

James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation  
2146 East Johnson Street  
Madison, WI 53704

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[James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation](#) (JRUUC) is a small 100-member congregation in Madison, WI that is passionate about social justice! In 1965, Rev. James Reeb traveled to Selma, AL from his UU congregation in Boston in response to Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.'s call for clergy to protest violence by state troopers against civil rights marchers. Rev. James Reeb, a white minister, died in Selma after being attacked by a group of white men. JRUUC feels drawn to honor his work by creating racial and social justice in our city, state, country and world.

We have a 3-pronged approach to social justice at JRUUC: 1) as a congregational member of larger organizations (the UUA, UUSC, and MOSES, described below), 2) through activities led by our congregational social justice group; and 3) as individuals involved in a variety of local and global activities. There is something for everyone and we are inspired by each other. Those who are unable to participate express their enthusiasm for what others are able to do. We now describe in more detail our social justice activities and our plans for future work.

1) Our current flagship project is our active participation in MOSES (Madison Organizing in Strength, Equality, and Solidarity). MOSES is an affiliate of WISDOM, a state-wide network of congregation-based community organizations that work to live out their values in the world; and WISDOM is a member of the Gamaliel Foundation, a national network that works to address issues of justice. While MOSES selects its issues locally, the partnership with WISDOM and Gamaliel allows the group to participate in state and national level justice work as well. The two other UU congregations in our city are involved as well. A newspaper article describing MOSES is attached at the end of this document.

In May 2012, JRUUC passed a [Statement of Conscience on the issue of over-incarceration](#), citing the significant racial disparities of Wisconsin's criminal justice system.<sup>1</sup> JRUUC resolved to stand in support of MOSES' current focus, the 11x15 Campaign for Safer, Healthier Communities. The 11x15 Campaign has a goal of reducing Wisconsin's prison population from its current size of about 22,000 to 11,000 by the end of 2015. JRUUC has been working toward this goal as a congregation in a variety of ways, including involvement in legislative action days, and letters and calls to state representatives to voice support of MOSES-initiated legislation. We have conducted worship services focused on racial disparities and the work of MOSES, hosted a community discussion entitled "Justice for Trayvon Martin in Madison and Dane County," and held an Adult RE class called "Racial Justice as a Spiritual Practice". In addition, we have a regular presence at MOSES organizing meetings. This work is a wonderful opportunity for our members to live out our UU principals of the inherent worth and dignity of every person; as well as justice, equity, and compassion in human relations. A testimonial from Rev. Joseph Ellwanger describing our work is attached.

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<sup>1</sup> More than 50% of Wisconsin prison inmates are African-American although only 6% of Wisconsin's citizens are African American; and African Americans are 6 times more likely to be arrested in Dane County than whites—a disparity that is among the worst in the country.

The UUA and UUSC also inspire our social justice activity:

- We held adult RE classes on the UUA Common Reads (*The New Jim Crow* last year, and *Behind the Kitchen Door* this year).
- Our congregation participates in the UUSC Guests at Your Table box each year.
- We conducted a climate change worship service, and have supported the national effort to have the 2014 GA agenda include a Divestment from Fossil Fuels resolution for the Unitarian Universalist Common Endowment Fund (UUCEF). This is an expression of our commitment to our planet and our principles, particularly the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.
- Over 50% of our congregation participated in the congregational poll to select UUA study/action issues.
- Our congregation is striving to meet UUA Fair Compensation Guidelines for our staff and to giving our fair share to the Mid-America Region and the UUA.
- In support of the 2013 UUA Statement of Conscience on Immigration as a Moral Issue, we held a six-week adult RE class which drew in 55 attendees (including several from neighboring congregations). The class included field trips to talk to migrants and "DREAMERS" at Voces de la Frontera in Milwaukee and at Centro Guadalupe in Madison.
- Two of our members attended the annual Allies for Racial Equity Conference last year, and others attended valuable workshops at General Assembly and Regional Assembly.
- We became an official Welcoming Congregation of the UUA in 1997, with recertification in 2009.

2) Our Social Justice Council (SJC) was given its official charge from the JRUUC Board of Trustees in 2006: *"The primary charge and goal of this council is to encourage and facilitate action for social justice by members of JRUUC. This Council is not charged with doing the social justice work of JRUUC, but with facilitating it."* The Peace, Justice and Sustainability (or PJSs) group evolved as an action-oriented group open to all members of the congregation. The PJSs group holds lively monthly meetings where the agenda items are both rich and varied, reflecting the deep commitment to social justice in our community. The congregation voted to begin our "Share the Plate" initiative in 2011 with over \$7,400 given to local organizations to date. Some other activities of the PJS and SJC are listed here:

- We host a monthly neighborhood potluck called Sustainable Saturday night, which features a talk on peace, justice and/or sustainability issues. Some of the topics we have addressed include [350.org](http://350.org) and its "Do The Math" video, natural burials at a green sanctuary site, environmental impacts of mining in Wisconsin, [Occupy Madison's Tiny Houses Initiative](#), and the "Just Dining" project of the [Interfaith Coalition for Worker Justice of South Central WI](#). Sometimes these evenings include letter-writing activities to U.S. and state representatives; they often include live music, and always good food.
- We lead "Service Sunday" worship services a few times each year that include social justice activities. Recently Rev. Joe Ellwanger, a long-time civil-rights

activist and minister, visited our congregation in celebration of our 20<sup>th</sup> Anniversary to discuss the Civil Rights Movement and our namesake, James Reeb (see attached testimonial by him). Service projects have included preparing and serving a meal at a homeless shelter, assembling 'Feel Good Bags' with toiletry items for men in a shelter, and cleaning brush and debris out of a neighborhood green space.

- In collaboration with another Madison UU congregation, Prairie UU Society, we cook breakfast at a men's shelter once a month.
- Each year we participate in the annual Pride parade in support of LGBTQ rights (see attached photos).
- Our "Standing on the Side of Love Banner" was visible within an interfaith group of protestors during the 2011 Wisconsin Great Uprising, which was in the national spotlight because of the dismantling of public employee unions in our state.
- Several times over the growing season, we collect fresh fruits and vegetables from the Farmer's Market for distribution to local food pantries.
- We engaged the neighborhood in creating a temporary chalk mural with a sustainability theme on the side of our building.
- Our Holiday Giving Tree collects gifts for families in need in the greater community.

3) Individuals in the congregation are involved in many social justice activities. Some examples include:

- lending architecture knowledge and people power for the building of "[Tiny Houses](#)" intended for people in the Madison community who are currently homeless;
- advocating for the rights of people who are homeless in our community;
- educating and advocating for immigrant issues and reform;
- supporting formerly incarcerated individuals through [Madison-Area Urban Ministries](#) Circles of Support;
- mentoring at-risk youth through [Breaking Barriers Mentoring](#);
- tutoring people with dyslexia at the [Children's Dyslexia Center](#);
- advocating for climate change legislation through [Citizens Climate Lobby](#);
- educating the public about climate change through [350.org](#) and encouraging local government and colleges to divest from fossil fuels;
- participating with the Solidarity Singers at the WI State Capitol to help maintain a continuous progressive, pro-labor presence at the Capitol and to create positive, progressive change through participatory song;
- supporting racial justice efforts via the community organization, [Groundwork](#);
- and engaging our youth in Trick or Treat for UNICEF, planting a community garden each summer, and participating in service projects.

After celebrating our 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary this past year, JRUUC looks towards the next 20 years and beyond with renewed energy and vision while maintaining a strong sense of connection to our founding. We are guided by these words in the official charge to our

2006 Social Justice Council: *“JRUUC is a religious and spiritual community for which social action is a fundamental expression of our core values and principles. The health and vitality of our congregation depends on creating opportunities for our members to take strong and effective social action.”* The members of JRUUC would be honored to be recipients of the Bennett Award and will work hard to continue the work of human justice and social action.

Attached are some photos of our congregation at work; a testimonial from Rev. Joseph Ellwanger about our MOSES work; a newspaper article about MOSES; and two articles about our adult RE class on Immigration.

Our Congregation:



The Madison Gay Pride parade:







One of the activities of this “Service Sunday” was to assemble a collection of food and clothing to donate to the [Community Action Coalition](#):



February 15, 2014

Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations  
ATTN: Review Committee to Determine 2014 Bennett Award for Congregational Action  
25 Beacon St.  
Boston, MA 02108

To Whom It May Concern:

This is a letter endorsing the James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, Madison, Wisconsin, as the recipient of the 2014 “Bennett Award for Congregational Action on Human Justice and Social Action.”

I am a retired Evangelical Lutheran Church in America minister who served as an urban pastor in an African American congregation in Birmingham, Alabama, 1958-67, and as pastor of a racially integrated congregation in the central city of Milwaukee, Wisconsin, 1967-2001. From 2002 to 2012, I worked as an organizer with WISDOM, a statewide network of congregation-based justice organizing affiliates. It was as an organizer with WISDOM, when I was working in Madison, from 2010 to 2012, to help establish an affiliate there, that I came in contact with members of the James Reeb UU congregation.

I am deeply impressed with the James Reeb UU congregation and their commitment to getting involved in the nitty gritty of justice work. They envisioned justice work as part of their mission at the very start of their congregation, when they named their congregation after James Reeb, the social justice activist who was martyred during the voting rights campaign in Selma, Alabama, in March of 1965. More importantly, they have been taking concrete steps to live into that vision during the 20 years of their existence.

When MOSES, the WISDOM affiliate in Madison, was getting off the ground in 2010, four members of James Reeb UU showed up at a MOSES Formation Committee meeting, and immediately offered their talents and their time to some of the crucial recruitment and communication work of the burgeoning MOSES organization, once they saw the social justice mission of MOSES and the power of belonging to a statewide network of organizations, capable of bringing about changes in unjust policies throughout the state. In a very thoughtful, democratic process, members of James Reeb UU voted to join in the justice efforts of MOSES when they were informed about WISDOM and its mission of social justice in five crucial areas: Public school education, mass incarceration, immigration policy reform, jobs and economic development, and voting rights.

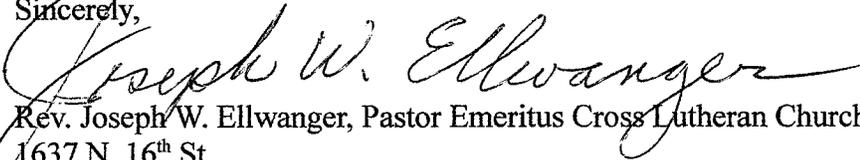
James Reeb UU congregation has hosted two very important MOSES trainings. Members of the congregation have participated in three actions at the Capitol, in support of WISDOM's “11X15 Campaign for Safer and Healthier Communities,” and several members have faithfully participated in the monthly meetings of the MOSES 11x15 Strategy Task Force. (The “11X15 Campaign for Safer and Healthier Communities” is WISDOM's initiative to reduce Wisconsin's prison population from 22,000 to 11,000 by 2015.)

In an effort to be sure that their social justice work is not just an “add-on” at the edges of the life of the congregation, leaders of James Reeb UU have made sure that justice, the work of MOSES, and specific

justice issues, such as the 11X15 Campaign, are included on a regular basis in the Sunday services and in their educational programs. For example, they invited me to speak about social justice and the 11X15 Campaign at one of their 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary services in 2013.

As a participant in the "Turn Around Tuesday" march in Selma, on March 9, 1965, I had the awesome privilege of marching over the Edmund Pettus Bridge with James Reeb on that fateful day, though I did not personally meet him. I am convinced that the members of James Reeb UU congregation in Madison, are determined to live into the powerful example of their namesake.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Joseph W. Ellwanger". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the typed name and address.

Rev. Joseph W. Ellwanger, Pastor Emeritus Cross Lutheran Church  
1637 N. 16<sup>th</sup> St.  
Milwaukee, WI 53205

# In the Spirit: Faith leaders tackle prison project

August 18, 2012 9:00 am • [DOUG ERICKSON | Wisconsin State Journal | derickson@madison.com | 608-252-6149](#)

[\(0\) Comments](#)

“You’re kidding, right?”

That’s the reaction David Liners often gets from people when they hear about the 11x15 campaign.

It’s a short name for an ambitious effort launched in February by a cross section of the state’s faith leaders.

The goal is to reduce Wisconsin’s prison population from its current size of about 22,000 inmates to 11,000 by the end of 2015. In other words, whack it in half in four calendar years.

“Don’t tell us it can’t be done,” said Liners, statewide coordinator for WISDOM, the Milwaukee faith-based organization leading the effort. “There are things we can do, and they’re within our grasp. They’re not far out.”

The current system, the group says, is wasteful, ineffective and unfair due to pronounced racial disparities.

The campaign’s leaders spent the last six months signing up congregations across the state. More than 100 people have been trained to do outreach and give presentations, and thousands of individuals have pledged to get involved.

The campaign is now entering its second phase of getting commitments to work toward the goal from state legislators, political candidates and county-level leaders.

“We purposely did not start off looking for legislative support,” Liners said. “We didn’t want this to be an issue coming out of Republicans or Democrats, but rather one coming out of grass-roots Wisconsin.”

Formal 11x15 groups are forming in most major cities. In Madison, a two-day training session was scheduled to be held Friday and Saturday at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation. Among the Madison congregations already heavily involved are First Congregational United Church of Christ, Fountain of Life Family Worship Center, Door Creek Church and the SnowFlower Sangha Buddhist community.

Also Friday, Nicole Porter, director of advocacy for The Sentencing Project, was scheduled to address legislators and others at the state Capitol, after this article went to press. The Washington, D.C., group works for a fair and effective U.S. criminal justice system.

“There are a lot of states trying to control their prison populations. Where Wisconsin is a leader and possibly a model is that this work is being done by the faith community, which is unusual and admirable,” Porter told me.

She’s not aware of any other states setting such a measurable benchmark for success. The Wisconsin goal is “ambitious but realistic,” she said. Approaches include beefing up community-based programs that address

addiction and mental illness — major culprits in recidivism — and giving judges more latitude in handing out sentences that are equally punitive yet keep people out of expensive prisons.

“You can sanction people in ways that are more cost-effective while maintaining public safety,” Porter said.

A huge majority of prisoners have underlying problems of addiction or mental illness and are not getting treatment or are getting the wrong treatment, said the Rev. Joe Ellwanger of Milwaukee, a retired Lutheran minister helping to lead the campaign. “Treatment launches people into recovery,” he said. “It’s a daily struggle for people to stay there, but to get there in the first place is the most important thing.”

To skeptics of the campaign, Liners points to a bordering state. Even if 11x15 is achieved, Wisconsin would still have a higher per-capita incarceration rate than Minnesota.

Read more: [http://host.madison.com/lifestyles/faith-and-values/religion/in-the-spirit-faith-leaders-tackle-prison-project/article\\_4cb9d0f2-e806-11e1-ac7e-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz2vo0vhHbn](http://host.madison.com/lifestyles/faith-and-values/religion/in-the-spirit-faith-leaders-tackle-prison-project/article_4cb9d0f2-e806-11e1-ac7e-0019bb2963f4.html#ixzz2vo0vhHbn)

# New classes will teach about issues faced by undocumented immigrants

[Print](#) [Email](#)

August 30, 2011 6:55 pm • [GEORGE HESSELBERG](#) | [ghesselberg@madison.com](mailto:ghesselberg@madison.com) | 608-252-6140

(0) [Comments](#)



A reflection of Madison's growing Hispanic population can be seen in billboards in Spanish. Several along Park Street and Fish Hatchery Road, for example, promote telephone services.

[Enlarge Photo](#)

## **IF YOU GO | IMMIGRATION CLASSES**

**What:** "Immigration as a Moral Issue," a series of classes to help people understand the complex issues and history of the immigration debate.

**When:** Six consecutive Sundays starting Sept. 18, from 2 to 4 p.m., at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 2146 E. Johnson St.

**To register:** Email Leila Pine, [sabinosanctuary@gmail.com](mailto:sabinosanctuary@gmail.com), or call the James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 608-242-8887, and leave a message requesting a registration slip. The registration deadline is Saturday, and the cost is \$15.

All it takes is a peek: Into the kitchen of your favorite restaurant, behind the garden shed of a condominium, or into the hearing rooms of the state Capitol, and you will get a notion of the growing importance of immigration issues in Wisconsin.

A series of weekly classes at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation that begins Sept. 18 has been designed to introduce Madison residents to the issues — social, legislative, legal and economic — faced by the city's silent population of illegal immigrants.

"Very few Madisonians actually personally know undocumented immigrants, or any immigrants" said Leila Pine, a retired Madison lawyer who has split her time between Madison and Arizona the past decade, working with that growing population and a faith-based humanitarian group called No More Deaths.

"You are educating yourself," she said. "Fear comes from lack of knowledge, a sense of loss of control. When you educate yourself, the fear tends to disappear.

Dane County's documented Hispanic population today is about 25,000, according to census data published by the Pew Hispanic Center.

"The Latinos are the fastest-growing minority in the country, and nobody knows for sure how many undocumented there are, but in Dane County for every one documented, there is at least one undocumented," Pine said.

With four bills coming through the Legislature identified by advocates as affecting immigrants, and with a continuing nationwide attention that has grown out of Arizona's laws, Pine said the time is ripe to bring context to the local discussion.

The classes' topics are broad, from the causes and history of immigration, economics and security, beneficiaries of the current system, and solutions.

What's different, said Pine, is that questions will be answered by experts.

"The purpose (of the classes) is not to try and tell people how to think, it is to provide accurate information that lets them draw their own conclusions. No proselytizing," she emphasized.

Though the church, 2146 E. Johnson St., is sponsoring the series, this is not a course on religion, she said.

"We're looking at the system through a moral, not a religious, lens," she said.

Among those scheduled to speak are Christine Neumann-Ortiz, executive director of Voces de la Frontera in Milwaukee; Salvador Carranza, president of Latinos United for Change and Advancement; Fabiola Hamdan, a social worker at Joining Forces for Others, and Luis Yudice, a former Madison police captain who's now coordinator of safety and security for the Madison School District and head of the Dane County Task Force on Immigration.

Read more: [http://host.madison.com/news/local/new-classes-will-teach-about-issues-faced-by-undocumented-immigrants/article\\_98bf6dec-d365-11e0-ac1e-001cc4c002e0.html#ixzz2vo0UZHRr](http://host.madison.com/news/local/new-classes-will-teach-about-issues-faced-by-undocumented-immigrants/article_98bf6dec-d365-11e0-ac1e-001cc4c002e0.html#ixzz2vo0UZHRr)

# Grass Roots: Course examines immigration through a lens of moral action

Print Email

August 29, 2011 5:15 pm • PAT SCHNEIDER | The Capital Times | [pschneider@madison.com](mailto:pschneider@madison.com) |

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(0) Comments

[pschneider@madison.com](mailto:pschneider@madison.com) | [@GrassRootsTCT'](#);">



Immigrant rights activists demonstrate in Los Angeles earlier this month for an end to the Department of Homeland Security's Secure Communities that identifies jailed immigrants for possible deportation.

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[pschneider@madison.com](mailto:pschneider@madison.com) | [@GrassRootsTCT'](#);">Enlarge Photo

Been keeping up with the news on immigration policy? It's challenging. But it's more important than ever to understand what's going on.

There were big developments nationally this month. As **protests against the federal Secure Communities program** that sends fingerprints of non-citizens in local jails to immigration authorities flared across the country, the Obama administration announced that deportations from now on will target people with criminal convictions. Meanwhile, **Arizona asked the Supreme Court to overturn lower court decisions barring controversial provisions of its SB 1070**, including requiring police officers to determine the immigration status of those people they stop to question.

Wisconsin has a trio of immigration initiatives before the state legislature. The GOP-backed, Arizona-style **AB 173** would require local law enforcement officers to determine the immigration status of the people they encounter on the job. Another Republican bill, **AB 222**, would require proof of citizenship to receive public assistance. And Democrats are floating **SB 137**, which would withhold tax credits, loans and public contracts from businesses that hire undocumented workers.

Keeping track of developing events is hard enough; analyzing the political underpinnings and practical impact of it all is a real challenge. Is **ordering prosecutors to set their sights on criminals a step toward a sensible policy** for overwhelmed immigration courts, or an **unconstitutional political capitulation spelled a-m-n-e-s-**

t-y? Will **Obama lose the Latino vote** anyway? Does having police check immigration papers increase public safety or violate civil liberties and chase away tourists? And how to set it all in historical context? **Immigration policies in the decade since 9/11 have been political tinder, as this new paper from the Migration Policy Institute** outlines.

"It's a complex issue," says Leila Pine of Madison, an immigrant rights activist who has worked in Arizona with **No More Deaths**, a group that gives humanitarian aid to migrants entering the United States through the desert. Social justice issues, like the fair and humane treatment of immigrants, affect everyone and the entire social system, says Pine. "We need to get into these issues in-depth to have an educated electorate."

That's why Pine will be leading a six-week series, **"Immigration as a Moral Issue,"** on Sunday afternoons starting Sept. 18. The course is based on a curriculum developed by the **Unitarian Universalist Association**, a liberal faith group that stresses social justice and personal responsibility.

Immigrant rights is a civil rights issue and a moral issue," says Elena Lavarrada, statewide organizer for the **Wisconsin Network for Immigrant and Refugee Rights**. And as in the civil rights movement of the mid-20th century that worked to bring basic rights to African-Americans, the **immigrant rights movement of the 21st century is drawing the support of faith-based communities.**

**Communities of faith are going to court to stop an Alabama immigration law** more restrictive than Arizona's. People of faith are standing on the front lines in protest of current policies, the like Rev. Peter Morales, the **president of the Unitarian Universalist Association who was sentenced last week to a day in jail for civil disobedience** during a protest against Arizona's SB 1070 in July. **Religious groups fall on both sides of the immigration issue**, however.

Pine sees the connection of faith communities with immigration as harkening back to something elemental in religious groups. "Almost every faith has something in its bible or history that talks about honoring the stranger and taking care of the foreigner in our midst -- treating them as you would want to be treated."

"What we're trying to do with this class is talk about how to treat immigrants in a moral and respectful manner while still meeting the needs with the U.S.," Pine says.

The Immigration as Moral Issue course traces historic and economic causes of immigration; security, enforcement and human rights; the benefits of the current system; and possible solutions.

Classes will be held 2-4 p.m. Sundays, Sept 18 - Oct. 23 at James Reeb Unitarian Universalist Congregation, 2146 E. Johnson St. Registration deadline is Sept. 5; fee is \$15. For more information, contact Pine at [sabinosanctuary@gmail.com](mailto:sabinosanctuary@gmail.com).

Lavarrada says that when people educate themselves on immigration issues, "they start realizing that these are human rights issues."

They are human rights issues that hit closer to home than people might have realized. "The forces that want to cut back on immigrant rights are the same forces trying to whittle away worker rights," Lavarrada says.

"Immigrant rights are workers rights."

Read more: [http://host.madison.com/news/local/grassroots/grass-roots-course-examines-immigration-through-a-lens-of-moral/article\\_2a8e78c4-d25a-11e0-87d1-001cc4c03286.html#ixzz2vo00jRPg](http://host.madison.com/news/local/grassroots/grass-roots-course-examines-immigration-through-a-lens-of-moral/article_2a8e78c4-d25a-11e0-87d1-001cc4c03286.html#ixzz2vo00jRPg)