



## **Activism and Courage: Extending the Legacy**

Under the leadership of President Charlie Clements, the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) is in the midst of another meaningful and productive year marked by extraordinary growth and progress.

A key highlight of the year was learning that in June two of our founders, social worker Martha Sharp and her husband, the Rev. Waitstill Sharp, are being honored for their heroic roles in helping Jews and others escape Nazi persecution. The designation “Righteous Among the Nations” is being conferred posthumously on the Sharps by Yad Vashem, the Holocaust museum and remembrance authority in Israel.

Although Yad Vashem has honored some 21,000 non-Jews worldwide for consciously risking their lives to save others in the Holocaust, the Sharps are only the second and third U.S. citizens on its roster, and Martha is the first U.S. woman. The distinction for the Sharps was celebrated on December 12, 2005, at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Wellesley, Mass., Waitstill’s home congregation.

Clements, who joined the Wellesley celebration, says the selflessness that the Sharps displayed resonates today with those who continue their good works.

“We intend to see that word of this honor brings attention to the legacy of Unitarian Universalist activism and courage, to the institution that the Sharps helped establish, and to the slow genocide that is now taking place in Darfur, Sudan. Indeed, the best way for us to honor the Sharps is to follow their example by taking action to end today’s genocide.”

## **A New Strategic Plan: Outlining a Future of Activism and Human Rights**

Of course, living by the examples of one’s forebears often involves not only following their footsteps, but forging new paths. One of the most significant milestones this past year was the finalization of an exciting five-year strategic plan which provides a vision and direction for UUSC’s future. The plan sets ambitious goals for human rights and social justice in the context of today’s world of great uncertainty, acute imbalances, and profound instability — a world in which human rights are increasingly threatened. UUSC’s goals are based on the conviction that sustained, positive change has always come about through the efforts of organized activists who have the courage to challenge and confront oppression. Fundamentally, we seek to support and build on this kind of activism.

Over the last year, UUSC has begun to implement this plan, and highlights are shown later in this report. At the same time, our strategic plan maps out a process of organizational growth and development in a number of critical areas. In the last 12 months we have added key staff, increased outreach, improved communications, significantly enlarged our membership, and strengthened programs.



We also created a fourth formal program, Rights in Humanitarian Crises, institutionalizing the disaster-response work we have done for decades. To head this program, we hired Martha Thompson, one of the most respected professionals in the field. Through her appointment, we are gaining expertise and augmenting our capacity.

At the same time, we have deepened our connection to the denomination by creating more experiential learning opportunities through delegations and JustWorks camps; engaging ministers through the ministerial advisory committee; building an online community; and launching two relief funds in collaboration with the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA).

## The Year's Highlights: Review of Major Programs

### *Civil Liberties: STOP Campaign Is a Go*

In a world threatened by terrorism, antiterrorism measures, and increasing authoritarianism, UUSC dedicates one of its four major program areas to defending **Civil Liberties** and protecting access to democratic processes. Our first initiative in this program is the STOP (Stop Torture Permanently) Campaign.

One of UUSC's finest moments ever was the STOP campaign's Call for Justice Weekend last fall in Washington, D.C., when more than 1,000 activists gathered to organize, lobby, learn, and speak out against U.S.-government-sponsored torture. For many who attended, the gathering was a transformative experience; in fact, UUSC Board Chair Todd Jones described it as "the high point" of his 30-year association with the organization.

The event began on Saturday, September 24, with a series of workshops, followed by films and discussion groups. Activists received training in the art of lobbying in preparation for Congressional visits on Monday, September 26.

One of the focal points of the weekend was a moving interfaith service in which participants joined torture survivors and religious leaders. The Rev. William Sinkford, president of the UUA, spoke at the ceremony, then led a solemn procession to the steps of the Capitol. There, the activists held a short observance before heading over to the Senate and House office buildings to visit their elected officials.

Another highlight of the Call for Justice Weekend was the daylong mock trial of Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld, Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, and former CIA Director George Tenet on charges of authorizing torture. Extensive testimony, based on real facts and events and using real courtroom procedures, was heard in front of the more than 500 participants in the "courtroom," a hotel ballroom. The three defendants were found guilty on all counts.

During their visit to the capital, many participants in the Call for Justice Weekend also took part in other social justice activities, including a massive antiwar rally organized by United for Peace and Justice, a coalition of peace and justice organizations and community peace groups in the Boston area.

Following up on the Call for Justice Weekend, individuals on UUSC's Human Rights Defenders advocacy list responded to a series of action alerts by making telephone calls and sending e-mails and letters-to-the-editor that helped build a veto-proof majority in Congress against the administration's torture policies. Despite intense White House pressure, Sen. John McCain's (R-Ariz.) bill to prohibit cruel, inhuman, or degrading treatment of detainees



became law without presidential waivers or CIA exemptions. However, an attempt by Congress to remove all habeas corpus rights for detainees was scaled back in a compromise that is still unacceptable. President Bush undermined the McCain amendment after the fact, however, by tacking on a “signing statement” saying that as commander in chief he could opt not to follow the law.

UUSC also worked closely with the interfaith community against torture and provided resources for allied coalitions, such as the Latin America Working Group and Win Without War, to participate in stop-torture activism.

### ***Environmental Justice: Water for the World***

Under another of the four major program areas, **Environmental Justice**, the UUSC is defending a basic human right that is often overlooked: the right to water. With the help of our new program manager, Patricia Jones, UUSC participated in the RED Vida coalition meeting in Bolivia, which brought together organizations working on water privatization issues in the Americas. She also visited new program partners in Bolivia and Peru.

UUSC made a grant to support the participation of two of our partners, Luis Isarra (FENTAP, Peru) and Julian Perez (FEJUVE, El Alto, Bolivia), in an international seminar with 40 right-to-water campaigners, unionists, and water professionals from more than 15 countries. Meeting in Madrid, Spain, on November 17-18, 2005, participants responded to ideas put forth in the book *Reclaiming Public Water — Achievements, Struggles, and Visions from Around the World* (2005), which talks about the privatization of water resources, a disturbing trend that has made the life-sustaining resource too expensive or unavailable for many of the world’s poorest people. Uniting as the Reclaiming Public Water network, they agreed to consolidate their work to promote alternatives to water privatization.

Another important recent development was the November 17, 2005, enactment of the Paul Simon Water for the Poor bill. This law makes access to safe water and sanitation in developing countries a specific policy objective of U.S. foreign assistance programs. Shelley Moskowitz, UUSC’s representative in Washington, D.C., joined with Water for All coalition partners Public Citizen and the Natural Resources Defense Council to help strengthen the bill, which was initially introduced by Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.) and Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.). Ultimately, Sen. Frist agreed to cede to the improved version of the bill introduced by Rep. Earl Blumenauer (D-Ore.) that passed in the House. This new law will provide future opportunities to promote access to affordable water for all.

UUSC is also working with Massachusetts Global Action, an organization dedicated to opposing and reversing the privatization of water and other public resources throughout the state. We are helping to develop their plan for a spring 2006 conference that will bring together grassroots activists and water workers to network, plan future collaborations, and create a regional support network for activists and water workers.

### ***Crisis Relief: Responding in the Face of Disaster***

UUSC’s newest major program designation, which deals with rights in natural catastrophes and man-made crises, officially was launched with the arrival of program manager Martha Thompson on October 5, 2005. The **Rights in Humanitarian Crises** program is building on UUSC’s strong track record in disaster response, the generous outpouring after the



devastating Asian tsunami of December 2004, and the donor responses to other violations of human rights, particularly genocide.

### **Easing Nature's Blow**

In the last 12 months, massive natural disasters — the Indian Ocean tsunami, hurricanes Katrina and Rita, and the South Asian earthquake — devastated portions of three continents. Marginalized people, as is sadly typical, were disproportionately affected.

A joint UUSC-UUA appeal was mounted in each case, raising a combined total of about \$5.4 million in 12 months. The Rights in Humanitarian Crises program currently manages approximately \$3.4 million of those funds, and UUSC disbursed approximately \$1 million for tsunami relief from February to June 2005.

In order to respond quickly and effectively to the situation in Pakistan after the October 8 earthquake, UUSC hired a consultant to work with regional organizations attending to populations left out of overall aid efforts because of gender or geography. As a result, UUSC was able to serve effectively as a highly targeted emergency relief organization. For example, we were able to fund groups that traveled by helicopter into remote areas and used satellite phones to call for supplies to aid villages cut off from other relief efforts by impassible roads and mountain passes. And we helped aid widows, women headed households in earthquake affected areas who were being marginalized from aid distributed to heads of households. We continue to monitor the situation.

This program also accounts for ongoing small-scale responses to other disasters, such as Hurricane Stan, which struck Guatemala last October.

### **Countering Man's Inhumanity**

Beyond responding to natural disasters, the RHC program aims to help those affected by catastrophes of human creation. Currently those efforts are centered on attempts to stop genocide in Darfur, Sudan, where more than 200,000 men, women, and children have died since February 2003, while another 2.5 million innocent civilians have been forced to flee their homes.

Facing what the United Nations recently defined as the world's worst humanitarian crisis, UUSC has increased its involvement in the Save Darfur Coalition, collecting the first of what we hope will be a vast number of postcards for the Million Voices for Darfur postcard campaign, and helping to organize major marches in Washington, D.C., San Francisco and Chicago. UUSC is also participating in legislative and grassroots strategy meetings on Darfur and is becoming recognized in the community as a powerful opponent to the genocide. Thanks to pressure from grassroots activists, the House of Representatives in early April 2006 passed the Darfur Peace and Accountability Act, sending the bill to a conference committee to reconcile differences with a Senate version. Also, the Senate Appropriations Committee approved an amendment for an additional \$50 million, a total of \$173 million, to help fund African Union peacekeepers in Darfur.

### ***Economic Justice: Organization Rights and a Living Wage***

In the last 12 months, UUSC's fourth major area of emphasis, the **Economic Justice** program, has progressed toward the core goal expressed in the organization's strategic plan.



By “applying an analysis of the ways in which gender, race, and class render particular groups of people vulnerable to economic injustices,” the plan reads, “this program is helping to fulfill people’s right to work in dignity for a living wage and supporting their ability to organize to defend those rights.”

We are developing relationships with nine economic justice partners in Kenya, Indonesia, Mexico, Guatemala, Brazil, and the United States that are employing innovative strategies on living wage campaigns and protecting the rights of the most vulnerable and marginalized workers. We are also building synergy across our program work by supporting partners working at the intersection of economic justice and rights in humanitarian crises through several joint projects aimed at increasing resources for workers in the Gulf Coast region devastated by Hurricane Katrina.

On Monday, January 16, 2006, UUSC remembered and honored the life and legacy of Martin Luther King Jr., partnering with the UUA and the Let Justice Roll coalition to host a high-profile living wage event at the historic United First Parish Unitarian Church in Quincy, Mass., known as the “Church of the Presidents.” Highlighting a slate of powerful speakers, Senator Edward Kennedy (D.-Mass.) made the case for an increase in the federal minimum wage. Kennedy was introduced by UUSC President Charlie Clements, while UUSC Senior Associate Wayne Smith talked about UUSC’s living wage program and reported on the success of another UUSC economic justice partner, the Santa Fe, N.M., living wage movement. The campaign was featured in a January *New York Times Magazine* cover story and in *La Marcha*, a new DVD produced with support from UUSC (see below). Other voices heard included those of the host and emcee of the event, UU minister Rev. Sheldon Bennett; Rev. Hurmon Hamilton, pastor of Roxbury Presbyterian Church and president of the Greater Boston Interfaith Organization; Rocio Saenz, president of SEIU Local 615; Margarita Restrepo, executive board member of SEIU Local 615; and Maude Hurd, president of the Massachusetts chapter of ACORN, a national organization working to promote social justice and strengthen communities. Bob Edgar, general secretary of the National Council of Churches, offered concluding remarks.

As part of its support for workers’ rights and living wages, UUSC also joined recently with the Leadership Council on Civil Rights and other coalition partners to send a letter to President Bush protesting the repeal of the Davis-Bacon prevailing wage law and expressing concerns about post-Katrina relief efforts. On October 26, 2005, President Bush restored the prevailing wage law.

### **Tooling Up for Justice**

Another key focus of the economic justice program has been the creation of educational tools designed to help our constituents and other activists learn about, and take action on living wage and workers’ rights:

***La Marcha.*** This DVD tells of the victorious Santa Fe living wage campaign, which resulted in the city’s new \$9.50 an hour minimum pay standard, among the highest minimum wages in the United States. It includes testimonies from workers, activists, and business allies, as well as an insert written by UUSC staff that outlines the living wage movement and offers focus group discussion questions.



***Resources for Living Wage Worship Services and Events.*** UUSC compiled this 30-page resource packet co-authored by UUSC and UUA for the Let Justice Roll coalition. It provides resources for conducting a living wage worship service or community event. This tool presents diverse theological perspectives demonstrating that living wage/economic justice activism represents faith in action.

***A Just Minimum Wage: Good for Workers, Business, and Our Future.*** This educational document, produced by the Let Justice Roll Campaign, illuminates wealth inequality, explodes minimum wage myths, and makes the business and “high road” economic case for a just living wage.

***Justice Sunday 2006.*** UUSC has produced *Simple Steps for Justice*, UU congregational worship service material with an economic justice/living wage focus. The package features multi-age appropriate activities, learning experiences, and games on topics of economic justice for children and adults. The contents shed light on the intersection of economic justice and race, class, and gender issues, and also focus on economic justice in the context of the humanitarian response to the Gulf Coast/Katrina disaster.

## **On Advocacy and Communications: Spreading the Word**

### **Building a More Activist Community**

UUSC made a key structural decision this year to create a Department of Advocacy and Communications. This decision not only brings together a range of functions that traditionally were located within separate departments, but also marries two key organizational functions that are each given increased emphasis in UUSC’s 2006-2010 strategic plan. The plan projects that by 2010 this will be the organization’s largest department, with more than 20 staff members. To date, the department has united communications, outreach, public policy, member services, and Cambridge-based advocacy functions. Over time, it is projected also to incorporate components of the organization’s experiential education programs.

Our Washington, D.C., office has been successfully re-established and is now providing active support to UUSC’s advocacy efforts. During this period, the Washington office has:

- Built a strong relationship with the UUA’s Washington staff, with whom our Washington representative shares space and administrative resources.
- Networked with key peer organizations, such as Public Citizen, and with congressional staff.
- Worked with UUSC program staff on preparation for the advocacy aspect of program events.

UUSC’s statewide advocacy efforts — linking UU networks that bring congregations together on a statewide basis to mobilize UUs for social change — have also been in the forefront of late. In the last period, UUSC made a round of grants totaling \$65,000 to seven statewide networks. This total includes first-time grants to important networks in New York



State and to an effort to form an advocacy network in Massachusetts. Perhaps most significantly, we are in discussions with foundation representatives and potential funding sources about a considerable expansion of the activities of New Hampshire Faithful Democracy, the network that emerged around the 2004 elections. If funding for this exciting initiative can be achieved, it would represent substantial growth in UUSC's work with statewide advocacy networks.

### **Keeping Communications Current**

Given the strategic plan's emphasis on communications, UUSC is using advanced technology to expand the visibility of the organization and its programs and to multiply the ways in which our constituents may join in our work. In the last 12 months, we have:

- Created two new electronic publications: *Hotwire: A Human Rights Weblog* and *eWire*, a periodic HTML newsletter providing UUSC supporters with up-to-date information and advocacy opportunities related to the organization and its programs.
- Improved the management of UUSC website contents to provide fresh, frequently updated material to visitors.
- Redesigned the UUSC newsletter. Formerly called *SC News*, the newsletter has been transformed into an attractive new product, *Rights Now*. Printed in an 8 1/2 in. x 11 in., format, the publication is more focused and has full-color photographs throughout. The second issue of *Rights Now* went to press at the end of January 2006, and with each issue the fine-tuning of the design continues. Work continues to improve the graphic presentation of information and move the text toward a more activist slant, rather than simply reporting on UUSC's activities and accomplishments. Members and supporters will soon have the option of receiving *Rights Now* by e-mail only.
- Enhanced the design and writing of the annual report, which is now printed in full color throughout and features lively photographs of UUSC partners and UUSC in action.

### **JustWorks: It Just Works**

Finally, UUSC's experiential learning programs, such as our JustWorks camps and delegations, continue to help us to build lifelong activism and activists through real, transformative experiences. Providing concrete opportunities for activists to work for justice is a key distinguishing feature of UUSC. This year we carried out four JustWorks camps and led delegations to Chad, to Darfur refugee camps, and to Guatemala, where participants viewed the work of courageous organizations fighting to build peace and justice. Here is a brief review of our camp programs:

#### **Mohawk Valley Teen Camp**

In Kanatsiohareke County, upstate New York, from April 18 to 22, 2005, campers learned firsthand about the life and culture of Native Americans in the modern United States. Participants interacted with a group of Mohawk people who have returned to the Mohawk Valley in upstate New York, learning about their culture, their daily farm work, and the



issues that affect their lives. Tom Porter, leader of the community, shared stories of the Iroquois Nation, including both spellbinding prophecies and compelling historical facts.

### **Freedom Summer**

Sixty youths and adults from around the country joined UUSC on last year's Freedom Summer Camp, a civil rights journey to Atlanta, Selma, Montgomery, and Birmingham. Held from July 9 to 16, 2005, the program honored the courage and sacrifice of those young people who worked in Mississippi to register voters as part of Freedom Summer in 1964. The 2005 journey featured activities designed to build knowledge and rekindle the spirit of human rights, including a service project performed in collaboration with Georgia Citizens Coalition on Hunger.

### **UUSC Lakota Camp**

UUSC worked with the Lakota community on the Rosebud Reservation in South Dakota to create an intercultural exchange in which campers labored alongside the youth of the community to convert a building into a youth center. From July 30 to August 13, 2005, volunteers stayed in tents and took part in life-changing activities that taught them about issues of economic and environmental justice.

### **Guatemala Camp**

From January 14 to 22, 2006, UUSC offered an experiential learning opportunity in Guatemala in conjunction with partner Equal Exchange. Participants learned firsthand how fair trade affects farmers in Central America.

### **Katrina Relief, Louisiana**

Participants traveled to Louisiana from February 6 to 10, 2006, to work on three initiatives: a cleanup project for the multicultural Resurrection of Our Lord Elementary School in New Orleans; a cleanup and multitask project for a New Orleans church congregation; and a multitask project for PICO WIN, a national association of grassroots groups organized through churches and schools that is working closely with evacuees in Baton Rouge.

With such exciting achievements, high ambitions for the months ahead, and with the new communications and advocacy initiatives called for in our strategic plan, Clements says, UUSC is full of optimism for another wonderful year of human rights activism to advance social justice.



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