

UUSJ Newsletter – Spring 2020

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

Andrew T. Fisher, Editor & Communications Director

1448 East 52nd Street, PM Box 144

Chicago, IL 60615

Phone: 773-595-4921 / E-mail: uusj@sbcglobal.net

Web site: <http://uusforsocialjustice.org/>

Chair's Corner:

These are certainly unique and challenging times we are living in now with the uncontrollable COVID-19 or corona virus spreading worldwide at an exponential logarithmic rate. All churches, schools, restaurants, bars, gyms, theaters, sports stadiums and any places where many people can gather closely at less than six feet apart are closed. In Evanston we held our Sunday service livestream over the internet, and I'm sure many other churches did too. Washington State, California, New York, Illinois, Florida and many other state governors have declared that these physical limits and closures are the rule in their states. This is to (hopefully) minimize the "spike" of infected people and spread it out over a greater period of time so our US healthcare system can handle all the infected people.

This crisis has also meant that many small businesses have had to close, many larger businesses like the airlines and manufacturing have also had to all-but close and lay off most of their workers. This has resulted in many employees getting laid off. All the schools closing means many parents have to work or stay at home to look after their children.

The federal government just passed a HUGE \$2 trillion package to help individuals, businesses small and large, schools as well as healthcare. President Trump wants to extend the quarantine to at least the end of April, but also says we have many short-term tests available now when they will take at least a couple of weeks.

Spring Quarterly Meeting

The UUSJ Spring Quarterly Meeting is on May 17, from 2 to 5 p.m. It will be a Zoom meeting – click <https://zoom.us/j/5121875317> id 512 187 5317 to join. The Interfaith Criminal Justice task force will do the program. Evan Freund, Chair of the Task Force will speak.

Program Description:

Evan Frenud will speak on the background, need, and prospects for criminal justice reform followed by Q and A period.

Some state and local leaders are helping, but this also means that we need our UU churches and groups like UUSJ now more than ever before to help us all communicate and especially help the poor and/or elderly members living alone. COMMUNICATION and COMMUNITY with our churches and

non-profit groups will guide us to the individuals who need help the most and get the help, products, and/or companionship they need to them.

As your Communications Director as well as your Chair, I'd like to let you all know that I recently inserted page visit counters at the upper left corner of EVERY page on the UUSJ website! The numbers are in white against the black box. You may not see it the first time. To see it, you have to reload the page. This is done by right clicking on the page, then left clicking on the circular arrow.

Andrew Fisher, Chair
fishorgn1580@gmail.com or 847-492-1832

UUSJ Economic Justice and Homelessness Task Force Report

The Corona virus crisis puts the homeless population at great risk. So advocates and supportive members of Congress were able to negotiate the inclusion of significant resources and measures in the large Corona virus relief package making its way through Congress the last week of March. The bill provides more than \$12 billion in funding for HUD programs, including:

- \$4 billion for Emergency Solutions Grants for homelessness assistance
- \$5 billion in Community Development Block Grants

- \$1.25 billion for the Housing Choice Voucher program
- \$1 billion for project based rental assistance
- \$685 million for public housing

The bill also institutes a much-needed temporary moratorium on evictions and foreclosures for homeowners and renters in federally subsidized apartments and homes with federally backed mortgages.

At the state and local level, the task force is supporting the Bring Chicago Home campaign. Bring Chicago Home is a grassroots movement of Chicagoans committed to creating a dedicated revenue stream to combat homelessness in Chicago. The coalition aims to restructure the Real Estate Transfer Tax (RETT), a one-time tax on properties when they are sold to advance a solution that will address the budget deficit and create a new, substantial and legally dedicated revenue stream to provide permanent affordable housing for people experiencing homelessness.

The proposal would provide a tax cut on properties sold under \$1 million and a tax increase on property sales over \$1 million. The campaign's current proposal would generate an estimated \$167 million in new revenue, \$88 million would be dedicated for the city's general budget and \$79 million to address homelessness. Bills to advance this proposal include Illinois SB 3243, introduced by Sen. Ram Villavalam (D-8th District), and Illinois HB 4826,

introduced by Rep. Delia Ramirez (D-4th District). It is expected that we will be having an Action Alert in support of that legislation after our task force meets on April 8.

During its meeting on January 22, 2020 the Task Force on Economic Justice and Homelessness approved a Home and Hope Booster grant nomination submitted on behalf of the Social Justice Committee of the Tree of Life Unitarian Universalist Church of McHenry. The nomination was in support of the congregation's Compassion for Campers program. Once a week from the second Monday in May until the last Monday in September the church's volunteers serve a meal and supply much needed personal care products, camping supplies, and canned goods to the homeless of McHenry County who are camping in unauthorized areas. The congregation's volunteers serve approximately 18 people each week. Tree of Life UU congregation partners with other churches in the county, social service groups, committees from the Tree of Life congregation, and in 2019 even a scout troop, to meet some of the needs of their homeless neighbors. The program has developed trust and friendships with the homeless community and have earned the respect of the county's PADS staff. Food and supplies are delivered to the homeless encampment in the county. This group is living in unauthorized areas and truly are forgotten folks.

In 2019, the Compassion for Campers coordinator donated approximately 80 hours to the program. This includes shopping for supplies, contacting the weekly lunch providers, setting up the lunch area, helping to serve the meal, and storing of the supplies at her home. Three of the church's congregants supplied 50 hours each through the course of the season through helping serve the meals and set up and take down of the area. Tree of Life committees and its outreach groups served 5 lunches. This totals 5 people per group for a total of 25 congregants. Through Tree of Life's second Sunday donations, a Camp out for Compassion fundraiser from the church's RE kids, and private donations we had a budget of \$1,300 for this year. The program is not part of the regular church budget and rely on donations of lunch food and other supplies. There is also a bin for members of Tree of Life UU congregation to place donated supplies. In 2019 the bin collected approximately \$250 worth of supplies. So, in all, the congregation provided close to 300 volunteer hours and over \$1,500 in financial and in-kind donations. We collected \$400 in contributions toward the current Home and Hope Booster grant, which will be going out as a grant check around the beginning of April.

This writer was planning to attend the Poor People's Campaign mass rally in DC the third Saturday in June and had signed up for one of the buses going from the Chicago area

to DC for that event. In the last couple days we were informed that the rally will now be a virtual event, due to COVID-19, so our bus ticket charges were refunded. If only poverty was something that was experienced not in reality but only in a virtual world.

The next meeting of this task force will take place via a conference call on Wednesday, April 8, between 2 and 3:30 p.m. If you are not a regular with this task force, but would like to participate, please contact the author of this article for the call-in number and password. Allan Lindrup, task force Chair 773-595-4921, uusj@sbcglobal.net

UUSJ Environmental Task Force Report

Congregational Reports:

(1) First Unitarian Church of Chicago – Allan reported that they read the book *The Uninhabitable Earth* by David Wallace Wells. They had a couple of forums.

(2) UU Society of Geneva Bill said all of our future congregational projects have been put on hold for the time being.

As a representative of UUSJ, he attended one of the three days of evidentiary hearings at the Illinois Commerce Commission on the Dakota Access Pipeline. They plan to double the volume of oil from 500,000 to 1 million barrels per day.

The permit will be granted or not depending on the decision of the ICC. On March 25 a Federal Judge ordered a full environmental review of the pipeline. It stopped short of ordering a shutdown. This is a step that President Trump tried to skip via executive order. Hearings scheduled for April.

(3) Evanston – Andrew reported the capital campaign committee has decided to resurface the parking lot with asphalt – the cheapest option – and in just 3 to 4 years it will be full of potholes at the south end where the heavy trucks turn around. The committee has also decided to definitely air condition the sanctuary with a water approach which is slightly cheaper (leaves less of a carbon footprint) than normal.

(4) Beverly – Fran reported that they will have another electronic toxics pickup sometime in June.

Action Alerts: Since the Winter UUSJ Newsletter, the Environmental task force has issued two action alerts:

(1) on March 2, 2020 to all Federal Representatives supporting Save Our Seas 2.2 Act; then

(2) on March 22 to only Chicago residents to Chicago Aldermen to support the Plastic-Free Waters Ordinance (O2020-161).

Educational inserts:

We had “Feeding Our Hungry Cities – with Vertical Farming and Other Approaches”. It was only done electronically uploaded to the website. We all agreed that with the corona virus and all the UU churches physically shut down, hard copies would only join a huge stack of mail and probably get discarded. We will wait till later for snail mailings.

Fran has a future educational piece she will work on all about plastics – the pros and cons.

Next meeting: – We agreed to hold our next meeting on Saturday, June 17, from 2:30 to 4 PM., at Potbelly at State and Lake, Chicago. If things are still shut down due to the virus at that date, we will have a conference call at 2:15 PM on that date. To see which and the conference number and code, call Andrew (see below).

With any questions, contact:
Andrew T. Fisher – Chair
847-492-1832 or
fishorgn1580@gmail.com

UUSJ Peace Task Force Report

March 26, 2020 Meeting

Present: Bill K., Evan F., Linda G., Rosalie R., Gene H., and Finley C., and Guest Fahima G. of Afghan Women's Fund. This is our second meeting in a row with a quorum. ***We invite interested persons to contact Linda Groetzinger regarding joining our task force. Lgroetzinger@yahoo.com***

The AFGHAN WOMEN'S FUND, (Fahima reporting): They work mostly in rural Afghanistan, to change Afghan society towards providing a voice for women. Their work to provide education for girls and community centers for rural communities, is very dangerous work. Activists continue to be targeted. The current government wants to promote rights of women;

35% of the government is women; but the situation in rural areas is not as open for women. Fatima reported that the US is trying to broker a so-called peace plan which disregards the good things the current government is doing, and which includes no limitations on the violence perpetrated by the Taliban on the people. At the same time, the Afghan Women's Fund relies on funds raised in the US, especially through churches, to support their work. She noted that Afghanistan has been in a state of war for generations.

Our task force has agreed to inform our congregations this year about the Afghan Women's Fund. We hope to develop the capacity for congregations to host informational/fund raising fares late this year or next year. In the past, this effort has been moderately successful because of the beauty of the rugs, scarves, and other products sold.

BACK FROM THE BRINK:

Rosalie reported: Evanston City Council passed the Back from the Brink legislation in January. The team working for it, which included representatives from Evanston Unitarian Church Peace and Justice Committee, convinced the Council that the only way to control nuclear war is to prevent it, by controlling nuclear weapons.

Robin Gabel, Illinois House Representative from Evanston, introduced the Back from the Brink Legislation in the House on January 24th. It was assigned to the State Government Committee on January 25. We can all work to convince our state

representatives to be co-sponsors of HR 0676! Current co-sponsors are Will Guzzardi, Kathy Cassidy, and Yoni Pizer. It is likely to pass eventually, but the sooner the better. Website for the legislation:

<http://www.ilga.gov/legislation/BillStatus.asp?DocTypeID=HR&DocNum=676&GAID=15&SessionID=108&LegID=123272>

An effort is beginning to get the Chicago City Council to pass The Back from the Brink legislation. See:

<https://www.preventnuclearwar.org>

The five points of the Back from the Brink legislation, adapted to suit each jurisdiction, are to Call on the US to lead the way to:

Renounce the option of using nuclear weapons first;

End the sole, unchecked authority of any US president to launch a nuclear attack;

Taking US nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert;

Cancelling the plan to replace the entire US nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons;

Actively pursuing a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their arsenals.

Linda Groetzinger is working with the distributors of the movie, "The Beginning of the End of Nuclear Weapons, to arrange an on-line showing by registration, which will be made as open as possible to interested UUs in Chicago area, starting with members of UUSJ. We have two organizers offering to participate in a post-showing on-line discussion. Contact Linda at

LGroetzinger@yahoo.com if you wish to be kept informed of the date and time.



[Home - The Beginning of the End of Nuclear Weapons](#)

Synopsis. On the 7th of July 2017, 122 countries voted in favor of the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons. Countries that don't have nuclear weapons but live under their threat voted for a ban.

<http://theendofnuclearweapons.com>

Interfaith Criminal Justice Taskforce Report.

The Interfaith Criminal Justice Task Force has met twice this quarter by Zoom conference. In January, we had a presentation by Fred Nelson, founder of the Inside Out Network, and in March a presentation by Jennifer Soble, Executive Director of the Prison Project.

The Inside Out Network (ION) is a non-profit organization that seeks to resister prisoners prior to their discharge from prison. It also registers community organizations that wish to provide services to rejoined citizens. The ION enables rejoining citizens to make their

contact information known to organizations that reach out to rejoining citizens. It enables the community organizations to know when prisoners are released and to reach out to them in a timely fashion. In a word, the ION facilitates the transition from prison to community, and supports prisoners in readjusting to civilian life. There are now two states, including Illinois, interested in facilitating the work of the ION.

The Prison Project is also a non-profit organizations that is affecting public attitudes to releasing identified classes of prisoners, starting with the elderly and infirm, and to re-establish parole systems in Illinois, which have been absent for prisoners convicted since 1987.

Due to the Corona Virus epidemic, there is an urgent need to de-incarcerate as many prisoners vulnerable to be killed by the virus as possible. Public officials seem oblivious to the danger to people confined to jails and prisons face from the spread of Covid-19 virus. Their benign negligence amounts to euthanasia of prisoners with systemic medical conditions, a prospect that no civilized society should allow. We are mobilizing all our resources to raise awareness about this danger and inevitability of this prospect unless action is taken. The ICJTF is sending action alerts to members of UUSJ and others for letters to the Cook County Chief Judge to demand that unnecessary incarcerations on money bail be avoided, and to the Illinois Governor to compassionately release elderly prisoners, particularly those due to be released in the next couple of years anyway. All of these actions are legally permissible currently.

In addition, IFCJTF has drafted a letter to Governor Pritzker, based on the

excellent legal research provided to us by Jennifer Soble of the Prison Project, asking for elderly prisoners with compromised health conditions to be released from prison. A copy of this letter is appended to this report. We invite readers to print and send this letter over their own signature.

Evan Freund 773-624-7568
efreund@chicagobooth.edu

*Office of the Governor
207 State House
Springfield, IL 62706*

Dear Governor Pritzker,

At this time of the COVID-19 health crisis I am writing to urge you to take action to reduce Illinois' overcrowded prison population, where most prisoners cannot practice social distancing. This initiative should focus on the thousands of Illinois incarcerated individuals who are elderly or have compromised health conditions, which puts them at greater risk of serious illness or death. If 20% of those elderly and/or health compromised prisoners were to become seriously ill with COVID-19 they could fill virtually all of our state's ICU beds, without consideration of the rest of our state's population. Thus, this initiative is needed to help protect our state's health care system in addition to protecting those at-risk prisoners.

I am asking that you:

- *Immediately grant all pending commutation petitions that seek release based on substantiated terminal illness. (Authority: 730 ILCS 5/3-3-13)*

- *Encourage IDOC to use its discretion to release elderly people with less than 12 months to serve and people serving Class 2-4 felonies who are vulnerable to serious illness or death due to an underlying medical condition. (Authority: 730 ILCS 5/6-8-7)*

- *Commute the sentences of anyone over the age of 60 with less than five years remaining to time served. Commute the sentences of all others over 60 to the judicially imposed term with the possibility of expedited parole in order to make these prisoners eligible for release after an expedited review by the Prisoner Review Board. (Authority: Illinois Supreme Court decision dated January, 23, 2004)*

- *Encourage IDOC and the Prisoner Review Board to expedite credit restoration, implementation of discretionary release programs, and every other step necessary to bring IDOC's population back to capacity. (Authority: Joint Commission on Administrative Rules – Section 107-160)*

I look forward to hearing your views on this matter, whether through an individual response to this communication or through a pronouncement in your daily press briefings related to the COVID-19 crisis.

Sincerely,

*Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice+
1448 East 52nd Street / PM Box 144
Chicago, IL 60615*