

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

Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator ([rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:rsgilbert@uuma.org))  
(Deadline for April issue is March 31)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE EVENTS CALENDAR**

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](http://www.uu-uno.org) or [springseminar@uu-uno.org](mailto: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. For more information go to [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org)

April 29: Equality and Justice Day – Empire State Pride Agenda – [www.prideagenda.org](http://www.prideagenda.org)

May 6: Clergy Day for Concerned Clergy for Choice – [info@edfundfpa.org](mailto:info@edfundfpa.org)

May 18-19: Interfaith Impact of NYS Advocacy Day in Albany (see below)

October 4: Social Justice Council Social Action Conference in Schenectady

**SOCIAL JUSTICE COUNCIL SERVICES**

If you would like to be on the E-mail list for this Newsletter or if you change your address or if you have newsletter items, please contact Dick Gilbert at [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto: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](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or 585-244-7403.

**UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS**

From the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

Go to this website for weekly alerts: [UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org](mailto:UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org)

February 22 issue: *Civil Rights and Liberties on the Line*

February 29 issue: Reintroducing Faithful America

February 29 Action Alert: Peace and Conflict

### **EDITORIAL: IRAQ AS AN UNJUST WAR – Richard S. Gilbert**

"A samurai warrior went to see a monk. "Monk," he said, in a voice accustomed to instant obedience, "teach me about heaven and hell!" The monk looked up at this mighty warrior and replied with utter disdain, "Teach you about heaven and hell? I couldn't teach you anything. You're dirty. You smell. Your blade is rusty. You're a disgrace, an embarrassment to the samurai class. Get out of my sight. I can't stand you." The samurai was furious. He pulled out his sword and raised it above him, preparing to slay the monk. "That's hell," said the monk softly. The samurai was overwhelmed. The compassion and surrender of this little man who had offered his life to give this teaching to show him hell! He slowly put down his sword, filled with gratitude, and suddenly peaceful. "And that's heaven," said the monk softly.

I fear our nation is closer to hell than to heaven, led on a march of folly with President Bush leading the parade. We were led into this war by lies and deceptions. "Thou shalt not bear false witness." What is it about those words that President Bush does not understand?

In avenging the loss of nearly 3000 lives on 9-11, this war has now cost the lives of 4000 American soldiers. Gandhi said, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth philosophy leaves us both blind and toothless." What is there about those words Vice-President Cheney doesn't understand?

President Eisenhower warned against a military-industrial complex. Our nation has paid a great price for war-making – ultimately up to 3 trillion dollars. "They shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks." What is there about those words that the Congress does not understand?

Hundreds of thousands of Iraqis have died; in military-speak "collateral damage." The UN Universal Declaration of Human Rights: "Everyone has the right to life, liberty and security of person." What is there about those words that our leaders in Washington do not understand?

There were no weapons of mass destruction to be found in Iraq. We were the ones who introduced them. "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called the children of God." What is there about those words that the Administration does not understand?

37 million Americans live in poverty, 47 million have no health insurance, the nation tumbles headlong into recession, while the rich get ever richer. "Blessed are the poor, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. . . . It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a rich person to enter the kingdom of heaven. . . . Inasmuch as you have done it unto the least of these, you have done it unto me." What is there about those words those pious politicians inside the beltway do not understand?

However, lest we be self-righteous, we cannot simply blame our leaders for this unjust war. In a democracy we get the leaders we deserve. It is not too late. On this 5th anniversary of a tragic war we need to launch a moral surge to demand withdrawal of our troops with all deliberate speed; to divert our bloated military budget to rebuild the nation's infrastructure, to address global climate change, end poverty and provide universal health care; to repent of the harm we have done to Iraq; and to rekindle the light of a democratic nation on the hill.

During the Gulf War a member of my congregation gave me a most unusual vase, standing over a foot tall, with graceful, curving lines, and a very heavy base. She had purchased it at a rummage sale some years ago as a flower container. Later she had picked it up and read the inscription on its base: "105 millimeters, M 14, lot 12c B Company, 1944. It was an artillery shell casing beaten into the shape of a flower urn. "Nation shall not lift up sword against nation; neither shall they learn war any more." It is these words we must understand and live on this solemn anniversary.

**SAVE THE DATE! IINYS ADVOCACY DAY MONDAY, MAY 19th**  
**Advocacy briefing and training on Sunday, May 18th**

The annual IINYS Legislative Advocacy Day will be held this year on Monday, May 19, 2008. If you already have an April date written in, please change it. Usually, we hold our Advocacy Day on the last Monday in April, but this is a leap year on the Jewish calendar. That made the date for Passover later this year. The Legislature changed their session calendar accordingly, and so has IINYS. May is a very active month in the Legislature. It will be an important time to make our values heard loud and clear.

Reform Jewish Voice of NYS will co-host the event again this year. And once again, we will have a Legislative Briefing and Advocacy Training with dinner the afternoon before, for those who can be there on Sunday afternoon, May 18, 2008, at the First Lutheran Church in Albany. For this briefing, we have a great line-up of speakers to cover our top issues: GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) rights, the Governor's Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act, and Universal Health Care. There will also be an advocacy training session with practice interviews.

With the help of State Senator Neil Breslin, we have reserved Room 711A in the Legislative Office Building in Albany for Monday, May 19th. This large room holds up to 100 people and is right in the middle of all the legislative offices. That gives you a place to leave your coats, eat, and network with likeminded folks from across the state. Breakfast and lunch will be available in the room, and it will be our staging area for visits to legislators and staff throughout the day. IINYS and RJV staff and volunteers will make the appointments in advance with legislators and legislative staff. You will get a final schedule and folder of materials when you arrive in Rm. 711A.

Last year, more than 70 persons took part, including members of the clergy from across the state, and we anticipate more this year. We encourage young people to join us, and will offer a special reduced rate for students. A registration form will be available soon, along with parking instructions, position papers, palm cards that provide summary positions, a roster of speakers, flyers, and other materials. Information will be up on our website, [www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org). Please note that we have a new bulletin board feature on our website this year that you can use to organize carpools, ask questions, make comments, discuss issues, and so on. We are encouraging the use of this new feature. The more people who use it, the more useful it will become.

Look for more information and a registration form in mid-March. Meanwhile, **Save Those Dates! Briefing--Sunday afternoon, May 18th; Advocacy Day Monday, May 19th.** Please let your congregation members know, and pass the dates on to your local interfaith organizations.

Robb Smith, Executive Director, Interfaith Impact of NYS  
 646 State St., Albany, NY 12203 - 518-441-3231

[robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](mailto:robb@interfaithimpactnys.org)

[www.interfaithimpactnys.org](http://www.interfaithimpactnys.org)

*Interfaith Impact of NYS: Liberal and Progressive Religious Faiths Advocating for Compassion, Reason and Justice in New York State public policies*

## 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](http://www.uusc.org).

### Election 2008 - Voter Registration

Concerned citizens are encouraged to organize their congregations for voter registration campaigns this Summer and Fall. This is "hands-on" social justice work and those of us who have done it have found it a surprisingly spiritual experience. New registrants, sometimes with tears in their eyes, will thank you for what you have given them. In Rochester, we have organized a coalition of 25 faith and community organizations for voter registration, and focus our efforts on areas with low voter registration (as identified by our county Board of Elections). Early in your organizational efforts, it is very helpful to invite someone from your county Board of Elections to meet with your group to review voter registration regulations and answer questions. A coalition of groups lets you share the work load and have voter registration activity at least every weekend at the major sites in your area (e.g., public markets, supermarkets, Foodlink locations, health clinics), but remember to get permission from the site first. *"Don't get mad at the game, become a player."* From Jack Maniloff, St. Lawrence District UUSC Regional Coordinator.

### Election 2008 Workshop

The St. Lawrence District Annual Assembly will be April 25-26 in Binghamton/Owego -- details at [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org). The Assembly theme will be "Sustainable Earth - A Call to Action." There will be a District Social Justice Council Workshop on voter registration and the 2008 election. The workshop, "Social Justice Council Workshop on Democracy as a Religious Principle: UU Values in the 2008 Election" will cover three topics: (1) What churches can and cannot do in the campaign, Robb Smith, IINYS; (2) Voter registration, Dick Dana, Albany; and (3) Moral dimensions of political issues, Sam Trumbore, Albany. There will also be a UUSC table, so stop by and learn more about the UUSC's social justice and human rights work in the U.S. and around the world.



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.

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](mailto:justworks@uusc.org). Also, visit [www.uusc.org](http://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

### Issue Alert!

*Public Assistance*

*Grant*

*February, 2008*

From the New York State Council of Churches

Jesus said, “As you have done to the least of these, you have done to me” (Matthew 25). Notice that he did not put qualifications upon the “least of these”. He did not speak of the “deserving hungry” or the “innocent imprisoned”. He told us to care about the hungry, the thirsty, the stranger, the sick, the naked, and the imprisoned as if they were Jesus himself. Period. Thus we pray for those in poverty without qualification. And prayer compels action –

Poverty is not uncommon in New York. In fact, according to recent census data, 888,000 (20%) of New York State’s children are living in poverty, and the state ranks 36<sup>th</sup> in the country in child poverty rates. Our country’s current economic problems disproportionately affect the poor. Families cannot meet their basic needs for shelter energy, transportation, food, and clothing.

Most decision makers will nod in agreement that something must be done, but they seem to be lacking in the will to do it. And so it is time that people of faith speak out. Since there is no bill for which to advocate, it is time to put some issues on the table.

**This memo speaks to one issue that will make a difference in the lives of many low-income families.**

### Background

Since federal legislation in 1996 created the Temporary Assistance to Needy Families (TANF) program, public assistance has become a temporary, transitional program intended to move people into the work force. Given this philosophy, it is especially unjust to support people during this transition with grants that amount to less than half of the federal poverty level. The grant should, at the very least, be equivalent to the federal poverty level, which would mean increasing the grant by 49%.

New York State last raised its basic grant level in 1990, when public assistance operated the Roosevelt-era Aid to Families with Dependent Children program. New York State has the money from the federal TANF block grant to raise the basic grant. Unlike many other states, New York has failed to use this funding to raise our grant levels and spends more than \$1 billion a year out of its total for purposes other than funding direct public assistance to needy families. Last year the State Assembly proposed a 10% increase in the basic public assistance grant, but the proposal died in negotiations with the Governor and the State Senate.

Please contact the Governor, your State Senator, and your State Assemblymember and

tell them you support raising the public assistance grant by at least 49% and urge them to do likewise. If you and/or your congregation are involved in ministries to people in need such as food pantries, soup kitchens or homeless shelters, indicate that and if possible share a story or two indicating the humanity of those you are serving.

### Sample Letter

Please support a significant increase in the public assistance grant this year. I believe this is necessary because I see people in my community who have been struggling to make ends meet and have to rely on public assistance. Recent downward economic trends are making matters worse.

As you know, the value of their benefits has fallen to only 50% of the Federal Poverty Level, or about \$8,800 per year for a family of three. The Public Assistance grant which has not been raised since 1990 is woefully inadequate. Soup kitchens, food pantries and homeless shelters simply cannot keep up with the increasing numbers coming to their doors for help.

I am especially concerned about the 888,000 New York children living in poverty. Some of these children and their parents are members of my community. [You may wish to insert a story here, such as *I have looked into the blank stare of a hungry child clinging to a parent who is waiting hours in a long line for the small amount they now get in assistance.*] You can help make a difference in the lives of such children by acting now to raise the Public Assistance Grant by 49%.

Thank you for your consideration.

If you need assistance finding your elected officials' addresses, Lutheran Statewide Advocacy has a link to help you [HERE](#).

The New York State Council of Churches: t: 518-436-9319| f: 518-427-6705e: [nyscoc@nycap.rr.com](mailto:nyscoc@nycap.rr.com) | w: [www.nyscoc.org](http://www.nyscoc.org)

### ***Advocates Call on Lawmakers to Increase Welfare Benefits***

(Albany, N.Y.) AP - Under the state's basic welfare grant, a family of three receives \$291 a month, and advocates say that's insufficient. Welfare recipients and advocates joined Assembly Social Services Committee Chairman Keith Wright in Albany Tuesday to call on lawmakers to increase the basic welfare grant, which hasn't changed in 18 years. They'd like to see the basic benefit increased to \$475 a month for a family of three. That amount doesn't include the shelter allowance, which varies by county. Wright says the Assembly will include an increase in welfare benefits when it passes its budget resolutions. Senate Democrats have introduced legislation that would increase the basic grant by 25 percent. Mark Hansen, a spokesman for the Senate's majority Republicans, couldn't say yet whether that bill has a chance of being passed this year because they're still in the process of putting together their own budget resolutions.

## **Environmental Advocates of New York: Legislative Priorities**

For details, see their website [www.eany.org](http://www.eany.org).

**Bigger Better Bottle Bill (A. 8044/S. 5856 & S. 3434):** This bill would amend New York's Environmental Conservation Law 27-1003(1) and the State Finance Law to expand and update the definition of "beverage" in the State Returnable Container Act (the bottle bill) to include non-carbonated drinks other than milk and liquor, and to direct the unclaimed deposit money derived from that program to the Environmental Protection Fund.

**Climate Change Solutions Program Act & Fund (A.7365, A.7366/S. 5347, S. 5371):** These companion pieces of legislation would ensure that the proceeds from any sale of emissions allowances (CO<sub>2</sub> or NO<sub>x</sub>) are invested in energy efficiency, renewable energy programs, and programs that improve air quality.

**State Green Building Construction Act (A.2005-B/S.5442-A – Not Same As):** This bill would require that construction of all new state buildings, and the substantial renovation of existing buildings, comply with the energy consumption and resource use standards as established by the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) in consultation with the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority (NYSERDA) and other relevant state agencies.

**New York State Lighting Efficiency & Toxics Reduction Act (A.8641-B/S.6124 – Not Same As):** This legislation would require the DEC to set electrical energy consumption reduction targets related to lighting and would also require the DEC Commissioner to establish a schedule of minimum energy efficiency standards for lighting in New York State.

**Net Metering (A.8690-A):** This bill would make solar eligible technologies for net metering and would expand the size of all eligible net-metered systems from their current limits to no more than 2,000 kilowatts. New York currently has the most restrictive net metering policy in the Northeast. The bill would also make the state's businesses eligible to take advantage of net metering, thus encouraging the use of clean, renewable energy. S.6507-A Wright is not currently active in the 2008 session.

**Environmental Access to Justice Act (A.1435/S.5182):** This bill restores the original legislative intent of the State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQRA), by allowing individuals or groups to challenge a SEQRA decision if they can demonstrate that they will suffer injury from the environmental impact of a proposed project, without having to show that the harm they will suffer is different from that suffered by the public at large.

**Wetlands Protections (A.7133/S.3835):** This bill would amend the state's Environmental Conservation Law to provide the DEC with regulatory authority over New York's freshwater wetlands of one acre or more, regardless of whether that wetland has been mapped by the DEC.

**Great Lakes Compact (A. 7266-B/S.4324-B):** The Great Lakes-St. Lawrence River Basin Water Resources Compact will ratify New York's participation in a multi-state agreement on the management of Great Lakes water to protect water levels in the Lakes and their tributaries, require New York to establish water conservation measures, prohibit the transfer of Great Lakes water outside of the Basin, and protect New York's right to set stronger management standards.

## NATIONAL ISSUES

**The Human Needs Report from the Coalition on Human Needs:** February 15,2008

### **Human Needs Programs Take A Hit In President's Budget**

President Bush's FY 2009 budget proposal, released on February 4, is replete with upside-down priorities. For the seventh year in a row, the President proposes making harmful cuts to domestic appropriations while at the same time extending tax cuts for the wealthy. At a time when the economy is sinking and Americans are struggling, the President fails to provide adequate funding for health care, job training, education, housing and other critical programs. For a more detailed and brief analysis of the President's budget see:

<http://www.chn.org/pdf/2008/chn09PresBudgetPiece.pdf>

Congress must now adopt its own FY 2009 budget resolution. The deadline for doing so is April 15. However, this year Members of Congress have set a goal to complete the budget resolution a month early, by March 14, before they adjourn for spring recess. Their budget resolution is likely to articulate a different set of priorities than the President's. Advocates are making the case that funding cuts made to human needs programs must be restored and progress made.

### **Congress Finalizes Economic Stimulus Package**

After the Senate fell one vote short of the 60 needed to add provisions to the House-passed bill - including extended weeks of Unemployment Insurance (UI), providing low-income heating assistance, and adding energy-related tax breaks - Congress agreed to an economic stimulus package that followed the contours of the House bill. (See:

<http://www.chn.org/humanneeds/080201a.htm>)

The Senate was able to make one positive change to the final bill by adding to those eligible for the onetime tax rebates seniors, disabled veterans and survivors of disabled veterans. People in those groups receiving \$3,000 last year from Social Security or veteran's disability benefits may qualify. On February 7, the Economic Stimulus Act of 2008, H.R. 5140, passed the Senate 81-16 and the House several hours later, 380-34. The President has signed the bill into law. The estimated cost of the bill in 2008 is \$152 billion. Part of the cost will be recovered later when deferred business taxes are collected.

Democrats who tend to believe that the economy will worsen have indicated that they would be open to a second stimulus bill that contained some of their priorities, including an extension of unemployment insurance benefits beyond the usual 26 weeks, low-income heating assistance, and aid to revenue-strapped states to help cover the cost of Medicaid, prevent other cuts in state services, and/or make improvements to infrastructure. The Administration is signaling opposition to these measures. Advocates were bitterly disappointed that measures such as extended unemployment benefits and a temporary increase in food stamps were not included in the stimulus bill. Both would be especially helpful to low-income people and were judged by economists to be among the most effective options to get money into the economy quickly.

Stimulus rebate checks of up to \$600 for individuals and \$1,200 for couples plus \$300 for each child under 17 will be sent beginning in May. Those earning at least \$3,000 a year, who pay

payroll taxes but do not have an income tax liability, as well as the seniors, veterans, and survivors of veterans added by the Senate will receive smaller rebates of \$300 for individuals and \$600 for couples plus \$300 for each child. Rebates will only be issued to persons with a valid Social Security Number on their tax return. Workers who have been issued Individual Taxpayer Identification Numbers by the Internal Revenue Service will not be eligible.

### **More Access to Education Possible Under TANF Final Rule**

The Bush Administration published final regulations for Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TAN F) on February 5. These are rules to implement changes in law enacted by Congress in 2006, as interpreted by the Administration. Among the law's changes was more authority to the federal Department of Health and Human Services to define allowable work activities. (In the past, states were allowed to set their own definitions.) When first proposed, the HHS rules were extremely restrictive, limiting the ability of states to establish workable education and training programs or to provide special work plans for people with disabilities. Responding to some of the many comments about these new rules, the final regulations make it somewhat easier to provide education and training, but do not change the constraints on work activities for people with disabilities.

The final rule allows states to count education leading to a baccalaureate or higher degree as vocational education, reversing a restriction in the previous draft. States are also allowed to count unsupervised homework time towards the required hours of work participation. In the initial draft, homework time would only count if performed in a supervised setting like a study hall. Many had objected that such a requirement would impose more child care costs, state administrative burdens, and unnecessary additional pressures on parents juggling work, education, and care-giving responsibilities.

The new regulations loosen some restrictions on counting English as a Second Language training within vocational programs.

HHS rejected comments asking it to allow special work plans for people with disabilities that might reduce the hours of participation to accommodate the person's special needs. The final rules also bar states from counting activities that remove barriers to work as work experience or community service, categories some states had used to permit adults receiving TANF to engage in certain treatments or therapies, for example. These barrier-removing activities will only be permissible for a limited number of weeks under the final rule.

For an analysis of the final rule, see "Summary of TANF Final Rule," Elizabeth Lower-Basch, Center for Law and Social Policy, available at [http://www.clasp.org/publications/summary\\_of\\_tanf\\_final\\_rule.pdf](http://www.clasp.org/publications/summary_of_tanf_final_rule.pdf). For the text of the final rule, see: <http://www.chn.org/pdf/2008/TANFfinalruleFeb5.pdf>

## 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).

### 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](mailto: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:

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