

UUSJ Newsletter - Spring 2009

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

An affiliate of the Chicago Area Unitarian Universalist Council

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Chair's Corner:

At the 2/15/09 meeting of the UUSJ Board, we voted to plan and carry out a gathering of social justice leaders from CAUUC churches. We have done this in the past, but it has been some time ago and there has been a lot of turn over in the social justice leadership over the past few years. In addition, of course, we have had the recent economic crisis and the historic 2008 national election. Here we have a situation fraught with peril and opportunity! But wait, there's more! On the local level, CAUUC has presented a vision with two major elements. First, CAUUC has said "Let's communicate better." Second, CAUUC has said, "Now is the time." Now you ask, "For what?" Keep reading.

The goal of better communication was covered in the CAUUC News for 1/09 and in a meeting 2/3/09 between the CAUUC Board and several UUSJ leaders. We have been doing many of these things for years. But several new and revised elements have been added, including web site www.uuchicago.org with links to www.cauuc.org and to www.UUsforSocialJustice.org, radio "spots" on Chicago Progressive Talk Radio, a service called Constant Contact which sends e-alerts, and the use of conference calls provided through CAUUC for our Peace Task Force.

These elements have potential to add much to our current system of websites, Action Alerts, phone contacts, meetings, e-mail and ground mail.

The "Now is the Time!" Effective Social Justice Advocacy workshop held 2/21/09 presented not only an interactive workshop but a Social Justice workbook. This was really an excellent introduction to community organizing for UUs. One-on-ones, witness, advocacy, planning, leadership developments, organizing, lobbying, community contacts and much more was covered. Again, we have done some of these activities for years. But the workshop presented a systematic program to help us live out our values in the public sphere, beyond our congregations.

So can we do it all? That is, can we communicate better, link our CAUUC congregations closer together for social justice, support our congregations, and develop some new community organizing techniques without paid staff and with very little money? As a great philosopher once said, "We will see!" If you want to see, or discuss, come to our next UUSJ Board meeting scheduled for Sunday, 5/10/09, 2 to 5 PM at the UU Society of Geneva or contact me at (773) 561-5296. Email: horcher@att.net
Gene Horcher

UUSJ Spring Meeting

Sunday, May 10, 2009

2 PM – 3 PM Program

3 PM – 5 PM Meeting

Unitarian Universalist Society of Geneva

110 S. 2nd Street.

Geneva, IL 60134

One block south of Rte. 38, one block
west of Rte. 31

Report of the Task Force on Economic Justice and Homelessness

This task force organized a community forum on The Economic Crisis and Its Affect on Homelessness, which was held at First Unitarian Church of Chicago on January 31, 2009. There were 19 individuals who attended, with non U.U.s being the majority of those in attendance. Al Hofeld, Jr., an attorney who assists families facing foreclosure, shared stories of the families he has helped who have been facing foreclosure, and in some cases the prospect of becoming homeless, due to predatory lending and misleading creative mortgages that home buyers did not understand. Richard Gilliam, a community organizer with Metropolitan Tenants Organization, shared the experiences of renters who, though current on their rent payments, are forced out of their homes with little fore-notice, due to their landlord going into foreclosure. These renters lose their security deposit and sometimes end up homeless. Al Sharp II, Executive Director of Protestants for the Common Good, addressed the recent housing bubble and other economic policies of recent years related to investment in affordable housing, that have reduced

the stock of affordable housing, particularly affordable rental housing, with a resulting increase in demand on food pantries, homeless shelters, and related social services. A lively question and answer session followed the panelists' presentations.

We considered three possible Action Alerts in March. The first Action Alert we initiated this year, in mid-March, was in support of Illinois House Bill 1195, the Illinois Vacant and Abandoned Properties Act. This legislation seeks to stabilize neighborhoods by giving municipalities more tools to address foreclosure related problems. Municipalities would be able to take actions to maintain vacant and abandoned properties, charging banks and other lenders who have foreclosed on properties for the costs of such maintenance. Totally abandoned properties could be placed in land banks and packaged to promote economic development and community revitalization. By making lenders bear the cost of maintaining vacant properties, they will be more motivated to avoid foreclosures by renegotiating mortgage terms so that families could remain in their homes. About a week after our Action Alert on this legislation, H.R. 1195 passed the Illinois House by a wide margin and has now moved to committee in the Illinois Senate. We will shortly be having another Action Alert, this one in support of H.R. 1106, the federal legislation which, among other things, would allow bankruptcy judges to modify the mortgages of individuals facing bankruptcy, providing such individuals/families have the steady income to allow them to maintain payments on a modified mortgage. That legislation has passed the U.S. House of Representative and is now pending in committee in the Senate.

Members of our task force are currently gathering information so that we can update the Chicago and Suburban Chicago versions of our If YOU or Someone You Know Need Help resources sheets. These sheets, which are distributed to U.U. churches in the Chicago area, plus too many social workers and organizations that interact with homeless individuals, are a convenient way to provide individuals who are homeless, or at risk of becoming homeless, with information they need on a variety of social services.

In February notice was sent out to Social Justice Committee Chairs, and others who hold social justice leadership positions in our Chicago area U.U. churches, that April 15 was the deadline for submitting a Home and Hope Booster grant nomination. Our U.U. congregations can nominate organizations serving the homeless that they have been assisting with volunteers and/or financial assistance. Congregations can also nominate themselves, for unreimbursed expenses they have for providing services to the homeless. Preference is given to those organizations that have not received a Home and Hope Booster grant in the past, or at least have not received one recently. If you need the nomination form and associated cover letter, you may receive them by writing to uusj@sbcglobal.net.

This task force will hold its next meeting on Saturday, May 2, from 12:30 to 2:30 p.m., at Third Unitarian Church, 301 N. Mayfield, in Chicago's Austin community. All are welcome. If you need directions or other information, feel free to contact one of this task force's Co-Chairs.

Allan Lindrup, Co-Chair 773-643-8061 or uusj@sbcglobal.net
Ron Chew, Co-Chair 708-524-9695 or ronnkarla@aol.com

UUSJ Environmental Task Force Report

Action Alert: We are considering future Action Alerts endorsing anticipated legislation in Congress, which will promote renewable energy (solar, wind, geothermal), and emissions reduction (similar to a bill we did an Action Alert on last year).

Educational Inserts: We've completed and mailed one by Mary Alice Masonic on CFL bulbs. It deals with their energy saving, their whiteness, brightness, and compatibility. It also deals with their disposal and proper methods for cleaning up broken CFL bulbs since they do contain some toxic mercury. We're planning a revision on the one about Household Hazardous Waste Disposal since the old one very much needs updating for the currently active sites accepting household hazardous waste, their addresses and proper contacts. Another one about the carbon footprint of wine has been proposed for later.

Program for UUSJ Spring Meeting on May 10 at Geneva The Environmental Task Force will present the program at the next quarterly UUSJ Spring Meeting at the Unitarian Universalist Society of Geneva (see box on page 2 for time and address).

Next meeting is Sunday, June 14, 2009 from 3 to 5PM at the Unity Temple, 875 Lake Street, Oak Park. All are welcome.

With any questions, contact:

Andrew T. Fisher – Chair
847-492-1055 or fisher.a@sbcglobal.net

UUSJ Peace Task Force Report

The main activities of the Peace Task Force during this quarter were our meeting on 1/24/09 and our participation in the peace march on 3/14/09.

At our 1/24/09 meeting we discussed putting on a peace service for one or more of the CAUUC churches. Many churches are looking for possible services, particularly during the summer months. We need to make a decision on this possible project soon, in order to contact the CAUUC churches in time for summer scheduling. The Peace Task Force is also responsible for putting on one program at a UUSJ Quarterly Board meeting. Our program is scheduled for Sunday, 8/23/09, 2 to 3 PM at the Hinsdale Church.

The Peace Task Force voted to participate in the peace march held 3/14/09 in the Pilsen area of Chicago. The turn out for the march and rally was substantial. However, it appeared that few members of our task force actually attended this event. We will discuss this at our next Task Force meeting. We did advertise the event and paid an entry fee.

Our next meeting is scheduled for Saturday, 5/9/09, 2 to 3:30 PM at Third Unitarian Church, 301 N. Mayfield, Chicago. To attend by conference call, dial 1-800-704-9804, then enter the code 892781#. All CAUUC church members and friends are welcome.

If you have any questions or suggestions, contact Gene Horcher, (773) 561-5296, email: horcher@att.net

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