

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

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(Deadline for June issue is June 1)

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**SOCIAL JUSTICE CALENDAR 2009**

**May 30:** 100% Organic Anti-Racism: Environmental Justice and Anti-Oppression. The 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Metro New York District UU Anti-Racism Conclave, Community Church of New York, 8:45 am-4:00 pm. On-line registration at <http://uumetrony.org/events/events/htm>.

**June 24-28:** Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly – Salt Lake City, Utah. Go to [www.uua.org](http://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 11-18:** Freedom Summer: A Civil Rights Journey (see below)

**July 26-August 1:** UULTI (Unitarian Universalist Leadership Training Institute) at Juniata College in Pennsylvania. Go to [www.sld.uua.org](http://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 BELOW**

**November 22:** UUSC Guest at Your Table Sunday



**The St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District  
Social Justice Council Presents**

## **DOING JUSTICE IN AN ECONOMIC TSUNAMI**

**November 7, 2009—9:30am to 4pm**

**Unitarian Universalist Church of Amherst**



### **Theme Speaker – JOHN BUEHRENS**

Former President, Unitarian Universalist Association, Minister, First Parish in Needham, MA  
This fourth annual conference will feature John Buehrens, former President of the UUA. John brings not only a national perspective on economic justice, but also the understanding of a parish minister. He has been a prominent figure on the national religious scene for years, has served as special advisor to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and is a prolific author.

The economic meltdown at the national and world levels has pervaded the religious consciousness. The recession has not only a social, political and economic impact, but also a moral and spiritual one as well. How do we respond as individuals, as a congregation, as a religious movement? John will outline his views on this troubling topic.

In addition to the theme talk there will be a question and answer period and topical workshops including Single Payer Health Care; Racism and Economic Justice, Economic Justice and Unitarian Universalists and Doing Religious Advocacy, among others.

Conference registration information and a detailed program will be available in early September on the St. Lawrence District website: [www.sld.uua.org](http://www.sld.uua.org) and will be mailed out in *Agenda for Change*. For further information, contact Dick Gilbert at [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org).

## NEW YORK STATE ISSUES

### MARRIAGE EQUALITY: THE TIDE IS TURNING

**TAKE ACTION:** Interfaith Impact has launched an e-action program to enable you to contact your representatives directly. See ATTACHMENT “Ask Your State Senator to Support Marriage Equality.”

Civil Marriage Equality for same-sex couples is on a legislative and judicial roll. An Iowa court has essentially made it legal in that Midwestern state. The District of Columbia Council passed a bill ensuring that same-sex marriages performed in the U.S. will retain full legal rights within the nation’s capital (Congress has 30 days to act – from May 6). The Connecticut Supreme Court ruled in favor of same-sex marriage. Maine has passed a same-sex marriage bill. Marriage equality is recognized in Massachusetts, Vermont and New Hampshire (pending). Rhode Island, New Jersey and New York are debating legislation. The New York State Assembly passed a marriage equality bill May 12, though prospects in the Senate are uncertain.

A NY Times/CBS News poll found that 31% of respondents over 40 supported gay marriage. By contrast, 57% under 40 supported it. In New York State 53 % were in favor, up from 43% in 2007; opposition has dropped from 47% in 2007 to 39% now (April 20 report on a Sienna College poll). Indicative of this trend Steve Schmidt, senior strategist for John McCain during the presidential campaign has called for Republicans to re-examine their stance for fear of losing a whole generation of young voters. He has himself endorsed it (NY Times April 29).

The key for New Yorkers is the Senate where Majority Leader Malcolm Smith says he will not bring it to the floor until he has the votes to pass it. Advocacy should include (1) church and state should be separate. No clergy person will be required to perform a same-sex marriage. But neither should any religious group require the state to enforce its view of marriage; (2) there are some 1,324 rights and responsibilities that come with marriage in New York State (See “1,324 Reasons for Marriage Equality in New York State,” a joint publication of the Empire State Pride Agenda and the New York City Bar Association). Loving same-sex couples and their children should not be treated like second-class citizens by being denied access to the protections of marriage; (3) civil marriage equality is a human rights issue. Democracy in the U.S. has been expanding rights, not restricting them; (4) marriage equality has increasing public support; (5) states around New York have legalized same-sex marriage; New York, the Empire State, which used to pioneer human rights, should not be a laggard here; (6) it is simply the right thing to do.

Resources: The May 12 Advocate of Stamford, CT. “Same-sex marriage: Faiths’ views are wide-ranging”: <http://www.stamfordadvocate.com/fdcp?1242225094781>.

Empire State Pride Agenda (Pride in the Pulpit): “Marriage Equality and Religion: The Massachusetts Experience,” a video: <http://www.politico.com/blogs/bensmith/>.

Empire State Pride Agenda: “Same-Sex Marriage Myths (Busted)” <http://www.prideagenda.org/IssuesExplained/MarriageandFamily>.

Sightings (University of Chicago Divinity School Martin Marty Center). “The Religious Violence of “Defending Marriage” by Jon Pahl. [sightings@lists.uchicago.edu](mailto:sightings@lists.uchicago.edu)

Pride in the Pulpit action agenda – five ways to support marriage equality <http://www.prideagenda.org/>

## **Equal Marriage: Our UU history by Michael Scott**

(Adapted from the May newsletter of the First Universalist Church of Rochester)

(Editor's note: members of the congregation joined over 1000 advocates in a recent rally sponsored by the Empire State Pride Agenda). ". . . it is perhaps worth remembering the history of UU support for LGBT issues. Much information can be found at the UUA website, including a chronological history (<http://www.uua.org/members/justicediversity/bisexualgay/20962.shtml>). Particularly noteworthy events include

- 1971: publication of the landmark About Your Sexuality curriculum kit, which strove to provide positive coverage of homosexuality and bisexuality
- 1973: creation of an Office of Gay Affairs at UUA Headquarters
- 1979: first UU congregation to call an openly gay minister (the Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong, All Souls church, Augusta, ME)
- 1980: General Assembly resolution affirming the settlement of openly gay, lesbian, and bisexual ministers
- 1984: General Assembly resolution affirming "Services of Union" for same-gender couples (I had the honor of voting for that resolution as a delegate from the Universalist Church of Wausau, WI)
- 1990: launch of the Welcoming Congregation program
- 1996: General Assembly resolution in support of equal marriage
- 2002: first UU congregation to call an openly transgender minister (the Rev. Laurie J. Auffant, Follen Church Society, Lexington, MA)
- 2004: UUA President the Rev. William Sinkford legally marries Hillary and Julie Goodridge, lead plaintiffs in the landmark Massachusetts court case
- 2006: 50% of all UU congregations in the US have joined the Welcoming Congregation program
- 2007: The Rev. Mark Stringer, of the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, IA, marries Sean Fritz and Tim McQuillan during a brief window between court cases. Until the new decision this past month, Fritz and McQuillan were the only legally married same-sex couple in Iowa.

Lest we become too self-satisfied, it is perhaps worth stressing that this has been a long and difficult process. The first entry in the on-line history reports a 1967 survey in which 7.7% of UU s indicated that homosexuality should be discouraged by law and 80.2% indicated at it should be discouraged by education. And the penultimate entry in the list above suggests an obvious question : what about the other 50% of our congregations today?

In his public statement in the wake of the Iowa court case on April 3, Rev. Sinkford wrote: "Today we celebrate, but we know that the struggle for marriage equality is far from over. Until all of our nation's marriage statutes are free of discrimination, the Unitarian Universalist Association will stand on the side of love and advocate for full legal rights for committed same-sex couples."

\*Lesbian, Bisexual, Gay, Transgender

## NATIONAL ISSUES

### AMERICA HAS A TAPEWORM – PENTAGON SPENDING

Peace Action is one of the leading anti-war groups in the nation. In a recent mailing it urged citizens to clamp down on excessive Pentagon spending by point out that:

US military spending accounts for 48%, almost half of the world's total military spending

US military spending is 5.8 time more than China, 10.2 times more than Russia, and 98.6 times more than Iran

US military spending is almost 55 times the spending of the six “rogue” states (Cuba, Iran, Libya, North Korea, Sudan and Syria) whose spending amounts to \$13 billion, maximum

Peace Action's grassroots campaigns promote reductions in the Pentagon budget that can be made without jeopardizing our security: (1) Reduce our nuclear arsenal to 1000 warheads or less on the road to abolition. A full 675 of the Department of Energy's budget goes into nuclear weapons. President Obama is committed to working on a treaty with Russia to reduce our nuclear stockpile to 1000 or less. Peace Action believes this should be a priority. We will all be safer for it and with the estimated \$50 billion in annual savings the Department of Energy can devote its efforts to energy independence; (2) End the so-called War on Terror. War isn't working and the US needs to work with our allies to create a counter-terrorism strategy that actually works. Bring the troops home and stop pouring over \$150 billion a year into a strategy that occupies foreign lands, kills civilians, breeds new terrorists and imposes incalculable costs on our troops and their families; (3) Eliminate unnecessary weapons programs. Much of the Pentagon budget serves to protect US hegemony and strike any nation that would challenge it with impunity. Weapons systems like the F-22 Raptor and Star Wars are easily identified by their record of cost overruns and irrelevant mission. These programs feed the greed of weapons contractors, but they buy us no defense.

Kevin Martin, Peace Now Executive Director, urges people to call President Obama to protest sending more troops to Afghanistan. White House number: 202-4556-1414

Peace Action, 1100 Wayne Ave., Ste. 1020, Silver Spring, MD 20910 [www.Peace-Action.org](http://www.Peace-Action.org)

### BUDGET DEBATE IN FULL SWING

If budgets are “moral documents,” then it behooves us to examine them critically. The Coalition on Human Needs, a coalition of progressive Washington, DC groups, provides useful background information. Most recently they have focused on “The President's Budget: A Dramatic Shift in Priorities;” “Protecting Low-Income People While Protecting the Planet from Climate Change,” “Congress at Work on Health Reform,” and “Congress Passes Budget Outline; President Fills in the Blanks.” Go to <http://www.chn.org/humanneeds/090511a.html>

### UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION NEWS

#### The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy (UUAWOA)

The May **Action of the Month** is Immigrant Justice. For more information on these Actions of the Month, visit [www.uua.org/socialjustice](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice). See May 14 SAC News (ATTACHED).

#### Unitarian Universalist Action to End Homelessness

See ATTACHMENT about UU's working with the National Alliance to End Homelessness

## UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

**UUSC focuses on four major program areas** to carry out its efforts to advance human rights and social justice. UUSC works in partnership with local grassroots organizations in the United States and around the world, standing with communities as they confront unjust power structures and challenge oppressive policies. In each program area, **UUSC focuses especially on issues of race, class, and gender** and their roles in perpetuating injustice and human rights abuses.



**1. Defending civil liberties and access to democratic processes:** UUSC partners with civil liberties organizations and civil society groups working to defend freedom and rights by strengthening individual liberties and democratic processes in the Global War on Terror.

**2. Advancing economic justice:** UUSC addresses the issues of globalization and privatization, with a focus on defending workers' rights and supporting living wage campaigns.

**3. Promoting environmental justice:** UUSC's primary focus in this area is promoting and defending the human right to water, especially in communities facing water-service privatization and resource depletion.

**4. Protecting rights in humanitarian crises:** UUSC responds strategically to disasters, whether natural or man-made, focusing especially on defending the rights of marginalized and oppressed populations.

UUSC is currently working with 65 organizations in 27 countries to assist them with their programs in these areas. Information on UUSC's grassroots partner groups and programs is at [www.uusc.org](http://www.uusc.org).

**Register for UUSC's e-Community:** By registering for UUSC's e-Community, you will stay informed about the latest news on UUSC issues you care about. You will also get the chance to make your voice heard, when decision-makers most need to hear from people committed to human rights and social justice. e-Community subscribers receive UUSC's monthly e-newsletter and periodic alerts about urgent actions and humanitarian crises.

Registering for UUSC's e-Community is simple - and free! A link to UUSC's e-Community registration page is at [www.uusc.org/take\\_action#ecommunity](http://www.uusc.org/take_action#ecommunity).

See the UUSC May Newsletter (ATTACHED)

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

## EDITORIAL: BECOMING A PUBLIC NUISANCE – Richard S. Gilbert

Bill Moyers, Baptist minister, assistant to Lyndon Johnson, media guru and social prophet, once said the role of the media is to be a “public nuisance.” He wrote, “A few weeks ago my colleague Charlie Rose put a question to the new president of CNN, Jonathan Klein. He asked: ‘Could there ever be a successful progressive version of Fox News Channel?’ Klein didn’t think so. He said Fox appeals to ‘mostly angry white men’ while liberals – ‘you know, they don’t get too worked up about anything.’”

I believe that Unitarian Universalists need to get “worked up” about the brokenness of this world. I believe the liberal church should become a “public nuisance,” questioning the conventional wisdom, challenging the status quo, and trying to live out the spirit of the prophets of old. I see its political role as prophetic – with Amos, dropping a plumb line of righteousness over the nation; with Isaiah loosing the bonds of injustice, with Micah doing justice, with Jesus blessing the poor and the imprisoned. Each of these prophets was a troublemaker in his time.

When Martin Luther King, Jr. gave his 1967 sermon against the War in Vietnam, he was roundly criticized, even by some civil rights leaders. He said in response: “The church must be reminded that it is not the master or the servant of the state, but rather the conscience of the state. It must be the guide and critic of the state, and never its tool. If the church does not recapture its prophetic zeal, it will become an irrelevant social club without moral or spiritual authority.” King was clearly a public nuisance.

We can and ought to be a “public nuisance.” Bill Moyers once concluded a speech with the story of an Irishman who came upon a brawl in the street and asked, “Is this a private fight or can anyone get in it?” He waded right in – as must we.

Moyers said he once heard Lyndon Johnson urge Martin Luther King – after some preacherly persuasion – to, in his words, “Martin, you go out there now and make it possible for me to do the right thing.”

This is a teachable moment. This is a crisis that presents both danger and opportunity. This may be one of those hinges of history in which we ask the most basic questions, discover the most fundamental answers and effect the most transformative changes. We have just given a grade to our president after 100 days. How do we grade ourselves today and what we will earn tomorrow?

Unitarian Universalist folk singer Peter Seeger, who turned 90 recently, has been a public nuisance for a long time. He has sung and strummed and spoken for peace and justice. He once built a schooner called the *Clearwater* to take people on Hudson River excursions and enlist their support for cleaning up the river. Although it was 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.” So, let’s get busy with our “damned little teaspoons.”

## **Services Offered by the Social Justice Council 2009-2010**

Contact [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org) or 585-244-7403 or 585-738-8229 for further information: Listed below are brief descriptions of social justice sermons, workshops and consultations offered by Social Justice Coordinator Dick Gilbert to SLD congregations and clusters.

### **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 “walking the talk.” This workshop explores the spiritual roots of social action, perspectives on UU mission, organizational tools and a practicum on planning for change.

### **“Giving Life the Shape of Justice”: A Level Two Workshop/Consultation**

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.

### **Being the Change We Want to See: Spiritual Growth and Social Action**

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.

### **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? How do we mobilize congregations for effective social action through NYS 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?

### **Talking the Walk: Why We Do What We Do in Social Action**

We are often admonished to “walk our talk,” to live out our values in the world; we are seldom challenged to “talk our walk,” to discern why we do what we do to repair it. What are the underpinnings of social justice – how do we change the world and how does that change us?

### **Social Justice Council Members Participate in IINYS Advocacy Day**

Several members of the SLD Social Justice Council participated in the May 11 Advocacy Day, sponsored by Interfaith Impact of NYS: Harsey Leonard, Chair; Robb Smith, member of the SLD Board and IINYS Executive Director; Lynn Ashley, Mary and Niels Schulz and Dick Gilbert, SLD Social Justice Coordinator and IINYS Chair. Marriage equality, the Farmworker Fair Labor Practices Act, the Gender Expression Non-Discrimination Act, the Dignity for All Students Act, the Healthy Teens Act and the Reproductive Health Act were on the agenda.

### **Agenda for Change SLD Social Justice Council Newsletter**

If you would like to subscribe to this monthly e-newsletter contact [Rsgilbert@uuma.org](mailto:Rsgilbert@uuma.org). Also, see Social Justice in the new St. Lawrence District website: <http://www/sld.uua.org>.

**JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!**  
Individual and Congregational Memberships Welcome

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a UUA-UUSC partner organization. The St. Lawrence District is an official member and UUs are active on the Board. Robb Smith of our Albany congregation is Executive Director - [robb@interfaithimpactnys.org](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: 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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