

Invitation to Form a UU State Advocacy Network (SAN) for Delaware

Introduction

A UU State Advocacy Network or SAN is an organization of the UU congregations in a state to advocate for progressive social justice legislation consistent with UU values. In March, there were a series of emails and meetings in which the concept of a UU State Advocacy Network for Delaware was discussed by leaders of our Social Justice Committees. Based on these communications, there seems to be a consensus that the five Delaware UU Congregations should form a SAN. This is a proposal to schedule an organizational meeting in May. Dover would be the most central location for a meeting.

There are many resources available to assist in forming a SAN. CUUSAN, the Coalition of Unitarian Universalist State Action Networks, is a national organization to support existing and newly forming SANs. Their website at www.cuusan.org provides extensive information on forming and managing a SAN. SANS have been formed in 21 states, including all of the states in the Northeast, except Delaware and Connecticut. The states surrounding Delaware have had highly developed SANS for many years.

Don Peterson, Social Justice Chairman of the Unitarian Universalists of Southern Delaware, and Jack Guerin with the Mill Creek congregation, have contacted the SAN coordinators in Pennsylvania, Maryland, and Rhode Island. These contacts provided the history of their development as well as examples of organizational documents.

The Coordinator of the Maryland SAN identified Steve Buckingham as an additional resource. Steve is an attorney who is Chair and one of the founders of the Maryland SAN. In addition, Steve is on the CUUSAN Executive Committee. He has worked with a number of surrounding states to help them develop their group's organizational structure, and has volunteered to meet with us in Dover one Saturday in May.

This document addresses some of the key issues in forming a SAN based on the research which Don and Jack have undertaken.

Should the Delaware SAN be an organization of congregations or individuals?

Steve Buckingham focused us on this issue. The Maryland SAN evolved out of a regional group, UUs for Social Justice, which was an organization of congregations. This organizational structure became unwieldy because every issue had to go back to the Social Justice Committees of each congregation for approval before the organization could reach a decision to support or oppose legislation.

As a result, the Maryland SAN was formed as a membership organization. Members of the congregation, who agreed to be on the Social Justice mailing list, became members

of the SAN. The members select the SAN's leadership group based on a process laid out in the governing documents (similar to bylaws). The leadership group can decide what issues to advocate for, and what positions to take on select pieces of legislation, without additional consultation with the congregations. The congregations are "affiliated" with the SAN.

Should the Delaware SAN be incorporated?

The primary reason to incorporate as a 501c3 is to qualify for tax exempt donations. However, a 501c3 can't devote more than 5% of its resources, including volunteer time, to advocacy or lobbying activities. The Pennsylvania SAN resolved this problem by incorporating as both a 501c3 and a 501c4.

The Maryland and Rhode Island SANs are not incorporated. Originally the UU Church of Annapolis was a fiscal agent for the Maryland SAN. This is a common arrangement allowed by the IRS for one 501c3 to sponsor another organization qualifying them for non-profit status.

Later a more integrated organizational structure evolved with the SAN established as a program of the UU Church of Annapolis. The SAN continues to function independently, and the leadership group includes members of other congregations. This integrated organizational structure satisfies IRS requirements limiting the resources which a non-profit can allocate to advocacy work.

Both the Pennsylvania SAN (44 congregations) and the Maryland SAN (24 congregations) have significant budgets for paid staff. With only five congregations, Delaware probably won't have the resources to employ staff. However, we may want to pay for a website, social media, and CUUSAN dues are \$100 for a start-up SAN. Some of our congregations might assist us as part of the share a plate program. Steve Buckingham is recommending that we follow the Maryland model using one of our congregations as a fiscal agent to qualify for non-profit status.

How would the advocacy agenda be developed and what issues would the Delaware SAN focus on?

The following is quoted from the CUUSAN website regarding issue selection:

"One of the first lessons learned is to limit your issues. We are more effective if we focus on no more than 2 or 3 key issues. It is very hard to limit yourself. There are a lot of exciting issues that the churches in your state are already working. There are also a lot of passionate UUs eagerly looking to expand their work. Even after issues have been selected and the advocacy plan is in place, a new issue may unexpectedly come up – a crisis in the state, a back burner issue moves to the forefront.

First establish a process for selecting issues. The process should be clearly defined and easily explained. Consistent with our principles, the process should be to seek broad input, but also leave opportunities for us to explore our values. You also want to have the ability to act on immediate issues. Therefore, regardless of the selection process, you may want give the Board the ability to act in certain instances where the Board determines it is appropriate for UUs to take action on timely matters that may not be encompassed by the Network's officially adopted issue(s)."

The Delaware SAN would logically build on the foundation of social justice issues already developed by the individual congregations. Most of our congregations have been involved with the Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow, which is developing a legislative criminal justice reform agenda for Delaware. First Unitarian has been very active in environmental and climate justice issues. Our organizational meeting will be an opportunity to discuss and share our social justice agendas.

CUUSAN provides all SAN organizations with [Salsa Labs](#) advocacy software.

Salsa Labs is a Maryland based software company that provides nonprofit online organizing and communications tools. Their advocacy software includes the following capabilities:

- Supporter profiles and segmentation
- Emails and social messages
- Social media integration
- Automated welcome messages
- Conversion with petition forms and targeted actions
- Auto-match constituents with legislators
- Spank or thank policymakers
- Analytics, testing and feedback
- All features are mobile responsive

This robust software package is a major resource provided by the national organization.

Conclusion

Everyone is encouraged to provide feedback on this preliminary document so that we can begin to develop some common concepts as a foundation for our organizational meeting. As a statewide organization, the number of face to face meetings will necessarily be limited, and we will need to rely heavily on virtual communications.