



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST LEGISLATIVE MINISTRY OF NEW JERSEY

A voice of Justice, Equality and Compassion in New Jersey

JANUARY 2012

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

On Tuesday, January 24, I testified before the NJ Senate Judicial Committee on behalf of UULMNJ and our congregations. From my testimony:

Unitarian Universalists believe that the First Principle of our faith, respecting "the inherent worth and dignity of every person," applies equally to people of all sexual orientations and gender identities. And have long recognized and celebrated same-sex marriages within our faith tradition for over thirty years.



As a minister, I have counseled numerous couples, both same-gender and opposite-gender, and have officiated at countless weddings and civil unions. One question I always ask each couple is, "Why do you want to get married now?" Invariably, the answer that comes back is, "We feel in order for our love and commitment to grow deeper, we need to take the next step. And that next step is marriage."

I believe that marriage is for two adults, who love each other so much that they want to spend the rest of their lives together. It is a deep-seated love that comes from the depths of the soul.

I believe this deep love is a gift from God. There is no other explanation for the human capacity to love in this way. God does not discriminate as to who can or cannot receive this gift. It is universal.

Unfortunately, when I counsel some couples, same-sex couples, I cannot promise them that next crucial step of marriage. I have to tell them that the State does not sanction their love as worthy of marriage; that somehow, the deep human love for their partner, in the eyes of the State, is somehow different from a heterosexual couple's love. I have to tell them that their civil union may not be treated the same as a marriage.

I think back to when my husband of thirty years and I decided to marry. If I had been told that we were only allowed to have a civil union, a lesser form of union designed to exclude us from marriage -- I would have been outraged. How dare anyone question the legitimacy and the dignity of my love for my life partner.

And yet, for gay and lesbian couples in New Jersey, that is exactly what happens every single day. And I am outraged.

We all have been given the same capacity to love -- both gay and straight. God does not discriminate, and neither should the State of New Jersey.

*In faith,
Rev. Craig Hirshberg
Executive Director*

MARRIAGE EQUALITY LEGISLATION INTRODUCED IN NEW JERSEY – THANK YOU FOR YOUR TURNOUT

A new state legislative session is just beginning this month. The very first bills posted in the Assembly and Senate (A.1 and S.1 respectively) would establish marriage equality in New Jersey. On Tuesday, January 24, the Senate Judicial Committee voted 8 to 4 along party lines to advance the Marriage Equality Bill. Proponents and opponents testified for three and a half hours. Thank you to all the clergy and members who came out. It makes a difference! We had 21 UU New Jersey clergy sign a clergy letter in support of Marriage Equality and eight come out to testify, not to mention members of our congregations.

Right now, it is anticipated that the bill will be voted on by the end of March. Supporters feel they have enough votes for it to pass in both houses, which in and of itself is historical. It is time for our congregations to take action.

The first action is to begin gathering signed petitions. A printable copy can be found on the UULMNJ website at http://www.uulmnj.org/images/documents/marriage_equality_petition.pdf. A letter writing campaign will follow shortly in concert with Garden State Equality. More info will be coming soon!

FROM OUR DENOMINATION

The January 2012 Multicultural Growth and Witness Newsletter is posted at:
http://www.uua.org/documents/aw/120120_news.pdf.

Standing on the Side of Love: Thirty Days of Love

From Standing on the Side of Love: “Thirty Days of Love, beginning Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and culminating with Valentine’s Day, is a collective visioning process about making sense of the present moment, and what we are called to do. We aim to accomplish this through self-reflection, active listening, sharing personal and community stories, and celebrating our lives and our heroes for their courageous love. Thirty Days of Love offers daily, direct actions for love, and the calendar is a template to guide you through a meaningful thirty days. But your participation is envisioned as a process, not an event. While there is great power in collective action, the beauty of Standing on the Side of Love is its “open source” spirit, so bring your own ideas, actions, and traditions with you for this journey.”

<http://www.standingonthesideoflove.org/national-standing-on-the-side-of-love-month-the-story-of-us-the-story-of-now/#bottomBoxes>

UUSC’s 2012 Civil Rights Journey

The UUSC is currently accepting applications for the 2012 Civil Rights Journey. This trip is specially tailored to young people, ages 15–20. From July 22–29, 2012, participants will travel by bus from Atlanta, Ga., to Birmingham, Montgomery, and Selma, Ala. In addition to visiting historic sites, participants will meet some of the courageous people who worked to desegregate schools, register new voters, and bring an end to racial discrimination in the United States. The cost for the trip is \$600 per person for youth ages 15–20 and \$900 for a limited number of adults able to serve as chaperones. Interested applicants can visit the UUSC website for more details about the trip or fill out an online application form. <http://www.uusc.org/justworks/trip/2012/civilrightsjourney>

UUA’s Multicultural Growth and Witness

Multicultural Growth & Witness seeks to make Unitarian Universalism a convivial, inclusive, empowering, and just faith for Unitarian Universalists who identify as bisexual, gay, lesbian, and/or transgender; economically oppressed; Latina/Latino and Hispanic; multiracial families; people of color;

and people with disabilities. They support Unitarian Universalist congregations in building and sustaining justice-seeking, inclusive, multicultural faith communities. Multicultural Growth & Witness' resources include leadership development and community building/organizing materials, educational curricula, workshops, worship and ceremonial guides, and information referrals.
<http://www.uua.org/directory/staff/multiculturalgrowth/index.php>

Environmental Justice Council Meeting Rescheduled

The first meeting of the Environmental Justice Council, originally slated for January 21, has been rescheduled for Saturday, April 14. The meeting will be at the First Unitarian Society of Westchester in Hastings from 10:30am-1:30pm, as planned before. The Metro NY District is starting an Environmental Justice Council to educate UU leaders in global, regional, and local environmental justice issues. The Council will meet three times a year and the organizers are asking for a two year commitment. Each congregation is encouraged to send at least one representative to this meeting. Please contact either Dr. Frances Sink at frances.sink@gmail.com, or the Rev. Peggy Clarke at pclarke@uuma.org for more information.

ISSUES UPDATES

Economic Justice

Housing: Lorraine Wearley attended the Housing and Community Development Network of New Jersey Members' Meeting in December, and updated the group on their 2012 priorities. (Policy Bulletin: New Legislative Session Sets Up Busy 2012 for the Network <http://www.hcdnnj.org/assets/documents/pbnewlegislativesession.pdf>). One of them, A359/S1651 Foreclosure Rescue Fraud Prevention Act, was passed and signed by the Governor. She also reported that New Jersey Department of Community Affairs Commissioner Lori Grifa is encouraging municipalities to spend their Affordable Housing Trust Money on special needs housing. Those doing so will receive a match from the State. http://www.nj.com/news/index.ssf/2011/12/nj_prods_towns_to_spend_money.html

Occupy Wall Street: The task force is planning to formulate an action plan with a subcommittee of EJTF members. Next steps discussed were: Spreading the word and educating our Congregations. Also alerting our congregants to legislation passed in some states inhibiting our right to civil disobedience and considering proposing legislation in New Jersey to ensure that right.

Please contact Lorraine Wearley for more information and to get involved with the Economic Justice task force, lorrainewearley@gmail.com.

Environment

The Environment task force is supporting the Green Sanctuary Committee of the UU Fellowship of Sussex County in their efforts to protect our parklands by opposing the Susquehanna-Roseland power line expansion. They have been opposing this expansion proposal for the past two years because of the harm it will do to the environment of northwest New Jersey and to our treasured parklands. This month the National Park Service will be accepting public input regarding the project. Details provided by the Sussex Co UU Fellowship, including a sample letter and how to submit comments to the NPS, are on the UULMNJ website.

Fracking: Although there weren't enough votes to override the governor's veto of the anti-fracking ban, the issue is not over. The bill has been reintroduced in the Senate. More details will follow.

Please contact Sally Gellert, sjguu@aol.com, for call-in information for the next Environment Task Force conference call.

Health Care

Health Insurance Exchanges: The task force is encouraging congregations to host a Health Insurance Exchange Forum to explain to Unitarian Universalists, and the general public, how health insurance exchanges will work and how we would like them to be organized. New Jersey will apply for a Stage 1 grant to help set up an exchange establishment grant. The task force will be monitoring how the money is spent.

Section 1115 Comprehensive Medicaid Waiver Application: Legal Services of NJ (<http://www.lsnj.org/>) has sent comments to the Center for Medicare and Medicaid (CMS) on New Jersey's waiver application. CMS has indicated that any endorsement of these comments would give them weight, which UULMNJ will do. The task force is also preparing additional comments for CMS on the waiver application.

The Health Care task force conference calls are every third Tuesday of the month, at 6:00pm and 7:30pm. Please contact Carolyn Baldacchini at cal6balda@yahoo.com for call-in details and/or to become involved with the Health Care Task Force.

Immigration

Part of the planning for the 2012 Justice General Assembly involves creating events that can happen around the country on the Saturday of GA week (June 23, 2012). The Immigration Reform Task Force will be encouraging New Jersey UUs to attend GA, and also working to create local or regional events on June 23. The task force will also continue its efforts to educate our congregations about immigration issues, and as always, are ready to help congregations with immigration programs, etc. Please contact Ted Fetter at fetter4@verizon.net for more information and to become involved with the Immigration Reform Task Force.

A new resource from the UUA: *Who Belongs Here – Exploring Immigration with Children and Youth*
<http://immigrationjustice.blogs.uua.org/education/who-belongs-here-exploring-immigration-with-children-and-youth/>

CONGREGATIONAL NEWS

The **Unitarian Society of Ridgewood** is sponsoring *Words of Choice* on Sunday afternoon, February 5. Words of Choice is a theatrical group who will be performing 14 powerful shorts, serious and comic, about the issue of choice. Olympia's Daughters, a women's a cappella group, will also perform. Olympia's Daughters take their name from Olympia Brown, a leading suffragist who was the first female ordained by a national denomination - the Universalists. See http://uumetrony.org/events/events.htm#Words_of_Choice for details.

What is the NJ Health Insurance Exchange and What Does It Mean for You?

A Forum on NJ Health Insurance Exchanges will be held on Sunday, February 26 after the second service at 12:30 pm in Fahs Theatre at the **UU Congregation of Princeton**. The national Affordable Care Act requires the implementation of an Exchange in each state during 2014 to assist individuals and small employers in purchasing health insurance. This Forum will discuss what a Health Insurance Exchange is and how it operates. An Exchange gives the opportunity for lowering health care costs and allowing

consumers to make better decisions on their health insurance. Learn what the options are for states and the actions that NJ is taking. The Forum is sponsored by the UU Legislative Ministry in cooperation with the NJ Citizen Action Health Care Campaign.

The **Morristown Unitarian Fellowship**'s five-year strategic plan calls upon the Social Justice Committee to create a "signature project" each year that will have a clearly defined goals and focus with specific volunteer opportunities to meet these goals. The 2011-2012 Signature Project is "Alleviating Hunger & Homelessness."

A recent article in the *Independent Press* celebrated **The Unitarian Church in Summit**'s Rev. Vanessa Rush Southern's 10th anniversary with the congregation, "... capping a decade that began with the terrible events of Sept. 11 and went on to see the church increase its membership and its social action agenda and win nationwide recognition in 2010 by the Unitarian Universalist Association."
<http://www.ucsummit.org/wordpress/parish-minister-vanessa-southern-is-featured-in-local-news/>

The **UU Church at Washington Crossing** has installed a Social Justice Historical Portrait Exhibit. The project resulted from the *Building the World We Dream About* program. The permanent portrait exhibit in the church's Crossings Room displays images of significant social justice leaders in UUCWC's history and describes their major accomplishments.

UUCSJS Social Justice Ministry prepares for a new era.... A call to ACTION: The **Unitarian Universalist Congregation of the South Jersey Shore**'s Social Justice Ministry writes in the congregation's current newsletter: After a change in leadership and a brief hiatus, the Social Justice Ministry is looking for another productive year of activism. While continuing our former emphasis on energy, environment, peace, ethical eating, LGBT issues, and support of South Jersey Animal Advocates, we hope to focus additionally with the "3-H Issues" in our local community, namely, Hunger, Homelessness and Health. We hope to make a positive and tangible difference in the lives of those who need us. Read more at http://www.uucsjs.org/newsletters/news_2012_01.pdf.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

Do you have an event or announcement that you would like included in our bulletin? We would especially like to include news about the many social justice events and initiatives that New Jersey's UU congregations are involved with.

Send an email to director@uulmnj.org and let us know what you are up to so that we can share it with others across our state.

"Our mission is to plant ourselves at the gates of Hope - not the prudent gates of Optimism, which are somewhat narrower; nor the stalwart, boring gates of Common Sense; nor the strident gates of Self-Righteousness, which creak on shrill and angry hinges... ; nor the cheerful, flimsy garden gate of 'Everything is gonna be all right.'"

- Victoria Safford, Unitarian Universalist minister

Please forward this e-bulletin to others in your congregation who might be interested.

If you would prefer not to receive e-mail from us,
just let us know and we'll remove you from our e-mail list.