

Voter Registration Drive Kick-off Event

TALKING POINTS

- Millions of Americans have hit the streets since last fall to protest George Bush's push for preemptive war against Iraq. But Mr. Bush wouldn't listen. He dismissed protestors and their concerns. Would he listen any better if everyone who has attended a march pledged to vote in 2004? Or if, in addition, everyone who carried a sign, made a speech, sent an email, wrote a letter or lit a candle for peace committed to register one new American voter every month between now and the next presidential election. Let's say that two million Americans participated in some way in protests against the war. Say each of them commits to registering one new voter every month between now and Election Day 2004. That would yield 36 million new voters registered for peace. (Some 56 million Americans are eligible to vote but are unregistered, according to the U.S. Census.) Of course, that would be unprecedented. But a register-for-peace drive would be hugely significant if it signed up even three million new voters. That would be one peace demonstration the president could not ignore.
- The beginning of the church year is a time to reflect on the year just ended and to set priorities for the year ahead. As this church year begins, I find myself thinking most about the role our faith can play in civil society. Unitarian Universalism has always had a spiritual center and a civic circumference. How are we called to live out our commitment to American democracy? I believe this year is a time to take action. I believe that the greatest service our faith community can perform right now is to help Americans reclaim our democracy. We should never again have a president or a legislature elected by only half of the eligible voters as happened in 2000. (Bill Sinkford).
- In our Fifth Principle, Unitarian Universalists covenant to affirm and promote "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." Too many Americans are not exercising that right, in effect giving away our democracy by eliminating the checks on those in power that regular elections provide. As one letter-writer to The New York Times put it shortly after the 2000 debacle, "low [voter] turnout is precisely what gives the government the mandate to act as if no one cares and no one is looking." And too many of those who did choose to exercise their right to vote in 2000 were denied that opportunity—the vast majority of them persons of color (and young people, Kate would add). There is work to be done. I'm not talking about simply affirming the importance of voting, nor of simply promising to vote ourselves. I'm talking about mobilizing to get out there and work to prevent the travesty of the last election from recurring. We want to see this nation's promise of democracy restored, and to do what we can to ensure that everyone's vote gets counted (Bill Sinkford).
- This is not a partisan issue. UUs cover the entire political spectrum, just as we do the entire theological spectrum. What we can agree on is the need for effective democracy, on the right of all persons and all points of view to be heard and respected. Everybody counts; everybody needs to be counted. This is not about politics; it's about governance. We cannot claim to be a democratic nation if our leaders derive their authority from elections in which too few vote and whose legitimacy is open to such question.
- How many people can we reach? There are about 160,000 adult UUs in our movement. You do the math. A few thousands votes in one state determined the outcome of the last Presidential election. I am going out and looking for my ten people. I hope you will join me.