



Building Our Hill of
DREAMS

Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church
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Mt. Vernon Unitarian Church Wins National Award for Social Action

The Mount Vernon Unitarian Church (MVUC) has received a national award for outstanding work on social action issues. The national Unitarian Universalist Association will present MVUC with the Bennett Award for congregational action on human justice and social action at its annual gathering in June. The local church is being recognized for its active local and national efforts in several areas, including homelessness and affordable housing, local blood drives, women's reproductive rights, a "greening the church" Green Sanctuary program and repealing the military's "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. MVUC also maintains support and cultural exchange with partner churches in Romania and India, and recently started a speaker series bringing elected officials and other public figures to speak on important issues of the day.

"Our church acts both locally and nationally to make the world a more just place. We are honored that our national church has recognized our efforts and are determined to keep up this work," said Georgeta Pourchot, chairperson of the Social Justice Council.

MVUC members Lynne Kennedy and Joan Darrah spearheaded a national effort to repeal the military's Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy – resulting in action by the 2007 General Assembly of the national Unitarian Universalist association to officially support repeal of the 15 year old policy.

In late May, MVUC was awarded Green Sanctuary status by the Unitarian Universalist Ministry of the Earth after a three year effort led by Suzanne Cleary Cohen. The church property was also certified as an official wildlife habitat and the children's program executed a Green Hill project.

The Rt. 1 Task Force led by Helen Lounsbury services the disadvantaged population on the Rt. 1 corridor, preparing and serving meals for the homeless, advocating for affordable housing in Fairfax County, and supporting organizations such as United Community Ministries.

The Reproductive Rights Task Force led by Lynn Alsmeyer-Johnson advocates for laws protecting a women's right to choose.

The Civil Liberties Task Force led by Marybeth Bernhard informs and advocates on issues such as the Patriot Act, immigration, and the war in Iraq, organizes petition-drives, lobby days and peace marches.

Partner churches in Romania and India support two Unitarian congregations in those countries, under the leadership of Lisa Gillispie.

The speaker series under the direction of Gregg Early has featured speakers such as Congressmen Tom Davis and Jim Moran, state Delegate Kris Amundson, Egyptian Ambassador to the U.S. Nabil Fahmy, and Syrian Ambassador to the U.S. Imad Moustapha.

Pourchot said about fifty percent of the church's 360 members have participated in its social action work. "A real cross section of people take part in our social action work, partly because it is so varied there is something to interest almost anyone who wants to serve our larger world," she said. "Children, newer members, long time members and regular friends and visitors all have a chance to take part. The work can be anything from signing a petition to taking a summer service trip to Romania, to organizing other churches for a national initiative."

For more information about MVUC's social action work please contact Georgeta Pourchot at gpourchot@yahoo.com.

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