

First Universalist Church
of Rochester

Guide to Programs
to “Nurture the Spirit,
Serve the Community”

2026

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Board of Trustees

The Board of Trustees is the major governing body of the church. The seven members of the Board are nominated, then approved by vote of the congregation. This executive team handles the highest level of business of the church. In recent years, for example, the Board has examined how to attract newcomers and serve the existing membership through a combination of physical and personnel investments, reviewed bylaws and term limits, and conducted the process to search for a new minister.

Committees

Caring

The Caring Committee's mission is to provide short-term help to members, friends, and staff of the First Universalist Church through caring, comforting, and visitation. The Committee members do their best within the limits of their resources to make sure that those who are experiencing a period of grief, sorrow, joy, or need due to life's transitions are attended to by someone from the church.

Communications

The Communications Committee assists the Office Manager with oversight of the church newsletter, website (uuroc.org), and social media; advertises church events; and assists church groups with communicating their events to the church and wider community.

FIAC (Faith in Action Council)

The Faith in Action Council (FIAC) is the umbrella team for supporting Social Justice efforts, primarily the Whole Church Project; Social Justice Circles, based on interests of small groups; and the Social Justice Plate offerings to nonprofits selected by congregational vote.

Approved Social Justice Circles:

- Animal Ministry
- EcoJustice
- LGBTQ+ Social Justice
- Migrant and Immigrant Justice

Finance (and Stewardship)

The Finance Committee helps to ensure the fiscal soundness of the church, through the annual budget, stewardship campaign, legacy giving or bequests, and investments.

House

The House Committee's mission is to maintain and enhance the church building and grounds while preserving the architectural integrity of our sacred space. As our building is listed on the National Register of Historic Places, special considerations are often needed and projects can be lengthy, complicated, and costly.

Garden

A subcommittee of the House Committee, the Garden Committee maintains the church's flower and food gardens, with a focus on native flowering plants to support pollinators.

Beautification/Welcome Team

This team works to make the church building more beautiful, welcoming, and accessible for everyone, including those with barriers to mobility, low or no vision, and neurodivergence. The team has already made many changes to the main entries—the Clinton vestibule and Clara Barton Lounge—with more being planned.

Library

This committee focuses on the organization, stewardship, and management of our church library in the Clara Barton Lounge.

Membership

The Membership Committee works closely with the Congregational Life Coordinator and the Minister to formulate and implement a sound membership policy, including processes for becoming a member, efforts to recruit and retain members, developing events and programs to grow membership, and outreach to drifting members. They also train and support those who volunteer to serve as greeters and ushers during Sunday services.

Ministry

The Ministry Committee works closely with the Minister on significant church, spiritual, and congregational issues. This includes steps such as updating key policies, such as the Covenant of Right Relations and Policy on Responsible Behavior, to outline a restorative process when covenant is broken.

In addition, an online ministry team helps unite the in-person and online members of the First Universalist community through virtual meeting support: acting as a dual greeter and usher (“grusher”), hosting virtual coffee hour, and facilitating online worship service while working closely with the Tech Team to address technology issues.

Music

The Music Committee supports the Music Director in cultivating the musical life of the church, especially building choir talent and practice, managing stewardship of the historic Hope-Jones organ, and facilitating outside musical talent for events and special occasions. To more fully serve the community, the committee also supports the Eastman at Washington Square Concert Series, and identifies collaborative opportunities, including providing significant financial support for ROCMusic as well as rehearsal space for local trans and non-binary vocal groups.

Nominating

The Nominating Committee’s role is to ensure that leadership opportunities within key church committees are stable, through a process of identifying potential leaders to fill any open positions such as on the Board of Trustees, Committee on Ministry, and Nominating Committee. They also recruit delegates to denominational meetings. The Committee meets less frequently than others, and they typically meet only when open positions require discussion, while keeping desired skill sets of future leaders in mind.

Personnel

The Personnel Committee provides help and advice to the Board and Minister on best practices for hiring, fair compensation, ensuring compliance with labor laws as well as assisting in development of personnel policies as needed.

Tech Team

The Tech Team works to ensure that the technological facets of modern church services remain in good working condition, resolves tech issues as needed, and trains volunteers to manage the tech needs of Sunday services and other events when the staff A/V Technician is unavailable. The Tech Team works closely with others to ensure the music, online worship, and virtual meeting needs of the church are supported through technology.

Nurture the Spirit: Spiritual Development and Religious Education

Book Club

The Book Club organizes regular meetings to discuss books relevant to our faith and values. Books may be religious or non-religious in nature. The Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) also selects an annual Common Read for congregations. For 2025-2026, it is “Social Change Now!”, available in our library.

Choir

Our drop-in choir is open to all. Anybody interested in participating is welcome, with practice typically occurring before church service, starting around 9:00AM. Occasionally, special choir performances at community locations or special events in the church require additional practice sessions.

Connection Circles and Small Group Ministry

These groups are formed around a specific topic or time for deepening connection. Groups typically form in the fall and are “closed” groups once formed, building a covenant for the group and exploring chosen topics in a more intimate format. Groups typically meet monthly, though some may meet more often, and may be virtual or in-person.

Open / Drop-In Spiritual Connection Circle

On the third Sunday of the month following church services, anybody is welcome to join this drop-in circle to deepen connection to our faith and spirituality. Topics generally match or follow the theme packets of our congregation or sermon subjects. Unlike other Connection Circles, this circle is open to everyone, who may choose to come once, or every month.

Discussion Groups

These drop-in groups allow congregants to connect more regularly to discuss topics which are generally connected to our values and faith but may also explore tangential issues, special or personal interests, and current events. These are always open to everyone.

Monthly In-Person

Meets in person, before church service, on the first Sunday of the month in the Chalice Room.

Weekly Virtual

Meets virtually, Tuesday evenings (usually 6:30PM – 7:30PM), most weeks.

Library

The library collection offers a wide range of books on the Unitarian Universalist faith, other world religions, social justice issues, and many other topics. Members and regular attenders are welcome to check out and enjoy the books for four weeks.

Newcomer's Circle

Folks newer to our congregation or interested in learning more about our faith are invited to an open chat with church leadership at a meeting held once a month. Topics include a brief history of our faith and specifically our church, current church covenant and practices, and details about membership.

Religious Education

More structured than Connection Circles, Religious Education offers curriculum-based education on our faith and values, to both children and adults. Children's Religious Education is offered during most church services to school-age youth (younger children have access to daycare, and some services are designated as multi-generational). Children will enjoy their own chalice lighting, joys and sorrows ritual, and faith-based education and activities.

Worship Associates

The Worship Associates support the Minister and Sunday services. They write and deliver brief introductions related to the sermon topic or broader worship packet themes, as a lead-in and invitation to congregants to worship. Worship Associates rotate and take turns with this important task, helping to set the tone of service through often personal stories that link us together.

Serve the Community: Service Opportunities Within and Without

Clara's Cupboard

Our Little Free Library box in the Clinton Avenue garden offers free food and hygiene products, as well as books, to area residents in need.

Coffee Hour

The Coffee Hour (previously MOCHA) team works to provide post-service food and drink for coffee hour, to facilitate and support the gathering, connection, and community of the congregation and visitors. Rotating volunteer "teams" choose a Sunday to host coffee hour, including preparation and cleanup. All supplies are procured by the coordinator of the Coffee Hour team. This program is free and open for all to attend to connect and meet up with others.

Community Garden

Facing Clinton St. and behind our church are two garden areas, precious green spaces amidst the urban landscape. Garden members plant flowers and vegetables and maintain the garden plots to beautify the area and provide fresh food to those in need or to supplement Coffee Hour snacks.

Family Promise of Greater Rochester

First Universalist has had a long relationship with this nonprofit, formerly known as RAIHN, which serves families in the community who are experiencing housing instability. First Universalist has previously worked with the agency on a two-year, all-church project, Housing for All; been a shelter host; provided donations through the Social Justice Plate; and sponsored families for holiday gifts.

Food In-Gathering

Congregants are invited to bring in money, food, and/or hygiene or paper products on designated Sundays, once a month. These donations support the Community Food Cupboard of Rochester on Nester Street.

Greeters & Ushers

Under the direction of the Membership Committee, these volunteers commit to serving as Greeters or Ushers for one Sunday a month. Tasks include providing a warm and informative welcome to congregants and newcomers, providing Orders of Service or directions, helping with name tags, collecting the weekly offering, and addressing urgent matters during Sunday service.

Pop-Up Events

As our church is a congregation of members, one-time events occasionally pop up throughout the calendar year. Examples include board game nights, masked crafting groups, and more.

Rentals

Multiple areas of the church can be rented out for events, functions, or meetings. Members can usually reserve space when it is available free of charge for events supporting the congregation or aligned with our values. Non-members and other community agencies typically pay a fee, with the amount depending on the usage and financial capacity of the renter. Members are also able to have rites of passage recognized in the church,

including marriages, funerals, and other blessings. In the past, some atypical rentals, including parking spots and bathroom access during festivals and protests, have been allowed.

ROCMusic

First Universalist has a growing relationship with this nonprofit organization, which aims to improve access to high-quality music education, instruments, and experiences for the Rochester community, especially those who typically would be unable to access the arts. First Universalist has collaborated with community partners for fundraisers and performances to benefit ROCMusic.

Social Justice Plate

FIAC identifies and then the congregation votes for a selection of local nonprofits aligned with our values that will receive our monthly social justice plate offerings. During the designated Sunday each month, the collected money is donated to one of these nonprofits.

Other News, Events, or Projects

Eastman at Washington Square Concerts

For 30 years, Eastman School of Music has provided free concerts, open to the public, in our Sanctuary from October to May. These events bring world-class talent to our central downtown area during the lunch hour for all to enjoy.

Handmade Holiday

Throughout late November and into December 2025, our congregation crafted and sold gifts and donated the proceeds to support social justice causes, as an alternative to consumerist spending and modeling the ideal gift economy. Proceeds funded a Rochester Rapid Response Network training for our community, with additional funds delivered to the Community Food Cupboard of Rochester on Nester Street.

Harvest Potluck

In the spirit of the harvest and our worship theme of liberation, our congregation gathered for a Harvest Potluck at Seneca Park. Campfire songs, lawn games, and delicious food and desserts brought a gathering of congregants together for an evening of connection and joy.

Housing for All, Alcove Team

Several years ago, the congregation voted for a two-year congregation-wide project in support of Housing for All. The goal was to engage all members of the congregation—young and seniors, new members and seasoned ones—with education, service, and advocacy, toward this important mission.

In addition to collaboration with local nonprofits addressing the issue and educating the congregation on the immense need for housing in the area, an Alcove Team has begun working to support individuals experiencing homelessness who have used our alcoves for temporary shelter. The Team works to reach out to individuals, meet them where they are, and connect them with appropriate service providers, while enforcing our boundaries and expectations while they are on church property.

Interfaith (Union) Thanksgiving Service

Over 150 years ago, First Universalist was a co-founder (along with First Unitarian and Temple B'rith Kodesh) of America's longest-running interfaith worship service, held every year on Thanksgiving. It now includes Jewish, Islamic, UU, Protestant, and Catholic religious communities. Hosting and preaching responsibilities rotate among the participating congregations.

Playground Project – October 1-3, 2025

A handful of congregants joined Kaboom!, the City of Rochester, Healthi Kids (Common Ground Health), Sierra (T. J. Maxx Companies), and Rochester R-Centers to literally build community together. After months of planning, two set-up days, and one fun-filled build day, a space that was once a patch of grass was transformed into a new playground for the Beechwood and Homestead Heights area on the city's near northeast side, at the Ryan R-Center, School 33, and Sully Library complex.

Pride Parade 2025

Uniting with First Unitarian Church of Rochester, our congregation marched in the annual Rochester Pride Parade in support, family, and allyship with our LGBTQ+ community. Joining well over 200 area organizations, First Universalist members gathered to demonstrate our values, that we Side with Love, and to affirm our commitment to equity and the recognition of the inherent worth and dignity of every person. First Universalist has been proud to march in the Pride Parade for decades!

Puzzles & Pumpkins

Our family-friendly Halloween event invited families and friends to enjoy a night of fun in our church. Pumpkins were decorated in our lounge while participants enjoyed fresh vegan food. Afterwards, families enjoyed stories, swapped puzzles, and explored a haunted second floor hallway!

Service Auction

Our church hosts an auction to raise funds to support church programming, open to all – newer friends, visitors, guests, and, long-time members. The organizing team strives to collect donations of services, recruit volunteers to help the auction run smoothly, and create a fun event with something in every price range for every attendee. This event is usually held the first Sunday in February, in the Clara Barton Lounge after church service.

UU The Vote

Democracy is a key value in Unitarian Universalism. Our congregants are involved in voter registration, get out the vote drives, election monitoring, and more. First Universalist strictly follows IRS guidelines for religious institutions, which allow for advocacy, outreach, and promotion of politically relevant issues related to our values, without specific endorsement of candidates, parties, or ballot measures.



**First Universalist
Church of Rochester**

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