

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER  
ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL – FEBRUARY 2009**

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(Deadline for March issue is March 1)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009**

**February 26 – March 1:** First International Convocation of Unitarian Universalist Women and Progressive Women of Faith. For information [www.icuuw.com:80](http://www.icuuw.com:80)

**March 21-24:** Sexuality Education Advocacy Training in Washington, DC. For information go to [www.uua.org/SEAT](http://www.uua.org/SEAT).

**March 22:** Interfaith Impact of NYS Forum – see below

**April 1-5:** Re-envisioning Economic Justice in the New Era (20<sup>th</sup> 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 3-5:** Listen, Learn, Lead: Leading Congregations into a Multiracial, Multicultural Future: Now Is the Time” – Tulsa, Oklahoma. For information about previous conferences go to: <http://www.uua.org/events/multiracialmulticultural/index.shtml>.

**April 24-26:** St. Lawrence District Assembly, Albany. Social Justice Council workshop led by Aaron Payson, “**When Emergencies Happen. A Guide to Congregational Preparedness.**” Aaron is Response Coordinator for The Unitarian Universalist Trauma Response Ministry.

**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%20Programs/Equality%20and%20Justice%20Day/))

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

**July 26-August 1:** UULTI (Unitarian Universalist Leadership Training Institute) at Juniata College in Pennsylvania (see attachment).

**November 7: “Doing Justice in an Economic Tsunami”** will be the theme of the 2009 annual conference of SJC to be held at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst Saturday, November 7. Former UUA President John Buehrens will be the featured speaker. Flyers and registration will be available at the District Assembly.

## **NEW YORK STATE ISSUES**

### **Ignorance Is Bliss?**

Interfaith IMPACT of New York State Presents Annual Legislative Briefing  
Religion, Sex Education, and the Legislature: A Discussion of the Healthy Teens Act  
SPEAKERS: Rabbi Laurence Kotok, Temple B'rith Kodesh

Jim Stewart, CEO/President Planned Parenthood

Reverend John Wilkinson, Third Presbyterian Church

Kim McLaughlin, Executive Director NYS Student Support Services Center

**Sunday, March 22, 2009, First Universalist Church 2:00 p.m. 150 S. Clinton Avenue**

Free and Open to the Public - For information, call: 585.442.5111. IINYS Conscience in Public Life project funded in part by the Fund for Unitarian Universalist Social Responsibility

### **Single Payer Universal Health Care Meetings**

Navigating the Healthcare Crisis, Saturday, March 15, 1:00-4:00 pm. Saratoga Springs Public Library, Community room. Contact [Preed9@nycap.rr.com](mailto:Preed9@nycap.rr.com) for information.

Cover the Uninsured Week, March 22-28. Check the website below for events in NYS.  
[www.covertheuninsured.org](http://www.covertheuninsured.org).

### **Commentary on NYS Environmental Issues**

Excerpts from a statement from Kenneth Bollerud, Interfaith Impact's environmental specialist:  
(1) Bigger Better Bottle Bill: “It is too bad that this bill is going to now be looked upon favorably as a revenue bill rather than an environmental bill, However, we have to take our support where we can get it. We do need to make certain that the revenues taken are not taken away from the environmental ends they were intended for. (2) E-Waste: Electronic equipment has done much to enrich our lives. However, the original Bottle Bill focused on carbonated beverages while the amount of plastic containers increased in the bottled water and sport drink area. We are just catching up in that arena. In the same sense we have much catching up to do in the recycling of electronic ‘waste.’ The proposed legislation would call for collecting a minimum of 25 percent of the annual equipment sales (by weight) each year, and increase that collection rate to 45 percent in the future. I feel we ought to ask for much higher levels of recycling. (3) Green Infrastructure in the Federal Stimulus Package: We ought to encourage the use of Federal Stimulus money to: help stop global warming; fix infrastructure, update facilities, improve systems rather than extending service to undeveloped or un-serviced areas; (c) institutionalize energy efficiency.

### **Higher Taxes for the Rich in New York State?**

As a way to help balance the budget there is talk in Albany about a “millionaire’s tax.” Over the last 30 years the trend has been to pare back income tax rates on the rich. The state has cut its top tax rate from 15.375 percent to 6.85 percent. The top income tax rate in New Jersey is 8.97 percent, and in Connecticut it is 5%. The richest 1 percent of New Yorkers paid more than 40

percent of the income tax in 2007, up from about 30 percent in 1996, though that figure is declining in the face of the financial crisis. Edmund J. McMahon, director of the Empire Center for New York State Policy, a conservative group, says: “This is the worst possible time to do this, because the economy is deeply stressed, our key industry is laying in pieces in the gutter and partially nationalized, and a lot of business people have to reassess their future in the most costly city in the country.” *New York Times*, January 21, 2009

To weigh in on this and other issues, call your legislators directly:  
 Assembly switchboard: 518-455-4100  
 Senate switchboard: 518-455-2800

We are also making increased use of the bulletin board on our web site, [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org). There you can access up-to-the-minute information, discuss issues, and review a calendar of opportunities for progressive advocacy. I hope you will make use of this option. The more we communicate, the more powerful we are.

[robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org) - [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)

## NATIONAL ISSUES

### STIMULUS PACKAGE AS OF MID-MONTH

As of this writing the Senate has passed its economic recovery bill 61-37. Now House and Senate leaders will negotiate a final bill which may be on the president's desk by February 16. The Coalition on Human Needs urges support of an American Recovery and Reinvestment Act that includes the House's aid to states and communities (including education, Head Start, and affordable housing), and the House's version of the Child Tax Credit. According to CHN, though the two bills are about the same size, \$800 billion, the House bill saves/creates 650,000 more jobs because it provides more aid to states to prevent education and other important services from being cut. The House bill also creates jobs by investing more to renovate low-income housing and to support community services including Head State. It also provides more help to millions more low-income families through the Child Tax Credit. The Senate bill does less in these areas, and spends more on tax breaks that mostly benefit upper-income people. For more details about the House/Senate differences go to:

<http://chn.org/pdf/2009/RecoveryConfPts.pdf>.

### BANG FOR THE BUCK

#### What a dollar of stimulus puts back into the economy when spent on:

Food Stamps (\$1.73); Extending unemployment benefits (\$1.64); Infrastructure (\$1.59); Aid to states (\$1.36); Payroll tax holiday (\$1.29); Refundable tax rebate (\$1.26); Across the board tax cut (\$1.03); Nonrefundable tax rebate (\$1.02); Extending Alternative Minimum Tax (\$.40); Making dividend and capital gains tax cuts permanent (\$.37); Corporate tax cut (\$.30); Making Bush income tax cuts permanent (\$.29); Accelerated depreciation (\$.27). Source: Moody's Economy.com; congressional testimony. Courtesy Rochester Area Labor Federation (AFL-CIO). **Contact information for NYS Senators:** Senator Charles Schumer, 313 Hart Building, Washington, DC 20510 – e-mail [schumer@senate.gov](mailto:schumer@senate.gov) – 202-224-6542

Senator Kirsten Gillibrand, 532 Dirksen Senate Office Building, Washington, DC 20510  
 e-mail – [gillibrand@senate.gov](mailto:gillibrand@senate.gov) – 202-224-4451

## The Prayer Delivered by Bishop Gene Robinson at the Inauguration

Millions of people heard Rev. Rick Warren deliver the Invocation at the inauguration of President Barack Hussein Obama. Warren vocally supported the passage of Proposition 8 in California, which took away the rights of same-sex couples to legally marry. Fewer people saw the "We Are One" inaugural concert that took place at the Lincoln Memorial on Sunday. And even if you followed on radio or watched it on TV, you would not have seen Bishop Gene Robinson's opening prayer because HBO and NPR chose not to air it. As many of you know, Robinson is the first openly gay bishop of the Episcopal Church. Below is his prayer: "Welcome to Washington! The fun is about to begin, but first, please join me in pausing for a moment, to ask God's blessing upon our nation and our next president.

O God of our many understandings, we pray that you will... Bless us with tears – for a world in which over a billion people exist on less than a dollar a day, where young women from many lands are beaten and raped for wanting an education, and thousands die daily from malnutrition, malaria, and AIDS.

Bless us with anger – at discrimination, at home and abroad, against refugees and immigrants, women, people of color, gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender people.

Bless us with discomfort – at the easy, simplistic "answers" we've preferred to hear from our politicians, instead of the truth, about ourselves and the world, which we need to face if we are going to rise to the challenges of the future.

Bless us with patience – and the knowledge that none of what ails us will be "fixed" anytime soon, and the understanding that our new president is a human being, not a messiah.

Bless us with humility – open to understanding that our own needs must always be balanced with those of the world.

Bless us with freedom from mere tolerance – replacing it with a genuine respect and warm embrace of our differences, and an understanding that in our diversity, we are stronger.

Bless us with compassion and generosity – remembering that every religion's God judges us by the way we care for the most vulnerable in the human community, whether across town or across the world. And God, we give you thanks for your child Barack, as he assumes the office of President of the United States.

### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

Each month, the UUA implements an **Action of the Month** campaign to engage UUs in accomplishing concrete objectives that reflect UU values. Following are the Actions for January through March: **February -- BGLT Equality**: Visit your Representative or Senator and ask them to support BGLT equality. **March -- Comprehensive Sex Education** - coinciding with the annual Sexuality Education and Advocacy Training, which teaches members how to be

effective advocates for comprehensive sexuality education. For more information on these Actions of the Month, visit [www.uua.org/socialjustice](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice). **Attached** are updates from the UUA Washington Office.

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

### Economic Justice

#### *Workers' rights are human rights*

Economic justice is essential for securing basic human rights, alleviating local and global poverty, and achieving a more peaceful and just world. As a human rights and social justice organization, UUSC embraces a vision of economic human rights, recognizing that workers' rights are human rights.

#### Supporting Workers' Rights

UUSC is committed to defending and supporting workers' right to organize, especially laborers marginalized by race, language, and/or gender who are therefore most vulnerable to exploitation. Within the United States, UUSC applies several strategies to achieve this objective.

» [Learn more](#)

#### Advancing the Fair Wage Movement

Raising the minimum wage above poverty level is perhaps the most effective instrument for combating poverty and supporting the human rights of children, women, and people of color in the United States. No other single issue or movement can so directly improve the lives of the working poor in this country.

» [Learn more](#)

#### Promoting Fair Trade

Fair trade is a set of principles and practices that more equitably distributes wealth and provides producers and farmers with a living wage. Supporting fair trade is central to UUSC's commitment to strengthening human rights and dignity for workers in the global economy.

» [Learn more](#)

Read more about UUSC's pursuit of economic justice:

**Our strategic approach**  
**Context: A Changing Workforce**  
**Faith-labor-community Coalitions**

For more information, contact Jack Maniloff ([jkmf@mail.rochester.edu](mailto:jkmf@mail.rochester.edu)), St. Lawrence District UUSC Regional Coordinator, or go to the UUSC web site ([www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org)).

## EDITORIAL: COGNITIVE AND MORAL DISSONANCE

With our economy spiraling out of control despite desperate efforts in Washington and elsewhere to save it, it is time for a reality check. Never before has the Chinese ideograph for crisis – two figures, one danger, one opportunity – been more appropriate. As someone wisely said, “A crisis is a terrible thing to waste.”

My mind drifts back to seminary where I read John Kenneth’s Galbraith’s book *The Affluent Society*. The central image of that book was an America with gleaming Cadillacs driving on pot-holed roads, elaborate campers in run-down public campgrounds and brilliant students taught by underpaid teachers in crumbling schools. In short, he argued that while investing heavily in the private consumer sphere, we had neglected the public sphere in which we all live and move and have our being.

Never has that been made more obvious than by attempts to provide tax breaks to those who are already affluent while trying to chop funds for public infrastructure and aid to ailing states and newly unemployed people; by ignoring the vast sums of money spent irresponsibly for the Iraq War while nit-picking every dime in the current economic stimulus package; by having the gall to protest “reckless” spending while having spent the country into a staggering deficit and debt.

No, this is a time for a reality check: (1) as a people we have neglected our public domain, the common good, the “general welfare” of the Constitution in favor of a self-interested profligacy for the prosperous; (2) we have created a tax system allegedly to fund a “trickle-down” economics that has not even dampened most Americans; (3) we have established a health system, unique in the developed world for having such relatively bad outcomes, while also spending far more than other nations; (4) we have, in the name of religious ideology, become the laughing stock of the world by our ignorance in science education; (5) we have yielded to a reactionary religious right the capacity to determine the rightness of the most intimate of human relations; (6) we have relied on an American exceptionalism to intervene in the affairs of other nations while holding ourselves up as champions of democracy and self-determination.

We are experiencing a cognitive and moral dissonance which should shake us out of our apathy and move us to align our policies with our ideals. While many of us bemoan our lowered prosperity, this is a time for a renewed commitment to social and economic justice. The very structures of our political and economic system are under challenge – as well they should be. Now is the time to drop the plumb line over our nation and cry out when we find it wanting. Never have I been more discouraged about the American dream, and never more eager to weigh in with the voice of a prophetic religious liberalism.

Folk singer Pete Seeger in an interview with the late Studs Terkel spoke of building a schooner called the *Clearwater* to take people on Hudson River excursions to enlist their support for cleaning it up. Although a small endeavor, Seeger likened it to a seesaw with one end anchored to the ground by a basket of rocks, while activists were at the other end using teaspoons to slowly fill a basket with sand. Some day the balance will tip and the rocks will be sent flying into the air. People will ask: “How did that happen so quickly?” It was because of “us and our damned little teaspoons.” Let’s start digging. Dick Gilbert

## **Services Offered by the Social Justice Council 2008-2009**

Contact [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto: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](mailto: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.

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

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