

Ruth Ann Russell Honored With Paul & Paula Murphy Human Sexuality Award

Ruth Ann Russell, Denver, will receive the 2024 Paul and Paula Murphy Human Sexuality Award from the Board of Directors of the Center for Health and Hope. The honor will be bestowed at the annual Gathering to H.E.A.L. (Helping End AIDS in our Lifetime) Breakfast at Hope United Methodist Church, Greenwood Village, on Saturday, September 29, 2024.

The Murphy Award is designated for a "pastor or layperson" who has advanced the discussion of human sexuality and/or human rights within a religious organization." It recognizes the pioneering human rights work within church and society of the late Rev. Paul and Dr. Paula Murphy, founding members of the Center's Board.

"Russell epitomizes how human rights advocacy and acceptance can become normative in daily living," noted Dr. Donald E. Messer, Center Executive Director. "Whether focused on the stigmatized of Africa or America, she speaks forthrightly and acts affirmatively."

Ruth Ann Russell was nominated because as co-lead of Park Hill United Methodist Church, Denver, and in many other church leadership roles, she has been "a social justice advocate for all marginalized groups and has significantly advanced all areas of human rights, including LGBTQAI+ rights."

In a nomination letter for Russell, it was noted that Ruth Ann has become a "change-agent in the area of LGBTQAI+ rights. She has had her preferred pronouns on her email signature blank for years. She never steps up to the podium without first identifying her personal pronouns. She is a straight cis ally who clearly respects the gender and sexuality spectrum, as did Paul and Paula Murphy (so far ahead of their time!). Ruth Ann makes members of the LGBTQAI+ community feel seen and valued."

The nomination also cited her additional human rights leadership, including organizing weekly bellringing and flying Black Lives Matters flags every Monday for the past 4 years. As the nomination says: "Many organizers' passion for this type of protest would have waned after a period. Not Ruth Ann. She stays the course of her convictions."

Ruth Ann has been married to Bruce Berger for thirty six years and loves being Grandma to seven wonderful grandchildren. She is a Christian, a feminist and Hoosier.

Previous recipients of the Murphy Award include Savannah Sandberg (2021), Rev. Angie Kotzmoyer and Rev. Sharon Langfeldt (2020), Senator Lucia Guzman (2019), Rev. Dr. Harvey Martz (2018), Rev. Kent Ingram (2017), Bishop Karen Oliveto (2016), Rev. Michael Dent (2015), Rev. Eric Strader, Rev. Jessica Rooks, and Rev. Brad Laurvick (2014), and Rev. Dr. Valerie Jackson (2013).