

**AGENDA FOR CHANGE: AN ELECTRONIC NEWSLETTER
ST. LAWRENCE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST DISTRICT - AUGUST 2007**

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(Deadline for September issue is September 15)

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**The St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District
Social Justice Network Presents
BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE
Politics and Justice in New York State
And Beyond**

**October 20, 2007--10am to 4pm
May Memorial UU Society - Syracuse**



**Theme Speaker - JAY GALLAGHER
Albany Bureau Chief - Gannet News Service
Member First UU Society of Albany**

ELIOT SPITZER: How the Former White Knight Was Knocked from His High Horse . . .and how if he'd paid attention to UU principles he wouldn't be in the fix he finds himself"

This second annual conference will feature Jay Gallagher, author of *The Politics of Decline: A Chronicle of New York's Descent and What You Can Do To Save Your State*. This will be an opportunity for social justice people to gather together, to share ideas and experiences, to focus on building a local program and to consider further plans for district activities. We invite those interested in relating faith to social justice issues in the public square.

Registration materials will be out in September

Covenant for Justice

The newsletter of Interfaith IMPACT of New York State is partly funded by grants from the New York State Convention of Universalists and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee.

Summer 2007

Welcome to the IINYS Summer E-Newsletter!

This e-newsletter includes a Legislative Update, a review of other IINYS activities, and good news about the new Interfaith Impact of New York State Foundation.

The NYS Legislature's regular session runs from early January through the third week in June. It may also come back for special sessions during the summer and fall. Parts of next year's (2008-2009) budget are already in their early development stages, and the Governor continues to press forward with new program bills and executive orders.

While there is no such thing as a real vacation in the public policy arena, the Legislature is not expected back any time soon, so we are taking this opportunity to reflect on the legislative season just completed and look at where our voice is needed. We achieved hard-won victories this year, and we lost a few battles, but our voice was heard. Your advocacy made a real difference. For more information, check out our website at www.interfaithimpactnys.org.

Please forward this newsletter to others who may be interested in making progressive and liberal religious values count in New York State.

Yours in Community,
Robb Smith, Executive Director

Legislative Update

We have just completed the first session of the two-year legislative cycle. Bills passed by one house but not yet acted on the other house are still active and will be on the agenda again in January. Here's where things stand.

Healthy Teens Act – New York has no designated funding stream for comprehensive sex education. The Healthy Teens Act (A.2856/S.1342) would provide resources to fund age-appropriate, medically accurate sex education for youth in New York State. The bill passed the Assembly, where it is sponsored by Assembly member Richard N. Gottfried, on March 27 by a vote of 130-11. It is stalled in the Senate.

Marriage Equality for Same-Sex Couples – In a historic move, the State Assembly passed the marriage equality bill (A8590) with a vote of 85-61. The act would amend the New York State Domestic Relation Law. In part, it reads:

"Marriage is a fundamental human right. Same-sex couples and their children should have the same access as others to the protections, responsibilities, rights, obligations and benefits of civil marriage. Stable family relationships help build a stronger society. For the welfare of the community and in fairness to all New Yorkers, this act formally recognizes otherwise-valid marriages without regard to whether the parties are of the same or different sex. It is the intent of the legislature that the marriages of same-sex and different-sex couples be treated equally in all respects under the law."

We commend the Assembly for taking this step.

Opposition to Tuition Tax Deductions for Religious Schools– IINYS joined Reform Jewish Voice in an advocacy campaign against providing tuition tax deductions for religious schooling in New York State in the spring of 2007. We are pleased that this did not find its way into the budget and was not brought to the floor of the State Legislature in the remaining months of the 2007 legislative session.

Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act - The Governor's Reproductive Health and Privacy Protection Act (S5829, no Assembly bill yet) will take the principles underlying Roe v. Wade and put them squarely into New York law, ensuring that every individual has a fundamental right to privacy with respect to personal medical decisions. IINYS supports this bill.

Opposition to the Death Penalty – The NYS Senate voted in favor of reinstating the death penalty (S319). Fortunately, this legislation stalled and it did not move forward in the Assembly.

Boot the SHU Compromise Reached – On July 17th, Gov. Eliot Spitzer and state lawmakers announced a compromise bill to ban solitary confinement for seriously mentally ill prison inmates. Legislation passed earlier this session would have faced a certain veto by the Governor. The Senate recalled the bill and passed an amended bill unanimously during a special session. The Assembly is scheduled to vote on the measure when it returns to Albany later this year. This is a victory for reason and compassion. The legislation requires the State Department of Correctional Services to set up residential treatment units for inmates with serious mental illnesses. Prisoners will be offered at least four hours a day, five days a week, of therapeutic programming and/or treatment out of their cells.

Thank you for your action on these issues! Please check the IINYS website – www.interfaithimpactnys.org – for updates and more information.

Executive Chamber Update

Stem Cell Research – The State budget included \$600 million for stem cell research. IINYS was invited to attend a press conference last week where the Governor announced his appointees to the Empire State Stem Cell Board, which will oversee research funding and ethics. We are active members of New Yorkers for the Advancement of Medical Research and pleased that the Governor appointed former NYAMR chair Robin Elliot to the funding committee.

During the press conference, Gov. Spitzer noted that the stem cell research funding was truly historic and will be remembered long after the current disputes between himself and Senate Majority Leader Joe Bruno have been forgotten.

The part IINYS members have played in the fight for human embryonic stem cell research funding is widely recognized. In fact, we have a quote included in the quotes section of the Governor's press release for last week's announcement (see <http://www.ny.gov/governor/press/0726074.html>). Every member of IINYS can take pride in the victory this year for human embryonic stem cell research.

IINYS Position Memos on Bills Sent to the Governor to Sign – IINYS is on a database maintained by the Executive Chamber of organizations that are asked to provide position memos on bills that have been passed by the Legislature and sent to the Governor for his signature. We regularly issue memos in support or opposition to bills that fall within our areas of concern. This is another way we make our religious point of view known in the civic forum where the laws are made. We are in the process of making these position memos available on the IINYS web site.

Equitable Funding for Public School Education – In addition to making a historic investment of \$1.7 billion in education, the Administration has targeted assistance to the districts that need it most and tied investment to accountability and reform.

Universal Access to Health Care – Earlier in the year, the Administration took another step toward universal health care by expanding Child Health Plus to cover all 400,000 uninsured children in the state and vastly simplified Medicaid enrollment. In July, Governor Eliot Spitzer and Lieutenant Governor David Paterson directed the Health Commissioner and the Insurance Superintendent to develop a comprehensive strategy for universal health insurance for New York State. The Commissioner and Superintendent will develop a final proposal for universal coverage and any interim steps toward that goal by May 31, 2008. We applaud this step and are hopeful for an open, fair public hearing process. The first hearings are scheduled for Glens Falls in September. More information about this will be available on the IINYS website for those who want to testify.

Interfaith Impact of New York State Foundation, Inc.

On July 25, 2007, the Internal Revenue Service approved our application for 501(c)(3) public charity status for Interfaith Impact of New York State Foundation, Inc. Donations to this organization are tax deductible. We expect that the IINYS Foundation will be funded by major donors and grants.

Interfaith Impact of New York State, Inc. is an advocacy organization that supports compassion, reason and justice in state public policies. We support and oppose bills, do grassroots organizing on issues, make our views known to legislators and the Executive Chamber. We name names, and we work directly with bills before the legislature. Our work is vital, but contributions to IINYS are not tax deductible, because we are classified by the IRS as a 501(c)(4) organization.

Much of our work, however, is educational and civic in nature, which can be tax deductible, so we decided some time ago to create a separate organization, a charitable foundation, which would concentrate on issue education and encourage civic engagement by people of faith and goodwill across the state.

Because issue advocacy remains at the heart of our mission, we encourage you to maintain your membership in IINYS, but for those who want a tax deduction, the IINYS Foundation offers an opportunity to generously support conscience in public life as informed by progressive and liberal religious values.

<p>Covenant for Justice is Published by Interfaith IMPACT of New York State, Inc., 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203. Bailey Bloom, President; DeWitt Ellinwood, Vice President; Don Odell, Secretary; John Keevert, Treasurer; Robb Smith, Executive Director. For information and copies of position papers, call the office at 518-463-5652, e-mail info@interfaithimpactnys.org, or visit www.interfaithimpactnys.org.</p>
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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SERVICE COMMITTEE CORNER

UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund

At the end of 2006, the Fund had received **\$3,622,250**, thanks to generous donations from UU congregations and individuals and a matching grant from the UU Congregation at Shelter Rock, and **\$2,366,387** had been spent through UUA/UUSC community partners. A list of community partners and grants is at www.uusc.org.

UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Volunteer Program

This Program connects volunteer congregations, groups, and individuals with the needs of communities in the hurricane-affected areas of Louisiana and Mississippi. Volunteers engage in projects with UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast Relief Fund community partners, repair and rebuild with UU churches in the area, and learn about the inequalities in the rebuilding process. UUA-UUSC Gulf Coast program staff in New Orleans and Mississippi provide an orientation for new volunteers, can arrange for groups to do their own self-conducted tour of the devastated areas with a written guide, provide debriefing sessions on the first and last days of work, and are on site to provide assistance on work-related issues. Materials at www.uusc.org include background information on volunteering, the area, health and safety, and medical and educational resources, plus information and forms for volunteer individuals and groups.

GUEST AT YOUR TABLE SUNDAY

On November 18, 2007, the Sunday before Thanksgiving, join UU communities nationwide to celebrate this important tradition. Materials for this year's program will be available by the end of August. If your church does not receive a packet by mail, materials can be ordered online at www.uusc.org.

ST. LAWRENCE DISTRICT UUSC REGIONAL COORDINATOR

Our UUSC Regional Coordinator is Jack Maniloff (First Unitarian, Rochester). He is available to assist congregations with UUSC programs and advocacy efforts, to live our UU values. He can be contacted at jkmf@mail.rochester.edu.

NEWS FROM PEACE ADVOCATES OF ROCHESTER

www.rochesterunitarian.org/peaceadvocates.html and BringOurSoldiersHome.org

Six “BringOurSoldiersHome.org” billboards, made possible by donations to Peace Advocates Task Force, will be up in Rochester during the month of September.

Bring Them Home Now vigils continue on the first Thursdays (7:30-9 am), second Tuesdays (4:30-6 pm) and third Wednesdays (7:30-9 am) at 220 S. Winton. See website for additional locations.

Friday, September 28, 7 pm, School of the Arts, 45 Prince St. Rochester, NY

The Veteran Care Project, a grassroots group of concerned family members, friends and community citizens who want to support our brave military men and women as they return home, will host the Rochester screening of **The Ground Truth and a panel discussion** following the film. The Ground Truth is a documentary, produced and directed by Patricia Foulkrod, that features Iraq war veterans discussing their experiences during training and in Iraq, and the difficulty of reintegrating upon their return home. Its focus is on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) and the medical and mental health needs of the significant number of veterans suffering from PTSD.

The panel members will include Kevin and Joyce Lucey who are featured in the film speaking of their son, a veteran of the Iraq war who, in his suffering with PTSD, took his own life. Also on the panel will be Joe Godfrey, a resident of Mexico, NY. Joe’s son was an Iraq war veteran who experienced PTSD upon his return, self medicated with alcohol to ease sleeplessness, and was murdered during a robbery outside a bar in Oswego on January 14, 2005. Admission to the screening and panel discussion is free and open to the public, but seating is limited. For more information, call Lynn Daley at 721-1693.

Saturday, September 29, time and location tba (Regional) Rally and March in Syracuse - Soldiers and Civilians Speak Out - presented by the Upstate NY Antiwar Network, of which Peace Advocates is a member organization. Check website for further information.

EDITORIAL: WHY IINYS MATTERS

The Social Justice Council partners with a number of organizations in our attempt to “repair the world” (tikkun ha-olam). The one with which we have the most contact is Interfaith Impact of New York State. There is a kind of inter-locking directorate here in which Robb Smith, Executive Director of IINYS, and I serve on both boards. I have been active in IINYS since the early 1990’s, serving as Chair as well as member. Our group has grown in terms of influence, membership and finances. We are on the verge of applying for a major grant. The one item on which we still need to work is building our active membership. Our most recent appeal was by far the most successful we have had. But I would like to continue that appeal by inviting all of you to become members of IINYS and encouraging your congregations to become corporate members – covenanting congregations. The form for doing this is at the end of this newsletter. Margaret Meade once said something about a tiny handful of dedicated people being the only thing that can change the world. Through our work in the District’s Social Justice Council and our partnership with IINYS we are part of that zealous cadre. Please join IINYS today – and plan to come to Syracuse October 20 to see how we as a district are doing to build the Beloved Community.

SOCIAL JUSTICE NEWS

HEALTH INSURANCE HEARINGS SET. “Partnership for Coverage” public hearings are to be held around the state to help develop a plan for health care coverage. They are sponsored by Governor Spitzer’s Taskforce on Health Insurance. The schedule is below. You are urged to testify on your own behalf or that of your health care task force or your congregation. For further information contact Robb Smith at robbsmith@nycap.rr.com.

Wednesday, September 5: Glens Falls Civic Center – 10 am – 5 pm.

Wednesday, October 3: Erie County Community College, Buffalo – 10 am – 5 pm

Tuesday, October 30: Fordham University, 113 W. 60th St., NY City – 10 am – 5 pm

Tuesday, November 13: Onondaga Community college, Syracuse – 10 am – 5 pm

Wednesday, December 5: SUNY Old Westbury, Old Westbury, NY – 10 am – 5 pm

Anti-Racist, Anti-Oppression, Multi-Cultural work is on the district agenda. Our AR/AO/MC task force is hard at work. Lynn Ashley lashley@uuma.org is chair. Another resource in this area is task force member Jacqui Williams (FIGAH@nycap.rr.com).

PEACEMAKING IN THE UUA: The current Statement of Conscience being considered by the UUA resolutions process is peacemaking. Should the UUA be a “peace church”? How do we live non-violently? There is an interested list serve for those interested in participating in this process. You can access it by sending an e-mail to peacemaking-network-bounces@lists.uua.org

COALITION FOR HUMAN NEEDS: their website is a valuable resource for those monitoring federal budget priorities and the actions of the administration and the Congress. CHN@mail.democracyinaction.org.

Agenda for Change Mailing List

If you would like to be on the CANDUU Electronic Activist List, or if you change you address or if you have newsletter items, please contact Dick Gilbert, SLD Social Justice Coordinator, at rsgilbert@uuma.org.

JOIN INTERFAITH IMPACT NOW!

Individual and Congregational Memberships Welcome

Interfaith Impact of New York State is a UUA-UUSC partner organization. The St. Lawrence District is an official member and UUs are active on the Board. Robb Smith of our Albany congregation is Executive Director - robb@interfaithimpactnys.org. We encourage individual Unitarian Universalists in New York State to join. We also encourage you to invite your congregation or social action group join as an organizational member. For your convenience a membership form is below.

Congregation/organization donation (suggested): \$50 - \$100 - \$300

Individual donation (suggested): \$10 - \$25 - \$50

Phone: (518) 463-5652

E-mail: interfaithimpactnys@verizon.net

Background information on state issues at www.interfaithimpactnys.org

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Please print or type:

Name and Title:

Address:

City, State _____ ZIP _____

Phone: _____ FAX: _____ E-mail _____

Congregation:

Address _____

City, State _____ ZIP _____

Affiliation: Protestant Unitarian Universalist Reform Synagogue Other

Membership Dues Enclosed:

Congregation/organizations \$50 \$200 \$300 Other (amount) _____

Please make checks payable to: Interfaith IMPACT of New York State
and mail to: IINYS, 646 State Street, Albany, NY 12203

Your Assembly Member _____ Your State Senator _____

Thank you for your support