

Feeding the Flame

The Social Justice Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland

Phone (989) 631-1162

www.uufom.org

December 4, 2014 (Volume IV no. 3)

♦ Forum on Institutionalized Racism, this Sunday morning, 9:00 a.m.

Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Eric Gardner. We have watched these unbelievable events unfold in shock. And we grow numb with the injustices piling up. In the tradition of Unitarian Universalists that have come before us, it is time for us to acknowledge the problem of institutionalized racism in this nation and to act.



During this Forum, we will discuss our responsibility as contributors to the problem, and how we can become change agents. The time for this conversation is overdue and it must begin now. Please join us in the Sanctuary and help reclaim our hope for a future untainted by this seemingly deathless scourge of racism.

♦ Equal Rights for Gay and Transgender People

A strong majority of Michiganders agree discrimination is wrong. And yet, people who are gay or transgender can still be fired, denied housing or refused business services based solely on their perceived sexual orientation or gender identity.



Michigan's House Commerce Committee heard testimony on Wednesday, December 3 on <u>HB 5804</u>, a bill introduced by Rep. Sam Singh that would amend Michigan's Elliott Larsen Civil Rights Act to extend civil rights to people from gay, lesbian, bisexual AND the transgender community. Rep. Frank Foster, Chair of the House Commerce Committee, decided to introduce an Elliott Larsen rights amendment that was NOT fully inclusive – it would not give equal protections to people from the transgendered community. The meeting concluded with no vote on either bill.

Tell members of this committee that it is not fair that some people aren't allowed equal rights and to support Rep. Singh's HB 5804.

Please call your State Representative, especially if they are a member of the Commerce Committee, including the following from our region:

Frank Foster, Committee Chair (R-107th District) - 517-373-2629

Ben Glardon (R- 85th District) - 517-373-0841

Joel Johnson (R-97th District) - 517-373-8962

Tim Kelly (R-94th District) - 517-373-0837

Tom Leonard (R-93rd District) - 517-373-1778

Stacy Oakes (D-96th District) - 517-373-0152

♦ Religious Freedom Restoration Act

The House Judiciary Committee today referred to a second reading without amendment <u>HB</u> 5958, an egregious assault on religious freedom.

Religious freedom is fundamental to personal liberty. We have the absolute right to believe whatever we want about God, faith, and religion, and we have a right to act on those beliefs, unless those actions harm others. The proposed bill will allows individuals to use their religious beliefs as an excuse to harm others. If passed, this bill would excuse any person from any state or local law that they claim "burdens" their exercise of religion. This includes beliefs that do not stem from any established religion. Thus, any individual religious belief can determine which state and local laws a person chooses to honor.



The bill could be invoked to undermine local antidiscrimination laws that protect lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, allowing people or businesses to deny employment, housing, or services based on their religious views. Other states with similar legislation have seen individuals and groups use religious freedom as a justification for all sorts of behavior, some of it criminal. Here are just a few examples:

- <u>Criminal Justice</u>: Police officers across the country have used religious freedom as an
 excuse to refuse orders they claimed offended their personal religious views. A police
 officer in Oklahoma asserted a religious objection to his community policing duties at a
 mosque, claiming a "moral dilemma."
- <u>Public Health</u>: Pharmacists in many states, including Arizona, Montana, and Wisconsin, have used religious freedom as a defense for refusing to dispense daily birth control.
- <u>Child Safety and Welfare</u>: A pastor who helped kidnap a child in Virginia from her legal guardian cited religious freedom as his legal defense. In New Mexico, a local religious leader cited the state RFRA when he appealed a conviction for sexually abusing two teenagers. A federal judge just held that the federal RFRA prevented the Department of Labor from fully investigating possible child labor law violations because the individual under investigation said that his religious beliefs forbade him from discussing those matters with the government.
- <u>Discrimination against gay and transgender people</u>: In Michigan, a school guidance counselor refused to help gay students because of the counselor's religious faith.
- <u>Municipal Burden</u>: Dallas, Texas is embroiled in an ongoing seven-year legal battle with a religious group that has used the Texas RFRA to claim that the city's health code and food safety standards burden their exercise of religion when serving food to the homeless.

By allowing someone who files a lawsuit to recoup damages, this bill could be an invitation for people to sue the government. The bill will increase congestion in Michigan courts and divert the already scarce resources of law enforcement agencies and governments at both the state and local level.

Please call your State Representative, especially if they are member of the Judiciary Committee, which includes the following from our region:

Kevin Cotter, Committee Chair, (R-99th District) 517-373-1789 Joel Johnson (R-97th District) 517-373-8962 Tom Leonard (R-93rd District) 517-373-1778

♦ New Escalating Inequality Study Guide Available Now

The Escalating Inequality Study Action Issue Study Guide is now available from the Commission on Social Witness at http://www.uua.org/economic/escalatinginequality/index.shtml. A team of experts has been working with UUA staff to produce a curated list of resources, organized into modules, to help congregations understand classism and economic inequality and identify opportunities for action.?

Challenging extreme inequality is a moral imperative. The escalation of inequality undergirds so many injustices which our faith movement is committed to addressing: from economic injustice to mass incarceration; from migrant injustice to climate change; from sexual and gender injustice to attacks on voting rights. This Study Guide provides Unitarian Universalist congregations with materials and guidance for beginning or deepening their exploration of economic justice, helping to navigate this complex and inspiring subject with many ways to engage at personal, congregational, local, state, national, and global levels. For more information or to contact the Commission on Social Witness, email socialwitness@uua.org.

♦ Status of Same-Sex Marriage in Michigan



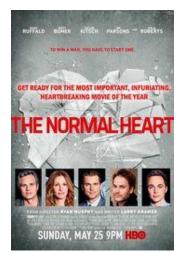
Since the 6th Circuit Court upheld Michigan's constitutional ban on same-sex marriage, the plaintiffs have filed their case with the Supreme Court. Michigan Attorney General Bill Schuette last week also asked the high court to review the state's case, supporting a petition filed by April DeBoer and Jayne Rowse, the Hazel Park lesbian couple who sued the state over its voter-approved ban. Having two cases with opposing parties each asking for review where there is clear conflict in lower courts builds momentum toward the Supreme Court taking up the issue

soon, perhaps in time for a final decision before the end of the current Term in June 2015.

The petition filed Monday presents four arguments for Supreme Court review:

- 1. The decision to uphold Michigan's gay marriage ban by the U.S. 6th Circuit Court of Appeals in Cincinnati conflicts with rulings from four other appeals courts around the nation.
- 2. The appeals court decision, lawyers argued, conflicts with previous U.S. Supreme Court decisions. "In Loving [v. Virginia, the 1967 Supreme Court case that overturned bans against interracial marriage], this Court decided the core constitutional issues at hand rather than wait for further studies about the claimed perils (especially to the country's children) of blending the races," lawyers for DeBoer and Rowse argued.
- 3. The question presented is of overriding importance. Gay couples who are denied marriage licenses in Michigan argue that they're harmed by deprivation of spousal benefits related to hospital visitation, adoption, estate planning, insurance options, taxes and other matters.
- 4. Michigan's gay marriage case, lawyers for the Metro Detroit lesbian couple argued, is the most fit for review by the nation's high court. "Because Michigan's constitutional and statutory bans are both broad and representative of those in many other states, this Court's review would settle the central question that remains across the country," the petition asserts. "The laws challenged here deny to same-sex couples marriage or any 'similar union for any purpose.' The MMA (Michigan Marriage Act) and parallel statutes extend not only to marriages within the state but also to the recognition of marriages "contracted . . . (in) another jurisdiction." Lawyers also pointed out that Michigan's case was the only one in which a full trial was conducted.

♦ Movie Showing – "The Normal Heart", Saturday, December 13



Interweave UUFoM will be hosting a movie night December 13 at 7:00 p.m. at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Midland. We will be watching the HBO film (based upon the play) "The Normal Heart." A small variety of snacks (popcorn, pretzels, crackers, etc.) will be provided. Please feel free to bring your own beverage or other snack if you wish to do so.

"The Normal Heart" is a 2014 American drama television film directed by Ryan Murphy and written by Larry Kramer, based on his own 1985 play of same name. The film stars Mark Ruffalo, Jonathan Groff, Matt Bomer, Taylor Kitsch, Jim Parsons, Alfred Molina, Joe Mantello, and Julia Roberts. The film depicts the rise of the HIV-AIDS crisis in New York City (among gay people) between 1981 and 1984, as seen through the eyes of writer/activist Ned Weeks, the founder of a prominent HIV advocacy

group. Weeks prefers public confrontations to the calmer, more private strategies favored by his associates, friends, and closeted lover Felix Turner (Bomer). Their differences of opinion lead to arguments that threaten to undermine their shared goals."

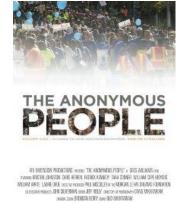
Interweave UUFoM values and affirms the lives and experiences of all Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer (LGBTQ) individuals and their allies. Grounded in Unitarian Universalist Principles, we provide leadership, support and awareness for LGBTQ issues in the Great Lakes Bay Region. In collaboration with other organizations of similar vision, we actively nurture and support all LGBTO individuals, communities, groups and their allies.

♦ Movie Showing – "The Anonymous People", Saturday, January 10

Seekers Practicing Addiction Recovery in Community (SPARC) invites you to a showing of the film "The Anonymous People" on Saturday, January 10 at 7:00 p.m. Deeply entrenched social stigma have kept recovery voices silent and faces hidden for decades. The vacuum created by this silence has been filled by sensational mass media depictions of addiction that perpetuate a lurid public fascination with the dysfunctional side of what is a preventable and treatable health condition.

Just like women with breast cancer, or people with HIV/AIDS, a grass roots social justice movement is emerging. Courageous addiction recovery advocates are organizing to end discrimination and move toward recovery-based solutions. The story is told through the faces and voices of the citizens, leaders, volunteers, corporate executives, and

public figures who are laying it all on the line to save the lives of others just like them. This passionate new public recovery movement is fueling a changing conversation that aims to transform public opinion, and finally shift problematic policy toward lasting solutions.



SPARC reaches out to those searching for personal spiritual and religious belief in life while living with addiction. SPARC acknowledges that the spiritual growth and search for truth outlined in our Unitarian Universalist Sources and Seven Principles can help us meet the challenge of addictions. The group offers resources and information to support reflection and personal honesty, and to help those with addictions and the important people in their lives reconnect in healthy openness. We offer support, an open environment, and strict confidentiality. Society often places shame and quilt on those suffering from addiction. We offer a safe space to question, learn, and heal.