



# The CommUUnicator

## Newsletter of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Waynesboro

### Protester's Rights

By Florence Ferguson

Times have changed. In certain locations, it seems like our rights to assemble and protest may not be assured, regardless of what the Constitution says. We may think that the outrageous scenes of abuse by government agents in Minneapolis are not likely here. But just as there, we live in state that did not vote for the president. We now have Democratic leaders of our state and capital city. That makes this a good time to review our rights to protest as provided on the [ACLU's Protester's Rights](#) page.

#### Attending a protest

- Your rights are strongest in what are known as "traditional public forums," such as streets, sidewalks, and parks. You also likely have the right to speak out on other public property, like plazas in front of government buildings, as long as you are not blocking access to the government building or interfering with other purposes the property was designed for.
- Private property owners can set rules for speech on their property. The government may not restrict your speech if it is taking place on your own property or with the consent of the property owner.
- Counter-protesters also have free speech rights. Police must treat protesters and counter-protesters equally. Police are permitted to keep antagonistic groups

separated but should allow them to be within sight and sound of one another.

- When you are lawfully present in any public space, you have the right to photograph anything in plain view, including federal buildings and the police. On private property, the owner may set rules related to photography or video.
- You don't need a permit to march in the streets or on sidewalks, as long as marchers don't obstruct car or pedestrian traffic. If you don't have a permit, police officers can ask you to move to the side of a street or sidewalk to let others pass or for safety reasons.

#### What to do if you believe your rights have been violated

- When you can, write down everything you remember, including the officers' badge and patrol car numbers and the agency they work for.
- Get contact information for witnesses.
- Take photographs of any injuries.
- Once you have all of this information, you can file a written complaint with the agency's internal affairs division or civilian complaint board.

#### What happens if police issue an order to disperse the protest

- Shutting down a protest through a dispersal order must be law enforcement's

last resort. Police may not break up a gathering unless there is a clear and present danger of riot, disorder, interference with traffic, or other immediate threat to public safety.

- If officers issue a dispersal order, they must provide a reasonable opportunity to comply, including sufficient time and a clear, unobstructed exit path.
- Individuals must receive clear and detailed notice of a dispersal order, including how much time they have to disperse, the consequences of failing to disperse, and what clear exit route they can follow, before they may be arrested or charged with any crime.

Given what we've been seeing, it may be assumed that these requirements will not always be followed. That means it is more important now than ever for us to remain true to our values and protest peacefully, but with courage and determination.

## Red Cross Blood Drive

Many thanks to all who participated in our recent Blood Drive. We made our goal by collecting 19 units of whole blood. Thanks also to those who tried to donate, but were unable to for health reasons, and to Nancy Trimble, Donna Nicely and Victor Monte who helped with registration. Finally, thanks to those who couldn't give at this drive, but who donated elsewhere. Your time and generosity make a huge difference for those in need of lifesaving transfusions. And a special thanks to Sharon Van Name, who arranges for and coordinates our blood drive year after year.



*The Annual UUFW New Year's Day Walk, which started atop Waynesboro's Sunset Park, was frigid with gale force winds. But afterwards, walkers warmed up with a toast to the new year and the usual chili, Hoppin' John and cornbread.*



## 2025 Membership Data

As of December 31, our Fellowship had 143 active members. This includes 22 new members in 2025. We suffered three deaths and said goodbye to three beloved members who moved away.

The average attendance at Sunday services in 2025 was 66.3. Attendance in RE classes averaged 6.7 children and 3 adults.

