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First Parish Honored for Social Action

~ Is Sole Recipient of National Human Justice Award ~

SUDBURY, MASS., May 16, 2005 – First Parish of Sudbury, a Unitarian Universalist congregation, is the 2005 winner of the Bennett Award for Congregational Action on Human Justice and Social Action. Given by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), the award recognizes First Parish’s “outstanding” range and level of activity to promote human justice, from service to advocacy on housing; gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender rights; civil liberties, and other issues. The award, which includes a small cash prize, has been given to one UU congregation each year since 1999.

“This is a real honor for our entire congregation, because our entire congregation was involved,” said Beth Rust of Sudbury. Rust and Judy Deutsch, also of Sudbury, co-chair First Parish’s Faith in Action committee, which submitted First Parish’s entry for the award. “It was doing our projects and living our values,” Rust added. “It was our ministry and our service.”

First Parish won the award based on its entry, “Taking It to the World,” which summarized the congregation’s work advocating and educating in a wide range of issues, from homelessness to prison reform to domestic abuse, large acts and small. For a complete description, view the entry at fpsudbury.org/cgi-local/wiki.pl?BennettAwardUUA.

“First Parish partnered with town government, with neighboring UU congregations, and with the League of Women Voters,” Rust said. “Our members built with Habitat for Humanity, walked for hunger, quilted for children sheltered from domestic abuse. We advocated for affordable housing, universal health care, and freedom to marry.”

The congregation’s advocacy took many forms inside and outside the parish, said Deutsch, including holding nine worship services dedicated to social action, publishing columns in area newspaper and testifying on Beacon Hill.

“Together with our minister, Katie Lee Crane, we created a nurturing environment—for our champions and leaders, for our children, for ourselves,” Deutsch said. “Through our efforts we have made a real impact to those outside of our congregation. Reaching out together, we have helped others—connecting us with each other, and building our community and individual strength.”

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The Bennett Award for Congregational Action on Human Justice and Social Action, instituted in 1999 by James Bennett to honor the congregation that has done exemplary work in social justice, is accompanied by a \$500 cash award that is presented at General Assembly. Dr. James R. Bennett is professor emeritus of the University of Arkansas and the former director of the Gustavus Meyers Center of Human Rights in North America. Dr. Bennett is a member of the UU Fellowship of Fayetteville AR.

Past recipients are the Berrien Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in St. Joseph, MI; Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church in Portland, Maine, the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Laramie, WY, the University UU Church and the Rainier Valley UU Congregation in Seattle, WA jointly, UU Congregation of Atlanta, and the Bismarck-Mandan UU Fellowship in North Dakota. For more information about the award and past recipients, visit www.uua.org/awards/bennett.html.

Sunday services at First Parish begin at 10 a.m. and are open to all members of the community. The First Parish of Sudbury Meeting House is located at 327 Concord Road, across from Town Hall. For more information about upcoming events, including concerts and dances, visit fpsudbury.org or call 978-443-2043.

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