

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

March 2007

Crocuses and daffodils aren't the only things popping up! As you'll see in the attached report, the life of the Advocacy and Witness staff group is on the move!

The Public Witness team met in February to review our strategic plan, which was designed over four years ago. As we expected, our strategic priorities needed tweaking and so we have now created a new list:

Family Matters remain high priority. Certainly no other work has galvanized our movement or brought us more media attention than the marriage equality work.. Though a federal marriage amendment will not be coming back in the next two years, other GLBT issues remain a focus. Given changes in Congress, we stand a chance at advancing positive work towards comprehensive sexuality education (see Rob Keithan's report for details). And our work on reproductive choice remains urgent.

Racial Justice remains high priority, but we have now linked it with **Economic justice** issues. Specifically, we want to use the Gulf Coast recovery work (more below) to engage our congregations in national advocacy work. Immigration is a hot item, with many of our congregations involved in a new sanctuary movement to support immigrant families in their local areas. And the living wage work which was so successful in 2006 will continue.

While we decided not to continue on the church/state separation work., we made special note of the attacks on Muslims and Arabs and agreed that this should be a priority under our Racial Justice banner.

New areas of focus: **International Work**. The addition of new staff in the Washington Office has made it possible to pay much more work to issues of peace/ Iraq (see Rob Keithan's report for details). We will continue with our work on Darfur. Global HIV/ AIDS will extend our work against abstinence only legislation into the international arena.

Global Warming and Sustainability. This is something of the 'red haired stepchild,' and despite our commitment we have few staff resources to put into this as of yet. We will rely heavily on the work of the many environmental activists throughout the nation.

Because of the closer connections, and bit of overlap, with UUSC priorities, key members of the UUA and advocacy and witness team, along with Janet Hayes, PR Director, met with advocacy,

communications, and program staff at UUSC for a daylong exploration of how we might work most effectively to support one another. It was a great meeting. Partnership with UUSC grows stronger daily.

Global Warming and Environmentalism were the topic of a daylong summit held by Bill Sinkford on January 30. All kinds of activists were in attendance, and reported on exciting work being done throughout the movement. We are trusting that staff resources will follow vision on this issue (not presuming new staff, but understanding that priorities may need to shuffle).

January 31-February 1 was a wonderful stakeholders meeting to envision a volunteer program for UUs in the Gulf Coast area. Moderator Gini Courter took strong leadership and will announce the need for funds for this program at General Assembly. A Friends letter will go out in April for it. Hundreds of UUs have already gone to the Gulf Coast and we anticipate thousands more will want to. Provided enough money comes through, we are anticipating an initial staffing through the fourth anniversary of Katrina, September 2008. We also hope to raise money for advocacy staff to focus on Katrina.

As Kathy Sreedhar reports, she took Kay Montgomery and Mark McPeak from the UUSC, as well as the Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs, with her to India in February. All were as impressed as every guest to the Holdeen India program partners has ever been!

Finally, huge thanks are due to Cathy Cordes for the work she has done to focus the International Programs. We are entering search for the new International Programs Director—as Cathy mentions in her report, a different job than before!

I am truly blessed to work with such a terrific team of people. Thanks for your hard work to support us all!

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
Submitted by: Susan Leslie
Director for the Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness
March 2007

Social Witness: Through our collaboration with the Washington Office we are seeing a greater response by UUs to our action alerts. Dozens of UU congregations, with just a few days notice, participated in the *No! to the Surge* events held immediately after the State of the Union address in January calling for more troops and 800 UUs marched together in Washington at the large peace march. This past week we sent out President Sinkford's statement opposing the supplemental appropriations bill and a fact sheet called *A Moral Balance Statement* for congregations to use in their advocacy and witness efforts. As of this writing I have already received several responses about congregational plans to use the information.

Several dozen UU ministers and social justice chairs signed on to the *Let Justice Roll Letter to Congress from People of Faith for a Just Minimum Wage* in January, with a large representation from Ohio where we had done some targeted in-reach. Our latest alert has been about possible plans to tie minimum wage legislation to the Iraq war spending bill. We continue to partner with the UUSC in this work and are making plans for mobilizing UUs in southern states where ballot initiatives to raise state minimum wages will be in the 2008 elections.

Also in January, the UUA was the first denomination (14 others are now involved) to sign on to *The New Sanctuary Movement* which enlists congregation in sanctuary and support for families defying deportation orders. No laws are being broken since the refusal is open and through the court system and no one is being hidden. Already we have heard from several congregations in California, as well as Texas, Missouri, Colorado and Florida. See www.newsanctuarymovement.org for more information. We are featuring a workshop and gathering on immigration reform and sanctuary at General Assembly with Interfaith Worker Justice Executive Director Kim Bobo. (Meg Riley and I are on the IWJ Board).

In February we ran a series on www.UUA.org for Black History Month that featured UU congregational activities to dismantle racism and engage in truth and reconciliation in their communities. One of the stories featured the UU Church of Baton Rouge and their advocacy program. Our office is working closely with Meg Riley, the Washington Office, and the UU Service Committee to promote national advocacy for Gulf Coast recovery. We are also co-sponsoring two workshops at General Assembly on the Gulf that will feature activists from the region along with Dr. William Cross (Cornell University, author of *Shades of Black*) and Linda Stout (Exec. Director of *Spirit in Action*, author of *Bridging the Class Divide*).

Lastly, we are coordinating campaigns with the UU Ministry for Earth, our partner the Earth Day Network, and the Step It Up! Campaign for the period beginning on April 14 Climate Change Day through Earth Day April 22nd. Hundreds of our congregations have shown *An Inconvenient Truth* and getting engaged in efforts to halt global warming. See www.uua.org in April for more information.

Between Advocacy-News, Social Action Chair (SAC) News, and Journey Toward Wholeness (JTW) News, we are reaching close to 5,000 UU social justice leaders. Our new Democracy In Action software has greatly enhanced the look of the e-letters and allows us to track readership and actions. I want to thank Audra Friend for her design work on SAC-News (which is up to 1800 subscribers and doubled in 3 years) and JTW News (which is up to over 1500 readers).

Social Justice Empowerment Program: We are currently accepting workshop applications for fall workshops. We will be conducting six-month follow-up consultations during April with the six congregations we piloted our newly revised materials with this past fall; as well as one-year follow-ups with the congregations we worked with last spring. We will be holding one more empowerment workshop this spring in Arkansas. A cluster workshop for the Raleigh/Durham area is planned for the fall and we are in the exploration and planning stages with several other cluster areas. A strength of the Social Justice Empowerment program is that outcomes and decisions are made either at the workshop, or soon after with proposals that are brought to congregation-wide meetings, regarding focus areas, establishment of issue task forces, involvement in coalitions and congregation-based community organizing and more. For this to work on the cluster level, a requirement for the workshop is that one cluster project be an outcome for the participants. This was done successfully with congregations in South Carolina last year who chose marriage equality advocacy as their joint project. One of the factors will be assessing in our follow-up is if there is growth resulting from social witness.

Committee on Socially Responsible Investing: Since the SRI website is in the second tier of the new launch, we are taking the opportunity to work with an SRI communications specialist to

reorganize the SRI site. Our goals are to link it to the Investment site (and not just to social justice) and to prominently display the General Investment Fund, the Community Investments Matching Funds Program, and news of our shareholder advocacy program. The new site will be up by General Assembly. We will be assisting the committee to continue offering the successful web-based teleconference series this spring and next fall. Our shareholder advocacy efforts include engagement on global warming/climate change resolutions, corporate governance issues, the adoption of non-discrimination policies and pressing for domestic partner benefits, and health care. We are promoting Community Investing opportunities in the Gulf Coast. We are very excited that Ben Cohen (co-founder of Ben & Jerry's) will be presenting on "Socially Responsible Investing and the Maturation of Capitalism" at this GA. (We are working with him on the logistics of his desire to bring ice cream to the event!) See the CSRI report for more details on investing and shareholder advocacy.

Congregation Based Community Organizing (CBCO): The mailing in November to all congregations of our new guide, *Congregation-Based Community Organizing: A Social Justice Approach to Revitalizing Congregational Life*, has led to reports from congregations who are involved in CBCO and were not listed in our guide and inquires from those interested in getting involved. Members of the UU Ministers Advisory Council on CBCO have been using it in district workshops and at UUMA chapter meetings. Two of the members, Rev. Art McDonald and Rev. Heidi Swartz, and the director of Congregational Advocacy and Witness, delivered a plenary workshop on CBCO at the national social justice conference in Denver CO on February 25th. A workshop on coalitions, that included CBCO, was held in the Mass Bay District on March 10th. Two workshops are being held at General Assembly that will feature CBCO work. One is on Gulf Coast recovery with Rev. Steve Crump from WIN in Baton Rouge, Mary Fontenot an organizer from ACT in New Orleans, and Rev. Tony Johnson of Community Church NYC who is working with the Gamaliel network on their national Gulf recovery program. The other is the above-mentioned workshop on immigration reform and solidarity with immigrants and will include UUs from San Diego and the mid-West.

Feature stories on various UU congregations in CBCOs were carried in *Interconnections*, Winter 2006, and *UU World* Spring 2007. The Office for Congregational Advocacy & Witness sent out a survey this past fall to 105 congregations involved in CBCO to gain information about their initiatives, dues memberships, and their level of satisfaction. We have received responses from 35 congregations and are in the process of compiling that information into a report for the council but initial review indicates high satisfaction and a wealth of information regarding UU involvement in CBCO and their outcomes.

One of the council members, Rev. Craig Roshaven of First Jefferson UU Church in Ft. Worth TX, now sits on the Interfaith Organizing Table with the director for Congregational Advocacy and Witness. Plans are underway for an interfaith, cross network summit to be held in Washington DC in January 2008. The summit will include tracks for congregational leaders who are interested in CBCO and for those already involved, as well as opportunities for denominations to gather separately. We are developing an outreach plan for UU congregational involvement with targets for number of congregations represented, both new, and already engaged. The next Table meeting is March 21st and we will have a better sense of our outreach plan after that.

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

March 2007

Highlights from the Washington Office:

- In close collaboration with other offices and staff groups, we have spent considerable time and energy working on the new website. Since 1999, the Washington Office has maintained its own website outside the main uua.org site, so the process of coming “in house” is complex and challenging. Nonetheless, we’re very excited to soon be fully integrated in the new social justice section of the site, which will allow for much better branding and marketing of all UUA resources which support effective organizing and action.
- The office has also been actively participating in the public witness team’s strategic planning process, which we expect to result in some shifts in the portfolios and priorities for our legislative assistants. Notably, Washington Office staff joined other UUA staff in a day-long meeting with the communications and justice staff from the UU Service Committee to ensure that we were in the loop with each other’s priorities and plans.
- Thanks to the support of a generous donor at All Soul’s Church, Unitarian, the Advocacy and Witness Staff Group created the position of “program associate for peacemaking,” to be housed in Washington Office. The primary focus of the two-year position is promoting implementation of the 2006-2010 Congregational Study/Action Issue, Peacemaking, using All Soul’s and congregations in the DC area as pilots for new materials. We expect that the position will start in mid-June.

Civil Rights and Religious Liberty: The office has focused largely on support for anti-hate crimes legislation and on immigration reform. Staff have spent significant time advocating for the Local Law Enforcement Hate Crimes Prevention Act, working actively with secular and religious organizations on legislative strategy and grassroots mobilization. To support both anti-hate crimes legislation and the Employment Non-Discrimination Act, the Office is partnering with the Human Rights Campaign to bring UU ministers to an HRC clergy lobby day on BGLT issues and is encouraging UU congregations to participate in a “Day of Action for Workplace Equity” organized by Lambda Legal. The Office continues to work for comprehensive immigration reform; as an active member of an interfaith advocacy coalition, the office has lobbied Congress for immigration reform. The UUA has also signed on to support the New Sanctuary Movement, and the office is working with the Office of Congregational Advocacy and Witness to facilitate and track UU congregations’ involvement in this movement. In support of religious liberty, the Office joins a broad coalition in opposing “charitable choice” and attempts to allow religious discrimination in hiring. The Office has also sent letters to Congress supporting voting rights for the District of Columbia, and staff continue to monitor several other issues important to the UUA, including privacy violations by the federal government, and criminal justice reform.

International Issues: In early 2007 the Washington Office for Advocacy has taken significant strides in pushing for an end to the Iraq occupation. On January 27th, soon after Bill Sinkford issued a letter to the President condemning the “surge” in troops, the office coordinated the

participation of over 800 UUs in an anti-war march. Throughout February and early March, the Washington Office—in coordination with the PW team—developed a “Moral Balance Sheet” assessing the true costs of the war. We strategically shared that resource with congregations and partnered with nearly a dozen to bring that moral outlook on the war to members of congress through a mass mailing and targeted lobby visits. The office has also stayed active on Global HIV/AIDS, pushing the PATHWAY Act forward by helping to organize a congressional briefing and a grassroots advocacy postcard campaign due to launch in late March. We continue to support the UUSC with their work on Darfur through e-alerts and organizing around GA. The office has also developed a web resource on human trafficking and is working closely with the UU Holdeen India Program to highlight their work and the ongoing tragedy that is modern day slavery.

Women’s Issues: Comprehensive Sexuality Education continues to be a priority for the Washington Office. The 3rd annual Sexuality Education Advocacy Training was successful in empowering 35 youth, young adults and adult allies from 12 target states to DC from March 24th -27th. Our targeted outreach built strong inter-faith groups of advocates who will continue organizing in their communities. Additionally, in partnership with the United Church of Christ, we organized a National Phone Briefing and Call-In day in support of the REAL Act. The office is also involved in a coalition working to pass legislation that increases funding for international family planning programs through advocacy days, a website campaign (www.supportfamilyplanning.org) and an interfaith congressional briefing. We continue to take a leadership role in the Religious Advocates Working Group to lobby for and monitor other policies addressing reproductive health issues, including the Prevention First Act.

Report to the UUA Board of Trustees
Submitted by: Cathy Cordes, Director
UUA Office of International Relations
March 2007

Focus groups are almost complete. Bill Sinkford and I will be conducting the last one in Portland, OR in late March. What remains to be done is to combine the info we have received and summarizing a report that covers that and the information gathered through the focus groups. I expect this will be completed before I leave office at the end of June.

We have had preliminary conversations with ICUU about a Memo of Understanding (MOU) and the UUPCC Board of Directors has also been working on one. I hope to have at least one completed by June so that it can be used as an example for MOUs with other groups and the process can be documented.

The job description for the International Office director is 90% complete and is being reviewed by Personnel for finishing touches. It cannot be enclosed with this report because it is not complete, but you will be able to see it on the UUA website before your meeting in April.

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

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

Kathy Sreedhar was delighted that after 23 years, UUA Vice President Kay Montgomery was able to visit UUHIP partners in India. UUSC Deputy Director Mark McPeak and Co-Ministers from Unity Church-Unitarian in St. Paul, MN, Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs also joined Kathy and Kay in seeing partners' human rights work and its impact on the lives of the most oppressed peoples in India.

Mark McPeak said he "obtained a good understanding of the Holdeen India Program" and that UUSC and UUHIP should build a long-term strategic relationship. He also invited Mihir Bhatt of the All-India Disaster Mitigation Institute (AIDMI), who is currently a Harvard fellow, to speak to UUSC staff, all of whom were very impressed. Mark also recommended that one of UUSC's Program Managers visit a number of UUHIP partners.

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

- *Reema Nanavaty, SEWA*, was invited to speak at the Global Philanthropy Conference in California this spring.
- *Arbind Singh, National Alliance of Street Vendors of India (NASVI)*, has been selected as an Eisenhower Fellow.
- *Mahesh Uphadaya, Solidarity*, will be at the Grantmakers without Borders Conference in New York City in June
- Revs. Rob and Janne Eller-Isaacs invited *Vivek Pandit, Vidhayak Sansad* to Minneapolis in November to:
 - continue theological discussions begun in India and
 - connect Vivek to people who may help his economic (biodiesel) programs

UUHIP Collaborations and Visibility

On January 12th Reverend Michael McGee and the UU Church of Arlington, VA hosted a UU Holdeen India dinner and fundraiser attended by about 150 people. They also are supporting UUCA member Barbara Johnson to produce a video showing Holdeen partners' extraordinary work in promoting economic and social justice in India. The film will feature examples of UU values in action and aims to increase UU's knowledge of and involvement with international social change and human rights work.

Kathy Sreedhar participated in a joint meeting of Human Rights and Peace and Security Funders. The purpose of the 2-day meeting on Capitol Hill was to explore the opportunities – and challenges – to advance a human rights and peace agenda during the 110th Congress. Members of Congress (e.g. Patrick Leahy, James Moran), Congressional staff, journalists, advocates and activists discussed key issues and advocacy strategies including legislation, litigation, media and grassroots organizing and networking. Minutes will be available.

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

March 31-April 6	All Souls Gulf Coast Relief Service Trip, New Orleans, LA (Adam, Elizabeth, Meredith)
April 6-8	JPD Sex-Ed Conference, Arlington, VA (Elizabeth)
April 13-24	Prairie Star District District Assembly, Minneapolis, MN (Adam)
April 21-22	Pacific Southwest District Assembly, Riverside, CA (Elizabeth)
April 22	Alliance Sunday, Arlington, MA (Meredith)
April 27-28	Joseph Priestley District Spring Conference, Harrisburg, PA (Rob)
April 27-28	Florida District Assembly, Clearwater FL (Adam)
May 27	UUs of Fallston, Fallston, MD (Elizabeth)
June 19-25	General Assembly, Portland, OR (Adam, Elizabeth, Kat, Meredith, Rob)

**Rob Keithan, Director, Kat Liu, Assistant Director, Elizabeth Bukey, Adam Gerhardstein, and Meredith Schonfeld-Hicks (Legislative Assistant)
Spring 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

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

March 21	Interfaith Organizing Initiative, Chicago IL
June 18-25	General Assembly, Portland OR