



## **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

www.uua.org

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

**Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**

**Reverend Meg Riley—Director, Advocacy and Witness Programs**

**March 2008**

I remember those sales called, “March Madness!” because I feel as if Advocacy and Witness is having its own kind of March Madness this year.

As you’ll read in the ensuing pages, the Washington Office is physically torn up right now, as its staff prepares for the move that will have occurred by the time you meet in April. I write this from Japan, where I have just represented Bill Sinkford at a Council meeting of the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). As I write it, more than twenty youth and advisors are in Washington, DC for the annual Sex Education Advocacy Training. I haven’t yet connected with Kathy Sreedhar since her latest, highly successful trip to India. Action!

I think, personally, that our focus and mission around international work has never been clearer. Eric Cherry’s report lists many of the specific program initiatives of the International Resource Office, but no list can document how the Board’s vision/ mission work has transformed what we do and how we do it. My trip to IARF was to inform them of the shift, discussed with you at last June’s meeting, to reduce our funding to this historic organization. My conversations there lead me to believe that the path ahead is to revitalize our congregations’ commitment to this arena of work, rebuilding commitment to it from the ground up.

The international work is becoming much more woven together with the domestic advocacy and witness work, a change I have long envisioned. It’s a pleasure indeed to work with such a strong, focused, team.

Rob Keithan’s year-long internship with First Church Portland (Oregon) next year, elevates our former Legislative Assistant Adam Gerhardstein to Acting Director in DC. I am confident that Adam will do this very well. I intend to be in DC a great deal more myself next year, and look forward to getting my hands back into that work in a different political climate from the one I left four years ago!

Susan Leslie has taken the lead on our Public Witness work at General Assembly. We hope to see you at the (uncontested) picnic to celebrate all families—whatever the sexual orientation, national origin, or immigration status of its members.

**UU Holdeen India Program  
Report to the UUA Board of Trustees  
Kathy Sreedhar, Director**

Kathy Sreedhar and UUHIP Advisory Board Chair John Sommer visited 20 Holdeen partners and several exciting new groups in India in January, February and March. John writes on the “ever-increasing impact of these groups....that exceeded my highest expectations, particularly the increased level of confidence, sophistication and accomplishments not only of the leaders but of the groups of dalits, tribals and women who have been emboldened, through Holdeen encouragement and resources, to fight for their legitimate rights.” John will write a new book about UUHIP’s work and partners that will be published by Sage this year.

The UUA/UUSC/UUHIP and UU congregations’ collaboration and support continues to produce results three years after the tsunami. UUHIP partners not only rebuilt their lives and livelihoods, but also created new organizations and programs. Peoples Watch enabled Dalits, who were excluded from most tsunami aid, to form a Federation of Dalit Villages for Livelihood Rights. The FDVLR started community revolving funds, pressured the government to address the needs of marginalized communities and now are both self-sufficient and expanding into many more villages.

Another UUHIP/UUSC partner, Mihir Bhatt, Director of the All India Disaster Mitigation Institute, has been asked to work on Harvard’s Humanitarian Initiative (HHI). Mr. Bhatt will help “map humanitarian knowledge needs” in health, education, business and governance, focusing on poverty, exclusion and rights.

Vivek Pandit, Director of Vidhayak Sansad, visited the U.S. in November to continue theological discussions with UU Ministers Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rev. Michael McGee and Rev. Abhi Janamanchi and to meet people who could help his bio-diesel initiative. Vivek spoke at Unity Church Unitarian and at the Unitarian Universalist Church of Arlington, Virginia. The UUCA raised several thousands of dollars for Vidhayak Sansad schools for tribal children. Rev. Abhi Janamanchi and Kathy Sreedhar are working together to secure U.S. investment in Vidhayak Sansad’s bio-diesel program.

Ekal Nari Shakti Sanghatan (Association of Strong Women Alone) has expanded from Rajasthan to several other states. UUHIP will support at least one of the new Ekal Nari organizations, probably in Himachal Pradesh.

Ela Bhatt, founder of SEWA (Self Employed Women’s Association), attended a meeting of the “Elders”, including Archbishop Desmond Tutu, Kofi Annan, Jimmy Carter and Mary Robinson.

The UUHIP Advisory Board welcomes new members Jael Silliman and Maitreyi Das. Dr. Silliman is the Program Officer for Women’s Rights at Ford Foundation. Previously she was Professor of Women’s’ Studies at the University of Iowa and has published several books and articles on women’s rights. Dr. Das is Senior Social Sector Specialist at The World Bank. Her research has focused on employment, ethnicity and gender.

After eight years, Barbara Wilson, Administrative and Research Assistant, is moving on to complete the internship for her master’s degree in Clinical Community Counseling from Johns Hopkins. The entire UUHIP family celebrates and appreciates her outstanding work, insights, enthusiasm and commitment to Holdeen partners and human rights. She has promised to stay in touch.

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

**Activities of the International Resources Office**

**Resourcing by internet**

- A new addition to the IRO pages on uua.org is profiles of the international engagement of UU congregations. 2-3 profiles will be added each month.
- A new e-newsletter from the IRO – “i-news” has been created.
- Offered congregations options for responding to crises in Kenya and Pakistan, cooperated with UUSC in creating a joint relief fund in response to Kenya’s post-election violence
- The UUA submitted an online response to the “A Common Word” correspondence from a wide-ranging and diverse group of Muslim leaders and scholars, and invited congregations to engage.
- Study materials about the Holdeen India Program for congregational use are in draft form, and will shortly be available on uua.org.
- Continuing to contribute to the A&W staff blog with international submissions.
- Participating in a UUA task force on staff blogging.

**New Resources**

- A “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 nearly complete.
- Database of congregational international engagement created.
- An international edition of “Inspired Faith/Effective Action” is in draft form.
- Participating in UUPCC project to promote effective microfinance efforts with U/U partners around the world.

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

- Advancing relationships with U/U groups in Africa, especially following ICUU leadership conference in Nairobi.
- Plans for President Sinkford’s visit to Africa in November ’08 are proceeding.
- Development of new relationship with IARF and maintaining/developing collegial relationships with historical partners in Japan are progressing.
- Supporting the building project of the historic Unitarian church in Chennai/Madras, India.
- Supporting UUNEI efforts to offer comprehensive sexuality education.
- Collaborating with UU-UNO, ICUU, ICUUW, UUHIP, UJME, UUGAC and UUPCC.
- The first two UUA Ambassador visits (to Transylvania and Northeast India) were successful.

**Institutional Developments**

- The UUA entered into a Memo of Understanding with the UUPCC in March. Progress continues on MoU’s with ICUU and UU-UNO.
- Working collaboratively with UUA departments, particularly the A&W staff group on internationally related projects.
- A draft “Faithful Global Citizenship for Unitarian Universalism” strategic plan is progressing.

## **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.
- A breakfast meeting for U/U organizations engage in international work will be provided
- A brunch for international guests and international leaders from the UUA will be held.

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

The office has busy implementing the UUA's public witness priorities on economic and racial justice, liberal family values, international peace and justice, and environmental justice mainly through various interfaith campaigns to involve the UUA and UU congregations. We have participated in national strategy meetings and developed resources and communications for congregations. In January, Advocacy & Witness staff met with UU Service Committee staff to identify areas of collaboration and develop partner campaigns. Our office does grassroots organizing of our congregations on all these issues while taking the lead on the economic and racial justice portfolio, working closely with the UUSC and our Washington Office and UUA Communications staff. We are of course also involved in promoting the *March to Peace* campaign, *Earth Day*, BGLT Rights, and our other priority issue areas.

**Living Wage Campaign:** Susan Leslie is representing the UUA in the *Let Justice Roll Living Wage Campaign*, an interfaith and grassroots coalition (see [www.letjusticeroll.org](http://www.letjusticeroll.org)). The UUSC also participates in the coalition and UUA is partnering with them in this work, with the UUSC taking the lead. A UUSC/UUA Living Wage Team now meets monthly to coordinate efforts and Susan Leslie and Lisa Swanson in the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy participate on this team. The campaign to raise the federal minimum wage to **\$10 in 2010** will kick off in the spring. It will include a *Faith Leaders Letter* similar to the one used to gain the federal increase in 2007, as well as a *Business Leaders* sign-on and a general petition. Signatures will be collected over the course of 8 months or so to be delivered to the new 111<sup>th</sup> congress in January 2009. *Living Wage Day* weekend will be held on Jan. 10-11, 2009 and congregations are being asked to save the date and begin planning now. Susan is coordinating another update of the *Let Justice Roll Living Wage Resources for Worship Services and Community Events* that will be available in May. The coalition is also developing resources and talking points for the campaign, including ways to raise this issue in the context of the 2008 elections. The UUA now has a Living Wage section at [www.uua.org/socialjustice](http://www.uua.org/socialjustice). As the campaign develops we will be sending out news and resources on our action alerts and social justice lists and tracking UU congregational participation.

In addition to developing a national strategy and work with legislative sponsors, the coalition continues to work on state campaigns as well. UU congregations are active in all these campaigns which include Georgia, Kansas, Ohio and Oklahoma, with the UU Church of Atlanta playing a leading role in the GA effort. In fact, UUs in GA are envisioning a state advocacy network growing out of their efforts. The Let Justice Roll Coalition is working to expand this "southern strategy" to include AL, FL, TN & possibly Louisiana to include more workers covered by minimum wage, such as farm workers and others.

**Immigrant Justice and New Sanctuary Movement:** Our office continues to work closely with Interfaith Worker Justice (IWJ) and the New Sanctuary Movement (NSM). There are now thirty interfaith sanctuary coalitions across the country and UUs are active in most of them. UU congregations are voting to sign the New Sanctuary Movement pledge, joining in efforts to create sanctuary and welcoming cities and states, supporting congregations of other faiths that are providing physical sanctuary, and holding forums and worship services on immigrant justice. We are tracking over 150 congregations that have contacted our office (or that NSM organizers have put us in contact with). The UU Congregation of Miami voted to become a new sanctuary congregation on March 2 and has joined a coalition with three other congregations in Miami in a sanctuary city effort. The Conejo Valley UU Fellowship in Thousand Oaks, CA is providing round-the-clock support to the family in sanctuary at the UCC congregation in Simi Valley. (One of the new sanctuary activities a congregation can sign-up for is to provide support for three months.) Arlington Street Church Boston voted to become a new sanctuary congregation in

January and is hosting a statewide meeting on May 10th in partnership with the UUA & UUSC on the Welcoming Massachusetts initiative that pledges compassion toward immigrants and efforts for immigration reform.

Our office is working closely with the UUA Washington Office on this issue sending out action alerts, news and resources, and updating our website.

Immigration will be a large theme at General Assembly. President Sinkford is hosting a workshop on *Welcoming the Stranger – Immigrant Justice*. Advocacy & Witness is sponsoring a workshop on UU theology and immigration and a workshop with the farm worker organization Coalition of Immokalee Workers. The Public Witness event on *Valuing All Families* – initially conceived as standing with BGLT families has been broadened to include immigrants as well. Both groups face significant legal and discriminatory barriers to keeping their families together.

**Congregation-Based Community Organizing (CBCO):** Susan is representing the UUA at the Inter-religious Organizing Initiative that is developing strategies at the national level to support CBCO in denominations and to develop a national campaign as well. The Table has expanded to include other organizing efforts led by Let Justice Roll, Interfaith Worker Justice, Sojourners, Tikkun and others. It will take time to build trust and consensus toward a national campaign, but well worth the effort that envisions bringing CBCO and interfaith advocacy teams together. The PICO network used this model for their work on SCHIP (state children's health insurance program) this year and achieved remarkable success, changing the votes of many in Congress through intense lobby days that brought grassroots folks out from across the country along with national faith advocacy staff. At this point they still have not achieved the strength to defeat a presidential override, but the presentation to the IOI about what it would have looked like if everyone around the table had been participating in the campaign has established a common vision.

We continue to track congregational involvement that currently stands at 115. We have also received reports of UU congregations involved in two new starts in Tulsa Oklahoma and Denver CO. The CBCO section of uua.org has been recently updated with new statistics, resources, and congregational stories with much help from volunteer Dr. Fred Seidl from our Clearwater FL congregation

The UUA CBCO Ministers Council is working with the Office on creating modules on CBCO that will be delivered to UUMA chapters. Susan conducted a workshop on CBCO and grassroots organizing at the Allies for Racial Equity conference in Memphis in February. The Office worked with Council member Rev. Art McDonald to deliver three CBCO and Power & Privilege workshops in the Mass Bay district with the UU Service Committee in March and April.

The Office is working with UUA Data Services to compile a report of UU congregations "not in CBCO that could be" by using geographic analysis of where CBCO affiliates that do not include UU congregations are located. We will have the data report in April and then begin outreach through the Council.

**Social Justice Empowerment Workshops:** This year's round of workshops have been highly successful. Over 100 people attended the workshop in Rochester MN where four issue areas were developed: GLBT Advocacy, Disability Advocacy, Health Care, Youth and Freedom in Religious Expression. There were 60 participants in Omaha and the congregation decided to focus on two main issues (1) "Making 2nd Unitarian a Beacon in the community on GLBT issues;" (2) Economic Justice--linking advocacy to the congregation's various service projects.

We piloted a cluster workshop in North Carolina that was attended by 130 people from the 3 larger congregations in the Triangle area with representative teams from 2 smaller

congregations. The workshop was very successful. The three congregations each chose one congregation wide focus – two were on the environment and the other was on poverty. A cluster-wide team was also convened. They agreed that their first action would be to combine their Justice Sunday Cost of Iraq War/March to Peace efforts on March 30<sup>th</sup> with media messaging about the 2,000+ UUs in the Triangle. Next steps include developing joint educational efforts, media work, and a collaborative project. Based on this successful pilot, we will now be offering a cluster workshop as part of the Social Justice Empowerment workshop. The workshop schedule is attached. 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:** In addition to the public witness event and workshops mentioned above, we are sponsoring a workshop on Advocacy for Gulf Coast Recovery with our partner in Turkey Creek Derek Evans, Rev. Jim VanderWeele of Community Church UU New Orleans, the Washington Office and the UU Service Committee. Derek has been traveling around the country with a FEMA Trailer and we are working with him on ways to bring the tour to GA.

## **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**

- Faithful Democracy, an interfaith coalition on voter mobilization started by the UUA and other faith partners in 2004, will re-launch in early April 2008 (see [www.faithfuldemocracy.org](http://www.faithfuldemocracy.org));
- Environmental issues are now a major category of our work, with relevant actions and resources already launched or in the works;
- The Office launched the March to Peace Campaign, comprising a month of major events with the goal of involving at least 250 congregations; and
- As of March 26, the UUA Washington Center will officially be moved into our new, better, more conveniently-located office space.

**BGLT and Women's Issues:** The Sexuality Education and Advocacy Training (SEAT) will be taking place March 15-18<sup>th</sup> in Washington, DC. Rather than a petition, the conference cosponsors have decided to focus on a National Interfaith Call-in Day for Comprehensive Sexuality Education. The Call-In Day will be held during SEAT, so as conference participants are doing visits on Capitol Hill activists across the country will be calling in to support the Responsible Education About Life (REAL) Act. Stories about reproductive choice and sexuality education have also been highlighted on the front page of the UUA website, beginning with a story about UU involvement in the pro-choice movement for the anniversary of Roe v. Wade and ending with a story about SEAT.

In terms of other legislation, the Affordable Birth Control Act, which would fix a glitch made by Congress that increased the cost of birth control for low-income and college aged women, has been getting a lot of attention but has yet to move forward in Congress. The Washington Office is continuing to encourage our networks to contact their Members of Congress in support of this act. The International Violence Against Women Act has been moving forward. The Interfaith Domestic Violence Coalition that the UUA is a part of held a briefing on Capital Hill in February on how faith based communities can work together in support of domestic violence laws.

**Economic and Racial Justice:** IMMIGRATION: the office has continued to be an active member of a coalition opposing the Secure America through Verification and Enforcement (SAVE) Act; a package of enforcement-only measures which is gaining momentum in the House. Staff went on coalition lobby visits to House members and sent action alerts. Staff continue to maintain the UU Immigration reform activist listserv. On REBUILDING THE GULF COAST, staff-written background information and ways to get involved have been posted on the UUA's social justice issues page.

NATIVE AMERICAN JUSTICE: Staff sent out electronic action alerts urging activists to support the Indian Health Care Improvement Act, IHCA, (S.1200). Staff also called the offices of eight Senators identified by Native American organizations as key targets. The effort was successful: IHCA was passed in the Senate on 2/26/08! SENTENCING DISPARITY: The office is supporting the Drug Sentencing Reform and Kingpin Trafficking Act of 2007, S.1711/H.R. 4545,

which would eliminate the current disparity in federal sentences for crack versus powder cocaine offenses, and establish a grant program to provide drug treatment and rehabilitative services within prisons, jails, and juvenile facilities. Staff sent an electronic action alert to activists for a national call-in day and faxed a letter to every Congressional office in support of the bill as part of Crack Sentencing Reform Lobby Month.

**Environment:** The office conducted considerable research on global climate change and environmental justice (EJ), including the science behind targeted reductions, carbon credits and trading, and the economic impact proposed solutions will have on lower income families. It also included making contacts locally, with environmental activists in other faith groups, the UUSC, and with UUs in the State Advocacy Network (SAN) and legislative ministries.

The months of March and April will be devoted to preparing for Earth Day. In collaboration with the UUSC, web pages on the “right to water” will be added as an EJ issue. Their release will be announced in conjunction with World Water Day on March 22<sup>nd</sup>. The EJ pages are also being revamped and expanded, which will be announced in conjunction with Earth Hour, March 29th. A short resource guide on looking at global climate change from an EJ perspective is being assembled, to be released end of March/beginning of April.

**International Issues:** The office has formed a close, productive partnership with the Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) to advance legislation that would encourage a multi-lateral, diplomatic solution to the war in Iraq and threat from Iran. Staff have participated in lobby visits and mobilized UU activists in key areas. In one particularly significant district, staff collaborated with a minister and successfully placed an op-ed in the local newspaper. In conjunction with the Olive Branch Partnership (see below), staff help to organize interfaith lobby visits with the Offices of House Speaker Pelosi and Senate Majority Leader Reid.

On HIV/AIDS, the Office continued to play a lead role in organizing religious opposition to the abstinence-only earmark and other troubling provisions of PEPFAR, the President’s Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief. Thanks in part to this work, the House Foreign Affairs Committee dropped the earmark from the PEPFAR reauthorization bill—a huge success!

**Peacemaking:** The previous months have been split between organizing the Interfaith Peace Witness—a national event promoting peace and justice—along with the Olive Branch Interfaith Peace Partnership (<http://olivebranchinterfaith.org>). This work has strengthened relationships with Christian, Muslim and Jewish organizations as well as progressive interfaith coalitions. This planning culminated with several worship services including one at All Souls Church, Unitarian; an event at the Capitol Building with thousands of activists; and civil disobedience. Rev. Bill Sinkford headlined the worship service at All Soul’s and was a speaker at the interfaith rally.

Staff continued to work with the Core Team of volunteers supporting the Congregational Study Action Issue: Peacemaking. The Core Team has begun transitioning from giving resources to guiding action. While resources will continue to be launched, such as a curriculum guide on the interplay between Just War and Pacifism as well as Conflict Transformation and Mediation for Congregations, support for national activism will begin to take a forefront in the efforts of the Core Team. Both the Interfaith Peace Witness and the CSAI: Peacemaking are aspects of a larger event- March To Peace, in which UUA, UUSC and UU-UNO staff encourage UU Congregations and Communities to devote the month of March to peace and justice.

**Rev. Meg Riley, Director  
Advocacy and Witness Programs  
Spring 2008 Travel Schedule**

March

4-6	Boston, MA	Meetings
9-16	Tokyo, Japan	IARF Council, Tsubaki Grand Shrine, Japan Meetings with RKK
28	New Brighton, MN	Creating Multi-Cultural Congregations day-long seminar, United Theological Seminary
29-April 7	Washington, DC Boston West Chester, PA	Meetings Meetings Preaching at Deb Mero's Installation

April

8	Minnesota	Twin Cities Roundtable: "Sources of our Tradition" (Speaking)
12	Omaha, NE	Keynote, Prairie Star District meeting: "Democratic Faith and Faithful Democracy"
13-26	Minneapolis, MN	Sabbatical

May

2-3	St. Paul, MN	Non-violent Communications Workshop,
6-7	Boston, MA	Meetings
8-30	Minneapolis, MN	Sabbatical

June

1-2	Washington, DC	Faith in Public Life board meeting
24-30	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	General Assembly

**Kathy Sreedhar, Director  
UU Holdeen India Program  
Spring 2008 Travel Schedule**

May

3 – 8	Boston, MA	Speaking at the First Parish in Bedford UU Church and to Harvard alumnae
-------	------------	---

June

25-29	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	General Assembly
-------	--------------------	------------------

**Eric Cherry, Director  
UUA Office of International Relations  
Spring 2008 Travel Schedule**

March

24-30            Hatfield, England            Annual Meeting of British Unitarian and  
Free Christian Churches

April

3-5              New York, NY                UU-UNO Spring Seminar

May

10                Newton, MA                 Andover Newton Theological School –  
“21<sup>st</sup> century mission” event

16-17            TBD                            UUHIP Advisory Board meeting

June

24-30            Ft. Lauderdale, FL            General Assembly

**Susan Leslie, Director  
Office for Congregational Advocacy and Witness  
Spring 2008 Travel Schedule**

March

21                San Francisco, CA            First UU Society of San Francisco

May

30-31            Atlanta, GA                 UU Congregation of Atlanta, GA

June

24-30            Ft. Lauderdale, FL            General Assembly

**Rob Keithan, Director  
Kat Liu, Assistant Director  
Grace Garner, Adam Gerhardstein, Lisa Swanson, and Alex Winnett  
Spring 2008 Travel Schedule**

March

28-30            Bethesda, MD                Joseph Priestley District Spring Conference  
*Rob*—Keynote Speaker, Workshop Leader  
*Lisa*—Workshop Leader

April

3-5                New York, NY                UU-UNO Building a Culture of Peace  
*Adam*—Panel Presentation

4-5                Pittsburgh, PA                Ohio-Meadville District Meeting  
*Grace*—Workshop

25-27	St. Louis, MO	Central Mid-West District Meeting <i>Kat</i> —Workshop
25-27	Austin, TX	Southwestern District Meeting <i>Adam</i> —Workshop
TBD	San Diego, CA	PSWD Assembly <i>Alex, Grace</i> —Workshops
<u>June</u> 25-29	Ft. Lauderdale, FL	General Assembly