

AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER

ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT

FEBRUARY 2008

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(Deadline for February issue is February 29)

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Social Justice Events Calendar

March 1: Deadline for Congregational Comments on the current UUA Congregational Study Action Issues, "Peacemaking"
March 4: Hunger Action Network of NYS Advocacy Day
March 10: Family Planning Advocates 31st Annual Conference: "It's up to us in '08" – Empire State Plaza Convention Center, Albany – to register go to www.fpaofnys.org
March 16: Interfaith Impact of NYS Briefing in Rochester: "Marriage Equality: Love, Leviticus and the Legislature" – Contact Judy Swartz at schwartz179@earthlink.net
April 3-5: Intergenerational UU United Nations Seminar in New York City. "Picking Up the Pieces: Building a Culture of Peace. For more information go to www.uu-uno.org or springseminar@uu-uno.org
April 25-26: St. Lawrence District Assembly in Binghamton/Owego. Assembly Theme: *Sustainable Earth – A Call to Action*. Social Justice Council Workshop on *Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election*. See program in Social Justice Council News below.
April 29: Equality and Justice Day – Empire State Pride Agenda
May 6: Clergy Day for Concerned Clergy for Choice – info@edfundfpa.org
May 18-19 Interfaith Impact of NYS Advocacy Day in Albany (see details below)
October 4: Social Justice Council Social Action Conference (Schenectady)

GUEST EDITORIAL

Just Us: Notes from Your Social Justice Coordinator

Tim Wilson, Social Justice Coordinator, First Unitarian Church of Rochester Social justice is as busy as ever at First Unitarian. Many, many committed people offer their time, skills and passion in ways large and small. For this I am truly grateful. From the privileged perspective of such bountiful activity, I have the luxury of occasional reflection. Lately I've been thinking about how important it is to balance service, education and advocacy, the main elements of social justice. I believe they are all necessary for our work to ultimately be meaningful – both personally and as a faith community. If we only petitioned legislators to support equal marriage but did not also offer a comprehensive sexuality course as part of our Religious Education program and provide a caring and welcoming community to gays and lesbians, what message would we be sending the LGBT community? I am glad our church not only supports the Peace Advocates' war protest vigils, films and discussions, but also provides dinners for our military families and recognizes those serving in the military. Our School Partnerships coordinate thousands of volunteer hours and resource drives but also facilitates letter-writing to legislators in support of school funding and hosts school board candidate forums.

Our Social Justice Advisory Team has been talking lately about asking the question of each task force and church-sponsored social justice group "What are you doing to make yourselves unnecessary?" In other words, are you helping someone get through life for another day or are you also addressing the culture and policies – the system that allows the problem to persist? Indeed, as we tutor young students, feed and house the poor or perform any of the other myriad services we provide as volunteers, it is worth keeping this question in mind. (socialjustice@rochesterunitarian.org or 585-584-3581)

ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL NEWS Election 2008 Social Justice Council Workshop

Social Justice Council Workshop, *Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election*, will be at the District Assembly, Binghamton/Owego, April 25-26, 2008.

- The "real rules," what churches can and cannot do in the campaign (Robb Smith, Interfaith Impact of NYS Executive Director)
- Voter registration (Dick Dana, Albany UU Society)
- Moral dimensions of political issues (Rev. Sam Trumbore, Albany UU Church).

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER UUSC Legislative Action Center

To learn about the issues and to contact your legislators go to the UUSC website www.uusc.org.

UUSC fact-finding mission to Kenya. An emergency delegation organized by the UUSC traveled to Kenya, January 20-25, 2008, to learn firsthand the extent and root causes of the political and humanitarian crisis that has engulfed the country since the flawed presidential election in late December 2007. The delegates met with dozens of people from civil society, the informal economy, and the general public, visiting markets in the slum of Kibera, a burned-down water-utility headquarters in Kisumu, an IDP camp

in Eldoret, and sites of intense violence, like the Alliances of God Church, where only a few weeks ago 30 people lost their lives.

Now back in the U.S., members of the delegation will meet with Senate Foreign Relations Committee staff, House Foreign Affairs Committee staff, State Department officials, and representatives of other key international institutions to share their findings.

UUSC President Charlie Clements wrote on leaving Kenya: "The commitment we have made to everyone we spoke with, or who assisted us, is to use this information in a way that will increase understanding and aid as well as contribute to a lasting solution."

Read blog posts from Kenya, view a photo essay, find more Kenya resources, and donate to UUSC-UUA Kenya Crisis Fund at www.uusc.org.



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. human rights in the United States and around the world.

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.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

Action Alert: Clean Money Bill in New York State Assembly

From The Interfaith Alliance of Rochester. TIAR is a supporter of Citizens for Better Government in NY which is in the middle of a campaign to get a Clean Money Bill in the State Assembly. Clean Money is shorthand for full public financing of election campaigns, the most effective way to get special interests out of politics and the public interest in. Citizen Action of New York has set up a web site on which you can learn more about Clean Money and - more importantly - send a letter to your Assemblyperson expressing your support for it. If legislators hear from their constituents enough, they do pay attention. So please go to the following web site and take action if you agree.
http://salsa.wiredforchange.com/o/1648/t/2524/campaign.jsp?campaign_KEY=2069

Action Alert: Bigger Better Bottle Bill

Interfaith Impact of New York State supports legislation to expand the definition of “beverage” in the state returnable container act to include non-carbonated drinks such as bottled water and iced tea. It would also require that unclaimed bottle deposit revenue revert to the state’s environmental protection fund. It also makes provision for municipal assistance to New York City’s bottle collection efforts and raises the handling fee for retailers.

This legislation was included in last years State Budget Bill but was removed in negotiations with the Senate. It was then introduced in both the Assembly (A.8044, Sweeney) and the Senate (S.5850, Marcellino). It passed in the Assembly but has not been allowed out of committee in the Senate.

The original bottle bill did not anticipate the increase in bottle water use, nor the advent of sports drinks, fruit juices, and other beverages that are popular today. The intent of this bill is to remove a substantial quantity of reusable glass, metal and plastic from municipal waste streams. It would also wisely return the unclaimed deposit money back to the community for worthy environmental projects, including waste reduction and recycling efforts.

Returnable container deposit laws have proven to be effective as a means of diverting valuable material from landfills and incinerators. States with container deposits enjoy an average glass, aluminum and plastic container recovery rate of 80%, while non-deposit states only manage 40%. Currently New York manages to recycle 76% of the beverage containers eligible to be reclaimed. (These figures come from www.eany.org, a good source of up to date information on current environmental legislation.)

This would be a good time to contact your legislator regarding your support for expansion of the Bottle Bill. In particular, the members and leadership of the Senate need to hear from you regarding moving the legislation out of committee and onto the floor for a vote.

The Better Choice for “One New York”

A coalition of reform groups has proposed principles for budget priorities. To grow New York’s economy we must invest in New York’s working families. A healthy state economy requires well-educated New Yorkers, safe communities, affordable health care, affordable housing and a sound transportation infrastructure. In recent decades, state budget policies have placed increasing pressure on local property taxes and local sales taxes. And the state government then came to the rescue with a program that provides rebate checks to all homeowners, regardless of need, and not enough to those who are truly overburdened by the increases in local taxes.

The Governor and the Legislature must work together to ensure that the 2008-09 state budget is fair to New York’s families by balancing the state budget in an equitable manner that makes the state tax system fairer and begins to actually reduce the pressure on the local property and sales tax bases rather than shifting more of the tax burden onto the backs of low and middle income New Yorkers.

We can promote tax fairness, strengthen local economies and help struggling families by: Creating a Tax System that is FAIR to all New Yorkers: The wealthiest New Yorkers' pay a much smaller percentage of their incomes in state and local taxes than low and middle income working families. Seniors on fixed incomes, working families and young couples are among the New Yorkers who suffer from the inequities in the current state-local tax structure. New York's policymakers must take the pressure off the property tax by restoring some of the income tax system's lost progressivity and closing corporate tax loopholes that allow some of the nation's largest corporations to avoid paying their fair share of taxes.

Strengthening Local Communities: Rather than putting increased pressure on the local property and sales tax bases and then providing "relief" to local taxpayers in the form of state rebate checks, New York State policymakers must work together to reduce the pressure on local property and sales tax bases by restoring the state's commitment to "revenue sharing" with its local governments and having the state government take over a greater share of local education and healthcare costs. And the state's STAR programs must be targeted to provide adequate relief to those families that are most in need.

It's time for New York State to end the special treatment of the favored few by: Closing loopholes that allow large, profitable corporations to avoid paying their fair share of state taxes.

Stopping sweetheart deals with high-priced consultants who are being overpaid to do jobs that state workers can do better and cheaper.

Lowering drug prices for state and local governments by using New York's purchasing power to get a fair deal from the drug companies.

Reforming economic development programs by improving the effectiveness and accountability of Industrial Development Agencies (IDAs), the Brownfield Clean Up Program (BCP) and the Empire Zones program.

Enacting the Bigger, Better Bottle Bill and making the beverage bottling industry return unclaimed bottle deposits.

Making New York's tax system fairer and more equitable by increasing the top marginal tax rates on the highest income households.

For further information go to New Yorkers for Fiscal Fairness, 212 Great Oaks Blvd., Albany, New York 12203. Fax to: 518-869-8649 or www.abetterchoiceforny.org.

Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act

This is Governor Spitzer's RHPPA (S05829) act to guarantee Roe v. Wade principles as state law. It is being opposed by the NYS Catholic Conference (see http://www.nyscatholicconference.org/pages/our_agenda/show_billDetails.asp?id+135) For supporting arguments see <http://www.nyclu.org/rhappa> or Google "Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act."

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

From the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

Newsletters for January and The True Cost of War: A Moral Balance Sheet

UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org

NATIONAL ISSUES

Action Alert: From the Coalition on Human Needs

"There is good evidence that cash that goes to low and moderate income people is more likely to be spent in the near term." Ben Bernanke, Chair of the Federal Reserve:

Below are links to a letter that describes elements of an effective stimulus package - federal spending on improved unemployment insurance, tax rebates designed to reach people with low incomes, increased food stamp benefits, various forms of federal aid to prevent state cutbacks and to put people to work quickly repairing schools or bridges, and home energy assistance.

http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/125/petition.jsp?petition_KEY=888.

To contact the Coalition on Human Needs go to: <http://www.chn.org/about/staff.html>

To sign up for CHN emails go to <http://www.chn.org/signUp.jsp>.

Action Alert: Back Up Your Birth Control Campaign

From NARAL Pro-Choice New York: After being on hiatus for the fall and winter holidays, the Back Up Your Birth Control Campaign is back in business. The campaign was created by the National Institute for Reproductive Health and NARAL Pro-Choice New York. It's needless to say that this campaign, created to raise awareness about emergency contraception (EC), is close to our hearts. We want you to join the campaign and celebrate the 2008 Day of Action on March 25. Let's fight to make EC available for all women regardless of their income or insurance coverage.

While the FDA decision that made EC available over the counter to women 18 and older was a victory, the high cost of EC over the counter, usually between \$40-60 in pharmacies nationwide, is a continuing barrier to some women accessing EC. What's even worse is the fact that many college health centers and safety-net family-planning clinics have had to drastically increase the cost of regular birth-control methods because of a provision in the Deficit Reduction Act passed in 2005 that eliminated discounts on birth control for these clinics.

This means that the four million college-age women across America along with low-income women who rely on the 400 safety-net family-planning clinics may need to back up their birth control with EC now more than ever before.

The campaign has some big plans for the next few months, and we want you to be a part of it. Check out the Back Up Your Birth Control Campaign's website for more ways you can get involved with the Day of Action, and/or order Rosie the Riveter FREE materials today so that you can advocate for EC-quality!

SERVICES OF THE SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL

If you would like to be on the E-mail list for this Newsletter or if you change you address or if you have newsletter items, please contact Dick Gilbert at Rsgilbert@uuma.org. In addition to an annual social justice conference and the *Agenda for Change* newsletter, the Social Justice Council offers the services of Dick Gilbert to preach and/or lead social justice workshops. Contact Rsgilbert@uuma.org or 585-244-7403.

INTERFAITH IMPACT ANNUAL ADVOCACY DAY

Due to a change in the legislative calendar the annual **IINYS Advocacy Day** has been scheduled for **Monday, May 19**, with a **legislative briefing and dinner** on **Sunday, May 18**, for those able to come early. The Briefing will be at the First Lutheran Church of Albany, 646 State Street. Advocacy Day itself will be on Monday, May 19, from 9:30 am – 3:30 pm in Room 711A Legislative Office Building, Empire State Plaza in Albany. The program is again co-sponsored by Reform Jewish Voice of New York State.

Registration for Advocacy Day begins at 9:30 am; a light breakfast will be served. The official program begins at 10:30 am with an Interfaith Prayer Session and will continue with a brief orientation on both the issues and advocacy. Participants will then have the opportunity to join teams led by experienced advocates and meet throughout the day with state legislators and other key policy makers. Box lunches are included in the registration fee. Issues will include The Healthy Teens Act (age-appropriate, comprehensive sexuality education for teens); Marriage equality for same gender couples; other issues that need our voices of faith, reason and compassion. Please visit the IINYS website for more information. www.interfaithimpactnys.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.

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