

# UUJEC Economic Justice Spotlight

## First Unitarian Society of Madison. Madison, Wisconsin

Congratulations to the First Unitarian Society of Madison for receiving the 2016 Economic Justice and Leadership Award from UUJEC. Becky Schigiel, Social Justice Coordinator for FUS shares the work and mission of the congregation:

### ***Tell us about the economic justice work in your congregation.***

The First Unitarian Society of Madison (FUS) has 10 Social Justice Ministry Teams working mostly on mass incarceration, homelessness, racial justice and worker rights. In our community, these areas are related and linked to our huge economic and educational racial disparities. Annually, members provide about 40 meals and 100 volunteer shifts at three homeless shelters. Offertory collections fund shelter initiatives, mentoring, reproductive justice, and workers' rights. Our Eviction Prevention Fund helped 79 households get into or keep housing in 2015.

With other coalitions, we are leading the Fight for \$15, supporting unions (under terrible assault), and finding new ways to leverage power for all that goes into sustainable working conditions (schedules, transportation, etc.).

We support a new early learning center which works along the two-generation model to lift families out of poverty; and another program which helps returning prisoners gain self-sufficiency. Our members are leaders in an interfaith network which advocates effectively at the state level, with successes such as increasing treatment and diversion (in lieu of incarceration) funding by \$1.5 million dollars in 2015, and continuing to hold back against a push for a new county jail in favor of funding economic empowerment.

Since 2013, we have hosted an NPR-facilitated racial justice panel, the Nuns on the Bus, directors of Interfaith Worker Justice; a Young Gifted and Black teach-in; and a "Food, Race, and Justice" event. We



*Photo by Michelle Stocker*



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moved away from Earth Day events toward promotion of the just society/ strong economy/ healthy planet understanding via ongoing education. Our anti-racism courses – whether taught by our ministers or allies – teach the history of structural racism and the present-day economic ramifications.

FUS sponsors a list of community summits and gatherings, as well as the monthly meeting of the newly formed WI Trans Health Coalition. Whether it's

through our religious school classroom projects, collections, or a community picnic-- we are showing up, speaking out, and breaking bread.

### ***How is your congregational leadership involved in your economic justice work?***

Rev. Michael Schuler, our Senior Minister, is a founding clergy member of the WI Dignity at Work Coalition. Michael is on the Board of the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central WI as well as a clergy leader in network, mentioned above, working on incarceration. Rev. Schuler is a regular public voice for higher wages and moral working conditions. He wrote the introduction to and the UU piece of ICWJ's Text Study Project.

Becky Schigiel, Coordinator of Social Justice Programs heads the transportation working group of the WI Dignity at Work Coalition, is on the board of the Madison-area Urban Ministry, which advocates for and assists returning prisoners and the homeless, and on a committee of the WI Council of Churches, a leader in WI poverty work. Becky is working toward coordination with other congregations so that our aid to the homeless better becomes prevention.



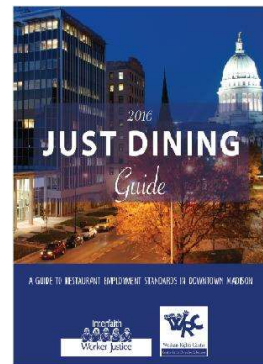
FUS is a UUSC Justice Building Innovator site. Our Board is helping to launch our congregation-wide project: to complete a full equity impact assessment of our work. We will engage our stakeholders in helping us to do this audit, and to make whatever changes are needed to further align our impact with our intentions.

### ***How has economic justice become a sustainable part of your congregational life?***

We work with partners in a way that combines ongoing, long-term relationship building and economic support with responsiveness. Our ministers, staff and ministry teams keep us linked to the partners. Our volunteer work provides proximity to economic need for all members. Our shared offertory collection is another vehicle for sustained involvement with partners.

All of this builds the capacity to promote change. Here's an example:

We collect for the Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice (ICWJ) every Labor Day Weekend. The sermon connects, and representatives from ICWJ are in the coffee hour to make personal connections. We sponsor ICWJ's annual event and gather a group to attend. We distribute ICWJ's Just Dining Guide to labor standards in local restaurants and build an understanding of how our restaurant dollars matter.



Our book club read "Behind the Kitchen Door." ICWJ is one of our service project partners every year on our Service Saturday event. In between, we are there to speak out for minimum wage increases, for collective bargaining rights, and against wage theft.

## ***What results or changes have you noticed because of your activity?***

FUS has long been a reliable partner, in financial support, in people power, as a host in the work for economic justice. In terms of changes in our congregation, we are bringing more of the whole congregation into our community partnerships. Members are becoming more personally awake to the reality of the economic need in our community and in Wisconsin.

We've hosted a new, locally written play, poetry and art from prisoners, and a full-sized solitary confinement cell replica. Our Black Lives Matter sign was vandalized twice, and we put a line of people out front with signs and songs. Relationships are being built, and -- slowly -- we are a part of racial and economic desegregation.



*FUS Facebook Image*



*FUS Facebook Image*

We have a Social Justice Roundtable quarterly, and we can see that our ministry teams are understanding the intersections of their work. Justice leadership is broadening to include young adults, parents of young children, while members of all ages keep extending beyond comfort zones in experiences and skillsets. People talk about race, about incarceration, about housing -- and members call each other into conversations about how to make our community really work.

Article developed in collaboration between UUJEC Administrator Rachel Bennett Steury and FUS Madison Social Justice Coordinator Becky Schigiel. To reach FUS, please contact Becky at [beckys@fusmadison.org](mailto:beckys@fusmadison.org).

### ***FUS Additional Resources:***

FUS Website: [www.fusmadison.org](http://www.fusmadison.org)

FUS YouTube Channel: <https://www.youtube.com/user/fusmadison>

Food, Race, and Justice: Solutions from Detroit to Madison

[https://www.fusmadison.org/media/MadisonUnitarian\\_Feb16\\_pages.pdf](https://www.fusmadison.org/media/MadisonUnitarian_Feb16_pages.pdf)

Microfinance resources and Investor Profile:

<http://www.wccn.org/investor-profile-first-unitarian-society-of-madison/>

From Me to We: Community Action

<http://workerjustice.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/MetoWe.pdf>

Social Justice Service

<https://fusmadison.org/service>

First Unitarian Society Reverend Dr. Michael A. Schuler's letter to Chief Koval

<http://www.ygbcoalition.org/blog/item/618-first-unitarian-society-reverend-dr-michael-a-schuler-s-letter-to-chief-koval-re-handsoffbrandi>

A Year of Progress in Social Justice

[https://www.fusmadison.org/media/MadisonUnitarian\\_Dec15.pdf](https://www.fusmadison.org/media/MadisonUnitarian_Dec15.pdf)