

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

Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator (rsgilbert@uuma.org)
(Deadline for May issue is April 30)

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SOCIAL JUSTICE EVENTS CALENDAR

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.*** (1) The “real rules,” what churches can and cannot do in the campaign (**Robb Smith**, Interfaith Impact of NYS Executive Director); (2) Voter registration (**Dick Dana**, Albany UU Society); (3) Moral dimensions of political issues (**Rev. Sam Trumbore**, Albany UU Church). For more information go to www.sld.uua.org

April 29: Equality and Justice Day – Empire State Pride Agenda – www.prideagenda.org

May 6: Clergy Day for Concerned Clergy for Choice – info@edfundfpa.org

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

October 4: St. Lawrence District 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. 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.

EDITORIAL: The Earth Has Moral Rights, But How? – Richard S. Gilbert

Earth Day is April 22, a time when our Seventh Principle comes into focus. You remember that Unitarian Universalists “affirm and promote the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” It was that principle that motivated me to preach a sermon “Does the Earth Have Moral Rights?” (e-mailed on request). I answered in the affirmative.

However, while it is today’s conventional wisdom to be “green,” I find the whole environmental ethic problematic. Herewith some problems that I see.

With all the talk of global warming and energy crisis, one item unaccountably left off the table is population. A Cornell professor once determined that the optimum carrying capacity of the earth is something like half what the actual population is now. Without debating that point, it is clear that little has been done about restraining population growth with its heavy impact on earth’s temperature and energy resources. Progressive development theory suggests that investing in the economic well-being of women is the best plan for smaller families, but this whole issue is not even hinted at by our presidential candidates.

The UUA Green Sanctuary program has been embraced by many of our congregations, but from what I read and hear, most of the effort goes into “greening” our congregations and their buildings. That is good insofar as it goes, and it is a good start. But if a change in our congregational practices does not manifest itself in advocacy for policy change of CAFE standards, controls on air and water pollution, I fear it will be of relatively little worth in the long run – and in the long run, said John Maynard Keynes famously, “we are all dead.”

UU’s are buying the Prius and other hybrid and efficient cars and “dissing” Hummers and the like. Again, unless our own green lifestyle, important as it is, moves into advocacy for public policy, it can easily become a feel-good exercise.

There are some real ethical conflicts in environmental activism. Perhaps you read of two families who lived adjacent to each other. One planted trees to promote shade (how many AC units does one tree equal?), while the neighbors went to solar panels on the roof of their house. As the trees grew they cast shade over the panels, reducing their efficiency. The neighbors are now in court over this conflict. There may be a pragmatic resolution, but the issue is emblematic of the problem.

Conventional wisdom suggests we ought to increase the use of bio-fuels to run our cars more cleanly and efficiently. However, the rapid transfer of agricultural land to the quick-profit ethanol products is one factor driving skyrocketing food prices around the world – with tragic consequences.

As we celebrate Earth Day and advocate our Seventh Principle, then, we do well to avoid too much self-congratulation and spend more time and energy and resources digging into these perplexing problems of living on earth.

Interfaith Legislative Advocacy Day

Legislative Briefing and Dinner, Sunday, May 18, 2008

3:00 p.m. –6:00 p.m., dinner following

First Lutheran Church, 646 State Street, Albany, NY

Speakers: Carol Blowers, Vice President of Government Affairs, Family Planning Advocates of New York State; Andrew Coates, MD, Secretary of the Capital District chapter of Physicians for a National Health Program; Ross Levi, Esq., Director of Public Policy and Education for Empire State Pride Agenda; and Demi McGuire, Director of the NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network, who will provide advocacy training.

Monday, May 19, 2008 - 9:30 am – 3:30 pm

Room 711A, Legislative Office Building,

Empire State Plaza, Albany NY

Registration begins at 9:30 a.m. A light breakfast will be provided. The program starts at 10:00 a.m. with a briefing on the issues and an introduction to advocacy. Assemblyman Jack McEneny will join us to discuss religiously informed advocacy. Each participant will be part of a team led by an experienced advocate, meeting throughout the day with state legislators and other key policy makers. (Appointments will be made in advance by IINYS and RJV.) Lunch is included in the registration fee. Room 711A will be our home base for the day, a place to rest between visits, network, and share information.

Join us as we advocate for:

- **Reproductive choice**
- **Marriage equality for same gender couples**
- **Universal health care**

Position papers, tips on lobbying, and information on parking will be available on the Interfaith IMPACT of NYS website and will be mailed to those who register by May 12th.

Please visit www.interfaithimpactnys.org for more information.

***Interfaith IMPACT of NYS: Progressive and Liberal Religious Faiths
Advocating for Compassion, Reason and Justice in NYS Public Policies***

InterfaithIMPACT and Reform Jewish Voice of NYS

Legislative Briefing & Dinner, Sunday, May 18, 2008

Interfaith Advocacy Day, Monday, May 19, 2008

Registration form

Title _____ First Name _____ Last Name _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

Home Phone _____ Daytime Phone _____

E-Mail Address _____

Congregation/Organization _____ City _____

State Assembly Member _____ State Senator _____

Costs:

Sunday: \$20* – includes dinner at First Lutheran Church, 646 State St., Albany.

Monday: \$30* – includes breakfast, lunch, and all materials for Advocacy Day.

TOTAL ENCLOSED

* Reduced rates available for students. Call Robb Smith at 518-441-3231 for information or see www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

I would like home hospitality for Sunday night (limited availability). Number of persons _____.

I am interested in carpooling. I could drive. I would like to be a passenger.

I would like more information about: IINYS; RJV-NYS

Make check out to Interfaith Impact of NYS. Mail registration by May 12th to:

Interfaith IMPACT of NYS
646 State Street
Albany, NY 12203

*Interfaith IMPACT of NYS: Progressive and Liberal Religious Faiths Advocating for
Compassion, Reason and Justice in NYS Public Policies*

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

From the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy

Go to this website for weekly alerts: UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org

April 3 Issue: The Unitarian Universalist Association, the UU Service Committee, UU Ministry for Earth, and the network of Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministries and State Advocacy Networks are joining together to celebrate Earth Day Sunday - April 20th - in our congregations and to advocate with one voice for national environmental legislation that will be effective in reducing our nation's carbon footprint on the planet without benefiting corporations at the expense of low-income families and communities of color.

Our gratitude for our earth is heightened by our anxiety for its health as we confront global warming and the perilous changes it brings. This spring as we Unitarian Universalists, descendants of Emerson and Thoreau, celebrate Earth Day, let us work together to ensure the continued seasons of rebirth and renewal we hold dear. [Let us know](#) that your congregation participated! UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org

April 9 Issue: Greetings from the new Washington Office. At the end of March we moved to our new location, 666 11th St NW, suite 800, Washington DC, 20001. (Yes, the building number really is 666. No, we didn't choose it for that reason.) Our new phone number is 202.393.2244. Our new location puts us closer to Capitol Hill - closer to your congressional representatives and also many of our coalition partners. We look forward to working ever more effectively on the issues important to Unitarian Universalists.

Speaking of which, this week's anews is jam packed. The UUA, as part of the Win Without War Coalition, is calling on Congress to finally act on Iraq. Please add your name to the letter. The UUA, as part of the Investors Against Genocide, is calling on Fidelity to divest from companies that, directly or indirectly, support genocide. If you have shares of Fidelity mutual funds, you can vote for genocide-free investing. The Department of Homeland Security (DHS) is trying to impose punitive rules against employers if an employee's social security number doesn't match government records despite concerns about wide-spread inaccuracy. You can support the rights of workers. And finally, just a reminder that Earth Day is Sunday, April 22nd. It's not too late to organize a congregational letter-writing campaign to support effective climate change legislation. See details for all this and more: UUA@mail.democracyinaction.org

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

Freedom Summer 2008: A Civil Rights Journey, July 12-19, 2008

The UUSC is pleased to announce its fifth annual Civil Rights Journey through several southern cities, which offers participants the chance to learn firsthand about the struggles of the 1950s and 1960s. This intergenerational (14+) trip will bring together people from around the country to travel by bus to historic sites that were significant during the civil rights movement. The journey will begin in Atlanta and move to Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham, Ala.

For more information or 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 us at justworks@uusc.org. Visit our website (www.uusc.org) often for updates, camp information, a review of other JustWorks camps, and a slide show of the 2007 Freedom Summer Camp.

UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Volunteer Program

The UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Volunteer Program grew out of the Hurricane Relief and Social Justice project of the Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, La. This project, which was created to respond to the great need of the surrounding region in the aftermath of the hurricanes, transitioned into the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Volunteer Program in April 2007. The mission of this program is to live our faith by standing in solidarity with the people of the Gulf Coast for a just and equitable recovery through active engagement by UU congregations in partnership with others.

UU congregations and groups can take an active part in the Gulf Coast recovery work by participating in the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Volunteer Program. Volunteers will learn about the communities affected by hurricanes Katrina and Rita, particularly the inequalities that continue to affect the rebuilding of Gulf Coast communities. They will also bring that understanding to bear on working for justice in their own communities.

The program offers volunteer groups materials to help prepare them for the trip; information on logistics; housing in New Orleans; orientation that includes a session to help them understand the context in which they will work; work assignments; and debriefing. There are on-site volunteer coordinators in New Orleans. We are not currently sending volunteers to work in Mississippi. Volunteers in New Orleans will have the opportunity to work with program partners, community organizations, and UU congregations in the region.

For more information about the UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast volunteer program, please e-mail Peggy Powell at uukatrina@uusc.org. Additional information and forms are at www.uusc.org.

From Jack Maniloff, St. Lawrence District UUSC Regional Coordinator.

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

ACTION ALERT: This forwarded message is urgent. Please take a moment to get in touch with your State Senator and let them know that you do not want them to vote to reinstate the **death penalty** in New York State. And - if you have a bit more time, please also let Senators Dale Volker and Martin Goldin (sponsors of the bills) know you do not support this legislation. Thanks.

Demi McGuire, NYS Episcopal Public Policy Network, nyseppn@aol.com, 518 339-5040

FAIR PAY ACT

From the League of Women Voters of New York State - lwny@lwny.org
(sample letter to your U.S. Senator)

I am writing to urge you to vote in favor of a motion to petition the New York State Fair Pay Act (S.3936) which Senator Craig Johnson has introduced and that will be voted on April 15, 2008. A positive majority vote on this motion will enable the bill finally to get out of the Labor Committee and to be considered by the full Senate membership.

As you probably know, The New York State Fair Pay Act, if enacted, will amend the State Labor Law to ensure that employers pay job titles, where women and people of color predominate, wages that are comparable to those paid to other job titles evaluated to require equivalent skill and responsibility levels.

Traditionally, job titles disproportionately held by women and people of color have been undervalued and have been paid less than comparable jobs with the same level of skill and responsibility. The tenets of the Fair Pay Act embody the notion that all employees should be fully and fairly paid for the work required by their job titles.

I strongly urge you to support the passage of the New York State Fair Pay Act by first supporting the motion to petition and then by voting for its passage when it comes to the floor. Pay equity is an important social/economic justice issue that provides employees with protections against wage discrimination. It deserves bi-partisan support in both legislative houses.

Thank you very much for your attention to this matter. I hope that I can count on your support of S.3936 during the 2008 Legislative session.

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