

UUSJ Newsletter – Winter 2020

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice

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Chair's Corner:

Andrew Fisher is writing. During 2020 I will be serving as the Chair of Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice. For those who don't know me too well, I'm Chair of the Environmental Task Force. I've been Communications Director for many years. This involves both designing and updating the UUSJ website plus editing and transmitting this quarterly newsletter. I'm from the Unitarian Church of Evanston. I earned my BA degree in Computer studies in 1988 from Northwestern University. I also founded the student environmental group there.

With Donald Trump as President, we still face many problems socially as well as environmentally at the federal level. This President wants to deport so many immigrants, give them little or no legal justice, wants to cut federal spending on education and build up the military, as well as not believing at all in climate change. Trump increases support for fossil fuels like coal and oil while putting in an EPA that cuts regulations on water and air, while cutting all federal funding for long-term solutions to climate change like renewable energy and batteries. However, much more progress can be made

UUSJ Winter Quarterly Meeting

The UUSJ Winter Board Meeting will take place at Third Unitarian Church of Chicago, 301 N. Mayfield, Saturday, February 22, from 10 AM to Noon. There will be no program.

and maintained at the state and local levels where we at UUSJ are now concentrating.

As we move into the New Year, I want to say thanks for our departing Board members service. Marie Cobbs (First Unitarian) served UUSJ for three years as she went through the three year Chair cycle (Chair-Elect/ Chair/ and then Immediate Past Chair), while Karla Chew (Third Unitarian) served as UUSJ's Treasurer in 2019. Allan Lindrup, now Past Chair, is now serving as Treasurer. Shawn Dream, of Unity Temple UU, is remaining our Board Secretary. Another fairly new Board member is Linda Groetzinger, of Second Unitarian Church, who took over as Chair of the Peace Task a couple months before the 2019 Annual Meeting. Our new Chair-Elect is Sandra Rigsbee of First Unitarian Church.

UUSJ always remains open to new task forces. Chicago area UUs who want to initiate a new task force, with a social justice focus different than that of our existing task forces, need to do outreach and gather a minimum of five activists, from at least three Chicago area U.U. congregations. Once you have met, set your mission and identified some ways in which you will work to advance it, and selected a Chair or Co-Chairs to lead the new task force, you can contact me or others on the UUSJ Board to get on the agenda for our next quarterly Board meeting, where a motion to recognize the new task force can be considered. Once a new task force is recognized it will receive a budget allocation from UUSJ.

2020 should prove to be a good year for progressive legislation in Illinois, as we have both a progressive General Assembly and also a progressive Governor. At the federal level we can expect the Democratic House to achieve some things through negotiations with the more conservative Senate and President. However, this being an election year, much less negotiation and true progress will happen. We can always hope for a following Congress that starts in 2021, when there may well be a Democratic Senate majority as well as a new Democratic President.

The UUSJ Board will hold its Winter Quarterly Meeting on Saturday, February 22, between 10 a.m. and Noon, at the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago. If you have something related to UUSJ or Chicago area UUs working together

for social justice, feel free to get in touch with me.

Andrew Fisher, Chair
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847-492-1832

UUSJ Economic Justice and Homelessness Task Force Report

We are happy to report that Andrew Fisher of the Unitarian Church of Evanston joined this task force in October, allowing it to once again have the minimum of five members from three or more UU congregations required for a task force to exist.

This task force initiated one Action Alert since the last UUSJ newsletter. In late October we encouraged communication with members of the U.S. House who were not signed on as co-sponsors of H.R. 3, the Lower Drug Costs Now Act. We are pleased to report that H.R. 3 passed the U.S. House in December and has moved on to the Senate. As this topic is one that both Democrats and Republicans have spoken in support of we are hopeful that this legislation has a chance of passing the Senate and being signed by President Trump.

Each year this task force updates the If YOU or Someone You Know Need Help resource sheets, one for Chicago and one for Chicago's Illinois suburbs. This year's versions were finalized in October, then produced and distributed to the roughly 90

U.U. churches, non-profit organizations, social workers and others who have asked to receive the annual updates when we issue them. This information is also posted to our organization's web site (www.uusforsocialjustice.org).

These resource sheets, the size of a two-sided Order of Service insert, can also be kept in purses, wallets, etc. and given to the homeless or other at-risk individuals looking for resources. If you know of an organization or individual serving the homeless that should receive these updates but isn't receiving them, let us know.

Our last Home and Hope Booster grant, which was in the amount of \$400, went to PADS of Elgin in September, on the nomination of the Social Justice Committee at the UU Church of Elgin. (More information on that organization and the funds and volunteer services provided to them by the UU Church of Elgin was included in the last UUSJ newsletter) We have received two nominations for the next Home and Hope Booster grant, one from the Tree of Life UU Church in McHenry and one from the UU Community Church in Park Forest. The task force members who participate in the next meeting of this task force, on January 22, will select one of their nominees to be the recipient of the next Home and Hope Booster grant.

Multiple members of this task force participated in lobbying the Chicago City Council to pass a Long Term Care Resolution in late October, which is a step in pressing the state

of Illinois to fund more long term, in home, care.

The next meeting of this task force will occur via conference call on Wednesday, January 22, between 2 and 3:30 p.m. (though the meeting may well be concluded within an hour). If you are not yet on this task force, but would like to participate, please contact me before January 20 at the email or phone number at the end of this column, to be sent the agenda, conference call number and call password. We always welcome new members and the ideas they bring for possible new projects, etc. that would fall within the scope of this task force.

Allan Lindrup, Task Force Chair
uusj@sbcglobal.net or 773-595-4921

UUSJ Environmental Task Force Report

Congregational Reports:

(1) First Unitarian Church of Chicago

Allan reported his church held a forum on November 17 about the top 5 Democratic Presidential Candidates' environmental platforms. Their environmental book club continues to discuss *The Uninhabitable Earth*, and they held training on recycling for staff and long-term renters.

(2) Beverly Unitarian Church

Fran Sowa – reported they will hold their next household hazardous waste and electronics for recycling collection in May or June.

(3) Evanston – Andrew reported the

green team has been concentrating on using the new capital campaign money to: (a) install energy efficient appliances in the kitchen, (b) re-surface the parking lot with strong porous material to minimize runoff, but still support heavy garbage trucks at the south end.

(4) UU Society of Geneva – Bill Koehl reported an Earth Hoar church event on March 28 from 8:30 to 9:00 PM for all to turn off their lights for one hour, while engaging in meditation and other things. Several churches are holding Earth Hour services. They are selling renewable energy credits. Bill mentioned there was a *Chicago Tribune* article on December 29 about efforts by SOIL to stop many oil companies from increasing the capacity of their pipelines by pumping faster.

Since the Fall UUSJ Newsletter, the Environmental task force has issued **two action alerts**: one on November 22, 2019 to IL Senators supporting the Lead Service Line Replacement and Notification Act -- HR 3035. This legislation would require each owner or operator of a community water supply to make an annual report to the Illinois EPA on the materials in its water service lines, until a full inventory has been provided and a plan for replacing the lead lines is in place. The second on January 13, 2020 to federal senators urging them to support Title VII of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which expired at the end of 2016 and to co-sponsor H.R. 1768, the Diesel Emissions Reduction Act of 2019, which passed the U.S. House with bipartisan support (295 to 114) in September and is now pending in

the Senate.

Educational inserts: The one by Andrew Fisher on Improving Battery Efficiency and Ecology got distributed. Fran Sowa's "Feeding Our Hungry Cities" is in the process of revision for (hopeful) distribution at our next meeting.

Next meeting: Will start at 2:30 p.m. on Sunday, March 22nd at Potbelly, State and Lake, Chicago
With any questions, contact:
Andrew T. Fisher – Chair
847-492-1832 or
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UUSJ Peace Task Force Report

After several months of low attendance at our telephone call Meetings, the Peace Task Force meeting on January 15, 2020, had a full quorum, with five members from more than three UU congregations. We were no longer so small that the By Laws call for our disbanding, so we agreed to revisit the question at an April meeting, and to amplify our work and impact.

Perhaps the awareness that an escalating war in the Middle East might well have been triggered by the illegal assassination by the US government of a uniformed general of another country (Iran), aroused our desire to be together, to consider both how we wish to respond, and how to engage more members of UU churches in our Region in working to build for international peace.

We gave serious consideration to three possibilities:

1. We are considering how to build support for the Afghan Women's Fund. Recognizing that the US government

has been involved in a destructive war in Afghanistan for 18 years, and that the war has caused the destruction of much of that country's infrastructure including schools and community centers, some of us have an interest in the Afghan Women's Fund's work to build schools, especially for girls, and community centers, in some of the most devastated parts of their country. One way they raise money is to provide fairs, hosted by congregations and others, where they provide an informative and motivational speaker, a slide show, and beautiful rugs, scarves, and other handicrafts for sale. While we consider the role of the Peace Task Force in expanding this program's ability to bring the caring contributions of US UUs to their efforts, you can learn more at: www.afghanwomensfund.org

2. We want to join the effort to bring a "Back from the Brink" resolution to as many jurisdictions as possible where we have UU churches in Illinois. If you wish to join a February conference call of organizations and individuals involved, please contact Linda Groetzing at Lgroetzing@yahoo.com

a. Back from the Brink: The Call to Prevent Nuclear War is a national grassroots initiative seeking to fundamentally change U.S. nuclear weapons policy and lead us away from the dangerous path we are on. The Call lays out five common-sense steps that the United States should take to reform its nuclear policy. We are asking individuals and organizations around the country to endorse The Call and build support for the U.S. government to adopt it as its highest national security priority. <https://www.preventnuclearwar.org/>

- b. The five steps:
 - i. Renounce the option of using nuclear weapons first.
 - ii. End the sole, unchecked authority of any U.S. president to launch a nuclear attack.
 - iii. Take U.S. nuclear weapons off hair-trigger alert.
 - iv. Cancel the U.S. plan to replace its nuclear arsenal with enhanced weapons.
 - v. Actively pursue a verifiable agreement among nuclear-armed states to eliminate their nuclear arsenals.
 - c. On January 13, 2020, Evanston City Council voted unanimously to support the Back from the Brink Campaign and to call on the U.S. government to take commonsense steps to reduce the likelihood of nuclear war. This is the first city in the Midwest to join Back from the Brink, bringing the total number of city endorsements to 42. The Peace Committee of Evanston Unitarian Church was among 21 local organizations supporting this resolution. In her opening remarks State Representative Robyn Gabel said, "This resolution is a strong signal to our federal government that the prohibition of nuclear weapons is achievable, necessary and urgent. The threat of nuclear war is real." She also announced her intent to introduce a similar resolution into Illinois State Legislature.
3. We hope to develop a small team from our Task Force and others, that would be willing to visit churches in our Region, to conduct, an educational workshop of topics such as: history of the U.S. role in the Middle East, and how to organize locally for peace and against a slide to war, the work that is ongoing against nuclear war or accident, etc. We would take the leadership to recruit additional knowledgeable speakers.

Interfaith Criminal Justice Task Force Report

The Interfaith Criminal Justice Task Force met on the internet via Zoom on January 15th to hear a presentation by Rev. Fred Nelson on the Inside Out Network. The Inside Out Network is a web-based system to enable prisoners to register while still incarcerated to notify service providers in the community to which they expect to go. The service providers are then in a position to reach out to the returning citizen using the contact information he provides. In this way, returning citizens can be offered and receive services that they need from the providers he/she chooses.

Rev. Nelson is recently moved to Tucson from Park Ridge, but is reorganizing the Inside Out Network to provide services to multiple states. Funding is being sought and conversations have been held with the Illinois Department of Corrections.

Since last November this task force has initiated **two Action Alerts**. In late November it had one in support of IL H.B 1587, a bill to reduce sentences for non-violent offenders. That bill passed the IL House last April and is currently pending in the state Senate. Second, at the beginning of January, 2020, it initiated an Action Alert in support of IL H.B. 1615, to reform Illinois' felony murder law, so that only those who commit murder can be charged or found guilty of that crime. Evan Freund 773-624-0333 efreund@chicagobooth.edu

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