



ANNUAL REPORT 2022-2023



WISCONSIN FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE

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STAFF AND CONSULTANTS

Executive Director - Rabbi Bonnie Margulis

Regional Director For Greater Milwaukee - Reverend David Sinclair

Communications Consultant - Tiffany Ellis Hudson

Tech Support - Cierra Nietzel

Intern - Thutop Wangchuk

Volunteer Bookkeeper - Karen Turino

Wisconsin Interfaith Voter Engagement Campaign Organizer - Rhonda Lindner

Development Consultants - Dawn Berney, Juliet Page, Matthew Greene, and Sarah Gilday

BOARD MEMBERS

President - Reverend Larry Sexe

Secretary - Vicki Berenson

Rabbi Marc Berkson

Rev. Nick Utphall

Professor Charles Cohen

Reverend Selena Fox

Reverend Willie Brisco

David Chaimson

Reverend Karla Renee Garcia

LETTER FROM THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

“Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has.” – Margaret Mead

It has been another busy, crazy, action-packed year! I am deeply grateful to all of you who have stayed with us through it all. We could not do our work without you!

Over the past year, with your help, we have assisted asylum-seeking families with temporary shelter as they searched for stable housing; provided over 150 rides to Milwaukee and Chicago for ICE check-ins and immigration hearings; brought back our annual Iftar as an in-person event; initiated a new program, Interfaith Intersections, to deepen understanding and build relationships among people of different faiths; trained 25 clergy to act as poll chaplains around the state on Election Day, knocked on over 2500 doors and talked with nearly 1000 people to help Get Out the Vote; and brought Reverend Jennifer Butler, founder of Faith in Public Life, to Wisconsin for three days of workshops and presentations on the rise of white Christian nationalism.

WFVJ held a Faith-Based Summit on

Affordable Housing and created an advocacy team of faith leaders and housing experts to fight for policies that promote affordable housing. We worked with our LGBTQ+ siblings to advocate for a ban on conversion therapy and to bring together faith communities and the LGBTQ+ community for interfaith services for Pride weekend and Transgender Day of Remembrance.

We do this work in coalition with our faith-based and secular partners, and with the help of amazing volunteers like you. Read this report to find out more about our work and all the tremendous partner organizations and individuals who help to make it happen!

Faithfully,

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis

Rabbi Bonnie Margulis
Executive Director



WFVJ MEMBER CONGREGATIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Advent Lutheran Church
Beth Israel Center
Bethany United Methodist Church
Bethel Lutheran Church, Madison
Board of Church and Society - UMC WI
Christ Presbyterian Church
Church Women United in Madison, Inc.
Circle Sanctuary
Congregation Shaarei Shamayim
First Baptist Church, Madison
First Unitarian Society Social Justice Ministries
First United Methodist Church & Society
Mission Team
Holy Wisdom Monastery
Just Dane
Lake Edge Lutheran Church
Lake Edge United Church of Christ Mission
Team
Madison Friends Meeting (Quaker)
Memorial United Church of Christ - Fitchburg
Middleton Community UCC Faith in Action
Team
North Central Wisconsin Worship Group
(Quaker)
Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ
People's United Methodist Church
Plymouth Congregational United Church of
Christ
Snowflower Sangha
St. Johns Lutheran Church
Still Point Zen Center
Temple Beth El

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THE WISCONSIN INTERFAITH VOTER ENGAGEMENT CAMPAIGN

<https://wivec.wichurches.org>

*Wisconsin is currently one of the most gerrymandered states in the union. WFVJ is working to end gerrymandering and safeguard every citizen's sacred right to vote. Co-led by WFVJ and the **Wisconsin Council of Churches (WCC)**, the **Wisconsin Interfaith Voter Engagement Campaign (WIVEC)** works to promote the continued participation by all Wisconsinites in our election processes, particularly those whose lives are most affected by public policy and whose voices are least often heard.*

In addition to our own work, WIVEC continues our ongoing participation in the **Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition (WVRC)** weekly meetings and several subcommittees: the Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition Mobilization Working Group, the Communications Working Group, the Jail Voting Working Group, the Legislative/Budget Working Group, and the DMV Working Group.

ELECTION WORK

Voting is the most direct and effective way that the average citizen can affect the laws of Wisconsin. Unfortunately, there are many barriers to safe and informed voting. Our job is to educate and energize the public for Election Day. In advance of the fall election, the WVRC convened a **Crisis Management Planning Meeting** to plan coordinated responses to potential scenarios of disruptions pre-, during, and post-Election Day. These can include harassment, voter intimidation, electioneering at the polls, and inordinate wait times due to polling stations closing. WIVEC also advocated with the **Dane County Board of Supervisors** regarding enhanced security for election workers in Madison.

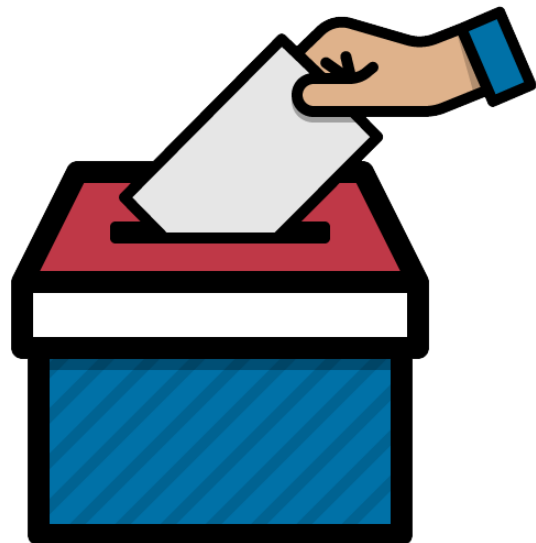
In 2022, we held four canvassing events between July and November, in partnership with the **League of Women Voters**, the **Urban League**, **Vote Riders**, and **Supermarket Legends**. In the end, a total of 115 canvassers knocked on a total of 2,547 doors in low-voter-turnout neighborhoods across the state. On Election Day, twenty-five clergy of different faiths acted as poll chaplains in Madison, Milwaukee, Kenosha, Green Bay, Wausau, and McFarland. WIVEC was also involved with multiple voter registration events within the last year, partnering with **Crossing Jordan Ministries**, the **Urban League of Milwaukee**, **Vote Riders**, and the **League of Women**

Voters. In the spring we partnered with **Fair Wisconsin** for another canvass event to get out the vote for the April 4 election.

SPEAKING AND PUBLIC EDUCATION

Educating the public about upcoming referenda and providing opportunities to hear candidates is another of our commitments. To that end, we arranged for **Dan Lenz** from **Law Forward** to be the keynote speaker at **Temple Beth El's Social Action Shabbat**. He talked about threats to democracy in Wisconsin. **Rabbi Margulis** joined him to talk about the spring election and the deeply problematic referenda that were on the ballot. She also spoke at a press conference with **All Voting is Local** calling on **Senate Majority Leader Devin LeMahieu** to remove **Robert Spindell** from the **Wisconsin Election Commission**. **Robert Spindell** is a commissioner who attempted to defraud the vote by acting as a fake elector for former **President Donald Trump**. The fact that he remains on the Wisconsin Election Commission is disgraceful.

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In addition, Rabbi Margulis helped organize and acted as a panelist for a **Madison Mayoral Forum** before the spring primary and again after the primary with the two remaining candidates, in partnership with the NAACP of Dane County and the Urban League of Greater Madison. The forum was an opportunity for the community to engage with the mayoral candidates and learn about their values and priorities. In March she met with 8th and 9th graders from **Congregation Sholom** in Milwaukee to educate them about civic engagement and the importance of voting, as well as the significance of the **Wisconsin Supreme Court** election. WIVEC has also held a series of webinars over the last year on voting rights, the January 6th insurrection, and holding our elected leaders accountable.

RESETTING THE TABLE WORKSHOP

<https://www.resettingthetable.org>

About twenty-five clergy from different faith communities around the state attended this workshop on **Building a Culture of Dialogue**. The purpose of the workshop was to teach people how to have

constructive conversations across political and ideological differences, conversations that help the participants to see each other as human beings rather than demonizing each other.

LAWSUITS

WIVEC is a party to two lawsuits: **Teigen vs. Wisconsin Elections Commission** and **Pellegrini vs. Wisconsin Elections Commission**. Both suits address the same issues: the legality of drop boxes and the use of assistance in delivering one's absentee ballot. Ballot drop boxes are efficient, reliable, and in fact more secure than standalone mailboxes. They are also available 24/7, whereas the city clerk's office is only open during office hours. In addition, many elderly, disabled, and homebound voters are simply unable to deliver their ballots in person. Requiring voters who are physically unable to return their own ballots (as Wisconsin currently does) disenfranchises Wisconsinites and discriminates against the elderly and disabled. We support **Law Forward** as they fight to make sure that voters are accorded every opportunity possible to make their voices heard! ♦

Satya Rhodes-Conway
(right) and Gloria
Reyes (below)



Mayoral General
Candidates

STAFF

Peter Bakken – Co-lead
Bonnie Margulis – Co-lead
Rhonda Lindner – Interfaith Organizer

PARTNERS

ACLU-Wisconsin
All Voting is Local
Beth Hillel Temple in Kenosha
Christ Presbyterian Church in Madison
Congregation Emanu-El B'ne Jeshurun
Fellowship
Jewish Federation of Madison
Jewish Federation of Milwaukee
League of Women Voters
Milwaukee Zen Center and Buddhist Peace
NAACP of Dane County and Milwaukee
Souls to the Polls
Supermarket Legends
Temple Beth El in Madison
The Disability Votes Coalition
The Urban League of Greater Madison
The Wisconsin Voter Rights Coalition
Tikkun Ha-Ir
Tippecanoe Presbyterian Church in Milwaukee
Voces de la Frontera
Voter ID Coalition

CREATING BELOVED COMMUNITY

Racism and white supremacy can only flourish if people of goodwill stay silent. As people of faith, we can be an effective voice for equity and justice for people of all ethnicities, sexual orientation, gender expression, and faiths in our community. We celebrate the differences that bring variety to our world, and we lift up every voice in the hopes of creating an equitable future.

AFRICAN-AMERICAN AND JEWISH TEENS PODCAST

African American and Jewish communities have a long history of working together to fight for civil rights and supporting each other in times of concern. To continue to build connections between these communities in the next generation, 100 Black Men and WFVJ have begun work on a project that will bring together Jewish and African American teens to make a podcast series on Jewish and African American history and culture. We hope the teens will learn their own, as well as each other's, history, and build relationships and understanding that will last beyond the project. The teens held their first planning meeting on May 22, 2023, and they are already learning and sharing about each other's faiths, cultures, and lived experiences. The excitement in the room was palpable. Look for the first episode to drop this fall! We are grateful to the Jewish Federation of Madison for funding this project!

TAKING A FAITHFUL STAND FOR RACIAL EQUITY

<https://www.wichurches.org/2021/07/taking-a-faithful-stand-for-equity-making-a-commitment-to-civic-engagement>

Taking a Faithful Stand for Racial Equity is a statewide campaign focusing on racial equity in our schools and local communities. We ask that volunteers sign a pledge to be an advocate for racial equity in our schools, and they are then invited to a series of monthly webinars featuring speakers on a variety of topics related to equity and local organizing. Some of our webinars this year have featured talks on the First Amendment and the Supreme Court, Holocaust education, voting rights and the disabled community, and the need for poll workers and poll watchers. Every webinar comes with a call to action. These have included: voting, op-ed writing, and lobbying. Taking a Faithful Stand is also working on a project aimed at tracking legislators and legislation related to equity and voting rights.

FAITH AND DEMOCRACY TOUR WITH REVEREND JENNIFER BUTLER

<https://www.faithinpubliclife.org/profiles/rev-jennifer-butler>

Reverend Jennifer Butler is an author, speaker, and advocate for progressivism in faith and interfaith cooperation. She is also the founder of **Faith in Public Life**. Her book, *Who Stole My Bible*, reclaims scripture from the hands of the orthodoxy and outlines the progressive messages within the sacred text. In February, **Creating Beloved Community** arranged for Reverend Butler to present her **Faith in Democracy Tour** across Wisconsin. The tour is designed to “equip communities to reclaim their faith and protect our democracy” from the rise of white Christian nationalism. Over the course of three days in February, 2023, Reverend Butler presented workshops, gave talks, and held conversations with over 500 clergy, faith leaders, and people of faith on the rise of white Christian nationalism and the role people of faith can play to counter this pernicious movement. Her presentations can be seen on the Taking a Faithful Stand YouTube channel.

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=O ET_nukqao&list=PLOBdOmeQ100eM33WQTWaAzVvkqf62IRjYA

TEACH THE TRUTH WISCONSIN

<https://www.wichurches.org/2021/08/teachthetruth-wi>

“Those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,” wrote George Santayana. **Teach the Truth Wisconsin** takes this to heart. So much of our country's history has been intentionally hidden, whitewashed, or is simply not taught in our schools. To combat the misinformation and ignorance that plagues our community, Teach the Truth has made it our mission to facilitate a series of presentations and videos to inform Wisconsinites of the unknown truths about our past. This year's videos covered a wide array

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of topics. On Indigenous Peoples’ Day, Native activist Art Shegonee and his wife Dawn erected a tee pee on the capitol lawn to hold a ceremony and give a talk about land ownership and Native spirituality. We also interviewed Public Historian Kacie Butcher on the Chazen exhibit “Sifting and Reckoning: UW’s History of Exclusion and Resistance.” Other topics from this year’s videos include reparations, solitary confinement, the 1969 Black Student Strike at UW-Madison, and school board takeovers by extremists. Also up on the Teach the Truth webpage is a brief history of sundown towns around Wisconsin.

We are looking at re-visioning our Teach the Truth project for this third year of its existence. The focus for 2023 will be on holidays: those which hold a darker or unknown meaning behind their celebrations, and those holidays that we wish to create to celebrate unique cultures and important contributors to our society.

LEADERSHIP TEAM

Interfaith Conference of Greater Milwaukee
MICAH
WFVJ
Wisconsin Council of Churches
WISDOM

FAITHFUL ACTION FOR A HEALTHY WISCONSIN

According to the University of Wisconsin Population Health Institute (UWPHI), Wisconsin is solidly middle of the pack when it comes to our health outcomes. We also suffer a marked disparity between health outcomes when accounting for race. Faithful Action for a Healthy Wisconsin is a joint initiative of the Wisconsin Council of Churches, Milwaukee Inner-City Congregations Allied for Hope (MICAH), and WFVJ. We organize clergy and faith leaders of all faiths across Wisconsin to advocate for equitable public health policies. This year, we have made a partnership with Ebenezer Moravian Church in Watertown and the Watertown Family Connections Center, as well as UWPHI, to move forward with our pilot workshop on changing the narrative around health toward public health and the social determinants of health, such as economic stability, environment, education, and health care access. ♦

PARTNERS

Jewish Community Relations Council – Jewish Federation of Milwaukee.
Wisconsin Council of Rabbis

THE DANE SANCTUARY COALITION <https://danesanctuarycoalition.org>

Based on our shared faith commitments to social justice, the member congregations and organizations of the Dane Sanctuary Coalition ally with vulnerable immigrant and refugee communities. We do this, under the leadership of WFVJ and guided by Voces de la Frontera and Centro Hispano, by providing and supporting physical sanctuary when needed. We also provide a conduit for information, education, and trainings on related immigrant justice actions.

DIRECT AID

The Dane Sanctuary Coalition engages both in direct action and advocacy for our undocumented and asylum-seeking siblings. Throughout the past year, several families in need were able to receive emergency housing assistance from us while they were waiting for space in shelters or for work permits. We partnered with the Dane County Immigration Office, Jewish Family Services, and individual congregations to

continue to pay for motel stays, eventually exhausting our emergency housing fund. Recognizing the statewide reality and depth of need, WFVJ has initiated a conversation with Governor Evers’ Administration and our immigration justice partners to find a comprehensive path forward to meet the needs of the growing immigrant communities.

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The Coalition continues to add to its roster of volunteer drivers, who take undocumented people to Milwaukee for ICE check-ins and Chicago for immigration hearings. We have also added an additional service to provide rides to the **Community Immigration Law Center (CILC)** for weekly legal clinics and occasional rides for medical care, as well as to a monthly pop-up clinic at **Christ Presbyterian Church** organized by CILC. Volunteers are needed, too, to provide temporary housing for asylum-seekers needing someplace to go to so that they can leave detention when they raise their bonds. There are many opportunities to help, so we encourage you to get involved here:

https://danesanctuarycoalition.org/?page_id=393

PLANNING

As the situation at the border and the affordable housing crisis at home show no signs of letting up, we and our allies continue to make plans for immediate hardships facing unhoused asylum seekers and immigrants. We continue to work with **Dane County Emergency Management** on a short-term emergency housing project and have connected with statewide organizing efforts. In Milwaukee, we have been assisting Voces de la Frontera in their organizing

STEERING COMMITTEE

Joyce Anderson
Karen Menendez Coller
Kristi Sprague
Leila Pine
Reverend Julia Burkey
Reverend Kelly Asprooth-Jackson
Reverend Leslie Schenk – Treasurer
Ruthanne Landsness
Stephanie Selgado

EMERGENCY SHORT-TERM HOUSING PLANNING TEAM

Charles Tubbs Sr – Dane County Office of Emergency Management Director
Julia Burkey
Phil Haslanger
Toni Swandby

efforts to build a **New Sanctuary Movement** coalition of congregations, and recently made a presentation on immigration and sanctuary to Milwaukee clergy at the invitation of Voces.

ADVOCACY

To raise public awareness, the **DSC Advocacy Committee** has decided that each member will ‘adopt’ one or two months over the course of the year and commit to write a letter to the editor in that month on an issue around immigrant rights and justice. Topics we have focused on include **A Day Without Latinos/Immigrants**, driver’s licenses for all, and the ending of **Title 42**, that has been used recently to expel migrants and deny entry to asylum seekers using the pandemic as an excuse.

The Advocacy Committee created petitions to send to **President Biden** and to **Wisconsin Senate and Assembly Majority Leaders Robin Vos and Devin LeMahieu** to advocate for a pathway to citizenship, assistance for refugees, legal driver’s licenses, and in-state tuition. We gathered signatures from our member congregations and sent the petitions last July.



ADVOCACY AND COMMUNICATIONS COMMITTEE

Bianca Tomasini – Co-chair
Emily Kuhn – E-newsletter Editor
Erica Serlin
Leila Pine – Co-chair
Mark Peters
Reverend Tim Schaefer – Webmaster
Sally Jones
Toni Swandby

HOST CONGREGATIONS

Congregation Shaarei Shamayim
First Unitarian Society
Madison Christian Community (Advent Lutheran Church and Community of Hope United Church of Christ)
Madison Mennonite Church
Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ

VOLUNTEER DRIVER COORDINATORS

Dan Zimmerman
Dineen Grow

SUPPORTING ORGANIZATIONS

Centro Hispano
Community Immigration Law Center
Family Farm Defenders
Supporting Our Immigrant Neighbors
Teaching Assistants' Association
Voces de la Frontera
Wisconsin Faith Voices for Justice
Wisconsin Network for Peace and Justice
Women's International League for Peace and Freedom
Worker Justice Wisconsin

VOLUNTEER HOUSING ORGANIZER

Betsy Abramson

SUPPORTING CONGREGATIONS

Beth Israel Center
Christ Presbyterian Church
First Baptist Church of Madison
First Congregational United Church of Christ
James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation
Lake Edge Lutheran Church
Lake Edge United Church of Christ
Midvale Lutheran Church
Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ
Prairie Unitarian Universalist Society
Pres House
Santa Maria ELCA
St. Francis House
Temple Beth El
The Crossing, Inc.

COALITION WORK

At WFVJ, we believe in working in partnerships and coalitions, understanding that real change can only come if we all raise our collective voices together toward our common goals. Therefore, we work wherever we can in coalition with other organizations.

In addition to our own **Dignity at Work Coalition** and **Dane Sanctuary Coalition**, some of the other coalitions to which we belong include:

- ◆ **Wisconsin Voting Rights Coalition**
- ◆ **Medicaid Matters Coalition** – led by Kids Forward and the Wisconsin Alliance for Women's Health
- ◆ **Declaration for American Democracy** – a national coalition working to promote trust in our elections and combat voter suppression and partisan gerrymandering on a federal level
- ◆ **Healthy School Meals for All** – coalition begun by Representatives Francesca Hong and Kristina Shelton to promote legislation mandating healthy school meals for all students regardless of income

We also run a **Poverty Simulation** (<https://www.wisconsinfaithvoicesforjustice.org/poverty.html>) for local organizations and congregations that wish to engage us. Poverty Simulations help participants gain insights into the daily life challenges faced by low-income and poor citizens of Wisconsin. The simulation also provides an opportunity to explore societal perspectives and discuss public policies on poverty. Most recently, we ran an updated version of our simulation for **Madison School and Community Recreation** in February 2023. MSCR provides a variety of recreation programs for people of all ages, including after school programs, fitness classes, and arts and enrichment activities for both kids and adults. They offer fee assistance to all residents of the **Madison Metropolitan School District (MMSD)** whose income is less than 185% of the **Federal Poverty Level**. ◆

THE DIGNITY AT WORK COALITION

The Dignity at Work Coalition (DatW) is a partnership of faith groups, direct service organizations, advocacy organizations, and labor unions. We work together on issues that provide dignified labor that helps workers support their families.

Under the leadership of Dignity at Work member organization **9 to 5 Wisconsin**, we are endeavoring to frame and focus our work under the rubric of ‘care economy’ – focusing on the essential workers that make our economy run but are often the least supported by fair wages, labor law protections, etc. These workers include, but are not limited to, teachers, daycare workers, bus drivers, home health workers, and house cleaners. To support our efforts, the coalition has also been hearing presentations from other organizations on their work. We hope that learning about their efforts will inform our own actions and increase our effectiveness.

In addition to seeking out partners and education, DatW has also supported community members who have faced direct economic injustice over this past year. Nurses at both **UW Hospital** and **Meriter Hospital** have been fighting for union representation, workplace improvements, and more input into the decisions that will affect them. We have supported the efforts of both these groups and will continue to support the nurses in their ongoing struggle. We also have been working with **Service Employees International Union (SEIU)** and **Worker Justice Wisconsin** to support the workers at **CUNA Mutual** and the healthcare workers at **Oakwood Village** in their struggles for fair wages, safe working conditions, and recognition of their unions.

This year, in recognition of our extensive work around COVID-19 safety and vaccine implementation, **WFVJ** and our partners were invited to a reception at Governor’s mansion. We were immensely gratified by the invitation, as well as by the general responsiveness and engagement of **Governor Tony Evers** and **Lieutenant Governor Mandela Barnes!**

ECONOMIC JUSTICE BILL OF RIGHTS

On March 9th, 2023, **Wisconsin State Assembly Representatives Francesca Hong** and **Kristina Shelton** held a press conference on the re-introduction of the **Economic Justice Bill of Rights** (<https://wisconsinexaminer.com/2023/03/11/state-reps-hong-and-shelton-reintroduce-economic-justice-bill-of-rights>) The Economic Justice Bill of Rights enumerates a list of rights that should be accorded to every worker. These include essentials like affordable health care and childcare, a living wage, the ability to unionize, and a clean and safe working environment. Notably, the bill includes undocumented Wisconsinites among its beneficiaries. **Rabbi Margulis** joined the state representatives, speaking from a faith-based perspective about the need for this crucial bill. Representatives Hong and Shelton are the keynote speakers at **WFVJ’s June 1st, 2023, Annual Celebration**, where they will outline their plans for future actions and advocacy opportunities stemming from the bill. ♦

STEERING COMMITTEE

Baltazar de Anda Santana
Janet Zander
Liliana Barrera - Kids Forward
Rebecca Meier-Rao
Sara Finger
Truth Freemyn
William Franks, Jr.
William Parke-Sutherland

Representatives Francesca Hong and Kristina Shelton



INTERFAITH COMMUNITY BUILDING

WFVJ is dedicated to building bridges between faith communities, to building interfaith understanding and cooperation, and to creating a community that celebrates and embraces our differences while coming together for action on areas of mutual concern.

INTERFAITH IFTAR

WFVJ's Interfaith Iftar remains one of our most successful and longest-running programs. Since its inception in 2017, our Iftar has far exceeded our expectations. In 2019, we hosted over 300 attendees. Afterwards followed three years of pandemic, during which the Iftar, like so many other events, moved to Zoom. You can check it out here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igtGnFJPDm8&t=5s>. This year, we were finally back in-person, and were immensely pleased to welcome more than 120 multifaith guests to celebrate breaking the fast with our Muslim siblings (<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.594806186013370&type=3>).

The Interfaith Iftar begins with a brief educational event, such as this year's presentation on Islam and Ramadan, followed by a potluck dinner. A safe space is provided for our Muslim attendees to pray, and then all guests are invited to eat, mingle, and socialize. Our Iftar this year was featured in an article in **Interfaith America Magazine** (<https://www.interfaithamerica.org/wisconsin-rabbi-hosts-interfaith-iftar>), the nation's premier interfaith organization. Planning for next year's Iftar is already underway. Ramadan 2024 begins again on March 10; we look forward to seeing you next March; stay tuned for the exact date of our Iftar!

INTERFAITH INTERSECTIONS

In 2019, our **Interfaith Community Building Initiative** began a series of educational **Sacred Site Visits** (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=igtGnFJPDm8&list=PL4WCCshEWmkbThE0cCVMxrAOA7dOJvFkY>). These provided opportunities for participants to visit houses of worship from a wide variety of faith traditions for the purposes of learning about different faith practices and building interfaith friendships. During the pandemic, the visits went virtual, only returning to in-person events within the last year.

Interfaith Intersections is the next phase. After having visited houses of worship run by Nature Spiritualists, Christians, Sikhs, Buddhists, Jews, Muslims, Quakers, and more, the team felt that it was time to create opportunities for more in-depth conversations. **Interfaith Intersections** is modeled after a program in Dubuque, IA, called the **Children of Abraham**, which consists of frank, personal conversations about faith. The purpose of these conversations is education and bond-building; they are not debates, but rather a chance for enhancing understanding and celebrating diverse faith viewpoints. Key to these events is that the panelists are not clergy or academics, but lay people. They do not speak on behalf of their faith, but from their own personal understanding of their faith.

The inaugural event on March 9, 2023, was attended by 34 people and ended in positive evaluations all around. Another 40 people came to the second event on May 18, both online and in person. Panelists came from Muslim Jewish, Baha'i, Quaker, Nature Spiritualist, and Roman Catholic traditions. The consensus was once again immensely positive. Look for information coming soon on our fall events, set for October 12th and November 9th, 2023.

LONGEST NIGHT SERVICE

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b8BhHU98Prc&t=1529s>

In response to the rise of antisemitism and other hate speech and hate crimes, **Memorial United Church of Christ** invited WFVJ to co-sponsor their Longest Night service, to focus on celebrating the diversity and recognizing the unity of the interfaith community. This is a service held annually on the longest night of the calendar, December 21st. **Longest Night** services mark the darkest time of the year, but they also celebrate the return of the light. On this night we look to the future and the light that will surely come! ♦

IFTAR 2023 PLANNING COMMITTEE

Catherine Buege
Chuck Cohen
Erica Serlin
Fatou Ceesay
Francie Saposnik
Lillian Abrams
Mary Strait
Nessreen Deebo
Sadat Abiri

IFTAR 2023 VOLUNTEERS

Angel Tang
Betsy Abramson
Dan Waldman
David Seligman
Dawn Berney
Dr. Ibrahim Saeed
Ken Kushner
Kim Waldman
Lamin Ceesay
Leora Waldman
Lynn Silverman
Mariyam Roth
Marsha Cohen
Matt Thomley
Mike Pressman
Paula Winnig
Phil Haslanger
Zayna Thomley



7th Annual
Ramadan Interfaith
Iftar 2023



IFATR 2023 CO-SPONSORS

Alan Ferguson
Anonymous
Bethany United Methodist Church
Black Leaders Organizing for Communities
Chuck and Christine
Congregation Sha'arei Shamayim
First Baptist Church of Madison
Fitchburg Memorial United Church of Christ
Interfaith Peace Working Group
Islamic Center of Madison
Jewish Social Services of Madison
Madison Christian Community
Pres House
Temple Beth El
Westminster Presbyterian Church
Wisconsin Council of Churches
Worker Justice Wisconsin

INTERFAITH INTERSECTIONS PLANNING TEAM

Chuck Cohen
Eleanor Margulis
Lillian Abrams
Mary Strait
Phil Haslanger
Sally Jones

IFTAR 2023 DONORS

Glass Nickel Pizza
Hy-Vee
Istanbul Market
Steep and Brew
Taza Mediterranean Kitchen



Interfaith Intersections
At Temple Beth El Madison

CLERGY ORGANIZING

Interfaith cooperation and clergy-led community mobilization are at the core of WFVJ's mission. We cannot do this work alone; our efforts depend on support from our fellow faith leaders and our wider communities.

WFVJ sponsors two interfaith clergy councils: the **Greater Milwaukee Faith Voices for Justice**, and the **Multifaith Coalition of South-Central Wisconsin**. Clergy and faith leaders come together monthly for mutual support, learning, and action. Members are Jewish, Christian, Unitarian, Muslim, Buddhist, Baha'i, Quaker, and Nature Spirituality, among others. Activities are targeted to the needs of each community.

MULTIFAITH COALITION OF SOUTH-CENTRAL WISCONSIN

The Multifaith Coalition of South Central Wisconsin, centered in Dane County, is dedicated to promoting diversity and inclusion for all. As part of this work, the Coalition is again presenting our annual Interfaith Pride service and our annual Transgender Day of Remembrance Interfaith service. See below for more information on these interfaith services.

In the wake of an anti-semitic incident at UW-Madison, WFVJ partnered with the Wisconsin Jewish Conference and the Madison Jewish Federation to gather signatures on a sign-on letter calling upon the UW-Madison administration to launch an investigation and to address the full inclusion of Jewish students and faculty as an integral part of the campus community. Further, we recruited clergy and faith leaders who attended jummah services at the west side mosque on Friday August 26th, 2022, in a show of solidarity in the wake of the shootings of four Muslim men in Albuquerque over the month.

Recognizing that some of our faith communities are particularly vulnerable to attack, on Nov. 30, 2023, we presented a **Countering Active Threats** training. We had about twenty-five people representing at least ten faith communities attending a session led by Ari Friedman from the Milwaukee Jewish Federation. A representative from the **Department of Homeland Security** also attended and spoke about resources the DHS has for faith communities to help with security.

GREATER MILWAUKEE FAITH VOICES FOR JUSTICE

The Greater Milwaukee Faith Voices for Justice interfaith clergy group has been engaging in activities to promote greater understanding of our diverse communities. Greater Milwaukee Faith Voices for Justice met on January 24th, 2023, and toured the Milwaukee Jewish Museum. At our March meeting, we visited the Black Holocaust Museum.

In addition to our monthly conversations, we also engage in direct action to address issues facing the greater Milwaukee community. Our Greater Milwaukee Regional Director, Reverend David Sinclair, organized a **Mobile Food Pantry** last summer and fall. In total, 673 bags of food were distributed to families at seven Early Childhood Education Centers in various locations in Milwaukee. The centers told us how appreciative their families would be, especially for the fresh fruits and vegetables. There was so much food that even the families of the staff received some of the bounty. ♦



LGBTQ+ ADVOCACY

In the wake of recent attacks on LGBTQ+ lives – book banning, multiple anti-trans bathroom bills, a major push to curtail access to gender-affirming care – WFVJ considers it our moral duty to stand strong with our queer siblings. We continue to fight for the rights of all Wisconsinites to give and receive love and to be accepted and embraced fully by our state.

This past year, our actions have focused on supporting the LGBTQ+ community through co-sponsoring events meant to lift up and celebrate our friends' lives and loves. Along with **First Baptist Church** and **Fair Wisconsin**, we have been working to build a cohort of supportive clergy for advocacy and other assistance. As part of this work, we signed on as co-sponsors for Fair Wisconsin's **LGBTQ+ Equality Day** on May 10, 2023, and led the faith workshop at the event. The occasion was a chance to meet our policy makers, network and strategize with other equality-minded LGBTQ+ and allied Wisconsinites, hear the stories of real community members, and inform the public what they can do to help support our queer siblings.

INTERFAITH PRIDE SERVICE

<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.432727002221290&type=3>

Last August, First Baptist Church hosted an **Interfaith Pride Service**, which we helped organize. In doing so, we revived a Madison tradition of interfaith pride services that dates back to the 1990's. As Reverend Tim Schaefer observed, "We stand on the shoulders of those who have done this work before us." The service was graced by the presence of many speakers and musicians, including **Perfect Harmony Chorus**, Madison's LGBTQ+ and Ally choir. Twenty-two faith communities participated in the event, which had three goals: 1) to begin with repentance for the harms that faith traditions have done to the queer community throughout history, 2) to affirm the rights and existence of the community, and 3) to celebrate the community in its full rainbow. A multiplicity of clergy from various faith traditions, including Christian, Muslim, Jewish, Nature Spirituality, and more spoke and prayed together for what will be the first of many such services. Plans for the next Interfaith Pride Service, set for August 21st at **Bethany United Methodist Church**, are underway, and we invite all our queer siblings and allies to join us!

TRANSGENDER DAY OF REMEMBRANCE (TDOR)

On November 20, 2023, we presented our second annual **Transgender Day of Remembrance Interfaith Service** at **Temple Beth El**

(<https://www.facebook.com/media/set/?set=a.502363225257667&type=3>), dedicated to the memory of all our transgender siblings who lost their lives to violence or suicide in the previous year. Studies have found that transgender people have mortality rates up to seventy-five times higher than their cisgender counterparts. This is due to increased risks from both suicide and homicide, as well as internal causes. Transgender advocate **Gwendolyn Ann Smith** started this tradition in 1999 in memory of **Rita Hester**, a transgender woman who had been killed the previous year. It became an annual tradition to honor all transgender people who lost their lives to violence because of who they were. Our third TDOR service will be held on Nov. 20, 2023, at **Bethany United Methodist Church** in Madison.

Finally, we represent the faith community in a coalition led by Fair Wisconsin, consisting of LGBTQ+ activists, social workers, and allies, which advocates for equity for the LGBTQ+ community, an end to harmful Conversion Therapy practices, and for all students in our schools to be able to participate in school sports, regardless of their gender identity.

In the coming year, we plan to continue our advocacy in support of our queer siblings and do our best to be allies worthy of the name. Despite the threats posed to LGBTQ+ rights in Wisconsin and elsewhere, we stand firm in our commitment to advocacy and support. Happy Pride Month! ♦



AFFORDABLE HOUSING CONCERNS

According to the National Alliance to End Homelessness, nearly five thousand Wisconsinites are homeless on any given night. Nearly half are unsheltered and over a quarter are chronically homeless. Housing is a social determinant of health. Access to safe and affordable housing provides physical safety, as well as an environment free of toxins and irritants. At WFVJ, we believe that housing should be a right, and we work toward the day that shelters are unnecessary and the word 'homeless' becomes defunct.

WFVJ is both mobilizing the faith community statewide to address the affordable housing crisis and representing the faith community on a number of committees and coalitions in Dane County and statewide.

FAITH-BASED HOUSING SUMMIT

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BVREOEeKTe0&list=PLIj3yglK23Wyzu-3xBjEEIrjNtCPr9E3>

On January 31st., WFVJ partnered with the Wisconsin Council of Churches for a **Faith-Based Housing Summit**. Hosted at Orchard Ridge United Church of Christ, the summit provided an overview of housing in Wisconsin, a vision of the special role of faith communities, and information about the nuts and bolts of how to engage in affordable housing projects. Many connections were made in January, and out of this successful event grew our new **Faith-Based Housing Advocacy Committee**. We have almost 30 clergy, faith leaders, housing experts, and advocates beginning to talk about the many complex issues that involve creating affordable housing. This new committee's first meeting was April 21st, and we began talking through where we want to focus our efforts.

COALITION BUILDING AND CONFERENCES

WFVJ is also committed to our ongoing participation

with the **Wisconsin Community Action Program Association (WISCAP)**. Together we are building a statewide housing advocacy coalition to address the affordable housing crisis. As part of this effort, Rabbi Margulis sits on WISCAP's affordable rental housing subcommittee. In addition, we represent the faith community on the **Dane County Regional Housing Strategies Advisory Committee**. The purpose of this committee is to address the affordable housing crisis in a strategic way as a county, rather than as individual towns and cities.



In June 2022, Rabbi Margulis was invited to attend the **Just Economy Conference**, sponsored by the **National Community Reinvestment Coalition (NCRC)**. Through a generous grant from the **Metropolitan Milwaukee Fair Housing Coalition**, Rabbi Margulis attended workshops on the long-term impact of redlining on health outcomes for communities of color; public-private partnerships with non-profit hospitals and community organizations, including faith communities, to create affordable housing projects and programs in their wider communities; and the

Community Reinvestment Act and the current opportunity to provide public comment as it is up for renewal and needs comments on the necessity to tie low cost loans and mortgages to people of color and BIPOC-led small businesses. ♦



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Election 2022 Canvassing Program



Interfaith Pride Service 2022





Chaplains at the Polls



Transgender Day of Remembrance 2022

ART PROJECT

Kathy Mazur, our most substantial donor and a local artist, painted “Creating Beloved Community” to celebrate our tenth anniversary. Become a donor to receive a print! Donors who make a gift over \$250 are eligible to receive a print signed by the artist.

