Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF)
Annual Report, 2016-17

Focus on Global Warming Issues:
For the past 2-3 years, the EJTF has remained focused on global warming issues, in particular we have been seeking enactment of state legislation – called the “Renewable Energy Transition Act” (RETA) – to promote the substitution of renewable energy (RE), mainly solar photovoltaic (PV) electric systems and wind, and investments in energy efficiency (EE) to generate and supply 80 percent of New Jersey’s electric power needs by the year 2050 (“80 by 2050”).

The RETA bill has twice won bi-partisan approval in the State Senate, largely through the efforts of Sen. Bob Smith (D-Somerset), the chairperson of the Senate Energy and Environment Committee. However, to date the RETA legislation has remained “stuck” in the Assembly Public Utilities and Telecommunications Committee, chaired by Assemblyman Wayne DeAngelo (D-Mercer) who, so far at least, has been unwilling to hold a public hearing on the bill or even to meet with members of the primary coalition supporting RETA, called “NJFREE” for New Jersey for Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency.

The EJTF’s advocacy on behalf of RETA includes:
1. organizing “mass mailings” of cards and letters to state legislators by UU congregations; and
2. meeting directly with state legislators by NJFREE members including EJTF/UU representatives; and
3. promoting the adoption by municipal governing bodies of “Resolutions of Support” calling upon their legislators to vote for RETA; and
4. writing “op ed” articles and letters to editors of newspapers.

We are now part of an effort to persuade the Assembly Speaker, Mr. Vincent Prieto (D-Hudson), to remove the RETA legislation from Mr. DeAngelo’s committee and to send it to the Environment and Energy Committee chaired by Mr. Tim Eustace (D-Bergen), who – based on recent communications as well as a face-to-face meeting – strongly supports enactment of RETA. To date, however, Speaker Prieto has not acted on this request.

Divestment from fossil fuels:
As a further action item promote renewable energy and energy efficiency as alternatives to the burning of fossil fuels (coal, petroleum, natural gas, etc.) in the generation of electricity, task forces has had numerous discussions of joining the “divestment movement.” Such a strategy would include two potential elements:

First, we would advocate for individuals in UU congregations around the state to consider putting their investments in “clean energy” stocks and mutual funds, of which there are many to choose from.

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Environmental Justice Task Force (EJTF)  
Annual Report, 2016-17 (continued)

Second, we would recommend that UU congregations at the local and state level consider divesting from stocks or mutual funds that include fossil fuel entities.

Although this divestment strategy – which I strongly support – was recently endorsed in a conference call with task force participants, I believe it should be thoroughly discussed at the Plenary and voted on by attending task force members before it is formally endorsed as an action item for the coming year.

Clean water:
As another action item the task force has endorsed a proposal to file a “rule-making petition” with the state Board of Public Utilities and the Department of Environmental Protection seeking the promulgation of more stringent potable water controls, including but not limited to removal of lead pipes especially those serving schools.