

UUCP History - The 1960s – A Time of Involvement



Early in 1960, Mr. Gettier announced that he would be leaving the church as of September 1 to take a pastorate at a Long Island congregation. A search committee was formed under chairman Ken Wells and spent many months seeking a new minister. In April 1961, Robert L. Cope was confirmed as minister of the church.

As early as 1953, Karl Deutsch, a visiting professor at Princeton, had spoken to the congregation about a possible merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America. In April 1953, the fellowship had gone on record as supporting the federation of Unitarian Universalists. Throughout the subsequent years, debate and discussion continued at the national and local levels concerning the merger. Finally, at the annual meeting of the denomination held on May 11, 1961, and attended by Peter and Durinda Putnam, Vee Spear, and Bob Cope, the denomination voted overwhelmingly for the merger. Dana McLean Greeley was elected first president of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

Robert Cope Called as Minister

Robert Cope was formally installed as minister on October 8, 1961, with Justice William O. Douglas as principal speaker. The charge from the congregation was given by Rowan Boone, and Bob Cope responded: "Not because I have the truth, but because together we may well have enough, thus I dare and do accept this ministry."

The larger world became a particular concern as the 1960s progressed. We debated in these years the resumption of nuclear testing, the wisdom of fallout shelters, and the actions of the House Committee on Un-American Activities. In 1962, more than 100 members signed the Covenant for Equal Opportunity in Housing (in Princeton); the Social Concerns Committee participated in the organization of a Study Center for Youth held at Dorothea House. In 1963–1964, civil rights activism mounted with the Freedom March on Washington, DC, in the summer of 1963. More than 200 of us gathered on Monday, November 25, 1963, at a memorial service for President

John Kennedy, killed the preceding Friday. A host of outstanding speakers that year included Loren Eisely, Dorothy Spoerl, Donald Harrington, Whitney Young, and Ralph Ellison.

In 1963, the Fine Arts Committee was formed and organized monthlong exhibits of regional artists' work in the main auditorium for the ensuing four years. (Insurance costs ultimately terminated this activity.)

The church was represented at the national level from 1965 through 1967, when Peter Putnam went to Boston to serve as Vice President for Fund Raising for the UUA.

In March 1965, a young Unitarian Universalist minister, James Reeb, was killed in Selma, Alabama. Among those who gathered at Selma in protest and indignation were Elaine Marshall, the Henry Drewrys, and Bob Cope. One thousand dollars of Auction, Etc., proceeds that year were sent to assist southern UU fellowships that were active in civil rights causes.

Our need for a professional staff was growing. In September 1962, Margaret Odell had been hired as the first director of religious education. Following her resignation in the spring of 1965, J. Howard Middleton was ordained as associate minister in October. The church school enrollment by this time was 288. Membership was 422.

With a talk entitled "Toward More Substantial Dreams," Ken Wells directed the congregation's attention to the need for expansion, and in February 1965, the congregation began to plan anew. The following February, the congregation approved an expanded structure at an estimated cost of \$300,000. The new building program encompassed a structure that would link the existing two buildings and provide religious education space for 250 children; a new multipurpose auditorium, with a stage, that would seat 100 persons; two new offices for the ministers; new chairs for the main auditorium; and a new sound system. John Diehl of Princeton was selected as the architect. Of the funds needed, \$125,000 was to come from a new first mortgage. A capital fund drive headed by Ken Spear, which commenced October 21, 1966, raised \$172,000 by the end of the year. The Building Committee, headed by George Easter, immediately began overseeing detailed design work.

Increasingly, the U.S. commitment in Vietnam came to be a subject of controversy and debate within the congregation, with members on both sides of the issue. Bob Cope and Howard Middleton signed a petition expressing concern at U.S. involvement in Vietnam, sponsored by the National Emergency Clergy Committee Concerned About Vietnam.

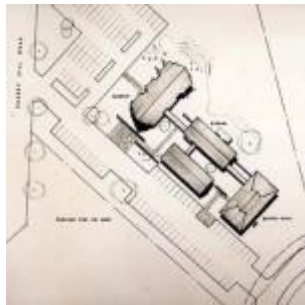
Expanding Our Home



Original architectural drawings show a cluster of three additional buildings in addition to the sanctuary.

Fred Ward Called as Minister of Religious Education

During the church year 1966–1967, Professor Richard Turner led a popular series on religion and art. A variety of speakers participated in a series entitled "Why I Am Not a Unitarian." Our usual informal summer program during 1966 was interrupted when the congregation was called to a formal Sunday service during which Bob Cope preached a sermon called "Midsummer Dreams and Nightmares." The nightmare reference became clear when the Building Committee told a stunned congregation that the lowest bid for the new building had come in 50% over what we were counting on and that the total cost would not be \$300,000 but \$442,000! After considerable discussion, the congregation authorized the assumption of even more indebtedness (from \$125,000 to \$275,000). In the following months, the money was secured through an increased mortgage and support from the denomination and the Plandome and Community churches in New York. Members increased their pledges from \$172,000 to \$192,000. Groundbreaking took place on September 24, 1967, in the area between the two buildings as the children released scores of balloons over Princeton.



Original site plan, with all stages complete.

Alarmed by the urban riots of the mid-1960s, the New Jersey Area Council of Unitarian Churches voted in September 1967 to hire a community organizer to work in Newark and asked churches to fund the \$10,000 program with contributions from members. In April 1968, the program was transferred to Trenton, where the House of Soul opened under Community Organizer John Young. The Princeton church became a principal source of funds and volunteers for this program throughout its existence until November 1970.

Local debate also focused on the attempt by a group of black Unitarians calling themselves the Black Caucus to gain UUA Board approval of their separate status, similar to that of the Women's Federation and the Laymen's League. In March 1968, the Princeton congregation voted 43–32 against separate status for the group, now called the Black Affairs Council. However, at the General Assembly in May, the delegates endorsed BAC and gave it separate status within the denomination as it desired.

In October 1967, Howard Middleton preached an angry sermon entitled "The U.S. Government's Illegal and Immoral Intervention in Vietnam." The subsequent uproar not only sparked a debate on the freedom of the pulpit but found the congregation sharply divided on the issue of the war. That month saw the creation of the Ad Hoc Committee of Princeton Unitarians Opposed to the War in Vietnam and the formation of a committee opposed to the Ad Hoc Committee.

In January 1968, the Copes left on their first sabbatical leave under the Leadership Leaves program instituted by the New Brunswick, Morristown, Plainfield, Trenton, Monmouth, and Princeton Unitarian churches. Their trip took them across the country and included a stay in California. From Berkeley in April, they sent a message read at our annual meeting, held several days after the assassination of Martin Luther King: "Seven thousand miles brought us to Berkeley, impressed with enormity, beauty and brutality of the USA—racism and parochialism rampant. Dr. King's living dream screams for help from each of us. Don't keep the faith, promote it." Later that spring, we also joined the nation in grief at the death of Robert Kennedy.

In June 1968, Howard Middleton left the church to begin the study of law, and Wilfrid W. Ward was called as minister of religious education.

September 1968 was an exhilarating time. Fred Ward was installed on September 29, and Bob Cope had returned to the pulpit. In a weeklong celebration, the new buildings were dedicated. For the first time in many years, children and adults could meet together in one location. Speaking on September 22, Bob Cope voiced the thoughts of many: "In these dark times one more light has been set on a hill. Rarely does a dream come true or a project be completed in such a way that the reality is better still. That has happened here."

In 1967, an anonymous donor gave the church \$8,000 for permanent art, and the Aesthetics Committee commissioned a work of art for our open-book-shaped reredos. This would cover the existing gold leaf. The artist selected was George Ortman, whose works were also in the Guggenheim Museum, the Museum of Modern Art, and the National Gallery of Art in Washington, DC. This work was installed and dedicated in November, 1968.

Church School Enrollment Prompts Double Sessions

With 250 children enrolled in the church school, it became necessary to hold services in double sessions, beginning November 1968, at 9 and 11 am. For the next four years, until fall 1972, the minister would preach his sermon twice; teachers in the 9 am church school would attend the 11 a. service; coffee "hour" became "hours," with one clearing up just as the other began. After-service business meetings were likewise held in two sessions with complicated methods of communicating discussion and decisions between them.

In February 1969, the congregation took the opportunity to voice a strong conviction when it approved (107–0) a statement on conscientious objection intended to provide background to local Selective Service boards in judgments concerning young people from our church who might be seeking conscientious objector status.

On May 4, 1969, the church celebrated the 20th anniversary of its founding as a fellowship with the dedication of the new lounge to the memory of Margery and Alson Robinson. During that year, Dean Starr and Robert West (candidates for the presidency of the UUA) both spoke in our pulpit, as did Paul Carnes, then campaign manager for Robert West. Our activities were many and various: evening series on poverty programs, the Job Corps, Model Cities program, problems of the aging, and youth opportunity centers. Les Muses en Série brought us classical guitar, modern dance, and voice recitals. Sensitivity training programs began. Intergenerational programs were featured. The first "circle dinners" were held.

The Sixties Leadership

Ministers – Robert L. Cope (1961–1976), Howard J. Middleton, Associate Minister (1965–1968), Wilfrid Ward, Minister of Religious Education (1968–1972)

Church Presidents – Edward Morehouse (1959–1961), Rowan Boone (1961–1963), Joseph Bachelder (1963–1964), Kenneth Wells (1964–1965), Albert Markwardt (1965–1967), Richard Mason (1967–1969), George Easter (1969–1971)