

# *UUSJ Newsletter – Fall 2021*

## *Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice*

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### ***Chair's Corner:***

April 2019 the New York legislature passed a bill that provided for significant changes in the state's money bond system. The law failed to fully eliminate bail, a goal which had been a viable possibility. Yet the bill was heralded as genuinely progressive and holding the potential to end mass incarceration at the local level. Judges retained a limited ability to set bail for the most serious crimes, primarily violent felonies. People charged with all other crimes--who made up 90% of the arrests in the state--were to remain in the community. The coalitions and activists that had organized around bond reform began work on goals for the new year, including laws that shielded police from public scrutiny, restrictions on the use of solitary confinement, and establishing mechanisms for people to challenge wrongful convictions when exculpatory evidence emerges.

The law passed in April 2019 went into effect January 1, 2020. Shortly thereafter the New York Police Department released statistics showing a crime spike. NYPD charged that the weakened bond rules were the cause. Although the claim was untethered from any legitimate analysis of data, a major backlash was unleashed. Police departments and unions, district attorneys, conservative politicians, and social media engaged in a campaign of public fearmongering. News media picked up and ran the stories asserting that bond reform imperiled public safety. Prominent politicians, including Gov. Andrew Cuomo and Mayor Bill de

### **UUSJ Fall/Annual Meeting**

The UUSJ Fall/Annual Meeting will take place at 1<sup>st</sup> Unitarian Church of Chicago and over zoom. Sunday, November 21, from 2 to 5 p.m. The Peace Task Force will lead a program: Rosalie G. Riegler, peace activist and member of the coalition calling for a no first strike pledge in regards to using nuclear weapons in a war. She is with the Chicago Area Peace Action on Anti-Nuclear legislative initiatives, including advocating for no-first use. Zoom link:

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/87625294665?pwd=bHhVeG0wbkU1dDZ2k0VtZXhhemZqZz09>

Blasio, who had actively promoted the no-money bond bill, covered and disavowed their own legislation. Efforts to counter the scare campaign with fact-based clarifications and data failed to gain traction. On April 3, 2020, the state legislature passed a new bill that contracted the newly enacted reforms by expanding the roster of crimes that allowed judges to set bail.

New York's efforts to institute money bond reform can serve as a cautionary tale for justice activists in Illinois. It also raises much broader and deeper questions for the social activist. How do we maintain stamina and commitment when our work is repeatedly derailed by apathy, untruths, or the self-serving interests of those who hold power? As I write my final column as chair of UUSJ, I remind myself that

the struggle for social justice is not a linear process, a solo endeavor, or bounded by any one person's lifetime. It spans across individuals, generations, and geographies. Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray offers:

....Unitarian Universalists' commitment to justice, equity, and democracy is not just political or moral, it is fundamentally theological. It grows from our affirmation of the inherent worth and dignity of every person and the knowledge that we are all interconnected. It reflects the fact that our theology is not so much concerned with the afterlife but is accountable to human experience and the conditions of people's lives here and now. Human dignity and interdependence are the foundation of our commitment to a multiracial, pluralistic democracy.

Her words, though addressed to Unitarian Universalists, would seem translatable to people invested in social justice irrespective of their religious faith or lack of faith.

We hope to see you at UUSJ's fall meeting, to be held on Sunday, November 21, 2 to 5 PM. The meeting will be both in-person at the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, 5650 S. Woodlawn, Chicago, and via Zoom. The program portion of the meeting will be sponsored by the Peace Task Force.

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## **UUSJ Economic Justice and Homelessness Task Force Report**

Since UUSJ's last newsletter, in April 2021, this task force has initiated three Action Alerts. The first was in support of the Raise the Wage Act, which would raise the federal minimum wage to \$15. The second was to support the President's Infrastructure Bill, in which we emphasized the social justice elements of that legislation. The third and most recent was in support of the many social justice elements in the American Families Plan. Those last two measures are now at the heart of the political negotiations in Washington.

This task force awarded a Home and Hope Booster award to The Night Ministry, which was nominated by the Social Justice Ministry at Second Unitarian Church. The Night Ministry is an interfaith non-profit that provides health, hunger, and housing services to the homeless on Chicago's north side, who are disproportionately LGBTQ youth. Their health services are provided out of mobile (bus) clinics. Their hunger services include meals distributed during weekly street outreach to homeless youth events, at stops by their outreach buses, and in The Crib, their emergency shelter for homeless youth ages 18 up to 25. Their housing services include the before mentioned Crib, plus transitional housing for young mothers.

Second Unitarian Church (2U) provides meals monthly for the Youth Outreach Program. For the past year 2U has provided 100 "Sack Suppers" and beverages to The Night Ministry team when they meet at Belmont and

Halsted. Ten different families or individuals make 10 suppers each. They are collected at the church and then delivered to The Night Ministry staff for them to distribute on the street. Prior to the Covid-19 restrictions they had a more extensive warm meal which included soup, sandwiches, fruit, vegetables, chips, a dessert and assorted beverages. 2U's crew makes the meals at the church and then serves the food to The Night Ministry community. 2U volunteers spend between \$200- \$250 per outreach event. Between the meal preppers and the servers, 16 2U volunteers are involved each time it serves.

Second Unitarian also provides a hot sit-down meal once every two months for clients who are spending the night at The Crib. This meal changes every month. It might include a casserole, chicken and rice or potatoes, or pasta as a main dish. They also make a salad and dessert. Prior to Covid a team of volunteers from the church would serve the meal and spend time visiting with the clients. This meal costs the church between \$100-\$150. 2U uses 7 volunteers for this project.

The Home and Hope Booster grant check sent to The Night Ministry amounted to \$555. Later this month the task force will be selecting its next Home and Hope Booster grant recipient.

Each year, prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, the task force updated its Chicago and Suburban Chicago *If YOU or Someone You Know Needs Help* resource sheets, and sends the final products to about 90 entities, such as the UU churches offices in the Chicago area, scores of non-profits that serve or interact with homeless individuals, dozens of social workers and others. We did not attempt to do an update in 2020, due to the disruptions and temporary abnormalities being caused

by the pandemic. Now we are updating those resource sheets again. The updating of the suburban version has been completed and we anticipate that the update of the Chicago version should be completed later this month. We will be distributing the updated sheets within a couple weeks after they are both finished, plus putting the updates on the UUSJ web site.

Long term task force member Linda Groetzinger stepped down from involvement with this task force, mainly due to declining health. We are glad that Bob Babcock of The Unitarian Church of Rockford has become active with this task force, so that we continue to have our minimum of five active members. The next meeting of this task force will occur on Wednesday, October 13, between 1 and 2:30 p.m. via Zoom. All are welcome. Please contact the task force Chair for the Zoom codes and agenda, if you would like to participate.

Allan Lindrup, task force Chair  
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## **UUSJ Environmental Task Force Report**

### **Congregational Reports:**

- (1) UU Community Church of Park Forest – No news.
- (2) First Unitarian Church of Chicago – Ellen reported that no news beyond that the capital improvement plan, which included several energy saving changes, is near completion
- (3) The Unitarian Church of Evanston – their Green Team meets monthly. Team is helping design the next long term capital campaign. Contemplating a HVAC upgrade to some version of heat exchanger or heat

pumps and the possibility of installing solar panels. Also possible improvements of a weather station in the rain garden funded through Northwestern.

(4) Beverly Unitarian – working to find a site in Pullman for the fall hazardous waste recycling event.

They plan to hold outdoor services every other Sunday.

(5) Geneva – Bill reported that The Green Sanctuary Team will be meeting for the first time in over a year. Mayors Metropolitan Caucus Chaired by Geneva's Mayor released its Climate Action Plan.

#### **Action Alert:**

The UUSJ Environmental Task Force has issued one Action Alert since the Spring Newsletter:

On August 22 to Federal senators to co-sponsor the PFAS Actions Act to require the EPA to establish drinking water perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS). standards.

#### **Educational Handout:**

There was discussion and editing suggestions about the next educational piece on Green Hydrogen. Allan agreed to plug in the changes and send it out to all for a final review. It has passed final email editing and has been sent out electronically and uploaded to the website.

#### **NEXT MEETING**

Saturday, October 16, at 1:00 PM via zoom. Contact Andrew for link.

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## **UUSJ Peace Task Force Report**

UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES, NO FIRST STRIKE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS IN A WAR SITUATION: A POSSIBLE OR IMPOSSIBLE DEMAND a Public Forum

When: November 21, 2021, Sunday, 2 - 3:30 pm at the Quarterly UUSJ meeting

Where: By Zoom (codes in box on page 1) and in Chris Moore Parlor, the First Unitarian Church of Chicago, 5750 South Woodlawn, Chicago Illinois

Who: The Peace Task Force of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), featuring Rosalie G. Riegler, peace activist and member of the coalition calling for a no first strike pledge in regards to using nuclear weapons in a war, presently living in Evanston where she is currently with the Chicago Area Peace Action on Anti-Nuclear legislative initiatives, including advocating for no-first use; Moderator, Finley C. Campbell, Acting Chair, the PTF.

What: A discussion of the validity of the concept of No First Use and updates on local communities which have taken a vote to support this pledge.

How? First there will be a presentation, followed by questions and discussions. Then a resolution of support for this effort.

Why? As the tensions between the Eurasian alliance of Iran, North Korea, China, and Russia and the US/NATO alliance intensify, it is important that if an armed conflict were to take place, both sides would agree to not use nuclear weapons first. And since we are here in the United States, we have an especially important duty to lead a movement to insure that our military abandons its present first strike position.

“Woe to ye who cry peace when there is no peace.”

Here we describe briefly the activities of the Task Force since our last newsletter. We have had to undergo some adjustments and yet we have managed to accomplish two things: confirming our existence as a UUSJ Task Force and a forum on the defeat of US Imperialism in Afghanistan.

With the resignation of our dear leader, Linda Groetzinger, there was a question about whether we could continue as a task force, for to be a task force, it is necessary to have a membership of at least five active UU members, from at least three Unitarian Universalist congregations. Fortunately, we have managed to do that, as our membership now consists of as our membership now consists of Dave Bartlett from Park Forest, William Koehl from Geneva, Nancy Cowrie from Beverly and Marie Cobb and I from First U., plus two others.

So in light of this reality, we decided to move forward, beginning with presenting a Zoom-forum (some 15 people in attendance) on the recent victory of the Taliban over US imperialism, featuring Fahima Gaheez, Director, the Afghan Women's Fund, who gave us personal stories describing the anguish and anger that she and her family and co-workers, were feeling, as the result of this victory, especially in light of the violence which some of the Taliban have carried out against them.

She shared honestly her hatred of the Taliban, seeing them all, in a sense as standing outside the perimeters of our First Principle, an understandable feeling, since she had been a victim of their earlier victory in the 20th century, and this hatred shaped her belief that their triumph was an unmitigated disaster for Afghan women in general and for the schools created for women and girls by the Fund, especially her latest, most successful effort, the Achin School.

I responded that I had hopes based on other data that the moderate

segment of the new Emirate Republic of Afghanistan would prevail over the hardliners, at least in mitigating some of the harsher misogynistic elements in the government and at some point, seeking to apply sharia law in a more modernistic fashion than they had done before.

Now, what is coming up?

As the acting chair, I will be proposing for discussion some initiatives to make the Task Force a vital part of the Peace Action Movement in the Chicago area. We are already beginning, having been allowed by the UUSJ Executive Committee to present the November program at our annual business meeting, described on the front page of our newsletter, and this is for me the most important thing we can do this year: alerting more people about the dangers of the use of nuclear weapons in future wars, especially the concept of having a First Strike Capability.

At our program in November Rosalie G. Riegler will show the fallacy in such an approach and describe ways that we as citizens in a democratic republic can oppose this policy (See [www.preventnuclearwar.org](http://www.preventnuclearwar.org)).

I have often argued at Peace Task Force meetings that the best way to try and prevent any kind of nuclear war, first strike or second strike, is to have detente, supported by all the nuclear powers, including Israel.

To conclude: recognizing that we are a very small part of the general Peace Action Movement in the Chicago area, we aim to support the No First Strike coalition, build up consciousness about the need for Detente, and sponsor forums and discussions on our own and in support of Movement actions as well — all this in the quest for the World Peace espoused by the sixth of our Seven UU Principles.

By Dr. Finley C. Campbell, Acting Chair

# **UUSJ Interfaith Criminal Justice Task Force Report**

The Interfaith Criminal Justice Task Force met during September with Jennifer Parrack, Re-entry Administrator at Illinois Department of Corrections. Ms Parrack updated the attendees on the many initiatives underway at IDOC. The Task Force will continue its exploration of IDOC initiatives for education and reentry in coming months.

Gregory Chambers has accepted the position of Co-Chair of the ICJTF starting in October. Born and raised in

the city of Chicago on its South and Southeast sides, Greg ventured into the field of law enforcement and served for several years as a Chicago police officer. A set of unfortunate circumstances led to an emotional breakdown compounded by a traumatic brain injury and a term of imprisonment in the Illinois Department of Corrections. Greg is currently Policy Organizer for Live Free Illinois – Chicago, a member of the Restoring Rights and Opportunities Coalition of Illinois, and a Governing Board Member of Heartland Alliance Fully Free Campaign.

The current Chair, Evan Freund, is relocating to California and will continue as Co-Chair of ICJTF.

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