinics and make it easier to prosecute harassers who protest outside of clinics. The bill would create a 15-foot buffer zone around clinic entrances in which no protest would be permitted, but it does not target peaceful protesters, "sidewalk counselors," or prayer vigils. As [Council Speaker Christine Quinn wrote in a letter to the editor in New York Daily News today](#), "Anyone who wishes to protest, and does not try to harass those who enter a health-care facility or willfully interfere with the operation of a reproductive health-care facility, should have no fear of arrest under our bill." Quinn and NARAL Pro-Choice New York President Kelli Conlon wrote in the Metro newspaper, "Through the implementation of this Clinic Access Bill, health clinic staff can have protestors arrested who deliberately interfere with a clinic's operations. Additionally, this Clinic Access Bill will allow police to arrest protestors they see blocking clinic

entrances and exits as well as parking lots and driveways, which is vital to health providers in outer boroughs."

Under the new law, providers could sue harassers on their clients' behalf, a provision that particularly frightened a panel offering testimony in opposition to the bill. A monsignor who engages in "sidewalk counseling" (unfortunately, I did not catch his name) stated to the Council that he would much prefer to respond to harassment allegations in court from the woman who felt harassed, rather than from the woman's provider. City Councilman Charles Barron responded with words I wish could be marshaled every time reproductive health advocates are fighting for protections: "With due respect, Monsignor, you may prefer that, but for a woman, an immigrant, a young woman who has been harassed, she may feel too intimidated to bring charges and may be relieved that her provider can." Hearing a male lawmaker tell a male anti-choicer to put women's perspectives first felt ground-breaking, and the chamber erupted in applause.

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

UUSC Celebrates Universal Declaration of Human Rights' 60th Birthday

Sixty years ago, on December 10, 1948, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was adopted by the United Nations General Assembly. This unprecedented document attests to the rights and worth of all people, identifying that these truths are the "foundation of freedom, justice and peace in the world."



During World War II, UUSC founders Martha and Waitstill Sharp risked their lives to save Jews, anti-Nazi dissidents, and other refugees in war-torn Europe. As UUSC grew out of the selfless acts of the Sharps, so grew the Universal Declaration of Human Rights out of the wreckage of genocide and war.

Today, the words found in the UDHR are more relevant than ever. Its words guide UUSC's efforts to end the genocide in Darfur, battle for civil liberties deteriorated by post-9/11 policies, and stand with workers struggling for economic security and fair wages.

Everyone can celebrate the UDHR and UUSC's human rights work.

- Join UUSC's Listen. Reflect. Act. Campaign.
- Youth aged 12-18 can participate in UUSC's photography contest!
- Religious educators and teachers can participate in the Bright Light Challenge and create a learning experience to celebrate the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and its connection to UUSC's work!
- Invest in human rights. Make a special \$60 UDHR commemorative gift to UUSC, or become a member of UUSC.

Information on these programs is at the UUSC web site (www.uusc.org)

VIDEO AVAILABLE. *Heroes of the Spirit: Genocide Then, Genocide Now.* This is the story of UUSC's beginnings saving refugees from Nazi Germany to its current work in Darfur. Contact UUSC to obtain this video or contact Rsgilbert@uaa.org to borrow a copy.

For more information on the UUSC, contact Jack Maniloff (jkmf@mail.rochester.edu), UUSC Regional Coordinator for the St. Lawrence District, or go to the UUSC web site.

EDITORIAL: PROFITS FALL AND PROPHETS RISE

“Markets are good servants, but bad masters.” Keynesian saying/Sukhamoy Chakravarty
 Luke 12:48: “From everyone to whom much has been given, much will be required; and from the one to whom much has been entrusted, even more will be demanded.”

Never has the discrepancy between “profits” and “prophets” been so great. It is generally acknowledged we are in the most serious economic slump since the Great Depression and there is no end in sight. “Profits” are down, not only in Detroit, but around the world, including in our retirement funds. It is easy to assign blame, depending upon your perspective. While the left proclaims the “greed” of the “haves” as the culprit, those on the right believe it must be the fault of liberal bureaucrats. Others would counter it was the “greed” of those who dreamed of mansions on a starter-house budget that is to blame, or those who seduced them into loans they could not repay. Deregulation in monitoring new financial instruments was also cited. Incompetence and sheer stupidity are not to be discounted, even among “masters of the universe.” I think that probably all these analyses contain some kernel of truth.

However, this economic crisis raises an even more basic question: “How much do we deserve?” (coincidentally the title of my Skinner House book of the same title). Our nation has been on a drunken orgy of getting and spending – consumerism run amok, especially for the affluent among us. We may have become the “greediest generation” of haves alongside the “neediest generation” of have-nots, both at home and abroad. While welfare roles have been cut in half over the past dozen years, poverty has ballooned to over 37 million – not taking into account the past several months. And there are those who say poverty, based on a 1965 “market basket” measure, is grossly underestimated. There are 47 million people without health insurance (a growing figure); food stamp use is up, soup kitchens are busier than ever, etc. etc. etc. Meanwhile I would be bemused if I weren’t so angry at CEO multi-millionaires who are willing to *sacrifice* their salaries and bonuses after they bankrupted their companies and came with hat in hand to the government, which Ronald Reagan told us was the problem. Have they no clue? (Evidently not in a company jet – or even in a hybrid car.)

Barack Obama has been chastised for his “spread the wealth” comment to Joe the Plumber. Francis Bacon said money is like manure, of very little use until it is spread around. Fair distribution is not only an ethical imperative, but it is an economic imperative to drive the economy (70% of which is consumer spending).

Profits are falling; but are prophets rising? Based on a personal experience, perhaps slowly. At a ministers’ meeting I was moaning about my diminishing retirement funds. A colleague serving a congregation in an impoverished inner city reminded me that, despite everything, she and I would be OK, but the people around the church she served were hurting desperately. I had been gently reminded about justice. It is time to reflect and act on the proposition that we are all in this together. And if income and wealth gaps continue to grow, we will continue to have economic instability as well as economic injustice. How about a “bailout” of those who have not benefitted from the unbridled greed of our society; how about a “bailout” for the common good? More on the specifics in a later issue. Dick Gilbert (opinions expressed are strictly my own).

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Miles Manchester, Potsdam (Manchester is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canton, NY)

The *Watertown Times* published an editorial on Nov. 22 opposing the revival of the "fairness doctrine" in broadcasting. You stated that this doctrine would be an "infringement on the constitutionally protected right of broadcasters." But on the other hand, what are the "rights" of the people who own the airwaves?

The people who own the radio towers and transmitters and microphones do not "own" the airwaves; the public does. The station owners hold licenses to use the airwaves. And the standards the station owners must maintain to obtain and keep these licenses are set by our elected representatives. It is very likely these broadcast licensing standards are going to change.

I do not think the public airwaves should be used for broadcasting half-truths, distortions, lies and other forms of deception. Rush Limbaugh should not be allowed to say the following unless he is able to prove it. He said of Barack Obama prior to the election this year, "But he's not black. Do you know he has not one shred of African-American blood? He doesn't have any African — that's why when they asked whether he was authentic, whether he's down for the struggle. He's Arab. You know, he's from Africa. He's from Arab parts of Africa. He's not — his father was — he's not African-American. The last thing that he is is African-American." (Audio and video clips of this can be found on the Internet.)

During this election campaign, conservative talk radio was filled with false and misleading information intended to influence voters to accept the political opinions of the program host. Why should that not be considered a form of "attempted fraud"? Were they not attempting to defraud the public of a free and fair election?

Half-truths, distortions and lies have become the mainstay of talk radio. That needs to stop. If not the Fairness Doctrine, then what? There is a problem here that needs to be corrected. On the other hand, if Democrats go too far, that could create another set of problems. We need a reasonable balancing of the rights of all concerned.

I encourage everyone to research talk radio and listen to as many talk radio hosts of all political persuasions as you can. Those who like the system now are very active trying to keep it as is. If you want change, let your elected representatives know.

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? Election year or not 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

Does the Earth Have Moral Rights? An ethical exploration of environmental justice.

How Much Do We Deserve? An Exploration in Distributive (Economic) Justice

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
