

UUSJ Green Activists – Environment and Climate Justice Meeting
Unitarian Universalist Church of Silver Spring
June 17, 2017 gather at 9:30am meeting 10:00am-12:30pm

Meeting attendees – Bob Denniston (UUC Arlington), Lavona Grow (UUC Arlington), John Gubbings (Cedar Lane UUC), Jack Lebowitz (RRUUC), Susan Rogers (All Souls), Jim Laurenson (Cedar Lane UUC), Cathy Tortorici (All Souls), John Kester (Washington Ethical Society), Larry Underwood (Bull Run UUC), Doneby Smith (UUC Silver Spring), Pablo DeJesus (UUSJ)

See last page for meeting agenda.

Pablo DeJesus, Executive Director of UUSJ convened the meeting at 10am following a social gathering time. Doneby Smith, from UUC Silver Spring, welcomed participants to UU Church Silver Spring.

Introductions and report out from participants

- Many participants said that they were in a planning mode regarding climate change actions post the People’s Climate March. A few congregations were also focusing on various aspects of green building improvements, including exploring solar panel installation, exploring the use of geothermal energy, recycling, upgrading HVAC, installing LED light bulbs, and obtaining green sanctuary accreditation.
- Particular focus areas from the congregations included providing information on the Carbon Footprint Game; supporting the International Green Building Code for Montgomery County; supporting the Neighborhood Sun company (<https://www.neighborhoodsun.solar>) that sells solar panels; conducting the bulb exchange program by involving children at the congregation to “treasure hunt” the bulbs; showing films.
- Many participants indicated that they did not have very active environmental committees in their congregations.

The Moment - Defining our strategic purpose: Pablo

Strategic Purpose from agenda:

“Frame a plan that enables UUs from the national capital region to engage effectively with elected officials in Washington on key issues related to environment and climate justice in a manner structured to invite UUs throughout the U.S. to collaborate and leverage UUSJ’s proximity to the federal formal.”

The UUSJ Green Activists team has noteworthy capacity in Witness/Mass Mobilization and Education, especially in assisting UUs from beyond the DMV when they attend major events in DC as well as in deep thinking on concrete actions for congregational based greening activity. This team’s participants and leaders are fairly well connected to Environmental organizations

and UUs nationwide working in the Environment and Climate Justice space. Where the team needs to discern and make choices about capacity and strategy is in the area of advocacy.

By necessity, UUSJ differs to individual churches and SANs structures at the level of community, county and state authority--where established relationships and organizations predominate. In contrast, in the arena of federal advocacy, few if any players occupy the landscape. A clear and stark vacuum exists in advocating for policy, program and legislative preferences that originate from UU values, principles and worldview: an advocacy posture that lifts up the interconnected and intersectional nature of our global and national Environment and Climate Justice challenges. By way of example are the green dimensions of infrastructure proposals, budget cut effects on monitoring capacity, challenges to science driven policy making, the connection between poverty and communities at risk from environmental degradation and the lack of sustainability driven thinking in corporate decision making.

The UUSJ Board has elected to focus the organization, its two part-time staff, and volunteer bandwidth on advocacy. Consequently, the UUSJ Green Activists should discern on the best way to meet the organization's pivot to an advocacy focus.

Related Questions:

1. How does the team want to respond to this circumstance?
2. Does the group want to emulate other UUSJ issue teams and develop a Green Advocacy Task Group, to deepen advocacy capacity right alongside Witness and Education, or does the group want to evaluate alternative means to engage in advocacy under the umbrella of UUSJ
3. Who is interested in doing advocacy?

How we got here? Larry Underwood and Pablo

- Coming off of PCM. Discussed where do we go from here. No decision on future action. Names of people who signed the petition and signed in or up for more info at the post-march All Souls events will be added to the UUSJ database.
- Carbon Footprint Game: continue to build on work of several congregations and share the links (Note: post meeting Eric Goplerud is pulling together people to package and further promote the game with the intent of nationwide dissemination.)
- UUA General Assembly: discussed the response of the three UUA presidential candidates to the set of questions posed by the larger climate justice individuals and groups. The responses can be found on the UUSJ website. Lavona will lead a breakout session during the three-hour Climate Justice Collaboratory sponsored by the UU Ministry for Earth and Commit2Respond. The session will focus on state and national opportunities for legislative action.

Advocacy focus, and priority ideas:

Lavona provided an update on federal legislation/advocacy. She is a member of the WISC – Washington Interreligious Staff Community: Ecology and Environment Working Group on behalf of UUA

- Withdrawal from the Paris Agreement: It was proposed that UUSJ investigate and support the *I'm In/We're In movement* that individuals, cities and congregations are signing to support implementation of the Paris Climate agreement
- Green Climate Fund (GCF): Unlikely that the U.S. will fulfill its financial commitment to fund the GCF - a fund established within the framework of the UNFCCC to assist developing countries in adaptation and mitigation practices. Lavona will provide information on the projects funded by the GCF.
- Develop talking points and sample letters for congregations to write members of Congress as the issues emerge in Congress
- On most issues there are 17 key Senators in 14 states that are the focus of legislative advocacy by WISC. UUSJ efforts are underway to work with the UU State Action Networks (SANS also in our area called the UU Legislative Ministries - Maryland and Virginia) and in states where there are no SANS, UUSJ will identify and work with larger congregations in those states to support UUSJ Capitol Hill Advocacy Corps office visits, and other direct advocacy by constituents including telephone calls and letter writing.
- Look for volunteers to help with the development of a UUSJ Faithful Budget (Note: post meeting the WISC published their Faithful Budget posted on the FCNL website)
- Bills on a tax on carbon are likely to be introduced in Congress. (Larry is actively working with Citizens Climate Lobby on this as are many UUs) The [Climate Leadership Council](#) (primarily Republican led), a prominent group of business, opinion and NGO leaders, promote a carbon tax.

Witness:

- The group discussed possible engagement with other groups and events for the [World Food Day, October 16](#). It was decided to provide general promotion of the event by UUSJ.

Education events (webinars are a way to reach a national audience):

- Lavona is working with Chloe Schwabe on the development of a webinar on growing the Green Economy. Chloe is a member of All Souls and she works for the Maryknoll Office of Global Concerns and member of the WISC-EE Group.
- Bob Denniston discussed the intersectional aspects of climate and racial justice and other issue areas and the need to create visuals to make the interrelationships clear for purposes of advocacy and collaboration.

Outreach and partnership development: on the agenda but we didn't have time to cover it.

Next Steps and Action Items:

How to get more members of congregations to work together and stay in touch on the following?:

- Continue to work on a carbon tax legislation at the federal level – advocating for this will require the development of background materials/talking points/draft letters.
- Bans on Fracking (work at state level Maryland and Virginia activities not UUSJ)
- Getting your UUSJ members (get list from UUSJ of members in each congregation - FYI at the June 3 UUSJ Board meeting all board members were given a list of UUSJ members in their congregation) to work with congregants/environmental committees on key issues.
- Conduct outreach to support voter registration – Hispanics and college students. A grant from the UU Funding Program can be used for this work. (Jack and Jim will work on this).
- Establish a set of budget principles that connect climate change, environmental justice, infrastructure development, racism, and a green economy (Bob, Cathy, and Larry will work on this).
- Note: following meeting Doneby offered to work on intersectional issue infographics with Bob.
- Work with UU Ministry for Earth and Commit2Respond.org on national letter writing campaigns. Sample letters and talking points will need to be developed. (Doneby will work on letter writing).
- UUSJ will look into developing an archive of sample letters and talking points

UUSJ Green Activists - Environment & Climate Justice - Meeting

June 17, 2016, UU Church of Silver Spring

9:30-10:00am - snacks and fellowship 10:00-12pm - meeting

Meeting Agenda

Strategic purpose: Frame a plan that enables UUs from the national capital area to engage effectively with elected officials in Washington on key issues related to Environment & Climate Justice in a manner structured to invite UUs throughout the US to collaborate and leverage UUSJ's proximity to the Federal Forum.

Welcome - Chalice lighting, preview the agenda, and introductions (20 min) - Doneby & John

- What draws you to this meeting? What personal experience and/or professional expertise do you have with this topic? What has your congregation been talking about since PCM?

The Moment - Defining and clarifying our strategic purpose (10 min) - Lavona & Pablo

How we got here - Background & Synopsis (10 min) - Larry

- Coming off PCM
- Carbon Footprint (Distribute and promote links)
- Eye on GA (UU Presidential election)

What are Green Activists interested in doing? - Discussion Items: (60 min)

1. Advocacy focus and priorities, ideas that have been proposed:
 - a. Research/identify a Green Budget to use as an Advocacy Guide
 - b. Develop national letter writing campaign on Trump Budget. *Who will form a team to implement? How can we engage other UU Green Activists on this?*
 - c. Identify key legislative and administrative policies to monitor, which are most important and most in need of UUSJ support? *Who will join a monitoring team?*
1. On Witness, what are the hot or new issue/topic frontiers within the green policy portfolio?
 - a. World Food Day (October), perhaps in conjunction with CWS or UUSC?
1. Outreach and partnership development, open questions & ideas:
 - a. Our lane in the road: how do UUs and UUSJ in particular distinguish our voice as a religious and moral community among so many organizational actors, both secular and interfaith?
 - i. *Who can we partner with? Who do we know?*
 - b. Status of post PCM to do list. *Who wants to do outreach about the progress?*
 - c. Video: Do individuals want to make a short video on why they are passionate about Climate Change?
1. Educational Events: Webinars that can engage people country-wide (including PCM contacts)
 - a. Chloe on Green Economy
 - b. Intersectional aspects of Climate Change - E.Koteen, Emily from FCNL, perhaps Jan Dash of UUUNO

Desired outcomes:

1. Get input to narrow down the UUSJ priorities to actionable items
2. Agreement on future tasks
3. Timelines
4. Working groups/individuals (who will do what)