



May-June, 2007

JPD Newsletter

Connecting all Unitarian Universalists in the Joseph Priestley District:
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District of Columbia, Northern Virginia Vol. 12 No. 5

LGBT Concerns, Issues, and Events High on UU Church Agendas

In recent months, LGBT concerns have been close to the hearts and high on the activities list of churches and fellowships throughout JPD.

UUs were strongly represented when 200 persons turned out for the annual March Lobby Day in Annapolis for LGBT civil rights, sponsored by Equality Maryland. After addresses by local political leaders and speakers and personal stories on discrimination toward same-sex couples and transgendered individuals, attendees met with legislators urging them to stop a proposed constitutional amendment defining marriage as only between a man and a woman. Among UU churches reporting attendance and support of Lobby Day, (an incomplete list) were Towson, Cedar Lane, Baltimore, and Silver Spring.

In February, First Unitarian Church of Baltimore celebrated hanging a banner that read, "Civil Marriage Is a Civil Right" near its entrance. Members also wore badges with the same wording at the event.

UU Church of Hagerstown, MD made February the focus of LGBT concerns and UU Church of Silver Spring, MD celebrated its tenth anniversary of becoming a Welcoming Church and began its Living the Welcoming Congregation workshop series through its Adult RE program.

Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, PA held its third annual "Freedom to Marry" rally, displaying signs at an intersection supporting same-gender marriage rights in February and later held workshops with a human relations speaker on LGBT rights.

LGBT Committee members of UU Congregation of York, PA and a Silent Witness group from Unitarian Church of Harrisburg, PA helped keep a protest peaceful when anti-gay activist Fred Phelps of Westboro Baptist Church demonstrated against a production of "The Laramie Project" at York Suburban High School. An exchange between students and the Westboro group threatened to get out of hand. Rainbow umbrellas came out and UUs sang, "We Are Gentle, Loving People." Police thanked the UUs for their efforts.

At a winter congregational meeting, UU Fellowship of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown, MD approved a motion to endorse a State Senate bill that would bar discrimination against transgender people in areas of employment, housing, credit and public accommodations.

Throughout the recent season, UU Church of the Restoration, Philadelphia, PA has held a series of film screenings, a Welcoming Congregation workshop series, and a Sunday Service with banners and signs on LGBT issues. These activities precede a May Congregational Meeting when members will decide on becoming a Welcoming Congregation.

At a special service on April 29, UU Church of Delaware County, Media, PA dedicated a new, rainbow flag sculpture of metal that replaces a fabric flag, stolen and returned burned and torn last fall.

UU Hammer and Saws Tackle Need for Affordable Housing

The Affordable Housing Task Force of Bull Run UUs, Manassas, VA spent a work day preparing a house for a disabled Iraq War veteran. It was an effort for Project Mend a House. Another organization, Homes for Our Troops, purchased the house.

UUs of Sterling, VA signed up to help rehabilitate a Loudon County house that, lacking needed repairs, had become unsafe for its owner.

This is part of a program, Rebuilding Together, that matches volunteers with homes in need of repair. The homeowners must be financially unable to make needed repairs, be elderly, physically disabled, or a family with children.

On a wintry day, five members of Cedar Lane UU Church, Bethesda, MD and 15 others from the UU Church of Rockville, also Bethesda, worked with future residents on 12 townhouse units in a Habitat for Humanity Project.

In March, Towson UU Church, Lutherville, MD began its 2007 Habitat for Humanity home building near the Johns Hopkins medical campus. Weekend and weekday building will continue through June.

**27th Annual UUMAC Summer Institute
July 22-28**

Davies Memorial to be Honored as 'Breakthrough Church' at General Assembly

Davies Memorial UU Church, Camp Springs, MD will be honored as one of four "breakthrough congregations," out of 1,050 churches, at the June General Assembly in Portland, OR.

Selected as an outstanding UUA congregation, Davies Memorial will be recognized as having significant growth in numbers and diversity. A year ago, the church had 130 members. This year it was able to certify 150 members, making it a mid-size congregation.

The church will show a 12-14-minute video during one of the GA plenary sessions and host a workshop, where it will be able to tell its story and respond to questions.

The congregation also was recognized at JPD's Spring Conference in Harrisburg last month.

River Road Launches First Annual All-Church Social Justice Project

River Road Unitarian Church, Bethesda, MD launched its first All-Church Social Justice Project for the week of April 14-21 to contribute to non-profit agencies in Maryland and DC.

With a theme of "Heart and Home," it provided opportunities for members of all ages to choose an activity with a non-profit partner, matching interests and talents.

"Home" activities ranged from refurbishing low-income housing to building bird houses, collecting books for a homeless shelter library or helping an animal sanctuary.

What's Happening....Following the cancellation of their rental lease by the Camden Catholic Diocese after sponsoring a Gay Rights speaker, **UU Congregation of the South Jersey Shore, Oceanville, NJ** is moving to new quarters at the Lions Center for the Blind in Absecon, NJ....**UU Church of Silver Spring, MD** has adopted a two services plan...**Two JPD Chalice Lighter Grants** were awarded to **UU Fellowship at Easton, MD** and **UU Fellowship of Southern Maryland, Leonardtown, MD**. Each grant is for \$20,000. Easton's will help with costs of a greatly increased mortgage for expanding facilities, while Southern Maryland's grant will support a recently-established RE coordinator position and nursery staff.

What We Care About...Members of **Dorothea Dix UU Community, Trenton, NJ** provided 78 meals for homeless families living in area motels.... **UU Congregation of Columbia, MD** is collecting housewares and supplies for women and their

children moving into their own apartments from a county Domestic Violence Center....Volunteers at **UU Church in Cherry Hill, NJ** joined the interfaith Bookmates program, partnering volunteers with children in four area schools for reading, mentoring and spending quality time weekly throughout the school year....A new Social Action Project for **UU Fellowship of Lower Bucks, Langhorne, PA** is providing suitcases and large gym bags for women at Libertae, a treatment facility in Bensalem for drug and alcohol dependency. When women and children leave the facility they often have to use garbage bags for belongings they have accumulated during their stay, having arrived with very little. A used, but decent suitcase makes long journeys by bus less difficult....**UU Congregation of York, PA** shipped 85 pounds of clothing and other items to children and staff in an orphanage in Haiti.

Cows, and Llamas, and Chickens, Oh, My

Concern for the earth and people whose lives depend on it is reflected in many activities of JPD congregations.

UU Congregation of Wyoming Valley, Wilkes-Barre, PA recently sent \$300 for the purchase of a cow to its Partner Church in India.

Children in the UU Church of Hagerstown, MD counted what they had earned and collected from their families and came up with \$91.25.

Through Heifer International they will be able to purchase: 1 hive of bees for honey; 1 share of trees to replenish the earth; 1 share each of a llama and a lamb for wool; 1 flock of chickens for eggs.

As its Social Justice project for Heifer International, the seventh grade Traditions Class of Cedar Lane UU Church, Bethesda, MD raised \$4,154.13. Bake sales, alternative gifts, and collection plate donations produced the total, an amount close to the \$5,000 needed to purchase a Gift Ark, that includes 15 varieties of pairs of animals.

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