February 2009 - Newsletter

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations

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Social Action Opportunities & Organizations

Mass Bay District youth can get involved with social action, too! Consider Legislative Action Day on Tues. April 21 at First Church, Boston from 8:30 - 3:30. This event is jointly sponsored by Promise the Children, First Church and the UU Service Committee.

Green Sanctuary committees, buildings support committees and anyone interested in greening their church are invited to a free workshop to introduce Savings Through Energy Management (STEM) - a low-cost high-impact 5-week course that helps congregations collaborate to save

A Social Action Meditation

by Gil Rosenberg
Intern for Social Action

In the midst of checking your e-mail, can the sacred break in?

Take a second, and examine how you feel right now. What's in your head? What is your body experiencing?

When I check my e-mail, my goal is clear: clean up my inbox so that I don't have anything hanging over my head. Particularly when it comes to "e-newsletters" like this one, I skim as quickly as possible. If I ever stop and see how I feel, and sense what my body is telling me, it makes me cringe. There is tension and stress. My shoulders are up by my ears, and my teeth are clenched. My mind is racing, but getting nowhere. If I'm honest about it, I might as well just delete most of the e-mails, my stress is so high that it prevents me from getting very much information or enjoyment out of them.

Hearing the words "social action" can do that to me, too. I think about how much I'm not doing, how far my efforts fall short of my goals. I think about the chaotic messiness of social action, which is particularly acute in many of our churches. I think about my inability or unwillingness to do more.

Now take another second, and breathe deeply. Close your eyes, and imagine lighting a candle. Recall the stillness of the prayer the last time you went to church. Take just a few seconds.

If you did take that break, however briefly, I suspect that your moment was transformed. For me, it feels as if the light of the world came in and illuminated my inner spaces. The larger perspective of my best self made itself known. I was

energy, save money, and fight climate change. Sunday, March 8, 3 to 5 p.m. at First Church in Belmont.

Your Unitarian Universalist Urban Ministry unites communities and transforms individuals through education, service, and advocacy. We engage communities and congregations in social action and change with programs that empower youth and adults to realize their full potential. To learn about our programs, please visit our website www.uuum.org.
If you are interested in volunteering, please fill out our online volunteer application or email Rev. Rebekah Ingram.

February District Programs

February 21: Sermon Writing & Preaching for Lay People

February 24: Small Group for Social Action Connection & Reflection begins

Other Resources

Consider applying for a Woburn Grant.

buried, but by simply stretching myself out I realized that I had only been surrounded by confetti, which now shimmers in the sunlight as it falls away.

Can you take a few more seconds to read a slice of poetry, slowly and with intention, as poetry is meant to be read?

And what is it to work with love?
It is to weave the cloth with threads drawn from your heart, even as if your beloved were to wear that cloth.
It is to build a house with affection, even as if your beloved were to dwell in that house.
It is to sow seeds with tenderness and reap the harvest and joy, even as if your beloved were to eat the fruit.
It is to charge all things you fashion with a breath of your own spirit,
And to know that all the blessed dead are standing about you and watching.

(From *The Prophet,* Kahlil Gibran)

A professor once described the difference between the frantic e-mail check and the succulent poetry reading as the difference between chronos, ordinary time, and kairos, sacred time. A thread that runs through many of the world's sacred traditions is the importance of kairos, and the potential to change all of our time into sacred time.

For many of us involved in social action at churches, nothing could be more helpful than a transformation of this sort. There are many ways for each of us to go about doing good in the world. But when we choose to do it at church, it has even a greater possibility of transcending itself and becoming sacred work.

I hope that some of you who are interested in transforming your social action work from chronos to kairos will join the small group that is convening for just this purpose. Starting Tuesday, February 24 at 7 pm at the Mass Bay Distict office at 182 Main Street in Watertown, we will continue every other week until May.

Religious communities have the potential to play important roles in our social action. In addition to supporting the sacred aspect of social action, they can help us discern what social actions we should undertake, and how we should go about that work. On the flip side, whole communities can be transformed when the entire community begins to see its social action as sacred work. When communities get

Deadline: March 1, 2009

Programs beyond February

March 20 to 22: Spirituality Development Conference for Youth and Adult Allies

March 21: Lay Pastoral Care Teams Training

April 2: Collegial Conversation for Ministers & REs

April 14 to 15: Renaissance Module

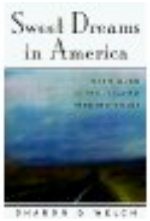
April 25: Annual Meeting & Spring Conference

May 9: Emergency Preparedness Workshop

Click here for program details.

together and reflect intentionally about their roles, as individuals and as a community, in social justice, the results can be powerful. I have been amazed by the great social justice work that is happening in the Mass Bay District, and beyond. You are truly transforming your communities and the world. I encourage you to see how the spirit of sacred time can allow your work to transform not only the lives of others, but your own life and community as well.

Resources for Social Action Leaders



Sweet Dreams in America: Making Ethics and Spirituality Work by Sharon Welch, Routledge, 1999
A traditional view of social action is that, through our work, the world will get better and better. But, Welch points out, " we cannot know if we will succeed... How, then, do we work, with power and passion, for social justice without the assurances of eventual victory and without the ego- and group-building dynamics of self-righteousness and demonizing?"

The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice by Richard S. Gilbert, Skinner House, 2000
Gilbert gives an historical and theoretical account of social action within the UU tradition. Then he presents models and resources for turning the theory into reality and for building on the rich legacy of UU social action.

Available through the District Library

In Our Hands: A Peace and Social Justice Program by Branch, Glodenberg, and Thomson. UUA, 1990
This is a curriculum with resources for combining social justice with reflection and spirituality. It can be used as a package for an adult education offering or a social action committee retreat. Or you can pick and choose exercises, resources and reflections to bring an acknowledgement of sacred time into a regular committee meeting. Curricula are available

for age ranges from 1st grade to adult.

Available through the District Library

When Youth Lead: A Guide to Intergenerational Social Justice Ministry (Plus 101 Youth Projects) by Jill M. Schwendeman, UUA, 2007
One way to make your social action work connect to the entire congregation, as well as to build a dynamic youth program, is to empower the youth to lead. This book explores the issues involved, gives concrete advice, and has those 101 projects ready to use.

Engaged Spirituality: Ten Lives of Contemplation and Action by Janet W. Parachin, Chalice, 1999
Parachin presents biographical information and readings from ten historical figures from a variety of religious traditions who embody an integration of spirituality and action. Designed for use by groups, the book is organized around short readings, reflection questions, and suggestions for active follow-up. The historical figures include Howard Thurman, Elie Wiesel, Thich Nhat Hanh, and Rigoberta Menchú.

Transforming Church Boards into Communities of Spiritual Leaders by Charles M. Olsen, Alban, 1995
This book was highlighted last month for the topic of leadership, but that includes social action leaders. Olsen presents ideas and resources for transforming the administrative aspect of social justice work into sacred time.

Report from January 2009 UUA Board Meeting

The UUA Board had a very full meeting on the weekend of January 14-18, 2009. Here are a few highlights of our meeting:

- Put on 2009 General Assembly agenda a series of bylaw amendments to Article II (Principles and Purposes) as proposed by the Commission on Appraisal

with one amendment made by the board: the last paragraph on sources was rewritten by the board to read "Grateful for the traditions that have strengthened our own, we seek to engage cultural and religious practices in ways that call us into right relationship with all." The complete language that will be voted on at GA can be found here.

- Voted to discontinue granting of Independent Affiliate status for new applicants after June 2009 and for existing Independent Affiliates after June 2010. This vote is "contingent upon the UUA staff creating a strategy to honor and harness the incredible talent, passion and experience present in this large group of dedicated UU volunteers. We encourage these important organizations to partner with the staff to create best practices for engaging with congregations, districts, and staff in carrying out our vision for Unitarian Universalism and the hope we have for healing the world."
- Voted to reverse a previously voted increase in Annual Program Fund contribution for fiscal year 2009-2010. In light of the state of the economy, the board voted to go back to the 2008-2009 rate of $56 per member, instead of the previously voted increase to $58.
- Declined to put on the GA agenda a series of bylaw amendments intended to formally establish a Music Leader Credentialing Committee. We have been very supportive of this new initiative but we are concerned that changes are being contemplated for the other credentialing programs for religious educators and ministers on which the music leader program is based. This board action does not affect ongoing staff work to create this program, so we expect to see newly credentialed music leaders honored at the Service of the Living Tradition at 2009 GA. However, we expect to wait to formally establish this structure in the UUA bylaws until a later date.
- Held a forum with the two candidates for UUA President, Rev. Laurel Hallman and Rev. Peter Morales. The audio of this forum will be available on through the UUA website.
- Heard an update on the UUA budget, which will be adversely affected by a 25% drop in the endowment. UUA finances are otherwise sound and we just received a clean audit report, but staff positions are now frozen and expenses are being reduced by 10%. Volunteer committees, including the board, are being asked to

reduce our expenditures and staff presence at GA will be reduced.

- Finally, as part of our transition to Policy Governance, we passed a draft set of Ends for the UUA. The text of this draft follows:

  Global end: Grounded in our covenental tradition, the UUA will inspire people to lead lives of humility and purpose, connection and service, thereby transforming themselves and the world.

  Our ENDS are growing Unitarian Universalist congregations that. . .

  Unlock the Power that Transforms Lives
  In our congregations, people deepen their spiritual lives. They:

  - Develop a personal spiritual practice
  - Participate in meaningful worship
  - Learn and practice empowered leadership and generosity
  - Find their ministry in the world

  Our congregations are:

  - Vibrant-joyful and excited about their ministries
  - Intentionally multi-generational and multi-cultural
  - Networked with each other

  Congregations are:

  - Active participants in ministerial preparation and development
  - Shared ministries
  - Agents of mission and extension

  Invite people into congregations that live out covenant through:

  - A strong, articulated sense of UU and community identity
  - High expectations of their members
  - Full participation in Associational life
  - An open and inclusive outreach and welcome
  - Embracing and struggling with issues of oppression and privilege

Move toward sustainability, wholeness and reconciliation through ministries, partnerships, and alliances.
Our congregations answer the call to ministry and justice work:

- Grounded in the communities in which they live
- Nationally, internationally
- With interfaith partners and alliances

The public engages in meaningful dialogue and takes action informed by our prophetic voice and public witness.

These are all at equal priority and are to be achieved within a justifiable cost.

I welcome your comments, questions, and concerns about the work of the UUA Board.

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Mass Bay District Trustee to UUA Board

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