

UUCP History - The 1970s – Recognizing Youth



Early in 1970, the Creative Theater for Youth, supported jointly by the church and by McCarter Theatre, began in the small auditorium. In May 1970, the congregation voted to add a Youth Trustee to the Board of Trustees and elected Barbara Shimberg. In January 1971, the congregation approved a thorough revision of the bylaws and the reorganization these changes mandated, creating new vice presidents for finance, administration, religious education, and program.

The early 1970s were particularly characterized by the need to meet the large budget involved in the maintenance and financing of our newly expanded building, the salaries of two professionals and office and custodial help, and the demands that this made on a membership whose growth was suddenly leveling out. Problems with the building continued to be with us: the furnace chimney was not high enough, creating heating problems; drainage from the upper parking lot left standing water in the lower sidewalk; pet rabbits, kept in the courtyard, ate all the plants.

Memorial Fund Established and Garden Identified

With money from the Mark Heald memorial fund, we began in February 1971 to plan the memorial garden that was laid out on the hill on the south side of the building. The two-ton limestone rock that overlooks the garden was selected from the Delaware Quarry in Pennsylvania. Over the years, as memorial funds have been made available, additional plantings have been made in line with the original scheme developed for us by Howe Nurseries.

More Consciousness Raising

Stirrings of feminism were first noticed in the late 1960s and early 1970s in topics for adult programs and Women's Alliance discussions. On February 14, 1971, Bob Cope preached a Valentine sermon supporting feminist goals. In April of that year, the Men's Club received a letter from about 30 members protesting that group's exclusivity and implacable ban on the

occasional inclusion of women; the following month, women were invited to the Men's Club for the first time. In the fall 1971, the church directory changed listings from "Mr. and Mrs. John Doe" to "Jane and John Doe." Even the "Song of Exaltation" came under scrutiny. "Men of all cultures and all creeds, . . ." became "We of all cultures . . ." ("cultures" had previously replaced "colors" during an earlier spell of consciousness raising).

Social concerns continued to involve many members. In the summers of 1969, 1970, and 1971, many families participated in a reading and recreation program for children from Trenton. For several years, members gathered occasionally to make cookies with high-protein fishmeal that were sent to children at the Woodrow Wilson School in Trenton. Other activities in 1970 included environmental action, peace action, the community organizer program, and civil rights. In subsequent years, members became involved in the problems and concerns of inmates in the county prison, leading to the Thresholds program in which members were active for many years.

In spring 1972, Fred Ward resigned to return to graduate work. He was replaced by member Mary Peck, hired as part-time RE administrator. In September 1973, member Carol Henderson and Joe Nyce, a student at Princeton Theological Seminary, divided the tasks of RE administrator with great success. In September 1975, Cynthia Ward took Carol's place, a year later becoming sole RE coordinator. By the late 1970s, 100 to 130 children were enrolled yearly in the church school. The program continued to be richly diverse and stimulating, drawing upon the efforts of many adults under the guidance of the RE Committee. One highlight of the curricula was the pioneering sexuality course introduced to the church in 1971 by Fred Ward. Other developments in curricula enlivened our RE program: "The Haunting House" and "Adventures of God's Folk" for primary grades; "Project Listening" for senior high and adults. The LRY continued its involvement in the Delaware Valley Federation, hosting conferences annually. Teachers and RE professionals regularly attended workshops and conferences. The RE and adult worship programs often merged through such services as the total community series and the traditional, three-part "Hanging of the Greens" Christmas service.

In the fall of 1973, Bob and Pat Cope took their second sabbatical leave. Once again, members of the congregation, assisted by other ministers in the program, turned to one another for support and inspiration. The Copes traveled abroad until May 1974; at home, guest speakers filled the pulpit, among them District Representative Carl Westman, who spoke to the congregation about the Sharing in Growth program organized by the UUA. The program was designed to enable churches to undertake self-evaluation and self-help, working through a small group of people from the participating church in conjunction with a companion group from other UU churches and the guidance of the UUA office. The congregation entered the program, and a Sharing in Growth group worked through the church year 1974–1975. In 1976–1977, a second group was formed, to be followed by three additional groups in succeeding years.

In January 1975, Bob Cope announced that he would be resigning at the end of June 1976. In the spring of 1975, a search committee was formed, chaired again by Ken Wells. Also that spring, the congregation elevated the membership chairman to trustee level by creating a vice president for congregational affairs.

Typical concerns during the fall of 1975 were energy conservation within the church building and major roof repairs for the large auditorium. An “extended family,” begun the previous spring, met at the church for weekend activities. A family food co-op was started by several members. In November, Sharon Naole and Herb Foster received approval from the Board of Trustees to establish the popular Forum for Singles.

Dr. Edward A. Frost Called as Minister

In April 1976, Dr. Edward A. Frost and his wife, Christine, were invited by the Search Committee to spend a week candidating in Princeton. By the end of the week, we knew our year-long search had ended, and Edward was invited to become our minister. At his installation service held on the evening of November 7, 1976, the Reverend Kenneth MacLean, president of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers’ Association, was the principal speaker.

The next two years were robust ones with programs that brought the membership together as a whole to celebrate church community and with experiments in small group activities to develop a sense of intimacy among members. Circle Dinners gave way to Dining Unitarian Style (DUNS) in 1977. Led by Enoch and Marilyn Durbin, groups of 12 persons agreed to potluck monthly in one another’s homes for at least six consecutive months. The number of groups increased annually, and some DUNS groups have met regularly for many years. Men’s Club again became a men’s club, but Dinner Discussion, organized by Helen and Ben Shimberg, included everyone. Social highlights were the Middle Eastern Cabaret – with a belly dancer – and the elaborate Renaissance Dinner, at which the congregation turned out in full regalia for a royal menu and medieval dancing to authentic instruments.

Recognizing Our First Quarter Century

On May 6–7, 1978, we celebrated 25 years as a church with a Sunday service and a gala Saturday night dinner attended by 280 members and friends. Chaired by Rowan Boone, the festivities were also attended by Paul Carnes, president of the UUA; Sandra Carron, moderator of the UUA; Ethan Davis, president of the Metro New York District; and the Reverend Harold Dean, president of the New Jersey Area Council.

In the spring of 1978, the church granted permission to Princeton High School drama students to stage the controversial play “Moon-children” after the school administration had denied them permission to perform at the high school. The following year, our small auditorium was again made available to the Princeton High Drama Club for a production of “Equus.”

Other junior and senior high schoolers, including our own youth and directed by Scott Ward, performed “Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat” for a Sunday service. The production was then taken to Haverford, Pennsylvania, where it was the opening night feature of the UU Religious Education Conference. Under the leadership of Cynthia Ward and Ginnie Murphy (Aronson), musicals by our church school youngsters became popular in the late ’70s; two memorable ones from that time were “Holy Moses” and “100% Chance of Rain” (about Noah, of course).

Volunteerism Wanes

Although the Board collectively put in about ten 40-hour weeks in meetings alone, recruitment

for all other leadership positions was a problem in 1978–1979. In December, Edward Frost preached: “Church is a voluntary association . . . volunteerism is in trouble. . . . A great many people are exercising their freedom to do nothing, to not belong, to not participate. . . . Statistics indicate our church attendance has increased over the past five years, but church involvement and financial support have not kept pace.” That year, we published “Sharings,” a collection of short member biographies to enable members to get to know one another better. Only a third of the congregation had their pictures taken for the church’s photo directory; but a churchwide contest to rename the Weekly Bulletin evoked 140 suggestions, with the winning entry Joanna Foster’s “Skylights.”

Very much alive was the church’s continuing commitment to donate to charitable organizations from the proceeds of Auction, Etc. In 1979, the first Auction Funds Outreach Committee was appointed to screen and recommend recipients of these annual outreach funds, and a popular silent auction feature was added to the Auction, Etc., format.

1979 brought good and bad news about two people close to us. The New Jersey Unitarian Universalist Counseling Services (UUCES) was established by the NJ Area Council of UU Churches with Fred Ward as director. Also, Betty Klockner resigned after 14 years as our church secretary.

The Seventies Leadership

Ministers – Robert L. Cope (until 1976), Wilfrid Ward (until 1972),
Dr. Edward A. Frost (1976–1989)

Church Presidents – George Easter (1969–1971), Chester Aronson (1971–1973), Ingrid Reed (1973–1975), Enoch Durbin (1975–1977), Carl Haag (1977–1979), Sally Easter (1979–1981)