

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST LEGISLATIVE MINISTRY

UULM

June 2004 Volume 1

CALIFORNIA



Reflections from a Budget Watcher

A group of students from West Contra Costa Unified School District walked to Sacramento in April to protest cuts to public education. The governor refused to meet with them. In response, supporters began fasting, first in Oakland, and then moving to the steps of the state capitol. For the next 16 days, the UU Society of Sacramento opened its doors to provide those fasting with shelter and moral support.

In early June, California college students in cap and gown were jogging around the capitol building protesting a budget proposal that would prevent some 25,000 eligible students from attending CSU and UC.

Advocates for the disabled and those who provide services to help them stay in their home rather than in an institution were aghast at the suggestion that the In Home Support Service workers would have their wages cut to \$6.75 an hour (\$14,040 a year).

(continues on page 4)



Historic Success on Marriage Equality

In the first coordinated UULM lobby day back in April, 33 UU clergy and laity from across the state joined with interfaith colleagues to deliver the message that love is stronger than fear and that all committed couples deserve equal civil rights.

The Director of Marriage Equality, who organized the day's events, specifically credited UULM for being "absolutely instrumental" to its success. One such leader wrote, "Assemblywoman Hannah-Beth Jackson (Santa Barbara) specifically mentioned that contact with straight clergy members changed her mind. I am excited to have UULM as an ally in this struggle, and cannot overemphasize the importance of your role in reaching the moveable middle on marriage equality!" *(continues on page 4)*

From the Director

Welcome to the UU Legislative Ministry in California!

As we begin our first year of operation, we find ourselves at a profound intersection of place and timing. At the edge of the Pacific, we are residents of a state that is the 5th largest economy in the world - a hub of immigration, and a cultural force where trends in public opinion & policy are begun that often ripple across the country.

What a year it has been in this state of ours! The governor was recalled. Same sex marriage has been catapulted into the heart of public debate. The state's continuing fiscal crisis threatens the fabric of our social services, education, environment and infrastructure. Deception at the highest levels of our federal government with regard to the war in Iraq, and the erosion of civil liberties and media democracy at home, have turned people out in the streets and started voter registration drives in record numbers. This past year has been a reminder that democracy is not a spectator sport.

Unitarian Universalism has been described as a religion with a spiritual center and a civic circumference. For UUs, civic engagement is a part of our faith. But how can we put that faith more effectively into practice? How might our UU values have more of an impact on the policies that so profoundly affect the lives of the poor and disenfranchised? How can we build respect for civil rights and renew commitment to civic responsibilities? How can we protect the earth that we will we pass on to future generations?

There are approximately 13,000 UUs of voting age who attend our California congregations. (Relatively small, but bigger than the influential League of Women Voters!) Margaret Mead reminds us - "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." Her oft quoted passage lifts up two challenges - *to be thoughtful* and *to be committed*.

Being committed to justice is more than a matter of will power, force-feeding another activity into an already overburdened life. It is about a conversion of the heart. How does that conversion happen? What prevents our engaging more actively in the civic arena? What is it that sustains a long-term commitment to activism? As our young people come of age how do they grow into morally engaged citizens rather than cynical consumers?

Being thoughtful asks us to think before charging off in principled isolation, banner in hand. It lifts up the value of listening, skill development, and strategic collaboration. How can our congregations shift from a social justice agenda that is driven by a few individuals or a small committee to one that is owned with passion and commitment by all ages of the congregation? How can we collaborate across the state, tapping the talent, wisdom and connections of UUs, so many of whom are leaders in academia, non-profits, government, media, politics, business and labor?



In our UU movement where most congregations' social justice work is focused on local issues, often through direct service, and where most advocacy work is directed toward the national stage, California's UU Legislative Ministry is charting new ground.

We are working to create a sustainable and powerful UU presence in the shaping of public opinion and policy in California. We are eager to visit your congregation and happy to lead a worship service and/or workshop, or to engage your congregation in our Listening Campaign.

The UUA and UUSC are both excited by, and supportive of, our emerging ministry. Perhaps they are hoping that California UUs will start a new trend that, once again, will ripple across the country, inspiring UUs in other states to organize and speak up for the values we hold dear. ↪

Prior to joining the staff of UULM, the Rev. Lindi Ramsden served our San José congregation for 17 years.

Raising UU Citizens: Parenting & Precincts

By Luther Jackson

My ten-year old son Alex wants to be President of the United States some day. Now that's not too unusual a dream for a fourth grader. But Alex has had a head start over most kids his age.

Alex was two when he "walked" his first precinct. He was actually in a carrier on my back as we went door-to-door in a south San José neighborhood. Two years later, Alex spent many Saturdays in a red wagon as I pulled him through the streets of downtown San José campaigning for City Councilmember Cindy Chavez. Cindy won both the primary and the general election by very thin margins, so Alex and I knew we helped get her elected.

Two years ago, Alex dressed as Harry S. Truman for Halloween. His kid friends, of course, had never heard of Truman. But when an adult friend pointed out that Truman was responsible for the A-bomb, Alex confidently pointed out that Truman was also surprisingly strong on racial equality issues.

Over the years, Alex has taken a keen interest in politics and democracy, and he understands that every person has the power to change our society

for the better. And now more than ever, I understand that it is my job as a parent to expose my children to the world of politics and to be a role model for them by voting and agitating for social and economic justice. This is a wonderful gift to bestow upon your children and your community.

As I become more active in the First Unitarian Church of San José and learned more of our Fifth Principle ("The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and society as a whole"), I have become even more conscious of my parental responsibilities in terms of the political process.



Alex Jackson and his brother Martin (in front)

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I understand that it is my job as
a parent to expose my children
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Last year, I hosted a meeting of interfaith justice leaders from San José and Chicago in our house. My youngest son Martin, then five, insisted on participating in the meeting. When the leaders introduced themselves and -- as an ice breaker -- told us something unique about their interests, Martin cleared his throat and introduced himself to the group.

Martin will get his turn to walk precincts in the 2004 general election campaign, but he is already learning that people are not helpless in the face of oppression and injustice, and that they must speak up if they want to be heard.

Both Martin and Alex look up to and admire elected officials. They enjoy attending political events and are not at all cynical about government or our elected leaders. They may not like each individual leader, but they know that voting and participating are how we make change.

I can't say for sure that either Martin or Alex will be president some day. But I can be confident they will become engaged and productive citizens. ✍

Luther Jackson is an Executive Officer of the San José Newspaper Guild and a member of the First Unitarian Church of San José.

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Reflections . . .

Families who had successfully gotten jobs and moved off of government cash assistance pointed out that California spends almost \$1 billion less on cash assistance than it did in the 1990s. This success is due, in large measure, to the funds that assist with childcare while families make the transition to work. Deep cuts to childcare funding would threaten such success.

Many UUs from across the state, working in or being the recipients of education, health care, public transit or social services, have seen “up close and personal” how the past four years of budget crisis have hurt the most vulnerable and have squeezed those providing them services to the breaking point.

While there are constituencies who can fight for particular sectors, there is a need for advocates who will look at the larger picture – and become champions of a sane and ethical fiscal policy, adequate funding for critical programs, and who will address structural issues that result in inadequate revenue and unfair taxation. The UULM, in addition to encouraging people to communicate with the governor, is working on a small group study guide that can help us to understand the moral questions and public policies that allow the most wealthy state in the nation to shortchange our children, our elders, our environment and our future. The issue of responsible state budget is large and complex, but we can learn about the issues in the light of our values of democracy and equity, compassion and interdependence. Our UU faith compels us to stand by those who cannot protect themselves. In this we are in good company. Caring for the disenfranchised is a theme that runs through all the great religious traditions.



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Historic . . .

Among the 33 was Rev. John Millspaugh from Mission Viejo. Said Millspaugh, “We are at an historic moment when national consciousness is turning to the issue of gay marriage rights. The public has come to associate religious presence on this issue as one opposed to gay rights. We must speak up (on the pro side) now, adding positive applications of advocacy to our voices.”



Bringing our values to Sacramento

Among our allies on this issue are Marriage Equality, Equality California, and the California Freedom to Marry Coalition, the lead organizations in our state promoting equal rights to civil marriage for all couples. Sometimes we forget, but the reality is that we are not alone on this issue. We’ve learned that true power resides in working together in such coalitions. But there is much work to be done.

With Millspaugh’s leadership, his congregation of some 125 members in one day sent 74 letters of support for marriage equality to their conservative Orange County legislators. Millspaugh preached a sermon in which he asked people to ‘take a meaningful look at the whole question of gay marriage.’ Then they set up informational tables, which included a sample letter



from UULM for individuals to consider. "The important spiritual piece was that each congregation member had to figure out where he or she stood and then could take action through these letters."

April's success was just the beginning. In July, the US Senate have decided to consider the proposed constitutional amendment to forbid recognition of gay marriage. Culturally conservative churches are encouraging their members to flood their Senators with phone calls on July 11th and 12th. We need to call as well. We need to call for respecting the spirit of a document that expands rather than contracts civil rights.

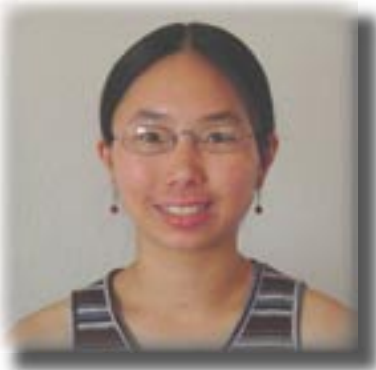
On the positive side, the Marriage License Non-Discrimination Act will be reintroduced for California's 2005-2006 legislative session with the support of Assembly Speaker Nuñez. We now have the chance to make history. However, for civil rights to be victorious, we must do much more education and outreach as people of faith. UULM will continue faith based organizing, focusing in some of the more conservative areas of our state, and reaching out to better inform older Californians and Latino immigrants about the issue. UULM invites you to be a part of this historic effort - by organizing a Marriage Equality Task Force in your congregation, and by supporting UULM's state-wide witness with a generous donation. ☞

By the Rev. Judith Morris, Eleanor Piez, & the Rev. Lindi Ramsden.

Summer Staff at UULM

Christina Pei-fang Shu

Christina Shu just finished her sophomore undergraduate year at Stanford University, majoring in Religious Studies. Her ever-increasing fascination with religion began while growing up at Summit UU Fellowship in La Mesa. Through her UU heritage, she developed a deep respect for the value of religion and religious diversity, Christina is excited to work with UULM this summer as the



Regional Organizer for the San Diego region, and eager to make the change from studying books about religion to putting her UU faith into practice.

She is especially looking forward to connecting with other young adults and youth.

At the end of the summer, Christina will spend two semesters in Kyoto, Japan, studying Japanese language, culture and religions. ☞



Wendy Williams

Having completed her internship at the UU Church of Davis in May, Wendy Williams' time in Davis has been extended so that she may serve as their summer minister. Her call to ministry stems from a life-long interest in justice fed, in part, by practicing law for 15 years.



Given her background, Wendy is delighted to work this summer for UULM as a part-time Program Assistant, focusing her energy on developing small group ministry curriculum and worship resources for UU congregations on state budget equity issues.

Having passed her interview with the Ministerial Fellowship Committee this past March, Wendy will return to Chicago at the end of the summer to complete her final year at Meadville-Lombard. ☞

Visit us online at: www.uulmca.org

From Analysis Paralysis to Full Tilt Boogie

By Mark Evens, field study intern



I've participated in low level politics throughout my adult life. Although encouraged by my UU church

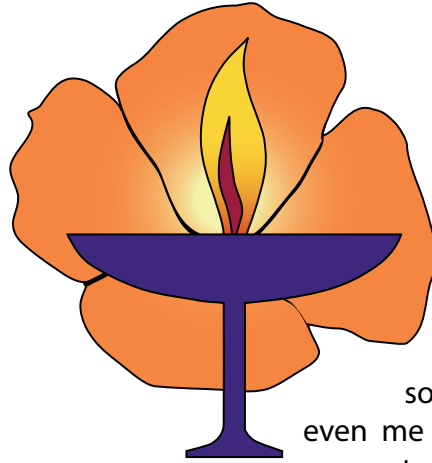
to continue my efforts, I rarely found my efforts satisfying. It was about spending too much time reading the news and far too little time using the news. This past spring, while in seminary, I joined UULM in order to address my own "analysis paralysis."

When San Francisco's mayor ordered the county clerk to begin issuing marriage licenses to gay and lesbian couples, Lindi asked me to work with UULM board member Lisa Sargent on a relevant resolution for the PCD annual Assembly. End of analysis paralysis. The remainder of my internship, I spent recruiting participants for lobbying day in Sacramento and collaborating on writing a grant.

Now, my analysis paralysis is gone for good. I see a vision of UU congregations balancing and connecting spiritual reflection, worship, and activism. It is exactly this vision which will sustain me in developing social justice ministries wherever I go. For all this I am grateful. ☺

How We're Doing It

By Eleanor Piez, Director of Outreach and Development



When I staff a table at a district assembly or give out brochures after a worship service, sometimes people are surprised: "How come I haven't heard of this before?" I answer, "Because we are brand new!" The UULM has a program that is so much needed, and so clearly welcome, that it even surprises even me that we are a new venture. Just like every startup, the UULM is doing this work on a

shoestring. Every contribution counts, and every new member is one more vote of confidence in our common work.

One sign that this work is both needed and wanted, is the generous support UULM is receiving. Our initial "venture philanthropists" - the UU Fund for Social Responsibility, the Pacific Central and Pacific Southwest Districts, and a donor who is inspiring others with a three year (2003-2006) challenge grant of \$65,000 through the Neighborhood UU Church of Pasadena, have all helped to create the funding base needed to hire staff and begin our real work.

More recently, The Society For Community Work, affiliated with the First UU Society of San Francisco, stepped forward with a grant. The UU Service Committee, excited about UULM's approach, also offered a challenge grant. Members of the Santa Monica and neighboring congregations organized a wonderful garden party to build support for UULM, successfully meeting the UUSC challenge. Following our good start in marriage equality activism, the UUA's Freedom to Marry Fund became our next major donor, giving their vote of confidence to our work on behalf of civil marriage.

So that's how we're doing it. One contribution at a time, we are building a budget and using it to organize and act to make our UU principles a more powerful force in California's public decisions. We hope you will join with us. Please become a member and send your contribution today! ☺

Editors note: Eleanor recently announced that she is leaving her part time position with UULM to accept a full time job with an affordable housing agency. We thank her for sharing her talent with UULM and are delighted that she will be continuing as a UULM volunteer.

A Listening Campaign in Your Congregation?

"Everyone needs a good listening to!" A simple way to reinvigorate and refocus your congregation's social justice ministries is to create opportunities for intentional conversations, often one-on-one, with your leaders and lots of other congregational members. By doing so, you'll learn more about their life journeys and what is most deeply important to them. Only then can you begin to identify the justice issues closest to their hearts. You only need four people who enjoy listening to others to get started. First, ask for the support of your minister(s), your Board, and social justice committee. Then schedule conversations with them first!

Once you've identified the dominant social justice issues, the congregation may want to hold an "Issues Assembly" to choose a couple of key areas critical to your congregation. As you are deciding where to focus your work, be mindful of opportunities for collaboration with the UUA, UUSC, the UU Legislative Ministry, and local interfaith networks.

Congregations, which have listened to their members, and moved from a social justice agenda owned by a committee to one that is owned and endorsed by the congregation, report more multi-generational involvement, energy, satisfaction, and effectiveness in their social justice ministries. For more information and concrete examples of such processes, please see our web site.

What Our Friends Are Saying

"It is my belief that one of the most serious threats to democracy is internal not external. It is the indifference, cynicism, and/or burnout that keep fully half of eligible voters away from the polls. It can result in a small percentage of the electorate having a huge influence. Remedying this problem does not begin with urging people to vote in presidential elections every four years, but rather lies in the slow and steady work of organizations like the UU Legislative Ministry in California that is listening to people's concerns and helping them learn to express their values through advocacy. The UUA, UUSC, and UU congregations will be the better for it, but the most important beneficiaries will be the communities in which the participants call home."

- Charlie Clements, President and Chief Executive Officer
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee

From North to South, We Are Listening to You

The UU Legislative Ministry has started a Listening Campaign of our own. What are California UUs passionate about? What issues are the most important for us to collaborate on as California UUs? What deepens our commitment to social justice and advocacy work as an expression of our faith? This is what we have heard so far:

Social justice ministries in our congregations are strengthened when we know our own UU history and faith, make friends and build community, learn to grow from losses as well as successes, and include food, fun, the arts, and worship in our social justice work. Choosing to focus on a few projects, to balance action and reflection, and to celebrate tangible results builds participation. Planning, doing our homework, and interfaith collaboration lead to greater results. Those surveyed commented on the importance of accepting people at different levels

of involvement (no guilt trips!), building hope, remembering to laugh, involving the kids, and saying "thank you!"

Since it is impossible to be effective if we are spread too thin, in November, the Board of the UULM California will be selecting a few priorities for the coming two year legislative session (2005-2006). In addition to the issues that we are working on in 2004 (marriage equality and the California fiscal crisis/tax equity) California UUs appear to be interested in collaborating around health care access, economic democracy & living wage, criminal justice reform, civil liberties, electoral reform, media reform, reproductive rights, public education, mental health services, environmentalism and preventing sprawl, to name a few. We can't do everything, and we'd love to have your input! Please fill out the Issue Survey on our web site or call for a copy in the mail. Better yet, invite us to your congregation so we can get acquainted in person! ☺

In Memoriam

Rev. Jody Shipley

The founder of the Society for the Larger Ministry (SLM), Jody was an eloquent and dogged advocate for UU Community ministries. She long ago articulated a vision of integrated social justice advocacy and parish life. Excited about UULM from the first moment she heard of it, Jody immediately landed a start-up grant to help spread the word about this budding notion, and to see if UUs in California were indeed interested. It was Jody's passion that turned the concept of "statewide" into reality. She spurred us forward, cheered our successes, and bolstered our courage when the organizing work felt tedious and endless. Her skill for spreading the vision as she traveled across the state has born sweet fruit. She touched many lives, and is missed tremendously.

Anne Seeley

When Jody sent out the first appeal for seed money to match the UUA grant, Anne was the first in with a check for \$200 accompanied by the words, "Great idea, how can I help?" Anne joined the planning group and brought her enormous planning and organizational skills to the table. An active leader with the Sierra Foothill Unitarian Universalists, she was instrumental in developing some of the fundamental infrastructure. Without her efforts, implementation would have undoubtedly been further off in the future. Her camaraderie, sense of humor and desire to put her UU faith in action will be deeply missed by all of us who shared this vision with her.



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