



## **Unitarian Universalist Association** of Congregations

Advocacy and Witness Programs

1320 18th Street, Suite 300B Washington, DC 20036

ph (202) 296-4672 x17

fax (202) 296-4673

[mriley@uua.org](mailto:mriley@uua.org)

[www.uua.org](http://www.uua.org)

### **ADVOCACY AND WITNESS STAFF GROUP**

#### **Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**

**Susan Leslie, Director, Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness**

**December 2007**

All of us at Advocacy & Witness hope you had joy-filled holidays and are looking forward to our continued collaboration in the coming year.

Meg Riley has been on sabbatical and asked me to pull together our report to you in her absence. Our new team from the Washington Office and the International Resources Office are working well together with those of us who have been on staff for a while now. We are looking forward to a strategic retreat that Meg has planned for us in mid-January where we will have an opportunity to further develop our efforts in ways that are synergistic and effective. We also be developing our partnership work with UU Service Committee staff as well. Most exciting we will be meeting with groups of UU ministers and social justice congregational leaders as part of our planning process.

The new focus of our public witness team and our emphasis on resources for congregational international and domestic work is apparent in the reports below from our Washington Office for Advocacy, our Office for International Resources, and our Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness. And what's also abundantly clear from these reports is the spirit of activism and justice-making on the part of our congregations.

## UUA Washington Office for Advocacy Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

**Rob Keithan**, Director  
**Kat Liu**, Assistant Director  
**Grace Garner**, Legislative Assistant for  
Women's Issues, UU Women's  
Federation Clara Barton Internship

**Adam Gerhardstein**, Legislative Assistant  
for International Issues  
**Lisa Swanson**, Legislative Assistant for  
Economic and Racial Justice

### Highlights from the Washington Office:

In the past few months the Washington Office for Advocacy has done significant work in several of the UUA's public witness priority areas, including BGLT rights, comprehensive sexuality education and HIV/AIDS, and peacemaking. While the pace in terms of actual policy change remains slow, our capacity for effective action is increasing at a much faster rate. A few of our campaigns are described in the issue-specific reports below. A few other things are worth mentioning:

- The UUA Washington Center (the name used for the physical office space that houses all DC-based UUA staff) will be moving by March 31, 2008, when the lease runs out on our current space. The management and maintenance of our current building is far below acceptable, so we are excited about the move.
- The transition to the new website is largely complete; please check out <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice> to see the result.
- On December 1, the UUA Washington Office partnered with UUs for Social Justice, a regional Baltimore-Washington group, to deliver a half-day version of our core training workshop, *Inspired Faith, Effective Action*. President Sinkford kicked off the day with a rousing call to action. More than 80 people came. The average rating for the overall workshop was 4.33 out of 5, with an average rating of 4.76 for the strategic planning portion.

**BGLT and Women's Issues:** In November, Congressional sponsors of the Employment Non-Discrimination Act (ENDA) announced that they were dropping gender identity from the legislation. The move led to considerable conflict in the civil rights advocacy community. In accordance with our commitment to accountability, the UUA stood strong with more than 300 BGLT groups in opposing the non-inclusive bill, which did eventually pass. We will continue to work with as many partners as possible in ensuring that protection from workplace discrimination is available to all persons in the BGLT community. Also, despite substantial progress, it seems unlikely that anti-hate crimes legislations (which already passed in the House) will make it through the Senate before Congress adjourns. However, there is still great strength within the Hate Crimes coalition to move forward in the next congressional session.

Planning for the 4<sup>th</sup> Annual Sexuality Education and Advocacy Training (SEAT), scheduled for March 15-18, is moving full steam ahead. Notably, the UUA will use the period from the anniversary of *Roe v. Wade* on January 22 through SEAT to conduct a high-visibility advocacy campaign for reproductive choice and comprehensive sexuality education. A petition will be circulated to UUs across the country and SEAT participants will present the signatures to congress on March 17, 2008. In conjunction with this lobby day, there will also be a National Call-In Day for comprehensive sexuality education sponsored by all of the SEAT partner organizations.

**Economic and Racial Justice:** For the past several months, staff has focused on immigration, Gulf Coast rebuilding, and criminal justice. In the area of immigration, staff has worked to launch an immigration-focused listserv for UU advocates. The listserv will include more in-depth information and resources around immigration issues as well as action alerts. Staff has also attended meetings of the Interfaith Immigration Coalition and worked with members of the coalition on a faith-based pro-immigrant postcard campaign in Iowa targeted towards the party caucuses. The office continued to support the DREAM Act and oppose a variety of enforcement-only measures. In the area of criminal justice, the office has been tracking the progress in eliminating the crack/powder cocaine sentencing disparity, which following major decisions by the Supreme Court and US Sentencing Commission in December will become more of a Congressional issue.

Staff member Lisa Swanson joined the Arlington, Virginia UU Church on a week-long service trip to New Orleans in October and did volunteer community service work through an organization called Hands On. She also met members of FUUNO (First Unitarian Universalist of New Orleans) and listened to their stories of surviving the storm, learned about continuing problems in the region. Since returning, staff has been writing text for the UUA website's social justice section on the Gulf Coast, and has continued to communicate with activists in the region.

**International Issues:** At the end of September, the UUAWO launched an ambitious campaign to get 25,000 signatures on an anti-war petition in three weeks. The campaign was inspired by a petition campaign of the United Church of Christ. Within three weeks over 13,000 UUs signed the petition on-line or in their congregations. This represented nearly 10% of certified UU members and the largest participation of UUs in a single advocacy action. Of those who participated in the campaign, over 1,000 signed up for our advocacy-news list, increasing its circulation by 50%. On October 10<sup>th</sup>, Rev. Sinkford joined Rev. John Thomas of the UCC in delivering their petitions to the Senate and House leadership. The UCC had received a similar percentage of participation with twice the time. A month and a half later, Rev. Sinkford returned to DC for World AIDS Day. For that visit, the Washington Office had arranged for him to participate in a high-level visit with the Office of the Global AIDS Coordinator to address their ongoing implementation and support for abstinence-until-marriage programs. Rev. Sinkford then spoke at a small rally outside of OGAC and then marched to Lafayette Park, in front of the White House, to speak at a larger rally. Earlier in the week he had participated in an audio press conference as well. His appearances led to coverage in Congressional Quarterly and the local Fox News. His ongoing, vocal support for comprehensive sexuality education programs to prevent HIV/AIDS has been greatly appreciated by our partner organizations here in DC.

**Peacemaking:** Staff worked closely in order to promote three national campaigns, one of which (the Petition for Peace) is mentioned above. For the October 8 Interfaith Fast Day for Peace, staff member Alex Winnett spoke in a national press conference which led to media coverage in *The Nation Magazine* and *Pax Christi Magazine*. Resources created by staff for the event were positively received. For Veteran's Day, a campaign to reclaim the original title—Armistice Day—resulted in an updated resource guide for congregations working with military families and veterans. Several ministers wrote sermons on the need for peace in our time. The database, developed along with the Commission on Social Witness, of congregations actively working on the Congregational Study/Action Issue has now surpassed 100 congregations, which is half way to the 25% quorum specified under the recent bylaw revision. The Peacemaking core team has created many fantastic resources to help congregations participate in the 2009 Statement of Conscience process.

**Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**  
**Submitted by: Rev. Eric Cherry, Director**  
**UUA Office of International Resources**

**Resourcing by internet**

- The international section of uua.org has been organized and improved with various resources and is beginning to serve as a clearinghouse. The international resources office is contributing to a new Advocacy and Witness staff blog that will also be a useful communication tool.
- A monthly international “Skype-casting” project has been implemented, and the November meeting featured a theological dialogue with Rev. Nihal Attanayake of the UU Church of the Philippines. Recordings of the Skypecast are posted to the A&W blog
- Preparing stories highlighting the variety of UUA congregations engaged in international ministries for uua.org. The data for this project emerges from the Office’s survey of congregational international engagement in 2006.
- Providing worship resources to UUA congregations in response to the Saffron Revolution in Burma and the government of Pakistan’s declaration of a “state of emergency.”
- Participating in a UUA task force on staff blogging.

**New Resources**

- The “faithful invitation to international engagement” workshop continues to progress. This will be a workshop adaptable to a variety of contexts with some sections available on uua.org.
- The development of a “Faith Without Borders” program – which invites congregations to plan their international engagement in a congregationally holistic and effective way – is progressing, and will be presented at General Assembly ’08.
- Guidelines for churches making financial contributions to international organizations.
- Participating in multiple UUA organization discussion of microfinance issues.
- Developing study materials about the Holdeen India Program for congregational use.

**Maintaining/Developing relationships with historic and emerging relationships**

- Collaborating with WCRP-USA, IARF, UU-UNO, ICUU, ICUUW, UUHIP, UJME, UUGAC and UUPCC.
- Meeting and collaborating with representatives of historic international U/U judicatories
- Developing procedures and best practices for the creation of relationships with new U/U groups in places like Kenya, Burundi, Uganda, Congo, Mexico, Bolivia and Argentina.
- Working with the UU Church of the Philippines to establish a ministerial sabbatical program there, in collaboration with the UUA’s Professional Development department.

**Institutional Developments**

- The UUA’s International Advisory Council is established and has had its first face-to-face meeting as well as a conference call meeting. These meetings have been very fruitful. Future meetings will occur on a quarterly basis.
- The UUA’s Ambassador corps has been established with UUA ambassadors to the Transylvanian Unitarian Church (Rev. John Gibbons), the Unitarian Union of North East India (Rev. Abhi Janamanchi) and the UU Church of the Philippines (Rev. Fred Muir) appointed and serving.
- With leadership from Will Saunders, progress is being made on the establishment of a Memo of Understanding with ICUU. Development of MOU with the UUPCC and the UU-UNO are also in process.

- Working collaboratively with UUA departments, particularly the A&W staff group on internationally related projects.
- Preparing to develop a strategic plan for the International Resources office during the A&W staff retreat in January.

### **General Assembly**

- International workshops at General Assembly have been submitted and will include:
  - “The UUA Holdeen India Program: Empowering Social Change” – a workshop about UUHIP which will include examples of ways for congregations to participate with UUHIP.
  - “U/U Theology... Internationally Speaking” – a workshop continuing the international U/U theological dialogue with one UUA theologian, two U/U theologians from international judicatories.
  - “A Faith Without Borders” – a workshop describing UUA resources for congregational international engagement, particularly the “Faith Without Borders” program.

## **Report to UUA Board of Trustees From Susan Leslie, Director, Office of Congregational Advocacy & Witness**

Our office has busy this fall laying the groundwork for the UUA and UU congregations to participate in various long-term interfaith campaigns by attending strategy meetings and developing resources and communications for congregations.

**Living Wage Campaign:** Susan Leslie is representing the UUA in the Let Justice Roll Living Wage campaign interfaith and grassroots coalition. Having been successful at the national and state level in achieving modest gains in raising the minimum wage, the coalition now has its sights on achieving – ***\$10 in 2010***. In addition to continuing to advocate on a national level and work with legislative sponsors, the coalition is working on state campaigns as well. The UUA is partnering with the UUSC in this effort. We're happy to report that UU congregations are active in all the state campaigns which currently include Georgia, Kansas, Ohio and Oklahoma. The coalition is also working on a "southern strategy" (AL, FL, TN & elsewhere) to include more workers covered by minimum wage, such as farm workers and others.

Susan coordinated an update of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage Resources for Worship Services and Community Events that can be viewed at <http://www.letjusticeroll.org/>.

Our office also commissioned a worker justice resource entitled *There is Power in Union: A Unitarian Universalist Guide to Supporting Worker Justice* by the Rev. Aaron McEmrys. Aaron has been serving as the Interim Assistant Minister and Director of Social Justice at The First Universalist Church of Denver and is now in search of a congregation. You can download it from the Leaders Library at [http://www.uua.org/documents/mcemrysaaron/power\\_union.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/mcemrysaaron/power_union.pdf)

**Immigrant Justice and New Sanctuary Movement:** We are continuing to work closely with Interfaith Worker Justice and the New Sanctuary Movement. Susan attended a national New Sanctuary Movement conference in November that had 75 organizers from several faith traditions from around the country including AZ, CA, CO, FL, IL, KS, MA, MO, NC, NY, OR, VA, WA, and Washington DC. Most of the organizers reported that UU congregations are part of NSM city coalitions and organizing efforts to create public awareness about immigrant families, to support other congregations providing sanctuary, and to advocate for immigration reform. (We are following up with organizers to track this activity). The coalition is developing a campaign calling for a moratorium on ICE raids and continuing to advocate for just comprehensive immigration reform nationally. The NSM will continue to provide sanctuary to selected families but is also seeking to expand the movement and the sense of sanctuary. The theme of the conference was: "Sanctuary is not a building. It is a response rooted in faith and nurtured by prayer and conscience." Families in sanctuary in Los Angeles were part of the conference and shared their stories and perspectives. It was particularly moving to meet with the family at the UCC congregation in Simi Valley that has been subject to daily protests by the Minutemen. A common thread of all the stories was "We are not criminals; we are just trying to take care of our families."

Our office created new immigration pages for the social justice website. Go to <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/issues/immigration/index.shtml>. (There is a wonderful video posted there of Bill Sinkford speaking at the protest at ICE headquarters in Portland last June.)

In conjunction with the Washington Office we have started an immigration listserv for over 100 people who have requested information and reported on their congregation's activities. (We received over 40 requests after *UU World* had an article about UUA participation in the New Sanctuary Movement). We also have a smaller list serve for ministers and leaders who met at

last GA to share strategies for organizing congregations. While comprehensive reform is stalled in Congress there are bills that provide partial protection for immigrant families that the UUA is supporting while we work in coalition and with our congregations to put a human face and bring compassion to the immigrant community.

**Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO):** The UUA sent a team consisting of Gini Courter, Moderator; John Blevins, Board; Rev. Jim Eller, President-UU Ministers Council on CBCO; Rev. Craig Roshaven, CBCO Ministers Council and representative to *the Inter-religious Organizing Initiative (IOI)*; Susan Leslie, UUA staff representative to the IOI, and volunteer UUA CBCO Consultant Dr. Fred Seidl to an *IOI* gathering in Nashville TN at the American Baptist College in December. The UUA joined eight other denominational teams along with leaders from the national organizing networks and directors of funding foundations (including Ned Wight, Executive Director of the UU Veatch Program). CBCO continues to grow nation-wide and the networks are now developing national campaigns with a potential for collaboration. The PICO network gave a presentation on their campaign to expand SCHIP (State Children’s Health Insurance Program) through a collaboration of grassroots organization and denominational advocacy efforts. The presentation raised participants sights to what might be achieved through greater inter-denominational and inter-network organizing.

The UUA team met to plan ways to provide leadership training in organizing to UU leaders and seminary students and to highlight and recognize the work of the 110 UU congregations now participating. Our office continues to track congregational activity and have recently heard from 4 more congregations currently exploring CBCO and/or participating in new starts. Our recent survey of CBCO congregations indicates generally high satisfaction with their organizations.

**Social Justice Empowerment Workshops:** We held a very successful workshop with the UUs of San Mateo the last weekend of October. Outcomes included the adoption of a Social Justice Council model with broad task forces on issues of housing and peace. The Housing task force includes both their CBCO work on housing and their participation Habitat for Humanity. The Peace task force will include anti-war work as well as Government Watch human rights and local Peace Action involvement. The facilitator reported: “The group also decided to propose two new projects to the congregation: Local—A Latino Support Project which they named “Amistades Comunitarios” participating in offering ESL classes, life-improvement needs, and to educate themselves about other needs. International—The Heifer Project, micro-credit, intergenerational project within the congregation, Christmas gift giving, involvement in already established organizations. Having the group consider the criteria of Grounding, Fit, Accountability, and Opportunity in their decisions has been very helpful.”

We will be holding workshops with the following congregations in the coming year (and are negotiating with a few others for late spring and next fall).

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester, Minnesota	Feb 1-2, 2008
Second Unitarian Church, Omaha, NE	Feb. 8-10 2008
UU Church of Elgin, IL	Feb 29-Mar 2
Raleigh/Durham/Chapel Hill cluster:	
Raleigh Fellowship, Eno River & Community Church UU	March 8-10, 2008
First Parish UU Canton, MA	March 8-10, 2008

An updated version of the Social Justice Empowerment Handbook is now on our website at [http://www.uua.org/documents/aw/sje\\_handbook.pdf](http://www.uua.org/documents/aw/sje_handbook.pdf).

**General Assembly:** We will be coordinating a public witness on BGLT rights and family equality in Ft. Lauderdale. Florida is now the only state that outlaws “gay adoption.” We will also be looking for opportunities to witness with the immigrant community and are bringing representatives from the Coalition of Immokalee Workers to GA to do a workshop.