

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

Dick Gilbert - SLUUD Social Justice Coordinator Rsgilbert@uuma.org
(Deadline for May issue is May 1)

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Social Justice Programs Offered to St. Lawrence District Congregations go to stld@uua.org or contact Rsgilbert@uuma.org

Interfaith Impact Membership Application – Go to www.Interfaithimpactnys.org

SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009

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 Payson is Response Coordinator for The Unitarian Universalist Trauma Response Ministry. For District Assembly information go to <http://www.sld.uua.org>.

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/))

April 29: Clergy Day in Albany, sponsored by Concerned Clergy for Choice. Rev. Steven Baines of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice will be the keynoter. For information please contact concernedclergy-owner@yahoo.com or to register dennis@fpaofnys.org.

May 9, 2009: Money, Values and Impact: A Conference on Ethical Investing for UU Congregations sponsored by [All Souls Church, Unitarian](http://www.all-souls.org) 1500 Harvard St., NW Washington DC. For further information contact All Souls at www.all-souls.org or 202-332-5266.

May 11: Interfaith Impact Advocacy Day in Albany. SEE BELOW FOR IINYS UPDATE

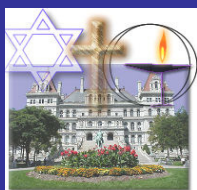
May 16-17, 2009 Transforming Our Whiteness - Unitarian Universalist Church of Delaware County, Media, PA sponsored by the Joseph Priestley District Journey Towards Wholeness Committee in partnership with Allies for Racial Equity. Online registration at www.jpduua.org or by FAX or email office@jpduua.org or 302-778-4564 or 800-351-6637 (toll free).

June 24-28: Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly – Salt Lake City, Utah. Go to www.uua.org for details. The Peacemaking Statement of Conscience is on the agenda. Your editor will be involved in two workshops: “And Thy Neighbor as Thyself,” sponsored by the Universalist Heritage Foundation, and “Be the Change,” a panel on social justice moderated by the Rev. Stephen Schick – both Saturday.

July 26-August 1: UULTI (Unitarian Universalist Leadership Training Institute) at Juniata College in Pennsylvania. Go to www.sld.uua.org for details.

November 7: “Doing Justice in an Economic Tsunami” will be the theme of the 2009 **St. Lawrence District Social Justice Council** annual conference at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Amherst, Saturday, November 7. Former UUA President John Buehrens will be the featured speaker. **SEE ATTACHMENT FOR SOCIAL JUSTICE CONFERENCE.**

NEW YORK STATE ISSUES



Interfaith Impact of New York State

Working for the Common
Good through Progressive
Religious Advocacy

IINYS E-Update - April 11, 2008 - Budget 2009: The Good, the Bad and the Ugly

This year's budget process produced a one-party budget, again--traditional and ugly. We all need to have input through our elected representatives, and nearly half our State Senators were shut out of what should have been a more democratic process. The bad part was a devastating deficit that was only somewhat mitigated at the last minute by the Federal stimulus package. The ever increasing deficit and tight April 1 deadline made it extremely difficult for legislators and staff to analyze the effect of multiple cuts and shifts in funding allocations. It may be a long time before we know how well they did and what the effects were on vulnerable populations.

Despite the confusion, some good things happened as well. Elected leaders and staff understood that the budget is a moral document, they listened, and with the Democrats in control of the NYS Senate for the first time in more than four decades, they used the opportunity to correct some long-standing injustices.

Reform of the Rockefeller Drug Laws: On April 3rd, the Senate voted for significant reform of these Draconian laws. This is a major victory for justice and the common good. Look for more information in the April IINYS Newsletter, which will be published soon.

Welfare Grant Increased: Until this year, the basic welfare grant had not been increased in 18 years. The budget includes a 10% increase per year for the next three years, starting on July 1. The Governor said this was a moral issue when he introduced his 2009-2010 budget, and the Legislature agreed. IINYS and other Faith and Hunger Network members were

among those groups actively advocating for the increase with legislators and committee and budget staff during the budget negotiations.

More progressive taxation: The Legislature created two new tax brackets for upper income New Yorkers. IINYS has been a long-time supporter of progressive taxation as part of our concern for economic justice. For a progressive religious perspective, see the recent testimony on "[What Is Just Taxation?](#)" by the Rev. Dr. Richard S. Gilbert on our web site.

Where do we go from here? We advocate together for the common good through e-mails, letters to the editor, petitions, and joining others in their efforts. Between now and our May 11 Advocacy Day, Empire State Pride Agenda is having its Equality and Justice Day on April 28, which IINYS is co-sponsoring, and Concerned Clergy for Choice is having their advocacy day on April 29, which IINYS supports.

IINYS also has e-advocacy capability now, and in the coming weeks, you will have the opportunity to send e-mails to your elected representatives and join the policy discussions around hot-button topics through our campaign website and in person.

Register Now for Interfaith Impact of NYS Education and Advocacy Day. The annual IINYS Advocacy and Education Day is Monday, May 11, 2009. This is your opportunity to help make sure that progressive religious values continue to make a difference in the Legislature. We have reserved Room 711A in the Legislative Office Building, where most legislators have their offices. That room will be our home base for the day, a place to eat breakfast and lunch (provided), and network with likeminded folks from across the state. We will advocate for those bills and policies that most need our support at that time. At the top of our agenda, if not passed by then, will be marriage equality for same-sex couples and comprehensive sexuality education for teens. Other issues we are supporting include the Gender Equality Non-Discrimination Act, the Reproductive Health Act, the Dignity for All Students Act, economic justice for farm workers, and universal health care. To register go to www.interfaithimpactnys.org and click on the advocacy day link or fill out the form below and mail it to Interfaith Impact of NYS, 646 State Street, Albany NY 12203. Alternatively, reply to info@interfaithimpactnys.org with the form filled out and then go to the IINYS web site and click on the big "Join Us" button in the left hand column where you can pay on line. IINYS Advocacy Day Registration. See the flyer at the end of this newsletter.

SAMPLE LETTER ON MARRIAGE EQUALITY

Governor David Paterson has recently introduced a program bill to provide marriage for same-sex couples. As your constituent, I encourage you to support the marriage equality bill and vote for it when it comes to the floor.

I believe that lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) families deserve the 1,324 rights and responsibilities that come with marriage in New York State. Loving same-sex couples and their children should not be treated like second-class citizens by being denied access to the protections of marriage.

I encourage you to support and vote for the Governor's marriage equality program bill. I will be watching as the legislative session continues to see how you have acted on this issue.

Rochester Briefing Focuses on Comprehensive Sexuality Education

The First Universalist Church of Rochester was the site of the annual legislative briefing/Conscience in Public Life program of the Rochester Chapter of Interfaith Impact of New York State. Forty citizens heard a panel urge them to promote this civil liberty. CEO Jim Stewart of Rochester/Syracuse Planned Parenthood noted the pathetic state of sexuality education in the U.S. compared to Europe, noting that one in four teens in the U.S. has a sexually transmitted disease (STD). Americans, he noted, seem not to be made enough to demand this fundamental health education. Rabbi Larry Kotok of Temple B'rith Kodesh asserted the Union of Reform Judaism's resolution that sexuality is holy, joyous and a gift from God, and is both a means and an end – procreation and recreation. The Rev. John Wilkinson of third Presbyterian Church stated that the role of the church is to help individuals become moral agents though the family is the primary religious educator. Kim McLaughlin, Executive Director of the NYS Student Support Services Center, said that this is a “teachable moment,” noting that while AIDS/HIV education is mandated, it is difficult to see how this can be done without adequate sexuality education (the latter is not a required part of this). New York State has declined federal money for “abstinence only” sex education. A questioner, your editor, praised the *Our Whole Lives* program, produced by the UUA and the United Church of Christ, as a comprehensive contribution to this process.

The program was entitled: “Ignorance Is Bless? Religious, Sex Education and the Legislature.” Participants signed letters to their legislators to support the Health Teens Act A-01806, which would establish a competitive grant program open to local school districts, school-based health centers, BOCES and community-based organization for the implementation of comprehensive , age-appropriate sex education. It mandates that such programs must include a strong parental involvement component, provide medically accurate information, stress the value of abstinence and provide information about STD and pregnancy prevention, and hope young people develop the skills they need to make responsible decisions about their sexual health and reproductive lives. The group received a message of support from local Assemblywoman Susan John. A video-tape of the proceedings is being created. Contact your Senator now.

Note: Other groups are encouraged to sponsor Conscience in Public Life briefings. Funding and administrative help are available through IINYS.

NATIONAL ISSUES

OBAMA BUDGET GETS KUDOS AND TAKES ITS LUMPS

John Pitney, a political scientist at Claremont McKenna College in Claremont, California: “This budget is like the Grand Canyon: All you can do is look at it in awe.”

It has become commonplace in progressive circles to say that governmental budgets are “moral documents.” Given that perspective what kind of review does President Obama's first budget proposal receive? Mixed. While the budget represents a dramatic shift in priorities, Peace Action headlined its story “The Pentagon Has a Weight Problem: Let's Put It on a Diet.”

The budget provides \$634 billion over ten years for expansion of health care, increased spending on unemployment insurance, a Child Tax Credit, full funding of the Women, Infants and Children nutrition program (WIC), increasing the Child Nutrition reauthorization and housing credits and home energy assistance, among other domestic programs.

However, the “elephant sitting on the economy,” proposed pentagon spending consumes 59% of the discretionary budget. It represents 48% of the world’s total military spending, 5.8 times more than China, 10.2 times more than Russia and 98.6 times more than Iran, 55 times the spending of the six “rogue” states (Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria). This picture dwarfs the proposed cuts in some weapons programs. For more information go to www.Peace-Action.org or www.chn.org (the Coalition on Human Needs). To register your opinion call the White House Comment Line 202-456-1111.

2009 FAIR ELECTIONS NOW ACT BEFORE CONGRESS

This bi-partisan bill (S.752, H.R. 1826) is sponsored by senators Dick Durbin (D-Ill) and Arlen Specter (R-Pa) along with representatives John Larson (D-CT) and Walter Jones (R-NC). Under this measure candidates would qualify for limited public money by raising a specific number of small donations from their community, and would receive additional funds to match their ongoing small contributions. They would be prohibited from taking any large contributions. Once qualified, candidates would receive a four to one match of the small donations they raise up to a limit.

GLBT AND MARRIAGE EQUALITY UPDATE

As readers know by now the Iowa Supreme Court has recognized same-sex marriage and the Vermont legislature has enacted into law (over the governor’s veto) a marriage equality law. Vermont was the first state to pass a law recognizing same-sex couples through civil unions. Thus, Massachusetts, Connecticut, Vermont and Iowa allow same sex marriages. As Empire State Pride Agenda Alan Van Capelle writes, “But I’m embarrassed for New York State.” A same-sex marriage bill languishes in the State Senate.

The Obama administration has formally endorsed a U.N. statement calling for the worldwide decriminalization of homosexuality, a measure former President George W. Bush had refused to sign. The U.S. had been the only Western nation not to sign. Seventy U.N. members outlaw homosexuality – and in several, homosexual acts can be punished by execution.

Issues around the military’s “don’t ask, don’t tell,” (the Military Readiness and Enhancement Act) and allowing same-sex partners of federal employees to receive health benefits are as yet unresolved. Go to <http://sldn.org> and www.couragecampaign.org for further information.

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

The April **Action of the Month** is environmental justice. For more information on these Actions of the Month, visit www.uua.org/socialjustice. See April 9 SAC News (**ATTACHED**)

CSAI—Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice for 2008–2012

Congregational Study/Action Issue (CSAI). Religious organizations throughout the world have discussed the production, distribution, and use of food. Some people enjoy many food choices while others remain hungry. The food industry produces wealth, but small farmers and farm workers are often poor. Food production and transportation contribute to many environmental problems.

Background and Reasons for Study: Congregations can develop effective strategies to address two of the world's biggest problems: social inequality and environmental destruction. This Congregational Study/Action Issue is inspired by the work of the several Unitarian Universalist (UU) affiliate and associate organizations that work with congregations in support of environmental justice. Hunger is both a community problem and an international problem that can be approached in a variety of ways. There is a need for political advocacy in support of government programs that try to feed the hungry. There is a need also for involvement with service programs that deliver food to individuals and families - for example, Meals on Wheels programs.

Significance to Unitarian Universalism: Unitarian Universalists have a vision of environmental justice. One of our principles acknowledges "the interdependent web." Others affirm the importance of human rights. Together our principles form one holistic statement that helps to define liberal religion.

Possible Study Topics: There are different religious teachings concerning the production, distribution, and use of food. Why is food so important in religion? There are environmental concerns and concerns about animal rights and human rights. What moral guidelines, if any, should govern food production? Some people have too much food and some have too little. How should congregations address issues like poverty and hunger, nutrition education, and health promotion? What guidelines, if any, govern the purchase and use of food and beverages in your congregation? Do you pause for a blessing when you serve food?

Possible Actions: Support sustainable agriculture and farmers' markets. Encourage organic community gardening. Volunteer in support of community food pantries, Meals on Wheels programs, and similar projects that address the problem of hunger. Become an advocate for social and economic justice. Support labor unions, farmers' cooperatives, "fair trade" associations, and other organizations that help the farmers and other workers who produce and distribute food in the global market.

Contact Us: UUA: CSAI—Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice: Contact Rev. John Gibb Millspaugh, Winchester Unitarian Society, Winchester, MA (781) 835-9422 , jmillspaugh@uua.org. For more information contact socialwitness@uua.org.

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

Rape to Become Law in Afghanistan?

Published on www.uusc.org by Sarah Peck, 04/06/09.



As if women in Afghanistan haven't suffered enough from years of war and Taliban leadership, a new scourge has just hit Shia women — a law that forces Shia women to be sexually available, always, to their husbands. [1]

The law applies to women of Afghanistan's Shia minority, who make up roughly 15 percent of the population. A separate family law will be drafted for Afghanistan's Sunni majority.

However, this law is *not* Shia law, culturally, or legally. It is a law of Afghanistan, written for the Shia population. Its an important distinction, because, all too often, people interpret restrictive decisions like these as cultural norms — and this just isn't the case.

The proposed law, which states that the wife "is bound to preen for her husband as and when he desires," essentially makes Shia women sexual chattel. It goes further, saying, "As long as the husband is not traveling, he has the right to have sexual intercourse with his wife every fourth night. Unless the wife is ill or has any kind of illness that intercourse could aggravate, the wife is bound to give a positive response to the sexual desires of her husband."

Thankfully, Afghan President Hamid Karzai has come under intense scrutiny [2] for signing this legislation last month. Bowing to intense pressure from most of the world, Karzai has agreed to send the law to the Ministry of Justice for review. However, he also defended the law, saying it had been "misinterpreted" by the west.

If you find this deplorable, there are things you can do. You can write a letter to U.S. leadership [3], letting them know you want them to put pressure on the Afghan government to strike this law from the books. You can write a letter to your local paper, letting them and others know that this is happening. You can also support UUSC's Civil Liberties Program [4], which partners with groups in Afghanistan that educate women and bolster their rights [5]. But don't let the women of Afghanistan come under even crueler and more restrictive laws than they have already been forced to deal with.

Source (retrieved 04/09/2009): http://www.uusc.org/blog/entry/1877/rape_law_afghanistan
 [1] <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/05/afghanistan-shia-rape-law-scrap>
 [2] <http://www.cnn.com/2009/WORLD/asiapcf/04/04/afghanistan.womens.rights/index.html>
 [3] <http://actnow.uusc.org/site/PageNavigator/Register>; [4] http://www.uusc.org/content/civil_liberties, [5] http://www.uusc.org/program_partners/barakat

Submitted by Jack Maniloff (jkmf@mail.rochester.edu), St. Lawrence District UUSC Regional Coordinator.

EDITORIAL: UU'S AND ECONOMIC JUSTICE - Richard S. Gilbert

April 1-5 Unitarian Universalists for a Just Economic Community (UUJEC) met at Rowe Camp and Conference Center to celebrate 20 years of existence and look to the future. We met with David Korten, author of *When Corporations Rule the World*, *The Great Turning: From Empire to Earth Community*, and, most recently *Agenda for a New Economy*. We also heard Chuck Collins, founder of United for a Fair Economy. He is a UU who inherited wealth and is using it to further a justice agenda – Chuck is now a scholar at the Institute for Policy Studies. With Bill Gates Sr. Chuck wrote a book vs. repealing the estate tax: *Wealth and Our Common Wealth*. We met as well with economists from nearby Amherst College. Our heads did spin.

Some “take-homes” for me:

1. We are probably never going to return to the halcyon days of bubble upon bubble – the age of “irrational exuberance.” It is not that market capitalism will die, but it will take on a new – and hopefully more people-friendly form. The world has simply been too hard hit to want to return to the supposed “good old days.” The people who brought us economic calamity will be brought to heel by the people and the demands of a just economic community. What shape the new economy takes will be up to us. Despite the economic pain, this tsunami of our own making provides us the opportunity to build something much better than we have known.

2. The new economy will hopefully be more decentralized than the old. While there we visited a local incubator of small businesses in the Greenfield, MA area – that whole river valley is awash in economic experiments. More and more localities will create their own locally-owned businesses and grow much of their own food (look at the new White House vegetable garden).

3. The adulation and near reverence in which the economic “Masters of the Universe” have been held is gone. When the people simply place their faith in those who presume to be able to unravel the mysteries of economics, we are in deep trouble. We need to pay attention to what is happening and ask the inconvenient questions.

4. To get us through the near-term Chuck Collins has developed the idea of Common Security Clubs. I like the format of these local (and potentially church-based) groups which focus on (1) learning and consciousness-raising – understanding the meaning of the current crisis; (2) mutual aid in substantive ways – sharing resources; (3) taking social action toward systemic change in the economy. For more information go to www.CommonSecurityClub.org.

(5) Despite our political leanings we need to be able to criticize the Obama administration for selecting former “Masters of the Universe” as advisors. “Taking Wall Street Out of the White House” became our slogan.

It was a large agenda, but one we welcomed. If you are interested in UUJEC, come to its GA events in Salt Lake City, go to www.uujec.org or contact me Rsgilbert@uuma.org.



Interfaith IMPACT of New York State

LEGISLATIVE EDUCATION & ADVOCACY DAY

Monday, May 11, 2009

10:00 am – 3:00 pm

Room 711A, Legislative Office Building,
Empire State Plaza, Albany NY

Never has your progressive religious voice been more important.

Join IINYS as we advocate for:

- **Reproductive Freedom**
- **Same Sex Marriage**
- **Other Issues to be announced**

Position papers, tips on lobbying, and information on parking will be available www.interfaithimpactnys.org and e-mailed to participants. Advocacy packets will be available at the registration table in Room 711A of the Legislative Office Building. Cal 518-441-3231 for more information.

Register on-line at www.interfaithimpactnys.org, e-mail info@interfaithimpactnys.org, or send in the form below with a check for \$25 for each person registered.

Name(s):

Address:

E-Mail: _____ **Phone:** _____

Faith: ___ Protestant, ___ Reform Jewish, ___ Unitarian Universalist, ___ Other

___ I would like home hospitality for ___ person(s) if available.

\$ _____ enclosed.

Mail to Interfaith Impact, 646 State Street, Albany NY 12203.

InterfaithIMPACT of New York State