

Faithful Democracy: UU Congregations and the 2004 Elections

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Faithful Democracy: Introduction

In the fall of 2003, **UUA President William Sinkford** called for UU involvement in the voter mobilization effort. He stated then:

"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."

Unitarian Universalists have a rich history of working to vitalize democratic participation in our political system, dating back to the earliest days of American government. Our **fifth principle** reads "we will covenant to affirm and promote the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large." We have long been committed to the belief that our democracy will be enhanced and improved by greater participation. To continue in the tradition we have inherited, the UUA has joined with other religious communities to form **Faithful Democracy**, an interfaith coalition that will provide resources, information, and suggested activities to increase the number of people casting informed votes in the 2004 elections.

Faithful Democracy is an interfaith, grassroots coalition drawn from many religious traditions. **As people of faith, we are called to promote civic action as a moral responsibility.** The strength of this coalition can be found in its unified voice around five areas of work: encouraging voter registration, educating voters, getting out the vote, monitoring the polls, and advocating for voter rights.

The UUA is also a sponsor of **Campaign for Communities**, a historic coalition for voter mobilization that includes the Earth Day Network, the NAACP Voter Fund, Southwest Voter Education Project, and Project Vote.

This guide, authored by the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy, provides the resources you need to put together a complete and successful voting project in *your* congregation. You will find in-depth information on forming community partnerships and interfaith coalitions and on holding joint voter registration drives. Most resources listed here are web based. Hard copies of The Interfaith Alliance's voter registration guide were sent to all congregations in the January 2004 Congregational Mailing. For additional copies of the guide, contact The Interfaith Alliance at 202-639-6370. For hard copies of UUA resources, contact Sarah Craft, Voting Project Coordinator at 202-296-4672 x22. A Voter Research Hotline is available from Project Vote Smart at 1-888-VOTE-SMART (1-888-868-3762).

Getting Started:

Priorities and Partnerships

If your congregation has not already done so, form a **voter task force**. Decide together the issues that are most relevant to your congregation and your community.

The UUA Advocacy and Witness staff strongly believes that voter activities should be done in partnership with community groups, with the knowledge that relationships formed during this work often last beyond it. We recommend that congregations explore opportunities for partnership early on in the process—before making big plans. **Community based organizations** know the ropes, know their communities, and need allies. Working with these organizations provides a way for those of us with more power and privilege to form needed alliances across race and class.

Brainstorm About Choosing a Partner

What existing relationships or memberships does the congregation have in interfaith or secular groups? What groups do members of your congregation work for or with that would make good partners? What groups work with communities with traditionally low voter turnout, such as young adults, people of color, and people with low incomes? Often **partner churches** in low-income areas, immigrant communities and/or communities of color have connections that can provide further suggestions for partnerships and projects. Check www.faithfuldemocracy.org for faith groups active in your area.

To partner with Campaign for Communities see the member organization's websites at:

- Earth Day Network www.earthday.net
- Southwest Voter Registration Education Project www.svrep.org
- NAACP Voter Fund www.naacpnvf.org
- Project Vote www.projectvote.org

Also see www.nationalvoice.org for community groups doing voter projects.

Many of the faith-based community organizing networks are working for increasing voter participation including the YRUU endorsed, Gamaliel-sponsored **Rolling Thunder Down Home Democracy Tour** www.rollingthundertour.org.

Form an Action Plan

We recommend planning your work so that it includes some activities in each of the **five areas**: voter registration, voter education, Get Out The Vote (GOTV), advocacy and poll monitoring. Start your planning by brainstorming goals in each area and then narrowing them down to manageable list. From there repeat the process by brainstorming activities to meet those goals. For example, one goal might be to have everyone in the congregation registered. Having a voter registration table at coffee hour could help you achieve that goal.

Legal Considerations

Congregations have tax-exempt 501(c) 3 status and therefore must conduct voter registration, education, and GOTV drives in a non-partisan manner. See *The Real Rules: Congregations and IRS Guidelines on Advocacy, Lobbying, and Elections*, a publication of the UUA Washington Office for Advocacy, at www.uua.org/uuawo.

Stay in Touch!

The more we know what you're doing, the more we can help you and other congregations share knowledge and inspiration. The UUA is committed to our leadership role in non-partisan faith based

voter registration. We want to know (and tell others) how many voters **our congregations are successful** in registering in 2004. *Please* send us the results of your registration drives, tell us how many people you registered, and let us know which actions worked best. Your participation will help us plan effectively for future elections! Have the chair or a person from your group let the **UUA's Voting Project Coordinator, Sarah Craft**, know that you are working on voter mobilization by emailing voting@uua.org or calling 202-296-4672 x22. For weekly updates from Sarah and to share best practices with other congregations, sign up for **voter-news**, the UUA's listserv for voter work, at <http://lists.uua.org/mailman/listinfo/voter-news>.

Get media attention

In brainstorming sessions, consider activities that would be exciting to local media. Partnerships and joint activities are often covered positively. Issue a press release to inform your local media about your congregation's dedication to voter and civic participation. Contact Janet Hayes in the UUA Public Witness Office for assistance at jhayes@uua.org or 617-948-4386.

A basic timeline for your voting work:

Present-September 2004: registration and voter education activities (see the Voting Events Calendar at www.uua.org/voting). Try to commit to holding **at least four activities** during this period.

August-October 2004: Intensive voter registration, approaching most state's 30 day registration deadline.

September, October: Get Out The Vote (GOTV)! Phone bank: call voters and remind them of their registration and their polling place. Also what their needs are for Election Day. Begin registering and training people to work as poll monitors for Election Day.

November 2, 2004: Work as poll monitors; facilitate rides to the polls.

Post-Election: Report back from voter activities; share best practices with the UUA (through voting@uua.org), other congregations and community organizations.

Voter Registration:

Registering voters is the first step in increasing civic participation. Followed by comprehensive voter education and Get Out The Vote efforts, registration drives have proven to be successful in increasing voter turnout in local and national elections.

There's no better place to start registering voters than **within your congregation**. Once all members are registered, use your skills to conduct registration **outside your church**. Encourage members to register others by putting 5 voter registration cards in each order of service.

The best way to get involved in voter registration and mobilization efforts this election year is through community partnerships. Community organizations have resources for training and staff support that will make your participation effective and often very easy. For more information on interfaith partnerships visit www.faithfuldemocracy.org. For community groups involved in various voter projects visit www.nationalvoice.org and www.earthday.net. If you have further questions, be sure to contact UUA Voting Project Coordinator, Sarah Craft, by email at voting@uua.org or phone at 202-296-4672 x22.

If your congregation is not successful at entering into partnership with community or interfaith organizations, the following resources are available to aid in conducting your own congregation based, non-partisan voter registration guide.

The UUA Washington Office for Advocacy has created a new resource: [“Ten Easy Steps for Organizing a Congregation-Based, Non-partisan Voter Registration Drive”](#) is available at www.uua.org/uuawo.

The Interfaith Alliance has created a [2004 Election Year Handbook](#). A hard copy was sent as a part of the congregational mailing in late January 2004. You can also download it directly from their website at www.InterfaithAlliance.org/Elections.

Voter **Registration Requirements and Deadlines** vary by state. To learn about your state’s voter registration requirements see: www.vote-smart.org/voter_registration_resources.php and select your state.

PLEASE PUT THIS LANGUAGE ON YOUR MATERIALS:

Our voter registration services are available without regard to the voter’s political preference. Information and other assistance regarding registering or voting, including transportation and other services offered, shall not be withheld or refused on the basis of support for or opposition to particular candidates or a particular party

A Federal Election Commission regulation requires that you post a sign or give written notice to people you are registering or helping to vote.

Voter Mobilization—Get Out The Vote:

Though often more time-consuming and expensive, many studies show that Get Out The Vote (GOTV) efforts are just as important, if not more important, than registering new voters. Just because someone is registered to vote, doesn’t mean she or he will show up at the polls on Election Day. If you are partnering with a community organization, your congregation can volunteer to be a part of their GOTV efforts. Here are a few tips on how to include GOTV activities in your voting projects.

Keep records of whom you register to vote. Copy all registration cards before you send them in to the election office so that you have contact information for everyone. You can also create a simple database that includes people’s names, phone numbers, and their polling places for follow-up calls. During registration, you can also ask people for their email addresses to do electronic reminders.

Register Absentee Voters. Help college students, people in the military, and people with mobility problems obtain and use absentee ballots. Each state has different rules for voting absentee, so you will need to call the state election office or visit their website. www.vote-smart.org has compiled absentee ballot information and provides downloads for most state forms.

Make sure voters are educated. See our section on Voter Education to make sure people know when and where the election will take place, what they need to bring to the polls, and what to expect once they get there. Be sure to also help them find Voter’s Guides inform them about the candidates.

Remind people to go to the polls.

- Use your database or the copies of registration to make phone calls, send post cards, do visits, or send electronic messages to voters about the upcoming election. Remind them of their polling place and what they are supposed to bring. Find out if they need a ride to the polls, and connect them with someone or an organization giving rides.
- Put a reminder in the Order of Service to remind members of your congregation to go to the polls.
- Post fliers throughout the community with all relevant information.
- Be creative! Have folks stand on the side of the street with signs saying “VOTE!” or put the message up on the church’s street sign.

Participate in “Call to a Faithful Decision Weekend” on either of the two weekends preceding the November 2nd election. Encourage your minister to preach about civic participation. For resources to launch the weekend, visit the Interfaith Alliance’s website at www.InterfaithAlliance.org.

Help people get to the polls. Volunteer with an organization providing driving shuttles for people with mobility problems, and encourage employers in your community to give employees time off to go to the polls.

Voter Education:

Voting Procedures

To find out all information on voting procedures, visit the website of or call your local election office. Go to the League of Women Voters website at www.lwv.org/voter/govote/taftv_contact.html for phone numbers and websites. Use the information on this website to:

- Tell people WHEN the elections are going to take place, including all primaries and the November 2nd national election.
- Make sure people know WHERE their polling place is.
- Tell people WHAT TO BRING with them to the polls. Some states require your voter ID card, and most will require a photo ID.
- Let people know WHAT TO EXPECT. Talk to your local election office to find example ballots, and show people what they will look like. You might also be able to find a voting machine to teach people how it works.

Candidate Positions

- Project Vote Smart has a comprehensive website listing thousands of candidates at www.Vote-Smart.org. Find your Presidential, Congressional, Gubernatorial, State, and Legislative races by entering your zip code, and encourage candidates to register their positions on various issues by using the vote-smart survey.
- The Friends Committee on National Legislation (FCNL) provides links to access your elected officials’ voting records and “Questions for Candidates: A guide to find out more about candidates’ positions on the issues that are important to you.” on their website at www.FCNL.org.
- Use information on candidate positions to hold discussion sessions after services. Remember to be strictly non-partisan and to include Youth and Young Adult members of your congregation.
- Hold multi-issue, non-partisan candidate forums. The Michigan Parent Teacher and Student Association has a comprehensive resource for 501(c) 3 organizations. Go to www.MichiganPTA.org and click on “How to Run a Candidate Forum” under the ‘Advocacy Main’ menu. Be sure to adapt the resource to your needs as a congregation.

The religious/moral reasons for voting.

- Go to www.uua.org/voting under 'Sermons and Theological Resources' for discussion guides, sample sermons, and UU history and theology of civic involvement.
- See www.FaithfulDemocracy.org for more interfaith resources.

Advocacy:

Voter work is not limited to registering, mobilizing, and educating voters. Our democracy requires vigilance and action on the part of citizens committed to equal opportunity. There are the many ways to support voter rights, in addition to your registration and mobilization drives. Continue your voter work after the election by channeling the congregation's energy into one or more advocacy area. A comprehensive resource for voter advocacy is an organization called Demos: A Network for Ideas and Action. Visit their site at www.demos-usa.org to find many ways to get involved.

Support Free Air Time with "Our Democracy, Our Airwaves Act" at www.ourairwaves.org
Senators John McCain (R-Ariz.), Russell Feingold (D-Wisc), and Richard Durbin (D-Ill.) have introduced a bill (S. 1497) that would require television and radio stations to provide more and better information to voters before elections.

Ensure local and state compliance with the Help America Vote Act (HAVA). Under HAVA, states must meet new federal requirements, including provisional ballots, statewide computerized voter lists, "second chance" voting, and disability access. See the implementation site at www.civilrights.org/issues/voting for more information on HAVA compliance and electronic voting security.

Support Ending Felony Disenfranchisement. An estimated 3.9 million Americans, or one in 50 adults, have permanently or currently lost the ability to vote because of a felony conviction. Permanent disenfranchisement fundamentally negates the principle of rehabilitation. See Right to Vote with five state campaigns and felony rights information from all 50 states at www.RightToVote.org and "Democracy Denied: The Racial History and Impact of Disenfranchisement Laws in the United States" at www.demos-usa.org/pub110.cfm.

Work for Same-Day Registration. Election Day Registration (EDR), also known as "same-day voter registration," permits eligible citizens to register and vote on Election Day in six states. Those states boast higher-than-average voter turnout and report few problems with fraud, costs, or administrative complexity. Download "DEMOS Tools for Democracy: Election Day Registration" www.demos-usa.org/pub14.cfm for more information.

Distribute Voter Bill of Rights. Voter empowerment begins with education. In 20 states, People For the American Way Foundation, along with their state and national allies, have analyzed election laws, consulted with election officials, and produced a "Voters' Bill of Rights" that tells voters in plain language precisely what their rights are at the polls. Go to www.electionprotection2004.org to access your state's voter bill of rights and learn more about this campaign.

Support Time to Vote. www.TimeToVote.net: to the Census Bureau, the number one reason why millions of registered voters did not vote in the past two presidential elections was because they did not have enough time on Election Day to get to the polls and fulfill their responsibilities at home and at work. Time to Vote is a non-political, non-partisan initiative energizing America's democracy by ensuring that all registered voters who want to vote have the time they need to vote.

Support Congressional voting rights for the District of Columbia. DC Vote is an educational and advocacy organization dedicated to securing full voting representation in Congress for the residents of the District of Columbia. See www.dcvote.org

Poll Monitoring:

Of the many controversies surrounding the 2000 presidential election, one of the most alarming was that some registered voters found many obstacles to casting their ballots. With new procedures and technologies for voting, we must **ensure the reliability, access, security, and integrity of polling systems** by understanding regulations and standards and by keeping officials and candidates accountable.

- In 2004, People for the American Way is working to increase voter education and to train volunteers for on-site poll monitoring in over 20 states. In each state, they have published Voter Bill of Rights and will provide a hotline for people having questions or problems with voting. To read about their work or to volunteer, go to www.electionprotection2004.org
- The Federal Elections Commission (FEC) provides information, by state, about the administrative structures of state election commissions, including who is qualified to monitor the polls on Election Day. Visit www.fec.gov/pages/tech3.htm.
- The FEC also has published *very specific and technical* standards for voting systems: www.fec.gov/pages/vssfinal/vss.html

Voting Technology Security:

Congress passed the **Help American Vote Act (HAVA)** in 2002. HAVA allocated \$3.86 billion for states to replace old voting machines with new ones. While touch screen computer voting provides **accessibility for people with disabilities** and other amenities previously unavailable, electronic voting systems have raised many concerns, from both computer scientists and advocates, about the possibility of election fraud. Advocates are calling for a **paper trail** to ensure reliability of electronic voting. Pending Congressional legislation, The "Voter Confidence and Increased Accessibility Act" (HR2239/S1980), introduced by Rep. Rush Holt in the House and Sen. Bob Graham in the US Senate would resolve much of the debate around voter technology and implementation of HAVA.

- **Electronic Voting: 2004 UUA Action of Immediate Witness:** Resolution in support of a voter-verified paper audit trail passed at UUA 2004 General Assembly. <http://www.uua.org/actions/civil-liberties/04electronic-voting.html>
- **Unitarian Universalists for Verified Voting:** spear-headed by **Teresa Hommel**, author of www.wheresthepaper.org, this site outlines actions UUs can take to address the 2004 Action of Immediate Witness: www.uuvv.org
- **Verified Voting** Org lists projects by state www.verifiedvoting.org
- **True Majority:** "The Computer Ate My Vote" www.truemajority.org/ComputerAteMyVote/index.cfm

Further Resources on Democracy, Voting, Partnerships, and Spirituality:

Books:

Available from the UUA Bookstore at www.uua.org/bookstore or 1-800-215-9076:

- *Soul Work: Anti-racist Theologies in Dialogue* edited by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley and Nancy Palmer Jones (Skinner House, 2002).
- *The American Creed: A Biography of the Declaration of Independence* by Forrest Church (St. Martin's Griffin, New York, 2003).
- *Bridging the Class Divide* by Linda Stout (Beacon Press, 1997).
- *Soul of A Citizen* by Paul Loeb (St. Martin Press, 1999).
- *Whose Vote Counts* by Robert Richie and Steven Hall (Beacon, 2001).

Also, see:

- *The Impossible Will Take a Little While* by Paul Lobe (Basic Books, *Coming in August 2004*). For an advance copy, go to www.paulloeb.org/donate.htm
- *Why Americans Still Don't Vote: And Why Politicians Want It That Way* by Frances Fox Piven and Richard A. Cloward (Beacon Press, 2000), available at www.amazon.com.
- *The Soul of Politics: Beyond "Religious Right" and "Secular Left"* by Jim Wallis (New Press, 1994) available at www.amazon.com.
- *The Best Democracy Money Can Buy* by Greg Palast (Plume Books, 2003) available at www.amazon.com.
- *Moral Politics: How Liberals and Conservatives Think* by George Lakoff (University of Chicago, 2002) available at www.amazon.com.

Videos:

- *Unprecedented—The 2000 Election*. 60-minute video available from www.amazon.com.
- *What America Needs: From Sea to Shining Sea*. www.whatamericaneeds.com.
- *Invisible Ballots: The Temptation for Electronic Vote Fraud*. An in-depth exposé of all-electric computerized voting. www.invisibleballots.com.
- *Voting In America*. An independent documentary about why Americans don't vote. www.votinginamerica.org.
- Spoken word performance and a chilling reading of the Declaration of Independence from www.declareyourself.com (click link at the bottom of the page).

Check www.uua.org/voting for updates to this document and more!!