

Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice
September 9, 2017 Board Meeting Minutes
Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church, Bethesda, Maryland

Attendees:

Martha Ades, member at large, UU Congregation of Fairfax
Al Carlson, member, UU Church in Reston
Hannah Connolly, member, UU Church of Arlington
Bob Denniston, Chair, member at large, UU Church of Arlington
Linda Doyle, member, Mount Vernon Unitarian Church
Lavona Grow, member at large, UU Church of Arlington
John Gubbings, member, Cedar Lane UU Church
Pat Karlsen, member at large, Cedar Lane UU Church
Jana Kirkman, member, River Road UU Congregation
Ed Kringer, member, Accotink UU Church
Chris Croft, member, Towson UU Church
Betsy Osterman, member, UU Congregation of Columbia
Larry Underwood, member, Bull Run UU
Armele Vilceus, member, All Souls Church, Unitarian
Adam Wasserman, member, UU Congregation of Fairfax

Staff/Contractors:

Pablo DeJesús, Executive Director
Sarah Masters, Contractor
Anna Rhee, Advocacy Consultant

Guests:

Bill Cranmer, UU Congregation of Frederick
Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President, UUA
Gary Magnuson, UU Congregation of Frederick
Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, Director of Stewardship and Development and Special Advisor to the President, UUA
David Strauss, UU Congregation of Rockville

Action Items:

- Advocacy Oversight Committee (AOC) to integrate more with issue teams
- AOC to make recommendation for discussion at the next Board meeting on guidelines for managing the task groups, including redrafting the existing documents to address advocacy only
- Administration to distribute to Board members list of names of people who are getting the UUSJ newsletter and asking the Board members to encourage them to become members
- Board members to look for a replacement accountant who is facile with Quick Books
- Anna and Lavona will arrange to write letter about DACA for Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray to sign and UUSJ deliver it to appropriate parties on the Hill
- Pablo to draft letter to Rev. Frederick-Gray detailing obstacles that UUSJ sees in the UUA to getting advocacy done

- Pablo and John will look to ensure that the staff timesheets account for lobbying and grassroots lobbying.

Meeting Notes:

The meeting was called to order by Chair Bob Denniston at 2:08. John Gubbings welcomed all to Cedar Lane and provided an opening reading related to the 5th Principle. A quorum was established with 14 members present. Minutes of the June 3 Board meeting were approved as written, unanimously.

Bob welcomed visitors, new members and officers – Martha Ades is the new Secretary; Adam Wasserman is the new member from UU Fairfax, David Strauss is substituting for Sean McCarthy from Rockville; John Gubbings will be the new Board member from Cedar Lane, replacing Katherine Scott whose terms have expired. Everyone present introduced themselves. Bob announced that our guests, Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray and Rev. Mary Katherine Morn, would be arriving about 4:00pm. Cards were passed out for members to record questions that Rev. Susan could take with her at the end of our discussion.

Social Justice Awards Celebration

The **Social Justice Awards and Celebration Event** will be held on Sunday, October 29 at 5:30pm at Cedar Lane UU. Martha reported from the Program committee that there will be an hour of heavy hors d'oeuvres followed by the awards program. Awardees will be offered the opportunity to display information about their programs. The program will allow us to hear what others are doing and to cast a favorable spotlight on our great work. The Awards Team (John Harris, Bill Alsmeyer-Johnson, Marsha White along with Pablo DeJesús) is finalizing awards for eight nominations from seven congregations. Announcement of winners will be made the week of September 11.

Advocacy Work

Highlights of the September 8 meeting of the **Advocacy Oversight Committee (AOC)** were provided by Lavona. The Committee's role is as an oversight umbrella to coordinate our advocacy efforts and plans for UUSJ to go national. Anna Rhee is our consultant to help us build our advocacy capacity, advocacy infrastructure, and help manage the Advocacy Corps (AC). The Committee believes it needs to integrate more with the individual task force groups (Immigration, Escalating Economic Inequity, Climate Justice). The groups are all at different stages of their advocacy work.

The AOC addressed issues related to **going national** such as a transition plan, costs, and how do we address a model for national support - work that cross-cuts all three issues teams. Following on the discussion at the June Board meeting about legal status of a national program for our 501(c)(3)(h) status, a lawyer was consulted. There is a limit on how much we can spend on lobbying: NTE 20% of budget and within that amount NTE 25% for grass-roots lobbying. (The "Report of Advocacy Oversight Committee Review of Federal Lobbying and Reporting Requirements" was distributed at the June 3 Board meeting and is accessible on the website.) UUSJ will need to be careful to document expenditures and separate the direct lobbying costs from others, but there is no problem for now. Bob pointed out that most of our direct lobbying efforts are through volunteers so little is expended. Lavona asked if since the last meeting action had been taken to address tracking staff hours on lobbying and grassroots lobbying. Pablo and John will look at the timesheets to ensure that it allows for space to capture the time for both categories.

Hannah reported that the new **Governance Committee** is starting to address the issues related to going national, such as having a different operating structure, different funding models, individual member benefits, working with State Action Networks, etc. Many of these will require changes to our governance documents.

Lavona talked about how the State Action Networks (SAN) and their organization CUUSAN can help us. She had met with them at General Assembly. If there is no SAN for a state, UUSJ can work directly with congregations and through the UUA regional groups, like our Central East Region (CER). UUSJ should be strategic and focus on states with members of Congress that are likely to be movable on our issues. We have 38 people on our Advocacy Corps list with 12-14 participating each time. Paint Branch is one congregation that does an especially good job of quick reaction to issues.

Martha reported on the data gathering initiative that will be used to support national efforts. This will involve information needed for visits to the Hill such as legislator and staff information, AC functions and reports on visits, as well as tracking letters we receive from across the country. UUSJ will also collect metrics to report to congregations, funders, in our annual reports, and to support grant funding requests on what support has been provided to UUs nationally through letter delivery and other actions. So far we have delivered >1,000 letters to Senate and House offices for our UU congregations.

Gary suggested we look at sources of website inquiries as a way to measure who around the country cares about our work. To date we have had 77 downloads of our "Write Here! Write Now!" toolkit.

Ed reported on the AOC discussion from September 8. The discussion boiled down to two points 1) We need to work toward having all three issue teams and the AC working together to move past what we have been doing the past couple of years to a broader UU voice. 2) We need to determine where we want to be – use the AC which can stop into 20-30 offices of members of Congress (sometime they have appointments set up in a few offices but most are drop-in visits) on the AC day, i.e. use the power of the AC/more people and more visits, but talking about issues more broadly or on the other hand, fewer people, i.e. an issue committee making fewer Hill visits but having deeper discussions and reaching fewer offices. Lavona stated that it does not have to be one or the other, but can be a combination of the two.

UUSJ needs guidelines for how task groups operate to be more effective. These might include templates, checklists, sample letters, documentation of lines of authority, guidance on how to gather issue and bill information, the process for endorsements and sponsoring actions. Checklists and templates are being drafted now to simplify the processes. Additional discussion covered the fact that UUSJ can't represent ourselves as experts, unless we really are, but can build relationships with legislators and staff supporting our moral voice. David pointed out that our sweet spot is our ability to make the moral explanation for policies. Gary had some initial concerns that our visits would not make any difference but now sees what we are doing as people doing what they can to make a difference.

Pablo explained that what we really are doing is charting a path between a professional shop and a full volunteer group. Our issue teams need to work in harmony across all groups and can be the experts on their particular issue on the Hill but then use the AC to back up their expertise.

Anna stated that no other faith group has an advocacy corps like ours. Our teams often do additional research before making their visits. We can serve as a model for other groups. She pointed out that it's lonely in some parts of the country to be a progressive. Anna and Lavona also conduct advocacy training. The successful training at Mt. Vernon was recorded for internal use only and would need waivers from participants to share with others.

Treasurer's Report

John reviewed finances and pointed out that the deficit showing is actually an operating deficit. However, UUSJ does need continued funding to support the staff salaries and Advocacy Corps. The grant from the UU Funding Program is to facilitate going national, to reach outside our region. Even though the grant UUSJ was awarded is from the UUFP it does not mean the UUA supports what we do since the UUFP is not a function of the UUA. We always respond when the UUA asks us to help ramp up programs. We can't expect UUA to fund us but we hope they will be supportive.

Linda Conyers, our accountant, is retiring after doing our books for 17 years. Board members were asked to look for someone to take her place. Pablo is working on membership and development and is hoping to see the UUA help with a capacity development program. As we go forward we need to find non-UU funding sources.

Guest – UUA President

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray, President of the UUA, arrived and spoke with us. Bob introduced her and explained the three things that UUSJ has to offer: our UU high-density area; our proximity to the Federal Government; our great issue expertise among congregants. After explaining what we have done recently, he asked what UUSJ can do for advocacy for the UUA. During the subsequent discussion Lavona suggested we could deliver a letter on DACA signed by Rev. Susan. She agreed to do that.

Rev. Frederick-Gray explained her personal priorities – 1) be a pastoral and prophetic voice for our faith, 2) ensure congregational health and vitality with a renewed sense of mission and purpose, 3) see that our association makes a bigger impact in the world. It is important to put our mission first. She is passionate about immigrant rights, racial justice and climate justice. When talking about advocacy she finds it important to work with the people who are in the situation; work to support them. We in churches have one foot in the status-quo, no matter what denomination we are in. We need to follow and be in partnership with grass-roots organizations. She provided an example of UUJAZ who, on legislative day in Arizona, brought in undocumented workers who were unable to get legislative meetings any other way. It is too easy to not see oppressions from a place of privilege. We need to be in solidarity with the marginalized communities. Maybe it isn't our role to represent their view but rather to use our privilege to amplify their voices.

In discussing our opportunity to support one local group, CASA, it was noted that they don't want our leadership involvement and that we have to follow their lead. Rev. Susan says we need to think of ways to leverage our power. Sometimes doing protests applies an urgency that will force action. There can be strategy around protesting. Lavona stated that there needs to be follow on to protesting, asking "to what end" do we protest, and that's usually to call for public policy change.

Bob asked how we get UUs out of the pews. Rev. Susan said real change happens when you get 16% of the population on board. UUSJ can expand strategies like getting people to knock on doors and partner with non-faith communities to increase voting presence. Adam explained it is hard to find partners in the income inequity realm and that we don't always have the time to find partners. Lavona used the example of the Dream Act. We know that the Dreamers want the Dream Act passed, whether or not they are at the table with us on our lobby visits, and they can't always take place especially in a quick moving environment. Rev. Susan suggested we reach out to local UUs to ask about who they are partnering with and ask if we can physically go to that location to knock on doors. Bob explained we are working with SANs. Pablo explained we are trying to have an impact on UU structures; we want to do push-pull so local issues are felt on the Capitol Hill and also transmitted back to local groups. Rev. Susan ask Pablo were specifically he saw obstacles to getting advocacy groups across the association to work to see the landscape. Pablo said he would get back to her.

Chris asked how we reach out to where the intersection of black and white meet. Rev. Susan suggested we read the work of Rev. Dr. William Barber, look at the work of Southerners on New Ground and look at what the Industrial Area Foundations are doing.

Board members introduced themselves and then gave Rev. Susan some written questions as she departed.

After Rev. Susan left, Bob made some brief announcements and noted that since we did not finish the agenda due to time constraints there would be a follow-up conference call in the weeks ahead. The meeting was adjourned at 4:59pm.

Respectfully submitted, Martha Ades, Secretary

ATTACHMENTS:

[2017-09-09 Final Board Meeting Agenda UPDATED as of 2017-09-07](#)

[2017-06-03 Board Meeting Minutes FINAL as of 2017-07-20](#)

[UUSJ FY2017-18 Donation Report thru August UPDATED as of 2017-09-07](#)

[UUSJ FY2016-17 Budget Report thru August as of 2017-08-31](#)

[UUSJ FY2017-18 Approved Budget plus grant as of 2017-09-06](#)

[Final Financials for FY2016-17 as of 2017-6-30](#)

[UUSJ FY-2017-18 Financial Report thru August as of 2017-09-06](#)

[UUSJ FY2017-18 Treasurer Report thru August UPDATED as of 2017-09-07](#)

[UUSJ Executive Director's Report as of 2017-09-07](#)

[UUSJ Committee and Task Force Reports UPDATED as of 2017-09-07](#)

[Member Congregations and Board Members Roles, Responsibilities, and Opportunities & UUSJ Committee List UPDATED as of 2017-09-08](#)