



Beacon of Justice Award

MUUSJA's Beacon of Justice Award honors a congregation that has made significant efforts to embody our Unitarian Universalist values through justice-making within its own walls and in deep partnership with movements for justice in the community. This year's Beacon of Justice Award goes to the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester!

First UU Church has a long history of being an important progressive religious voice in southeastern Minnesota, grounded in a commitment to service, education, witness, advocacy, and community organizing. From being recognized by eqUual Access for their work to confront ableism and accessibility issues, to their Racial Justice Task Force's advocacy for equity in education, healthcare, and housing in the Rochester Area, a commitment to justice and liberation are at the center of the living, beating heart of First UU Church's practice of our faith.

In the past year, the church has engaged again in its intentional process of discernment regarding major congregational decisions about justice issues. Through careful learning, reflection, and relationship building--balanced with real-time, on the ground engagement with local religious and secular partners--the congregation just recently passed a resolution affirming a deep commitment to combatting racism and xenophobia and showing up to support immigrant and refugee communities. First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester is now a Sanctuary Supporting congregation, and the Board is authorized to take steps to implement a process of becoming a Sanctuary hosting congregation.

While Sanctuary status has been a part of their process, as it has been for many of our UU congregations, the members of First UU Church have also been clear that the need for providing sanctuary is actually an unfortunate byproduct of much larger systemic issues that must be addressed. Rooted in that understanding, First UU Church has entered into deep partnerships with the local Quaker, Congregationalist, and Catholic communities in their area; together, leveraging their liberal voice in a largely conservative area, these people of faith are drawing media attention and changing the public conversation around race and immigration. And as their reputation has grown, First UU Church has also become not just a main voice, but a physical hub for organizing and collaborative work, hosting many public meetings and providing space for several organizations representing frontline communities organizing for justice.