

OSHKOSH SATELLITE PROJECT
Strategic Planning Committee Recommendations
April 29, 2009

I. Background

The long-range plan adopted by the Fellowship in May 2004 included exploring the possibility of satellite congregations after our Appleton site is fully developed. The long delay in our building addition project, the repeated requests of many members from the Oshkosh area for more activities in Oshkosh, the realization that there is a lot of growth potential in Oshkosh for Unitarian Universalism, and the start in the fall of 2008 of a campus ministry program at the University of Wisconsin-Oshkosh convinced Fellowship leaders that we should begin exploring this possibility sooner, and that we should focus it initially on Oshkosh. As a result, last spring our Governing Board adopted exploring a possible satellite in Oshkosh as a goal for the Fellowship in the 2008-09 program year.

One congregation, multiple sites: this concept lies at the heart of the satellite idea. The idea in this case would be to have one congregation—Fox Valley Unitarian Universalist Fellowship—in two locations: Appleton and Oshkosh. Our long-range vision is that both locations would eventually offer full programming including education and worship. Given the larger population base in the Fox Cities, we believe that the Fox Cities location would probably always be larger and offer more programming. Both would eventually have physical sites (whether rented or owned). Given the strategic issues in the Fellowship's short and long-term future, fully realizing this vision is a long way off. The reality is that the Fellowship doesn't have the financial or the staffing resources to fully realize this vision in the short-term. Crucial to developing the resources to support two locations will be additional building space in Appleton so that the congregation can continue growing in the Fox Cities. A congregation of 900 or 1000 members will have the resources to support two locations. Looking at member growth and financial projections for the Fellowship, we believe that having two fully functioning locations is perhaps ten years in the future.

The initial two meetings exploring a satellite in Oshkosh revealed a deep level of interest in the project among Oshkosh area FVUUF members and friends. We estimate that around forty FVUUF members and friends attended one or both meetings. This is a good portion of the approximately seventy-five FVUUF members and friends we currently have in Oshkosh.

II. Limitations

At this time there are several limitations that we will need to bear in mind. First is the economic meltdown as well as the short and medium-term financial picture for the Fellowship. The severity of the recession was not foreseen when the Board adopted the goal of exploring a possible satellite. As a result of the severe recession, the Fellowship's budget will be basically the same in 2009-2010 as it was in 2008-09. This means that there will be very little money for starting a satellite. While we believe we might be able to get a grant from the Central Midwest District Chalice Lighters program for capital purchases to start a satellite (e.g., equipment to record and project sermons), we likely

would not be able to secure funding for operational expenses such as rental charges. Money will remain tight for the Fellowship in the medium-term even if the economy improves as the Fellowship moves forward with its building project (which we identified above as being crucial to eventually being able to have full programming at an Oshkosh location). This is why we believe the time horizon for the satellite's start-up is long.

A second limitation is staff time. We are already under-staffed for a congregation of 600+ members. As a result, our staff would only be able to devote a small amount of time to the satellite. Increasing the size of our staff—which will happen as our membership and financial base increase—will eventually enable more staff time for programming at an Oshkosh location.

A third limitation voiced by many of our Oshkosh members is the importance of offering high quality programming in whatever we offer in Oshkosh. High quality programming including worship and educational opportunities and attractive space will be appealing to Oshkosh people; in the absence of high quality, many or most people from Oshkosh will choose to travel instead to our Appleton facility.

III. Proposals for first year of satellite project

Given the limitations cited above and the long time horizon, we believe that the project needs to start modestly. And we believe that establishing a sense of community among our Oshkosh members and friends as well as newcomers is essential for the long-term success of the project. Another important goal is to make sure that the idea of “one congregation, two locations” remains at the forefront. We believe these four proposals will accomplish these two goals. We propose that we:

- Offer a high quality, monthly Wednesday night program for all ages in Oshkosh. The program could begin with a pot-luck or catered dinner. Like Fellowship Wednesdays, it could include educational programs for adults and children as well as child-care for infants and toddlers. The program could also include a short intergenerational worship service. To assist in the development of our campus group at UWO and to tie participating students to the Fellowship, we recommend that the program be held on or very near the UWO campus. This program should be marketed to the whole Fellowship since people from beyond the Oshkosh area may want to attend.
- Become more intentional about integrating Oshkosh people and concerns into Fellowship programming where possible. For instance, we could make it goal to regularly offer Circle Dinners in Oshkosh, create additional covenant groups in Oshkosh, and focus some of our social action programming on issues relevant to Oshkosh.
- Develop a stronger presence in the Oshkosh community, for example through participation of our professional and/or lay ministers in interfaith activities in Oshkosh. Another vehicle for this would be offering higher profile programs on campus.
- Develop our carpooling network so that it is easier, more economical and more environmentally sound for Oshkosh area UU's to travel to our Appleton site for services and programs. (As programming develops in Oshkosh over

the next several years, we also anticipate eventually needing to develop a carpooling network flowing in the opposite direction.)

IV. Immediate next steps

A. Establish a small Oshkosh Satellite Project Leadership Team which would be charged to lead the four proposals identified above. The Leadership Team would need to mobilize volunteers and staff to institute the four proposals above—in particular the monthly Wednesday evening program. The Leadership Team would also explore possible future steps toward fulfilling our vision of a fully implemented satellite, perhaps including weekly or monthly services utilizing technology (e.g., projecting DVDs of sermons delivered at the Appleton site). Our ministers would provide support to the Leadership Team.

B. Connect with FVUUF members and friends in the Oshkosh area who have not yet attended a satellite project meeting or expressed interest in the project. It will be important for these folks to feel welcomed to participate in the Wednesday evening programs and other satellite project initiatives.

C. Establish a space subcommittee that would search for free or very low-cost space for the Wednesday night programs. This subcommittee would be appointed by and report to the Leadership Team.

D. Charge the FVUUF professional and lay leadership to figure out ways to be more intentional about integrating Oshkosh people and concerns into FVUUF programming and to establish a stronger public presence in Oshkosh.

V. Conclusion

We believe that given the reality of the limitations cited above—and given our commitment to take initial steps toward this important goal despite those limitations—adopting and implementing this proposal will begin building a strong foundation for a satellite in Oshkosh for which the long-term is vibrant, healthy, and appealing. We believe that this foundation will allow us in time to realize our strategic goal of having one congregation in two locations.

Respectfully submitted,
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Amended on May 1, 2009