



UU FaithAction NJ President's Report

It was my honor to succeed Rev. Tracy Sprowls as President of UU FaithAction late in 2017 and to continue to do the good work that she and prior Presidents have done.

I am fortunate to have begun to serve at the end of the dispiriting Christie era and at the beginning of the optimistic Murphy era. I am sure that I don't need to tell any of you that Gov. Christie did not share many of our UU values and, as a result, much of your hard work on important issues never came to fruition thanks to his vetoes or the prospect of such action. We are UUs, so we continue to fight the good fight, but the hard reality of Chris Christie made one pessimistic about the possibility of transformational change in New Jersey.

That all changed in November. A more sympathetic Murphy administration offers the possibility of progress on any number of issues on which we toiled in the past eight years. Examples include common sense gun violence legislation, parole reform and other criminal justice reform, fair wages for women and all working people, protection of women's health, increased environmental protection and many other initiatives that our Executive Director will detail in his report and which you will learn about from our Task Forces in the afternoon session. The renewed energy and excitement is palpable.

Further fueling the enthusiasm of our volunteer force has been the introduction of our new Signature Legislation program, under which FaithAction takes the initiative to proactively propose legislation that forwards our fundamental principles. Our Task Forces are able to see their dreams turned into reality, thanks to the work and support of Gary Nissenbaum and his Legal Advocacy team, which researches the concept and drafts proposed legislation. Our first such piece of legislation, concerning confidentiality for workers and clients at clinics, has been voted out of Committee recently and will hopefully be signed into law this year.

Our Legal Advocacy program continues to extend our reach by allowing us to become part of important litigation, from protecting the rights of "dreamers" to fighting efforts to restrict the building of mosques to a number of other vital issues. Once again we owe thanks to Gary and his team for leading this effort.

In addition to this important policy work, FaithAction recognizes that it has an important education role. We have sponsored a number of informative conferences. Montclair and Princeton both presented FaithAction conferences about the new Murphy administration and legislative

opportunities, Lincroft featured a fascinating look at Women and Prison and the need for reform and Montclair and Englewood hosted panels on the possible new marijuana laws.

FaithAction also takes very seriously the fact that it is now the only statewide UU organization in New Jersey. Our Music Festival brings our choirs together and we are seeking other vehicles to unite our congregations. We have offered training

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in social action to one congregation and our Executive Director has preached at a number of congregations over the past year. We are planning a training program that will equip our lay leaders to give talks at congregations needing to supplement their worship programs. We have added a state calendar function to our website to allow all of our congregations to announce their significant activities and ask others to join. This increasing unity can only make us stronger.

There is a sense of excitement surrounding FaithAction thanks to the significant things we have already achieved and the sense that we can do so much more. This has led to an increase in financial support, both from our member congregations and especially from individuals like you, that has allowed us to have a full-time Executive Director and a full-time Administrator for the first time.

The present is exciting and future is even brighter. I can't wait to see what is next for FaithAction.

Report Concerning the UULMNJ Public Policy Network

The Public Policy Network is a sister organization to FaithAction (and to the UU Legislative Ministry of New Jersey before it). Established under 501(c)(4) of the Internal Revenue Code, its function is to pay excess lobbying expenses that would otherwise have been incurred by FaithAction and which, if paid by FaithAction, would exceed the statutory limit, thereby imperiling FaithAction's tax-exempt status. Because no such payments have been required to be made by the Public Policy Network to date and it is not anticipated that such payments will be needed in the immediate future, that organization was placed in dormancy last year in order to save needless operating costs.

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