

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Florida

Spring, 2007

Special Points of Interest:

- Ministry with Public Purpose Founded
- How we got here: A History
- Meet your Steering Committee
- Where to find us.

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The Unitarian Universalist

Legislative Ministry of Florida Serves to Empower the Moral Voice of Unitarian Universalist Values

In early February, five Unitarian Universalist volunteer leaders from around the state of Florida met in an all-day meeting at the spiritual home of the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater. The group had been called together by Fred Seidl on behalf of the Defending Democracy project of the West Central Cluster.

The February meeting saw the passage of by-laws, approval of a statement of purpose, a lean but focused organizational structure and the election of a Chair of the Steering Com-

mittee. The Chair is the Rev. Dr. Meredith Garmon of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Gainesville.

The UULMF is a statewide justice ministry that serves to empower the moral voice of Unitarian Universalist values in the public arena. Guided by UU principles, the Ministry educates, organizes and



The Florida District UUA has agreed to serve as fiduciary for the UULMF.

advocates for public policies that

- uphold the worth and dignity of every person,
- further justice, equity and compassion in human relations,
- ensure the use of the democratic process and the rights of conscience,
- protect religious freedom,
- promote respect for the interdependent web of all existence and
- build a community of peace, justice and liberty for all.

Meet your Steering Committee

The UULMF Steering Committee:

◆ Rev. Dr. Meredith Garmon, Co-Minister of the UU Fellowship of Gainesville serves as chair. Rev. Garmon is a lifelong UU. He holds 5 degrees in 4 fields, including a Ph.D. in political theory.

◆ Gerald Goen is a member of the Board at Tarpon Springs UU, a very active Democratic party

leader and an experienced lobbyist.

◆ Recently retired Bob Keim is the Regional Coordinator for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, and Chaplain of the UU Church in the Pines.

◆ A former Catholic Priest, The Rev. Bud (Richard) Murphy is minister at the UU Society at Daytona Beach Area.

◆ The Rev. Millie Rochester hails from Oregon. She is Associate Minister of the Unitarian Universalists of Clearwater.

◆ Lobbyist Dr. Steve Segner is active in the UU Society Daytona Beach Area.

◆ Fred Seidl serves as Coordinator.

◆ Irene Keim keeps us focused, serving as recorder.

A Brief History: How We Got Here

We are here as a functioning Ministry owing to the efforts of Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, Minister of the Tampa church and previously a staff member of both the UUA and UUSC, and best known for her work in anti-racism. Through Marjorie's leadership and joint funding both the UUA's Fund for Justice and the UUSC, the West-Central Cluster has been engaged in a three-part effort to

extend and protect democracy in West-Central Florida.

The first phase of the Defending Democracy project was an extensive voter registration-get out the vote campaign. The campaign mobilized scores of volunteers to canvass neighborhoods in door-to-door and where possible face to face meetings to encourage people to register and vote.

A total of 22 UU churches joined in the effort.

Defending Democracy's Second phase served to let the community know that progressives have values, too. A community meeting was held in downtown Tampa with a distinguished local panel and Donna Brasil doing the keynote.

That left Phase III: going state-wide with a human rights advocacy network, and the UU Legislative Ministry of Florida was born.

Considering Action Projects

The Steering Committee has expressed its desire to seek the wisdom of our congregations and clergy in determining what policy, regulatory or legislative changes the Ministry will seek. The Steering Committee is working on ways to make that happen.

Some areas of interest have already been ex-

pressed. Areas which have been raised by members of the Steering Committee have been Voting, Health Care, Global Warming, Homelessness, Farm Labor, and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender rights. Our lobbyists will be scanning next fall's legislative agenda for opportunities.

And the UULMF

wants our congregations to be full participants in project formulation and action. Talk to us, please. All projects will be consistent with UU principles and purposes, address public issues or concerns important to UUs and advocate for public concerns that have significant implications on Florida legislative and regulatory issues.

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Largo City Manager Fired

Largo City Manager Steve Stanton was fired on the heels of an article in the St. Petersburg Times reporting that he was undergoing gender reassignment. Within two weeks of the announcement a prelimi-

nary vote to discontinue Mr. Stanton's employment was taken. He has been City Manager for 14 years and had received highly acceptable evaluations throughout that time.

The UULMF wrote letters to Mr. Stanton, the Mayor of Largo and to each of

the members of the City Commission. Steering Committee member Rev. Millie Rochester, presented testimony in a second public meeting, as did clergy and members of area UU churches. The vote remained 5 to 2 against Mr. Stanton. Legal action is expected.



Make Every Legal Vote Count!



We all know the sad and embarrassing history of Florida's inability to run a proper election. The UULMF has joined a coalition of organizations including the ACLU of Florida, the Florida Fair Elections Coalition, Common Cause Florida, the Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections and others in endorsing a Position Paper calling

for voter verified paper ballots, random, statistically significant, manual independent audits, as well as other provisions to help ensure fair elections.

UULMF is tracking legislation as it moves through the House and the Senate, and encouraging congregations, clergy and Social Justice chairs to visit their representatives, send email, make telephone calls and write letters on behalf of the provisions in the position paper. The Governor's proposals go a long way toward addressing the problems of

Florida Voting. Fully funding Gov. Crist's proposal is high on the UULMF's agenda.

At this writing, Steering Committee member Steve Segner is in Tallahassee working on this bill with coalition members, including its prime mover, UU Kindra Muntz.

The key person is Kindra Muntz, of our Venice congregation and President of the Sarasota Alliance for Fair Elections. Kindra has worked long and hard for badly needed changes in the ways Florida votes. We owe her our deepest gratitude.

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A Landmark Victory for Farm Workers

Over the past several years, the Unitarian Universalist Association has passed a number of resolutions at General Assembly in support of living wages and safer working conditions for agricultural workers. The Coalition of Immokalee Workers is an award winning organization whose efforts have been endorsed by many religious organizations, including the UUA, the National Council of Churches, The Robert F. Kennedy Center, and former President Jimmy Carter.

Working with Inter-FaithAction, the UUA has written letters, provided technical assistance, and UU congregations have provided needed support. The UU Clearwater congregation demonstrated at a local McDonald's restaurant, and handed letters to local restaurant managers asking McDonald's to negotiate with the CIW. For three years McDonald's ignored the CIW and those who supported them.

As Chicago UU Churches were preparing to assist farm workers in CIW's demonstration to be held next week, the news broke: A landmark agreement has been reached between McDonald's and the CIW. As requested by the CIW, McDonald's will pay a penny-a-pound more for tomatoes directly to the workers, and ensure safer working condition throughout it's supply chain.

We can all celebrate this victory!

The National Networks: UU Human Rights Advocacy

All across the UUSC and the UUA Regions, Unitarian Universalists are building capacity for human rights advocacy. Here are some of the groups and their websites:

- Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice Action of the Baltimore - Washington - Northern Virginia Legislative Ministry (<http://uusj.org>),
- UU Legislative Ministry California (<http://uulmca.org>),
- Southern California Unit of UU Service Committee (<http://www.he.net/~uusca/unit.htm>),
- UULM of Maryland (<http://www.uulmmd.org>),
- Promise the Children (<http://www.uumassaction.org>),
- Tuckerman Coalition (<http://www.Tuckmancoalition.org>),
- Michigan UU Social Justice Network (<http://uujustice.org>),
- Minnesota UU Social Justice Alliance (<http://www.muusja.org>), and
- New Hampshire Faithful Democracy (<http://nhfaithfuldemocracy.org>).





Organization

Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Florida

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Putting Legs on Faith

The Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Florida, is supported by a grant from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. It is Phase III of a jointly funded UUSC-UUA Defending Democracy Project., and is the realization of a state wide human rights advocacy network. In its first eight weeks of existence, the Ministry's Steering Committee has enacted by-laws and a long-term plan, addressed two major public issues and is engaging in research on several others. UULMF is a congregation-based community organization in that membership in the Ministry is as congregations. It is the purpose of the Ministry to put legs on faith by putting UU values and principles to work in public political, economic and social life, working to empower our congregations to act effectively in the larger community.

Becoming a Member Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Florida

There are 44 Unitarian Universalist Congregations in the State of Florida with 5,292 certified members. We want to consider all of these congregations to be members of the UULMF as full participants.

The Steering Committee is entirely volunteer, the Coordinator an hourly employee. We have expenses for telephone conference calls, automobile mileage, representation in Tallahassee and our annual

face-to-face meeting. We have a small grant from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and intend to apply for additional grant moneys as the grant cycles come around.

To leverage our available money to support the work of the Ministry, we are asking our congregations for a one dollar per member per year contribution.

Checks may be made out to:

'Florida District, UUA' with 'UULMF' on the memo line. Mail to: Florida District, UUA, 1901 Robinson St. Suite 18, Orlando, FL 32803

Individuals are invited to support this ministry through the Friends of UULMF. Please make checks out to: 'Florida District, UUA' and enter 'Friends of UULMF' on the memo line. Mail to the District address as above.