

Heart of Universalism

The Heart of Universalism award is given to honor an individual who most exhibits the living spirit of Universalism. Justin Lapoint, who is here today and is the 2005 award recipient, conceived the idea of this award.

Today, we are honored to present this prestigious award to a husband-wife team of Rev. Dr. Richard Gilbert and Joyce Gilbert. The Gilberts are unable to attend. Accepting the award on their behalf is the Convocation Secretary Helen Borland.

The Gilberts just recently celebrated their 63rd wedding anniversary. Their early life included summers at the UU-related Unirondack camp in New York State's Adirondack Mountains—the center was founded by the New York State Convention of Universalists in 1951. The newly married couple spent their honeymoon at Unirondack. As a young adult, Dick served as the camp's recreation and song leader. Joyce continued the connection by leading the Board of Directors in the 1990s and early 2000s.

They recall meeting at Betts Memorial Universalist Church in Syracuse in 1959 to discuss the proposed consolidation of the Universalist Church of America with the American Unitarian Association.

Rev. Richard Gilbert was ordained in 1961 after graduating from St. Lawrence Theological School, a Universalist seminary. Joyce, at this same time, was completing her graduate studies at Northwestern

Dick would go on for more than 40 years to serve churches in New York and Colorado. In 2002, he was awarded the title of Minister Emeritus from the First Unitarian Church of Rochester.

The Rochester Church honored the Gilberts for their 32 years of service by creating the Gilbert Spirit Fund that provides grants to organizations pursuing social and economic justice, promoting the arts, and partnerships dedicated to the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice.

The Gilberts believe social justice is a “prophetic imperative.” As Rev. Gilbert shared, “the universalist impulse must guide us to preserve our planetary home not only for ourselves but for generations to come.”

Dick is a prolific poet and author. He created the adult education series called “Building Your Own Theology,” three books published by Skinner House and many others on meditation, social justice, and faith development.

The Gilberts happily live in Rochester, New York.