

UUCP History - The 2000s – A New Century and Millennium



Looking back at the decade, *Time* magazine labeled it “The Decade from Hell.” They believed the American Dream had dimmed because of the 9/11 attack, those killed in Iraq and Afghanistan, the struggle against radical Islam, a hurricane in New Orleans, the worldwide recession, and even the anthrax letters posted in Princeton, NJ. UUCP called Forrest Gilmore, who retired five years later; reached the highest number of members in 20 years but then experienced membership decline; reached the largest pledge income in our history; had our staff increase to 10; and began Policy Governance, co-ministry, the expansion of Social Outreach, and a Green Sanctuary program; and installed solar panels.

Y2K Comes and Goes

On December 31, 1999, along with the rest of the world, we awaited with anticipation and fear of the unknown the dawning of the twenty-first century and what “Y2K” would bring. The clock struck 12, but all was the same: our roof still leaked, volunteer recruitment was still a persistent challenge, our world was still fragile, but life went on.

Responsible Behavior

The Year of Petitions came to our congregation in 2002. In support of an effort by Princeton Borough to ban smoking in public venues, 66 members signed a petition. They spearheaded our congregational vote to support a boycott of Kraft Foods, a subsidiary of tobacco giant Philip Morris. In 2000, we joined seven local congregations to create the interfaith social action group “Not in Our Town,” which is committed to exposing everyday racism and working against all forms of prejudice and discrimination. Ted Fetter and Pat Ramirez stimulated our participation in this continuing program. In the spring of 2000, we published the “Putnam Memorial Book” as a tribute to Peter Putnam, a founding member of our congregation and longtime inspiration in the life not only of our community but of the nation. Included in the book are 16 sermons Peter delivered to our membership.

At the 2000 Annual Meeting, the congregation voted on the first payout of \$20,000 from our new endowment fund. We honored the Rev. Donna DiSciullo who, after leading the Campus Ministry program at Princeton University for 11 years, relocated to Boston, where she remained as director of UUA Campus Ministry programs. She was replaced by the Rev. Mary Tiebout, a former member of our congregation, for a year. The following year, Jessie Washington, a researcher in Princeton's Development Department and chair of the UUA Pamphlet Committee, assumed the duties of Campus Ministry. Under her guidance, the group held weekly gatherings, including dinner on campus. "Guest at Our Table" speakers included members of our congregation. During the 2002–2003 school year, the group helped bring William Schultz, president of Amnesty International in the United States and former president of the UUA, to the Princeton campus as a speaker. When Jessie resigned to pursue other interests, Fay Moore, another UUCP member who led meditation groups for many years, assumed direction of the program.

Also in 2000, a highly popular and long-awaited improvement was made in Channing Hall. In part to ensure that cooler heads would always prevail, we installed air conditioning.

In the summer of 2001, the RE Council organized Earth Spirit Week, a summer camp for children ages 4 to 10. As we turned 50, the camp was planning its third year with a paid director and afternoon child care.

September 11, 2001

Along with the rest of our country and the world, we were all numbed, frightened, confused, angry, and saddened by the horrible events of what quickly became known as 9/11. Our junior youth group planted a tree in memory of those who perished on September 11, and a special collection was taken for the UUSC/UUA New York City Humanitarian Relief Fund. In October, a concert was held to benefit the families of firefighters lost on September 11. Nearly all of us had friends, neighbors, or acquaintances affected by the atrocity that changed many lives forever.

Welcoming, Helping, and Celebrating

September 2001 also saw us welcome David Hunter as our intern minister. In October, The Second Time Around, our consignment shop, whose profits help support our congregation, celebrated its silver anniversary. Committed members of the congregation, working with HomeFront, periodically prepared and delivered approximately 100 meals to homeless families sheltered in Route 1 motels. As a congregation, we began to investigate the relatively new concept of "shared ministry." After a study of several years, we voted to become a "Welcoming Congregation," officially expressing friendship and support to gay, lesbian, and transgendered persons.

Paul Johnson Resigns

In the spring of 2002, Paul Johnson, our parish minister of 11 years, announced that he was leaving to become senior minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock on Long Island. We began the search for an interim minister. At the same time, we said good bye to Joanne Case, congregation secretary for nearly 20 years, and farewell to Youth Advisor Dave Gibson, now married and moving on to other responsibilities.

On June 30, 2002, a seven-member committee, chaired by Judy Malsbury, was elected to search for a new parish minister. In August, Paul left for Shelter Rock, our interim minister the Rev. Robert Latham arrived, and the Search Committee began the task of finding “the Reverend Ms./Mr. Right.” In September, we welcomed Lara Campbell to fill the newly combined post of youth director and RE administrative assistant. (She has since moved on to become director of religious education at the Plainfield UU congregation.) Rory Van Fossen assumed responsibility for *Skylights* from retiring editor Maggie Beaumont. Our board began to explore where and who we were with a series of “town meetings” on shared ministry, spirituality, and becoming a “program church” (as compared with a “pastoral church,” which more accurately described our status). More than 55% of us responded to the Search Committee survey in September. In March 2003, the Search Committee reported it was unable in the time available to locate a suitable candidate and announced that it would continue the search for another year. The Board of Trustees received Robert Latham’s agreement to stay an additional year. Though our membership had fluctuated little since the mid-1960s, our 2003 annual fund drive generated just short of \$400,000, more than a 16% increase in pledging that was regarded, in poor economic times, as a strong vote of confidence in the future of the congregation.

We Celebrate Our 50th!

When the 50th anniversary did arrive in 2003, we celebrated on May 18 with more than 200 members and friends at a dinner in Channing Hall. Bob Cope, our minister in the 1960s, sent a greeting that was read by the Rev. Carol Haag, a member of our congregation and retiring MRE of the Summit congregation. Present to speak to those gathered were the Rev. J. Howard Middleton, associate minister in the early 1960s; Fred Ward, our first MRE; Edward Frost, still senior minister in Atlanta; and Paul Johnson. All shared memories of their Princeton days. Our Sunday service in recognition of the 50th saw our good friend the Rev. William Schultz preach at both services. His topic, appropriately, was “Can These Bones Live?” Between services, he dedicated two chalices that had been created by two artist members of our congregation, Patricia Lange and Betty Sinha.

As we celebrated our golden anniversary, much had changed in our society. Our congregation had changed as well, but in other ways we are the same. We have learned a strange new vocabulary: Internet, modems, genomes, snail mail, derivatives, DVDs, DNA. Our interim minister and trustees have motivated us to look at ourselves and to the future. Yet we recall once again that in many ways we are not much different from the folks Ken Wells described at the Annual Meeting in 1958:

“trying to define ourselves . . . trying to establish our congregation’s scale of values. We want leadership, but not too much. We want new experiences, but we want to be quiet and calm. . . . We want our congregation to be a place where one can say ‘I don’t know’ and hold his head up when he says it. A place where our children have at least a fighting chance to find out why their parents are the kind of people they are. A quiet spot in a confusing world, a haven for people who will always love the unending search for their own certainties about God, Man and the Universe.”

Something Old and Somethings New

In the fall of 2003, one recurring problem, our roof, was repaired once more, with a new angle

– a \$135,000 replacement of our flat roof. Covenant Circles began with 15 small groups and 120 folks. Worship Associates, tested during the summer, became an integral part of the Sunday Service. Later in the 2003–2004 year, the Pastoral Associates program was announced, and a UU Buddhist group was formed.

Change Is in the Air

In his first year as our interim minister, Robert Latham identified obvious problems: our building, which needed a great deal of attention, partly as a result of the wear and tear on it from our heavy rental program, and the need for new office equipment, a full-time office manager, a full-time secretary, and more. At the heart of all the issues, he believed, was the lack of devotion to our religious mission.

In Rev. Latham's second year, he and the Board, along with the congregation, worked to move us from a Pastoral to a Program church. The Board initiated four work groups charged with (1) helping us become a mission-driven congregation, (2) preparing a strategic plan, (3) planning a capital campaign, and (4) improving governance.

The group developing our Mission Covenant statement held a workshop for the congregation in fall 2003 and then set up discussion meetings in 10 homes. The work was completed in March 2004 when the approved Mission Covenant was hung in our church entrance area. In November 2004, the Pastoral Associates program was announced; its mission was to extend pastoral care beyond that of the ministers. With the involvement of the ministers, the co-coordinators, Carol Haag and Laurie Powsner, trained the first group of 10 members. Pastoral Associates began calling and visiting those members who needed some kind of assistance and involving the ministers when desired. They met monthly to sharpen their skills. The Sharing and Caring Group was thanked for its long-term involvement and some of its members joined the 35 individuals who would help congregants by driving, bringing meals, providing child care, doing housework, walking dogs, and more.

Board president Sharon Copeland talked about how difficult change is and Robert Latham echoed the sentiment, stating that the congregation could react to the Program church concept by "(1) doing nothing, (2) fighting it, or (3) helping make the change." After many workshops and discussions, our members were generally on board. In spring 2004, the Board of Trustees shifted its focus to Policy Governance.

Not All Work

Throughout the 2003–2004 year, the many groups of the church met with spirit: the Women's Alliance had its annual bus tour; "Food for Thought" met monthly; a new men's group formed; the Adult Program Committee had many offerings, including "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven," the UU Bookstore came back; the film series continued; Joan Waite gave a concert; and Bart Hoebel's Steamboat Floating Classroom SPLASH was launched on the Delaware River in the spring. The most exciting event in the spring then occurred.

Our Ministerial Candidate Announced

"Searchlights," a special edition of *Skylights*, identified the Rev. I. Forrest Gilmore as the candidate for our parish minister. Forrest, 33, had grown up in southern New York State, had

majored in biology and society at Cornell, had worked for the Forest Service, graduated from Starr King, and served in two California churches. He preached his first sermon on Sunday, April 17, 2004, met with individuals and groups all week, and then offered “A Shared Dream” in his second service. Forrest left the church while the congregation voted to call him as our minister; then he returned with his parents for a celebration in Robinson Lounge. Robert Latham ended his relationship with our congregation, offering his congratulations in our calling Forrest Gilmore.

Change Occurs

The changes set in motion the previous two years began to solidify. We became a 12-month church, which meant a different vacation schedule for our two ministers: a study leave in the cold months and a month off in the summer. Forrest Gilmore and Chris Reed became co-ministers in November 2004, and their salaries reached parity in fiscal 2006.

Without question, the matter that the Board focused on most was Policy Governance, much in UU vogue at this time. The BOT created a “Covenant Statement” to guide its work, shared in forums and *Skylights* how Policy Governance would work in our church life, and developed the by-law changes that would define the new operation. These new by-laws stated there would be 9 trustees (down from 15) and no vice presidents outside the BOT, and it codified the Committee on Ministry, the Executive Team, and the Ministerial Search Committee. The by-laws were approved at a costumed Halloween congregational meeting and potluck dinner on October 26, 2005.

The former vice presidents became coordinators in a council that was to meet monthly. The Board focused on developing “ends” (policy) statements and had help with this from the Rev. Mary Higgins, a district executive who was the guru of Policy Governance. Mary met with the BOT one week before Christmas 2005 and again in October 2008. During that almost three-year interval, the Board refined and sharpened the ends statements, although, as President Jordan Corn said in April 2007, “There is no end of ends.” The BOT worked continuously to develop and refine ends statements, as well as policies and Executive Team limitations throughout the decade.

The Board was diligent in working with the congregation to understand “our collective vision” and to create clear, actionable priorities (ends) and then in monitoring compliance with these policies by the Executive Team, composed of Forrest and Chris. Besides their ministerial responsibilities, they were in charge of “day-to-day operation of the Congregation’s business.” This included creating the annual budget and recruiting leaders, which proved challenging, they said, in December 2006.

The Forrest Era

Forrest brought his spiritual quest to us. It seemed to combine his love of the natural world, his inquiry into Buddhism, his solo fasting retreats in the wilderness, and his practice of meditation. In April 2006, he shared his belief that “All Existence Is One,” which he hoped would make Unitarian Universalism a world religion in the future. In October 2007, Forrest spent 21 days at the Oneness University in Golden City, India, reporting on his experience at a service afterward. He articulated his view of our congregation’s mission in the summer of 2008:

“To help people seek the sacred and serve the world in a community of love.” He echoed Robert Latham’s words, “Mission is why we are here and Ministry is how we accomplish our Mission.”

Earth Fest on April 21, 2007, grew out of the Oneness group that Forrest convened. It had almost four hours of activities, food, music and dancing, and 25 exhibitors. In the evening, Paul Winter’s *Missa Gaia* concert raised \$2,100 for the Watersheds Association. Forrest gave a one-day workshop on “Developing a Sustainable Society.” The Green Sanctuary program debuted under Dolores Phillips in February 2005. Forrest testified on the “Mount Laurel” decision before a New Jersey Senate Committee, and its vote confirmed his view. He and Chris joined other clergy in Princeton to honor fallen American soldiers.

In March 2006, Forrest, Dana and Henry Powsner, and Maggie Beaumont went to a Large Church Conference, although with 460 members (40 more than the previous year), we were not “large.” Forrest spoke of “big pledges of 40 to 50% of church income devoted to service projects.” This fit into one of our congregation’s themes from our founding days and led to UUCP committing 8% of its budget for social justice in 2006, which the UUA said was unprecedented.

Social Outreach/Justice

In February 1959, Doreen Spitzer chaired the first church auction and raised \$800 for local charities. The commitment to social outreach remained strong over the next 50 years, but there was probably no time when the organized effort was more focused than from 2005 to 2009. Some of the fundraising that took place included the following:

- The Spring Sale annually raised about \$15,000.
- The annual Fellowship Auction collected more than \$14,000 in 2007 (a high).

The proceeds from these two events were totally committed annually to

- Social Outreach – about \$20,000 to \$24,000 to at least 20 organizations
- Denominational Outreach – between \$5,000 to \$6,000 sent to six to nine groups

The decision to set aside up to 9.2% (2005) of our total amassed budget funds led to the financial support of the following major projects (large amounts of volunteer time and hard work were also contributed):

- East Trenton Habitat Houses – at least \$40,000 and several thousand hours of labor to help build five townhouses, under Ray Nichols and Pete Gerster.
- East Trenton Community Learning Center – begun in spring 2007 and completed in May 2008, after many church members cleaned, restored, replaced, and added new elements. We donated \$10,000 to this effort. Other members followed, providing tutoring to local students.

- **Legislative Ministry** – After months of effort led by Elaine Nigam and Doug Rhodes of our congregation and joined by those from other New Jersey UU congregations, a well-developed full-day program was held at UUCP on January 12, 2008, to launch the UU Legislative Ministry of NJ. The conference was attended by more than 60 clergy and laypeople. UULMNJ’s mission is to “focus on impacting social justice and public policy issues in the state through Education, Advocacy, Witness, and Service.” A year later at the First Annual Plenary, there were 15 congregations involved, 92% of NJ UU churches. UUCP contributed \$80,000 over four years to successfully launch this effort – it was the “House of Soul” (see “The Sixties”) magnified manyfold.

Other Social Outreach Efforts – Our congregation was one of the largest contributors each year to the Metro District “Chalice Lighter” appeal that assists UU churches in improving their buildings and programs. The Women’s Alliance annually provides funding for our own church and for the community – in 2005, \$3,800 was given to eight groups helping women and children. The Partner Church Committee continued to send thousands of dollars (as much as \$45,000 from 1998 to 2007) to our sister congregation in Feheregyhaza, Transylvania, partly to help it build its church and an adjacent guest house. In 2006, our partner church dedicated the guest house while hosting the Unitarian Synod of Transylvania gathering, where the new bishop was elected. Another portion of the funds we sent supported the high school and college education of three students.

There was also a one-woman effort during the decade. Joan Waite performed 12 concerts in New York and New Jersey. Half of these were at UUCP: three contributing to the church’s general social outreach, two raising funds for the Trenton Area Soup Kitchen (TASK), and the 2008 “Travel the World in Sound,” in which Joan sang in 11 languages and raised \$3,757.80 for the Crisis Ministry.

Plate collections for major disasters provided funding for Tsunami Relief in 2005 (\$5,585) and for supporting the UU Knoxville Church after the shooting there (2008) and raised money with brunches for Pakistani Earthquake Relief (2006) and for the Witherspoon Church to purchase the Paul Robeson House. During the final years of the decade, 100% of the plate collections were dedicated to social justice efforts, raising \$23,206 in fiscal 2008–2009. RE brunches alone generated more than \$6,400 one year for local and international organizations.

Among those deeply committed to Social Justice work were Carol Allen and Pat Radke, who chaired Coalition for Peace Action committees; Lauren O’Neal, who was liaison with the Crisis Ministry; and Henry and Dana Powsner, who attended long NJ legislative sessions on marriage equality, along with many other UUs.

No one has ever totaled UUCP volunteer time or money for Social Outreach during this time, but it is clear that many hundreds of hours and tens of thousands of dollars were contributed.

For Children, Youth, Adults

There were learning opportunities for all, thanks to the efforts of the Rev. Chris Reed, Shelle Summers, the RE Coordinator; and Youth Programs Coordinators Nancy DiGiovanni followed by Pia O’Loughlin. The RE enrollment was 231 in 2000 and 193 in 2009. The rich assortment of

classes each year required a high level of parent and congregational volunteers; in fiscal 2007, there were 60 teachers and liaisons involved. This was active learning, including volunteering in the larger community. The fourth-grade class in 2005 ran the “Race for the Cure” water station a half mile from the finish line for the 15,500 runners.

The Youth met weekly and participated in church events such as the “Hanging of the Greens Service,” the Fellowship Auction, a Youth Sunday Service (in 2006 the theme was “Growing up making better decisions,”) and the Coming of Age Ceremony. The Youth Group hosted more than 100 youth and advisors in a district gathering on February 3–5, 2006, and cleaned the church before the services on Sunday. One of their advisors, Jeff Bock, had to leave for a six-month tour of duty in Iraq in 2007.

Adult programs, run by the renamed Adult Program Committee in 2004, blossomed to provide some 30 courses and events in 2006, such as Single Moms, Great Books, Minds on Fire, Thoreau as a Spiritual Guide (150th anniversary of Walden), and groups such as “Loss and Grieving,” “Aging and Saging,” and “Transitions” for those hurt by the economic crisis in 2009. There were spring and fall film series, often set up by Shelle or Forrest, about Love and Gender, Spirit of Life (*March of the Penguins*, *Grizzly Man*), and Jesus.

Two records were set in the decade. In March 2006, it was announced that the group led by Chris Reed had read every page of the almost 1000-page James Joyce novel *Ulysses*; it had taken 3 years, 2 months and the 14 finalists’ photo was published in *Skylights*. The Scriptures class, also led by Chris, spent 12 years reading the entire Hebrew Bible and Christian New Testament. Some carried on by next reading the Qur’an.

Music in the Air

Forrest’s love of music was apparent in his first Sunday service as a candidate: he looked at the congregation and, without saying a word, began singing a cappella, gave his sermon, and sang again, this time accompanying himself on his guitar. This foreshadowed changes in our Sunday services, including leading off each service with the congregation standing to sing two or three lively hymns, and, in 2008, to two types of music in the services—the 9:15 am being more contemplative and traditional and the 11:15 am service more celebratory with the full choir.

Peter Lauffer, our music director, left in May 2005 to return to Westminster Choir College, leaving his position open. That summer, 100 UUCPers filled out a music survey regarding what they wanted in the church music program. That led to a search all fall for a new music director. Forrest announced in December that the Musical Search Committee had chosen, “after long interviews and auditions,” Dr. Marjorie Herman. Marjorie had taught at the university and community levels for many years; was the artistic director of the Hopewell Valley Chorus; and had a weekly nationally syndicated program on WWFM, the local classical music station.

Under Margie, the Adult Choir, the Children’s Choir, and the Bell Choir flourished. She wrote about the Music Ministry she was creating, discussed the perennial question of “whether to clap or not to clap,” and went to the UU Music Directors’ annual six-day conference that ran from 8 am to 10 pm daily. In 2008, Forrest told the congregation that the UU Musicians’ Network recommended spending 7% to 10% of the budget on music and that we were providing 6%.

Two professional musicians became involved with UUCP. Beth Ertz became our pianist after 20 years in Los Angeles orchestrating and arranging for Elmer Bernstein, the Academy Awards, live concerts, pops orchestras, and recording artists such as Barbra Streisand, Willie Nelson, and Placido Domingo. As an accompanist, Beth had collaborated with Bernadette Peters, Robert Goulet, and Bette Midler. When she moved east, she performed in the musical theater and dance worlds of New York City.

One day Craig Rubano came to our church to be with his sister in her daughter's Cherry Hill Nursery School classroom. Afterward he went upstairs to explore the building and discovered the UU pamphlet rack, took most of the publications to read, and marveled that, in his 1,500 performances on Broadway and giving concerts around the world, he had never heard of our religion. Craig's life took a new direction: he became a Master of Divinity candidate at Princeton Theological Seminary and a ministerial intern at UUCP.

All Together: Staff, Building, Grounds, Money

The Staff of Life

The constant central players are the staff members whose commitment to getting their jobs done is critical. These individuals are not as visible to church members as are the ministers, but staff work became more important as member volunteering hours became less for many reasons. In January 2005, the staff other than RE and music included office manager Mona Sgobbo, office assistant Cara Karch, sexton Ron Smith, and for security, Bob La Fauci, who lived in the building. Two years later, all had left, except Cara. Security was handled in various other ways and a new position was added: social justice coordinator.

The nerve center of operations in our church is the office. UUCP had been fortunate to have long-serving office managers, who had institutional memories and knowledge of operations and procedures. The early 2000s were not such a time—office managers came and went, sometimes in less than a year. Since the tasks handled in the office had multiplied and included creating *Skylights*, taking over the web/computer responsibilities, handling finances, and managing the sexton, the title was changed to “congregational administrator” and the search began.

Sara Oderwald, who more than filled the role, joined the staff in July 2005. Sara, with a master of science degree in library science, had worked for AT&T's Education and Training unit. With her background as a database coordinator and systems analyst, Sara was able to streamline many of the office processes as well as support the Executive Team and the committees of the church. About the same time that Sara joined the staff, the janitorial services company provided a man to do the cleaning who gave his name as “George.” Some months later, George, really Jorge Garcia Salas, was hired as our sexton, and Jorge also taught Spanish as part of the Adult Program Committee's offerings, not surprising since he had been a teacher in Guatemala before coming to the United States in 1992.

Well-Grounded Building Changes

Keeping our building in good shape took more than the daily maintenance, especially with its heavy rental and community uses. There was an ongoing effort to upgrade floors, walls, and

plumbing and to add a new phone system, FiOS cable connections, and the like. We saved money by doing the work ourselves, some \$9,000 in refurbishing the Founders' Room in 2004, reported Bob Van Schaick, chair of Buildings and Grounds, who did much of the installation. Some work was driven by safety codes, such as installing a fire alarm system in most of the lower-level classrooms and installing playground equipment to meet New Jersey standards. Some was to make the building more handicap accessible, for instance, making one of the new front doors open with a push of a button. The debut of the Green Sanctuary program in 2005 led to replacing old light bulbs with CFLs and a large array of solar panels being installed on the church roof in November 2008. The panels cost \$84,506, but with the state providing more than \$50,000, our cost was reduced. We went live with the solar panels on January 26, 2009. Payments for electricity generated beyond our use provided \$15,000 annually in energy rebates for our operating budget.

Our grounds were cared for by outside services that mowed the grass and trimmed the trees. Snow removal was the responsibility of the Princeton Medical Center, which rented the parking lot Monday through Friday for its staff. Flowers and new plantings were put in by church members, led by Sally Easter and then Ruth Tomlinson. Our attempts to replace our church sign with our not-so-new name was foiled by Princeton Township because it was too large. Although we could pay \$1,500 and perhaps get a variance, we put up a smaller attractive sign, which was soon hit by cars at least twice.

The improvements in our building and grounds did not obscure the fact that our building, in particular, needed to be upgraded. For three years, a small group of knowledgeable, concerned lay members and the ministers working with an architectural firm put together the draft of a Master Plan that was presented to the congregation in January of Decade Twenty Ten.

Making Ends Meet

Money is one of the important ways we express our values. Over the past five years (2006–2010), our expenses have averaged \$760,000. Of this amount, 60% or \$457,000 on average, has been devoted to staff, and 14% or \$110,000 on average to our building, grounds, and utilities. The remaining 25% or \$197,000 on average funds our program and administrative expenses and a strong social justice and outreach effort. To meet these expenses, total income has averaged \$764,000, with 75% or \$575,000 coming from congregational pledge payments with the balance of \$189,000 coming from plate collections, rental income, fund-raising events, and other sources. Our reserve funds are affected by several factors, most important in this period by the financial debacle late in the decade, but the average was approximately \$466,000 for the FY 2006 through 2010. Continuing in his decades-long role as the virtual CFO of church finances, George Easter is relied upon by ministers and lay leaders alike.

Memorable Happenings

Life's joys and sorrows kept happening, of course. Bob Cope, our minister from 1961 to 1976, died in 2004. The following year, Edward Frost retired from the UU Congregation of Atlanta; he had served our church from 1976 to 1989. Fred Ward, who was our first minister of religious education from 1968 to 1972, also passed away. Chris Reed's husband, J. D. Reed, a gifted author – his novel *Free Fall* was made into a movie – and senior editor of *People* magazine, died in June 2005.

John Wheeler was 96 when he died in 2008. Professor Wheeler was among the group of eminent Princeton University physicists who were involved in our church in its early days. He had experimented with Einstein's Theory of Relativity, created the term "Black Hole" and worked with Niels Bohr in Denmark and later on the Manhattan Project. Dr. Wheeler was involved in establishing the Leadership Leaves program of New Jersey, because he believed that ministers, like professors, needed sabbaticals to develop professionally and be involved in the denomination and larger society.

Adra Fairman, who signed the membership book on October 31, 1954, turned 97 in November 2009. Her memories of early days in the church were captured through a unique program called "Telling Our Stories" created by Linda Benson and Carol Haag in 2009. They began recording interviews of senior members of the congregation on videotape and completed nine additional interviews by year's end. Venerable Tony Tucker, in his mid-80s, brought out his story entitled *My Life, So Far*, describing what it was like growing up as a black man in the South, in the army (landing shortly after D-Day), and facing discrimination getting a job in New Jersey afterward.

New traditions came into being, such as the First Annual Harvest Dinner in 2004. Some carried on in changed ways – the January 1st Art Exhibit in 2006 had 32 works of art plus 6 musicians and 3 poets. The following year there were 3 musicians and 9 poets/storytellers. Another came to an end, Dinner Discussion, led by Hil Anderson, Mal Durbin, and Raj Nigam, after 32 years of a delicious dinners and speakers such as Pulitzer Prize winner Dr. James McPherson and Nobel Laureate Joseph Taylor, did not return in September 2009. The Spring Fair almost ended in 2009 because of a lack of chair people, but three members volunteered at the last minute.

There were notable visitors during the latter half of the decade. T. Colin Campbell, author of the *China Study* and brother of congregant Ron Campbell, filled our worship hall in November 2005. In June 2006, Dr. Dan Gottlieb, author and host of WWHY's "Voices in the Family" did the same with congregants and community members. A year later, one of the world's greatest environmentalists, John Seed, spoke to us. UU Neil Chetnik, author of *Father Loss*, gave a workshop for couples entitled "Love for the Long Run" in 2008.

Young adults in their 20s and 30s began offering a full program of activities in 2004 – their own DUNS group and website, movie nights, book group, and fellowship circle. Leadership retreats were held at Murray Grove where Forrest initiated a Coffee House with rollicking performances by young and old. The Murray Room Mural came into being because former Murray Grove President Carol Haag sat in that room alone and envisioned, on the large wall, the moving meeting of Thomas Potter and John Murray. It came into being when Elizabeth Peck painted the scene and other talented people projected it onto the wall. On March 14, 2009, young and old church members painted the mural.

Ted Fetter was one of three individuals in the nation inducted into the Warren Burger Society by Chief Justice John Roberts in 2006. The honor is awarded to those showing "exemplary commitment to improving the administration of Justice in the United States," which Ted had demonstrated in his work in the New Jersey court system. Ted also became president of the UUA Metro District Board, and it was a period when our members annually gave workshops at its annual meetings. The district presented the Rev. Carol Haag the first "Metro Award for

Excellence in Religious Education” at its May 2005 meeting. At the 2009 meeting, she and her husband Carl received the “Jerry Davidoff Award for Lifetime Achievement.”

UUCP attendance at the UUA General Assembly rose and fell. We had 15 members at the GA in St. Louis in 2006. Members participated in important ways at GA, but none more pronounced than Princeton Professor Melissa Harris-Lacewell who, in 2009, became the youngest person ever to present the annual Ware Lecture.

Final Notes

The development of a Relational Covenant for our congregation began in spring 2008. The committee tackling this worked long and hard, held a workshop on October 2, 2008, with 55 people in attendance, followed soon by a number of cottage meetings in homes that attracted 175 members, and finally presented it for a vote in the Annual Meeting on May 31, 2009, where it was adopted.

Forrest, in his February 2005 *Skylight*'s column, wrote: “I am working to make friends so I can stay at UUCP for a long time.” It is a difficulty that probably most single ministers face. However, in June 2006, Forrest told the congregation that the love of his life, Jill Miller, had reentered his life once more, along with her children Hannah and Noah. Forrest and Jill were married on May 10, 2008. The congregation was shocked to receive a letter from Forrest on March 31, 2009, stating that he was resigning his position as co-minister because he felt his “inability to balance my spiritual, family, and work lives, leading me to shortchange all three.” And, thus, on June 21, 2009, Forrest Gilmore gave “A Last Sermon” and he, Chris Reed, and the congregation went through a “Ritual of Release” together.

In May 2009, the Board met with Andrea Lerner, the district executive. She asked Board members if they would think of “going with one minister.” That question was not to be answered until the fall, when Meg Barnhouse would be with the congregation as our interim minister.

In August, Meg Barnhouse came home. Meg had graduated from the Princeton Theological Seminary and went forth into college teaching, pastoral counseling, and ministry at the UU Church of Spartanburg, SC. In addition, she was an author and contributor to NPR and had traveled nationwide as a speaker/songwriter and humorist. The congregation experienced her many gifts, plus a comforting wisdom that helped us in our two-year transition period of “self-examination and preparation.” Sunday Morning Forums started again with Meg “facilitating a safe and gentle discussion about” (1) “the best things about UUCP” and (2) “the ministers of this congregation.”

The Search Begins

The congregation began preparing for our next minister. Accordingly, a Ministerial Search Committee was proposed by the Nominating Committee, endorsed by the Board of Trustees, and elected by the congregation at a meeting on October 4, 2009. The Search Committee held an overnight retreat at Murray Grove, guided by the Rev. Craig Hirshberg, the UUA District Ministerial Settlement Representative (MSR). During this carefully crafted process, each of the seven members accepted assignments and Kathy Lehmann became the chair.

However, the question remained: what kind of a minister were we seeking? Chris Reed helped focus the answer when she announced that she would retire within two years.

Meg Barnhouse, with the help of the Board, organized a series of eight “cottage meetings” in members’ homes. Meg facilitated each meeting and stimulated discussion on the worst and best scenarios about each possible type of ministry, ending with a vote on each: Co-Ministers (8%); Lead, Second Minister (43%); Solo, DRE, Administrator (20%), and Solo, DRE, Executive Director (29%). The Board studied the data extracted from all the meetings and concluded that “our next called minister (should) be a lead minister.” They added, “It remains to be determined whether we will hire a second minister once Rev. Chris Reed retires or whether we will augment our administrative staff.”

In November, the Search Committee began meeting weekly for two hours to begin the almost two-year process of conducting a survey, gathering other information, interpreting all material, and meeting the deadlines for submitting the Congregational Record online and the Information Packet, also online. A timeline was created to keep the Search Committee on target for each element involved.

Leadership

Ministers – Dr. Paul S. Johnson (until 2002), Robert Latham, Interim (2002–2004), Forrest Gilmore (2004–2009), Christine Reed (1998–2011), Meg Barnhouse, Interim (2009–2011)
Church Presidents – Judy Malsbury (1999–2002), Sharon Copeland (2002–2005), Nancy Fiedler (2005–2006), Jordan Corn (2006–2007), Jeanne Carsten Thomas (2007–2009), Jonathan Sachs (2009–2011)