

Board Report
Spring, 2009
Advocacy and Witness Programs
Rev. Meg A. Riley, Director

Happy Spring to all of you!

In these challenging economic times, I am always aware how lucky I am to serve the Association. Each day I get to work with people I love and respect, doing work that is engaging and creative, to create a better world. Did I win some karmic jackpot in my last life?

As I write this particular report, I am sharply aware that it is my last one during Bill Sinkford's administration. It has been a real privilege to serve a President so consistently devoted to Advocacy and Witness work. I am amazed at what we have accomplished by focusing our advocacy work and our media work in clear, directed, limited areas. We are now excited to be part of an even more targeted effort to mobilize media in a values-based campaign.

At the same time that we are reaching out further and in more strategic and targeted ways to impact our country and world's future, it is not surprising that we are taking steps to deepen UU work for justice so that it is well-grounded in UU theology, history, and our living tradition. By GA, the DVD "A People So Bold" will be available for the 10 hour Social Justice Ministry track at UU University, to give congregations inspiring tools to link up our work with our mission as a religious people. The book by the same title will come out a bit later, featuring essays by UU theologians, ministers and activists about what UUism has to do with justice.

Much of what follows in this report is a list of tactics, which we are employing to move forward on our strategic goals. Please know that every tactic is connected to a strategic purpose, and that we are ever-increasingly aware that we must steward all resources with precision and clarity.

Finally, our Holdeen India Program turns 25 this year! Keep your eyes peeled for opportunities to celebrate a quarter century's revolutionary work on behalf of the most marginalized peoples of India!

UUA Office of International Resources

Rev. Eric Cherry, Director

Nicole McConvery, Administrative Assistant

Erik Resly, Intern

Activities of the International Resources Office

Resourcing

Continued maintaining and expanding www.uua.org/international as a well developed and organized source of resources for congregations.

Continued expanding and promoting the "Faith Without Borders" program

Continued Distribution of bi-weekly e-newsletter "i-news".

Continued participating in A&W staff group blog and with the UUA task force on staff blogging.

Continued providing a monthly page for the UUA congregational bulletin.

Continued development of a DVD describing UU Holdeen India program

Leading worship at First Religious Society, Newburyport, MA

Erik Resly leading worship at First Parish UU in Kingston, MA

Presenting Faith Without Borders at Pacific Northwest District AGM.

Began development of an international U/U monthly e-devotional resource involving U/U leaders from around the world.

Maintaining/Developing relationships

- Continued collaborating with UU-UNO and UUPCC in preparing for and following-up President Sinkford's Africa journey.
- Continued promoting increasing cooperation between UUA and RKK
- Promoted a sabbatical program for UUA ministers in the Philippines, and eventually other locations.
- Continued meeting and collaborating with representatives of historic international U/U judicatories
 - Preparing for President Sinkford's journey to Transylvania
 - Welcomed Karsten Urban from the German Unitarians to the UUA for a day of collegial visits.
 - Welcomed the Starr King Balazs Scholar to the UUA for a day-long visit.
- Continued Supporting development of relationship between Unitarian Union of NE India and UU Holdeen India Program
- Providing UUA support to the UU Church of the Philippines' "Quimada Center" project.
- Coordinating collaboration between UUPCC, ICUU and UUA.
- Participated in the International Convocation of UU Women
 - Providing UUA leadership in the follow-up to the Convocation
- Preparing an international U/U monthly e-devotional
- Working with UUPCC to establish 2 church-to-church partnerships with 2 African countries
- Coordinated the "Joint Working Group" (ICUU, UUPCC, UUA-IRO) to submit 3 large grant proposals to UU Church of Shelter Rock
- Joined ICUU's International Ministerial and Theological Training Task Force.
- Attending UUPCC's Winter Board Meetings in Bedford.

Institutional Developments

- The UUA's Ambassador corps is functioning extremely well.
- The UUA's "Milestones for Right Relationship" in our historic and newly developing international relationships is in place.
- Continued working collaboratively with UUA departments, particularly the A&W staff group on internationally related projects.

HDS Intern

- Erik Resly, the IRO's intern from HDS, is doing a spectacular job.

Unitarian Universalist Holdeen India Program (UUHIP)

Kathy Sreedhar, Director

Jennifer Wright, Administrator

Sreedhar visited over 20 Holdeen partners in India in January and February. All reported that the global financial crisis affects economic conditions in India and has an impact on the poorest and most marginalized sectors. Specifically, there is demonstrated increase in starvation deaths among the poor, an increase in unemployment, and an increase in migration, including migration from the cities back to the poor villages.

A recently released documentary film entitled *The Forgotten Woman* by Dilip Mehta, describes the status of widows in India. It contrasts the lives of the widows that are forced to go to ashrams in Vrindavan to beg and live and die in poverty with those that fight for land rights and government entitlements through the organizational assistance of Holdeen partner Ekal Nari Shakti Sanghatan (Association of Strong Women Alone). Two other Holdeen partners that promote women's rights are highlighted in the film.

Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) was featured in a half-page article in the New York Times, March 7, 2009.

http://www.nytimes.com/2009/03/07/world/asia/07bhatt.html?_r=1

Washington Office for Advocacy and Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness

Adam Gerhardstein, Acting Director
Kat Liu, Assistant Director
Orelia Busch, Legislative Assistant for
Women's Issues, UU Women's Federation
Clara Barton Internship
Lisa Swanson, Legislative Assistant for
Economic and Racial Justice

Alex Winnett, Program Associate for
Peacemaking, Mary Bonner Memorial Intern
Lesley Murdock, Office Manager

Susan Leslie, Director – Congregational
Advocacy and Witness
Audra Friend, Program Associate –
Congregational Advocacy and Witness

We have three priorities for this year:

1. Streamlining our Advocacy and Organizing Work

- Over the first two months of the Obama administration we have already made considerable progress on our 14 Legislative Objectives for the 111th Congress (see <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice/119150.shtml>.) One of his first acts as president was to rescind the Global Gag Rule, freeing up funding for international organizations that provide reproductive health services. The \$787 billion Economic Recovery and Reinvestment Act invests \$500 million in Green Jobs and \$375 million will be spent to strengthen levees along the Mississippi River and one million more to support volunteer efforts. President Obama has also announced a firm timeline for troop withdrawal from Iraq and has made overtures to engage diplomatically with Iran. The department of justice and homeland security responded to activism, of which we played a crucial role, by rewriting the 287(g) immigration enforcement program. In addition President Obama has indicated steadfast support of a carbon cap and trade system and employment non-discrimination. In a short two months we have accomplished or made progress on 6 of our 14 Legislative Objectives for 2009-2010.
- To support our objectives, we have carried out three more *Actions of the Month* on Living Wage, BGLT Equality, and Comprehensive Sex-ed (More info below).
- Another change we have seen over the past three months is that the Obama Administration has made room for us at the table. We have met with members of the Administration multiple times and they have invited our presence at meetings, briefings, and bill signings. The White House has also solicited our input on a variety of issues.

2. Strengthening our Congregations

- **Social Justice Empowerment:** The winter workshops at Cedar Lane in Bethesda, MD and at the UU Congregation in Boise ID were very well attended (100 and 90 people respectively) and well received with both congregations developing more accountable and vibrant social justice programs. We are holding an SJE pilot cluster skill-building workshop for social justice leaders and ministers of the North Texas Association of UU Societies (NTAUUS) at the Horizon UU Church in Carrollton, TX on April 11th. We plan on promoting this cluster skill-building model to districts and clusters in the coming year. Congregational workshops scheduled for the fall include UU Church of Minnetonka, Wayzata, MN and Peoples Church UU, Cedar Rapids, IA. We are in process with congregations in Santa Cruz, CA; Santa Barbara, CA, and Belmont, MA.
- **CBCO-News** was launched in January to provide news, resources, information and best practices about congregation-based community organizing.
- **SRI-News**, which has been dormant for a while, was relaunched in February.
- **Social Justice Resources** web pages have been redesigned and updated with new resources for easier use by congregations. See www.uua.org/socialjustice/resources.

3. Supporting the UUA's Four Public Witness Priorities

Economic and Racial Justice

- **Immigration:** In February, the Interfaith Immigration Coalition, of which the Washington Office is a member, presented their transition document with 450 religious signatories in a press conference on Capitol Hill in which the office arranged for Rev. John T. Crestwell to be a speaker along with Rev. Jim Wallis, Rabbi David Saperstein, Bishop Carcaño, Rep. Gutierrez, Rep. Honda, and others. The press conference kicked off a week and a half of 150 grass roots prayer vigils and actions across the nation in which UUs participated heavily (no exact data). The Washington Office became heavily involved in coordinating responses in Phoenix, Arizona, to the Maricopa County Sheriff Joe Arpaio's racial profiling and inhumane treatment of immigrants. Washington staff sent a letter to Napolitano urging that the 287(g) agreement which enabled Arpaio's profiling be rescinded and collected the signatures of 60 organizations in support. Shortly after a Feb. 28 rally in Phoenix in which 48 UUs participated, the federal government announced a rewrite of the 287(g) agreements as well as a Department of Justice investigation into Sheriff Arpaio's actions. Staff is continuing to build momentum by communicating with UUs elsewhere in country working against 287(g)s, (VA, NJ, etc). Staff plans to work with Immigration Equality to highlight binational same-sex couples in the near future and a bill that would permit same-sex sponsorship for immigration. Child Citizen Protection Act has been reintroduced, and staff promoted a New Jersey call-in day in which UUs participated which resulted in a NJ representative co-sponsoring the bill. The immigration e-update membership has grown by forty members to reach a total of 345 since the last board report, and action rates on the list are above average. Plans are underway for the May Action of the Month which will center around the theme of learning everything possible about immigration in a month.

At General Assembly there will be a major program on *Welcoming Our Neighbors: The Path to Immigration Reform* featuring Kim Bobo, Executive Director, Interfaith Worker Justice, Rev. Dr. Pablo Ramos, Canon for Latino Ministries for the Episcopal Diocese of Utah, and Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, UU Congregation of Phoenix where they will receive the *Congregational Social Justice Bennett Award*.

The Public Witness event this year will be on *Standing on the Side of Love with Immigrant Families* and will be an interfaith event calling for just immigration reform and a moratorium on raids and deportations.

- **Gulf Coast:** The Washington Office has joined a coalition supporting HR 4048, the Gulf Coast Civic Works Act. Three successful Gulf Coast Updates including information from UUA, UUSC, GNOUU, and the Rebirth Center have gone out and are set to continue on a bimonthly schedule. The Gulf Coast listserv has grown to from 189 members to 207.
- **Living Wage:** The UUA and UUSC are members of the Let Justice Roll Living Wage coalition. The January Action of the Month featured resources from all three organizations and asked congregations to participate in the \$10 in 2010 Living Wage Sundays in January. Let Justice Roll reports that faith leaders (ministers, social justice chairs, board presidents) from 98 congregations signed-on to the Faith Leaders Letter to Congress and a total of almost 500 signatures were collected from that Letter and the General Public Letter to Congress which included a space for congregational affiliation. These signatories have been forwarded to UUSC for a UU Living Wage Newsletter. The UU Church of Nashua NH held a flagship event with UUA President William Sinkford giving a Living Wage sermon. The congregation collected \$900 for Let Justice Roll. Reports were received from 20 congregations on the services and activities they held and are posted at www.uua.org/congregationallife/justicediversity/128155.shtml.

Gender and Sexual Justice

- **BGLT:** Our Action of the Month for February on BGLT Equality brought in six UU guest bloggers to write about their work and perspectives on marriage equality on the Advocacy and Witness staff blog, Inspired Faith, Effective Action. These included four ministers and one youth. The blog received 1,706 hits and 2,783 page views in February, the highest numbers in the past year. The office engaged in a multifaceted strategy using uua.org, the blog, and facebook to encourage people to start conversations about and become involved in the struggle for marriage equality. The office is working with the Human Rights Campaign and the National Center for Transgender Equality on two lobby days for clergy that are coming up at the end of April and the beginning of May. Staff has been visiting members of congress identified by coalition partners as possible supporters of the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Act and following up with congregations in those districts about opportunities for letter-writing and lobby visits.
- **Sex-ed:** Final preparations for the fifth annual Sexuality Education Advocacy Training, March 21-24, are underway. The conference will be attended by 37 participants from UU, UCC and Reform Jewish communities nationwide. Among the participants, 23 are Unitarian Universalist and 7 are youth. The March Action of the Month encourages individuals and congregations to call their Members of Congress in support of funding comprehensive sexuality education. Resources were provided on the website, and the call-in days coincide with lobby visits by SEAT participants. Staff has also been attending lobby visits to new pro-choice members of congress with our coalition partners for reproductive health and justice.

International Justice and Peacemaking:

- **Peacemaking:** In January, staff participated in *Heeding God's Call: A Gathering on Peacemaking* in Philadelphia, PA. Staff also coordinated a very successful interfaith teach-in for peace with Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership for MLK Day celebration and Inauguration at a packed All Souls Church, Unitarian. Speakers included President Sinkford and Rev. Robert Hardies of All Souls among other prominent civil rights and anti-war leaders. Staff developed, wrote and piloted a four week curriculum on congregational conflict transformation to be distributed this spring. Staff practiced Get Out The Vote for the most successful CSAI congregational polling for a Statement of Conscience. Results are below.

Total Yes: 437

Total No: 15

Total % of congregations Voting: 40%

Total Abstain: 369

Total Participation: 821

Total % of congregations participating- 79%

Quorum Needed to Pass the CSAI (25% of UUA) was met with a solid majority voting for the measure, less than half abstaining and a small minority voting against it.

Congregations who had participated in the CSAI process (360 congregations that we know of) were more likely to vote for the SOC rough draft than vote against it or abstain.

- **Iran:** Campaign for a New American Policy on Iran developed and presented a transition document to the new administration, which is following the recommendations and pursuing a diplomatic relationship.
- **Iraq:** The Washington Office responded to the economic stimulus package legislation by comparing its components (education, health care, green energy) to military contracts from 2008. A document was formed and sent to all Members of Congress. When Obama announced his timeline for withdrawal, the office developed talking points for

UUs marking the sixth anniversary of the war (March 19th), during which we are also encouraging congregations to participate in the Iraq Memorial to Life project.

- **Darfur:** Staff is currently promoting the Save Darfur postcards to Obama campaign. Hundreds of postcards have been distributed to congregations and hundreds more have been filled out on-line. Staff is also responding on our blog to developments within Darfur, including the arrest warrant issued by the ICC against President al-Bashir for crimes against humanity.

Environmental Justice

- **Green Jobs:** The recently passed Recovery and Reinvestment Act invests \$500 million in the 2007 Green Jobs Act (an increase of 400% of the original allocation) as well as \$8.2 billion in related programs. Van Jones, founder of Green for All with whom the UUA has worked in partnership, was recently appointed as “Special Advisor for Green Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation” to oversee the distribution of these funds.
- **Climate Change:** It is expected that Rep. Waxman, now Chair of the House Committee on Energy and Commerce, along with Rep. Markey, will introduce a climate change bill some time later this year, possibly by Memorial Day 2009. Waxman and Markey were co-author of a Climate Change Principles Letter last year that A&W and the UU State Advocacy Networks supported with great success (see previous board report). In anticipation of the pending legislation, we are mobilizing UUs (as part of April’s Action of the Month) to urge their representatives to support Waxman/Markey’s bill.
- **UUA/UUSC/UUMFE Partnership:** The UU Environmental Justice working group continues, with representatives from the UUA (Kat Liu), UUSC (Patricia Jones), and UUMFE (Claudia Kern). We are collaborating on April’s Action of the Month, which will focus on Environmental Justice (EJ), will be presenting a workshop together on EJ at General Assembly, and passing out action badges from our respective GA booths for further outreach/education on EJ.

Spring 2009 Travel Schedules

Rev. Meg A. Riley Director, Advocacy and Witness Programs

April 1-3	Boston, MA	Leadership Council, Public Witness meeting, State advocacy network meeting
April 5-6	San Francisco, CA	Preach
April 13-17	Washington DC	Meetings, UUAWO, etc.
April 25	St. Paul, MN	Facilitate adoptive parents group, APIC conference
April 30- May 2	New Jersey	Metro NY District meeting Keynote and UUMA meeting
May 5-7	Boston, MA	Leadership Council, Public Witness meetings
May 20-28	Washington DC	Meetings, UUAWO, etc.
June 2-3	Boston, MA	Leadership Council, Public Witness meetings
June 7-12	Washington DC	Meetings, Faith in Public Life, UUAWO, etc.
June 24-28	Salt Lake City, UT	General Assembly

Washington Office for Advocacy

Adam Gerhardstein, Acting Director
Kat Liu, Assistant Director
Orelia Busch, Lisa Swanson, and Alex Winnett

April

1-3	Boston, MA	PW Meeting (Adam and Orelia)
11-12	Pittsburgh, PA	Inspired Faith, Effective Action Training (Alex, Lisa)
23-25	Boston, MA	Youth Social Justice Consultation (Adam)

May

June

24-29	Salt Lake City, UT	GA (Alex, Rob, Kat, Orelia)
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Kathy Sreedhar, Director – UUHIP

Rev. Eric Cherry, Director – UUA Office of International Resources

March

28	Cleveland, OH	CMD AGM
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April

25	Albany, NY	SLD AGM
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May

1-2	Jersey City, NY	MetroNYD AGM
1-3	Mesa, AZ	PSWD AGM

Susan Leslie, Director – Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness

April

10-11	Carrollton, TX	Social Justice Empowerment Skill-Building Cluster Workshop for North Texas Association of UU Societies (NTAUUS) at the Horizon UU Church
2-3	Boston, MA	Planning Meeting for UU State Advocacy Networks
24-25	Boston, MA	Gathering of UU State Advocacy Networks & Legislative Ministries, UUSC & UUA Staff

June

3-4	Washington, DC	Inter-religious Organizing Initiative Reformed Jewish Action Center Meet with Washington Office Staff
23-28	Salt Lake City, UT	General Assembly