

**Report to UUA Board of Trustees
from Commission on Social Witness
Chair: Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
December 2007**

Our UUA Commission on Social Witness is the elected and appointed body that facilitates our congregationally driven social witness process, which includes the screening, editing, drafting, and amendment editing of proposed Congregational Study/Action Issues (CSAIs), Statements of Conscience, and Actions of Immediate Witness. We are five in number—three of us elected by GA delegates, two of us appointed by our UUA Board of Trustees. Working closely with our UUA staff liaison, Susan Leslie, we seek to honor the readiness of our congregations to propose, study, act, reflect, comment, engage, amend, and vote on issues of conscience.

At GA 2006, delegates adopted bylaws for a social witness process that extends the lifespan of a Congregational Study/Action from two to four years, permits CSAIs to be proposed every other year rather than every year, and requires a 25% quorum of certified congregations to participate in every Congregational Poll for the process to move ahead. For Actions of Immediate Witness (AIWs) the process remains the same.

The intention of this bylaw change is paying off through greater depth of study and action in the current Peacemaking CSAI. The Peacemaking CSAI Core Team is a hybrid of UUA staff, a CSW point person, and multiple others who are advancing this issue with our congregations. Over 100 congregations are engaged in at least one of the multiple working groups through this core team. As we consider the drafting process for a Statement of Conscience, these congregations are a source of seasoned expertise, along with the longstanding input channel provided through on-line comment forms. The CSW continues to be the primary arbiter of this drafting process. The Core Team has formed multiple working groups on various facets of Peacemaking, including the production of a DVD (with generous grant funds) that will assist congregations in their ongoing work. To learn more, visit www.uua.org/csai.

Imminent in the social witness process is the February 1, 2008 deadline for the Congregational Poll, which holds two proposed CSAIs—one on Ethical Eating: Food and Environmental Justice and the other on Nuclear Disarmament. At our October 2007 meeting, the CSW screened both against the criteria for valid CSAIs—fit, grounding, and opportunity as well as non-duplication of previously adopted Statements of Conscience. We conferred with the designated contacts of the proposing congregations to ensure that we were in sync with their intentions in the gently edited proposal. As of November 15, these proposed CSAIs “went live” with the opening of the Congregational Poll, the first poll for which the deadline is February 1, intentionally designed to coincide with the deadline for the congregational certification form. We made available on-line and through congregational mailings a Guide to Voting in the Congregational Poll and a Summary of the Process. The UUA Information Technology staff was immensely helpful in working closely with us to ensure an accessible format and clear language.

Toward attainment of the 25% requisite quorum, we have encouraged congregational participation through letters and e-mails to district leaders and through the December UUA mailing, UU World ads, congregations engaged in the current Peacemaking CSAI, SAC postings, the UUMA newsletter and chat line, liaisons with YRUU and C*UUYAN, and informal communication throughout our UU universe.

GA is a node in the ongoing work of social witness as facilitated by our Commission on Social Witness. While we oversee the crafting of statements, to make those statements live, we rely on the commitment to justice embodied in our faith and its practitioners. We rely on our congregational and district leaders, the leaders of our Association, each other, our youth and young adult leaders, and upon each and all of us who count ourselves UU family. To do so, we use that word that invokes a behavior sometimes foreign to us. We witness. We bear witness. We bear social witness. And we keep on and keep on, because the issues that we choose to address are commonly lifelong issues that tap the deepest springs of our faith. Our byword is collaboration at all levels of our Association.

Since GA 2007, the CSW has met twice—once in July via phone conference, and October 11-14 in Boston. We will meet again February 6-10 in Boston. The next meeting will be at GA. Minutes are available at www.uua.org/csw. Links to our work are available at www.uua.org/socialjustice.

Currently we are one commissioner short of five. Catherine Blue, who served splendidly as a commissioner, resigned recently due to employment obligations. The Committee on Committees has posted a notice of a person to fill the duration of her term (through June, 2009). The appointee would be eligible for re-appointment to two more four-year terms.

What is our message to our UUA Board of Trustees? Wherever you go, please get the word out that ours is a democracy of faith and practice. It only works if we work it. Ours is a faith of conscience. It only holds credibility as we engage in acts of conscience. Ours is a promise to help heal a hurting world. We can only be faithful if we keep our promise to do exactly that.

With abundant thanks for the work of our UUA Board of Trustees; our President, Rev. Bill Sinkford; our Moderator, Gini Courter; our UUA staff in the Department of Advocacy and Witness, including our staff liaison, Susan Leslie; all of our UUA staff; the many dedicated volunteers with whom we partner; and my co-commissioners: Dr. John Hooper, Rev. Dr. Paul Johnson, and Dr. David May, and for the fine service of Catherine Blue.

Respectfully submitted,
Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull
Chair, Commission on Social Witness
December 16, 2007