



UULMNJ Executive Director's Annual Report

April 18, 2015

UULMNJ has had an exciting and challenging year as it tries to respond to the emerging issues of the day within the context of a politically slow legislature. Many of the issues important to UULMNJ have not moved quickly through the legislative process. However, there are some very important initiatives UULMNJ has taken.

In light of the police killings across the country, the UULMNJ board has issued a statement regarding race and racism. UULMNJ is committing to greater understanding of race and its role in every issue the organization addresses. The full implications of this action are only beginning to be discussed. A small group is being formed to explore how we can best help our congregations build greater awareness and help t build the Beloved community.

After considerable study, the Ending Jim Crow Task Force has called for the taxation and regulation of Marijuana. The position paper is in this year's Annual Meeting materials along with other educational materials. This is by no means an endorsement of marijuana use. It is a call for justice and compassion. The detrimental impact of current laws concerning minor drug violations is harmful. The resulting mass incarceration is ruining the potential productivity of young lives, particularly people of color. UULMNJ is encouraging educational discussions within each congregation about this important issue.

Other issues UULMNJ has focused on over the past year includes the following:

- Earned Paid Sick Days
- Foreclosure Legislation
- Bail Reform
- Opportunity to Compete Act
- Parole Reform Legislation
- Fracking Waste Ban Veto Override
- Anti-poverty legislation in coalition with the NJ Anti-Poverty Network
- COAH Advocacy
- Intrastate Prison / Detainee Phone Rate Regulation
- Continuing Plaintiff in Church/State separation case against Dept. of Education
- Legal Advocacy Project Initiatives (LAP) (see separate report).

In addition, UULMNJ has done the following:

- Successfully advocated for the release of the Affordable Housing Trust funds.
- Promoted “Do Not Stand Idly By” program encouraging local municipalities to purchase police weapons from manufacturer who produce smart guns and promote high safety standards.
- Participated in crafting of New Jersey’s environmental and sustainability legislation through Sen. Smith’s initiative.
- Helped organize New Jersey UU’s participation in the Peoples Climate March in New York with approximately 300 NJ UU participants.
- Organized the State Advocacy Network (SANS) Workshops at the UUA General Assembly and upcoming Metro District Conference.
- Represent UULMNJ on several NJ and national coalitions.

UULMNJ’s influence and effectiveness in social justice advocacy is growing as indicated by recognition of New Jersey decision-makers:

- UULMNJ was asked by the Governor’s office to attend the signing of Bail Reform legislation.
- UULMNJ served on the NJ Senate Environment Stakeholders Task Force.
- UULMNJ received several complementary letters from NJ Legislators thanking UULMNJ for specific issue advocacy work.
- Three UULMNJ leaders have been tapped by the Center for American Progress to participate in their national training programs on reproductive justice and domestic violence and gun violence and young adult advocacy.

Organizationally, UULMNJ has grown in complexity as well: This past year, UULMNJ has accomplished the following:

- Hosted two UUA College of Social Justices summer interns
- Developed five YUUR Voice TV half-hour issues programs on Immigration, mass incarceration, sustainability, and affordable housing. Shows appeared on Princeton TV and are available on the UULMNJ YouTube channel for congregational use.
- Began planning SALTA, a young adult advocacy training program
- Expanded the administrator position to half-time to provide more stability and accommodate the growing amount of administrative work.
- Expanded the Exec. Director position to 30 hours/week.
- Expanded Salsa electronic advocacy, data and donor programs and social media postings. Currently, UULMNJ has 940 Salsa (electronic advocacy) supporters. Thanks to the new UULMNJ administrator, the Facebook and twitter contacts are growing. This

year UULMNJ added 250 Facebook followers, and 198 twitter followers. UULMNJ averages about 350 hits a week. Obviously, these numbers are not huge but they continue to grow.

- Participated in NJ Faith Leaders coalition in meetings with the Governor Christi, NJ Chief Justice Rabner, and US Senator Booker.
- Held an over-night board and leadership retreat for planning and reflection.
- Hired a Development Director, Diane Connell to implement the financial development plan.

In addition, UULMNJ held the first annual Muusic Festival, held at the Morristown Fellowship, attracting 206 people. 98 performers from 6 congregations raised their voices and our spirits as they sang to benefit UULMNJ. The event included the inaugural performance of the NJ All State UU Chorus. The event raised \$6000. Many thanks to Laurice Grae-Hauck for her vision and execution of the program and the choir directors and choirs from Lincroft, Summit, Morristown, Somerset Hills, Montclair and Paramus for such an uplifting day.

Obviously, this work is not possible to accomplish by three part-time staff. The volunteer effort of the UULMNJ board, task forces, liaisons, volunteers and congregations compounds our efforts and makes UULMNJ so productive and efficient. As executive director, I would like to thank the staff, board and all of our volunteers for everything they do. The strength of UULMNJ rests with its collective congregational support.

As Unitarian Universalists we believe in the inherent worth and dignity of every individual, we believe in justice and we believe in the democratic process. Often one's dignity and worth is brought into questions by social structures that create inequality and injustice. Therefore, we are called to act. And when we act together, we strengthen our power and influence to create a more just and compassionate world.

Respectively Submitted,

Rev. Craig Hirshberg, Executive Director

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