

Why February 21 Matters – Special Message From the Community Action Committee

What happens on February 21 at King's Chapel matters because it could save lives and change ours. The preacher is the Reverend Dr. William Schulz. He is the former executive director of Amnesty International, the former president of the Unitarian Association, and the retiring CEO of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. "William Schulz...has done more than anyone in the American human rights movement to make human rights issues known in the United States (*The New York Review of Books*, 2002)." Dr. Schulz's message is about the dire need for social justice throughout the world and the opportunity to make a difference that is within our reach, thanks to the work of the UUSC.

UUSC Leads Unitarians in the Cause of Social Justice

The Unitarian Universalist Service Committee is a human rights organization powered by grassroots collaboration in more than a dozen countries throughout the world. Currently, the agency is focused on three principal program areas. Each of them has recently been described as successive installments in King's Chapel publication, *Between Sundays*. A synopsis has also been posted on the King's Chapel website: www.kings-chapel.org. The priorities are:

- UUSC's Rights at Risk Program – defending human rights under threat throughout the world in extreme situations of natural disaster, armed conflict, genocide, forced migration, and systematic injustice;
- UUSC's Environmental Justice Program – defending the human right to water, safe, sufficient, accessible, and affordable water for personal and domestic use; and
- UUSC's Economic Justice Program – influencing local, statewide, and national policy on workers' rights for the world's most marginalized and vulnerable workers.

The mission of UUSC is to advance human rights and social justice around the world, partnering with those who confront unjust power structures and mobilizing to challenge oppressive policies. UUSC envisions a world free from oppression and injustice, where all can realize their full human rights.

UUSC Protects the Human Rights of Refugees

The minister of King's Chapel, the Reverend Joy Fallon, has noted that many parishioners deeply concerned about the plight of refugees in Europe and elsewhere. Knowing this, we have asked Bill Schulz to share with us what his agency is doing about Rights in Humanitarian Crises and how we might best respond. Indeed, it should be of interest to all people that the UUSC had its origins in 1940 when Waitstill and Martha Sharp began rescuing refugees fleeing the Nazis in Europe.

We have learned that in Europe, UUSC is working with partners to help the thousands of refugees who are stranded in eastern border zones under abysmal conditions with no hope of advancing their journey. UUSC has partnered with the Asylum Protection Center in Serbia to provide comprehensive mobile aid across the migration trail and with the organization, Prakis, in Greece to provide food and medical care to refugees in such places as the small village of Idomeni where 3,000 people have been living in appalling conditions at facilities equipped to house only a fraction of that number.

In the USA, UUSC's advocacy work is focusing on the admission of refugees and the decriminalization of the asylum process. This year, the UUSC has worked to oppose legislation that would ban Syrian and other Muslim refugees in the U.S. and to counter the toxic anti-refugee rhetoric that feeds draconian border restrictions. UUSC also focused a spotlight on the traumas of asylum seekers from Guatemala, Honduras, and El Salvador being held in jail-like facilities in south Texas and Pennsylvania, some held for more than a year while awaiting court hearings. The UUSC commissioned a mental health study that documents the psychological and health toll among mothers and children held in protracted detention

having experienced multiple traumatic events and concludes that conditions in the detention centers are inhumane and counter to U.S. moral values.

UUSC is a vocal advocate for the human and legal rights of asylum seekers, especially the thousands of refugees in Europe with little hope of advancing on their journey and Central American mothers and children crossing the U.S. border over the past year.

UUSC's Dynamic Leadership Achieves Results

William F. Schulz is the president of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. Previously, he served as president of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) from 1985 to 1993 and the Executive Director of Amnesty International USA from March 1994 to 2006. He is also a senior fellow at the Center for American Progress in Washington, DC, where he works in human rights policy and religion; adjunct professor of public administration at the Wagner School of New York University; and affiliated professor at Meadville/Lombard Theological School at the University of Chicago. He has served on the boards of People of the American Way, Planned Parenthood Federation of America, and the International Association for Religious Freedom.

Bill Schulz has travelled the globe in pursuit of a world free from human rights violations: visiting refugee camps, prison cells, poverty stricken villages; leading missions to Liberia, Tunisia, Northern Ireland, and Sudan; and spreading the message on campuses, in boardrooms, with civic organizations, and in the media as guest on Good Morning America, The Today Show, Hardball, and Nightline.

He is the author of two books on human rights and contributing editor for three others. A Phi Beta Kappa graduate of Oberlin College (1971), he holds a master's degree in philosophy from the University of Chicago (1974), and was awarded a master's degree in theology and a Doctor of Ministry degree from Meadville/Lombard Theological School in 1973 and 1975. He is married to the Reverend Beth Graham, also a Unitarian Universalist minister. His family includes two grown children from a previous marriage.

UUSC Can Make a Difference at King's Chapel

Each year in February, a Sunday service is designated as Community or Social Action Sunday (UUSC calls it Justice Sunday). Its purpose is to increase awareness and engage us in reflection and action. It's an opportunity to make a personal connection to the world of millions of people where justice can be the difference between living and dying. On Sunday, February 21, Dr. Schulz will deliver a sermon that will make that connection, "The Blessedness of Bodies." The Sunday collection will give us an additional opportunity to make the connection as the offering will be donated to the UUSC and its work in response to the refugee crisis and the human rights of asylum seekers. Later, a luncheon at the Parish House will be the opportunity for an even deeper connection as Dr. Schulz comments on the refugee crisis and answers questions, following a thirteen minute video production from UUSC's 75th Anniversary that vividly portrays the works of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee throughout the world. Please RSVP your intentions to attend the luncheon (by telephone or email to the Parish Administrator Gretchen Horton: Gretchen@kings-chapel.org). And be prepared to contribute to the UUSC. There will be envelopes when the collection plate is passed, or a check can be mailed to the parish office payable to the UUSC. Finally, for those who wish even more information, visit the UUSC web site to learn more about the cause of justice: www.uusc.org. Thus many lives be saved and ours changed.