First Universalist Church
of Rochester

Guide to Programs to "Nurture the Spirit, Serve the Community"

2027

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Introduction

This guide was developed to help you – as a congregant of First Universalist Church – to more easily review the opportunities available to connect further in our congregation. The guide is divided up roughly into four sections: the Board and Committees; “Nurture the Spirit,” or opportunities to enrich your faith and spirituality through connection or action; “Serve the Community,” or opportunities to put your faith into action to positively impact our community; and other projects and events. Some items appear twice to reflect options to both get involved as a leader or to participate and enjoy personally, such as the Garden or Library. If you have questions or notice errors, please reach out to the Congregational Life Coordinator at conglife@uuroc.org.

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 or coordinate 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
> Housing (coming soon / new this year)
> LGBTQ+ Social Justice
> Migrant and Immigrant (Harvest) Justice

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

> **Stewardship**
> Annually, a team of Volunteers commit to leading the Stewardship Campaign, which requests, collects, and records (through the Collector) funds raised from member pledges to inform the budget.

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. The House Committee also organizes semi-annual cleaning and maintenance days.

> **Garden**
> A subcommittee of the House Committee, the Garden Committee maintains the church's plant and flower gardens, with a focus on native flowering plants to support pollinators.
>
> **Welcome Team**
> This beautification team works to make the church building more inviting, welcoming, and accessible for everyone, including those with barriers to mobility, low or no vision, and neurodivergence. The team has been busy in the last year, transforming spaces throughout the building.

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, programs to help grow membership, and outreach to drifting members.

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.

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 Directors 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 rehearsal space as well as significant financial support for ROCMusic.

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, and assisting in development of personnel policies.

Tech Team
The Tech Team works to maintain the technological facets of modern church services 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 2026-2027, it is “Love at the Center”, available in our library.

Choir
Our drop-in choir is open to all. Anybody interested in participating is welcome, with practice typically starting around 9:00AM before Sunday church service,. Occasionally, special choir performances at community locations or special events in the church require additional practice sessions. The choir rehearses and performs almost every Sunday during the church year, but typically not during the summer.

Connection Circles (f/k/a Small Group Ministry)
These groups are formed around a specific topic or convenient time for deepening connection. Groups typically form or open for new group members in the fall and become “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 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. Special presenters are sometimes recruited to lead these discussions.

> **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 & Membership Pathway
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 about once a month. In Newcomer’s Circle, attendees are invited to share

more about themselves and their spiritual background. Topics include a brief history of our faith and our church. In Membership Pathway, we dive deeper into current church covenant and practices, faith and belonging, and details about membership, leadership in church programming, and stewardship.

Religious Education
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.

OWL
Short for Our Whole Lives, this comprehensive, lifespan sexuality education curriculum provides honest, accurate information about sexuality for ranges of ages from childhood into adulthood. This curriculum aims to "dismantle stereotypes and assumptions, build self-acceptance and self-esteem, fosters healthy relationships, and improve decision making."

Prayground
Thanks to a NYSCU grant, and the work of several volunteers, Room 31 has been transformed into an indoor spiritually conducive play space, or 'prayground.' Children can spend time doing arts and crafts, reading, imagining, or actively playing in this fully refurbished space.

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

Coffee Hour
The Coffee Hour team provides post-service food and drink every week, to facilitate and support the gathering and connection of the congregation and visitors. Volunteers can sign up for rotating shifts to help run Coffee Hour, including set-up, hosting, providing food, and cleaning up. Monthly church group sponsorship also helps support, and special monthly and quarterly celebrations are held to recognize the milestones of our community. This program is free and open for all to attend to connect and meet up with others.

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.

Garden
Facing Clinton St. and behind our church are two garden areas, precious green spaces amidst the urban landscape. Garden members curate flowers and native plants to beautify the area and support natural wildlife such as pollinators in our urban location. A compost bin is also on-site to recycle organics for the garden.

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, family friendly movie nights, and more.

Rentals
Multiple areas of the church can be rented out for events, functions, or meetings. Members may reserve available space free of charge for events supporting the congregation; a discounted fee applies to non-congregational events. Non-members and other community agencies aligned with our values may rent out spaces for 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. Other 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 Offering
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 month, one quarter of our collected plate offering is donated to one of these nonprofits.

In addition, our Social Justice Circles regularly meet to transform our congregants' energy into action in our local community. Our Animal Ministry has advocated for animal rights and the end of animal testing. Our EcoJustice group has partnered with the City of Rochester on important initatives. Our Immigration and Migrant Justice group has collaborated with and supported local groups on the forefront of education and advocacy efforts. Our LGBTQ+ group has launched monthly newsletter articles to inform our congregation of such issues. Our Housing group is launching, solidifying previous efforts, projects, and community connections into an on-going justice initiative to address the needs of folks experiencing homelessness in our community.

Other News, Events, or Projects

BBCBB (Building Beloved Community Beyond the Binary)
In April 2026, our congregation was a satellite host for this conference for the first time. Started in 2017, this event celebrates our larger LGBTQIA+ community with workshops and dynamic keynote speakers. We gathered to enjoy an exploration of the speaker's life journey and then a deeper dive into shared values for collaborative organizing: anti-capitalism, anti-racism, de-colonialism, anti-imperialism, intersectional & de-colonial feminism, disability justice, pro-LGBTQ+, sex positive, anti-state violence, decolonized spiritual practice, pandemic consciousness, and love. Planning is starting for 2027's conference.

Eastman at Washington Square Concerts
For over 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.

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.

Handmade Holiday
Throughout late November and into December, our congregation crafts and sells small gifts, donating the proceeds to support social justice causes or novel church initiatives, as an alternative to consumerist spending and modeling the ideal gift economy.

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.

Pride Parade 2026
Uniting with our area UU churches, our congregation marched in the annual Rochester Pride Parade in support, family, and allyship with our LGBTQ+ community. Joining well over 150 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, rain or shine!

Puzzles & Pumpkins
Our family-friendly Halloween event invites families and friends to enjoy a night of fun in our church. Pumpkins are decorated in our lounge while participants enjoy a dietary-friendly meal. Families also enjoy spooky stories, have an opportunity to swap and build puzzles, and explore a decorated second floor haunted 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
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