



UULMNJ Statement on the Marijuana Laws

UULMNJ is intending to take a stand on the decriminalization/legalization of Marijuana. This is a bold step for a faith community. We take it with considerable forethought and awareness of its implications for our society. UULMNJ does not endorse the recreational use of marijuana, just as it would not endorse the recreational use of tobacco or alcohol. The UULMNJ position is based on the concern for social justice. The current drug policy laws and the resulting incarcerations for minor drug possession adversely affects life opportunities for many young people, and especially young black men.

The taxation and regulation of marijuana is not a new issue for Unitarian Universalists. In 1970, the Unitarian Universalist Association passed a general resolution calling for the legalization of marijuana. The resolution stated that the drug laws are making criminals of and causing undue and unjust punishment to many persons who have no criminal intent in the use of marijuana; and are being used as political weapons against those who dissent in politics or lifestyle from the accepted norms. It states that no reliable research on the effects of marijuana has shown its use to be as hazardous to the public or the individual user as the use of tobacco, alcohol or many other stimulants and depressants legally available to the public.

Now fast-forward 45 years. Many things have changed. We have learned that marijuana has some significant medical use in controlling seizures and pain. We have learned that a number of states have either decriminalized or legalized the use of the substance, allowing for significant regulation and taxation. Sadly, though, we now have documented the hundreds of thousands of lives that have been ruined because of arrest and incarceration due to minor drug charges. The cruel realities of these minor drug arrests have limited employment, education, family relationships and future opportunity for those who have been caught in these draconian policies. And people of color have particularly suffered.

Marijuana Reform is fast becoming a central focus of current efforts to dismantle the mass incarceration/"New Jim Crow" system and its widespread destructive effects on society and the lives of millions. In 2013 there were almost 700,000 marijuana arrests in the U. S., more than 45% of all drug arrests and more than for all violent crimes combined. This is a major part of the mass incarceration system which makes us, by far, the largest imprisonment country in the world. Criminalization of marijuana, and resulting incarceration and stigmatization, cripples lives and serves to increase rather than constructively address problems of drug use.

Despite this draconian and disproportionate system of alleged justice, marijuana continues to be the most widely used illicit drug in America, admittedly used at one time or another, by more than 114 million Americans. The true indictment of this system is the fact that marijuana arrests disproportionately target and affect people of color by rates nearly four times greater than others despite data showing very similar usage rates across racial and ethnic lines. The State of New Jersey typically accounts for more than 20,000 possession arrests annually with some counties showing arrest disparities of 4 or 5 times greater for people of color.

Eighteen states and Washington D. C. have enacted or initiated approaches to decriminalize marijuana possession. Five of these have lifted the prohibition of marijuana altogether with various approaches to control and regulation. About two dozen countries have taken steps toward drug decriminalization and legalization with constructive programs most notably Portugal, Czech Republic, Netherlands, Uruguay, Colombia and Argentina. This experience has demonstrated societal benefits and little or no increase in drug use or crime.

Decriminalization along with treatment programs when properly implemented can

- Substantially reduce arrests and incarceration and the crippling effects of a criminal record,
- Increase drug treatment and public health and safety,
- Reduce criminal victimization of people of color,
- Reduce criminal justice and incarceration costs and make funds available for needed social programs,
- Help redirect law enforcement efforts to prevent serious and violent crimes,
- Improve relations between law enforcement and the communities.

The call of our faith communities to demand regulation and taxation of marijuana is a call for justice. It is a call for compassion. The UULMNJ supports measures directed to eliminate criminal penalties for marijuana possession and to a broad expansion of harm reduction and drug treatment programs. In addition we support a serious examination and discussion of regulatory alternatives to drug prohibition to address the major drug related societal ills not alleviated by simple decriminalization. The New Jersey Unitarian Universalist Congregations are invited and urged to join us in this effort and discussion to eliminate this obstacle to social progress.

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