

# Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations



Advocacy and Witness Programs  
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## **ADVOCACY AND WITNESS STAFF GROUP**

### **Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**

**The Rev. Meg Riley, Director**

**December 2006**

Our fall has been a time of internal transitions—Rob Keithan began seminary and Kat Liu joined our staff to share his job with him (see Rob’s report for how their duties break down). Jeannette Jackson, our steady and graceful administrator, departed, and Parva Fattahi joined our staff and is working hard to keep us all in line.

We also anticipate, with the change in the balance of both Houses of Congress—though as I write this, Senator Tim Johnson, D-SD, remains in uncertain health conditions—that our work in national policy arenas will also involve many changes in 2007. While we always work in a non-partisan fashion (Darfur being a prime example of this being done well), our social issues will certainly shift with the leadership of Congress. We do not expect, for instance, to be fighting another Federal Marriage Amendment in this session. This gives space to move forward on long-neglected positive legislation, such as the Employment Non Discrimination Act, or the Hate Crimes Bill, which have been virtually set aside since the mid nineties.

Our Public Witness team will participate in a strategic planning session in February to examine what new opportunities arise because of these political changes, as well as changes in our congregation’s work for justice. That interdepartmental work remains steady, I’m delighted to say, through staff changes and reorganizations. Fred Garcia’s guiding hand in this arena remains a source of my eternal gratitude.

The media we garnered this month around World AIDS Day is payoff for how seamlessly our policy work and our media work cooperate. (See Rob Keithan’s report for further details). Our legislative assistants, Adam Gerhardstein, Meredith Schonfeld-Hicks, and Elizabeth Bukey, are an indispensable ‘research arm’ for much of our public witness work, as well as representing us well on Capitol Hill and in our congregations. They are the heart of our office, and the theological reflection they participate in with Rev. Alida DeCoster continues to keep all of our work well-grounded in our faith, rather than our simply being a shadow puppet for secular groups or agendas.

As Cathy Cordes mentions in her report, we are in the midst of conversations—focus groups—with UUs across the country to listen to them about their international work. I personally look forward to facilitating several of these groups, but already I have learned from reading Cathy’s transcripts. We are grateful to the Partner Church Council for the ‘loan’ of half of Cathy’s time.

Kathy Sreedhar, as ever, is taking a pile of people with her to India for various reasons. While I had originally hoped to join this trip, my own sojourn will need to wait until perhaps next year. The number of people who want to visit the Holdeen India Program partners grows every time someone comes back from a trip and shares of the extraordinarily good work being done there. Kathy could have a staff of five to fulfill all of the requests in this regard, which is not the mission of the Holdeen Program. We continue to discuss, on the Holdeen Board, how to deal with this issue.

As for my own time, I would lift up several key areas that have been my focus of late. One is the work in the Gulf Coast. Joe Sullivan and I look forward to being with some of you on Friday to discuss our evaluation of our work done, as well as to sketch out steps for the future. The funds in the Gulf Coast Relief Fund will be committed by early spring, but the work there is not anything near done. Gini Courter and many others have been highly motivated to extend the ways in which Unitarian Universalists can live our faith on the Gulf Coast, and we hope to continue this vital work through the UUA/ UUSC partnership which has been so successful.

Second, I remain on several boards of directors. The one to which I give the most significant time is Faith in Public Life: A Resource Center for Justice and the Common Good. FIPL sends out a daily digest of articles about religion and politics which is excellent—you can sign on to it by going to [FaithInPublicLife.org](http://FaithInPublicLife.org) and clicking the button that says ‘news’. This will show you a daily newsreel sample and tell you how to subscribe. I am very proud of this organization, which I have had a heavy hand in creating and beginning. The mission is, I feel, exactly what is needed at this time, and our work was critical in reframing the religious voices heard in this past election. Peruse the website and you’ll see our mission (supporting existing on the ground groups to do their work more effectively), methodology (open source sharing of resources, creating public spaces for religious folks to collaborate and learn from each other), and members (folks who helped to create this organization included Jim Wallis of Sojourners, Welton Gaddy of The Interfaith Alliance, James Forbes of Riverside Church, Susan Thistlethwaite of Chicago Theological Seminary, as well as many denominational folks like me.)

Finally, it has been quite interesting to begin to revision the work of the international office, so that it is not so separate from other Advocacy and Witness Work. Adam Gerhardstein’s position, addressing issues ranging from Iraq to Darfur to Global AIDS, has been a first step. Adam, Rob Keithan, Kathy Sreedhar, Barbara Wilson and I are now looking carefully to see what kind of policy work would most support our Holdeen Partners, and what role the UUA might play in that work. The more effective we become, the more exciting it is to show up for work!

Thanks to all of you for your support. Please don’t hesitate to call or email if you have questions or concerns! (612-722-0040).

**Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**  
**Submitted by: Susan Leslie**  
**Director for the Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness**  
**December 2006**

**Social Witness:** This past fall was a busy time in our office and for our congregations. Many UUs were active in witnessing on ending the Iraq war, raising the minimum wage, and supporting marriage equality. The electoral season provided opportunities for speaking out and our congregations are becoming more active in doing so. Our Office helped connect social action chairs and others with efforts to raise public awareness about the war by organizing screenings of *The Ground Truth* and *Iraq for Sale*. UUs worked with the *Let Justice Roll* campaign in six states to support ballot initiatives raising the minimum wage. And our congregations continued to provide greatly needed leadership in support of marriage equality. Our coalition partner Freedom to Marry reports that we continue to 'lose forward' on this issue, with 7% less of the electorate supporting these anti-gay initiatives. We will continue our coalition and public witness work with these efforts as well as on climate change with UU Ministry for Earth, Earth Day Network and others; the Save Darfur campaign, and comprehensive sex education advocacy. Additionally we are working with Interfaith Worker Justice (I represent the UUA on their board) and other organizations on Gulf Coast recovery and immigration reform (see [www.iwj.org](http://www.iwj.org)).

**Social Justice Empowerment Program:** Six workshops were held this fall in UU Church of Meadville PA, Lake Country UU Church in Wales WI, First Parish of Brookline MA, UU Chalice Congregation in Escondido CA, Washington Crossing NJ, and Richmond VA. We will be conducting follow-up interviews and next steps consultations in the coming month but initial reports are that the new materials we are using have greatly enhanced the program and congregations are focusing their social justice efforts through participation in this program. The new follow-up component will help us better track the effectiveness and the outcomes of the program. We have received a few more applications for the spring.

**Committee on Socially Responsible Investing:** The second round of SRI teleconferences was even more successful than the first, with teams from several congregations attending all five sessions. We will continue to offer these as a regular feature of our outreach and education efforts. Our shareholder advocacy efforts include engagement on global warming/climate change resolutions, corporate governance issues, the adoption of non-discrimination polices and pressing for domestic partner benefits. See the CSRI report for more details

**Congregation Based Community Organizing (CBCO):** Our new CBCO guide *Congregation Based Community Organizing: A Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Congregational Life* was mailed to all congregations in November and is also posted on the CBCO section of the Justice website at [www.uua.org/programs/justice/cbco](http://www.uua.org/programs/justice/cbco). Two new members have joined the UU Ministers Advisory Council on CBCO – Rev. Jim Eller for All Souls in Kansas City MO and the Rev. Craig Roshaven from Jefferson in Ft. Worth TX. Rev. Roshaven is also attending the Interfaith Organizing Initiative meetings with me. Plans are moving ahead for a summit of CBCO leaders in Jan. 2008 and I

am participating on the planning team, which is headed up by Kathy Partridge, Executive Director of Interfaith Founders (and a UU from Colorado).

## **Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**

**Submitted by: Rob Keithan**, Director

**Kat Liu**: Assistant Director

**Elizabeth Bukey**, Legislative Assistant for Civil Rights and Religious Liberty

**Adam Gerhardstein**, Legislative Assistant for International Issues

**Meredith Schonfeld-Hicks**, Legislative Assistant for Women's Issues, UU Women's Federation

Clara Barton Internship

**Washington Office for Advocacy**

**December 2006**

Internally, the two notable developments from the last few months are (1) further clarification and understanding of how Rob and Kat are sharing the Directorial responsibilities, and (2) the progressive roll out of our new on-line advocacy tools. It is now "official:" Rob retains that outward-focused, advocacy and Washington coalition aspects of the work, while Kat will work closely with the Legislative Assistants on connecting with congregations, through communications (like our email lists and website), grassroots organizing, and general advocacy resources. On that latter point, if you haven't checked out the Washington Office for Advocacy website in awhile, you are encouraged to do so ([www.uua.org/washington](http://www.uua.org/washington)). We're particularly pleased that activists can now email their members of Congress directly from our website, as well as letting us know what issues they're interested in and what communications they'd like to receive from us. On an external note, the change in Congressional leadership will have a huge impact on our work. Much more of our time will now be spent working pro-actively on legislation, such as the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, which would outlaw workplace discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity. We're talking strategy with all our coalition partners now, and plan to have a list of 2007 priorities available in mid-January.

**Civil Rights and Religious Liberty:** Having completed a report on the UUA campaign against the Federal Marriage Amendment, the office provided support and written resources to UUs in states facing anti-gay constitutional amendments. Leading up to the 2006 elections we revised our comprehensive voting guide, "Faithful Democracy" and fielded questions about appropriate congregational activity in elections. The office has also begun planning for BGLT advocacy in the new Congress, including significant campaigns for employment non-discrimination and hate crimes legislation. We continue to work with the coalition opposing illegal government wiretapping, with the UUA participating in several letters and grassroots actions. As a member of a broad interfaith immigration coalition, the office has sent letters to Congress on immigration reform, and participated in the coalition's placement of its "Interfaith Statement for Immigration Concerns" in the September 20 issue of a Capitol Hill newspaper. We also helped to facilitate the UUA's signing of a religious organizations' amicus brief supporting school integration, and continues to monitor several issues important to the UUA, including drug policy reform and separation of religion and state.

**International:** The office continued its campaign in support of the Global HIV/AIDS bill, the PATHWAY Act, with a variety of events surrounding World AIDS Day, December 1st. In partnership with a broad coalition, we arranged for Bill Sinkford to participate in an audio press conference on 11/29/06 which resulted in significant media coverage. On World AIDS Day Rev. Sinkford was a featured speaker at the "For Whom the Bell Tolls" vigil, which received live CNN coverage. He also

spoke at the UNAIDS luncheon focused on women's issues and global AIDS and he visited some strategically chosen House offices. In the build up to these events, congregational activists sent their stories to our office, leading to coverage on UUA.org - there was also coverage of the World AIDS Day actions. In addition to this work, we have been networking with a variety of peace and security organizations, preparing for what will hopefully be a season of change on Iraq policy in the spring. Enabling our congregation's peace work, the office completed the development of the Peacemaking CSAI resource guide by the 11/1 deadline. The work was shared among a wonderful team of dedicated volunteers that continues to meet to implement the CSAI in our congregations.

**Women's Issues:** Comprehensive Sexuality Education continues to be a priority for the Washington Office. The office is currently planning for the 3rd annual Sexuality Education Advocacy Training that will be held in DC from March 24th -27th. Our outreach targets 10 key states where we hope to build strong inter-faith groups of advocates. The office is also involved in a small coalition working to re-introduce legislation that increases funding for international family planning programs. We continue to take a leadership role in the Religious Advocates Working Group to lobby for and monitor other policies addressing reproductive health issues.

**Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**  
**Submitted by: Cathy Cordes, Director**  
**UUA Office of International Relations**  
**December 2006**

The International Office has scheduled a series of focus group meetings around the country. These are being conducted by myself, Meg Riley and Bill Sinkford. We have already had two of these. While it is too early to report on the content or conclusions of the focus groups, it is clear that they will be a good source of information as we move forward with planning for the International Office.

In addition to focus groups, the office is conducting interviews with individuals at other churches who completed the questionnaire this past fall. We are talking to ministers and board chairs at churches identified as being of special interest on the basis of the information in the questionnaires.

We are beginning to formulate the functions of the international office and identifying the skills necessary to carry out the needed functions. This will form the basis for the job search to fill the position of director for the international office.

In November 2006, I attended the Executive Committee meeting of the International Conference of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU). We began preliminary explorations of a memorandum of understanding between ICUU and the UUA. We are awaiting board action on a series of policy statements that will give us the guidance needed to go forward with this discussion in earnest.

**Report to the UUA Board of Trustees**  
**Submitted by: Kathy Sreedhar, Director**  
**UU Holdeen India Program**  
**December 2006**

**UU Holdeen India Program Report to the UUA Board of Trustees, January 2007**

UU Holdeen India Program Director Kathy Sreedhar traveled in India and China in September and October. In India, she met with partners and potential partners, foundation and journalists. She also spoke to the new American India Foundation Service Corps Fellows about UUHIP's approach and work. She went to Xian, China to take part in the Global Fund for Women (GFW) Asia Advisory Council Meeting. The meeting brought together 25 Advisors representing 16 countries. 25 members of the Chinese Women's Federation and GFW grantees joined us for 1 day of the meeting. We discussed the Asia region's critical issues, strategies to address them and Grantmaking priorities. We agreed to focus on economic, sexual and reproductive rights. UUHIP and GFW co-fund several organizations in India.

**UUHIP Collaborations and Visibility**

The Reverend Michael McGee, Minister of the UU Church of Arlington, Virginia, who traveled with Kathy Sreedhar in February 2006, is working with his Congregation to support specific UUHIP partners. He gave 4 sermons on his trip and is planning an event on January 12<sup>th</sup> to focus on India. Several UU congregations have raised funds for UUHIP partners: Atlanta GA, Clearwater FL, Cedar Lane in Bethesda MD, Cedars UU Church on Bainbridge Island WA, Gainesville FL, Greenville SC, and Morristown NJ.

UUA Vice President Kay Montgomery, UUSC Deputy Director Mark McPeak, and Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, Unity Church - Unitarian, St. Paul MN, will join Kathy Sreedhar to visit partners in India in February 2007.

UUA President Bill Sinkford, VP Kay Montgomery, Treasurer Tim Brennan, UUA Board of Trustees Financial Advisor Dan Brody met with three representatives from Wachovia Bank to discuss the Holdeen Trusts. Tim Brennan will give a full report to the UUA Board of Directors.

The Rishho Kosei Kai renewed its grant to the Self Employed Women's Association for support of their peace centers.

UUHIP nominated P. Sainath, one of India's leading investigative journalists and a close colleague, for the Harry Chapin Media Award, given annually to a journalist for best coverage of hunger and poverty issues. While Sainath was in New York accepting this award, we arranged a joint program with the UU UN Office and Religions for Peace. His program on inequality can be heard at: <http://www.rfpusa.org/podcast/index.html> (near the bottom of the page).

After hearing Kathy Sreedhar speak at a UU Congregation, The Arlington Learning in Retirement Institute invited her to put together a six week course on India. Over 50 people attended the series which covered inequality, gender and caste issues, history, politics, economics and diaspora literature. She has been asked to give the course again next year.

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

January 4-5	Leadership Council and Public Witness meetings, Boston MA
January 12	Focus Group on International Work, Davenport IA
January 19	UUA Board Meeting, Boston, MA
January 25-26	Faith In Public Life Board Meeting, Washington Office meetings, Washington DC
January 28	UUWF Sunday, First Universalist Church, Minneapolis MN
January 30	Environmental Summit
January 31-Feb 1	Gulf Coast Volunteer Program Summit Boston, MA
February 4	Preach, Unity Church-Unitarian, St. Paul MN
February 5-7	Public Witness Retreat, Leadership Council Meeting Boston, MA
February 14-19	Family Vacation in Orlando, FL
February 18	Preach, UU Fellowship of Vero Beach
March 7-10	Leadership Council, Boston MA Washington Office meetings, Washington DC Keynote Mass Bay District meeting for social justice work, Boston, MA
March 18-April 9	Family Vacation, China (!!!!)

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

Jan 22-23	Let Justice Roll Coalition Meeting Cleveland OH
Jan. 30	UUA Environmental Summit Boston MA
Feb. 14-15	Committee on Socially Responsible Investing Meeting Boston MA
Feb. 23-24	UU Social Justice Consultation Denver CO
March 10	UU Social Justice Leadership Teams Training Mass Bay District
March 21	Interfaith Organizing Initiative Chicago IL

**Cathy Cordes, Director**  
**Office of International Relations**  
**Winter 2007 Travel Schedule**

January 20	River Road MD for a focus group with the Greater Washington Area partner Churches
January 26 - 28	Tampa - St. Pete Florida focus group
February 2-4	Dallas / Carrollton TX focus group
February 23 - 25	Houston TX focus group
February 27-28	Tulsa OK Focus Group
March 30 - April 1	Portland, OR focus group with Bill Sinkford

Yet to be scheduled - California focus group(s) one or two to be scheduled