



Congregational Profile

First UU Congregation of Ann Arbor, March 23, 2021

Congregations who are setting out on the Green Sanctuary/Climate Urgency pathway submit a **Congregational Profile** as a first step on their journey. This profile describes the congregation and its interests. The profile informs the Green Sanctuary Staff and volunteers of your intentions, and allows us to understand the broader context within which you will be approaching this work.

First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor, Michigan

Website of the Congregation: www.uuaa.org

Size of the congregation: **large (620 members)**

What is your Religious Exploration enrollment? Children **250**, adults **100** [pre- pandemic numbers]

Type of congregation: **suburban – university town**

Mission statement of your congregation.

*[These statements are **drafts**, not yet adopted by the congregation.]*

Mission: Grounded in love, lifted by hope, centered on justice.

Vision: We are a liberal religious community, grounded in love, committed to justice and sustainability within our congregation and beyond.

Purpose: The First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor is a community of religious seekers and social justice activists. In living our principles, values, and covenants out loud, we serve as a wellspring of love and hope, a place of radical welcome, where people of diverse racial, cultural and spiritual backgrounds feel connected and valued, where all can join forces to heal our ailing planet and end oppression in all of its forms. We gather to create and experience beauty, transformation, and enrichment through **moving** religious experiences, inspirational music programs, and spiritual growth opportunities for all ages. We draw from the world's many love-centered belief systems that ask us to



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envision a better world.

Throughout our more than 155-year history in Ann Arbor, we have experienced the power of collective action in our hands-on social justice work. We joyfully serve as a valued resource for other UU congregations and for community organizations in southeast Michigan.

Help us understand your congregation's historical context: are there any recent highs or lows that might impact how you will approach taking on this transformational climate-change journey?

Environmentalism and sustainability have been front and center at UUAA for many years. (Our website includes a history of our renewable energy projects-

<https://www.uuaa.org/index.php/social-justice/faith-in-action/environmental-action>)

For over 20 years we have been making steady progress on renewable energy goals. Some highlights:

- 1998 – environmental impact reviews of the designs for construction of our current building / grounds
- 2003 - designation as a UUA Green Sanctuary
- 2010 – installation of the 90 ft wind turbine we refer to as our steeple, and installation of an array of rooftop solar panels- Additions to the panels over the years take us to 102 rooftop panels (annual production 30,000 kWh)
- 2011 - installation of a 10 panel Tracking Solar Array
- 2018 - designation as a “Cool Congregation” by Interfaith Power & Light

UUAA has also been engaged in food justice issues since the formation of our Mindful Eating Team in 2009. This group provides volunteers to a nearby organic farm that grows produce and raises money for a local non-profit, Food Gatherers. The Mindful Eating team holds programs to help congregants learn about environmental and economic justice issues related to food systems, and how food production and transportation of non-local food



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contribute to global climate change and resource depletion.

[\[https://uuaa.org/index.php/social-justice/faith-in-action/locavores-a-mindful-eating \]](https://uuaa.org/index.php/social-justice/faith-in-action/locavores-a-mindful-eating)

The UUAA Climate Action Group was created in 2014 to encourage actions to mitigate global climate change. This group has been exploring the intersectionality of environmental justice and climate action. They recently worked with our Challenging Racism Group to facilitate a discussion of the book *Justice on Earth* co-edited by our Senior Minister, Rev. Mishra-Marzetti. This discussion explored how we might begin or deepen partnerships with people and communities bearing the brunt of environmental injustice.

[\[https://uuaa.org/index.php/social-justice/faith-in-action/climate-action-group\]](https://uuaa.org/index.php/social-justice/faith-in-action/climate-action-group)

In May of 2020, our congregation completed the first phase of a long term visioning project, 'Vision 20/50', which involved over 300 congregants in a highly interactive process to decide on the primary focus of our work together over the next years. We identified three overlapping priority areas of work we want to engage with more intentional focus: Environmentalism/ Climate Justice, Anti-racism/ Anti-oppression, and Radical Welcome. The congregation expressed deep interest in making climate justice a defining focus, building on our decades of commitment to environmentalism/ sustainability and expanding to view this work through the broader lens of environmental/ climate justice.

Our building and property: We are very fortunate to have a large, well-maintained building on 46 acres of land, assets that we can dream of putting to work in many ways. We can showcase projects on our grounds to our regular renters and the many visitors to UUAA. However, our location outside the city of Ann Arbor, and distant from a bus line makes our radical welcome outreach and community partnerships more challenging.

As part of your review of your congregation's historical context, we ask that you take a long view, even as far as identifying the indigenous people whose land you occupy. Across our denomination, as part of the national reckoning around systemic racism, congregations are identifying their location in the context of historical oppression of indigenous people and of all people of color. Research and identify any historic moments when systemic oppression was locked in for people of color in your area. Examples would be: redlining, sundown towns or counties, abrogation of treaties with indigenous people, or pervasive repression of voting rights. This process will further your understanding of systemic racism in your region, and it



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may also help you identify a future justice project and a potential partner for collaboration. (To submit your profile please indicate the area of exploration you know you need to explore more deeply in order to develop relationships and projects. That deeper discovery you share in your Opportunity Assessment.)

The First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor was organized in 1865 as a missionary church to the University of Michigan. We remained in this missionary role for 81 years (until 1946). Over the years, we have become less associated with the university and draw congregants from outside Ann Arbor, but we are located in a university town, and remain a mostly white, affluent, highly educated community.

The university and the city of Ann Arbor are built on land that was originally populated by Ojibwa, Ottawa, and Potawatomi peoples. A Potawatomi elder dated the formation of “the Council of Three Fires” to 796 AD. The state of Michigan is named from an Ojibwa word, “mishigami” meaning “big water”, and our county “Washtenaw” derives from a Potawatomi word. The names of many counties, streets, lakes and cities in Michigan reflect their Native heritage, yet indigenous people who live in today’s Michigan feel they are invisible. Michigan is home to 12 federally-recognized Native Nations. About 50,000 Native Americans live in the tri-county area of Wayne, Oakland and Macomb counties, not far from Ann Arbor. However, Ann Arbor reports only 437 Native American residents and the university has less than 100 students with any Native heritage.

The money that made the University of Michigan possible came from a sale of property acquired by Michigan in the 1817 Treaty of Fort Meigs, signed by the Territory of Michigan and multiple Native Nations. The Native leaders ceded a large area of land, with the understanding that Native sons and daughters could benefit from education in the schools that would be built, but it was 130 years later before the first Native American enrolled at U of M.

The largest ethnic minority population in Ann Arbor is Asian (16.9%). In the late 1800s Chinese students were encouraged to train at the university and academic connections were established with China by President Angell, then president of U of M. Much later, after the Chinese Exclusion Act ended in the 1960s, the Asian population here blossomed; many people were attracted to employment with the university and in nearby manufacturing. In Ann Arbor, Asians have not been targets of discrimination in housing, health and education as frequently as other minorities have been, but there has been a surge in racist incidents against Asians during the current pandemic.



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Ann Arbor's Black population has remained steady at about 6%. This is far below our neighboring city, Ypsilanti (28%), Detroit (78%) and the state as a whole (14%). While Black citizens of Ann Arbor have had an active community since the early 1800s, they were historically restricted to housing in a few small and crowded pockets of the city until the 1960s. (We are proud that our congregation played a big role in the 1963 fair housing ordinance that eliminated these restrictions.) Ypsilanti has attracted more Black residents in part because of more available/ affordable housing, proximity to manufacturing jobs and a larger supportive Black community.

Ann Arbor and our congregation were actively involved in the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s. Our minister at the time was one of the many UU ministers who joined the Selma march. While students and Ann Arbor residents continue to see themselves as a progressive and diverse community, Ann Arbor stands in stark contrast to nearby Ypsilanti, Detroit and Flint in terms of racial diversity in both population and civic leadership.

Reflect on why the congregation is pursuing Green Sanctuary accreditation or re-accreditation. What is motivating you to undertake this comprehensive program? Congregations pursuing re-accreditation should include reflection on their initial accreditation and how re-accreditation will build and extend the work accomplished in that process.

Our 2019-2020 "Vision 20/50" project led us to our three overlapping areas of priority work to do in Environmentalism/ Climate Justice, Anti-Racism/ Anti-Oppression, and Radical Welcome. The Green Sanctuary 2030 certification program is very appealing to us because:



- It addresses all three of these Priority Areas
- It provides a structure and framework for most of that work and is flexible, allowing us to focus on our work and innovate for our specific needs since we won't have to invent the entire process!
- It fits well with the recommended practices guidance being developed by UUA's Vision Steering Committee in that:

Green Sanctuary 2030: uua.org/greensanctuary



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1. It lifts up collaborative approaches internally and externally, including work with external communities near us who are systemically oppressed and most likely to be impacted by disastrous climate change outcomes.
 2. It is grounded in UU Values
 3. It sets an expectation to engage the entire congregation in the work.
- It provides tools with Green Sanctuary-specific guidance and gives us access to resources like CreateClimateJustice.net, and it provides connections with other Green Sanctuary congregations and climate justice focused groups, such as the UUSC.
 - Re-certification is a goal that will be easy for UUAA congregants to understand.
 - Re-certification can help us build on our previous renewable energy projects and our current in-progress mitigation work to decrease UUAA's carbon footprint. Green Sanctuary 2030 broadens the scope of our work, lifting up both the urgency of this existential climate crisis, and the intersectional complexity of environmental/ climate justice work.
 - Green Sanctuary could help with our beginning efforts to identify local and regional environmental justice groups working with Detroit and Flint based coalitions focused on clean water access and affordability, among other justice issues. We have much more to explore, learn, and do here that could benefit from the Green Sanctuary assessment and campaign development process.

It is time to step up UUAA's commitment to climate action – and to do it by living our UU values with a sense of optimism, courage, creativity and joy – and in partnership with those who have been historically marginalized. We look forward to doing this work collectively with UU colleagues, to take steps toward the vision of *“A world that is sustainable and just for humanity and for the whole of the web of life, including present and future generations.”* (Vision of Green Sanctuary 2030, from *Green Sanctuary 2020: A Faithful Response to Climate Urgency*)