

UU Justice Partnerships

There's a new dynamism in Unitarian Universalist congregational justice ministries springing from a deeply relational approach to faith-based organizing. Increasingly, congregations are developing interfaith and community partnerships and joining congregation-based community organizations and UU state action networks.

Rather than asking, "What issues do we care about?" congregational leaders are asking, "What are our core values and who do we know or need to get to know to build Beloved Community in our communities? Who is excluded? Who is vulnerable? Who is working for change and would welcome our support? Who are our neighbors? Who shall we partner with?"

Standing on the Side of Love

These questions are at the core of Standing on the Side of Love, a public advocacy campaign that seeks to harness love's power to stop oppression, sponsored by the Unitarian Universalist Association and open to all. Over 80 percent of UU congregations have connected with the campaign.

Because of its open source nature, Standing on the Side of Love encourages congregations to ask, "Who do we need to be standing on the side of love with in our communities?" The answer ranges from immigrants, people of color, Muslims, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer people, to homeless populations, Walmart workers, people impacted by mountaintop removal, and many more groups facing injustice.

Showing up at justice events as "the Love people" sets a religious, spiritual tone for justice-making, captures imaginations, garners public attention, puts justice-making at the center of congregational life, and creates possibilities for deeper community relationships.

Partnering Builds Capacity

Most UU congregations are engaged in community partnerships, ranging from interfaith partnerships that run food pantries and soup kitchens, to collaboration with immigrant and civil rights organizations that challenge human rights violations, to joining forces with workers' centers taking on wage theft, to local coalitions that support homeless LGBTQ youth or advocate for climate justice.

Congregations partner with each other, with state action networks, and with congregation-based community organizations.

UU state networks organize UUs within nearly half the states in the U.S. for state-based advocacy efforts and enable UUs to work efficiently with interfaith and advocacy partners. They also help connect UUs to national advocacy campaigns for everything from racial justice to raising the minimum wage to addressing climate change.

Nearly 200 UU congregations are members of congregation-based community organizations (CBCOs), local interfaith organizations that are part of one of five major national networks for building power and creating justice at the local, state, and national levels. CBCOs build bridges across the divides of race, class, and faith that result in shifting funds from prisons to schools, changing economic development priorities to affordable housing and green jobs, and securing agreements from banks to stop foreclosures.

Partnership builds capacity when volunteers connect with paid staff, passionate people of faith connect with professional organizers, and coalitions create opportunities for leadership development.

Spiritual Justice-Making and Transformation

By bringing the Standing on the Side of Love message into coalitions and partnerships, UU state networks,

community organizers, and congregational leaders have given Unitarian Universalism a new identity in interfaith settings and transformed secular activism into a spiritual experience. UUs stand on the side of love. Secular partners enthusiastically welcome this presence and the spiritual tool of less polarizing language and positions.

Unitarian Universalists believe that partnerships can transform our world for the better, and it can start in our congregations. Over the past decade and more, UUs have identified the following best practices for successful congregational justice ministries:

- Nurturing committed, organized, and engaged leaders.
- Integrating justice ministries into all of congregational life from worship to religious education, from employment practices to hospitality and inclusion.
- Imbuing justice-making with UU values and language of welcome and inclusion, spiritual and caring community practices, reflection, covenants, prayer and song, and spiritual community-building activities.
- Actively learning about our own social location—who is in our community, who our neighbors are, and what our own status is relative to power and privilege in our community. We ask ourselves: “What would the community lose if we were not here?” and ask the same question of others in the community.
- Using one-to-one conversations, focus groups, storytelling sessions, collective visioning, and/or Appreciative Inquiry processes to find out what people in the congregation are concerned about and dream about.
- Engaging in processes to find the best fit between congregation members’ passions and urgent community needs. “Grounding, Accountability/Right Relationship, Fit, and Opportunity” is one tool for doing so.
- Ensuring a balance of experiential activities that include service, education, advocacy, organizing, and witness, and building bridges between them.
- Inviting partner groups to the congregation, sharing the pulpit, attending partner activities, participating in partnership efforts, sharing Sunday offerings with key partners as part of an intentional plan, and dialoguing with partner groups about the partnership.
- Developing members’ multicultural competence by using UUA Multicultural Institute trainings and curricula, and debriefing about community organizing experiences.
- Offering multigenerational activities and childcare as part of all of our social justice programs and efforts.
- Celebrating achievements in worship and on special occasions.
- Bringing multicultural art, music, and worship into the congregation to inspire faithful, relational justice-making, and attending or hosting dinners, dances, concerts, and art shows with community justice partners.
- Creating a radically hospitable, loving community and culture dedicated to justice and inclusion—a Beloved Community model for justice—based on congregational mission, vision, and covenant.

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For resources and stories related to building UU justice
partnerships, please visit

uua.org/action