

Newsletter - February 2010

Massachusetts Bay District of Unitarian Universalist Congregations



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Spiritual Leadership for Social Change



by **Meck Groot**

MBD Program Support and Social Justice Coordinator

As a long-time social justice educator and advocate newly immersed in Unitarian Universalism through my work at the District office, I am in awe of the opportunities and possibilities that exist within this movement. I see people of faith who care deeply about our world; people motivated by a fierce blend of love, compassion and moral imperative; people daring to demand inclusion and willing to risk difference.

Congregational newsletters that come into the District office by mailbox or inbox testify to the range of activities that keep Unitarian Universalists busy in what is variously named "social action," "social service," "social justice," and "social concern."

[READ MORE](#)

Workshop for Social Action

Claiming Our Joy: Spiritual Leadership for Social Change

March 13, 2010 - 9 AM to 2 PM

[First Parish Church in Weston](#)



Led by **Hilary Allen**, Community Engagement Manager at Boston Center for Community and Justice, and **Meck Groot**, MBD Social Justice Coordinator and former Co-Director of Women's Theological Center.

Unitarian Universalists work hard against systems of domination and oppression. The needs created by these systems are enormous and the strategies for dealing with them perplexing. Those working for transformation can easily feel overwhelmed and spent.

[Lay-Led Worship](#) (June 12)

Upcoming Webinars

MBD is now offering webinars. Our first one with Wayne Clark on February 9 included over 80 participants from 5 districts and cities as far away as Halifax, Nova Scotia!

[Note: if the following links do not bring you immediately to the event listing, scroll down a bit.]

[Capital Campaigns: If You Build It, They Will Come](#) (March 3)

[Introduction to Social Media for UU Leaders](#) (April 7)

[The Green Sanctuary Movement: Get Involved Now!](#) (April 15)

Events @ Congregations

To see what's coming up at congregations, check out the congregation calendar on the MBD website [here](#).

If your congregation has an event to list on this calendar, contact [Judy Murray](#) with your information.

MBD Annual Meeting

The MBD Annual Meeting will be held on April 11, 2010, from 5:00 to 8:00 PM at [First Parish Needham](#).

To register your congregational delegates, [click here](#) for the form. Fair share status not required to attend or vote.

Youth History Prize

The Unitarian Universalist Historical Society seeks original historical essays (or sermons,

How do we remember and nurture our connection to s/Spirit as we work for change? How can we tap into the power of Beloved Community even as we work to create it? These are the questions at the heart of this workshop.

Claiming Our Joy will help social action committees and other congregational leaders consider the spiritual leadership practices they can use to enliven social change and social action efforts within their congregations and the wider world. The workshop will help leaders:

- identify current attitudes and behaviors that deplete our souls and divide us from s/Spirit and each other
- craft an understanding of what community is and how it can sustain us for the long haul
- recognize that community is both a catalyst for and a result of social change
- explore spiritual leadership practices that open our hearts and build Beloved Community

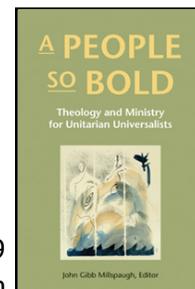
[REGISTRATION FORM](#) (including details on cost).

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A People So Bold

THE BOOK

John Gibb Millspaugh, Editor



A collection of essays by prominent UU ministers, lay leaders and theologians on the culture of UU social justice work who met at the Baltimore convocation in 2009 to "talk about how Unitarian Universalism could move beyond its emphasis on 'freedom from'... to 'freedom for'..." Inspired and thought-provoking, this book is a must-read for UUs who long to engage in social justice ministries in ways that deepen Unitarian Universalist faith and connection. Available through the [UUA Bookstore](#).



THE JACK MENDELSON FORUM

with Rev. Meg Riley

February 27, 2010 from 3:00 to 5:00

plays, dramatic readings, worship services, or poetry) written By YOUTH (ages 12-19) on Universalist, Unitarian, or Unitarian Universalist History. Entry Deadline: April 1, 2010. \$350 First Prize, \$150 Second Prize.

[Click here](#) for contest guidelines and other information.

UUA Benefits

February is open enrollment for Long Term Disability and Life Insurance through the UUA benefits program. Be sure those people in your congregation who receive benefits through the UUA know about this - especially the open enrollment opportunity for those who haven't yet taken advantage of the coverage.

[Click here](#) for more details.

Woburn Fund

Applications to the Woburn Fund are due March 1. [Click here](#) for guidelines.



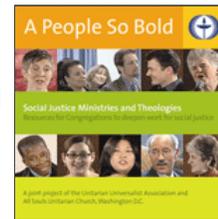
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[UU Urban Ministry](#)

A Presentation on justice-making as the spiritual practice that embodies Unitarian Universalist faith. Rev. Riley will speak about the importance of social justice work to Unitarian Universalism and its centrality to the UU mission in the world, both historically and now. She will base her presentation on the new book, *A People So Bold*. [Click here](#) for more details about this event.

THE DVD

Documented conversations and online curriculum materials designed for congregational use as well as individual viewing and reflection. Questions considered include:



- How does our faith ground us in social justice, theologically, historically, with spiritual practices?
- How does our faith hold brokenness, injustice, suffering?
- How do we develop prophetic voice?
- How do we create prophetic congregations?
- How do we mend a broken world?

A resource for congregations that focus not only on serving their members, but understanding that serving the larger world is central to their mission. [Click here](#) for more information and to order through the UUA.

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MBD Spring Conference

Using Social Media to Fuel Congregational Mission

May 1, 2010

Facebook. Twitter. Websites. Flickr. Podcasts. YouTube.

This dizzying array of social media is the cutting edge of communications in our 21st century culture, especially for youth and young adults. And yet we grapple with how to lasso this technology to serve the mission of our Unitarian Universalist faith and the purpose of our congregations.



MBD's Spring Conference will introduce participants to a host of new technology and expand our imagination about how to use social media to support our faith. We'll

identify and reflect on the potential and limitations of social media to nurture spiritual depth, faith development, and community building, and we'll explore the theological and ethical implications of this media.

We'll have keynote presentations from UU experts in new technology and its theological implications, and focused discussion for ministers, DRE/youth workers, and lay leaders to discuss the ethical and operational issues that arise when using social media in their particular roles.

We have a few logistical pieces to work out before taking registrations, but we hope you mark your calendars now for this exciting event!

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Spiritual Leadership For Social Change (continued from top)

Here is a sampling from the recent past:

- Participation in disaster relief work
- Serving dinners at area shelters
- Becoming a Welcoming Congregation
- Turning church buildings into green sanctuaries
- Creating and distributing holiday food baskets
- Tutoring at the UU Urban Ministry
- Hosting forums on multiculturalism
- Lobbying with UU Mass Action
- Organizing a Youth Social Action Conference
- Marching in area Gay Pride Parades

This list doesn't even get into the plethora of options for involvement offered through national UU institutions such as the UUA, the UU Service Committee, DRUUM, UU Allies for Racial Equity and UU Ministry for Earth, to name a few.

In all of this and more, I see people who want their faith to matter in this life. At the same time, I witness confusion about how to be effective, frustration at the apparent apathy of some congregants, time-consuming debate about which issues and strategies are most important, righteous indignation when values appear to clash, and bitter disappointment when best efforts do not yield the results hoped for. These expressions of distress remind me of what I see among many social activists who work in secular settings. Without spiritual grounding, social service, advocacy and activism are often joyless and difficult to sustain.

According to James Luther Adams "liberal religious people come to church seeking two things from the religious life: intimacy and ultimacy."* Rob Keithan, Director of the UU Washington Office for Advocacy, renames these as "community" and "meaning." Given that most people don't go to church in order to be involved in social action, why then the concern for social action in so many congregations?

It is my observation that while social justice doesn't typically bring people into congregations, Unitarian Universalism often does bring people to social justice. In their search for community and meaning, UUs who take their faith seriously recognize that these two are not enough without justice. "Without this missing component," writes Keithan, "our religious life is too isolated and incomplete." Indeed, every one of the seven UU principles points to the centrality of justice at the heart of Unitarian Universalism. These principles cannot be lived without intentional attention to right-relationship [justice].

Doing social justice work in meaning-making community, therefore, necessitates doing it in such a way that it "promote[s] meaning and community." Dominant culture does not teach us much about how to work in this way. We are trained to be problem solvers, troubleshooters, and fixers. Even people of faith tend to apply these strategies to social action work. Dominant culture rarely affirms the skills of "spiritual leadership"**- that is, the practice of doing justice in ways that strengthen our own and others' experience of community and belonging while deepening our sense of sacred connection and purpose. Consequently, both our faith life and our social action work are often not as engaging and enlivening as they might be.

On March 13, the District is offering a Learning Congregation workshop called "[Claiming Our Joy: Spiritual Leadership for Social Change.](#)" Hilary Allen and I will be leading that workshop for congregational leaders and social action committees (and anyone else interested). Our intention is to provide participants opportunities to explore what spiritual leadership is and how its practices and skills can spark creative, joyful engagement in social action in ways that promote both community and meaning. More details are provided in the announcement above. We hope you can join us.

* from "Community, Meaning and Justice" by Rob Keithan in A People So Bold: Theology and Ministry for Unitarian Universalists.

** a term used by Women's Theological Center, Boston, to describe the "practice of living on purpose, in spirit, for justice."

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[Meck Groot, Editor](#)
[Massachusetts Bay District of UU Congregations](#)

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