

DRAFT May 13, 2021

IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY FOR THE NATIONAL ROLLOUT OF UUSJ CONGREGATIONAL MEMBERSHIP

submitted by UUSJ Membership Committee

I. INTRODUCTION

To broaden UUSJ's strategic influence in order to advance equitable national policies and actions of the federal government aligned with UU values, the UUSJ Membership Committee proposes the establishment of a uniform national network of UU member congregations.

The Committee is proposing changes to UUSJ policies to enable such a network. The proposed policies include a written but flexible agreement between the interested congregation and UUSJ, and designation of a UUSJ Congregational Liaison, to promote connection, visibility, and partnership with the national organization. The proposed policies also address financial considerations by encouraging but not requiring congregational members to make an annual financial contribution to the UUSJ, and outlining aspects of that contribution process.

Assuming the Board adopts the proposed policies, UUSJ will need an implementation strategy. This document is intended to provide an initial blueprint for rolling out the new policies and furthering the national network. It first identifies some issues affecting the rollout and suggests approaches to address those issues. It then outlines a three step implementation strategy, with needed actions highlighted. Given the novelty of this initiative for the organization, and the lessons we will undoubtedly learn as we move ahead, it is likely the strategy will need periodic revision in the months ahead.

II. ISSUES AFFECTING NATIONAL EXPANSION OF UUSJ MEMBERSHIP

A. Making the Case for UUSJ Membership

Some congregations may be unaware of USSJ. Others may be slightly familiar with it but lack a broad understanding of UUSJ activities. And it is expected some will ask why they should agree to a signed covenant with UUSJ or be asked to provide financial support. In response to these factors, UUSJ must make the case for why the congregation's involvement is a desirable act.

A starting point is education regarding UUSJ's mission, past accomplishments in furthering UU social justice goals, and future plans. *We recommend that written materials be sent to prospective member congregations including a brief cover letter, a visually attractive one page flier clearly highlighting UUSJ's role, and a Q and A document addressing such questions as what activities and opportunities might be open to member congregations, how those enhance congregations' current social justice work, and how UUSJ differs from other UU organizations.*

In regard to what UUSJ offers potential congregational members, the starting point is not services offered to the congregation in a transactional type of relationship, but an opportunity for the congregation to join other UUs in effective education, witness and advocacy at the national level, i.e. an opportunity to live their values on national policy debates. Examples of past UUSJ efforts in those fields and impacts should be able to make that case convincingly.

Looking forward to future endeavors which might appeal to congregations, we could point to the possibility of:

- trainings and webinars, a prospect enhanced by virtual media,
- other educational events, perhaps including those led by congregations but shared nationally or regionally,
- periodic meetings, probably virtual meetings, of member congregations to share progress, challenges, and ideas,
- more regular updates on Congressional activities on topics of interest,
- provision of outreach and informational tools to social justice leaders in the congregations, perhaps through special sessions where ideas are shared, and
- possible access to UUSJ tools, such as Write Here Write Now and Action Alert templates, for use by congregations on issues not currently emphasized by UUSJ.

B. Addressing Different Size Congregations and Distinguishing UUSJ from Similar Efforts

Congregational interests and capabilities may vary in part based on size of the church. Smaller congregations may find some of the activities mentioned above to be attractive supplements to their current activities. But the lack of full time social justice ministers and staff, or even a standing committee, may limit their ability to use these tools. *UUSJ should consider offerings that can be made available to the people in the congregation and implemented readily without requiring significant staff or committee resources for such congregations.*

Larger congregations may have robust social justice programs and wonder why partnering with UUSJ helps their efforts or adds to services already provided by other national UU bodies. In such cases, *we can point to the unique capability of UUSJ to consistently provide high quality, value based content and get that to key decision makers in Washington DC on national policy issues of interest to UUs and our moral owners.* The congregation may be well positioned to do excellent social justice work on some issues or to get useful input from other UU groups on certain topics, but there is really no other UU group providing the same kind of opportunities to influence national policy on a wide ranging set of issues.

C. Promoting the National Rollout

It will take more than one letter to accomplish the educational and persuasion tasks alluded to above. As mentioned earlier, we envision a membership solicitation package including crisp descriptive material and answers to common questions, as well as a copy of a covenant document (or that

document could be sent in follow up with interested congregations). Before that is sent, research will be needed to target candidate congregations (see following sections). In some cases, research will be needed to identify specific addressees. Existing contacts in target congregations will need to be pursued by UUSJ Board members, team members, and staff.

In addition to mail and phone contact, we can consider the possibility of:

- at least some “road trip” visits (e.g., scheduled in-person or virtual visits and perhaps pulpit or committee presentations to candidate churches),
- perhaps regional conferences where promotion of membership is added to substantive topic presentations, and
- interaction with other UU bodies (UUA national and regional staff, State Action Networks, other national UU social justice related groups), to give a “heads up” and explore ways our national expansion can meet other needs.

D. Providing Required Resources

Obviously these activities will require time and money. There are existing resources which can be tapped, including the Membership and Development Committees, Board members, team members, and other active volunteers. *Some staff time will be needed to be assigned to this effort as well in the 2021/2022 period. In addition, funding for some outside consulting or technical support may be needed with some research and some of the newer tasks suggested here.* Perhaps interns can be put to work in some areas.

Ultimately, some of the outreach and services described here may not be realistic, at least in the short term. In such cases, the promotional materials and message will need to be tightened to not over promise and inadvertently mislead. Our great hope, of course, is that new members resulting from this effort will lead to new funding to help pay for this work and for more UUSJ education, witness and advocacy.

III. A THREE STEP IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGY

It is envisioned that expansion will occur in stages, starting first with congregations most familiar with UUSJ and proceeding over time to congregations where there has been little or no past involvement.

A. Current Member Congregations

There are currently 17 congregations who are considered UUSJ members. Due to the historical focus of UUSJ, all of these are in the Washington DC area. All of them joined under the current “Fair

Share” funding formula, where congregations are asked to provide a contribution equal to \$4.50 per member, although not all congregational members have been able to meet that level. We are proposing to replace that funding formula with a more flexible approach described in the proposed policies. All current congregational members are able to designate a representative and alternate to the UUSJ Board, although the new Board structure taking effect on July 1, 2021 eliminates that system in favor of a smaller elected Board with membership more representative of national UUs and our moral owners.

The current congregational members of course are likely to be broadly familiar with UUSJ, albeit with different levels of understanding among different ministers, staff, and volunteers in those congregations. So the communication going to them can be less detailed, although it is suggested that the initial solicitation described earlier go to these members. What will be more tailored here is the discussion of the change in our approach to congregational membership: the move to national membership, and the proposed changes in policies regarding congregational membership.

Most importantly, it will be incumbent on current Board members from these 17 congregations to help communicate the changes to the relevant leadership in their church, answer questions, and encourage their congregation to sign a covenant with UUSJ (including designation of a liaison with UUSJ) and prepare to meet the financial contribution they choose.

We suggest current Board members begin this communication shortly after the proposed policies and implementation strategy for national congregational membership are adopted, presumably starting in the Summer of 2021. The membership written materials described earlier should be sent shortly after this initial communication occurs.

B. Target Congregations with Past UUSJ Involvement

The second phase of implementation should involve congregations largely outside the Washington DC area who have some past involvement (more than superficial interactions) with UUSJ. In particular, we are aware of almost 50 congregations outside our current DC area based members, who have been partners in at least one past Write Here Write Now (WHWN) campaign. 20 or so congregations have been regular participants. We have contact information for almost all of these groups. Given that past involvement, these congregations should have some sense of the value UUSJ brings and the type of work UUSJ conducts.

Again, we recommend that the initial solicitation described earlier go to these potential members. What will be more tailored here is the acknowledgment of their past work on WHWN, and an approach that builds on that relationship while offering the additional arguments outlined in this strategy.

We believe it is crucial that, as much as possible, UUSJ members who worked with these congregations on the past WHWN or similar efforts lead the communication with them. We envision the second stage campaign beginning toward the end of calendar year 2021 and continuing into 2022.

C. Other Target Congregations

It is unrealistic to think that an organization the size of UUSJ can manage a membership campaign to all UU congregations nationally. In thinking about which congregations should be approached in the third stage, we suggest the following criteria be considered:

- congregations in states with key members of Congress, so that by adding member churches we can better enlist constituents in those states to effectively reach out to those Congress members on behalf of UUSJ priority issues. UUSJ staff and action team members can help identify those Congress members whose influence is most critical in moving our key issues.
- congregations with a sizable number of current individual UUSJ donors, who are also considered members. We have a list of over 300 such people, along with (in most cases) their local congregation.
- congregations with a sizable number of current names in the UUSJ database. We have a list of over 3000 such people, along with (in most cases) their local congregation.

Based on these criteria, we suggest that a relatively small number of such target congregations be chosen, probably no more than 25 initially. The specific actions taken to reach these congregations will be influenced by what was learned in the first two stages of the rollout. *At this point, we suggest the initial solicitation described earlier go to these prospective members. What will be more tailored here is the need to introduce UUSJ. We anticipate this effort could begin toward Spring of 2022.*

A key part of the strategy will be personal contact with the people in these congregations who are already involved with UUSJ through individual membership or past participation in meetings or receipt of materials. USSJ staff, officials, and volunteers can reach out to these people and enlist their support in encouraging their congregation to join.

IV. CONCLUSION

Here, in summary, is a brief timeline laying out key implementation steps proposed above and our best sense of their timing:

— UUSJ Board adopts proposed policy changes regarding membership and the proposed congregational covenant, and reviews this proposed implementation strategy: early Summer, 2021

— UUSJ staff, Membership Committee, and others begin preparations for implementation (e.g., research on congregations and contacts, development of written outreach materials, development of new program initiatives): mid Summer 2021

— UUSJ Board members and staff, Membership Committee, team members, and others launch outreach (e.g., send written materials, follow-up phone calls and visits, etc.) in 3 stages:

1. Current member congregations (with a key role for current Board members): late Summer 2021.
2. Congregations with past involvement (with a key role for UUSJ staff and members who worked with these congregations): Fall 2021 and Winter 2021-2022
3. Other target congregations: Spring 2022

It is our belief that if this strategy is implemented, UUSJ will see a growth in not only its congregational membership, but also in individual memberships and in the involvement and financial contributions of members. This new energy and these new resources should significantly enhance UUSJ's effectiveness in promoting national policies consistent with UU values and the interests of our moral owners.