



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST LEGISLATIVE MINISTRY OF NEW JERSEY

A voice for Justice, Equality and Compassion in New Jersey

MAY 2012

FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

I love annual meetings. Coming face to face with all of our dedicated UULMNJ volunteers, some of whom I only see once or twice a year, warms my heart. There is something about the synergy of Unitarian Universalists coming together, united in a common purpose, that just plain feeds the soul. All of you inspire me in my work. Your commitment and tenacity is admirable.



This week I received an email requesting that I attend a state level meeting because of UULMNJ's "very active legislative ministry." The email also said that if I couldn't make it, could I please send one of my staff. On one level, I found it humorous, but on another level, it was quite a compliment, not just to me, but to our UULMNJ community. We are beginning to be known as a group who is dependable and credible. We take this work seriously, really researching issues to better understand the best public policy, and we are beginning to be known for our ability to mobilize our constituency in a way that is heard by our legislators.

Never question whether our actions are making a difference. There is no question that we are creating change, one day at a time. Congratulations on another year well done.

In faith,
Rev. Craig Hirshberg
Executive Director

WELCOME TO UULMNJ'S ADMINISTRATOR – LEANNE MCGOWAN

We all are excited to welcome our new UULMNJ administrator, Leanne McGowan.

Leanne is a member of our Baptistown congregation and a former member of the Montclair congregation. Leanne has a BA in Art History and Business Administration from Washington University. She has a diverse background working as an Independent Sales Representative for Silpada, a research and development associate and director of special projects and volunteer coordination for the Montclair Art Museum, and assistant Director for the Museum of Modern Art in New York. Leanne will be working part time in the UULMNJ office.

NEWS FROM THE UULMNJ PLENARY

On April 14, about 70 UUs gathered in Lincroft to carry out the business of UULMNJ and the UULMNJ Public Policy Network. Thank you to the UU Congregation of Monmouth County for so graciously hosting us. New board members were elected, the 2012 – 2013 budget was adopted, and the past year’s highlights and accomplishments were reviewed. Annual reports from Rev. Craig and the task forces, as well as other materials included in the participants’ packets, are posted on the UULMNJ website.

Ingrid Reed, recently retired as a Policy Analyst and the Director of the New Jersey Project at the Eagleton Institute of Politics, Rutgers, and a member of the UU Princeton congregation, gave a thought-provoking keynote address. She began by thanking UULMNJ for doing the program on *Citizens United* and making it available on video, as it is important to understand what this decision is about and where our efforts should be. Ingrid went on to say that she is encouraged that *Citizens United* is getting attention, as it plays an important role of alerting us to the issue of fairness and our democratic process. UUs come at this from the value of every individual and each one should have a place in selecting who governs us.

As of July 1, 2012, there will be five new members on the UULMNJ Board of Trustees:

Adam Green, youth member, is an active member of the Senior High Youth Group at the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood. As a jazz musician he has provided special music for events at USR and was named Outstanding Student of Instrumental Music at Manchester Regional High School in Haledon, New Jersey. He also received the Louis Armstrong award from Helix Charter High School in San Diego in 2011. Adam recently delivered a homily in the annual youth service at USR and enjoys public speaking. His volunteer activities have included soup kitchens, after school programs, homeless outreach, and phone banking for marriage equality. Adam is passionate about youth involvement in social justice and is a member of Garden State Equality’s Youth Caucus. He also enjoys politics, history, and sports.

Rev. Kathleen Green is the minister of the Unitarian Society of Ridgewood. She has also served congregations in Anaheim, San Diego, and Wisconsin, before coming to Ridgewood in Aug. of 2011. While in California for four years, she was actively involved in the UU Legislative Ministry of California. Her community engagement in California extended to involvement with the San Diego Interfaith Committee on Worker Justice and Orange County Congregation Community Organization. Her ministerial internship was a hybrid of parish ministry with the Unitarian Church of Evanston, IL and community ministry with Faith in Place, an interfaith environmental agency in Chicago. Kathleen has known from the time she arrived in New Jersey that UULMNJ would, in some way, be a part of her ministry in the wider community.

Rev. Virginia Jarocha-Ernst has been the minister of the UU Congregation of Monmouth County since August 2009. She came to ministry from a background in fine art, teaching and exhibiting pottery and sculpture in clay, paint and mixed media. She has served Unitarian Universalism for over 20 years as a religious educator and minister in congregations in Bethlehem PA, Somerset Hills NJ, and Devon PA and the Joseph Priestly District. In all of her work, her passion for justice and peace making flows through the personal and political

expressions of beauty and truth.

Frances Prestianni (Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton) has been one of the UULMNJ liaisons from the Princeton Congregation for two years. She has been a member of UUCP for 25 years holding various positions on the Board of Trustees, including VP. She was also a member of a Ministerial Search Committee, Membership Committee, Nominating Committee and the Social Justice Committee. Frances retired over three years ago from State government where she worked for over 30 years in various research and planning positions including non-partisan legislative staff. Her most recent responsibility was managing development of public reports on NJ health care quality.

Gail Saxer is a member of the UU congregation in Toms River in Ocean County. She brings with her a great deal of political and legislative experience. Gail retired from the Community Medical Center, where she was Coordinator for Medical Staff Leadership. She served as the Clerk of the NJ General Assembly and as the Chief of Staff of the NJ 10th District Legislative Office. Among the broad list of her other accomplishments are the following: President of League of Women Voters of Ocean County and serving on the LWV New Jersey Women's Issues Committee, Legislation Reform Chair, Women's Issues and ERA Coordinator, LWV representative to the White House Conference on Families, Government Relations, Department of Law and Public Safety, NJ, and the Division on Women, Program Development Specialist.

Leaving the Board will be Ray Deeney, Rev. Bob Janis-Dillon, Erin Luken, Rev. Susan Rak, and Margaret White, who have given generously of their time and energy. Sally Gellert was also thanked for her leadership on the Environment Task Force, with Chuck O'Neil (Cherry Hill) welcomed as the incoming task force chair.

TO ALL UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS INTERESTED IN REPRODUCTIVE JUSTICE

Carol Loscalzo, Mandy Restivo, and Rob Keithan have issued a call to all UUs interested in working for reproductive health, rights, and justice. Read the full text of their letter at: <http://www.uulmnj.org/component/content/article/2-uncategorised/111-to-all-uus-interested-in-reproductive-rights.html>

As Unitarian Universalists, we are the inheritors of a 50-year history working for reproductive rights. We also share a firm commitment to anti-racism and social justice. We are called to widen the current socio-political debate on “reproductive rights” to one on “reproductive justice,” allowing us to fill a unique niche as both a religious group and a reproductive justice organization. To effectively combat the current war on women's bodies, UU advocates and congregations need to be re-equipped with energy, connections, and the frame of ‘reproductive justice.

At this summer's UUA General Assembly in Phoenix, delegates will have the opportunity to choose one issue to be the subject of the next four years of denomination-wide study, reflection, and action (a Congregational Study/Action Issue, or CSAI). Reproductive justice is one of the five proposed CSAIs, and a campaign has been launched to have it be selected. Whether or not

you will be in Phoenix, strengthen the effort to bring reproductive justice to the forefront of the UUA's justice work.

If you would like to join this effort, please visit <http://bit.ly/GM7Em5> and sign up to be part of UUs for Reproductive Justice.

“I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And because I cannot do everything, I will not refuse to do something that I can do. What I can do, I should do.” - Edward Everett Hale

ISSUES UPDATES

The task forces' annual reports, which were distributed at the annual meeting, are posted on the UULMNJ website.

Economic Justice

The Economic Justice Task Force will continue to spend quite a bit of its time on affordable housing. Their signature accomplishment over the past year has been the Occupy Wall Street statement, which received good newspaper coverage, and has served to help bring forward inequalities of society. The video of the presentation, “The Impact of *Citizens United* on the Democratic Process” has gotten great pick up (it's available, long with a study guide, on the UULMNJ website). Several churches will be putting together groups to view the video together and hold discussions.

As there is a need to focus on one primary issue, for the next six months the task force will help to raise awareness in our congregations of the importance of the upcoming elections and being involved and educated on the issues. They will also continue to monitor legislation on affordable housing and the minimum wage, with an eye to taking action if warranted.

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

Environment

Environment Task Force chair Chuck O'Neil asked those assembled for the annual meeting if we had enjoyed the warm winter, which followed the warm summer. Severe Midwest tornadoes, drought in Texas, and the east coast. All examples of why the task force is trying to keep New Jersey in Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI), after the Governor withdrew our state. Hopefully this will come up in the Assembly in September. In the meantime, people can contact the co-sponsors and let them know of their support of keeping New Jersey in RGGI.

Another important issue is the way that we have developed our communities around the availability of cheap energy. We have reached peak oil, and whatever oil we now use will be

more expensive and less available. As a result, we see people trying to get gas in less environmentally friendly ways, such as fracking. The task force is trying to stop fracking in the Delaware River Valley. They will be talking to old and new allies to determine strategies and how we can fit in, and continuing to educate people as to the consequences of fracking.

All are welcome to participate in the task force conference calls on the fourth Monday of the month. For more information, please contact Chuck O’Neil, chuckconeil@gmail.com.

Health Care

The Health Care Task Force wants to make sure all people get healthcare that they need and deserve. They have been concentrating on two issues - Medicaid and future of health insurance exchanges (the next step in Affordable Health Care Act).

Exchanges will fix New Jersey’s dismal record of insuring individuals. Two bills dealing with exchanges recently passed the NJ Senate and Assembly, and are awaiting the Governor’s signature. The bills define the makeup of the board overseeing the exchanges; the hope is that the board will have a strong pro-consumer presence. The task force will encourage congregations to hold forums to provide information on the exchanges.

In September 2011, the State applied for a Section 1115 Comprehensive Waiver. A waiver is a request to the federal government to alter how the Medicaid dollars are spent. The task force doesn’t want the waiver to be used to balance the state budget, and has asked that it not reduce basic services to our most needy citizens; the poor, the elderly and the disabled. They also asked that the State and the HMOs not have the right to dis-enroll patients.

Reproductive Justice is an extremely important issue, one that task force members feel must be addressed. Therefore the group decided to add a co-chair who will be responsible for reproductive justice issues, and to coordinate our work with that of other key organizations. Leanne McGowan agreed to take on this responsibility, with the hope that someone will step up to help with this.

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

Much of the policymaking on immigration is at the federal level. At state level, pending legislation would strengthen protection against wage theft. Another area of focus has been opposition to the implementation in New Jersey of a federal program called “secure communities.” Among other problems, this destroys community relations with local police. The task force also worked against the construction of a huge new detention center in Essex County, which would be privately run. The task force has been encouraging people to attend GA as it will have an immigration justice focus.

In the breakout session, the task force heard a summary of the situation in Highland Park of a group of Christian Indonesian refugees who fled to the US fearing persecution in Muslim Indonesia, and who are now being deported, in spite of significant family ties and no criminal record. Althea Schoen, from the East Brunswick congregation, is leading the effort for us, and she is part of a group led by a local pastor in Highland Park to support these refugees. Our group unanimously passed a motion to go on record supporting them and urging our congregations to write letters in support.

They also reviewed the process for passing legislation in New Jersey, including the several ways that New Jersey's process is different from other states and the federal government, and then applied that review to New Jersey's proposed legislation on Wage Theft. They agreed to support this bill and to urge our congregations to write letters to the Assembly Labor Committee chair.

Contact Ted Fetter, fetter4@verizon.net, for more info and to participate in the conference calls.

Emerging Issues

Marriage Equality: Marriage Equality is a galvanizing issue that generated a great deal of interest in UULMNJ, and it will continue to be that, and some of the best work of UULMNJ (and the Public Policy Network) has been linked to this issue. It was felt that we want to be proactive in the effort to promote an override to the veto of the legislation that would have established marriage equality in New Jersey. To that end, it will be important to have a few people to facilitate the information flow. Marty Rothfelder will be the point person, and we'll need other people who are interested in participating in this group to work with him.

Education Equity: It was determined that there were two issues on the table, one immediate and the other long term.

Immediate: The folks at Ridgewood, under the leadership of Helen Lindsay, have written a letter that can be addressed to either the Governor or Legislators. The letter identifies three important elements of the state's education plan as it would be regulated in the budget that will be set by July: reduction of state aid to all districts but particularly to districts unable to make up the deficit; inclusion of a new formula for determining children at risk, reducing state burden while decreasing support to students who are clearly in need; and a proposed change in determining the number of students in each district by using attendance records as opposed to the traditional registration numbers, again hitting the neediest districts the hardest. Rev. Charlie Ortman will coordinate the effort to get this letter out to the congregations for a coffee hour letter writing campaign

Long Term: It was felt that for education equity to find a home within the UULMNJ panoply of concerns there needs to be a task force of volunteers willing to study, reflect and recommend what issues might come before the larger UULMNJ membership. Volunteering to share in this effort are Will Reisman, Helen Lindsey and Carolyn Musser. Please contact Rev. Craig if you are interested in working with this group.

“We Unitarian Universalists have inherited a magnificent theological legacy. In a sweeping answer to creeds that divide the human family, Unitarianism proclaims that we spring from a common source; Universalism that we share a common destiny. - Forrest Church

CONGREGATIONAL NEWS

We have a new affiliate! The **Lakeland Fellowship** (Wayne), <http://luuf.org/>, recently voted to affiliate with UULMNJ.

Options for creating a New Jersey Health Insurance Exchange will be discussed on Sunday, May 20 in a 12:15 p.m. forum at the **Morristown Unitarian Fellowship**. States are required to establish such exchanges in 2014 under the national Affordable Care Act. The forum is sponsored by the UU Legislative Ministry in cooperation with the NJ Citizen Action Health Care Campaign. Speakers will discuss issues such as how the Exchange might be organized, who should be represented on its board, how it can best offer access to affordable health insurance, and how the new exchange would fit in with existing New Jersey health insurance programs for individuals and for small employers.

The **Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Princeton**, as a certified Green Sanctuary, is pledged to undertake concrete and significant actions to cultivate awareness of environmental problems, to reduce their negative impact, and to address environmental injustice in cooperation with the broader community. The Green Sanctuary Committee therefore plans to ask the Congregation at its Annual Meeting to pass a resolution supporting the Save Our Climate Act, H.R. 3242 and urging all of New Jersey’s Congressional Representatives to do the same.

The **UU Congregation of the South Jersey Shore** participated in the 99% Spring Movement (an outgrowth of Occupy Wall Street). On April 11, they hosted a 3-hour training session for peaceful, nonviolent direct action. They concluded with a one-day protest demonstration outside of the Wells Fargo branch office in Linwood, New Jersey to draw attention to the individuals and families who have been hurt by the recession and foreclosures caused, in very large part, by the actions of mortgage bankers, particularly Wells Fargo.

On June 1, the youth group at the **Central Unitarian Church** will host a concert featuring several New Jersey band. Funds raised at the concert will go to the "Every Child is Our Child" project which is a program of the UU-UNO that focuses on children who have been made vulnerable in Ghana by HIV/AIDS and it addresses the UN Millennium Development Goals which work towards achieving universal primary education, fighting HIV/AIDS, reducing poverty and hunger, and working for gender equality.

"Unitarian Universalism offers us a faith that challenges our energy usage and confronts us with hunger and injustice around the world without giving inadequate simplistic answers. It offers the harder path of respect for all being and for the Earth, and calls us to be accountable for our actions. We are responsible for our own spirituality, our own salvation, and for doing all that we can to make the world better." - UU minister Rev. Bob Klein

FROM OUR DENOMINATION

April 2012 Multicultural Growth and Witness Newsletter:

http://www.uua.org/documents/idbm/120326_news.pdf

UU Justice Action News – April 2012:

http://salsa.democracyinaction.org/o/1272/t/0/blastContent.jsp?email_blast_KEY=1242379

Congregational Study/Action Issues to be considered at GA:

<http://www.uua.org/statements/current/>

Washington Office Collecting Reproductive Justice Stories

Jessica Halperin, Women’s Issues advocate in the UUA’s Washington office, is collecting stories about UUs who worked for reproductive justice in the years before abortion became legal.

Halperin is inviting ministers and lay people to contribute their own stories and to interview those in their congregations who hosted clinics, drove women across borders, argued before the Supreme Court, etc.

<http://tipsheet.blogs.uua.org/resources/washington-office-collecting-reproductive-justice-stories/>

UUA: What is Environmental Justice <http://www.uua.org/environment/27663.shtml>

UUA Board and the Doctrine of Discovery: Accountability in Action

In 2010, the General Assembly directed the UUA Board to create a different kind of General Assembly for 2012. This “Justice GA” was to be planned in accountable relationship with partner organizations who had invited us to Arizona as part of their ongoing struggle for human rights and equality. When our Association’s Arizona Immigration Ministry met with our partners, we received one clear request for an agenda item at GA2012. Our partners said that the single most important piece of business we could do at GA2012 was to study and repudiate the Doctrine of Discovery and support the full implementation of the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People.

<http://board.blogs.uua.org/uncategorized/uua-board-and-the-doctrine-of-discovery-accountability-in-action/>. For an explanation of the Doctrine of Discovery, see

<http://www.uuworld.org/news/articles/198697.shtml>

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.

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.