

To Establish a National UUSJ Congregational Membership

Submitted by UUSJ Membership Committee

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Issue: To broaden UUSJ’s strategic influence 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.

Status: Member congregations of the Unitarian Universalists for Social Justice (UUSJ), are defined in the UUSJ bylaws as follows:

“Member Congregations shall be those UU congregations recognized by the UUA who choose to be members and meet such criteria as the Board may set from time to time for such membership.”

To date the UUSJ Board of Trustees (Board) has not set criteria for a congregation wanting to become a UUSJ member congregation in either the UUSJ bylaws or UUSJ policies. However, it has been customary practice for UU congregations in the MD-DC-VA region who have chosen to be members, to contribute a Fair Share amount based on a funding formula of \$4.75 times the number of members in their congregation as certified to the UUA each February. To date, 17 UU congregations in the region have chosen to become UU member congregations by paying their Fair Share contribution. Fair Share contributions make up about 26 percent of the UUSJ annual budget revenue.

Approximately 23 UU congregations outside the MD-DC-VA region have “aligned” themselves to the UUSJ, primarily through the *Write Here, Write Now* program and other UUSJ activities. Three of these congregations provide voluntary monetary support to the UUSJ, ranging from \$40-\$2,000. None of the 23 UU Congregations have been asked or chosen to become a formal UUSJ member congregation.

Need: The Membership Committee reasons that the sustainability, advocacy, and well-being of the UUSJ is enhanced by maintaining and increasing the membership and diversity of the organization through both individual and congregational memberships. Toward that end, there is a need to develop a uniform membership policy and process for all qualified UU

congregations that are interested in and choose to be, a UUSJ member congregation. Having such a policy and process may support a more proactive membership outreach effort, both in-person and online, by the Membership Committee to UU congregations nationwide, and pave the way for scores of UU congregations establishing a relationship with the UUSJ, and advancing UUSJ education and advocacy initiatives. It may also build a broader base of UUSJ financial support. Together UUSJ's voice for UU values will be strengthened and its potential as a national organization will be realized. This would come at a time when UUSJ is needed more than ever to dismantle social injustice through federal policy advocacy and engagement.

Proposal Adopted by the UUSJ Board (3/20/2021)

1. The Membership Committee proposes to develop a uniform UUSJ congregational membership policy and process by July 1, 2021. This policy and process will include proposed criteria and steps for interested UU congregations who choose to be a UUSJ member congregation, to be able to do so.

Covenant responsibilities of the interested congregation to the UUSJ may include:

- aspiration to make an annual financial contribution to the UUSJ.
- commitment to join UUSJ advocacy activities and events, including the Write-Here-Write-Now program action alerts, and Advocacy Corps.
- dissemination of UUSJ education, advocacy, and witness offerings to their congregation.
- designation of point of contact to be the congregation's recipient of UUSJ communications, and encourage people in their congregation to participate in UUSJ activities and join as individual UUSJ members.

Covenant responsibilities of the UUSJ for the congregation may include:

- timely communications on social justice issues.
- invitation to join Write-Here-Write-Now program and Advocacy Corps.
- member congregation representation at UUSJ Board meetings;
- arrangements of meeting with Congress on UUSJ priority issues.
- participation in social justice clearinghouse.
- discounts on UUSJ seminars, podcasts, and training.

Covenant for UUSJ Congregational Membership between UUSJ and interested UU congregations, are intended to establish faith-based relationships, be positive, mutually beneficial, and practical. It is expected therefore that the Covenant be adaptable as much as possible to each congregation's circumstances and level of participation.

It is also expected that the implementation of the UUSJ congregational membership process to be phased in over time, beginning with UU congregations in the MD-DC-VA region. This would

be followed by WHWN program partner congregations, and lastly UU congregations of strategic importance to UUSJ advocacy activities nationwide.

The management of this effort will require additional UUSJ staff time with the assistance of the UUSJ Membership Committee. In time, greater member congregation contributions will pay for UUSJ staff costs associated with maintaining and growing this UUSJ national network of UU congregational members.

Benefits of growing UUSJ member congregations have the potential to:

- support the evolution of UUSJ becoming a national organization;
- put all UUSJ member congregations on an equal footing regarding UUSJ participation, as has been shown to work through use of communication technology during the pandemic;
- foster a significant increase in the pool of eligible volunteers to support the UUSJ;
- broaden UUSJ’s congregational network and having the members of these congregations become strategic points of contact to increase UUSJ “power mapping” possibilities to advance its advocacy activities regarding federal legislation and actions; and,
- have UUSJ serve as recipient and clearinghouse for UU congregation social justice initiatives and related information.¹

Benefits to UU congregations becoming a UUSJ member congregations are:

- receipt of all UUSJ news and notices, including UUSJ witnessing events, that may be shared with all congregants;
- participation in the WHWN program, including receipt of issue research and being part of a UUSJ strategic communication program with Congress;
- membership in the UUSJ Advocacy Corps;
- eligibility to have representation at UUSJ Board meetings;
- nomination of UUSJ social justice awards;
- meeting arrangements with Congress on UUSJ priority issues;
- participation in UUSJ sponsored social justice clearinghouse, webinars and education initiatives; and,
- qualify for discounts regarding UUSJ seminars, podcasts, and training.

¹ Such information would be shared and exchanged with other UU member congregations for their use to advance social justice.

Proposal Adopted by the UUSJ Board (3/20/2021)

2. The Membership Committee proposes a new baseline monetary contribution for all UUSJ member congregations. This baseline monetary contribution would be based on a percentage of the congregation’s operating budget. The Committee finds this approach more equitable, fairer, and justified with respect to a congregation’s ability to pay, rather than a set per congregation member amount. To this end, the Committee proposes:

Sustainable UUSJ Congregation Membership - For an annual contribution of 0.25 percent of the congregation’s operating budget, will entitle the congregation to all benefits described in the Memorandum of Agreement.

Aspirational UUSJ Congregation Membership – For an annual contribution of 0.125 percent of the congregation’s operating budget, and the aspiration to give more later. This will entitle the congregation to be a full member and receive UUSJ communications.

Further, there may be a need to provide flexibility in what a member congregation may be able to contribute to maintain its relationship with the UUSJ. Moreover, a member congregation may opt to supplement its annual contribution, should the congregation desire to more fully support the UUSJ financially to advance its activities.

Below is a comparison of member congregation contributions between the current \$4.75 per number of congregation members, and contributions based on 0.125 percent, 0.20 percent, and 0.25 percent of the congregation’s operating budget. These computations are based on 2020 UUA data.

Congregation	Current Fair Share	0.125%	0.20%	0.25%
Accotink	\$889	\$453	\$725	\$906
All Souls	\$4,750	\$2,508	\$4,012	\$5,015
Arlington	\$3,610	\$2,032	\$3,250	\$4,063
Bull Run	\$1,007	\$563	\$901	\$1,127
Cedar Lane	\$3,595	\$2,113	\$3,380	\$4,225
Columbia	\$2,071	\$1,004	\$1,606	\$2,008
Davies	\$304	\$172	\$275	\$344
Fairfax	\$2,983	\$1,467	\$2,347	\$2,933
Frederick	\$1,630	\$731	\$1,170	\$1,462
Mount Vernon	\$1,539	\$776	\$1,241	\$1,552
Paint Branch	\$779	\$468	\$748	\$935
Reston	\$1,183	\$643	\$1,028	\$1,285
River Road	\$2,394	\$1,696	\$2,713	\$3,392

Rockville	\$1,691	\$947	\$1,516	\$1,894
Wash Ethical Soc	\$784	\$855	\$1,368	\$1,710
Ames UU Fellowship	\$1,059	\$355	\$568	\$710
Birmingham (MI) Unitarian	\$1,596	\$980	\$1,568	\$1,960
Edmonds (WA) UU	\$1,406	\$518	\$1,037	\$1,296
First UU Church of Boulder	\$1,211	\$788	\$1,261	\$1,576
First UU San Diego	\$2,893	\$1,959	\$3,315	\$3,919
Springfield (MO) UU	\$542	\$137	\$219	\$273
UU Ann Arbor	\$3,054	\$1,499	\$2,398	\$2,997
UU Congr of Miami	\$390	\$292	\$468	\$584

If just ten percent of UU congregations, or 97 congregations, contribute .125 % of their annual budgets to becoming a UUSJ member congregation, that may result in an estimated \$34,145.00 in annual income. Moreover, a contribution of .25 % of a UU congregation’s operating budget would total an estimated \$68,291.00 in annual income. It should be pointed out that these numbers are only estimates, and may be greater depending upon the size of the operating budgets for those UU congregation that are UUSJ member congregations.

There are many UU congregations larger than the average UU congregation in the MD-DC-VA region. These include, for example, UU congregations in Boston, Tulsa, and Madison, with respective memberships of 2,615, 2,267, and 1,423. These large UU congregations – should they become a UUSJ member congregation - have operating budgets capable of providing the UUSJ with a significant Fair Share contribution, and likely to have members who may want to become advocates to influence Members of Congress in Massachusetts, Oklahoma, and Wisconsin.

Conclusion: Next Steps and Potential Outcome of Approved Proposal

Should the UUSJ Board approve this proposal, the Membership Committee will develop the policy, a draft model Covenant, and process for the Board’s review and approval by July 1, 2021. These would be steps toward the Membership Committee and UUSJ staff to strategically plan, develop, and implement a UU national congregational membership campaign beginning with – as beforementioned – the UU congregations in the MD-DC-MD region in 2021.

Purpose of this national campaign would be to seek out interested UU congregations, and upon indicating its interest, the congregation and UUSJ would be invited to enter into a relational covenant designating and declaring that the congregation is a UUSJ member congregation. In return, the congregation would receive the benefits described in this proposal.

The growth in the number of UU congregations becoming UUSJ member congregations, has the potential of increasing UUSJ's base of financial support, and significantly increase the likelihood of UUSJ having strategic connections to advance its education and advocacy initiatives.