

## UU Legislative Ministry of Virginia (UULMVA) Strategic Plan

### Introduction.

Legislative Ministry has emerged in Unitarian Universalism (UU) over the last twenty years as our faith realized the need to coordinate our statewide voices on matters of pending legislation. California was first, and others soon followed. Our own Virginia voice was raised first in 2011 as the need for liberal religious perspectives were raised on LGBTQI and feminist issues. The idea of UULMVA sprang to reality. The greater U.U. legislative picture continues to broaden, and coordination among Legislative Ministry programs strengthens our voices across the nation. Programs are recognizing five key characteristics of legislative ministry work:

- Coordination of communication with a clear message by UUs and others to state legislators **is** more effective than separate random communication of individuals
- Local involvement of congregations in influencing local representatives has an effect in all capitols
- Messaging developed and shared by all UU legislative ministries can amplify national legislative programs
- Partnering with others who share our view is more effective than going alone
- There are some issues in which we may not be able to partner with ally organizations and these may be some of the most important times to raise UU voices

Our efforts to raise a UU Virginia voice to our legislators requires support, communication, coordination, funding and action. This strategic plan details possible paths to an effective legislative ministry effort. We ask all our Virginia congregations and those who have been working on state legislative efforts to consider it and the opportunity it presents to support our voice in Virginia's capitol.

### Theology

Justice in all human relations is named by Unitarian Universalists (UUs) as a core principle of our faith. We understand that dynamics of power often lead to oppression and can lead to privilege, and that prosperity can lead to greed. Guarding against these moral slides in ourselves and others is at the heart of political life. Balancing the needs and requirements of a people is the art of building and sustaining a commonwealth, a descriptor our state intentionally re-adopted at the time of the American Revolution. In choosing "commonwealth," our political forebears named their aspiration, if not their future behavior. In the creation of our state constitution and many local laws and ordinances, the Commonwealth of Virginia made the highest claims to liberty and justice but has lived to deprive too many of its people of both. Virginia's duplicity has called many UUs to action in advocating changes that bring all people of Virginia within its commonwealth.

### Commitment

Perhaps the strongest Unitarian Universalist conviction is to live what you believe in the demands of daily life. Less a theological belief than a statement about how one lives, it is a commitment to avoid its opposite, the dreaded sin of hypocrisy that was so clearly practiced in Virginia history. It is the Christian bible's book, James 1:22 KJV, that renders this thought most famously: "But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves."

There is something both deceptive and despicable about not living according to our own beliefs. Equally abhorrent is to deprive others of the benefits we accrue to ourselves. UULMVA is a pathway of action for UUs in Virginia to educate, advocate and illuminate our views on matters of the laws of the commonwealth. Therefore, *the purpose of UULMVA is to bring alive the theology of UU justice in our*

*commonwealth*. The more actively we live our beliefs and see them enacted in the life of the commonwealth, the more confident we are that justice itself is made real for others.

### UULMVA History

In politics, there is strength in numbers. Following a presentation and discussion at the March, 2013, Tidewater Cluster at Williamsburg UU, an email list began that led to a group of UUs from different congregations around Virginia forming what has become the Unitarian Universalist Legislative Ministry of Virginia, a statewide legislative advocacy network. Virginia is the 18th state to organize such a network. *Our goal is to work together to coordinate our political advocacy efforts with the hope to change public policy.*

On September 14th, 2013, **at meeting**, included a presentation from activists about working with statewide UU advocacy groups, a discussion on ongoing efforts of the Richmond's Church in lobbying, a decision to focus on Virginia policy, and discussion of what the official name should be. There was also a discussion of a future meeting to adopt a governance structure using the UU Legislative Ministry of Maryland's governance as a guide. Rev. Jeanne Pupke offered the use of the First UU Church of Richmond to house this effort. This arrangement has since been formalized under a Memorandum of Understanding between the Boards of these two organizations. Locating UULMVA in the state capitol enhances the ability to stay on top of fast-moving legislative sessions and to lobby the General Assembly. UULMVA organizers adopted governance guidelines and elected a working Board of Directors on January 4, 2014.

### Membership

The membership of the UULMVA is comprised of congregational members and individual supporters. Congregations will select representatives based on skills (collaborative, organizational, communication) and commitment to UU values and current legislative issues. These representatives will represent their congregations by understanding the priorities that congregations place on issues before the Virginia Assembly and bringing those views to the UULMVA. Supporters may also be involved in UULMVA in various roles such as advocates, organizers, and fund-raisers.

### Benefits of Membership

Our association is based on walking together in covenant. When we come together based on our shared values, we magnify our impact. One unified body of covenanted communities creates a strong UU voice in Virginia as well as strengthening our individual congregations to take action.

Becoming a member congregation to UULMVA benefits a congregation by having its priorities and values brought to the Virginia Assembly. A statewide network of advocacy allows congregations to build community around the social justice passions that UUs share. Building relationships and basing our advocacy on our shared principles creates a strong and impactful voice for UU's in Virginia. When we are connected and walking together in solidarity, we create a strong UU presence for justice in Virginia. When congregations start working together, natural collaborative efforts may become evident, such as sharing resources with each other or with UULMVA.

### A Path to action

UULMVA's work together must be based on training in social change theory and social organizing principles. One community organizing principle that may be helpful for member congregations is using "listening sessions" within the congregation to become aware of their top justice priorities.

An annual UULMVA conference will gather participants from UU congregations across the state to share priorities, and to become informed about current legislative agenda issues and how to advocate for them. The conference will take place in Richmond and have advocacy and witness actions available for participants.

UULMVA will create connections with the nation-wide UU legislative network, CUUSAN, which will address national issues and priorities.

#### Expectations & training of Members

A congregation that joins UULMVA commits to sending representative to attending common training, who will then return to their congregations to lead local training.

Member congregations commit to at least one annual congregational discussion around VA legislative priorities to inform their representative.

*Training objectives are as follows:*

- Describe social change theory that will be used to effect change in the legislature and community
- Describe social organizing principles for creating passion in congregations around common social justice goals such as listening sessions and one on one discussions around self interest
- Create a sense of community among members in Virginia congregations around passion for justice
- Practice effective communication techniques for advocating for issues with legislators
- Practice effective social media strategies for communicating common advocacy goals

#### Funding

*Annual membership* dues will be paid by congregations or by individuals. There dues are a requirement in order to have a vote on UULMVA priorities and board representation.

*UULMVA will pursue funding from numerous sources* including members, supporters, project donors and grant funding. UULMVA is made up of both individual and congregational members. Annual membership fees for congregations are XX (to be determined) and for individuals are XX. Individual donations outside of membership fees allow individuals to donate to the organization whether or not they participate as a member of the organization.

*Major donors or those who wish to donate for a specific focus area* are referred to as “project donors.” Major gifts are those which have a significant impact on the programs and UULMVA as an organization. Any major gifts that have specific requirements attached will be subject to Board approval before funding can be accepted. The Board will approve such projects based on the alignment with UULMVA’s mission and priorities and the values of Unitarian Universalism. UULMVA will also actively pursue grant funding through Unitarian Universalist and non-Unitarian Universalist sources. The fundraising committee will be responsible for finding these resources.

All donations will generally be accepted from members, supporters, and project donors without limitations - unless the source or any stipulations attached to the gift are inconsistent with UULMVA’s beliefs, values, and mission.

### Operations of UULMVA

Within UULMVA, there are many roles for supporters and members. *There are three general categories of participation within the organization: Organization Supporters, Advocates, and Fundraising*

- Organization supporters include UULMVA members, the Board of Directors, trainers, and a communications team. These individuals will focus on the day to day operations of the organization including the work of the coordinator and the future Executive Director.
- Advocates include educators, issue experts, officeholder visitors and witnesses. Advocates are responsible for lobbying for the legislative priorities identified by the member congregations and individuals at the annual conference. They will meet with legislators both at the General Assembly and at their local offices to advocate for the issues important to Unitarian Universalists around Virginia. Advocates will train individuals from member congregations to be prepared and equipped to help their congregations lobby for responsible legislation, provide public witness at social justice events, and prepare written statements from congregations to the media.
- The fundraising team is responsible for member relations, supporter relations, and project funding. The fundraising team will seek contributions from congregations, individual donors, UUA sources and grant funding.

### Selection of Board Members

To establish a board in the short term, the present board and two representatives each from Nova and western congregations will be added to assure broad representation. Thereafter, once congregations have selected representatives, the following procedure will begin:

Board members of UULMVA will be selected by the congregational representatives. Each congregation represents one vote. All supporters and representatives are eligible to run for a position on the Board. All potential board members will be nominated the nomination committee who will seek nominations from the congregation members. Board positions rotate with a three-year term.

### Annual Conference

The Annual Conference of UULMVA (October 27th, 2019) will:

- Connect the justice advocating efforts of UU organizations in Virginia
- Inform and train UU congregation representatives of member congregations
- Provide representatives with materials to share in their own congregations
- Listen together and discern Legislative priorities for the coming session
- Plan the legislative approach and events to advocate UU voices in the VA legislature
- Communicate congregational witness and organization events to others in VA

### Media

Our online presence is critical for the level of support we require for legislative action. UULMVA will have a social media presence through Facebook, Twitter, Instagram and other social media platforms. Members will be encouraged to “like” and “follow” UULMVA on social media in order to receive the most up to date information on actions and priorities that may be moving quickly in the legislature and/or social actions. UULMVA will also have a website that will be updated regularly. The UULMVA coordinator is responsible for updating the website and keeping supporters and members informed through social media. Organization supporters including the Board of Directors and the Executive Director will write and distribute press releases and hold news conferences as necessary.

Unitarian Universalism has a long record of speaking out on issues of justice. UU has established a record of positions taken by resolution of the General Assembly. In addition, congregations will always discern their own social justice priorities, intentionally or practically. UULMVA, will be aware of UU positions taken, active in learning congregation priorities and consulting with legislative partners to help discern the statewide priorities it will support. The priorities of UULMVA's legislative sessions will reflect the values UU and of the Virginia member congregations.

### Organization Partnerships

#### Milestones for '18-'19 Year:

Completion of Draft Strategic Plan to Board	May 24
Board Meeting for Strategic Plan Review	June 2 (Zoom)
Plan revisions	June 4-8
Recruitment of additional Board Representatives	June 2-8
Strategic Plan Draft and Survey to Congregation Leaders (UULMVA Emailing)	August 2018
Receive responses of Congregation Representatives NLT	September 2018
Establishment of regular meeting dates	September 201
Follow up on non-responding congregations	September 255th
Present Board to compile and prioritize survey priorities	Early October
Invite Congregational Representatives to training in October	October 27th
Congregational Representatives conduct Listening Sessions report NLT	November 2018
Report to entire UULMVA Membership	December 2018
Offer training opportunities to Congregations	December-January
UU education dates (for specific legislation)	TBD October