

SUBURBAN JOURNALS

Last modified: Saturday, October 25, 2008 3:18 AM CDT

UCM meeting set for Thursday in Lebanon

By [Scott Cousins](#)

Health care and jobs are expected to be two of the major topics discussed when as many as 700 people gather in Lebanon Thursday for the United Congregations of Metro-East's sixth annual Public Action Meeting.

The meeting will be from 7-8:30 p.m. at the New Life in Christ Interdenominational Church, located at 689 Scott Troy Road (Troy-O'Fallon Road).

UCM is a faith-based social justice organization that represents 26 separate congregations with a total membership of about 20,000 in Madison and St. Clair counties.

"Over the past year, we've really been working hard on the issues," said UCM community organizer Ken Aud. "We want to bring people together to celebrate our successes; we also want to hold accountable public officials - praise them where they follow through on our agenda and then hold them accountable where they have not."

The meeting will focus on several major issues being dealt with by UCM, including the Madison County Sheltered Care Home referendum, health care, jobs, diversity in education and housing in O'Fallon, and climate change.

Representatives of the group met with reporters Wednesday to discuss issues.

"Our faith tells us that we are our neighbor's keeper," said Ron Trimmer, who chairs UCM's committee on jobs.

"We need an economy where everyone can develop to their potential and to not be exploited," he said.

UCM is promoting workforce agreements on major projects such as the new Mississippi River bridge and dedicated funding for job training programs.

"We know the best way of getting people out of poverty is to get them good jobs," Trimmer said.

The group is also actively supporting the advisory referendum for Madison County to continue operation of its sheltered care facility in Edwardsville, as well as state and federal legislation to promote a universal health care system.

Specific local issues include the "Cool Cities" initiative, which has gained some momentum in the Alton area through efforts by the Sierra Club and UCM, and has been endorsed by Mayor Don Sandidge.

The program includes energy-saving and other environmentally friendly efforts such as using LED lights, recycling, the use of solar panels and other similar projects.

In O'Fallon, UCM is supporting efforts to encourage diversity - focusing on the school district and housing.

"As people of faith, we've discovered that God loves diversity," said Cheryl Sommer, pastoral associate at St. Clare Catholic Church in O'Fallon.

She said that a major push by UCM is to encourage the School District to hire minority staff members.

Sommer noted that while 25 percent of the enrollment in the district are minorities, only 2 percent of the staff is.

Another major push by UCM in O'Fallon is to maintain affordable housing - specifically plans to close the Rock Springs Estates mobile home park and replace it with luxury town homes is a major concern.

"We were very concerned when we found out that the housing was going to be taken away and not replaced with affordable housing," Sommer said.

UCM is working with city officials to deal with the situation.

For more information about Thursday's meeting, call UCM at 451-1458.

"This is something where we are trying to address the issues of the local community, and would appreciate the general public being out," Aud said.