

2016 Spirit of Hope Award For Perseverance and Faithfulness in Ministry with the People of the Montana Synod

The 2016 Spirit of Hope Award recipient is Joyce Ranum, the former Executive Administrator of the Montana Synod, and a member of Our Savior's Lutheran Church in Great Falls.

Joyce is originally from upstate New York, where she worked as a secretary at State University of New York, Cortland campus, for three years, and then was Town Clerk in Virgil, New York, for six years. She moved to Great Falls, Montana in 1984, where she was secretary at the Great Falls Chamber of Commerce for one year and then went to work at the Montana Synod as secretary and executive administrator for 17 years, with Bishop Norm Wick, Bishop Mark Ramseth, Interim Bishop Walt Kirkegaard, and Bishop Rich Omland, until her retirement in 2002.

In her retirement, she enjoys travelling, painting, and advocating for justice issues. She is married to John Ranum, has three sons and seven grandchildren.

What is the Spirit of Hope?

The Spirit of Hope award was established by the Montana Synod Council to recognize individuals and ministries who have exemplified the spirit of hope in their lives.

Past awardees have included a family who has adopted a dozen special needs children, a congregation whose building burned down on Christmas Eve and rebuilt by the following Easter, Lutheran Disaster Relief, fire relief workers, individuals who have battled life-threatening illness, people who have gone above and beyond to serve their community, and more.

The nomination letter of this year's recipient:

Nominators: Jessica Crist and Mark Ramseth

In a time when the criminal justice system is a major point of conversation in our church, we note the tireless work of Joyce Ranum as an advocate for justice in the criminal justice system.

Joyce Ranum spent two years of her life doing advocacy and organizing on behalf of Barry Beach, a man imprisoned for life for a crime he says he did not commit. As a teenager Barry Beach was accused of murdering a classmate in Poplar, Montana. He was forced to confess by law enforcement in Louisiana, a confession which he has retracted ever since. Beach was freed by a judge for 18 months, and then sent back to prison. Efforts to parole him were thwarted, in part because he would not express repentance for a crime he says he did not commit.

Joyce Ranum led a group of Great Falls residents who demonstrated weekly in support of Barry Beach, led campaigns to publicize his case, and lobbied everyone they could think of. The "Free Barry Beach" movement was supported by as disparate a group of Montanans as represented by both Conrad Burns and Brian Schweitzer, in addition to thousands of ordinary citizens.

In 2015 the Montana Legislature changed the policy on clemency, and Governor Bullock granted clemency to Mr. Beach in November.

Joyce Ranum has not been an activist before. She spent many years serving as the Executive Assistant in the Montana Synod Office, working with Bishops Norm Wick, Mark Ramseth and Rich Omland. After retirement she dedicated herself to her art, becoming a recognized artist in the Great Falls art scene, and a member of the women's art cooperative, Gallery 16.

But when she learned about Barry Beach, she set aside everything else and dedicated herself and her energies to pursuing justice for a man she had never met.

That, indeed, is the spirit of hope!