

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations



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ADVOCACY AND WITNESS STAFF GROUP

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

The Rev. Meg Riley, Director

September 2007

Happy autumn!

Amazingly, we have five new staff people in place since the last board meeting (three new Legislative Aides in the DC office; two new staff in the International Resources office), with yet another in the hopper to be hired—our office manager, Parva Fattahi, is moving on to law school.

I'm not Dionne Warwick, but I don't think it takes a psychic to see that it will be an exciting, eventful year in the realm of Advocacy and Witness.

Our Washington Staff (Legislative Aides, AKA interns) now have their portfolios aligned with the key areas in our public witness strategic plan: 1) Family Matters; 2) Racial and Economic Justice; 3) International Crises. See Rob Keithan's report for more details about these portfolios.

Rev. Eric Cherry has gracefully put on the new mantle of "International Resources Director," and tells you in his report how he is working to enact the board's vision statement on international engagement. I am especially excited that one of his tasks will be to introduce UU congregations to the outstanding work of the Holdeen India Program, our best kept social justice secret!

Susan Leslie shares in her report the many ways in which our congregations are becoming more effectively engaged in their social justice work, and the resources her office is providing to them.

As I write this, I'm on the brink of heading for Jena, Louisiana, where all of our Louisiana clergy and many lay UUs will be gathered to witness and protest the sentencing of "the Jena Six" (see www.uuworld.org for story). It is a deep privilege, once again, to have my work send me exactly where my spirit calls me to be.

Moderator Gini Courter was on hand on the Gulf Coast to witness the second anniversary of Hurricane Katrina. We are finished with dispersing the Gulf Coast Relief funds, though much work remains unfinished in both our congregations and the community at large. Our volunteer program, carried out in collaboration with the UUSC, continues to grow stronger.

We are in fruitful conversations with Ministry for the Earth about how to support their work, especially the Green Sanctuary program, in the future.

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
Submitted by: Eric Cherry, Director
UUA Office of International Relations
September 2007

It was a pleasure to begin full-time work as the Director of International Resources for the UUA on August 20th. And, I'm pleased to report that a new Administrative Assistant for the office, Nicole McConvery, was hired in late August and began work on September 3rd.

- Much of the work in the office over the past 6 weeks has been envisioning, designing and planning, i.e.:
 - Planning for and beginning the implementation of an effective presence for the International Resource Office on uua.org.
 - Planning the design of a workshop that will serve as a “faithful invitation” to congregations to enter into the transformative work of international engagement. This workshop will be adaptable to a variety of contexts, and will have various multimedia elements which may be accessible over the internet.
 - Planning for monthly “Skypecast” teleconferences to begin in October. These will be panel discussions on international resources related topics like “the theology of partnership” or “Religious Education for International Engagement”, or “Best practices in collaborating with international service organizations”.
 - Planning for organizing the data from last year’s International Office survey of congregational international engagement into a searchable and sortable database. This database will help the office to consult with internationally engaged congregations who are prepared to share expertise they have gained with others, and to inform the international office of the resources they need the UUA to provide. It will also be the key source of information for highlighting stories of international engagement by congregations on uua.org.
 - Attending to relationships with historic U*U partners of the UUA, including the UK Unitarians, the Transylvanian Unitarians, the Philippine UU’s, and the Khasi Unitarians.
 - Attending to relationships with international U*U and interfaith organizations, including:
 - UUPCC, who are in the process of creating a Memo of Understanding with the UUA.
 - WCRP-USA, whose new, interim, executive director and I have a conference call scheduled this month to discuss opportunities for congregational engagement
 - ICUU, which will hold its biennial Council Meeting in early November, and with whom new concerns have recently been raised regarding the transparency and effectiveness of its leadership development.
 - IARF, which continues to mull over its future.
 - And the beginning of collaboration conversations with other U*U organizations, including the Holdeen India Program.
 - Planning for the inaugural meeting of the UUA’s International Advisory Council on September 27th. The members of the IAC are Barbara Beach, Rev. John Buehrens (chair), Rev. Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rev. Abhi Janamanchi, Mark McPeak, Rev. Fred Muir,

and Kathy Sreedhar. The IAC will discuss key issues including sustaining and/or creating “right relationship” with both historic and emerging U*U congregations/judicatories around the world, and the establishment of an “Ambassador Corps”.

- Considering topics/workshops for GA08 that will assist congregations in their international engagement.
- A few “nitty-gritty” accomplishments include:
 - Providing resources for a congregational forum on international U*Uism
 - Assisting a UU planning to travel to the Khasi Hills with history/language resources and preliminary material about church-to-church partnerships.
 - Beginning to clarify procedures for UU congregational travel to Cuba with John Hickey at UU Urban Ministry.
 - Preparing recommendations for adjustments to the office’s FY08 budget.
- Along the way, I’ve been seeking out opportunities to meet with various UUA departments (the Washington Office, Public Information, Finance, MPL, CLF, UUFP, and OEC, etc.) to gain a clearer sense of areas of collaboration.

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
Submitted by: Kathy Sreedhar, Director
UU Holdeen India Program
September 2007

Kathy Sreedhar will be in India during October-November and again in January-March to visit Holdeen partners, donors, journalists and other colleagues. John Sommer, UUHIP Board Chair, will accompany Kathy on her February trip.

Several UUHIP partners will visit the U.S. in the coming months:

- Reema Nanavaty, SEWA, will speak at the Clinton Initiative 2007 Annual Meeting in New York City, September 26-28.
- Arbind Singh, National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI), has been selected as an Eisenhower Fellow, and will spend six weeks in the U.S.
- Vivek Pandit, Vidhayak Sansad will visit Co-Ministers Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs in Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN in November to speak at Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul and to continue theological discussions begun in India. He will also speak at UU Church of Arlington, VA where UU Holdeen Board member Rev. Michael McGee is Minister. At both places Vivek will meet with people who may help his biodiesel programs.
- Nafisa Barot, Utthan will bring the Ahmedabad Theatre Group from Gujarat to perform a play about peace in cities in the U.S.

Several UUHIP partners and colleagues have received recognition and awards for their work:

- P. Sainath, UUHIP colleague and India's leading investigative journalist, who has often written about Holdeen partners and issues, won the 2007 Ramon Magsaysay Award, widely regarded as Asia's equivalent of the Nobel prize.
- Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA (Self Employed Women's Association) has been selected to be a member of the newly created "Elders Group", joining other Nobel peace laureates, politicians, and development specialists to form a "council of elders" dedicated to fostering peace and resolving global crises. Chaired by Archbishop Desmond Tutu, other members include Nelson Mandela, Jimmy Carter, and Kofi Annan.
- Paromita Goswami, Elgar Pratishtan was featured in the documentary "Flying: Confessions of a Free Woman," a dialogue among women from many countries about universal concerns across race, class and nationality.

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

Submitted by: Rob Keithan, Director

Kat Liu: Assistant Director

Lisa Swanson, Legislative Assistant for Economic and Racial Justice

Adam Gerhardstein, Legislative Assistant for International Issues

Grace Garner, Legislative Assistant for Women's Issues, UU Women's Federation Clara Barton Internship

Washington Office for Advocacy

September 2007

Highlights from the Washington Office:

- In mid-August, the office went through the bittersweet process of staff transitions:
 - Meredith Schonfeld-Hicks finished her two years as Legislative Assistant for Women's Issues, UU Women's Federation Clara Barton Internship, and is now working as Director of State Organizing Strategies at our partner organization Advocates for Youth. She is succeeded here at the UUA by **Grace Garner**. Grace is a longtime UU and has held many positions during her time in YRUU. She most recently ended a two-year term with the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of California. She graduated from Pitzer College in May with a B.A. in Political Studies and Gender/Feminist Studies.
 - Elizabeth Bukey finished her two years as Legislative Assistant for Civil Rights and Religious Liberty. In response to the UUA public witness team's shift in priorities, the issue portfolio for this position is now Economic and Racial Justice, a job filled by **Lisa Swanson**. Lisa grew up in Northeast Tennessee and became a UU at age 14. She continued to be involved in UU activities at the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, where she graduated in 2006 with a degree in Comparative Literature. After graduation, Lisa served an Americorps year as the Hispanic Services Coordinator at an inter-faith social service organization.
- The transition from the Washington Office's old website—which was maintained independently of the UUA website—to the new, fully integrated UUA.org site is nearly complete! The new site, found at <http://www.uua.org/socialjustice>, will present the resources and work of the Washington Office, integrated with the rest of the UUA's justice work.

- A major piece of the website transition has been the long-overdue process of revising how UUA Social Justice Statements are categorized and presented, with the goal of making them more accessible. The process of creating Public Policy Statements was on hold during this work, but is once again moving forward.

Economic and Racial Justice: With a new staffperson in a new portfolio, the office has been doing more research and planning in this area than advocacy. Staff are working to create or renew relationships on issues including Gulf Coast advocacy, criminal justice, and voting rights—all key areas where the effects of racism are most readily identified and addressed. The office has continued to advocate for fair and just immigration policies through coalition work and grassroots advocacy.

International Issues: At GA 2007, the Washington Office conducted workshops with the UUSC on Darfur, with the UU Global AIDS Coalition on HIV/AIDS, and with Earth Day Network on Global Warming. Additionally, over 1000 postcards in support of the PATHWAY Act (HR 1713) were distributed. Since GA over 750 of those postcards have been collected and many have been delivered during three coalition lobby days over the summer. This campaign took a major stride forward when a provision was included in the Foreign Operations Appropriations bill (which has passed both houses of Congress) allowing the president to waive the abstinence earmark in the distribution of our HIV/AIDS prevention funding. The campaign will continue until the earmark is permanently erased. The Office also launched its first environmental on-line action campaign in support of Carbon-Emission-Reduction legislation. Continuing advocacy on the Iraq war, in September the UUA released a revised version of the Moral Balance Sheet with a letter to every member of Congress.

Peacemaking: As this topic is new for the Washington Office, much time has been spent on negotiating the roles of the staff. At General Assembly 2007, staff coordinated several workshops on UU peacemaking including a highly successful discussion between UU theologians William Schulz and Sharon Welch. Staff also participated in the filming of a short documentary on contemporary peace theory in the UU church. Since General Assembly, staff has worked closely with UU peace activists on local and national levels. Alongside the Commission on Social Witness, staff has created a comprehensive database locating key congregations in the UUA along with local activists/pointpeople at each location. This is crucial due to the new Statement of Conscience process which requires a quorum of 25% of all UUA congregations. Staff has also facilitated UU participation in the Interfaith Fast Day for Peace (<http://www.interfaithfast.org>). Utilizing both the aforementioned database and several social networking sites on the Internet, grassroots efforts have been extremely effective. Staff has also begun a project of collecting best practices on UU and American Muslim interfaith dialog. Based on a similar successful program created by the American Mennonite Council, this project seeks to support the creation of fulfilling and accountable relationships between UUs and Muslims.

Women's Issues: These have been busy months, as both the Employment Non-Discrimination Act and Hate Crimes Prevention bills are at pivotal points in Congress. The office is devoting substantial resources to ENDA, with the sincere hope that after 13 years of strong UU support it might very well become law before the end of the 2007 Congressional session. The office has been working closely with the Human Rights Campaign and other religious and secular partners to generate grassroots advocacy. Planning for the 2008 Sexuality Education and Advocacy

Training (SEAT) has begun, with the exciting news that Spiritual Youth for Reproductive Freedom, a program of the Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice, has signed on as partners (the others are Advocates for Youth and the United Church of Christ). September and October will also be critical months for ensuring that positive steps taken in the arena of funding for sexuality education are signed into law.

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees

Submitted by: Susan Leslie

Director for the Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness

September 2007

Much was accomplished at this last General Assembly to forward the UUA's public witness priorities that our office organized and that we are building on this fall. This report summarizes those gains and activities and plans for the coming year.

A workshop on immigrant rights that featured leaders from Interfaith Worker Justice (Exec. Director Kim Bobo and national organizer Kristin Kumpf) along with board member Jose Ballester from First Church Houston and social justice lay leader Jackie Statman of San Diego was held in a large packed ballroom (300 to 400). Dozens signed up for action alerts on this issue and an 'off the grid' organizing meeting was held with 15 UU ministers and continental lay leaders from around the country to network on ways for UUs to work for immigration reform, immigrant rights, and support the New Sanctuary Movement. This group has agreed to stay connected and work in an advisory capacity with the Office of Congregational Advocacy & Witness. The Action of Immediate Witness to stop deportations and the ICE raids was organized by this group and they organized for UUs to attend the interfaith protest that Bill Sinkford spoke to in Portland in front of ICE headquarters.

Our office is receiving daily inquiries about UU participation in the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM) especially since the UU World ran a feature about it. Movement. We have received several reports from congregational leaders that they are holding congregational forums and some votes this fall. I will be attending a national interfaith gathering about the NSM that will include positioning it to broadly include education and witness. The arrest of Elvira Arellano in August, and the continued ICE raids, has had a chilling effect on families willing to fight deportation. We continue to work with Interfaith Worker Justice on this initiative who are staffing the NSM. We will also work closely with the Washington Office on immigration reform legislation.

Over 600 UUs joined interfaith, national, and community activists at GA for a *Witness for Earth Community*. We plan to build on that energy in this coming year to increase UU advocacy efforts to halt global warming and participate in the Green Sanctuary program.

Hundreds of UUs attended Bill Sinkford's GA session on Truth & Reconciliation and came to hear Beacon author Sherilyn Iffil on the legacy of lynching and the need for reconciliation and reparations. The responsive resolution for Truth, Repair, and Reconciliation is a heartening indication of our faith community's readiness to move our anti-racism initiative forward. In fact, an indication of this trend is the mobilization of UUs in the SW and nationally for *Justice for the*

Jena 6. Paula Cole Jones and I co-led a session on Sept. 13 with the Investment and Socially Responsible Investing Committee on how community investing and shareholder and corporate advocacy connect to reparations and reconciliation.

We are partnering again with the UUSC, Interfaith Worker Justice, and others in the *Let Justice Roll Living Wage* campaign. After the successful passage of an increase in the federal minimum wage that was implemented in July, we have congressional sponsors for another increase to be introduced to congress this fall (Kennedy-MA & Miller-CA). And UUs are getting organizing in several states for legislative and ballot campaigns during the next electoral season (they include GA, KS, OH, TN & OK).

In addition to organizing on key issues, of which there are many—and organizing for peace, gulf coast recovery, as well as bgl rights continue to be priorities--our office is working to build congregational and collaborative capacity for doing justice:

The UU Ministers Council on Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO) met at GA. They are offering a workshop on CBCO that is this year's featured UUMA CENTER Chapter program to encourage UU ministers to explore CBCO that our office is managing. And nationally, the UUA will be sending a team to a networking/training meeting on CBCO in December at the American Baptist College that will include interfaith teams of heads of communion, national staff, national denominational leaders, network leaders, and funders.

Rob Keithan and I met with leaders of UU State Advocacy Networks in August to look at where our issues intersect and how we can work in partnership.

My office will be hosting a monthly conference call for UU social justice organizations to share learnings, identify intersections (i.e. the corporate advocacy component of any issue, or the economic and environmental aspects related to global warming etc.) and to create a UU social justice calendar.

I am now serving as staff liaison to the Commission on Social Witness and will work with them to learn more about congregational activities on peacemaking and new proposals that will come in Oct. 1.

A new cluster model Social Justice Empowerment workshop will be held in Durham NC with six congregations the first weekend in March. We have also scheduled workshops for our congregations in San Francisco and San Mateo this fall and for Second Unitarian in Omaha in February. We have received six other applications to date and are negotiating dates for the coming year.

The 2007-2008 promises to be a dynamic year and we are looking forward to the role we can play in networking, energizing, and mobilizing UUs to be a religious voice for justice.

**Rev. Meg Riley, Director
Advocacy and Witness Programs
Fall 2007 Travel Schedule**

September 5-7	Budget and Leadership Council meetings Boston MA
September 17-18	Advocacy Staff Group, Leadership Council meetings Boston, MA
September 27	Keynote, Reproductive Choice National Gathering Minneapolis, MN
September 28	International Advisory Group Boston, MA
October 1-4	Series of meetings, including Leadership Council and UUSC board meeting Boston, MA
October 9-11	Prairie Star District UUMA Retreat On the Minnesota Prairie
October 27	Workshop leader, UU New England Conference Worcester, MA
Oct 28-Nov 6	ICUU Meeting Uberwesel, Germany
November 7	Leadership Council Boston, MA
November 9	Host Vivek Pandit, Holdeen Partner Twin Cities, MN
Dec 3 – Jan 3	Sabbatical, Minneapolis, MN

**Eric Cherry, Director
UUA Office of International Relations
Fall 2007 Travel Schedule**

September 28	International Advisory Council, Boston
October 21	Preaching, First Parish Bedford, MA
October 30 – Nov 7	ICUU Council Meeting, Oberwesel, Germany

**Kathy Sreedhar, Director
UU Holdeen India Program
Fall Winter Travel Schedule**

September 24 – 28	Boston, UUA International Advisory Council; meetings with UUSC
Oct. 7 – Nov. 7	India
Late January – Mid-March	India

**Rob Keithan, Director, Kat Liu, Assistant Director, Lisa Swanson, Adam Gerhardstein,
Alex Winnett, and Grace Garner
Fall 2007 Travel Schedule**

September 17-20	Boston, MA – Public Witness meeting, LA orientation (Rob, Adam, Alex, Lisa, Grace)
October 2	Bethesda, MD – A&W strategic planning meeting (every one)
October 6-13	New Orleans, LA – community service (Lisa)

**Susan Leslie, Director
Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness
Fall 2007 Travel Schedule**

Sept. 13	Committee on Socially Responsible Investing & Investment Committee Boston MA
Sept. 19-20	Let Justice Roll Executive Committee Meeting Washington, DC
Sept. 24-25	Interfaith Worker Justice Board Meeting Chicago IL
Oct. 2	Advocacy & Witness Staff Retreat Cedar Lane UU Church, Bethesda MD
Oct. 14	Association Sunday First Parish, Concord MA
Oct. 24	Interfaith Organizing Initiative (IOI) on Congregation-Based Community Organizing ELCA Building, Chicago IL

Nov 13 – 15	New Sanctuary Movement National Meeting tbd - either Washington, DC or Los Angeles, CA
Dec. 10-11	Interfaith Worker Justice Board Meeting Chicago, IL
Dec. 12-13	IOI CBCO Training/Network Meeting for Interfaith Leaders American Baptist College, Nashville TN