

# SO GREAT A VISION

A HISTORY OF THE  
MT. DIABLO UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH  
1951-1984  
BY BEVERLY SCAFF



MT. DIABLO BEACON PRESS

**This book is dedicated to the memory** of those who founded and nurtured this fellowship and the church they created – those persistent seekers whose desire to search together gave us this building, whose search for truth shaped this questing religion, whose vision for themselves and their children created this sacred space that is our community, our shared church family. Our present is lit by their dreams and their deeds.

[Adapted from the words of Emmy Lou Belcher]

The original book was scanned, using Online OCR (Optical Character Recognition) ([www.onlineocr.net/](http://www.onlineocr.net/))

Scanned, transcribed and edited by Daniel B. Zwickel

The title is set in AR BONNIE, the intro titles in AR BERKELEY, the chapter headers in AR CENA and the text in Palatino Linotype, originally called Palatino when designed in 1948 by German graphic designer Hermann Zapf, then revised 1999 for Linotype and Microsoft. Named after 16<sup>th</sup> century Italian master of calligraphy Giambattista Palatino, the font is based on the humanist fonts of the Italian Renaissance, which mirror the letters formed by a broad nib pen; this gives it a calligraphic grace. (Wikipedia)

Published in cooperation with Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church, 55 Eckley Lane, Walnut Creek, California.

Copyright © 1996 Beverly Scaff  
*All rights reserved*

# *Contents*

## **Part 1**

<b>Chapter I</b>	<b>The Fellowship Years, 1951–1960</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Chapter II</b>	<b>The Gilmartin Years</b>	
Part 1	The Early Years, 1961–1967	55
Part 2	The Later Years, 1967–1974	113
<b>Chapter III</b>	<b>The Road to Eckley Lane</b>	<b>169</b>
<b>Chapter IV</b>	<b>Years of Transition, 1975–1984</b>	
Part 1	Josiah Bartlett, Interim Minister, 1975	188
Part 2	Peter Christiansen, Minister, 1976–1982	198
Part 3	Til Evans and Bob Forbes, 1983	243

## **Part 2**

<b>Chapter V</b>	<b>The Human Potential Era, 1963–1974</b>	
Part 1	The Encounter Years	257
Part 2	The Extended Family Program	206
<b>Chapter VI</b>	<b>A History of Singles Activities</b>	<b>209</b>
<b>Chapter VII</b>	<b>Music and the Arts</b>	
Part 1	Musical Programs and the Choir	217
Part 2	The Coffeehouse Unicorn, Films	220

## **Chapter VIII The Focus on Children and Youth**

Part 1	The Religious Education of Children	223
Part 2	High School Programs: From LRY to YRUU	267
Part 3	Programs for Junior Highers	293
Part 4	The Youth Adult Committee	298
Part 5	Rurban School and the Switchboard	303

## **Chapter IX Civil Rights, Social Justice and Peace**

Part 1	The Early Years, 1951–1964	306
Part 2	Civil Rights and the East Bay Project	313
Part 3	World Without War and the Mt. Diablo Peace Center	322
Part 4	Other areas of protest and action, 1964–1984	328

## *Biographies & pages*

Allen, Bob & Betty	36-7, 230
Baker, Bob	188
Baltzo, Andy	9-10, 322
Bartlett, Josiah	143
Belletini, Mark	144
Biederman, Jack & Mavis	28-29
Blake, Marge	25
Bortin, David	3
Chase, Chuck & Lillie	20-21
Christiansen, Peter	151
Diller, Howard & Nancy	31-33
Evans, Til	164, 185, 254
Forbes, Bob	185
Ford, Don & Jewell	22-24
Gilmartin, Aron	43-128
Glover, David & Rose	18-19
Hill, Orville & Stella	308
Houser, Don & Jane	5
Hurley, Dick & Marion	140, 232
Johnson, George	313
Kent, Glenn	1-2
King, Robin & Billie	71-2
Matson, Howard	22
Melnicoe, Norma	26
Pierson, Dave & Florence	27-30
Reid Soskin, Betty	12-15
Scaff, Lloyd & Beverly	76
Steenberg, Bill	130
Steenberg, Marilyn	234
Toaspern, Bill & Marie	11, 226
Weller, Peter	6, 225

# *Appendixes*

Boards of Trustees, 1951–1992

Ministers, 1960–1984

Church School Superintendents and Directors of Religious Education,  
1954–1994

Ministerial Interns, 1955–1994

Newsletter Editors, 1957–1994

Hungry-U's, 1962–1989

## *Acknowledgments*

I wish to thank the more than fifty people who graciously contributed their time and wonderful memories during personal interviews, telephone conversations, and in letters. There would of course be no history without this rich input. I have tried to include profiles of all the Fellowship members I could reach, and a representative sample of those who later contributed to the direction the church has taken.

To those whom I did not interview I can only say the story continues, and they will surely be a part of the next volume in the life of our church community. I have tried to include as much as possible preserved in newsletters, Orders of Service, Board and committee minutes, and correspondence. Particularly in the early years, records are sparse. Some don't exist at all, for instance, newsletters for 1974 and 1975, which was surely my error. Others will know of anecdotes and activities which should have been included. Perhaps they can form a supplement (along with the correction of errors!)

Several people must be singled out for special mention. I should probably never have had the courage to undertake this task if it hadn't been for the ongoing encouragement of David Sammons. He offered numerous suggestions, and read the completed manuscript, putting comments on almost every page! Dave Bortin was of enormous help not only in dealing with countless computer glitches, but in reading chapters of the early years, explaining and clarifying the period before my time. Whatever the errors they are surely mine.

My women's group of sixteen years (Bonnie Daines, Til Evans, Janet King, Joyce Mohrman, and Marcia Newey) has been supportive and encouraging since the idea first tentatively occurred to me four years ago. They gave me the confidence to continue. My daughters Jennifer, Mary K., Jeannie and Judy have encouraged in every step of the way. Finally, my love and appreciation for my husband Lloyd who has ungrudgingly given me the tools, the space, and the affirmation that has made it possible to complete this labor of love.

## CHAPTER I — THE FELLOWSHIP YEARS, 1951-1960

On April 25, 1951, a small group of people in the Diablo Valley area met with The Rev. Frank Ricker, Executive Director of the Pacific Coast Unitarian Council [now Pacific Central District], to form a Unitarian Fellowship. The nearest Unitarian churches were in Oakland and Berkeley. Gini Merrill, who worked for the district, later a member of the Fellowship, remembers seeing their names in the office. She marveled that anyone would live out there — “that dry little place” — when they could live in Berkeley!

Mr. and Mrs. Charles Johnson provided their home for the meeting. Those who attended were Glen and Hazel Kent, Dave and Bonnie Bortin, and Mrs. Shirley Hawley. The first issue of the fellowship newsletter, *The Diablo Times*, published in September 1957, described this meeting: “... a stalwart group of renegades (numbering less than ten) formed what was to become the Valley Fellowship.”

Before moving to Pleasant Hill, the Kents were members of the Berkeley church. They felt it was too far away to attend with their children every Sunday. The minister, Dr. J. Raymond Cope, and secretary, Maizie Newman, shared names of members and friends who lived in the area. The district office provided names of area Unitarians who subscribed to *The Christian Register*, a Unitarian publication.

The organizers also had names of those who belonged to the Church of the Larger Fellowship, UU's in areas where there was no fellowship or church. When the American Unitarian Association in Boston received their request, Dave Bortin told us Director of Extension Munroe Husbands was reported to have said “Diablo? Where in ‘ell is that?”

The group sent out invitations to a public meeting at the Walnut Creek Veterans Memorial Building on south Locust. Twenty-two came, on a Sunday evening in May. \* Frank Ricker addressed the meeting chaired by Glen Kent. They voted to form a fellowship, chose an organizing committee to draw up bylaws, and elected officers.

---

\* The Bortins, Joe Clarke, Joe Geiger, Shirley Hawley, Virginia Hubbard, the Johnsons, the Judds, the Keats, Glen Kent, Mabel King, the O'Haras, Frank Ricker, Jack Tarlen, Ray van Tassell, Sigrid Webber and Mrs. Zucco



## 2 So Great Vision

### 1951 – Glen Kent, President

At a meeting on July 30, 1951 they sent a letter of application from the Valley Unitarian Fellowship to the American Unitarian Association requesting Fellowship status. Fourteen people signed the letter including the newly elected officers: Glen Kent, president, David Bortin, vice president and treasurer and Virginia Hubbard, secretary. Joseph H. Clarke Jr. was appointed chair of the Religious Education Committee. The AUA accepted the Valley Unitarian Fellowship into membership September 19.

The application stated, "We plan to hold meetings twice monthly, Monday evenings, at the Veterans Memorial Building, and expect meetings will be guest speakers and discussion." They did not check "worship," one of the choices. We do not have the names of the eighteen charter members, but they included the Kents, the Bortins, Byron and Virginia Hubbard, and probably the O'Haras, the Judds, Mabel King, Sigrid Webber, Roger Decker, and Jack and Helena Tarlen.

Glen and Hazel Kent moved to Pleasant Hill in 1950. Glen's brother Jack had graduated from Starr King School for the Ministry. A medical doctor, Glen was profoundly disabled by arthritis, and his condition continued to deteriorate. He was well cared for by his wife Hazel, a nursing supervisor. The discovery of cortisone changed their lives. Glen returned to school in public health. He served as head of the Contra Costa County Health Department for several years.

Hazel returned to a career of homemaking, parenting, and community service. She participated in the founding and nurturing of the Valley Unitarian Fellowship, which met in their home in the early months. The Kents were the two most responsible for the founding of the fellowship. After Glen's death, Hazel continued to support the church until her death in 1993.\* Meetings continued through the summer at the Veterans Building.

Years before the freeway, nearby Mt. Diablo Boulevard carried traffic to East Bay cities, and to Main Street, the main north and south route. Trucks rumbling by made

---

\* David Bortin, newsletter article, January, 1993

it difficult to hear, and the atmosphere was austere, barren and none too clean. They began meeting alternate Saturday evenings in members' homes.

Meetings were primarily discussions and social occasions. Dave Bortin recalls potluck dinners and discussion of material from Beacon Press and the AUA. The Fellowship Office sent mimeographed sermons as discussion starters, usually short position papers on theological controversies. A couple of titles are typical: "Jesus: God, man, or myth?" "God: person, force, or invention?"

Attendance averaged between ten and twenty, with a mailing list of about forty families. Dave described the meetings as like seminars — lots of fun, but with serious intellectual, and personal ethical and religious issues to grapple with.

This was during the Joe McCarthy era when public speech was chilled by the fear of being reported to a government investigating agency or legislative committee as a left-wing sympathizer. For many, such a stigma could threaten their careers. The Fellowship offered a safe environment where discussion could be open and unrestricted. Members were mostly recent college graduates, and a free exchange of ideas was important to them.

Dave Bortin described the early members as "come-outers," dissatisfied with their religious upbringing. They were mostly anti-church and anti-clerical, and not particularly interested in listening to sermons. They wanted education for themselves and religious education for their children, and a Unitarian presence in their community. Creating their own religious group appealed to them, with their strong beliefs in the individual's search for truth and meaning, the democratic process, and the inherent worth and dignity of every person. No one was going to speak for them!

Dave recalls that as young parents, he and Bonnie's primary reason for forming a group of like-minded Unitarians was to provide a religious education for their children consistent with their liberal religious beliefs. According to Dave, the original members were all imbued with the philosophy of Surrnerhill — trust children to know what they need, value them and listen to them, so that they will know they *matter*. They were identified with the new approach to children's religious education envisioned by Sophia Fahs, Dorothy Spoerl, and the Beacon Curriculum, such as *Today's Children and Yesterdays Heritage*, and *Consider the Children*, (Chapter 8).

## 4 So Great Vision

### 1953 — Dave Bortin, President

Dave Bortin was elected the second President of the Fellowship. In June 1953, he and Glen Kent invited everyone on the mailing list to a meeting at the Kents' to plan a children's program in the fall. Those who had carried the R.E. program felt others needed to pitch in. No one came, and the two couples spent the evening playing bridge. This was a low point in the history of the group. It seemed questionable whether it could survive. There was no children's program in 1953 and 1954. Dave said that except for the few couples who got together socially, the fellowship all but disbanded.

**Dave Bortin** was born in St. Louis, and came to California when he was 12. His first memory of religion was his aunt's synagogue pre-school class, having an argument with the teacher who insisted the color of the ocean was blue when Dave knew it was green. When he was 11, Dave and his mother attended a nearby reform temple that had a progressive rabbi. David was adamant that he would not learn Hebrew. They passed a Unitarian church on the way to the temple. His mother told him they might have considered that church if it were not for Hitler, whose influence was felt even in South St. Louis, which had a heavy German population in the 1930s. As they became more aware of the treatment of the Jews in Germany, she felt it important to maintain their identification as Jews.

When David was in the Army Air Corps during World War II, his brother Harry wrote him regularly telling him about the religion of Thomas Jefferson and Tom Paine, sneaking in information about modern Unitarianism. During the war David was stationed in Salt Lake City, and tried out the Unitarian church there. The minister was Dr. J. Raymond Cope. Dr. Cope became minister of the Berkeley church about the time David was discharged and moved to Berkeley to continue his education. Cope was a father figure for David, and wanted him to pursue a career in the ministry, but David felt it was not right for him.

David, his wife, Bonnie, and their two children, Ben and Millie, moved to Concord in 1950. He was ready to help organize a religious home for himself and his family. Dave has been active in the Fellowship and the church ever since. He has served on the Board, twice as president, and has chaired most committees in the church. As a lawyer he gives generously of

his time to the church, and in civil rights. The church has been shaped by his leadership, and we are grateful for his years of dedicated service.

#### **1954 – Virginia Hubbard, President**

Although the fellowship was almost inactive in 1953, the need was there. The Diablo area experienced explosive growth as cheap housing and a rising birth rate (the Baby Boom) brought new families to the suburbs. It was this second generation of members who made the continuation of the fellowship possible.

As new people became active they revived the floundering group, and started it on an expansion that has continued ever since. Fellowship members were eager to find a place to meet with classes for the children. Dave Bortin said meeting at the Kents' created a sense that this was the Kents' group, heightening the wish for "a place of our own."

#### **1955 – Nelson Oldford, President**

In the spring of 1954 Nelson Oldford was elected president, Dorothy Gauld corresponding secretary, Jane Houser recording secretary, and Harry Bickerton treasurer.\* They met at the First Christian Church in Concord. The group appointed a program committee, a committee on religious education to study the establishment of a church school, and a planning committee to explore future expansion of the fellowship.

By the fall of 1954, they had grown to an average attendance of about thirty. Episcopal minister Philip Daunton offered his church, and the group began meeting at St. Michael's in Concord Saturday evenings. Dave Bortin recalls many interesting meetings there, including a reading of Arthur Miller's "The Crucible."

Dr. Cope, minister of the Berkeley church, discussed "Of Man and Men." — Frank Ricker, director of Pacific Coast Unitarian Council, spoke on "Ancient Roots of Liberalism in Religion." Dr. Arnold Crompton, Minister of the First Unitarian Church in Oakland, and Dean Josiah Bartlett of Starr King School for the Ministry

---

\*Also serving on the Board were Don Houser, Max Fisher, Arnold Durlacher, Roger Decker and Muriel Stratton.

## **6 So Great Vision**

discussed “When Unitarians Worship.” They were again meeting in the homes of fellowship members.

The religious education committee sponsored an end-of-the-year picnic in Tilden Park in June. In July interested members met to discuss the church school program to begin in September, and the problem of where to hold it.

### **1955–56 — Don Houser, President**

On October 11, 1955, the group was incorporated, and the name changed to Diablo Unitarian Fellowship. Craig Randall did the legal work. Don Houser was elected president, Roger Decker treasurer and Durlacher, Roger Decker finance committee chair and Muriel Stratton secretary. Also on the Board were Max Fisher, Arnold Durlacher, Dorothy and James Gaud. Serving on the Finance committee were Jack van Zandt and Sigrid Webber. Religious Education superintendent Arnold Durlacher was an elementary school principal, deeply interested in religious education.

**Don and Jane Houser** moved to Concord in the early '50s. They heard about the Fellowship from Grace Calder and the Bortins when they joined a co-op nursery school. They were seeking a group of like-minded people like those in Corvallis where they attended college. Jane worked for the Methodist Church, and members had been very supportive when their twins were born.

Jane remembers meeting in homes. There was no program for children. She enjoyed those evenings out with a babysitter for the children, but they were eager to have a religious education program. Don remembers writing to the AUA for materials, and as always, there were spirited discussions, some members feeling they should design their own. The Beacon Press religious education series became the core teaching materials. We continue to use them, as they have evolved over the years.

### **August 1955 — Pine Street Rented**

As the fellowship continued to grow the need for their own home grew stronger. Psychologically it was important to be together to build a feeling of community. It was a controversial issue, many feeling that it was too risky to take

on a collective financial commitment. Who would be responsible for making sure the rent was paid? Could these few people assume this burden?

In August 1955, for \$75 per month, they rented a small, two-story house at 1415 Pine just behind the North Main Street skating rink (near where the BART tracks now cross over North Main). They held Open House Friday evening, August 26. It is important to realize what a small group of people began this experiment, and what a courageous leap of faith it was to commit them-selves to the responsibility of the Pine Street house. They held Sunday morning worship services for the first time. The Fellowship requested an annual pledge of \$100, and they were on their way.

Joyce Macbeth (Hesse) wrote in May 1971, about her first contact with the Fellowship:

*"I'd heard about the Unitarians and someone said, 'Call Dave Bortin' which I did. A small boy named Ben was on the extension phone and I still remember clearly his enthusiasm.*

*"A gal I'd recently come to know and love, Betty Reid, took me with her to our first Unitarian Christmas service. This was in 1955. I've forgotten now the minister's name — he later went to the Honolulu church [Frank Ricker]. He really gave us something special and we've both been around ever since, Betty [Reid] Soskin and I kind of on the periphery. Co-op had a head start, got the edge, and I guess became my primary church.*

*"Pine Street was my kids' church school experience. They never were turned on, unfortunately, and it was for them I made such effort at a happier church background than I'd had. Oh, well, they dig it even if they don't get involved. It gave us all Ric Masten, who's very special with them."*

### **Starr King Students**

The first service in the new Fellowship House, in September 1955, was "Opening Day and the Year Ahead," given by Starr King students Dan Week and Peter Weller. Dan Week's sermon on September 25 was "A Liberal Religion." Don Houser remembers that Starr King was a great help to the young Fellowship, sending student interns to meet with them and providing speakers.

## 8 So Great Vision

In the fall of 1955 Dr. Horton Colbert, Director of In-Service Training, arranged to have Peter Weller and Dan Weak work with the Fellowship. During the 1955–1956 year they delivered sermons, attended Executive committee meetings, did some visitations, and R.E. consultation. The Fellowship paid seven cents a mile for their travel. Peter Weller, a former engineering student from the University of Michigan, was a World War II and Korean War veteran. Dan Weck, a former freelance writer and psychiatric technician at Agnew State Hospital, had received a BA from San Jose State. Both were working toward a Divinity degree. This was the beginning of a long and wonderful relationship with Starr King that continues to this day.

**Peter Weller** shared his recollections of this year:

*“The Fellowship took an ambitious step forward the summer of 1955. It included not only leasing the house on Pine Street and the arrangements with Dan and me, but the offering of a two hour religious education program.*

*“The Fellowship held adult services concurrently with church school, with Dan and me sharing the opening service, alternating after that. The service was held on the sun-porch, with church school occupying the house. But the thirty-two adults at the first service were more than could be accommodated. I tried to make something positive of the cramped space and distracting sounds, suggesting these were signs of vitality and future promise. I’m not sure it was convincing. The next Sunday the service was held in the living room, better for adults, but not for the children.*

*“A few weeks later the Walnut Creek Women’s Club, a mile away, was rented. It was an attractive meeting place, leaving the house for the church school. It could only be temporary, as costs for the two places was \$1,401 month — too much then.*

*“The next step was to begin holding adult services Sunday evenings. Attendance dropped from 30–40 to between 15 and 20. One of my services in January had six attending. We had an unusually good discussion that evening — everyone participated!*

*“After a month of alternating Sundays Dan and I realized this was more than we could do, given the limits of our involvement with the Fellowship. We agreed to each do one Sunday per month with guest speakers one Sunday, and lay leaders the fourth. Lay services proved to be a special challenge. Most of the members were new to the fellowship and Unitarianism, and conducting worship services was quite*

*intimidating. They required several planning meetings, and it took more time to prepare than if we'd simply done them ourselves. In due time the process paid off, and by the following spring some outstanding lay services were being offered with little or no help from us.*

*"At a social action forum, members learned of a need for a mental health referral agency. In February the Pine Street house became the first meeting place of the newly organized Mental Health Society.*

*"In January the first pledge canvass was held. Canvassing was done by couples. There was one woman member whose husband was not active, so she and I were given the names of several on the mailing list who did not attend. We visited our four families, who were all sympathetic to Unitarianism, and received us cordially, but the Fellowship did not have a high priority for them. We received a \$3 contribution, plus \$1 to remain on the mailing list. But the active member canvass was a great success.*

*"There were very few 'seasoned veterans' in the Fellowship in 1955, so there were none to serve as mentors to Dan and me, trying to learn how to become ministers. I'd had no significant church experience, hence the 'blind leading the blind'. I had so much to learn — writing sermons, preparing services, trying to be a helpful presence at long and wearisome Board and committee meetings. The people of the Fellowship were gracious and accepting of us. It was a good year for me and I learned a lot, although I wasn't sure I'd been much help to the group."*

Starr King student **Fred Rutledge** worked with the fellowship during 1957-58. In answer to our request for his reminiscences he wrote:

*"Ah yes, I remember Walnut Creek. There I performed for the first time a dedication of a child, Dorian Reid, daughter of Betty and Mel Reid, her adopted brother serving as godfather. And there I performed my first funeral for 25-year-old Leslie Gaboury, who died as a result of a drunken driver. James Mead, also an intern at the fellowship, assisted.*

*"I remember a communion service — with unity and commonality of bread — not anyone's body, but the staff of life becoming our body, and milk — 'nature's perfect food' — body fluid but not blood. (It was not appreciated — attempts to put new wine in old skins rarely are).*



## 10 So Great Vision

*"I remember a service of poetry and song put together by several of us. I can say now (I was too young to say then), 'Life for me ain't no crystal stairs' — Langston Hughes, I believe. I still have the reel-to-reel tape used. I am happy to hear that something I shared affected Andy Baltzo's life. [See Andy's biography.] Long ago I was told, 'ministers may never know what profound effects they have on people.' The same is true of parents, teachers, store clerks, and children — an obtuse reference to Countee Cullen's trip to Baltimore long past.*

*"The Fellowship met in a small house, adults in the living-dining room and the children in the bedrooms. The communion on Thanksgiving Sunday was at the house, 20–30 people sitting around the walls. For the poetry service I recall we were in rows facing the tape recorder.*

*"Now I'm retired, clerking in my daughter TIA's costume shop (she was three years old at the Fellowship). Her older sister Cyndi and younger brother and sister are all here in Baltimore now. Ann, my wife, still works as she did then, but now is a researcher at Johns Hopkins University Medical School."*

The Fellowship appreciated the ministerial assistance of Starr King, but not without reservation. To quote from a letter to the congregation written by the treasurer, Roger Decker, *"Your officers were somewhat conservative from the viewpoint of denominational advisors who say the answer to our desire for more services and maturity to become a beloved community or a church is to hire a full-time minister."*

A Starr King graduate and ordained minister, Richard Fresco, requested work with the Fellowship as a paid minister for 1955–56. Roger Decker advised him they were in no position to provide a minimum salary, and felt it necessary to wait until membership was sixty-five, and could qualify for denominational help. They did not want to lose the sense of ministering to each other, or risk overextending themselves.

Roger had been a friend of Dave Bortin's for a couple of years before joining us. He retained his membership in the Concord Christian Church, but expressed his "free-form religion" by working actively in the Fellowship. It was he who insisted we incorporate, and paid the fees out of his own pocket. Roger's life was cut short in his early forties, and his memorial service in 1953 was one of the first conducted as a Sunday Service at the Women's Club.

An evening discussion series on social and economic topics continued. They held a Sunday evening series with Dr. Cope, called "A Liberal's Interpretations of the Religious Life." Dan Weck next spoke on "A Liberal Religion." There were four Sunday school classes for 3-12 year olds, meeting for two hours!

The budget for 1955-56 again included an item of \$300 for a building fund. The total budget was \$3,155, and membership was about thirty active families. Some felt the Fellowship was too small to devote money and energy to actively seek property or a building. Don Houser wrote articles for the newsletter cautioning against this before they had a larger group of contributors. Jane also was reluctant to see the group grow. She felt they would lose the close relationships and sense of community. "Ministry to each other" would be lost if the Fellowship became larger.

The Program committee presented a series on economic, social and religious issues one Wednesday evening each month at the Fellowship House. Program committee chair Jane Houser wrote the speakers, "*... we felt that we, as individuals in the Unitarian Fellowship, need most a chance to consider ourselves in individual and group social action in a general way, rather than immediately plunging into specifics.*"

Fellowship members like most groups in the '50s, did not elect to be actively involved in social action. This was to change markedly during the '60s, with the changing times and our first minister, the highly proactive Aron Gilmartin. The Fellowship held a buffet supper to benefit the UN International Children's Emergency Fund, and an international potluck dinner to benefit the UN Rehabilitation and Relocation Program.

Speakers included Ray Cope, Dr. Horton Colbert, Oakland Unitarian Church minister Arnold Crompton, Dr. Hugh Coffey of the U.C. Department of Psychology, Contra Costa County Chief Health Officer Dr. Hendrik Blum, Russell Jorgensen of the American Friends Service Committee, and Lloyd Morain, President of the American Humanist Association.

Peter Weller and Dan Week spoke regularly Sunday mornings. Dan gave a sermon entitled "Worship for Liberals," and Peter, "What's the Point of It All?" and "Many Paths and Many Pitfalls." Don Houser arranged with the Women's Club to hold four Sunday services there during October and November, 1955, for \$15 per Sunday. It was too costly to pay for the Pine Street house and the Women's Club. In October 1955, the Fellowship sought membership in the Contra Costa

## 12 So Great Vision

Council of Churches. Much thought and effort went into this, but in the end the Council could not accept “non-Christian” members.

### 1956–57 — Eugene Bohan, President

Lillie Chase remembers Gene Bohan as a fascinating man — handsome, an excellent speaker, philosophical. She believes he held a position in social work. She and Chuck felt he was a good president, and led in a very quiet way. Lillie remembers he spoke of the protective covering we all have, and that we never reveal our true selves. Lillie took issue with this, feeling life is too short to not reveal herself — it’s essential in human relationships.

Joan Bohan remembers, “Those were exciting years at the Fellowship, leading to the establishment of the church. We had fun, controversy, and of course, ‘spirituality.’ Gene and I led LRY (Liberal Religious Youth) for a while, Virginia Hubbard and I started the Women’s Alliance, and the Worship committee was one of my favorites. We had Starr King students and enjoyed working with them. I guess our spirituality culminated in a dance of worship (if I remember correctly) by Lillie Chase on the side of Mt. Diablo, plus a Halloween sermon with rice in the little house on Pine Street reverberating with T. S. Eliot’s “Hollow Men.”

### 1957–58 — Andy Baltzo, President

At the annual meeting held in March, Andy Baltzo was elected president of the Board.\* The congregation elected Bill Toaspern chair of religious education, Ruth Cusack public forum (program) chair, and Nancy (“Tim”) Diller, chair of Sunday services. Don Houser began publishing the first regular newsletter, “The Diablo Times,” in the fall of 1957.

**Andy Baltzo** was the seventh president of the Fellowship. Andy’s mother gave up Catholicism when he was three. He had little interest in religion, feeling it was fairy tales. She was a humanitarian, and impressed on Andy the importance of doing good in the world. In college he asked the mother of a friend, “What’s your secret for raising such a wonderful family?” She

---

\* Arnold Durlacher vice president, Ethel Cole recording secretary, Bonnie Bortin corresponding secretary, and Clark Calder, treasurer.

replied, "Take them to church." He thought little about this until he and Deb took their two children to the Lutheran church in which Deb had been raised. Andy was appalled at what they were teaching, and they did not return.

Andy returned to UC Berkeley after serving as a Conscientious Objector lab technician in World War II. When he told his two best friends we could have a nuclear war, they thought he was crazy. Andy was so overwhelmed by their response he didn't mention this again. As a child Andy was timid and introverted. He was laughed at when he raised his hand in grade school, and said he never raised his hand again, even in college.

In 1954 while working at Chevron he asked a friend if he had heard of Unitarianism. The friend told Andy it's a religion that goes into philosophy and psychology. That sounded good to him, so he called the Berkeley church. They told him there was a little Fellowship in the Mt. Diablo area. Andy came to a gathering at the house on Pine Street. He was thoroughly shaken, realizing that at last, this could be the place for him. Later he asked how one became a member. Someone told him, "You want to think about that." So he did not join. He felt the people in the Fellowship wanted to keep it small.

Andy immediately got involved. He joined the Program committee, which planned the services. They met irregularly. Andy felt the adults should have a service every week, and soon they did. Students from Starr King were helpful. He remembers one service by Fred Rutledge about death. Fred said that death is a good thing because it makes us aware that we have to really value the time we have - it can end any time. They also had speakers from the Humanist Association. Andy felt their values are the same as ours.

By 1957 Andy was on the Nominating committee. No one could be found to serve as president. The committee asked Andy, and he served during the 1957-58 church year. He was amazed that everyone came to him for answers — the first time he experienced himself as an authority figure. Arnold Durlacher served as vice president, Bonnie Bortin corresponding secretary, and Ethel Cole recording secretary.

## 14 So Great Vision

Someone noticed that Andy had not signed the Membership Book, heeding the warning to think about it first. After serving as president six months, he joined in October 1957. Andy planned to quit Chevron and return to teaching, but deferred for a year to devote full time to the Fellowship. This was the first place he could be himself — to say the things he believed and still be accepted, and he wanted it for everyone. He remembers Dave Bortin saying you can go to the Co-op and you're a co-opian, the Democratic Club and you're a democrat, but at the Unitarian Church you can be yourself. This meant a lot to Andy.

Andy founded the Mt. Diablo Peace Center, covered in Chapter 9.

Sunday services included Starr King Dean Josiah Bartlett who spoke on the training of religious leaders, and Horton Colbert, speaking on "The Way of Liberal Religion." An evening meeting featured Russell Jorgensen speaking on "Group Action is Effective."

In May 1957, the Fellowship rented the Walnut Creek Women's Club for adult services. It was too crowded at the Pine Street house for adults and children. They also met the first Wednesday night each month with guest speakers "of interest to members and the public." Evening interest groups met at the Fellowship House on Pine Street. Bill Toaspern was elected chair of the Religious Education committee, and served until April 1958.

**Bill and Marie Toaspern** moved to Concord in 1949. Marie taught kindergarten and Bill taught high school chemistry. They attended the Presbyterian church, but found it very conservative; it did not reflect the values they wanted for their children.

The Toasperns heard about the Unitarian Fellowship from Harry and Nona Bickerton. Bill and Marie attended the fellowship — not for its religious content, but because they considered themselves humanists, and appreciated the intellectual stimulation and fellowship of its members. Bill particularly feels strongly that religion probably does more harm than good.

The Toasperns were among those who did not want the Fellowship to become a church, and did not want a minister. They did not feel the need for someone in a position of authority. Bill said that sometimes the need to

maintain an organization becomes an end in itself, and we lose sight of the reasons for its existence.

They continued to attend after Aron Gilmartin came, while their son John was in the nursery, but 4H Club activities began taking more of their time. Marie served as historian, and began saving news clippings, which have been a great help in compiling this history.

Bill and Marie still support the church because it is important to them that there is a place in the community where people think for themselves. She feels they might be more involved if they were not so busy with other things. Bill is very active in community theater and children's acting, and Marie is a weaver, but they have remained "friends of the church."

In April 1957, Rev. Colbert and Fred Rutledge proposed a series of discussions on the philosophy of Unitarianism, and other subjects suggested by the Fellowship. Four students from Starr King presented the series.

Maria Durlacher and Helen Schermer organized a Membership committee, to visit new members, and make special visits as needed. In May Nancy Lorber was appointed chair when Helen resigned because of ill health.

The Board appointed Tim Diller chair of the Program committee in May. They called inactive members to learn if they were still interested. The Membership Book contains the Membership Roster of the Valley Unitarian Fellowship, Fall 1954, with twenty-nine signatures. This is apparently a second signing in a new book, and the earliest record we have.

It is interesting that the Planning committee considered renting Shadelands Ranch. The owners decided not to sell, and it is now an historical museum. The Planning committee investigated many housing possibilities. The Board voted to continue at the Women's Club.

Peter Weller gave the service May 26, on "Leadership in Liberal Religion," and Fred Rutledge was scheduled for the first service in June. A swim party and picnic at Betty Reid's followed the last June service, Youth Sunday.

### **Betty Reid**

Betty and Mel Reid moved to Walnut Creek in the summer of 1952. They grew up in a small community of well-to-do, well-integrated Negroes

## 16 *So Great Vision*

[politically correct in the '50s] in Oakland. Betty's father and grandfather were architects. Lionel Wilson, son of another of these families, was the mayor of Oakland for many years. His brother Harold was a minister at MDUUC in 1969.

In 1945 the Reids opened a music store in Oakland. As the store prospered, they decided to build a home in the suburbs, as many young families were doing. The Reids chose a site in Walnut Creek. The bank did not approve their loan, which surprised them, since they'd had no trouble getting a loan for their business. Apparently the bank would have been glad to underwrite the loan if it had been for a home in Oakland, but not for one in a white suburban community. Betty knew they had a right to live here, and she found the way to say this publicly. They obtained the loan through a white real estate agent.

Betty grew up in the Catholic church. She began attending the one nearest her new home with her three sons — eight-year-old Rick, three-year-old Bobbie, and David, a toddler. She was aware that here at least she was not seen as "other," but could be anonymous. Everyone faced the altar, concentrating on something else. Rick was in catechism class and Betty was uncomfortable with the unquestioning rote memorization.

The first overt racism she experienced was in a diner across the street from the church. The waitress told her "We're closed," when Betty entered with her three children. Betty had to find a way to explain to them they had been refused service because they were not white. The shock of this encounter so close to the church, coupled with her negative feelings about what her son was learning, marked the end of her Catholicism.

Before moving to Walnut Creek Betty attended a couple of programs at the Berkeley Unitarian Church. When Helen Scharmer asked her to come to a meeting of the Fellowship at the Bickertons, she was happy to do so. Berkeley minister Ray Cope spoke. She liked his intellectual honesty and openness. This group was not based on faith without reason, dogma or hypocrisy. She described being struck by the quality of ordinariness — she was not responded to positively or negatively because of her color. Here she could express her anger in a safe environment.

One of her earliest memories is a call from Dave Bortin asking her to accompany him to a neighborhood meeting in Pleasant Hill dealing with a

black family moving there. Apparently these people did not perceive Betty as black, because many negative comments were made. Betty is sure this would not have happened if they had known she was not “one of them.”

Betty finally stood up and told them that she and her family had been living in Walnut Creek for some time and none of the dire things they feared had happened. She was sure they would not happen in Pleasant Hill, either. Betty then left the meeting, and several left with her. The black family moved in without incident.

Betty tells of a big black dog that befriended her children, spending much time at their home. She later learned that the dog's name was Nig, and realized why the dog's owners could not call him home. Helen Scharrner, Grace Calder, and Betty were setting up chairs in the Pine Street house when she told this story. They doubled up with laughter. She knows that race can never be an issue when we can laugh about it together.

Betty describes the Fellowship, this small experiment in liberal religion, as possessing “humility.” Members were young families experiencing a new beginning. They'd just rented this rundown little bungalow out on the edge of town that needed so much care and effort. It was a wonderful feeling, they had nowhere to go but up. All were new to the community, to the religion, and to each other. They were embarked on an uncharted course, conscious of establishing their own religion. Betty remembers they were proud to be on what they sensed was the leading edge.

Betty's children had been the motivation for returning to the Catholic church, but she came to the Fellowship for herself, and knew this would be right for her children as well. She had cut her ties with Berkeley and was aware that she was establishing a new life for herself and her family. They had found a home — the only black family in a white church. Mel and Betty signed the Membership book in November 1955.

In November 1958, with the approval of the Board, Betty started the Friday Night Open House at Pine Street. Later they met in homes, a more pleasant atmosphere. Betty presented the Thanksgiving service with Starr King intern Gene Bridges, and in March 1959, was elected vice president of the Board.

The first time she met Aron Gilmartin here to candidate in 1959, she sensed there was something special about him. It was the first objective



support she'd experienced, and she found him personally empowering. She felt she could be her total self, and that Gil responded to her with authenticity. For the first time she was aware that she personally, and the church, had the potential to affect the community. She felt the people of the church represented the leadership of the community and that they *did* make a difference to the moral and religious climate. She feels the people who were a part of those early years lived the richest part of the groups history. The community was still small, and their efforts were effective.

Betty grew up feeling at home in a white world. The siege of Birmingham was a powerful consciousness-raising experience for her. When she saw and heard the people inside that Birmingham church singing "Before I'd be a Slave" she knew she had to sing it at Gil's service that day. Betty had never thought of herself as a singer, but had to bear witness to this tragedy before her friends. No one attending remained unmoved. Betty's songs became a rich and powerful heart of the fellowship and church for many years.

Several church people prepared a float for the Walnut Festival Parade to protest the bombing of the Birmingham church and the killing of the four little girls. Dave Pierson painted banners for the car. Carol Pierson and other LRY young people carried a large banner. George and Mollie Fujioka, Robin King, and Betty were in the car. They waited two hours for permission to join the parade. Betty heard hissing along the route, but remembers Billie King waving to them triumphantly as they passed.

Betty suffered a breakdown when her fourth child was born, a daughter, Dorrie, who is retarded. She knows that the love and support of her church community helped her to recover from this tragedy.

One of her dearest memories is of Jewell Ford, who chose to be her special nurse when Betty had major surgery. Jewell was with her when she went into surgery, and by her side when she woke. Betty felt cared for by a stronger love than even that of her own family. That is what the church was for her. It made it possible for her to become the centered, focused person who has since become a driving force in the black community of Oakland.

Betty realizes she was privileged to live in a time and place where it was possible to act, and take strong risks that could make a difference. She

feels most people don't get this opportunity, or perhaps don't choose to do so.

She says, "For twenty-five years I saw myself as a bridge between my people of color and my people in this church. I am no longer a bridge, I have had to choose sides. I have chosen an inner city side. I don't want to change the minds of people about civil rights or racism. I simply want to model what I believe. I don't think you can teach people to be respectful. They learn it by being respected. This works for me."

Speaking of Betty, Eve Gilmartin has written: "My memory lingers on your ability to stand alone, to articulate your insights with clarity and passion, your songs shared with us, whose lyrics and music came out of what you call your "poet place." They moved us to tears and laughter. They were sung in times of celebration and tragedy. In the late '60s when the church stood in support of the Black Caucus you were at the heart of that birth of Black awareness and power, interpreting for us so that we could find our way. It has been hard to let go of your physical presence, but your real presence remains and inspires us."

Betty continues to manage her family's successful music store, which has been a neighborhood gathering place for almost fifty years. Her sons work with her. Although she has gone on to other interests, the loving, caring spirit that is so much at the heart of our church community was enriched by the years when Betty Reid was here to help make it happen.

The Fellowship's seventh year began with more than fifty people attending the first Sunday Service September 15. They met at the Walnut Creek Women's Club, and heard Starr King student Jim Mead talk about "The Proper Study of Man." A discussion on the nature of man followed the service. Services in October included Dr. A. Schwartz, Chief of the State Department of Public Health, who also spoke on the nature of man. Starr King student Dwight Brown gave a sermon entitled "Deer Park" and fellowship member Chuck Chase reviewed "Religion and the Rise of Capitalism" by Toynbee. Chuck remembers this was a high point for him.

The Worship committee, with chair Tim Diller, was concerned about improving the services. They planned more training for lay services, and better handling of discussions after the service. They provided a \$25 honorarium for

guest speakers. The Board voted not to employ an executive secretary. It would be almost ten years before half-time paid clerical help became a reality. They approved Joan Stromberg as Publicity chair in September. Articles appeared in local papers with good response. Virginia Hubbard agreed to serve as Maintenance chair.

In November Jim Meade gave a sermon on religious education, and offered an evening meeting to discuss Unitarianism with new members. Jim did his in-service training with the fellowship from September 1957, until January 1958, giving a sermon once a month, and working with the Executive committee. Other November services were by Fellowship members Arnold Durlacher, on "What the Fellowship Asks and Offers," and Dave Bortin: "Education for What?" Jean Martinez and Betty Reid discussed "Thankful to Whom and for What?"

The Membership committee continued to visit new members and those who requested a visit, and sent letters to visitors welcoming them. They sponsored a discussion of Unitarianism for new members with new Starr King student Ernie Howard, who joined them in the spring.

The Fellowship was settling down to a busy schedule and rapid growth. During November thirteen new members "... decided to throw in with us in our struggle to bring [liberal] religion to the hearts and minds of our community."\* December services included Hayward Fellowship member John Dye, and Horton Colbert on "The Fragility of all Precious Things."

The Christmas service was by Pacific Central District Executive Director Vic Goff, "From the Dawn to the Daylight of Christmas," a service of poetry, music and dance with Bonnie Bortin, Nona Bickerton, Lillie and Charlotte Chase. The Program committee sponsored a Public Forum in December featuring Mary Morain, President of Planned Parenthood, and the Women's Alliance held a program on "Women in Suburbia."

Some were content to keep things as they were to the point of discouraging visitors and new members, as mentioned. Some felt the Fellowship existed primarily to become a church. A "more rational philosophy" espoused by former president and newsletter editor Don Houser, held that "we should welcome visitors and attempt to provide for new people. If this leads to a church, well and good; if not that's fine too. To refuse to grow is to die; to live for growth is futile."

Leonard Grote gave a service in January, discussing Toynbee's *Historian's Approach to Religion*. Leonard attended the fellowship, and later served as Mayor

of Pleasant Hill. February services included Les Blades on "What is a Free Mind?" and Henry Lingren of the San Francisco church, professor of psychology at SF State College, on "Is Religion Necessary?" Conrad Rheiner of the San Mateo church spoke on "The Revival of Religion." A Unitarian minister, Dr. Rheiner was Supervisor of the Service of Needs Project of the Mission Neighborhood Center in San Francisco. Fellowship member Jack Van Zandt discussed the Dead Sea Scrolls from a historian's viewpoint.

A book discussion group met in February at the Diners' to discuss David Riesman's *The Lonely Crowd*, and in March, Ruth Benedict's *Patterns of Culture*. The monthly evening programs resumed with Edna Brunner from Boston AUA headquarters speaking on Religious Education and the Beacon Press.

In March there were two services on education. R.E. chair Bill Toaspern, spoke on "Moral and Spiritual Values in the Public Schools," and Sunday School Superintendent Jane Houser presented a program entitled "What's So Important about Sunday School?" Also speaking that month were retired Unitarian Minister John Lathrop, and renowned poet Kenneth Rexroth on "Religion and the Poetic Mind."

**1958-59 — Chuck Weidner, President**

On March 28, 1958, the Fellowship held its annual meeting and potluck dinner. Eighty people attended by. Charles Weidner was elected president, Bill Toaspern vice president, Felix Kleeberg treasurer, Nona Bickerton, recording secretary, and Ruth Cusack, corresponding secretary. The following committee chairs were appointed:

Denominational Affairs	John Cusack
Program	Howard Diller
Religious Education	Eugene Bohan
Denominational Affairs	John Cusack
Program	Howard Diller
Religious Education	Eugene Bohan
Newsletter	Joan Stromberg
Finance	Chuck Chase

---

\* The Diablo Times, December 1957

## 22 So Great Vision

Housing	Don Houser
Organizational Planning	Glen Kent
Membership, Hospitality	Virginia Hubbard
LRY Advisors	Van Zandts and Dillers
Women's Alliance	Sandy Kent

The congregation approved a budget of \$3,400, about 30% lower than requested, with reductions in R.E. and Sunday Service to be restored if funds were available. The high point of the meeting was Lillie Chase's presentation of the Planning committee's Seven Proposals:

1. Wait till we have 60 member families and shoot for the moon.
2. Buy an existing building and remodel.
3. Buy two acres, build Sunday School and continue at the Women's Club.
4. Hire a minister and executive secretary.
5. Do away with Religious Education.
6. Split into a Walnut Creek and a Concord fellowship.
7. Disband Adult group, expand R.E.

The congregation discussed these alternatives. The group continued to explore possible buildings and sites. Lillie gave a final report to the executive committee in August. The Board held meetings so that everyone could be heard. A majority felt the most immediate need was acquisition of adequate space through purchase of an existing building. They recommended a building fund drive. They also set up a continuing canvass to contact new people throughout the year.

The April newsletter carried an editorial written by Don Houser to the new officers: "... Where some administrations have had merely to carry on the established scheme of things, you are facing a situation where some basic decisions must be made. The rapid growth since last year has introduced many new ideas and ways of doing things, some are healthy, some are not. Some really liberal, some only nominally so. You will have to decide which path we will take."

At its April meeting the Women's Alliance featured the chair of the Northern California Women's Alliance, Helen Pearson, speaking on, "Organization and Goals." The group then became affiliated with the national organization.

Starr King student Bob Doss presented a service on the Archibald MacLeish play, "J. B." Student Ernie Howard met in May with members of the Executive committee and Dr. Colbert to discuss having a student for a full year, and the philosophy of the in-service program. Everyone agreed that all committees should work closely with the student, but that he would want to emphasize some areas as part of his education.

The Board approved a Yellow Pages listing with the phone number of Chuck and Lillie Chase. Glen Kent headed an Organization and Planning committee. The Fellowship began the church year in September with twenty-three member families, and in June 1958, there were fifty, an increase of over 100% in eight months!

Howard Diller served as chair of the Program committee. Howard knew Dave and Rose Clover, Unitarians who had moved here from San Francisco. He urged them to come to the Fellowship. They came, and immediately pitched in, helping wherever needed.

**David and Rose Glover** met while attending the San Francisco Unitarian Church when David returned home after World War II. They started the Dutton Club with four other young people to attract new members and help raise money for the church. The Glovers moved to Pleasant Hill in 1950, when David began teaching mathematics at Diablo Valley College. He retired in 1993, after 33 years. Rose was secretary to the Assistant Superintendent in charge of curriculum for the Mt. Diablo School District. She retired to care for mother in 1972.

They were aware of a Unitarian Fellowship in the area, but continued to attend the San Francisco church until 1957, as long as Harry Meserve was minister there. Howard Diller convinced them to try the Fellowship. They signed the Membership Book in November 1957, and characteristically plunged right in.

David got involved in planning the Sunday morning programs. Rose did just about everything else — typing the order of service, fixing the coffee while David set up the chairs, playing the piano during the service, and cleaning up afterwards.

Coming from the large San Francisco church, they were accustomed to a more formal service. Dave remembers members called the sermon the

## 24 *So Great Vision*

“address,” and they sang songs, not hymns. Rose was used to playing “amen” at the end of hymns, and the Fellowship members did not want that. This was a new experience for them.

They remember there was real fellowship among the members as they worked and struggled to provide a religious community that would meet the emotional and intellectual needs of their adult members, and an appropriate learning situation for their children.

David Glover and Arnold Durlacher used their classical music records for services. Debbie Baltzo, Don Judd and Betty Reid sang. Nona Bickerton remembers singing several solos in those years. Services tended to be talks followed by discussion. The Glovers described the Fellowship as “secular humanist,” wanting no formal structure.

The Rev. Howard Matson was a friend of the Glovers from Stebbins Institute summers at Asilomar. They asked Howard to speak at the Fellowship, and he became a regular speaker once a month. One of the Fellowship’s favorite speakers was also a friend of the Glovers, Henry Castor, a member of the Marin Fellowship.

At the annual meeting in March 1959, Dave Glover was elected to the Board, serving as treasurer the following year. The Board appointed Dave chair of the program committee. He obtained many interesting speakers through the San Francisco church.

Among them were minister of the Redwood City Church Russell Lincoln, and his wife Rabbi, an authority on religious education. The blind Berkeley psychiatrist Les Blades spoke several times, and district director Vic Goff. Larry Jaffe, later minister of the Stockton church, and Chuck Doughty, Starr King intern in 1959, also spoke.

Dave Glover was elected to the Pulpit committee. Both Rose and Dave observed that a Pulpit committee becomes a highly charged and interesting aspect in the life of a Unitarian society. Unitarians are independent thinkers who find their way to Unitarianism by many diverse intellectual and emotional routes. They all have very different and decisive needs and goals, and are willing to work hard to achieve them.

Aron Gilmartin stayed with the Glovers when he first came to Walnut Creek in 1960. The Glovers think the world of both Gil and Eve, but felt the

need for a more “spiritual” religious experience. They went to the Berkeley church for several years, but eventually stopped because of the distance.

The Glovers are caring and dedicated people who helped bring the Fellowship from an intellectual discussion group toward a more “religious” community. MDUUC has changed since they were active, and I hope they will feel the pull to return occasionally because of the happy memories they have of the people they worked with in those early days.

### **Philosophy of the Fellowship**

The following statement was prepared by the Planning committee (Lillie Chase, chair, Howard Diller and Felix Kleeberg) for presentation to the Executive Board, and was included in the July 1958 newsletter:

*“A liberal religious movement has a two-fold obligation: one, to its members, and two, to its community. It is the purpose of liberal religion to offer its members the opportunity for fellowship for the exploration of ideas, and for sharing in the eternal search with like-minded fellow human beings — the chance to share with others the idea that the search is an important human experience.*

*“It is the purpose of a liberal religious movement to offer to a community a climate of opinion where change is possible — perhaps inevitable and desirable — a climate that offers imagination and courage to meet new human needs and goals. Each community expresses itself by the institutions that flourish and grow in it, and those institutions in turn influence the growth and development of the community. Historically, religious liberals have had to wander over the face of the earth to find communities where growth was possible. Remembering this, religious liberals should work for a community where liberal religions not only exist, but can flourish.*

*“The Diablo Fellowship can best do this by establishing a strong liberal religious movement in this area. In view of the fact that we started last year with 23 member families and ended the year with 50, the membership has indicated which plan it favored to accommodate this growth gracefully, recognizing that it is not in keeping with liberal religious ideals to close our doors to others who are seeking the same fellowship we have found.”*



### **Chuck and Lillie Chase**

The Chases came to Walnut Creek in 1956 from Palo Alto, where they were active in the Unitarian Church. As soon as they unpacked Lillie called the Fellowship. She announced, "We are the Chases, we have four children, and we will be in church Sunday." She was told there was no room for them. Her reply, "Well, move over and make room for us, and we will help." Growing up as Mormons, they shared a unique sense of responsibility and willingness to work.

Lillie was devout as a child. She studied and prayed fervently, but never received a testimony. At Brigham Young University she wrote in her journal, "If I ever get involved in religion it will be Unitarian." Years later when her daughter Charlotte came home extolling a Christian God, she and Chuck decided the time had come.

They soon realized that in moving to Walnut Creek they were in a very conservative area. Lillie referred to it as a "John Birch area," and she knew that for her the Fellowship was the only force in the community that could fight against this. Chuck had finished at Stanford and was now the wage earner for the family. While he was supportive of social action, it was Lillie who put the energy and time into becoming an agent of change. The group she helped organize became the "Fair Play Council," opening up housing to minorities.

When the Fellowship voted to become a church and hire a minister, Chuck sought training as a fundraiser — a comfortable role for him as he was a professional comptroller. He conducted the first campaign with Carl Stromberg, raising the budget from \$3,000 to \$10,000 in one year!

The Chases remember the Fellowship as extremely individualistic. The congregation would not sing, having rejected this along with the rest of their early religious training. This was hard for Lillie who had been involved with choirs all her life, but she agreed that when they did sing it was pretty bad. Chuck said this was a serious issue for the group.

Everyone took turns doing the work needed to keep the Fellowship going. One Thanksgiving Lillie remembers cleaning the Pine Street house before preparing Thanksgiving dinner for 30 people. She also helped with three memorial services. One was for Roger Decker, who was treasurer in 1956. He had asked Lillie to dance at his Memorial service. She and her

daughter Charlotte portrayed Life and Death. Lillie taught in the church school for 20 years. As the Fellowship continued to grow, it was increasingly difficult to find people to do all the many things that needed to be done.

Lillie and Chuck wanted the Fellowship to become a strong political base in the community. They wanted a minister who would make an impact against the conservative majority. Some were not in favor of this. They wanted to remain small and close, so they could support each other. Chuck still likes having many different people in the pulpit. Getting better acquainted with members who have many interests and much to give has always appealed to him.

Chuck was involved in the Finance committee. Money was always a problem. The Chases say we still want more than we are willing to pay for. People want lots of programs and activities but some tend to be irresponsible about where the money comes from. Lillie stopped participating in finance because it bothered her that the ones who wanted the most were often the lowest pledgers.

They both feel we should recognize pledgers the same way others are recognized. Chuck and Carl Stromberg together canvassed the entire congregation by home visits for two years, a wonderful way to get acquainted. Chuck feels professional fundraisers are important for a successful canvass. It made a difference the years that the church had them.

Chuck and Lillie were close friends of Felix and Renee Kleeberg. Felix was treasurer during the 1958-59 year. An ex-career Navy man, he eventually left the church over support of the Peace Center. They later sold their Danville home, lived on a boat, and left the area.

The Chases were always involved in different areas of church life. They once arrived at a Board meeting, Chuck to present the Finance committee recommendation that each family pay \$300 per year for church school enrollment, and Lillie to present the R.E. committee recommendation of no fee.

There were lots of parties — with a swing band (Carl Stromberg, clarinet; Chuck Weidner, drums; Chuck Chase, flute; Orville Hill, sax; and Dave Ellis, piano. Chuck feels people had a lot more fun then. Drinking was more acceptable, and there was lots of it. He remembers Women's Club

neighbors complaining, but everyone enjoyed the parties and dances. He also played classical music, and was in a small instrumental group playing at the church as well as in the community.

Lillie has been part of almost every social event since they first came. She pops up all through this history, putting on a tone poem, choreographing holiday programs, and producing or directing many Hungry-U's. She is a wonderful dancer, and can nudge the shy among us into confident performers.

Lillie and Chuck were together in their beliefs about parenting. Their children saw them as a united front. They experienced boundaries, and Chuck and Lillie remained in charge. Their philosophical disagreements were many and long, but they never disagreed about religious values. They are caretakers — of their children, their parents, people who need them. Gil and Eve stayed with the Chases when they returned from Jordan and their house was not finished. For almost 40 years they have been caretakers of the Fellowship and of the church. They are well respected, loved, and appreciated for all they have done.

Services during April included Starr King Dean Jo Bartlett's Easter sermon on "Hope," and Henry Castor, author of several books on semantics and Unitarianism, speaking on "The Cry to Know." Lillie Chase gave a service on "The Meaning of Poetry." On May 4, members participated in a Fellowship Sunday as guests of the Berkeley Fellowship.

Services at the Fellowship were very informal. Coming from an established Midwestern church, Bob and Betty Allen commented on the ashtrays beside every chair in the Women's Club. Betty had been a smoker, but it would never have occurred to her to smoke during the service. She remembers a member provided a lovely Center of Interest each Sunday — a practice still in effect today.

At this time Joan Stromberg took over as editor of the newsletter, *The Diablo Times*. Virginia Hubbard served as Membership chair. Starr King student Ernie Howard gave the last May service entitled "Religion and Literature." Howard Matson spoke one Sunday each month.

### **The Rev. Howard Matson**

Howard was associate minister of the San Francisco church. Dave Glover secured him as an informal part-time minister. In addition to speaking once a month he performed other ministerial functions: weddings, dedication of children, and memorial services.

Howard went with other Unitarian ministers to Selma Alabama, and stayed on to work with Martin Luther King, Jr. His life's work was promoting justice among farm workers. He became director of the Unitarian Migrant Ministry, working with Cesar Chavez and the United Farm Workers Union.

Howard married Rosemary Thompson, who was on the staff at Pacific Coast Unitarian Council. He continued to speak regularly until the Fellowship became a church and called Aron Gilmartin in 1960, and occasionally after that. They were friends of our church for many years, remaining on the mailing list after moving to the Carmel Valley. He was the author of two books, "The Fourth Wiseman," and "A Walk in the Village." He was working with his wife on a third book, "A Walk Through My Mind," when he died, on August 17, 1993, at the age of 86.

By July 1958, Starr King intern Gene Bridges served the Fellowship. Gene had worked with a 4<sup>th</sup> grade class at the Berkeley Fellowship, and at a boys club in San Francisco, Good Samaritans. He was also an attorney. A native of Texas, he came to California via Iowa. He and his wife were parents of a five-year-old daughter.

### **Don and Jewell Ford**

Don attended Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley, following his father as a Methodist minister. After completing his Master of Theology degree, Don took a job with the Alameda County Welfare Department in Oakland. Jewell grew up in the fundamentalist United Church of the Brethren. She did her nurse's training at Mt. Zion Hospital in San Francisco. She met Don at Calvary Presbyterian Church, where they were married in 1949. Jewell worked at Oakland Children's Hospital after completing her training.

In 1953 Don took a job with Contra Costa County Social Welfare. They bought a home in Concord, and attended the Methodist Church. Don knew

he no longer believed in the Apostle's Creed. His supervisor, Gene Bohan, suggested he try the Unitarian Fellowship.

Jewell's mother suffered a breakdown caring for three of her grandchildren, and Jewell cared for two of the children, along with her own two young daughters. She felt the Methodist Church was not supportive during this trying time.

Don knew immediately that the Fellowship was the place he intended to go, and Jewell was willing. They attended Easter Sunday at the Pine Street house, with the children in one room, and about 35 adults in the other. Both Arnold Durlacher, superintendent of the religious education program, and Dave Bortin told them "We're not sure we can take you in." This impressed Don and Jewell, as other churches had taken everyone. They felt this meant the Fellowship really cared about the quality of the education of children.

This new experience was exciting to the Fords. People were friendly and like peers rather than figures of authority. Not afraid to try out new ideas, they were people Don and Jewell felt they and their children could learn from. They wanted this experience for their children. They remember Andy Baltzo's struggle giving up his career as a chemist to become a teacher, and then to devote himself to peace work. They admired how supportive people were as he worked through these changes.

At first Jewell was uncomfortable not having answers for herself and her children, but by March 1956, she signed the Membership Book. Don joined in November. Jewell began teaching in the Sunday school, and started the R.E. library in 1959. She and Don served on the R.E. committee in 1958-59.

When the Fellowship considered calling Aron Gilmartin, Jewell remembers many feeling uncomfortable and threatened by his divorce. What kind of counseling would he give young couples struggling to make their marriages work? She recalled Howard Diller dismissed this as not important. But Gil soon won the members over, and Don and Jewell introduced him to their children as a "member of our family."

One of the Fords' (and Gil's) favorite stories happened at the 1960 Christmas service. Two-year-old Nancy was squirming on Jewell's lap. She ran up to Gil, and he took her up in his arms. Being a responsible parent,

Jewell retrieved her. But Gil caught Nancy's eye, and beckoned to her. She ran to him, and he held her again, a warm and loving moment for the whole congregation.

Don served on the Creative Worship Committee. He especially remembers the famous coffee service (below), which was a serious and worshipful attempt to illustrate the importance of the coffee hour to our sense of community. Some congregants felt it left something to be desired, but others loved it.

Don also remembers a service he did using many different-size chairs to illustrate our diversity, and a service about race relations with Rowena McGregor. Another was about how easy it was for us to be accepting of each other since so many of us lived in the Eichler tract, belonged to the Co-op, drove VW's, and voted Democratic — priding ourselves on how accepting we were of differences. Don served on the Board in 1970. He also taught an adult class in the philosophy of Martin Buber. Jewell served on the Board in 1979.

When Gil and Eve were beginning the Encounter program, they got together a group that included the Fords, Knoblocks, Piersons, Schillings, and Segals. Their idea was to train people in encounter techniques who could serve as facilitators. The group became so close they refused to break up. Many went on to lead groups during the Encounter period, Don among them.

When Don retired, and he and Jewell bought over two acres in Sonoma County. For two years they lived in a trailer while they cleared brush and cut down trees to build their solar home. The house is surrounded by flowers, fruit trees, berries, vegetables, and majestic redwoods. They are active members of the UU Fellowship in Santa Rosa, and enjoy visits from friends made during their long and satisfying years in the Mt. Diablo Fellowship and church.

### **1958-1959**

The church year opened with Gene Bridges speaking on "Didactic Doggerel — Perfection and the Consequences in Interpersonal Relationships." Howard Matson discussed "How to Write a Sermon." Les Blades returned to discuss Paul — "The Man Who Turned a Cult into a Culture." Guest speakers received an

## 32 So Great Vision

honorarium of \$20. The Executive Board discussed whether to have political speakers, and decided to stick with issues, not candidates. "The Social and Religious Impact — East and West," was the title of an October service. It was conducted by four students just returned from Pakistan. Associated Students of UC, working with the U.S. Information Service, sponsored them.

In October the new president of the AUA, Dana McLean Greeley, came to the West Coast. Fellowship members attended his service at the San Francisco church, "Unitarianism Faces the Future." The newsletter quoted Dr. Greeley: "Pursue the vision with a dedication worthy of its beauty. We are not a negative religion. We are a more positive religion than the orthodox ones. They are founded in the fall of Adam. We believe in the ascendancy of the inner spirit of man."

Other October speakers were Berkeley Fellowship member Adena Joy, speaking on "The Wisdom of Insecurity." Attorney Stan Rider, also from the Berkeley Fellowship, and chair of Oakland Lodge of Brotherhood of Railroad Trainmen, also gave a service.

Forty-two people attended the first monthly evening service at the Seventh Day Adventist Academy in Pleasant Hill. Howard Matson spoke on "The Nature of the Liberal Church." Henry Castor spoke the following Sunday on "Some Antic Semantics." Starr King senior Bob Doss presented a service in two parts, "A Unitarian Fable" by Starr King student Glen Turner, and "Why have we an organization for liberal religion in our community?" The November Book group met at the Baltzo's to discuss *The Mind of the South* by W. J. Cash.

In November 1958 Joan Stromberg resigned as newsletter editor to become church school superintendent, replacing Betty Reid. Zel Latner edited the two November issues, and Marge Blake became editor in December. The Board appointed Jane Houser recording secretary to fill the vacancy left by Nona Bickerton, who moved away.

**Marge Blake** attended the University of California at Berkeley. Her mother suggested she try the Unitarian church because it was intellectual. She went to the First Unitarian Church in Berkeley (near the campus), where she met Jim Blake. They were married by Dr. Cope. Marge was a non-joiner and did not join the Berkeley church. She dropped out of school to help support her husband through school.

After Jim graduated they bought a house in Walnut Creek, knowing the freeway was coming, the Co-op was opening, and there was a Unitarian Fellowship in the area. They came to a service at the Women's Club, and signed the membership book November 10, 1957. Marge liked the Fellowship and the people immensely, although Jim had a harder time, as he had a great respect for Berkeley church minister Ray Cope.

Marge was impressed that Howard Diller came to see them within a week after they joined. In May 1958, when newsletter editor Joan Stromberg resigned to become superintendent of the Sunday school, Howard asked Marge to edit the newsletter. She served as newsletter editor for two years, until July 1960. Marge did the newsletter twice a month, often five or six pages. She called people for information, typed it, ran copies on the ditto machine, applied addresses, stamps, and mailed them.

Marge helped form the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice, and was active in its leadership. There were difficulties around taking a public stand. Many felt the Fellowship should take no public action without a vote of the entire congregation. It would be misinterpreted as speaking for the everyone. Organizers of UFSJ felt that acting through this group would be OK, but some still objected. Marge was also active in the Fair Play Council, started by church members, and the Diablo Women's Peace Council. The Board appointed her Publicity chair in May 1959.

After the birth of her third child she served as chair of the Baby Group, caring for infants and toddlers at Edwina Wehels', a close friend and neighbor. Marge's two-year-old Steven, and Edwina's year-old Bonnie, met in the child care group. They were married in 1981, and divorced ten years later.

Marge and Jim and their four children attended the picnics every summer, and enjoyed the social functions at church, Hungry-U's especially. They also took part in discussion groups. Marge was disappointed when the congregation called Aron Gilmartin. She was unimpressed with his candidating sermon, but liked him as a person, and enjoyed working in the office with him.

In 1966 she and her family moved to Castro Valley. They joined the Starr King Church in Hayward, where Mark Belletini, our former intern, is now minister. In 1971, her children in school, she got a Masters degree in



## 34 So Great Vision

Mathematics, and taught at Chabot College and Cal State Hayward for several years until her retirement.

After 21 years of marriage Marge divorced, and married Bill Schwab in 1974. They are active in UU camps and conferences, particularly Mendocino Woodlands. She and her daughter Sylvia chaired Family Camp in 1990. Sylvia is secretary of the district's Camps and Conferences. Marge says her children are UUs *because* of their camping experiences, and they all continue to keep Camps and Conferences going.

When the Membership/Hospitality committee was split in 1958, the Membership committee wrote the following statement of their purpose:

“To promote interest among potential new members  
a. in cooperation with the Publicity chair  
b. organizing discussions about Unitarianism  
c. followup calls to interested people”

The Membership committee also organized morning neighborhood coffees and evening meetings to help integrate new members. Many members volunteered for the new committee. Norma Melnicoe became chair of Hospitality (Sunday morning greeters). They returned to using nametags and serving coffee at the morning service. Its hard to believe this was ever not part of the service! Norma also served as President of the Women's Alliance, Virginia Hubbard as secretary-treasurer.

**Norma Melnicoe** dropped out of the Fellowship when her children were no longer involved in the youth group. Her husband was not interested in the church. When he died Norma completed a degree as a Children's Librarian. She was active in the Peace Center, and after retiring she returned to the church. In 1989 she served on the Board, and was president for a short time before her death in December 1990.

Norma served on the Memorial Committee for many years, and organized the Friends of the Garden (F.O.G.). Members spend a Saturday morning each month caring for the Memorial Garden. Several times Norma was in charge of the annual Fellowship Dinner, the biggest event of the

church year. She was a well-loved member of our church community. A memorial bench dedicated to Norma is at the entrance to the garden.

The 1958 Thanksgiving service was by Gene Bridges and Fellowship member Betty Reid. Dr. Edward Z. Rowell, emeritus professor of speech, UC Berkeley, gave a service entitled "The Evolution of a God."

Monroe Husbands, AUA Fellowship Director from Boston, was in the area visiting Fellowships and possibilities for new ones. Jack Cusack and Howard Diller attended his seminar, and the Bay Area Unitarian Advance Committee, organized to cope with problems of expansion in the Bay Area. Howard served as president.

The program committee met in November 1958. They planned services through the middle of February. The minutes state "the Program committee feels Sunday evening services are not fulfilling sufficient needs to warrant expense, inconvenience, etc. R.E. committee feels that most teachers prefer continuity on Sunday morning, and one class, (6-8<sup>th</sup>), is meeting on these Sundays. We therefore recommend Sunday evening services be discontinued."

December services included the Rev. Dan Lion, minister of the Palo Alto Unitarian Church, discussing responsibility to make up one's own mind on matters of social, political and moral issues, "Judge for Yourself." Howard Matson spoke of how we cannot "Borrow Religion," our attitude toward life must be our own honest position. The Family Christmas service featured the Sunday School children. They brought gifts for children to be distributed by the Community Welfare Council. Lillie Chase gave a program on "The Meaning of Poetry" for the last service of the year.

The Board faced the problem of lagging pledges. Of \$1,784 due in September, \$677 was overdue, and \$295 had been discontinued. This theme runs through the history of the Fellowship and the church, but we continue to thrive in spite of it. In the last several years we have improved!

The book discussion group discussed "How to be Sane Though Negro," a transcription of a KPFA address by semanticist, S. I. Hayakawa. Hayakawa also spoke at the Red Cross building, and once under our auspices at Diablo Valley College. His wife, Margedant, was active in the co-op movement. They lived in a redwood and glass Marin County home with one son, a Down Syndrome child.

During the turbulent 60s and early 70s, as President of San Francisco State College, he was to have a very different reputation, less appealing to Unitarians.

At an age when most men would be contemplating a quiet retirement, he saw the trend of the new Reagan governorship that had come in on the backlash against the Berkeley Free Speech movement. So at that age, by impressing the ultra-conservative governor, he managed to become a university president (from a minor professorship), a public figure, and finally a United States Senator. If he “sold out,” as some of his liberal former friends claimed, he at least got a good price!\*

Following a New Member Joining Ceremony in December, there were 76 members representing 45 families, and 105 addresses on the mailing list. Members were married except for two divorced women and one widow. Demographics have changed considerably in 35 years — now approximately half are single men and women. Among those welcomed into membership were Dave and Florence Pierson, and their four daughters, Carol, Joan, Donna and Barbara.

**David and Florence Pierson** lived in Santa Monica during the 1950s where Dave was manager of the Santa Monica Co-op. They attended the Westwood Methodist Church in Los Angeles. Dave’s position required a Sunday work schedule, so he was seldom able to attend. They liked the minister, who, along with David’s grandfather, also a Methodist minister, performed their wedding.

They would probably have continued attending if it hadn’t been for their children. Florence walked into a room where the bible was displayed with lighted candles on either side. This gave the bible more importance than she was willing to give it. She found a copy of Sophia Fahs’ book, *Today’s Children and Yesterday’s Heritage*, in the church library. It was exactly what they were looking for, and they began attending the Santa Monica Unitarian church, where Howard Matson served as minister.

The Piersons came to the Bay Area when Dave took a job at the new Geary Road Co-op in Walnut Creek. They bought a home in Lafayette, where they still live. Their first Fellowship meeting was at the Seventh Day Adventist Church in Pleasant Hill. The people impressed them — Lillie

---

\* These comments were made by Dave Bortin

Chase, Betty Reid, Howard Diller, and church school superintendent Zel Latner. They enrolled their four daughters at the Pine Street house.

David was burned tending a backyard fire. At Kaiser Hospital emergency, they met Fellowship member Dr. Carol Lynn (Anderson). Carol served on the Board from 1965 to 1968, and as pianist for many services and memorable Hungry-U's.

The Fellowship impressed David and Florence. They attended meetings at the Women's Club, and were delighted by the wide variety of [mostly] men who spoke. David loved the talkback afterwards. Florence remembers the Fellowship having an intellectual focus, and that it was a fun and inclusive group where they felt very welcomed by everyone.

Their first social event was a Cabaret they thought was wonderful. David especially remembers being amazed by Jack Page's creative decorations just for that one night. Dave served as vice president of the Board for two years between 1960 and 1962, and remembers Howard Diller as a very strong president. David was clear about not wanting to serve as president. He knew that he did not want the kind of pressure that Florence seems able to live with.

Later, when Dave Bortin was president of a board that seemed very "uptight," took themselves very seriously, and were often bitterly divided about serious matters of principle (but no one can remember just what they were), he appealed to David Pierson to rejoin the board, feeling that his easy-going personality and wealth of common sense and wisdom would help them to lighten up. It did.

The Piersons had attended Co-op summer sessions at Camp Sierra since the 1940s. They loved the freedom to do their own activities, with all the adults taking responsibility for the kids. Dave loved the acting, leading the singing, and being with so many people who shared the same ideas and values.

David Pierson said that their neighbor in southern California, Beverly Lawskey, first met Dave Bortin at the Co-op camp Sierra in 1958. The Piersons had lived in Santa Monica, where David was manager of the Santa Monica Coop. Beverly was the editor of the newsletter Co-opinion of the Santa Monica Co-op, and part of her job was to review the minutes of the

Berkeley Co-op Board of Directors, of which Dave Bortin was a member. When she read the minutes she was noticed how much she and Dave Bortin agreed on all the issues. When she got back to Camp Sierra she was interested in getting better acquainted with him. He was at camp with his two children, as he and his wife Bonnie had divorced in 1957. Beverly moved to Concord in 1959, and Dave and she were married in 1960.

The District Religious Education committee reserved a week at Camp Sierra in the summer of 1963. It was here that Dave Pierson first discovered art. An artist, Manny Santana, was on the staff. He laid out a long strip of fingerpaint paper, with about 20 children and adults on each side. Manny poured liquid starch, and dumped on big globs of brightly colored fingerpaint powder. Budding artists attached whatever they found to the gooey surface – leaves, yarn, feathers, twigs, etc. David knew that art was what he wanted to do. As soon as he returned home, he copied a painting from a magazine, and the rest is history. David has had countless shows, his paintings grace our homes, and he is a recognized painter.

Florence feels she owes the direction of her life's work to John Graulich, R.E. Director in 1964–65. He helped her face her inability to make decisions accepting so many commitments she did not have time to make choices. John convinced her to give up everything except what she truly wanted to do. She resigned from church school teaching, the R.E. committee, and Co-op duties. She began participating with their son Bill in a Pittsburg preschool program for poor children under the Concerted Services Project. When the administrator went on leave, Florence, as a volunteer, took over her job.

So much of her time (and money) went into this that David said she would have to find a paid job. In the fall of 1966, Concerted Services received funding for two Head Start classes. Florence took the Head Start training, becoming one of the teachers. In 1967, she moved to the Mt. Diablo School District Head Start-State Preschool, and a year later became the program coordinator. "On her retirement, they named a building after her, so she has that in common with Beverly Scaff," according to Dave Bortin.

Over the years Florence has served on probably every committee of the church: Religious Education, Social Action, Ministerial Relations, Long Range Planning, Land Use and Canvass committees, and more. Still active

in the area of children's needs, she serves on our Children's Task Force, assessing and meeting the needs of children of our county. Serving on the Board for two years, she feels she learned not to get involved in the nuts and bolts of liaison assignments, to set priorities, and decide how to use her time to accomplish her goals. She continues to astonish those who know her with her energy, involvement, and follow-through.

David loves the church. He calls it his tribe, his family, with interesting people who don't depend on God, and are not looking for a parent. The information he gets from wise people fascinates him. The many people he enjoys delight him. He loves the acting he has done and all the social events. A member of the Special Events, Sunday Services, and Program committees for many years, he also served on the Interiors committee, is usually responsible for the Center of Interest each Sunday. David has helped paint the church inside and out, hangs pictures, helps with programs, luncheons, and is always willing to do whatever the church needs.

The most important and exciting aspect of the church for David is watching fragile people become strong. He feels his children — and the church — have made it possible for him to grow up. He has been able to give up being a trainer/controller, and at last can see his children and others close to him making their own lives without his need to be involved in shaping the outcome.

Both Dave and Florence have contributed an enormous amount to the church over the years, in almost every area of church life. They are well-loved, respected, and appreciated members of our community.

The By-laws Statement of Purpose was included in the newsletter in November 1958:

*"The purpose of this Fellowship is to foster liberal religion, and specifically those Unitarian principles of individual freedom of belief, discipleship to advancing truth, the democratic process in human relations, brotherhood undivided by nation, race or creed, and allegiance to the cause of a united world community."*

In December the annual canvass included a preliminary building fund for purchase of a site. The Board established a Building committee with Carl Stromberg as chair, soon replaced by Bill Steenberg. This committee did an incredible amount of work in the next several years. The Board asked committees to include "minimum" and "ideal" amounts in their budget requests. The Program committee's request went from nothing, "We don't have to have paid speakers," to \$7,625 that included the cost of a ministers salary!

January 1959 services featured the renowned Dr. Alan Watts, author, lecturer, professor, and Dean at the American Academy of Asian Studies. Recently retired, he was devoting full time to writing, research, lecturing and teaching. It was an honor to have him. An overflow crowd of 110 attended his service, "Comparative Philosophy and Oriental Religions — Impact on Contemporary Western Culture." Howard Matson again spoke, and Henry Castor on "The Historical Aspects of Becoming Fifty." Gene Bridges examined similarities and differences between "Zen and Existentialism."

February speakers were Howard Matson with an address "To an Unknown God." Edward Rowell spoke on Thomas Wolfe, "When You Can't Go Home Again." A Berkeley Fellowship poll named him one of the two best speakers of the year. John H. Lathrop spoke on "When the Leaders of the Worlds Religions Confer." Dr. Lathrop was a former president of the International Association for Religious Freedom, minister emeritus of the Brooklyn Community Church, and a former minister of the Berkeley Church. Conard Rheiner spoke on: "The Revival of Religion in America," insurance religions, unseen bodyguard religions, and those he characterized as "liberal divine."

Speakers in March included Howard Matson, and Rosemary Matson. Her service was entitled, "Damn Those Relatives." Rosemary served as Administrative Assistant of Pacific Coast Unitarian Council, helping organize and develop new Fellowships and strengthen the Unitarian movement in our area. Dr. J. M. Stubblebine, past president of the Marin church, and psychiatrist at Langley Porter Clinic in San Francisco, spoke on "Sin, Sex and Psychiatry." He later became director of the California Department of Mental Hygiene.

On Palm Sunday Rabbi H. Hirsh Cohen of the Jewish Community Center in Lafayette, an expert on the life of Jesus, spoke about the historical aspects of the crucifixion. Howard Matson gave the Easter service, "Resurrecting the Historical

Jesus." The children's service was at the City Park, with dancing, stories and songs, and an Easter Egg Hunt.

The Book group finished their Philosophers series with *The Age of Analysis*. Betty Reid decided to transfer the Friday Night Open House to private homes. The first, at her home, was warmly received, and everyone appreciated the cheerier atmosphere. Stella and Orville Hill hosted one, as did new members Frank and Judy Politzer.

In February the Board approved a proposed budget of \$10,227, including a building fund item of \$8,000. This was an increase of 345%! We can only marvel at their courage. The Fellowship was determined to take the plunge.

At the annual meeting March 20, there was a spirited discussion of the budget, finally approved at \$10,745. Andy Baltzo remembers this historic meeting. There was prolonged discussion of the need to have a building in order to grow. Howard Diller vividly remembers turning to Felix Kleeberg and saying, "If we can raise this kind of money we could get a minister." Felix urged Howard to present the idea. Howard moved that the budget of \$10,745 be approved, but that the funds be used to call a minister. This carried by a vote of 13 to 11.

### **1959-60 Howard Diller, President**

Howard Diller was elected the 9<sup>th</sup> president of the Fellowship. Betty Reid was vice president, Orville Hill corresponding secretary, JoAnn Harry recording secretary, and Frank Bobo, treasurer. Felix Kleeberg and Chuck Weidner were also elected. The Board appointed Dave Bortin R.E. chair, Dave Glover Program, and Kathy Reis Membership. Marge Blake was in charge of publicity, and Stella Hill of the Social committee. Sue Sanford gave the report for LRY. The budget included \$3,160 for meeting places, \$3,000 for ministers salary (replacing the building fund), and \$1,040 for religious education, with \$960 for the R.E. Director.

### **Howard and Tim Diller**

The Diners moved to Walnut Creek in 1955 when Howard joined Kaiser Hospital as a pediatric physician. They had been active in the Dallas Unitarian church. Howard remembers he was happy and amazed to discover they had no organ, and played chamber music. The Dillers were married by the Rev. Bob Raible, minister of the church.



Howard had discovered Unitarianism in college. He was Jewish, and since they did not wish to attend a synagogue, they found in the Unitarian church a group of people with similar liberal values. Dallas during the 50s, particularly in the medical profession, was very conservative, both politically and religiously.

Their introduction to the Fellowship was not a welcoming one. They learned about it from John and Ruth Cusack, who told the Dillers when they first called they were told there was no room for them. Friends of the Cusacks later left the area and gave their place to the Cusacks. Howard insists this is a true story.

They were busy getting settled, and did nothing further. Howard received a call from Andy Baltzo extolling the virtues of the Fellowship and urging them to join. Howard feels if there is a hero of the Fellowship it is Andy. Having discovered the Fellowship was a life-saving experience for him, he was determined to make it available to everyone who wanted or needed it.

Howard agrees with Dave Bortin that the decision to give up meeting in homes and rent the Pine Street house was the biggest step the Fellowship took. They could provide a real program of religious education. It also meant they had to begin collecting money to pay for these things.

Andy was behind the push to move to the Women's Club. According to Howard, inviting one's friends to a service at the Pine Street House was a pretty funky experience. The small living room was stuffed with adults listening to a canned sermon, surrounded by the noise of 30-40 lively children upstairs, with more arriving every Sunday. The Women's Club provided a lovely, quiet setting for a religious service. The fact that Howard Matson was giving a service each month added to the stability and growing maturity of the Fellowship.

Soon Tim and Howard were both on the Program committee, with Tim as chair. Howard prepared an Order of Service on his office mimeograph machine, listing announcements. He decided to mail this each week before the service, and devote the other side to news. This was the first regular mailing of the Fellowship. We have no copies of these early mailings. September 1957 is the date of the first official newsletter.

Howard believes the original members were primarily people who had attended the Berkeley church. They did not want the new group to be formal, conservative, and “church-like.” Theirs was a “mutual admiration society.” They were strongly motivated to provide religious education for their children, as much for a defense against what children heard on the playground as a place to learn about critical thinking and liberal values.

Howard feels the move to the suburbs during the 50s separated a generation of young parents from their families and stable communities, setting them down in large tracts, having little in common with their neighbors. This created a need to seek out a community of like-minded people, particularly true for Unitarians — always a small minority.

Totally committed to the church, Howard felt his job sometimes got in the way of his involvement. He served as president from March 1959, until July 1960, remaining on the board the following year. He also worked at the district level, and could see inevitably this would lead to more involvement, eventually at the national level. He did not want this, and made the decision to stop his district activity, concentrating on working in the R.E. program with high-schoolers for several years. Howard had an important singing role in the church’s first Hungry-U in 1962.

Because of the importance of the church to Tim [she was on the Board, and president in 1962], Howard dropped out when he and Tim divorced. Since retiring from Kaiser he has taken extensive training as a remedial reading specialist — a consuming interest. An accomplished musician, he plays violin in several quartets and orchestras. The church is no longer important to him personally, although he continues to support it. Howard was an important force in shaping the direction the church has taken.

The Service committee offered assistance to members who were ill. In April 1959 the Board appointed Sandy Kent and Marian Grober co-chairs. Lucille Shumacher, Lois Cline and Mabel King served on the committee. They expanded to include community service, volunteering at Juvenile Hall, the Rheumatic Fever Clinic, and with Friendly Visitors (helping the house-bound).

The Board appointed Dave Glover chair of the Program/Sunday Service committee. Speakers in April included Starr King student Charles Doughty discussing “Creedless Religion — What Is it?” and the Rev. Vic Goff, PCUC

#### 44 So Great Vision

Director, on "Fellowship for What?" Howard Diller presented a pulpit editorial on "The aims of our Fellowship." Frequent speaker Les Blades discussed "Eternal Judas," translating New Testament symbolism and its affect on our lives.

In May Russell Lincoln, minister of the San Mateo church, spoke on "What and How Shall Our Children Learn?" discussing the religious quality of life and the foundation of religion with a searching, free mind. Rev. Lincoln was formerly Religious Education Director of the UU church in Detroit, and minister of the Birmingham, Michigan church. The following Sunday his wife, Robbi gave the service, "The Unitarian Approach with Children." Their son Jim, 33 years later, served on our Board. Jim is a professor of business administration and foreign trade with a specialty in Japan.

By May 1959 Stella Hill was chair of the Social committee. They planned a July party, The Devil's Cabaret, with live entertainment and dancing, at the Women's Club. Admission was 50 cents.

The Joint Commission on Merger of the Universalist and Unitarian denominations was established in 1956. They worked steadily to bring the two denominations together. The Joint Biennial Meeting and the Religious Education programs had already merged. The newsletter published information so that members would be well informed before the vote. A congregational meeting in March 1960, voted approval. The denominations officially consolidated in 1961. Beverly Bortin gave a sermon, "Why I am no longer a Unitarian." In December 1978, the congregation voted to change the name of the church to the Mt. Diablo Unitarian Universalist Church.

Many worked to raise consciences about our responsibility to the denomination. New Fellowships, particularly in the west, had little appreciation of how much the district and denominational headquarters helped us. A special collection brought in half the requested donation of \$6 per member, \$480.

It has taken many years to change our thinking about our relationship to the denomination. Only within the last few years has the church met this responsibility. [In 1992 the combined "fair share" figure for the District and the UUA was \$33 per member.]

The book group discussed in *April The God that Failed* edited by Richard Crossman. The Fellowship held a series of eight evening discussions led by Starr King intern Charles Doughty, on an "Introduction to Unitarianism" at the home of Don and Marjorie Judd.

The Judds had been close, long time friends of the Kents before founding the Fellowship, in which they helped. They were active for many years, leaving the area to retire on Orcas Island in Puget Sound. Don had a prospering business as a post-hole digging contractor, and loved to sing in barbershop quartets. His songs were a regular part of church services and programs for many years.

Services in May included "The Other Six Days of the Week" given by Ann Benner and Ann Rheiner, founding members of the San Mateo Fellowship. This service was the third in a series on religious education. Russell Lincoln gave the fourth sermon entitled "It Doesn't Just Happen," on the needs of a vital church school. The series was followed by R. E. chair David Bortin, assisted by the teachers, in a discussion of the Fellowship's investment in its church school. Children then registered for next year's program.

"The Primacy of Work" was the title of Howard Matson's May service — the importance of creation and production in our philosophical outlook. Fellowship member Frank Politzer spoke in June on "The Commandments Revisited" — when scripture bids us one way and experience another.

**Frank and Judy Politzer** moved to Walnut Creek from Idaho, where they were members of the Fellowship of Southeast Idaho in Blackfoot. A psychologist at Idaho State Hospital, Frank served as clinical psychologist at Oak Knoll Naval Hospital in Oakland. He later went into private practice in Walnut Creek. The Politzers had been in an auto accident, in which he lost a leg (he got around very athletically with a wooden prosthesis). Judy was confined to a wheelchair, and was a whirlwind of volunteer activity. Their three children, Gary, and the lively twins, Geneva, and Stephen, grew up in the church.

Judy was involved in the religious education program, and helped children understand how much love could come even from a damaged body. She gave a memorable sermon entitled, "No atheists in foxholes? A fox's point of view." Her son Gary played a hunting horn fanfare. She told how well-meaning friends after her tragic accident said, "Well, now this has befallen you, surely you agree that you need God." She didn't appreciate that, and insisted on being a freethinker. After Judy's death Frank moved out of the area to be near his children.

## 46 So Great Vision

For the first time the Fellowship began the practice of Sunday morning greeters. A different couple greeted each week, the first being Dave and Rose Glover. Open Houses continued once a month, in May at the home of Lou and Kathy Reis. The Book group discussed *The Causes of World War III*, by White, at the Chase's.

In May the Board created a new Service committee to help Fellowship families in need with transportation, child care, visiting, grocery shopping, etc. This important function of "ministering to each other" has continued to the present time. It is now called the "caring committee," and works in close coordination with the minister.

On May 17, the Board called a special congregational meeting to vote on the following motion: "That the Executive Committee be directed to call a Minister." Fifty-four people voted for the motion. No one opposed it. A committee to select a candidate was elected.

Virginia Hubbard	Bill Slayman
Felix Kleeberg	Dave Bortin
Lillie Chase	Howard Diller
Chuck Weidner	Frank Politzer
Carl Stromberg	Lynn Sperry, LRY rep.
Orville Hill	Edwina Wehe
David Glover	Glen Kent

David Pierson served as chair of the Pulpit committee (now Ministerial Search committee). Meeting regularly through the summer, they prepared a questionnaire to all members and friends to help define the Fellowship, and assist in the selection of the minister.

The committee received names from the Department of the Ministry. Lillie Chase remembers hoping they could find a recent Starr King graduate who would be able to work for very little. But Aron Gilmartin was the person they wanted. They knew he would make an impact, and forcefully confront the conservatism, racial bias, and injustice in the community.

The congregation voted unanimously to apply for church status. Debate revolved around the choice of a new name. Howard Diller thought there would be heated discussion. As strong as the sentiment against becoming a church was,

he thought they would opt for "Society." But they chose "Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church."

At last it was possible to realize a dream many members, although not all, held for some time. With church status the American Unitarian Association would provide a financial subsidy toward the minister's salary. This sudden vote was touched off by the welcome news of a successful canvass. Almost the entire amount of \$10,227 was already pledged — an increase of 345%!

The Pulpit committee distributed packets to ministers they were considering. They included information about the church and the community:

*The church grew 68% in the year 1959. The membership included business workers in the Bay Area, engineers, teachers, social workers, doctors, a lawyer, a veterinarian, two machinists and a post-hole digger.*

*The Diablo Valley includes Walnut Creek, Pleasant Hill, Concord, Lafayette and Danville. Fifteen miles to Berkeley, 26 to downtown San Francisco, half of our member husbands commute.*

*The population in a 6-mile radius surrounding Walnut Creek was 130,000 and expected to double in 15 years. It seemed as though everyone was moving to California, most of them here!*

*Unlike San Francisco, the area has distinct seasons with winter rains and clear, crisp days, and summers warm enough to swim from May to December with low humidity and cool nights. New tracts are integrated into natural growth and well landscaped, with a long growing season for gardening.*

*School systems have received national recognition for excellence. Diablo Valley College has almost 6,000 day and evening students. The University of California at Berkeley, Starr King and several other theological schools are 20 minutes away.*

Results of the membership questionnaire placed major emphasis on quality of preaching, conduct of worship (including member participation), religious education and youth work, working with committees, human relations within the church, counseling and attracting new members. They wanted a humanist who was "not too churchy." They especially wanted someone who would make an impact on the larger community.

They felt the role of the ministers wife was for her to decide, but some suggested her role was to support the minister. They saw their problems as rapid growth not well coordinated in a lily-white suburban community, and felt the potential existed for creating one of the major churches on the west coast.

Mt. Diablo was the site of the year-end annual picnic. In June the Book group discussed *The Myth of Sisyphus* by Camus, and Freud's *Civilization and its Discontents* in July. Membership held summer Open Houses, and compiled an interest file of church members. The Board agreed Membership would make the first call on newcomers, and only then would they be contacted by the Finance committee. Neighborhood callers contacted newcomers to learn about areas of interest and invite them to the Open Houses. This was a great success. JoAnne Harry resigned as Church School superintendent to serve as secretary of the church, still a volunteer position. Betty Allen became the new superintendent.

**Bob and Betty Allen** were members of a Cincinnati Unitarian church before moving to Walnut Creek in 1958. Bob was a research chemist at Cutter Labs in Berkeley. Betty was at home, caring for four young sons. Before her marriage she taught high school English, and returned to teaching after the boys were grown. Betty taught English as a Second Language (ESL) for 17 years until her retirement in 1986. Bob retired from Cutter in 1981.

The Allens have always enjoyed the social activities of the church, particularly the annual Hungry-U and Art Auction, especially those by Robin King. Betty singled out one Hungry-U in particular when Andy Baltzo as Don Quixote, backed by the choir, sang "The Impossible Dream." They remember the wonderful and elegant Alice's Restaurant dinners put on by the Pounds and van der Veens. They always attended the Serve-U, and the many dinners and theater evenings over the years. Betty loved the wonderful series Stan Knoblock put on at Diablo Valley College with Bob Kimball, President of Starr King, and renowned author Ashley Montague.

Bob and Betty were happy that the church voted to call a minister. Coming from an established church they did not share the Fellowship ideal of "doing it all ourselves." They welcomed Aron Gilmartin warmly, and felt that in many ways he was just what the congregation wanted — a strong

liberal, moral, ethical, and religious presence in the community. Betty did not have the feeling that Gil was deeply identified with the children's program, although she feels he was wonderful with older teenagers and young adults. She feels his greatest skill was with people in trouble, and said many members have shared with her how much Gil did for them in times of need.

Although they may not have believed in "doing it all ourselves," they did a lot. When Betty called Dave Bortin (then R.E. chair) to say she might be interested in the church school superintendency, he responded impulsively, "Lady, you are from heaven!" and she proved to be. Betty has often been chair of Fellowship dinners, a difficult job. She has helped fold and mail the newsletter week after faithful week for many years. Bob has been a familiar figure working on the church's building and grounds over the years. The Allens' four boys each in turn, acted as the church janitor while in high school. Betty and Bob have sung in the choir for years. Betty has twice served on the Board. We will have more to say about the Allens in later chapters.

Dr. Ford Lewis spoke in June on "We Hold These Truths." Dr. Lewis served Unitarian churches in Stockton, Riverside, Sacramento, and Portland. He was on the Board of Starr King, and president of the World Affairs Council.

Well attended Open Houses continued each month in members' homes. The Board called a congregational meeting in July to vote on bylaws changes. They concerned hiring and firing a minister, adding two Board members for a total of nine, officers' responsibilities, membership status, and election of officers. The congregation re-elected current Board members, and added two new members: Dave Glover and Frank Politzer. They elected a Nominating committee of five. The Board established a Ways & Means committee to be set up by the Finance committee. Raising funds in addition to pledges had become necessary.

Marge Blake agreed to continue as newsletter editor in July. The possibility of a choir was first mentioned in the August newsletter. The Program committee reported there were a number of people eager to sing, but they needed a director. There was also a plaintive plea requesting a typewriter for the office. The newsletter, minutes, financial statements, publicity, were all typed at someone's home or office. Its difficult to imagine this now when probably half the church



members have computers at home and at work, and there are five in the church office!

At a special meeting in September the Board voted to vacate the Fellowship House on Pine Street, their meeting place for four years. Not only was the space inadequate, it failed to meet fire and safety regulations. The Board asked parents to immediately pick up their children after the service, and return to discuss what was to be done. The Pine Street house was rented for \$75 per month. The ground floor of the Highland Building, twenty-one hundred square feet, was \$210 per month. Newsletter editor Marge Blake wrote:

*“There is hardly time to shed a sentimental tear at this leave-taking. Many of us, children and adults, have fond memories of Sunday school classes, potlucks, Sunday services before we began to use the Women’s Club.*

*We will remember huddling around a primary table and shivering in the winter months at Board meetings, committee and discussion meetings. We’ll remember the house as the place of some of our best personal inspirations, as the scene of some of our most important group decisions.”*

The 1959–60 year began with the Social committee providing the Church Breakfast at the Women’s Club. Now given by the Board, this tradition is a warm and welcoming beginning to the new church year. Board president Howard Diller gave the first sermon, “What is Man? or A Womb with a View,” based on a commencement address by Floyd Ross, author of *The Great Religions by which Men Live*. Howard discussed suggestions for humanity using the disciplines of comparative religion and depth psychology. He had a special talent for sermon titles: on another occasion, his title was “Christ is the answer. What is the question?”

In October the Membership committee reported that in five months twenty-one families had joined. There were 71 active member families, which rose to 80 in December. Attendance at Sunday services averaged 95. The second orientation meeting was a success with seven families attending, one new member and four new people joining committees. Membership cleaned up the membership rolls, contacting those no longer attending to learn if they wished to be placed on the Inactive list. A potluck Halloween costume ball sponsored by the Social

committee was held at the Lafayette American Legion Hall. Stella Hill was chair of the committee.

Robert Rodney gave a service in September — “Unitarian Beliefs and Assumptions.” A member of the church and chair of the Finance committee, Bob worked for the Department of the Army negotiating and supervising scientific and production contracts. His wife Lois was active on the Membership and Publicity committees. They had four children. Shortly after this service they were transferred to the Los Angeles area. Bob donated a much-needed typewriter to the church. It was triumphantly installed in the new office in the Highland Building. Mavis Biedermann was in charge of office records and clerical help.

**Jack and Mavis Biedermann** began attending the Fellowship almost at its inception — in the fall of 1951. Jack received a master’s degree from California Arts and Crafts in Oakland. They moved to Concord when he began teaching art and photography at Mt. Diablo High. Fellow teachers Bill Toaspern and Eldo Bianchi told him about the Fellowship.

Jack had grown up a Catholic and was happy to leave it behind. Mavis had attended neighborhood churches as a child and was not particularly identified with any, so they were eager to explore the Fellowship. When they first attended in early 1952, the group was still meeting in members’ homes, which they enjoyed, but there was no program for children. They still remember the first time they met at the Pine Street House in the fall of 1955, with people sitting on the floor and children everywhere.

They liked the people at the Fellowship, enjoying the intellectual stimulation and diversity of beliefs. Mavis remembers being shocked there was no singing. She enjoyed singing in church and couldn’t understand why they did not. Jack was working at two jobs, so limited his participation to serving on the R.E. committee and acting as an arts resource person for the teachers.

In 1956 Jack took a job as a civilian crafts director for the US Army Special Services in Germany, where they lived for three years, returning to Concord in 1959. Mavis worked on the newsletter with editor Zel Latner. She typed it at home, and ran it off on the new mimeograph machine. One evening each week she and Betty Allen, with the help of three or four other volunteers, addressed and mailed it.

For the 1960–61 church year Mavis served as Clerical and Records chair. She organized records stored in Gil’s office, and coordinated clerical functions. Jack continued on the R.E. committee, and met with each of the classes, doing art, photography and paper sculpture with the children. He served on the first Starr King Intern committee, appointed in December 1960.

The Fellowship voted to call a minister while they were in Germany. They preferred the Fellowship as it had been when everyone was involved in the smaller, more intimate group. Jack felt it was not exciting any more. Mavis spent Sunday mornings working on the R.E. library in the Highland Building. They stayed in the church as long as their two daughters were active in the church school and later in the high school group. In the early 60s they began building their home. This took so long and so much of their time that they gradually withdrew from the church.

They participated in the summer programs at Asilomar for several years, and Jack was involved in the search for a district Unitarian summer camp. He visited and photographed many sites. One in northern Marin county with 130 acres he worked very hard to convince the churches to buy, but the money just wasn’t available. Although they are no longer actively involved, the Biedermanns have fond memories of the years when they did attend. They continue to support the church.

The Book group held a play reading in September at Lynn Lewis’ home, “A Taste of Honey” by 18 year old Shelagh Delaney, which had won many awards. In October they discussed Erich Fromm’s *Psychoanalysis and Religion*. Church school registered 123 children and young people, and 20 high schoolers attended the first LRY meeting, while 95 adults attended the opening service given by Howard Diller.

Former intern Chuck Doughty spoke on October 4, on “Unitarian? Rituals? – Which should we reject and which shall we call our own?” The Fellowship, like many Unitarian societies, had always rejected rituals. He discussed Susan Langor’s book, *Philosophy in a New Key*, which offered some integration for Unitarian thought on this theme. The Program committee planned a discussion series led by Chuck on topics participants chose.

### **Aron S. Gilmartin Chosen to Candidate**

David Pierson remembers that Rosemary Thompson felt Aron Gilmartin was the best person to serve as their first minister. Everyone on the Pulpit committee was in favor of Gil. Dave thinks they did not interview Gil in person, but talked with him by phone. They were aware of the enormous risk they were taking, and only the fact that the Unitarian Association would cover half the salary the first year and one-third the second, made it possible for them to make this decision.

Dave Bortin said that Howard Diller regularly checked out the ministerial candidates with his former minister in Dallas, "Daddy" Bob Raible. Raible acquired that title because two of his sons, Peter and Chris, are prominent UU ministers. Howard quoted Raible as saying, "Listen, if you can get Gilmartin, don't bother with any of those others."

On October 7, 1959, the newsletter announced the Pulpit committee had selected the Rev. Aron S. Gilmartin as its candidate. He would be speaking and meeting with members during the week of October 11-18. Gil's long and effective involvement in civil liberties and social action impressed the Pulpit committee. He had built the small University Unitarian church in Seattle into a large and thriving one, and they hoped the same thing could happen here. But according to Gil, few thought that he would stay.

Gil spoke on "At Home in the Universe." An Open House at the Dillers' followed the service. Sunday evening he met with the LRY group, and throughout the week with the Board and committees. The Pulpit committee hosted an evening of open discussion at the Highland Building. The congregation voted the following Sunday.

Well over 100 members and friends attended the meeting. The vote was Yes - 67, No - 3. Reports at the meeting showed that favorable reactions to Mr. Gilmartin grew as the week progressed. Members began to appreciate that he understood the ambivalent feelings and attitudes of a group so recently changed from a Fellowship to a church. Gil said "There is tremendous potential in Unitarian groups such as this - the human potential is almost breathtaking. The problem we have is to realize and harness this potential and to creatively use it so it is meaningful in our lives. There is no end to what we can become."

Gil was intrigued by this little group of hardy Unitarians. He felt there was great potential for growth in this area (although no one dreamed how much!) The Board appointed Dave Pierson to serve as chair of a new Ministerial Liaison

committee. Its purpose was to look after the minister's interests, and to act as a third party in passing on to the minister complaints or suggestions.

The life of the church continued as members and friends looked forward to the beginning of a new period in its history. Frank Politzer spoke in October on "Man's Commitment to a Changing World: What are Unitarians doing about social action and what should they be doing?" Edwina Wehe asked the Board at its November meeting to set up a social action committee. They deferred this until February so that Mr. Gilmartin could be involved in the discussion.

Lillie Chase gave the service the following Sunday, answering questions posed the week before — "A Unitarian in Action." Lillie discussed the outstanding work toward non-discriminatory housing of The Fair Play Council, created two years earlier, primarily by church members. She read from Erich Fromm, Ashley Montague, Albert Schweitzer, Bertram Russell, and from *Heredity, Race and Society* by Dunn & Dolzhansky. Don Judd and the LRY sang music from "Lost in the Stars." A symposium on local social action issues followed the service.

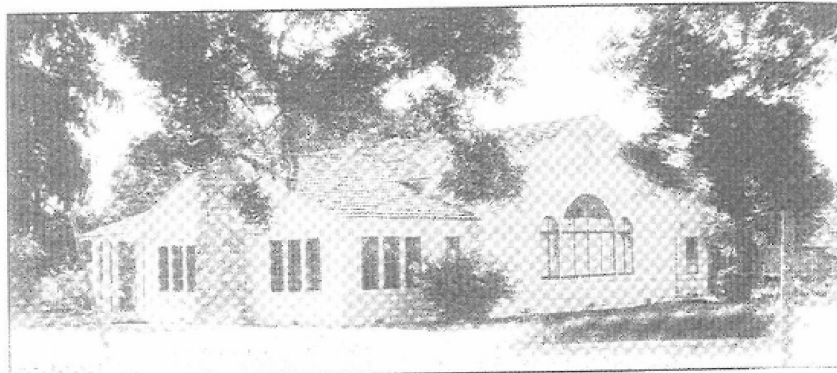
Services in November began with Mrs. Max Knight speaking on "Religion and Authority." Her study of primitive religions had inspired her anthropological view of the relationship between authority and religion. Jo Bartlett spoke on "The Care and Feeding of Unitarian Ministers," in preparation for Gil's coming. The following Sunday Dr. Lewis Hillyard, third-year Starr King student body president, spoke on "Is War the American Way?" Dr. Sedgwick Mead, President of the Berkeley Fellowship, graduate of Harvard Medical School, and Medical Director of California Rehabilitation Center, discussed "The Life and Death of a Modern Saint." (Gandhi) The last service in November was entitled "What is Man?" by San Jose State Associate Professor of Philosophy, Dr. William Deininger.

In December Henry Castor spoke on "Reading, 'Riting and Ritual — beyond Unitarian orthodoxy." Judy Politzer and Starr King intern Chuck Doughty discussed "The Twelve Days of Christmas," less well-known ways to celebrate the winter holidays. Starr King Intern Robert Smith spoke on "From Trinity to Unity." Dr. Gordon Tyndall spoke December 20, on "Are Unitarians Christians?" A family Christmas party followed the service with music, pageantry and gifts, ending with a candlelight service. The year ended with Lawrence Jaffa discussing the "Religious Symbolism in Dr. Zhivago."

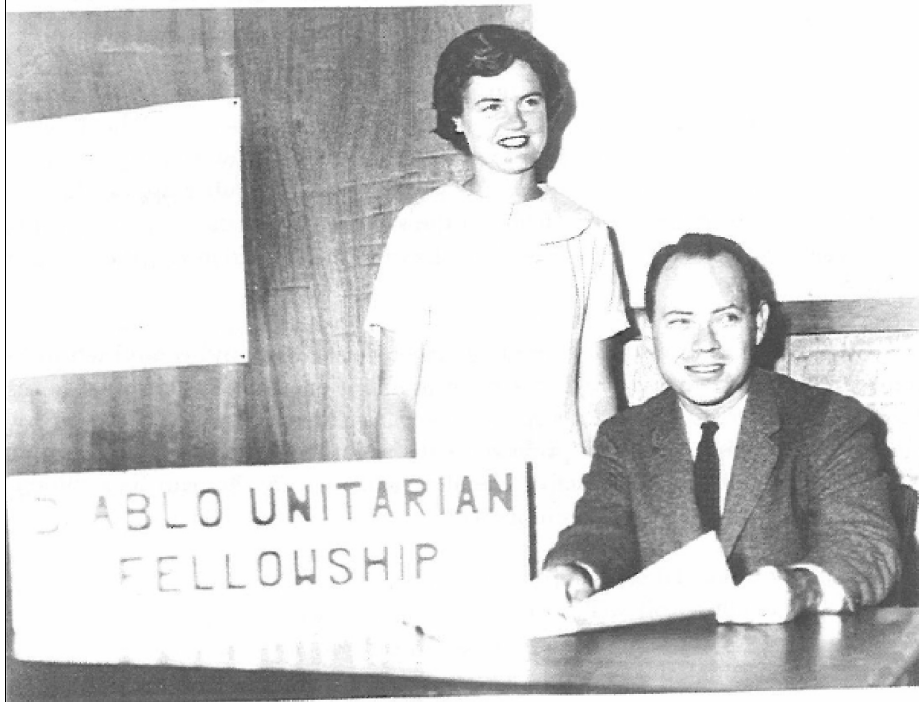
This was the end of an era. A small group of determined and committed individual Unitarians had created a new force in their community — one that was

destined to serve as an important liberal religious voice in a largely conservative area. They looked forward with great excitement to their future, and took pride and satisfaction in the prospect of contributing to filling the need in the community for an active liberal religious society. We can be justifiably proud of what they created and what they accomplished.





The Women's Club clubhouse at 1224  
Lincoln Avenue



Howard Diller and Ruth Cusack - 1959

## **CHAPTER II - THE GILMARTIN YEARS**

### **Part I The Early Years, 1961-1967**

On January 1, 1960, Aron Seymour Gilmartin was called to Walnut Creek as the first minister of the Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church. He served for almost sixteen years, retiring in August 1974.

Gil was born in Boston in 1910, attended Boston Latin School (founded in 1630), and graduated from Harvard in 1931. From 1931-33 he did post-graduate work at Meadville Theological School, University of Chicago, and the School of Social Service Administration. He worked as a social worker in Chicago. In 1934 he accepted the pastorate of the First Unitarian Church of Des Moines, and co-founded the Iowa Civil Liberties Union, serving as its first Director. In 1935 he served as Executive Secretary of the Chicago Socialist Lawyers Committee.

The following year he was Executive Director of the New York City Labor & Socialist Defense Committee (Workers Defense League), Executive Director of the National Committee for the Defense of Civil Rights in Tampa, and Director of the National Defense Committee for Southern Tenant Farmers. He conducted an investigation in Arkansas resulting in federal prosecution of a public official for practicing slavery.

Gil became director of the Massachusetts Historical Record Survey the following year. He was a leader in the civil liberties movement, concerned with the needs of people victimized by the depression. He chaired the Chicago Committee for the Defense and Relief of Kentucky Miners, working with coal miners in Kentucky and southern Illinois.

From 1940-45 Gil served as minister of the Unitarian church in Newburgh, New York, and from 1946-52 as minister of the Fort Wayne, Indiana church. He was the first president of the region's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), and of the United World Federalists. During these years he served on the Board of the Urban League, and had a weekly radio program in Fort Wayne.

Gil came to us from the Seattle University Unitarian Church where he served from 1952-60. He had been President of ACLU of Washington state, and regional consultant for the Pacific Coast Unitarian Council. He served as associate



director of a high school service camp of the Unitarian Service Committee, working with native Americans near Gallup, New Mexico.

In describing Unitarianism to Ruth Boots, religion editor of the Contra Costa Times, Gil said, "The Unitarian Church emphasizes the integrity of the individual, and thus has never formulated an official creed or body of doctrine. It encourages and helps individuals develop a meaningful religious faith for themselves. The program of education for children is essentially a process of religious discovery."

The congregation gave a reception welcoming Rev. Gilmartin on January 22. It was held at the Real Estate Building on Locust. Invitations were sent to local churches and district Unitarian fellowships and churches.

A press release prepared by Howard Diller refers to Gil as "one of ten nationally prominent Unitarian ministers, board member of the Seattle Urban League, Washington Chapter of ACLU, Christian Friends for Racial Equality, and the Workers Defense League." Howard went on to share some local history with his readers:

*"The northeast peak of Mt. Diablo was once named Starr King.\* In 1862 Professor W.H. Brewer of Yale, and Josiah Whitney, state geologist, invited Starr King on a two-week geological survey of Mt. Diablo. Brewer and Whitney named the NE peak Mt. Starr King, although historians do not record why the name failed to hold."*

Dr. Dana McLean Greeley, President of the American Unitarian Association, delivered the sermon at Gil's installation, at Hillcrest Congregational Church in Pleasant Hill. Harvard classmates, both had long careers in the Unitarian ministry. Dr. Greeley spoke on "The Liberal Minister and the Free Church."

This little group of hardy Unitarians intrigued Gil. He felt there was great potential for growth in this area (although few dreamed how much). Walnut Creek was close enough to Seattle so he could be near his children, and he looked forward to the challenge of widening the influence of Unitarianism in Contra Costa County.

---

\* Thomas Starr King was the San Francisco Unitarian minister, mountaineer, abolitionist and author who worked for California's entrance into the union as a free state.

Adults met in the Walnut Creek Women's Club. Church school classes were in the Highland Building basement on Boulevard Way. Gil's office was a small, windowless anteroom with two doors — one from the hall, the other into a classroom, with barely enough space for a desk, file cabinet, and chair.

"What Shall We Venture?" was the title of Gil's first service two days after arriving. The following Sunday he spoke on "The Function of the Modern Church." On January 31 he talked about "The Man Who Most Influenced Me." [Probably John Haynes Holmes.]

Church members Dave and Rose Glover opened their home to Gil while he looked for an apartment. During his first month he maintained a full schedule, meeting twice with the Board, Religious Education and Finance committees, and once with Ministerial Relations and Membership. He met three times with the Program committee and twice with the Discussion group.

Gil attended two neighborhood meetings and one meeting for prospective members. He met with the high school group twice. Two sessions of church school children heard him define his role as a teacher of parents, helping teachers and parents learn to help children formulate ideas of their own.

The area Liberal Ministers Association welcomed Gil, and he acted as a resource on social action at the Central District Conference at Starr King. He met with the director of Church Extension and attended a seminar for ministers sponsored by Planned Parenthood. In a newsletter article he was said he hoped to visit each family in the church!

Gil remembers with affectionate amusement that members refused to use Styrofoam cups because they ruined the taste of the coffee. They faced the dilemma of whether to pass a collection plate by a scientific study — placing a plate near the door for a month, and passing it for a month. The collections were almost identical. Passing baskets became an accepted part of the service.

The new minister appreciated the excellent musicians in the church. Chuck Chase, Dave Fills, Carl Stromberg and Tom Hodgson. Ted Owen and Orville Hill played classical music for services and jazz Saturday nights. Rose Glover played the piano for services, with songs provided by Don Judd, Debbie Baltzo and Betty Reid.

Everyone realized if this free religious faith was to survive it would have to become better known in the community and attract new people. Members

committed themselves to an active recruitment of newcomers, and worked hard to help each find

a place within the church. In 1959 the Board approved a Ways & Means committee responsible for money-raising activities. They voted \$200 as working capital, and named Jean Jonas chair. A year later the name was changed to Special Events committee. Nothing appears in the newsletter to suggest the committee was functioning.

Eda Bobo was chair of the Women's Alliance, and Marjorie Judd served as treasurer. They sold coffee cake once a month to raise funds for social service. By 1963 it was no longer functioning, and other women's groups have since taken its place. Kathy Reis resigned as chair of the Membership committee, replaced by co-chairs Beverly Bortin and Joan Stromberg. The church had 137 members.

By the middle of February Gil had moved to an apartment near the Highland Building. He set aside an "At Home" evening once or twice a month for those who wanted an informal and unhurried time to talk with him about whatever was important to them. Gil spoke twice about the coming vote on merger of the two denominations, Unitarian and Universalist, "When the Ramparts Fell," and "Toward a United Liberal Church," to help the congregation understand the issues of the proposed merger.

In his next sermon Gil discussed what we do Sunday mornings and how the parts relate to each other, in "What Happens When We Go to Church?" "Religion and the Moral Life" was the title of his sermon on March 11. He asked what "living one's religion" means, and how does our religion relate to our life? He next spoke about secularism, and why this term "has become a whipping boy in religious circles."

Gil's soon-to-be wife Eve visited him several times in Walnut Creek. Eve remained in Seattle another year as a Consultant in Special Education. She joined Gil in Walnut Creek at the close of the 1961 school year. It was difficult to leave her church where she served as president of the Board, and her challenging and satisfying work. She was surrounded by a loving and supportive community.

On her first visit Gil proudly showed her the view of Mt. Diablo from his apartment, saying "Look at the mountain." Eve's response was "what mountain?" Coming from Seattle ringed with Mt. Baker and Mt. Rainier, it didn't look like much of a mountain to Eve!

A new Board was elected at the April annual meeting. Bill Houff became president, Dave Pierson vice president, Juanita Lambert secretary, and Dave Glover treasurer. The newsletter reported that the Service committee had collected \$225 from members' contributions for the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC).

Gil offered an evening to discuss Unitarianism and the meaning of membership. He helped organize a chapter of Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice. In April he gave a sermon about "Thomas Jefferson — Unitarian." At the Easter service Gil talked about immortality. In May 40 people attended Gills series on the Bible. Discussions included other sacred writings, how the Bible began, infallibility, inspiration, and revelation.

In his report to the annual meeting Gil made a thoughtful and eloquent plea for a "home of our own." It was the beginning of the difficult and exciting journey toward our buildings on Eckley Lane (Chapter 3). Gil discussed a recent art exhibit at the New York Museum of Modern Art in May, "New Images of Man." Yankee Crusader Theodore Parker, who helped shape the thought and character of Unitarians, was the subject of a later service.

The Board again voted to set up a Ways & Means committee in June 1961, but by February nothing had come of it. There was a sense of urgency because of a large deficit. They asked all committees to pitch in. In July Aileen Gosslin became Membership chair, and Lillie Chase chair of Committee on Committees.

The last two services of the year were a post-summit sermon, "The Other Side of a Mountain," dealing with the aftermath of the summit conference (Chapter 9), and "A Personal Statement of Faith," in which Gil shared his personal religious beliefs. There was a Joining Ceremony for new members. This was the last regular service, and summer services began after a two-week recess.

During the summer Gil served as director of the Encampment for Citizenship in Berkeley, sponsored by the American Ethical Union. For young people 17 to 23, this project develops an interest in the nature of democracy. Gil (and later Eve) served summer encampments for many years, in the U.S. and abroad.

The church year began with the Second Annual Church Breakfast. Social committee chair Elizabeth Johnston and the Program committee planned the breakfast, with 83 attending. Gil and Board president Bill Houff welcomed everyone. The following Sunday for the first time in the group's history, the

church held double sessions. There were two adult services and two church school sessions, at 9 and 11 am. The same service was presented at both.

Gil began with a series on "Authority and the Individual." He discussed Bertram Russell's question, "How can we combine that degree of individual initiative necessary for progress with the degree of social cohesion necessary for survival?" He also began an evening discussion series for parents based on Sophia Fahs' book, *Today's Children and Yesterday's Heritage*, the foundation of our R.E. program.

Open House Socials were resumed by the Membership committee. They made permanent name tags, and began a new Guest Book. Joan Stromberg, chair of the committee, told the Board they needed members. Stella Hill was appointed chair of the Membership committee in November.

The Fellowship had a long relationship with Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley, calling on students for sermons and help with committees. In April the Board approved Gil's request for a student to work with the church. For the first time the church served as part of the students' training, working under an experienced minister.

Mike Boardman was the first intern to work with Gil at MDUC. With a B.A. in history, Mike was a first year student and worked with the church school. Second year student Robert Smith held an M.A. from University of Iowa in the humanities. He worked with Gil and in other areas of the church. The Board appointed an Intern committee — Jack Biedermann, Judy Politzer, Bill Houff, and Gil.

In October Gil gave two sermons dealing with religion and politics: "Protestant-Catholic Tension," and "Religion in American Politics." His next service was "Utopias and Utopian Thinking." He said, "Men have always dreamed of an ideal society; they have prayed for it and sometimes tried to create it here on earth. What about our own time? What about us?" The student protest movement was beginning. Gil spoke about "The Children's Crusade of 1960," the resurgence of American student political activity that was to dominate the scene for many years.

The first mention of Memorials was in December 1960. Norma Melnicoe donated \$25 as a memorial to Sigrid Webber, a founder of the Fellowship. The Board authorized the purchase of a Memorial Book for a permanent record of memorials given to the church.

Gil honored the anniversaries of the adoption of the Bill of Rights and the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. He surveyed the state of our liberties in a sermon entitled "Liberty is Always Unfinished Business." His Thanksgiving sermon was about our symbol, the Flaming Chalice.

Holiday services included "The Humanism of Christmas," and a family Christmas Eve service, attended by 200 adults and children. Christmas day fell on Sunday, and there was no service. A Holiday Party on the 21<sup>st</sup> featured a program by the high school group, dances, and holiday songs. The congregation gave Gil a gift of Beacon Press books.

### 1961

Harry Scholefield, minister of the San Francisco Unitarian Church, spoke on self-assessment New Year's Day, and Gil spoke at the San Francisco church. The following week Gil addressed the question, "Do We Have a National Purpose?"

There were 36 new members since September. By February the Membership committee had a record twelve members. Dave Keating was chair of the Program committee, with Sid Weinberg and Steve Chase.

Gil again offered a six-week session for parents on the values of Unitarianism and how to communicate them to children. He spoke in January about Laile Bartlett's new book, *Bright Galaxy*, an assessment of the effect of fellowships on the denomination. Later in January he spoke on "Being Good," asking the question, "Have we done with Calvinism?" Ways to re-establish discussions after the service were discussed by the Board.

In February the church began meeting at the Red Cross Building on Ygnacio Boulevard. A lawn in back looked out across open fields, with an unobstructed view of Mt. Diablo. The ruins of an old slaughterhouse were nearby. I remember looking at this view on a clear spring morning thinking I want to remember this just this way as it will probably be gone soon. The ruined slaughter house has been replaced by office buildings, and San Marco development now covers the rolling hills.

Gil's first sermon at the Red Cross was "What is Positive Thinking?" an analysis of Norman Vincent Peale and the "Peace of Mind cult." Charles Patterson, spoke on "Segregation Moves to the Suburbs" the following week. Charles had been a member of the Fort Wayne church Gil served. He was engaged in a research

project on emerging leadership in the new African nations. He was a member of the San Francisco church, and a doctoral candidate in sociology at Cal.

The latter part of February featured Jane Staves of Portland speaking on "The Brilliant Paradox." She discussed the development of the individual through relationship with all life, describing her visit with Albert Schweitzer. Bill Houff, president of the church and research chemist, spoke on a hobby of his, "Anatomy of the Cold War, 1930–1960."

Our minister spent a February weekend "on loan" to the Hayward Fellowship, meeting with their Board and committees to discuss concerns about growth and whether to call a minister, and giving the service. We were proud to be part of this new District program to help fellowships. Gil spoke to two fellowships in Washington the following weekend.

In March Gil and Eve were married at University Unitarian Church in Seattle. During Easter vacation they were honored at a reception at the Dillers'. Eve returned to Washington to complete the school year, moving to Walnut Creek in June. She was welcomed warmly into the church. They rented a lovely home on Woodland Drive, just off the Danville highway.

"The Liberalism of Bishop Pike" was the title of Gil's first March service. He spoke about liberalism in orthodox churches and discussed the question, "Is the good bishop a heretic?" He next spoke about "Who Defines Americanism?" about the House Committee on Un-American Activities (HUAC), and other "patriots."

"The Pulpit and the Pew" addressed the question, "What shall the minister talk about?" His Palm Sunday sermon was an introductory consideration of Jesus, "Who is this Man?" On Easter Gil gave a liberal interpretation of "What Happened that First Easter." In April Gil discussed the new Unitarian Universalist Association, voted the year previously. Commissions had been working to create the structure of the new organization, and a spirited contest for the Presidency developed. The following week he spoke about the Eichmann trial.

Gil was elected president of the Pacific Coast Chapter of the Ministers' Association. He participated in a dialog sermon with Dr. Homer Jack on April 23. A Unitarian minister, Dr. Jack was serving as Executive Director of the National Committee for a Sane Nuclear Policy.

Gil was actively involved in church activities. He reported to the Board discussions with church fund-raiser Howard Hauze, and met with the LRY to help resolve conflict around separate junior and senior groups. He asked the Board to

make sure each committee had a chair and was functioning smoothly before the annual meeting, so the new church year would get off to a good start.

In his annual report Gil began with the trepidation and anxiety he knew members felt in calling a minister two years before. He felt it too, coming to a brand new church after twenty-five years serving established churches. He said "our hopes and expectations have proved stronger than our doubts," and a mutually creative and self-fulfilling relationship had begun.

He spoke of the importance of a strong liberal presence in the community. He talked about the importance of involvement and participation in the creation and maintenance of a religious fellowship wherein we are transformed. He saw the liberal church as an environment encouraging individual growth and development that a minister helps create. He saw the growth of church members and the push toward a "home of our own."

He concluded with an expression of his deep appreciation of the many friendships, the consideration and warmth with which he had been blessed. He was especially moved by the loving welcome shown to Eve on her visit at Easter, and looked forward to her "being settled here, and our work together, with you, in this fellowship."

The new Board was elected at the April annual meeting. New officers were: Frank Politzer president, Dave Pierson vice president, Jack Cusack secretary, and Bill Houff treasurer. The Board agreed to meet twice a month.

An Interiors committee was active making the Highland Building a more welcoming place to spend Sunday mornings. Eve Gilmartin and Rachel Knoblock were active on this committee. Carl Stromberg and Gil tried to reactivate the Membership committee. A few were willing to be on it, but there was no chair.

On April 26 Starr King In-Service Training Director Horton Colbert spoke. Gil and the Board attended a weekend retreat. The following two Sundays Gil attended the UUA May meetings (General Assembly) in Boston. The Unitarian Universalist Association officially came into being. Gil reported on this at the May 21 service.

Davis Church member John Conrad spoke the first Sunday in May on "Crime, Punishment and Mother Russia." Associate Director of International Survey of Corrections, he had returned from a six-month tour of correctional facilities in Russia. Intern Robert Smith spoke May 14 about the Black Muslim



movement and their separatist philosophy in a controversial sermon entitled "A Religion of Hatred."

The building program, so long a dream, was gearing up. At a congregational meeting May 21 Gil called for a deep commitment to finding the site and building on it. The congregation unanimously resolved to begin a building fund drive and find a site before September.

During 1961 intern Mike Boardman conducted a survey of the congregation for a sociology class. Some of his conclusions: In the nine years since the Fellowship began, the largest age group had shifted up to 40 from under 30. While there were 60 people under 45, there were only ten between 45 and 64, and only one over 65. In 1960 those under 45 made up almost 80%, dropping to 33% sixteen years later. Education rose. In 1960, 15% had advanced degrees; in 1976 - 32.6%. Change in marital status was striking. Almost 90% were married in 1960; that figure had dropped to 49% by 1976.

Gil discussed the Freedom Riders travels through the south in his sermon "All Aboard for Freedom." His Memorial Day sermon was entitled "With Charity for All." His last regular service was "What My Religion Means to Me." During the summer Gil again directed the six-week Encampment for Citizenship, in Berkeley. He also gave a service at the Palo Alto church.

Summer services began with member Malcolm Smith on "The Religion of an Atheist." Pat Green and Andy Baltzo spoke in July. The following Sunday Howard Matson was in the pulpit, and Gil conducted a Dedication of Children and Parents. Other summer services included Judy Politzer, Irene Wells, Richard Hurley, Dave Bortin, Howard Diller, and Dave Pierson. The Rev. Robert Sonan of the Miami Unitarian Church spoke. There was a social hour and discussion period after each service.

After completing the year in Seattle, Eve moved to Walnut Creek in the summer of 1961. Eve was excited by the changes she saw in Gil. She felt he was adapting to the very different style of a do-it-yourself fellowship, now a church. The large University Unitarian Church in Seattle Gil had served for eight years required a different kind of ministry. Here there was a feeling we were creating our church day by day, and "we're all in this together."

The people impressed Eve. They were familiar, she felt at home with them. She saw them as "my kind of people." She had just been through a large building program in the Seattle church. She was awed by Bill Steenberg's doggedness in

exploring over a hundred building sites, not settling for one that wasn't just right, though there was tremendous pressure to choose something.

Coming here as the ministers wife was different from being just another member. Eve knew she could not be active in quite the same way, yet that concern was less than she had expected. She loved their new home, and could participate in the life of the church in the way she loved — entertaining.

All kinds of get-togethers were held at the Gilmartins' home — meetings, parties, beginning-of-the-church-year Breakfasts, Thanksgiving dinners, Christmas Open Houses. Services at the Red Cross and church school in the Highland Building basement meant there was no "center." Gil and Eve's home was the perfect setting. It was part of the life of the church. The congregation gave them a coffee table, punch bowl and cups as a wedding present for their new home.

According to Howard Diller, diversities within the church began to coalesce around Gil. For many he was too involved in social action, and for others, not as strong in this area as they had hoped. While most had no quarrel with the content of Gil's sermons, for some his delivery was less than they had hoped for. Felix Kleeberg, who had been anxious to call a minister, was disappointed in Gil, according to Howard. There had been the expectation that we would experience enormous growth. While it was considerable, it was not as much as Felix had hoped. Gil remembers Felix told him if he'd heard Gil's first sermon [on restructuring our economy] before the congregation called him, Felix would not have voted for him. But most members and friends were pleased with Gil and enjoyed working with him.

The church year began with the Annual Church Breakfast the Sunday after Labor Day. Gil spoke the following week on "The Rainbow and the Cloud," discussing the resumption of nuclear testing and the world crisis. On September 24<sup>th</sup> he discussed the question, "Why is the Mental Health Movement Under Attack?"

The Board created a new Program committee responsible for adult education, different from Sunday Services committee. Reg Fleetham served as chair, with Carol Cook, Don Ford, George Fujioka, and Rae Fleetham. These two areas had previously been together. The Board created an "Enrichment of Sunday Services subcommittee" under Program to help the minister with Sunday services.

As president of Contra Costa County Mental Health Association Gil spent three days at the fourth annual meeting of the California MHA in San Diego, with

Estelle Girande, church member and Executive Director of the county Mental Health Association.

Gil's first sermon in October was "How We Teach Religion to our Children." He spent the following Sunday with the church school children while Bill Houff spoke on "The Rise of the Uninvolved Man." Eve and Gil held their first Open House October 21, a celebration for members and friends.

Eve loved the special ritual of coffee after the service. Every Sunday she carried her linens and silver service to the Red Cross. Hostesses poured at each end of a beautifully decorated table. Many felt this was too much work, and it became harder to find volunteers. The message, "it's too much fuss," finally came through to Eve. They returned to Styrofoam cups poured from the big urn. Eve was saddened by this. It seemed to reflect the attitude that the atmosphere is unimportant. She feels that creating a beautiful setting makes a statement about the meaning and importance to us of our religious home.

"To Be or Not To Be — A Rhinoceros," reflections on the play by Ionesco, was the title of Gil's service in October. Pacific Coast Unitarian Council person Marie Wells spoke the following Sunday on Family Worship.

Starr King sent us two new interns. Robert Senghas taught in the church school, and former Board president Bill Houff worked with the Program committee. Bill continued to serve on the Board during his internship. Gil preached the Ordination sermon for his friend, the Rev. Lewis McGee, first full-time minister at the Chico Fellowship.

On October 29 Gil looked at our place in a great historical movement on the anniversary of Martin Luther's ninety-five theses, a sermon entitled, "Unitarianism and the Reformation." "A Litany for All Souls" was the title of his service on November 5, All Souls Day. Regional Director of the Pacific Coast UU Conference Vic Goff spoke November 12, on "Six Languages of Liberal Religion." Gil gave a sermon entitled "My Brother's Keeper," about the need to continue service to people everywhere.

The Gilmartins offered their home for a church family Thanksgiving dinner, beginning a tradition that lasted many years. The welcoming warmth of the Gilmartins' home is a favorite memory of many individuals and families. Gil offered a discussion for parents and teachers on the meaning of Christmas for Unitarians. One Saturday evening in December Gil and Eve welcomed Board members and their spouses for a holiday celebration.

David Bortin spoke November 26 on "The Price of Love," while Gil gave the service at the Fresno church, and conducted a Dedication of Parents and Children. He returned to the pulpit December 3, with "The Eye of the Beholder." "Seeing is believing, but can we always trust what we see?" On December 10 Gil spoke about "The Right is Sometimes Wrong," discussing the extreme right wing political movement.

Christmas Open House was held at the home of Joe and Camille Connery. The following Sunday a special Christmas service, "What I Like About Christmas," included a Joining Ceremony to welcome new members. The congregation gave Gil and Eve a much desired tape recorder. There were no services or classes Christmas Eve morning. Families attended a Christmas Eve service of stories and music with the children's choir, at the Recreation Center. The last Sunday of the year featured a New Year Sermon for adults and older children so teachers could have the day off. Younger children enjoyed a special program at the Highland Building.

## 1962

Gil spoke about "A World-wide Liberal Religious Movement," and "The Meaning of Suffering" in January. "The Social Concerns of the Liberal Church," examined the actions of the Unitarian Association from 1950 to 1960. Palo Alto minister Dan Lion spoke on the Bible and anti-communism when Gil spoke at the Palo Alto church. At the first service of the new year the new pulpit designed and built by church member Tom Hodgson, was formally dedicated. The lovely walnut pulpit was commissioned by the Sunday Service committee with the Board's approval, and built at a cost of \$20! We used this pulpit until a new one was designed by Bob Hill and built by Art Ungar in 1992.

The Program committee offered several series during the winter of 1962. George Fujioka led "An Introduction to Unitarianism," Walnut Creek city council member Doug Page led a series on "The Political Front." Claire Calhoon led a book discussion group, and Gil gave a series on the bible. Zel Lather led an adult series about her fifth grade Akenaten class. They planned a summer series by Bill Houff on "Key Words in Religion."

In February Gil spoke on Unitarianism at the new Antioch Fellowship begun by George and Gini Merrill. The Rev. Ernest Howard, minister of Gil's first church

in Newburgh, New York spoke at our church. On February 11, Gil spoke on "Personal Growth through the Church," and next, a second sermon on suffering, "Robert Frost Wrestles with Job." Charles Patterson gave the sermon the following Sunday on "The Brotherhood of Blackness."

"New Ways in Religion" was the title of Gil's first sermon in March. Bill Houff spoke the following Sunday. Gil discussed freedom of the press, "Without Fear or Favor." On March 24 he talked about the captivity of the church in suburbia. Nuclear testing was the subject of an April sermon, as was "Ceremonials of Unitarianism." He gave a sermon about the unique English school, Summerhill, "Let the Children Be Free."

The Social committee had languished for some time. Betty Reid tried to revive it, and in May, Ivan and Bernice Fawley agreed to chair the committee. They planned six events. By September Bob and Lee Clipson had become the new co-chairs. Gil has always been active in the larger community. He was on the County Community Welfare Council, and served as president of the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice.

The annual meeting in April elected a new Board: Nancy "Tim" Diller (Robbins) president, Dave Pierson was elected vice president for the third year, and Dick Hurley secretary. The following month the Board appointed Bruce Robbins to the Board and as treasurer. Because of career commitments Dick Hurley and Bill Houff resigned, replaced by Susan Mosely and Martin Dimbat. Susan was elected secretary. Mavis Biedennarn resigned as office manager, and Margaret MacLane took this job.

**Margaret MacLane** brought up in the Episcopal church. She sang in their choir while a student at UC San Francisco, majoring in physical therapy. She and Alan married in 1958, and moved to the Diablo area the following year. Friends suggested she try the Unitarian church, so she eventually looked up the number and spoke to Lillie Chase.

Her first service was at the Women's Club. Gil's sermon was about A. Powell Davies, minister of All Souls in Washington, D.C. She was impressed to learn about the history of the denomination.

She was pleased to see Zel Lather, whom she knew from nursery school. The second time Margaret attended she came to the early service and heard Bob Kimball from Starr King, speaking on "Catcher in the Rye."

Margaret went home and persuaded Alan to come with her to the second service. Alan was convinced, and they signed the Membership book in November 1960. They were amazed to hear live music when they attended a party at the Highland Building. All the musicians were church members! [Dave Ellis piano, Joe Lorber playing the jug, jazz violinist Diane Weidner, and Carl Stromberg on sax.]

Betty Reid asked Margaret to chair the coffee committee. She was shy and did not know many people, so Margaret fixed coffee herself for a couple of years, eventually getting acquainted and finding others to take over.

Margaret has always worked to beautify the settings of our Sunday services. She did the Center of Interest at the Red Cross, and sang in the small choir. She and Alan especially enjoyed services that included Lillie Chase's dancers.

When Margaret became office manager, she replaced the time-consuming hand-held silk screen newsletter addressing by convincing the Board to purchase an Addressograph machine. This was much faster, but Margaret spent many long hours setting up the metal plates and a complex system of tabs.

When the new buildings were completed she and Alan helped build the movable R.E. cabinets, and the built-in cabinets, drawers, and counters in the office. Margaret served as canvass secretary for the Building Fund Drive run by professional fund-raiser Reuben Coleman. Many techniques he introduced are still in use.

Margaret and Alan were always involved in the Hungry-U. Alan worked on sound, and Margaret was in the cast or working behind the scenes. She and Judy McLean put on many church dinners. When Bill Gehres built the kitchen Margaret Varathaned the drawers, and painted the walls. She served on the Special Events committee for several years.

The church grounds have always been important to her, she has spent a lot of time over the years caring for them. Margaret was a member of the Finance committee for years, and continues to prepare and mail the

## 72 So Great Vision

quarterly statements. She enjoys working in the office, and resists the temptation to spend more time there. She has served on the Center of Interest committee several times, was a member of the Board in 1972, and has sung in the choir for many years.

For several years Margaret was registrar of various summer UU camps. She and Alan are business managers for Stebbins Institute at Asilomar. Margaret and Alan have been active and hard-working members for almost 35 years. They have contributed a great deal to the life of the church, and are much appreciated for all they have done.

The 1962 Easter service was entitled 'The Renewal.' The children enjoyed an Easter Egg Hunt at Walnut Creek Park with music, singing and a play. Gil discussed President John F. Kennedy's recent Strike Policy in a sermon April 29 entitled "One Strike and We're All Out."

On May 6<sup>th</sup> the new Creative Worship committee presented an experimental service. It was inspired by the painting given the church by artist and church member Bill Finch. This is a high point in Eve Gilmartin's memory. Eve asked Bill to donate a painting for the Hungry-U Art Auction. He wanted to give a painting to the church instead, and asked Eve to choose one.

Gil and Eve hung the picture over their fireplace and called a meeting of people interested in creating a service to present the painting to the church. Stravinsky's "Firebird" was played while we contemplated the painting. When the music ended we shared our experiences. The feelings were so powerful we decided to reproduce this experience for the congregation.

We visited the Red Cross to see how the light would fall on the painting. Chairs were set so everyone had a good view. The morning of the service people were asked to enter in silence, and move quietly about the room viewing the painting from different angles, before taking a seat. The Order of Service was filled with poetry to create a mood of contemplation. No words were spoken, only the music of Stravinsky, the written poetry, and the painting. Many found the service moving and powerful, inspiring an anonymous poem in the next newsletter:

*"Seldom do we stop to see,  
To meditate and penetrate.*

*We miss depth in our experience.  
Can we learn to look, to wait, to feel,  
To know, in another dimension?"*

On May 13 Gil gave a sermon about "Henry David Thoreau, Yankee Individualist." The following Sunday the high school youth group, LRY gave the service. Gil's last sermon of the church year was "New Images of the Minister."

The Board and the minister attended a retreat at Inverness the first weekend in June. They explored what we expect of a minister. Many important qualities were expressed: integrity and reliability, leadership in social action, counseling skills and caring, inspiration and education, and being available. Everyone agreed this was asking a lot.

Gil said the Berkeley Fellowship had recently hired a Minister Coordinator to do administrative work and speak once a month. How this would affect their relationship was not yet clear, but it would suggest the role of the minister was changing.

### **The Hungry-U**

The Finance committee struggled with finding money-raising activities to ease the deficit. Lillie Chase remembers they were trying to come up with ideas. She asked, why not get people together who can sing or dance or do something, and see what happens. The Hungry-I was a popular nightclub in San Francisco then, and Finance chair Bill Gage suggested, "We could call it the Hungry-U." They would include an Art Auction. No one believed Bill, who thought we could make \$600 [a lot in 1962], half the church's deficit. Bill was always urging everyone on saying, "You can do it!"

Del Purscell acted as general chair, Lillie was in charge of program, and Bill Gage bartender. Shirley Owen handled the art donations and auction. Eve Gilmartin created decorations to resemble the Hungry-I, with its brick background. Our dapper, bearded, black turtlenecked, and beret-wearing minister made a very passable Enrico Banducci. The show was held at the Farm Bureau Hall in Concord.

Jack Cook served as Master of Ceremonies. Kaiser physician/pianist Carol Cook provided the musical accompaniment. A Beatnik Pad Party featured Ted



Owen, Bill Cameron, and Ted Gage. Lillie rehearsed the dancers for two months. No one knew anything about dancing, she literally started from scratch.

Marilyn Steenberg bounded across the stage intermittently on a pogo stick. Lillie remembers when she asked Marilyn to do this, she said “yes” and asked her husband, “What’s a pogo stick?” Donna Houff came on stage chastely covered with balloons. She danced and sang “Once in Love With Amy.” A straw hatted crooner, pediatrician Howard Diller, sang “A Pretty Girl...” as young women in elegant costumes paraded across the stage.\* For most of these people it was their first time on stage. At the service the next morning Gil referred to the congregation as “the Sleepy-Is.”

This was the beginning of the longest running tradition in the history of the church. From 1962 to 1989, a period of 27 years, there were 28 Hungry-U’s. These shows turned many a shrinking violet into a star performer, provided hours of delight for our church community, and enriched our homes with beautiful art work!

John and Judy van der Veen both participated in the Hungry-U’s. John remembers his first. He thought it inappropriate for a church. It was not serious enough. But John became a willing and able performer. In Robin King’s famous satire of the encounter movement Jody Schilling led John blindfolded across the stage on a “trust walk.” Each time they appeared, another part of his body was bandaged. His last appearance followed a horrendous offstage crash as he was carried across on a stretcher.

John’s most famous role was that of the young Jesus, under the wing of his over protective Jewish mother Mary, played by Rachel Knoblock. These scenes were written by Bernie Segal for the 1972 Hungry-U. One of my favorites was Joyce Mohrman’s English poem and ballet in praise of water, in a Hungry-U about the drought. Joyce’s elegant dance ended when John appeared above the scenery, and poured water upon her from a bucket. Another Hungry-U found John standing on his head in a dance with Joan Rodriguez, choreographed by Lillie Chase.

---

\* Pat Green, Irene Gage, Donna Houff, Stella Hill, Raymond Deutsch, Betty Reid and Marilyn Steenberg. Dancers: Stella, Marilyn, Betty Kunkel, Diane Weidner, Lillie and Charlotte Chase. For a complete list of Hungry-U’s, see Appendix 6.

There were so many wonderful shows. Robin's Encounter spoof included Dave Pierson and Stan Knoblock's classic interpretation of Robin's "Talk to the Chair." Stan, the pushy therapist, urges a bewildered Dave Pierson to express his anger toward the chair he'd bumped into. It is too bad video cameras were not available to preserve these hilarious shows for others to enjoy.

In June 1962, Eleanor Taylor was appointed chair of Denominational Affairs. I represented the Pacific Central District Board on the committee. The Gilmartins left for a visit with Gil's sister in Boston, then flew to Puerto Rico, serving on the staff of the Encampment for Citizenship. They visited in Seattle before returning to Walnut Creek in September.

The traditional all-church Family Picnic was held in Mitchell Canyon Park in June. Summer services featured Bill Houff speaking on "Unitarians — *Quo Vadis?*" Chuck Weidner, Doug Page, Dave Pierson, John Cressman each gave a service, and Eleanor Taylor's service was entitled "Some Thoughts on Death and Immortality."

The Board held a retreat in July to become better acquainted and discuss church philosophy. They explored how to keep a position of political neutrality on controversial issues to respect differing views. They agreed that all opinion pieces in the newsletter be signed. They discussed whether more personal and inspirational religious themes might be expressed Sunday mornings, "with perhaps less social action." They agreed "the minister must choose areas in which he feels the deepest concern, though members of the congregation should feel free to suggest areas they would like to see included."

Later summer services included Don Ford speaking about his experiences on the Program, Creative Worship, and Parent Relations committees. Genevieve Beach with Andy Baltzo and Glen Kent asked, "Does Peace Begin at the Local Level?" The Rev. Kenneth Patton, minister of the Charles Street Church in Boston, spoke on "The Religious Needs of Our Time."

The first September service was an outdoor family service at the Walnut Creek Park. The Gilmartins talked about their summer experiences. Regular double sessions resumed the following Sunday when Gil discussed "Action or Inaction — a Moral Dilemma."

September Board minutes quote Gil as saying two Starr King students were expected — Mike Boardman and Dick Harris. Mike had worked in R.E. during the 1960–61 year. This year he would attend Board and committee meetings and work with Gil. First year student Dick Harris worked in religious education.

Gil offered a series on “An Introduction to Liberal Religious Education” for parents. An Introduction to Unitarianism class was led by Bruce Holdsworth. On September 23, Gil discussed “The Catholic Church Encounters the Twentieth Century,” the first of several sermons on the Council in Rome. Dr. Homer Jack spoke of his summer experiences in Moscow. Jack Page became the new chair of the Sunday Services committee.

October services included “After 100 Years — What?” on the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. “Do they know about it in Mississippi?” Gil asked. The following Sunday he and Eve talked about their experience in Puerto Rico during the summer. Leon Hopper, Executive Director of Liberal Religious Youth., spoke on “Reflections of a Wandering Minister.” Gil was to speak the last Sunday in October on “The Mark of Protestantism.” Instead he shared our grief at the tragic death of President Kennedy.

Gil and Eve again offered their home for a shared Thanksgiving Dinner. Gil’s service November 18 was entitled, “We Are Thankful ...” He attended the annual ministers’ retreat at Refugio in southern California. Bess Weinberg agreed to chair the Service (Caring) committee and get it going again.

On November 25, 1962, Gil delivered a sermon that was destined to change the history of the church. It was entitled, “For What Would I GIVE My Life?” This sermon sparked an interest in a continuing discussion of deeply personal theological and ethical considerations by many people. The exploration grew into the Encounter movement, covered in Chapter 5.

Gil and Eve spent a week in Seattle where he preached at four services of the University Unitarian Church. They celebrated Gil’s daughter’s 20<sup>th</sup> birthday, and attended the annual meeting of the Washington State Chapter of ACLU.

The year ended with a wonderful Family Christmas Celebration put together by the Creative Worship committee chaired by Florence Pierson. It included a puppet show, Santa Claus, the youth group as Santa’s helpers, and the Youth Choir directed by Dave Bortin. Bob Hurlbert accompanied the choir. The Center of Interest committee decorated the Recreation Center. More than 50 children and

adults participated in this special celebration. More than 500 children and adults attended, making it the largest gathering in the church's history.

The congregations' gift to the Gilmartins was furniture of their choice. Gil and Eve wrote in the newsletter their wish that church members would often enjoy it in their home. They spent the holidays in the northwest, where Gil preached at the Tacoma church and the new Central Unitarian Fellowship in Seattle. After returning Gil spoke at a service of the Delta Fellowship in Antioch.

### 1963

Gil's first service in January was based on a controversial article in the *Saturday Evening Post*, 'Why I Quit the Ministry.' Gil spoke about the issues it raised, and discussed his decision to enter the ministry, "Why I Chose the Ministry - Twice." Later in January he spoke on "Religion's Concerns with the Economic Order."

At Marty Dimbat's request, Stan and Rachel Knoblock agreed to chair the Program committee. Marty reported in the newsletter that the new Program committee was looking for people interested in adult programming to join the committee.

Gil spoke January 27<sup>th</sup> about "Standing Room Only: the Worlds Population Problem.' February 10<sup>th</sup> was Race Relations Sunday, and his sermon was on "Freedom! Dream and Disappointment." The service included a recording of Paul Robeson's "Ballad for Americans." Roland Gray spoke the following week on "Teaching about Communism: Indoctrination or Education?" A former Alaska School Superintendent, he completed a survey of the 50 states and ten Canadian provinces investigating public school programs for teaching about communism.

As President of the Mental Health Association, Gil served on a panel at a workshop for Children with Special Needs. Church member Kim Kimball, Walnut Creek City Manager was also on the panel. Membership chairs Bob and Lee Clipson reported the church had 270 members, and another 110 on the mailing list. Gil served on a panel for Brotherhood Week in February sponsored by the National Conference of Christians and Jews. He was appointed to the Board of the American Civil Liberties Union, Northern California.

In March Gil spoke on Vatican II and "What is Conscience?" and "What is the Liberal Ministry Coming To?" Church member Robin King spoke on March 21.

Robin interviewed Gil on Spectrum 74, his KCBS call-in show April 3. Gil attended a National Staff and Consultants Conference of the UUSC in Boston, and preached at the First Parish Church in Dorchester.

Gil gave a sermon on "The Divinity of Man" in April. The congregation had a weekend camp-out on Mt. Diablo with Bill Houff speaking on "Why See the Living Among the Dead?" New Hayward church minister, Charles Blackburn, spoke on Unitarianism, and Gil the following week on "How Relevant the Church in the City?"

### Hootenannies

The first Hootenanny was held Saturday, March 23, 1963, at the Walnut Creek Recreation Center, with 385 attending. Robin and Billie King produced the show. All the singers and instrumentalists were church members and their children. Ways & Means chair Del Purscell gave special thanks to Alan MacLane for the sound system, and to John Mackey for photography. Ways & Means reported the performance made \$500.

Hootenanny II was held October, with three performances. It was again produced by Robin and Billie King. Participating were Kim, Sean, and Tris King, Donna Pierson, Betty Reid, Carol Pierson, Dave Bortin, Rachel Knoblock, and Andy Robbins. It was a great success, making over \$900.

The Hootenanny Jr. kiddie matinee was performed for a cheering, singing and clapping under-ten crowd and their parents. KPFA taped the show for use on the station. Five organizations bid for the services of the distinguished cast for benefit shows.

Dave Bortin spoke fondly of the two Hootenannies, where so many old and young musicians and singers in the church performed before large and enthusiastic audiences. They were high points in the life of the church for him, and for many others.

The new Program committee chaired by Stan Knoblock held a public lecture by nationally known author, social biologist, and anthropologist Ashley Montague, at Diablo Valley College. He spoke on "The Meaning of Love." Dr. Montague's usual fee was \$1,000, but Stan convinced him to speak for a considerably smaller amount, according to Robin King.

At the annual meeting in April Gil spoke of how the church had grown in three years, with small groups maintaining the warm, intimate relationships larger organizations often lose. He felt this had been a successful year for congregational participation in programs, and the good feeling throughout the church.

Elected to serve on the new Board were: Betty Allen, Marty Dimbat, Bruce Robbins, Susan Mosely, and Bruce Holdsworth. Bruce Robbins was elected president, Marty Dimbat vice president. Betty Allen secretary, and Bruce Robbins temporary treasurer. Ed Elkins was later appointed treasurer.

Gil's service May 5, "When a Man Chooses," concerned the action of a Marin minister who refused to pay income tax to support military expenditures. The following week Gil and Eve attended the UUA General Assembly in Chicago. The annual Youth Sunday service was presented by LRY on May 19, on relationships between parents and children.

Different speakers gave the 9 am and 11 am services May 26. San Jose State Political Science professor Lawrence Birns spoke on dissent on the campus, and Albert Rosenberg, English professor and member of the San Jose church, spoke on "The Religious Novel and Its World."

Gil and Eve presented the sociodrama of a marriage developed by William Hollister, a consultant at the National Institute of Mental Health. It was called "The Sermon of the Chairs — Trackus Rodentia in Urban Society." The service was developed by the Creative Worship committee, and included a discussion period.

A Dedication of Children and Parents was held during the service May 12. The Board, minister, and committee chairs attended a retreat at White Memorial in Marin the end of May. White Memorial is a lovely old estate on Mt. Tamalpais, in a beautiful natural setting. Many retreats and encounter weekends were held there during the 60s and 70s. The Membership committee held a New Member Welcoming ceremony the first Sunday in June.

Gil's last service in June was the keynote address he gave before the Anti-Defamation League Institute, "Civil Rights and the Legislative Process." The following Sunday the annual family picnic was held at Roberts Pool in Redwood Regional Park. Gil and Eve's summer began in Seattle where Gil preached at University Unitarian church. They returned to Walnut Creek for the Berkeley Encampment for Citizenship. In August Gil performed a wedding in Monterey, and spoke at the Monterey church.

Summer speakers included Urban Whitaker, Professor in International Relations at San Francisco University, and psychiatrist Dr. William Goldman. Willard Johnson, Director of the UUSC, also spoke. Church members Bill Houff and Florence Pierson each gave a service. Robin King discussed "Have Liberals Forsaken Art?" with Stan Knoblock.

In August Robin and Billie King agreed to co-chair the Ways & Means committee. Art and Betty Pakenham took over as co-chairs of the Social Committee. They sponsored Round Robin dinners with 60 attending, and a Wine-tasting attended by 180 people.

Gil returned to the pulpit in September to share his thoughts on the labor movement in the United States. The next Sunday the Gilmartins held Open House in place of the Annual Welcome Back Breakfast. The following week Gil gave "An Experimental Service on the Meaning of Worship."

Program committee chair Stan Knoblock held a brainstorming session attended by 21 people to plan future programs. They sponsored a lecture in December by Leon Tichinin, head of the U.S. Information Services Mission to the 1960 Moscow Exhibition.

The racial crisis in the south was escalating, culminating in the bombing of the black church in Birmingham. Gil's sermon September 18 was "Blood in Birmingham." Rabbi Robbins of Temple Isaiah and Gil, with the Council of Churches, organized a Memorial Service for the children killed in that disaster. It was held at the temple in Lafayette.

Robert O'Brien, minister of the Unitarian Church of the Monterey Peninsula, spoke the last Sunday in September on "A Sense of the Past and the Future." Gil spoke on "Our Church — A Summons to Greatness" in October. In "A Changing Morality" Gil discussed a Look Magazine article on the new morality, particularly of youth. He spoke of its wider manifestations among adults as well. On October 20, church member, architect and builder Jack Cook spoke on "Evolution of the Church Form." Gil next discussed Bishop John Robinson's book, *Honest to God*, exploring the controversial ideas he expressed.

The Holiday Festivities committee was already at work by the first of October. Diablo Valley College Student Union was reserved, and the committee was meeting regularly. Bob and Eleanor Pound were the new Membership committee chairs, continuing through 1965.

Gil's Halloween service was entitled "Dropping the Mask, or Halloween Every Day." The Woodwind Quintet performed at both services — Tom Hodgson, French horn; Chuck Chase, flute; Carl Stromberg, oboe; Jay Sherman, bassoon; and Dave Ellis, clarinet.

On November 10, services were held at Acalanes High School auditorium so that a large audience could hear Socialist Party candidate Norman Thomas. Gil had worked with him during the 30s. An ardent supporter of civil liberties and racial equality, Mr. Thomas dedicated himself to working for disarmament and peace. He told an overflowing audience that the United Nations was our best hope for peace.

The following week Bayard Rustin was scheduled to give the service at Acalanes, but due to illness, Vogden Denitch, founder of CORE in Berkeley, spoke. He was quoted in the local paper, "Negroes will lead their own revolution now." He urged us to boycott Realtors who discriminate, and work toward equal job opportunities.

The first Thanksgiving Day Service jointly sponsored by our church and Temple Isaiah was held in 1963. It was suggested to Gil by Rabbi Robbins, and both obtained official and enthusiastic approval from their Boards. It was held at Temple Isaiah in Lafayette. This service is held every year, and now includes representatives from many area churches and synagogues.

Thanksgiving Dinner was again at Gil and Eve's. These annual gatherings were attended by an overflow group — often as many as 75 children and adults. In November Gil and Rabbi Robbins met with the Council of Churches to discuss the legality of Baccalaureate services at public schools. They decided the schools should be paid, or the service should be held in a church. The Board approved this.

Gil and Eve returned to Seattle to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the University Unitarian Church. Gil spoke at three Sunday services, sharing the pulpit with Dr. Josiah Bartlett, also a former minister. Jo Bartlett served our church as Interim minister after Gil's retirement.

Plans for a Social Action committee were underway. On November 27, several speakers gave the service discussing pros and cons of social action in preparation for a congregational vote. It had been postponed because of the tragic



death of President Kennedy. Bill Houff presided at a Memorial service for President Kennedy in Gil's absence.

Sunday, December 15<sup>th</sup> the new choir under the direction of Carole Danzig made its debut. While the choir of six women was ready for its first performance, basses and tenors were needed. The Social Committee sponsored a gala Christmas Cocktail Party at four San Miguel Eichler homes. We enjoyed hors d'oeuvres and drinks at the Kimballs', eggnog and tree trimming at the Pakenhams', exotic coffees and singing at the Moseleys'. The last stop was at the Chases' with champagne and dancing. This was a delightful affair, singing carols as we made our way from house to house.

Diablo Valley College was the site of the annual Family Christmas Party Sunday afternoon, December 22. A New Year's Eve Party was held at the Highland Building with dancing, champagne, and an art and crafts exhibit.

The Gilmartins Open House was December 29. The congregation's Christmas gift to the Gilmartins was a set of colorful cocktail trays, used often during the holidays. Gil's last service of 1963 was entitled "In Defense of Heresy." He reviewed the principles of religious liberty, and the burning of Servetus at the stake for heresy. This date marked the 400th anniversary of the death of Castellio, who issued a manifesto on tolerance in protest of the burning of Servetus. The Woodwind Quintet played a special program of holiday music.

## 1964

The January 12th service, "We: A Sermon on Friendship" was given by church member Bill Olin, architect and Starr King student. Gil spoke the following Sunday on "The Vatican Council: A Fading Hope?" He assessed its second session and the promise for success in the final session. He spoke on January 19, on "The Discovery of the Social Gospel." Gil also attended the annual West Coast Conference for UU ministers in January.

On February 2, Gil discussed "The Swim: Symbol of Today's Youth." He looked at the oldest complaint, "What is the Younger Generation Coming To?" and the world they would inherit. The next week he discussed our hectic schedules in a sermon entitled, "Take Time." His sermon on February 23 was "Our Responsibilities to Children."

In the spring of 1964, the Adult Education committee presented a series on Marriage at Diablo Valley College. Psychiatrist Elizabeth Howes discussed Women in Marriage. The second speaker was Dr. Charles Graham, chief psychiatrist and director, East Bay Mental Hygiene Clinic, Berkeley, discussing Children in Marriage. Psychiatrist Jean Neighbor, Advisory Board chair of Contra Costa Mental Health Association, talked about Men in Marriage at the final lecture.

“America’s Oldest Minority: The Indian,” was the subject of Gil’s first service in March. The following week his subject was “The Other America – President Johnson’s War on Poverty.” During this period Gil gave a class on the life of Jesus. Guest speaker Hank Anderson spoke on March 15 on “Fields of Bondage: The Hidden Civil Rights Problem.” Hank was chair of Citizens for Farm Labor and editor of the journal *Farm Labor*. He later became a member, and editor of our newsletter.

Gil spoke the following Sunday on “Who Minds the Shop” – a discussion of the “We-They” psychology in a church, or where does the power reside? He returned to the South Bend Indiana Unitarian church to preach at their 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration. Gil helped found it as a Fellowship in 1949.

The Board continued to discuss secretarial help. Gil wrote everything by hand, took it to the home of a volunteer, and picked it up when typed – an unsatisfactory and time-consuming process. In March the Board discussed using earmarked secretarial funds for the new Addressograph machine, but decided not to make this transfer.

At the March congregational budget meeting minutes show “discussion of church secretary was favorable, concern centered on relieving Gil.” No action was taken, and three more years passed before Gil had a part-time secretary.

On April 1st, Gil had a pulpit exchange with Charles Blackburn, minister of Starr King church in Hayward. Charles’ sermon was entitled, “The Bible: Relevant or Irrelevant?” Gil’s sermon April 12, was entitled “The Religious Factor in Life,” discussing what effect religion has on our daily conduct. The Easter service, “A Celebration of Life,” was at the Red Cross Building, with special music by the choir. Children were at Civic Park, with singing, dancing, stories, and an Easter Egg Hunt.

Former Board president Bill Houff graduated from Starr King in May. He was called as the first minister of the Unitarian Fellowship of Redwood City. Bill

served many churches during his distinguished career as minister and interim minister. Our church, and Gil, were proud to have been a part of his decision to become a Unitarian minister.

Area Unitarian men continued to meet for lunch at the North Main International Restaurant. Announcements appeared in the newsletter, never mentioning women were welcome as well. Except for a few teachers, most 1.3U women in 1964 were at home with their children.

At the annual meeting in April, a discussion of secretarial help was again considered, and a motion made to allocate \$1,600 for a part-time secretary. This passed by a vote of 26–21. After discussion of the deficit this would cause, they included it contingent on pledges reaching \$29,000. The sum of \$500 was authorized for now. John Schilling became chair of Ways & Means, Russ and Carol Hodgson were appointed co-chairs of the Social committee.

In his annual report, Gil spoke about the building of the church, and said the church is really the people who make up the congregation. He felt his responsibility as a part of the lives of the congregation was a privileged one.

New Board members elected were Dave Bortin, Orville Hill, Eleanor Taylor, Don Judd, Roy Elke, Billie King and Norm Smith. Alan MacLane was the new treasurer. The Board elected Dave Bortin president, Martin Dimbat, vice president, and Billie King secretary.

Dave Bortin shared this story from the summer of 1964. Dave followed several Board presidents who felt burned out, and Board members who resigned because they had too much responsibility for making the church go. It was a period when the work of the Board was not much fun. It was a board that seemed “uptight,” took themselves very seriously, and were often bitterly divided about matters of principle (no one remembers just what they were).

Dave appealed to David Pierson to rejoin the board (to replace a member who resigned). He felt David’s easy-going personality and wealth of common sense and wisdom would help them lighten up. His presence would bring some loving kindness and humor to the task. It worked, he said.

Gil’s sermon April 19 was entitled “The Tyranny of the Majority.” Clark Olson spoke next on “Personal Growth and the Organized Life.” He discussed how human needs are satisfied or thwarted by how our “causes” run us. Clark had recently come to the Berkeley Fellowship as “Minister Coordinator.” The group

hoped to retain a larger measure of autonomy than they felt they would have with a more traditional ministerial role.

May 3rd, Gil spoke on "Where Should Children Pray?" a consideration of prayer and bible reading in public schools. Music for the service featured church member Diane Weidner and her daughter Lynn performing a violin and viola duet. In 1964 the UUA General Assembly was held in San Francisco, the first on the west coast for many years. Church members participated as volunteers and delegates in this historic gathering. Few people from MDUUC had attended GA since most were held in the east.

The Rev. Donald Thompson participated with Gil in a dialog sermon on "Race and Violence in the South." Gary, Stephen and Geneva Politzer provided music, playing the flute, trumpet and baritone horn. May 17 the Rev. Jack Kent, minister of the First Unitarian Church in Chicago spoke on "American History: A Negro View." A UC Berkeley and Starr King graduate, he served on the Board of UUSC, and was vice president of the Chicago area Liberal Ministers Association. He was the brother of Glen Kent, founder of the Fellowship.

Dr. Leslie Corsa spoke on May 24, on "Population Problems and Solutions." Dr. Corsa had worked in Pakistan as the first Family Planning Consultant. He also advised the government of Turkey on family planning and observed such programs in many countries of the Far East. He had returned to California to resume his position as Chief of the Bureau of Maternal and Child Health for the state.

The following week Gil discussed a recent Broadway play, "The Deputy." The play criticized the Pope's failure to act against Nazi persecution of the Jews, raising the issue of moral responsibility. Gil was one of fifty Bay Area clergy of 2,000 nationwide to sign a "Letter of Conscience" urging Soviet authorities to alleviate oppressive measures against Jews in the USSR.

"Modem Appeal to the Young" was the title of Gil's first June service. This was the last performance by the choir. The following week the annual Family Picnic was held in Redwood Regional Park. Gil and Eve went to Seattle where Gil officiated at the wedding of his daughter Alice, and gave the service at University Unitarian Church.

Summer services arranged by the Program committee began with a discussion of the Rumford Act, forbidding discrimination in the rental or sale of

property. Church members worked hard to defeat Proposition 14, the Realtors' Amendment, designed to invalidate this act (discussed in Chapter 9). The service June 28 was a panel discussion, "Inquiry into the Nature of Prejudice," with Lee Davenport, Lillie Chase, Alan McGregor and psychiatrist Ralph Lininger. On the fourth of July Dave Bortin spoke about "Patriotism and the Liberal." The following week the service featured another panel discussion, on "World Stability."\*

Gil and Eve were again on the staff of the Bronx Encampment for Citizenship, with nine-two young people from all over the world. Our daughter, Mary K. Scaff, attended this Encampment. Gil spoke at the Society for Ethical Culture in New York on "Young People Speak Out," in which he described the multi-cultural experiences of these youth.

The Gilmartins spent a week with Gil's sister on the East coast, and two weeks in Seattle. They also participated in a UUSC conference in Monterey. Gil and Eve had purchased a home on Crescent Drive in Walnut Creek. Church members helped them move when they returned in the fall.

United World Federalist Director Dr. Francis Thompson, spoke about "World Rule" in June, and the following Sunday a panel discussed "Our Own Critique of the Feminine Mystique." Russ Hodgson, Dorothy Jongward, Zel Lamer, Franz Stang, Eleanor Taylor, and Hayward church member Bob Forbes evaluated Betty Friedan's book. The panel was moderated by Dr. Frank Politzer.

Services in August included Meditation and Readings by former church school superintendent Betty Allen, and new R.E. Director John Graulich. A service of Music and Meditation followed featuring a painting by Bob Allen as the Center of Interest. The next week featured San Francisco NAACP president and Human Rights Commission member, Dr. William Burbridge, speaking on "The Morality of Illegal Acts."

On August 23<sup>rd</sup> David Pierson, Stan Knoblock, and I presented a discussion on "The Search for Self-Worth." We explored the work of Carl Rogers, Maslow, and Fritz Perls. Then Robin King, Doug Page and Hugh Montgomery talked about "The Artist, Politician and Scientist: Their Influence on Society." Labor Day found

---

\* Dr. Alan Longshore, Gwen Donchin, Claire Calhoun, and church members Doug Page and Andy Baltzo.

the congregation at a Family Campout at Plaskett Creek Campgrounds south of Monterey.

The church year opened with the annual Welcome Back Breakfast at the Red Cross, with the children at Larkey Park for refreshments and activities. Gil's first service was a discussion of "Unitarianism and Sunday Worship." The Eckley Lane property was a reality; an architect had been engaged. Gil said, "To determine what kind of building ... requires that we know who we are and what it is we are doing." On September 27, Gil and Eve shared their summer experiences in New York, the race riots, and more about the Encampment for Citizenship.

The Adult Program committee held a brainstorming meeting in September attended by 34 members. Suggestions covered a wide range of ideas. One that stands out from a distance of 30 years: "Informal gathering for women — to do mending, have discussion, perhaps lunch, and child care." A September congregational meeting covered several issues. By-law amendments changed the fiscal year to the calendar year, and terms of office from January through December, resulting in the Board staying in office an additional six months. Beginning January 1, 1966, terms coincided with the calendar year. A resolution on the Realtors' Proposition 14 urged its defeat. "Our belief should be made public, and we should continue after the election to do all we can to improve the educational, employment, housing and recreational opportunities of all disadvantaged people." It passed unanimously.

Rev. Gilmartin delivered a sermon October 4, entitled "Time to Fight Again? or A War Every Generation." He chose this subject in view of the anniversaries of the first and second World Wars. Gil again offered an Orientation Series covering the history and ideology of Unitarianism, religious education, programs and committees of the church. The third, at the Gilmartins' home, was an opportunity for new people to get acquainted with others in the church.

The UU Layman's League sponsored a pilot study project on Life, Time, Work, and Leisure, exploring the changing ethical climate. This project was created by Dr. Charles Merrifield, Head of Social and Behavioral Sciences at California State College, Hayward. A Unitarian, Dr. Merrifield had served on the Pacific Central District Board. Gil discussed this pilot study in a sermon entitled "Leisure and the Ethic of Non-Work." The church participated in the study.

On October 11, Sue Sanford, daughter of Board member Don Sanford, spoke about her summer voter registration work in Mississippi. Formerly active in LRY,

Sue was attending San Francisco State College. The following week was Religious Education Sunday with Starr King professor Bob Kimball, John Corrado, and John Graulich, both Starr King students. John Graulich was our Director of Religious Education.

At the October Board meeting Stan Knoblock asked that the Program committee not be responsible for summer programs. They hoped to concentrate on providing exciting programs during the church year. For the third time they opened the Fall season with "Unitarianism in your Daily Life." Because of the large number of sign-ups, two groups were offered, with Gil and Eve as facilitators.

On October 25, Gil delivered the first of two pre-election sermons, "Legislation for Morality or Hatred." The sermon the following week was entitled "I'd Rather be Right, [Mr.] President" Music for this service was provided by the Woodwind Quintet.

Charles Patterson returned to the pulpit on November 15, with "Africa: Lion and Frog Perspective." Charles had just returned from two years in Africa, and six months at the Cambridge Center for Afro-Asian Studies. Gil's next service was "A Time for Remembering: the death of President Kennedy, Thanksgiving, and the sorrow of the world."

The annual Fellowship Dinner was held at the Walnut Creek Elks Club. This historic event began the Building Fund canvass that launched the building of the church. An interesting statistic: of the fifty-nine canvassers, two were women. All the fifty-five Fellowship Dinner hostesses were women. The joint Thanksgiving service was again at Temple Isaiah. Rabbi Robins gave the sermon, members of both choirs provided the music. The Gilmartins held Thanksgiving Dinner in their new home.

Vilma Szantha Harrington, Assistant Minister of the New York Community Church, spoke November 25, on "The Roots of Unitarianism." She came from Transylvania where Unitarianism began more than 400 years ago. Gil's first service in December was entitled "Have You a Conscience?" He officiated at a Dedication of Parents and Children. The Woodwind Quintet provided music for the service. The Rev. Richard Weston considered aspects of being human in a sermon entitled "the single secret will still be man." It was taken from a poem by e.e. cummings, and based on the writings of Søren Kierkegaard. Debbie Page and Lynn Weidner played a string duet.

December 20, Gil gave "A Christmas Sermon." The Family Winter Festival was at Diablo Valley College. It began with the ceremonial lighting of the Yule Log and Hanukkah candles, readings and music. Children danced the Nutcracker Suite under the direction of Eve Gilmartin, Eileen Maples and Lillie Chase. Santa Claus distributed candy, helped by LRY elves. Refreshments were served and food collected for the children of Southern Rhodesia. The live Christmas tree was later planted on the Eckley Lane building site.\*

Gil and Eve held their annual Holiday Open House. It was always a wonderful party. Their new home was crowded with members and friends who loved being part of this special celebration. The congregation's gift to them was a dishwasher. It was invaluable to Gil and Eve with all their entertaining.

### 1965

Gil's first service of the new year was "What is the Great Society?" This was the fifth anniversary of Gil's ministry at MDUUC. The following Sunday he spoke of what these years meant to him, and what the future holds. A talkback provided the opportunity for people to share their hopes and dreams. On January 17, Gil spoke about "Albert Schweitzer — A Living Legend." Schweitzer had celebrated his 90th birthday, an appropriate time to discuss the man and his work. Gil spoke the following week about "America's Fourth Faith," an inquiry into the adequacy of religion today.

Program chair Stan Knoblock received a letter from Bob Kimball, describing his coming lectures: "People are interested in what constitutes morality in our age, in interpersonal questions, and in children. So the series is slanted in that direction, but will also discuss the racial revolution during the series." Dr. Kimball's series was entitled "A human touch (?) who needs it." The first was called "Hey little girl, hold still just a moment (an existential ethic)." The second, "Sure we can be honest about our business and reaching." He explored what constitutes moral action in our age. Dr Kimball pointed out that our cultural basis for ethical action is challenged by new ideas, and examined the gulf between what we say and what we do.

---

\*This program was planned by Florence Pierson, Stan Knoblock, Eleanor Pound, Lee Clip-on, Helen Kaufman, Alma Davies, John Graulich and Aron Gilmartin.



In the last two lectures Kimball discussed bridging the gap between parents and children to gain insight into each others worlds. He explored ways in which our culture portrays a reality different from what is happening in human relations. They were entitled "Children – our time and theirs," and "Pre-non-extra-post-intra-marital." Dr. Kimball spoke in the Diablo Valley College auditorium to a standing room-only audience. He is a speaker with intelligence, compassion, originality, and humor.

The lecture series was a resounding success. Expecting to just cover expenses, there was a profit of \$540, a lot thirty years ago! Tapes were heard on KPFA in March, and March, and Dr. Kimball discussed the talks with interviewer Burton White. The Membership committee held a brainstorming session to pool ideas generated by the series and how to communicate them to newcomers. Twenty-eight people shared ideas of ways to strengthen our religious community.

On January 31 Charles Patterson again spoke, "Color Blind in a Color Conscious World." He left the next day to assume a new post as Deputy Administrator for African Projects of the Peace Corps. The following Sunday Gil's sermon was "Marriage and Divorce – California Style." He explored the reform of marriage and divorce laws the California legislature was considering.

Gil moderated an Open Forum on the University of California Free Speech controversy at San Ramon High School. This public service forum was sponsored by MDUUC because permission to discuss it in a current events class at the school had been denied. Six UC students, graduates of San Ramon, presented their views of the controversy.

Race Relations Sunday in February Gil spoke on "Brotherhood is More Than a Word." The following Sunday his sermon was entitled "The Passing of the Infidel." After the second service everyone gathered at the Eckley Lane site for a picnic and explored the area. At the Board meeting on February 24, Gil again brought up the question of a part-time secretary. The Board minutes state, "Money has been budgeted for this, and we should proceed immediately to acquire such help."

The Rev. Paul Sawyer, minister of the Sepulveda UU Church, was guest speaker on February 26. Paul's church had been designed by Frank Ehrenthal, our architect. Paul spoke about "The Contemporary Church – Its Worship and Architecture." On March 7th Mazi Okoro spoke about the UU Service Committee's work in Nigeria.

The Program committee sponsored a new discussion series from the Layman's League, "Our Search for a Personal Faith." The Membership committee distributed a "Guide to Membership." Howard Matson gave the service March 14. His title was "The Inwardness of Things," exploring the question, is existentialist thought a way of approaching an understanding of reality?

The Board, Gil and Eve, committee chairs — 24 of us, attended the retreat in March for an in-depth discussion of leadership. Many views were shared and participants came home with enthusiasm for the months ahead.

Unitarian pulpits were vacant Sunday, March 14. Across the country ministers were en route to Selma, Alabama, where Unitarian minister James Reeb had been killed in the protests. Our community gathered for a memorial with brief readings by Eve Gilmartin, the songs of Betty Reid, and Sue Miller's flute.

The Board minutes of March 17 report "A phone call from Gil in Selma was relayed by Eve to the Board. Gil has replaced Homer Jack as Coordinator of all Unitarian action in Alabama, and as Unitarian liaison to Martin Luther King." He requested the Board's permission to stay until the march to Montgomery, another week. This was granted unanimously. Robin King remembers there were some who did not approve of Gil leaving his congregation to go to Selma, but they were only a few.

The Board also voted unanimously "to express our appreciation to our minister for his act of personal commitment representing our church in the voter registration demonstrations in Selma and Montgomery, Alabama." For details of this period see the chapter on Civil Rights.

Gil returned March 28, sharing his experiences in Alabama. The choir from Temple Isaiah joined our choir for a presentation of Jewish music. There was standing room only at the 9 am and 11 am services to hear him. The following Sunday Gil continued his reflections on Selma, the death of Jesus, and looking the other way, in a sermon entitled "Greater Love Hath No Man."

Gil explored the meaning of Easter and its celebrations. The Ceremony of the Flowers was introduced. It was created by Dr. Norbert Čapek, Czech Unitarian minister executed by the Nazis at Dachau in 1943. He saw this ritual as a symbolic way to bind his congregation of former Catholics, Protestants and Jews together. Each child and adult brings a flower from home, placing it in a communal bouquet, symbolizing that each freely joins with the others. Dr. Čapek consecrated the flowers. At the conclusion of the service each person takes home a flower as

## 92 So Great Vision

a symbol of accepting one another. Not only do we give, but we receive from our religious community.

The Ways & Means and Social committees sponsored a Wine Tasting party at the Reliez Valley Country Club in May. Board member Eleanor Taylor sent a memo to the Board urging a Ministerial Relations and a Personnel committee. She said, "It is my hope that we will hire an office secretary if only part time." Gil had been minister for over five years and still relied on volunteer help.

"The Forest Calls Back" was the title of Gil's sermon April 25, in honor of the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. This was the title of a book by UU minister Dr. Jack Mendelsohn. It is about Dr. Binder and his hospital in Peru. Sid Peterman, minister of the San Jose Unitarian Church spoke the following Sunday.

Eleanor Taylor served on the Denominational Affairs committee. Jack Biedermann became the new chair in May. Bob and Eleanor Pound resigned from Membership, and Herb and Grace Moran became the new chairs. A yearly contribution as a condition of membership was asked, but was voted down. In May 1965 there were 80 people serving on committees, nine Board members, and about 40 teachers. The newsletter stated, "If the church is run by a clique it would be hard to prove it!"

May 9 was Youth Sunday. The high school group presented an adaptation of Shirley Jackson's "The Lottery," followed by a discussion of its meaning. On May 16<sup>th</sup> the teachers of the church school were recognized and honored by Gil and R.E. Director John Graulich.

On May 23 an experimental service was presented, conceived and arranged by Billie King and the Creative Worship committee. They used many different art forms to explore alienation in our society. It was entitled "King Christ, the world is all a-leak, and life preservers there are none..." from a poem by e.e. cummings. Participants in this thought-provoking and controversial service were Eve and Gil, Robin King, John Graulich, members of LRY, and dancers Lillie Chase, Meg Burgess, and Joan Rodriguez.

Chairs were arranged as a cross so that people sat facing away from each other. The music was about alienation. Gil, who never wore a robe, wore a black robe and offered a prayer about separating the sheep from the goats. The choir sang fundamentalist hymns. Carol Pierson sang a Bob Dylan song; the record "Downtown" was played. Lillie Chase and Joan Rodriguez, in black leotards, took

the collection. Short speeches written by Billie were read by members of the congregation.

It was a powerful, upsetting experience, an artistically created art form profoundly provoking the sense of alienation that divided us. Some saw it as outrageous, having nothing to do with religion, a putdown of fundamentalism. For Eve (and others) it was a tremendously important and meaningful service. One person left before it was over, but most found it deeply moving and powerful. Many expressed the wish that the Creative Worship committee would provide more experimental services.

Don Ford served on the Creative Worship Committee. He remembers the famous "coffee service," created by Billie King, Betty Reid and others. It was a serious and worshipful attempt to illustrate the importance of the coffee hour to our community during the time of improvisational "happenings."

Dave Bortin also remembers it fondly. Betty Reid began the ritual making of the coffee. Outside at the hose, Lloyd Scaff did not receive the signal to turn on the water. When no water arrived, Betty impulsively lifted the coffee and showered it across the assembled congregants. Dave was directly in the line of fire. At first taken aback, he quickly rose to the occasion and was impressed with the wonderful quality of the grounds. It was a service that pretty much put us on the map in Unitarian circles. Some had very mixed feelings, but others loved it. A letter published in the newsletter said, it was a moving service, and elicited a call for more."

Don Ford remembers a service about how easy it was for us to be accepting of each other since so many of us lived in the Eichler Tract, belonged to the Co-op, drove VW's, and voted Democratic — priding ourselves on our diversity.

The congregation grappled with a growing deficit at the meeting in May. A By-law amendment requiring a yearly contribution for membership that could be suspended by the minister or a committee appointed by the Board was defeated. Also defeated was a motion for an R.E. registration fee. A motion to eliminate the Sunday plate offering passed. Members present urged that the total congregation be made aware of the financial situation by frequent newsletter reports. They urged good pledge follow-up, with new members and those in arrears, quickly contacted.

Gil spoke at the Sepulveda church on May 30. The Creative Worship committee presented another service, "What Were Their Names?" Excerpts from

old diaries and letters of little known persons who were of heroic stature were read, and folk songs stressed the common bond among people of all times and races. Sunday, June 6, was the annual All Church Family Picnic, in Tilden Regional Park.

Gil gave his last service of the year the following Sunday, "What Do You Want in This Church?" He said that while the congregation considers the architect's plans for the new building, he'd like to explore what we want in a religious society. Why do people come, join, and remain? A New Member Recognition Ceremony was included in the service.

During the summer Gil and Eve participated in a UUSC project at Bir Zeit College in Jordan, living and working with 80 Jordanian students. In an intensive eight week program Gil and Eve taught English to prepare the students for study in English- speaking colleges abroad.

The Adult Program committee planned summer services. Speakers included Robert Pickus of Turn Toward Peace, and Louis Kelso, author of "The Capitalist Welfare State," speaking on "The Economics of Poverty." Pulin Garg, a native of India, spoke on "The Dynamics of Modern Living — East and West." Other services were by members of the church, and included an outdoor service at the Eckley Lane site. Another experimental service by Robin and Billie King explored the question, "Is liberal religion anti-art?" with sculptor Bernie Segal, dancer Lillie Chase, the newly appointed Music Director George Prall, architect Bob Greenlee, and the Kings. Dave Pierson served as moderator.

### **Robin and Billie King**

Robin first learned about the Unitarian church in New York while working for Henry Wallace in the 1948 presidential campaign. He wrote a variety show performed in towns all over the east, and Unitarian church social halls were usually the only places willing to hold them. Robin worked as an illustrator. In 1961 Robin and Billie, with their four boys — Kim, Sean, Kevin and Tris, moved to Arizona to get away from the frantic pace of New York City.

They did not realize what a conservative area Phoenix was. Robin wrote a letter to the newspaper expressing his views, which resulted in several acts of harassment. He received one letter which said, "you must be a Unitarian," inviting him to the Unitarian church. On their first visit he

noticed someone unobtrusively taking down license plate numbers in the church parking lot.

Robin and Billie were warmly welcomed at the church. The Rev. Arthur Olson [father of former Berkeley Fellowship minister Clark Olson] invited them to join. Many organizations Robin supported met at the church. They felt at home and realized how important the church was in this conservative community. Although brought up with decidedly negative attitudes about religion, Robin and Billie joined the church.

There was no work for Robin in Phoenix. Relatives and close friends Stan and Rachel Knoblock had moved to Lafayette, and urged the Kings to join them, which they did. One of Robin's books, *The Angry ABC Book*, had just been published. He was interviewed on a San Francisco radio station, and hired by the station, beginning a new career in broadcasting.

In June 1962, when Robin called the Unitarian church, Bruce Robbins explained summer services were mostly done by church members. Robin remembers the first time they attended Doug Page was speaking about "War and Peace." Bruce introduced himself and welcomed them.

Robin read Gil's printed sermons before meeting him, and was struck by his passion and courage. Robin attended one of Gil's Orientation to Unitarianism meetings and was impressed with his intelligence and animation.

The Kings felt good about the church. They saw these people coming together because they needed each other. No other place offered this liberal community. The non-judgmental atmosphere appealed to them. There was so much that people wanted to do, and there was no way to go but up. He felt they were in on the seeding, and they relished being part of that growth.

Robin and Billie attended the second Hungry-U at the Boulevard Way Holy Ghost Hall in 1963. Billie felt this was the kind of thing they could contribute after the experience of the Henry Wallace shows. The following year they spent many weeks writing the material and rehearsing the skits. They also wrote and directed the 4<sup>th</sup> Hungry-U, in the fall of 1964. In those days as many as 40 eager performers showed up to be in the shows.

Robin wrote and directed the best remembered Hungry-U IX, a satirical revue of the encounter scene. In 1971 and 1972, Scott Beach worked with Robin putting the show together. The 1972 show featured highlights

of ten years of Hungry-U's. Robin again directed the show in 1974, an evening of melodrama from the 1890s.

Both Robin and Billie created many Sunday services noted throughout this chapter. They put together the highly successful Hootenannies for two years, and the Co-op Hootenanny, which resulted in an excellent recording, and broadcast on KPFA. The Limelighters' Lou Gottlieb acted as Master of Ceremonies.

Robin served two years as Dean of the district summer camp at Cazadero. He served as Arts representative on the Building committee for several years. He also facilitated several encounter groups. A comment made at a church evaluation meeting expressed the wish for "more groups like Robin King's youth group." Robin appreciates the irony of being seen as a model for youth, but it was important to him that young people were listened to and responded to with honesty.

In 1965 Robin and Billie moved to Berkeley. Billie attended Starr King, and she and Robin were divorced. In 1972 Robin and Jennifer Scaff were married and returned to Walnut Creek. They were active in the Sunday Services committee, and participated in many creative worship services. Some time later they moved to San Francisco and are no longer actively involved, but MDUUC is still their church home.

Robin and Billie King brought a tremendous surge of creativity and wealth of talents to the church. They shared them unstintingly. Many of our most memorable experimental services were created by them. Their exciting musical productions such as the Hootenannies and the Hungry-U's, will be long remembered by those of us fortunate enough to have shared them.

A camp-out and service was held on Mt. Diablo, and panel discussions on such topics as "Search for a Personal Faith," "Time, Work and Leisure — A New Ethic?" "Oriental Philosophy and Values," and "World Without War." An experimental service entitled "To Be Human," the theme of the coming year's R.E. program, was presented by John Graulich and Carolyn Webb.

Paul Sawyer, minister of the Sepulveda church, was theme speaker at the 1965 UU summer conference at Asilomar. Paul invited his friend Ken Kersey to be on the staff. Kersey arrived with his psychedelic busload of Merry Pranksters. This

was too much for a few of the conference goers who did not stay for the week. For others it was an eye-opening experience of the counter-culture.\*

The first September service described coming church activities. Committees talked about building plans, a youth-adult retreat, a new kind of fund drive, the church school program, etc. Board president Dave Bortin moderated the discussion. The last summer service was a discussion of "What Do We Want?" It was an opportunity to tell the minister and Board our hopes for the year ahead, and to learn what each of us would like the church to provide. This was a valuable community-building experience.

Dave Bortin asked Stan Knoblock to serve on the Board in September 1965. Dave had served two years., the only board president to do so, and was ready for Stan to take over. Dave became board secretary. He was the first board president for as long as any one could remember who had not burned out at the end of his term. Others disappeared, not to be seen for some years afterward. Dave considers this his most important accomplishment, because afterwards, presidents didn't burn out but became part of the permanent leadership group of the church. We now have many ex presidents doing important jobs.

The Annual Church Breakfast was held at the Red Cross Building on September 19, prepared by the Social committee. Children met at Larkey Park. Gil discussed "The Disciplines of Freedom" at the first service in September. The choir sang under the direction of new choir director, George Prall. Church school classes began, also with two sessions.

Gil and Eve shared their impressions of Jordan the next week, sharing souvenirs and Jordanian music. Gil was elected in November to the ACLU-Northern California Board. He was also appointed by the UUA Board to the Advisory Committee of the Department of Social Responsibility. Gil spoke on the political and military aspects of the Arab-Israeli dispute from first-hand observations in the Middle East during the summer. His talk was entitled "Firing at the Border."

On October 17, Don Ford and the Creative Worship committee presented "The Chairs," an exploration of the child in our adult personality. They used different size chairs to show how we integrate the conflicting aspects of ourselves. The program included drama, music, and discussion. This service was the

---

\* These incidents are immortalized in *The Electric Pool Aid Acid Test*, by Tom Wolfe.



contribution Don made to the church of which he was most proud. He chaired the Creative Worship committee for many years.

United Nations Sunday, October 24, Gills sermon was entitled "What Have You Done for Peace Lately?" Gil and the Creative Worship committee presented another experimental dialog service, "Ghosts and the Matter of Death."

Workshops and discussion groups offered by the Program committee included one on human relations led by Eve Gilmartin. Stan Knoblock led a group entitled "Morality and Sex," and Frank Politzer, "Emotional Conflicts Faced When Changing Religious Values." Frank's group was changed to "Switching Religions," a simpler title.

In November Barbara (Isabel) Johnson, Eleanor Taylor, and I started a morning group called "Conversations with Women," to discuss books, values, education, human relations, the arts, etc. Babysitting was provided.

A series of Home Meetings replaced the annual canvass so that members and friends could express themselves in small groups. This was an important canvass, soliciting funds for the new buildings. It was a unique opportunity for people to talk about what they were getting from the church., and how the church could be more responsive to their needs.

Over a ten-day period thirty home meetings were arranged by Eve Gilmartin and Lillie Chase. Everyone was invited to a meeting near their home. Three church leaders attended each meeting. The Board wanted to create an atmosphere encouraging open and honest expression, recorded so that comments could be shared with appropriate individuals and committees. A brochure was mailed to everyone before the meetings with information and questions to begin this process.

Notes from the home meetings were read by the Board. Marty Dimbat presented a summary at the annual meeting in December. The Board and the congregation felt these meetings were valuable, although the operating budget increased only \$660. Pledges for the building fund totaled \$13,000.

November services included a program of poetry readings and jazz called "The Sound of Surprise." Music was by folksinger Betty Reid and pianist Marvin Rosenzweig, with drummer Ted Owen, who planned the program and wrote some of the music and poetry. Gil's service on the 14<sup>th</sup> was entitled "The Transparent Self: Getting to Know You," based on a recent book of this title. The following

Sunday the service celebrated a quarter century of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, "Toward One Humanity." The program featured Gil, Agnes Elfving, and Alma Davies sharing their personal experiences with UUSC programs, and a film depicting the world-wide activities of UUSC, "World Within Our Reach."

The third joint Thanksgiving service was held at Temple Isaiah. Rabbi Robins conducted the service and Gil spoke. Both choirs sang, and presidents of both congregations participated. The Gilmartin again had Thanksgiving Dinner at their home.

The Board agreed that the third priority in the budget (after the minister's salary and rent), should be a full time administrative secretary. There was disagreement about whether this job should be decided by the minister or a personnel committee. Gil felt the minister should make the final decision. Dave Bortin pointed out the major work would still be done by volunteers. They agreed a personnel committee was needed. An item of \$4,000 was included in the budget for a half-time secretary, and was approved at the annual meeting. At last the way was cleared for paid secretarial help for the minister — after six years!

December services included the second in Rev. Gilmartin's series on idealism and idealists, "Absolute Idealist or Practical Idealist." New members were recognized. The choir sang two Robert Frost poems set to music by Randall Thompson, "The Road Not Taken" and "Choose Something Like a Star." These beautiful choral arrangements are still sung by our much larger choir. Gil's next service on idealism was "The Relevance of the Ideal" and then, "Christmas as an Ideal."

The Annual Family Christmas program was against DVC. After lighting the Yule Log the congregation enjoyed a multimedia production of Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales" read by Robin King. Ted Owens and Mary Rosenzweig played drums and piano. Bernie Segal sketched while LAYERS danced scenes, choreographed by Lillie Chase. Newsprint and crayons were laid out for all the little ones. A beautiful handmade ornament created by Eleanor Pound was given to each family for their tree as a gift from the church. A memorable celebration, fondly remembered by all those fortunate enough to share it.

1966

The first service of 1966 featured Morris Milgram, an old friend of Gil's, speaking on "Ethics and Housing." Mr. Milgram was president of Modern Community Developers, and Planned Communities. He developed integrated communities and advised groups planning democratic housing. The following Sunday Gil spoke about "The Function of Leadership and the Role of the Minister." His topic January 23, was "The Individual and Foreign Policy," and the 31st: "The Process of Education."

About sixty people attended the four evenings at the Gilmartins' to discuss the tapes of last year's Kimball lectures, "the human touch, who needs it?" Lee Davenport agreed to serve as chair of the Program committee when Stan Knoblock was elected to the Board.

The Program committee engaged Alan Watts for a series of three lectures in February, at Diablo Valley College gym. Dr. Watts was an exciting speaker, author and lecturer. Former Professor and Graduate School Dean of Harvard, author of fifteen books, he was an expert on Eastern thought, and saw himself as a bridge between the East and West. His series was entitled "Morals in a Floating World." The lectures, "Metaphysics and Morals," "The Game Theory of Ethics," and "Religion and Sexuality" were attended by about 800 people. Lois Sprague and Mary Jo Dimbat sold over 100 volumes from our Bookshop, and we made \$2,400 for the church.

The Social committee held a "Masked Ball and Carnival" in February, at the Walnut Creek Elks Club. There was live music, art, games, and poetry. The Board was still not ready to hire secretarial help. Don Sanford suggested someone be hired part-time with the understanding that if the financial situation improved the job would be full-time. Orville Hill spoke of the danger of deficit spending and the threat to committee functioning if funds were cut. Gil again stated his great need for secretarial help.

At the February meeting the issue was still unresolved. Gil asked the Board's approval to return to Jordan for a nine-week session during the summer. When objections were raised to being away so long, Dave Bortin said "a secretary could help here if one is hired by then." The total yearly salary was to be \$2,500, and the church did not have to pay social security. Don Sanford said that as a responsible employer we should pay it. At the annual meeting Lucille Davenport

was cheered for mailing sixteen TONS of books to Tuskegee Institute. A most impressive undertaking! Inez Stuart was chair of Denominational Affairs, but the committee was not functioning.

In February Dorothy Jongward gave a talk entitled "An Introduction to Transactional Analysis." A long-time friend of the church, she was a marriage and family counselor and lecturer, who later wrote *Born to be Free* with Dr. Muriel James. Former R.E. Director John Graulich spoke on "Tryouts Saturday, 1-4 pm." The following Sunday Gil explored the age of the secular city, said to be an age of no religion at all. The last February service, "More Liberal Than Thou," was a drama and discussion of liberalism, disagreement, and closed versus open thinking, created by Don Ford and the Creative Worship committee.

When I learned Gil was looking for a part time secretary, I called Gil to ask about the job. We made an appointment, and the following week I reported for work as the first secretary of the Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church. It proved to be a long and happy occupation, lasting just four months short of 25 years.

My desk was just inside the large work room in the Highland Building basement, dark and far from the windows. But there was a light on the desk, a typewriter, and hours that made it possible to be home when my children returned from school. Volunteers were in and out, and Gil was good to work with. This was just what I'd been looking for. The March 9<sup>th</sup> Board minutes state "Gil announced that we now have a part-time secretary, Beverly Scaff. Hooray! She will work at the direction of the minister 20 hours per week, and requests for her assistance must be channeled through Gil."

### **Lloyd and Beverly Scaff**

When Lloyd took a job as Administrative Assistant to the Contra Costa County Controller in 1961, we moved to Pleasant Hill with our four daughters — Jennifer, Mary K., Jeannie and Judy. We came from San Leandro where we helped found the Starr King Unitarian Church in Hayward five years before.

Lloyd was raised a Southern Baptist, and I grew up Catholic. While living in New York we explored the Society for Ethical Culture and a Friends Meeting House, but did not really get interested in religion until Jennifer was born and we read Sophia Fahs' *Today's Children and Yesterday's*

*Heritage.* This was what we wanted for our children. We attended the Berkeley Church until we learned a Unitarian fellowship was forming in San Leandro, and were charter members when the group applied for Fellowship status in 1954.

We took a year's sabbatical (new Fellowships were lots of work!) before joining the Mt. Diablo church in 1962. Our children attended the R.E. program, and I joined the R.E. committee. I also joined the Creative Worship committee. The following year I was elected to the Board of the new Pacific Central District, serving two years, and was liaison to the District R.E. committee. Lloyd remembers many nights of babysitting during this time. We both sang **in** the choir.

Our introduction to social events was the first Hungry-U. We were impressed by the talent and creativity, and the following year I tried out for the Hungry-U II, performing in many over the years. Lloyd worked on set design and staging.

Lloyd served on the Board for two years, and has been involved with Building and Grounds since our buildings were built. The church community has been central to our lives, and we continue to be active. Our four daughters grew up in the church school and LRY, and we grew up here as well. Jennifer was married by Gil, Jeannie by Peter Christiansen, Mary K. and Judy by Intern Ann Tyndall. Jeremy, our first grandchild, was dedicated by Til Evans. Our five grandchildren love to attend and feel at home here. Lloyd and I appreciate what a gift it has been to be part of this beloved community.

Gil's first service in March was "The Comfortable Pew." He explored the UU admonition to "comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable." The next week he talked about the Delano strike and the migrant farm workers in "Anyone Who Eats the Sour Grapes..." On March 20, Gil looked at the progress made since the march from Selma to Montgomery one year before.

LRY (the youth group), conducted the service March 27, "Popular Music in the Age of Sub-Culture." A special service of music and poetry on the Negro in Africa and America, "No Hidin' Place," was presented by Betty Reid. The script was written by Glenn Myles, Bay Area singer and actor. Drummer and dancer

Ellsworth Johnson, and high school music instructor Floyd Wade were also featured.

Betty described the service: "We all cry for dialog, communication, a chance to relate. With the music of Kurt Weill, some moving music of slavery days, the eloquence of Floyd's guitar and the excitement of Ellsworth's native drums, the fine voice of Glenn and the gentle contrast of Betty's, we think we *can* 'tell it like it is'."

A Spring Festival, "Renaissance," on the theme of birth and rebirth, was held April 10. There was music by the choir, Joan Rodriguez danced to music by Ted Owen and Mary Rosenzweig. Eve and Gil also participated. On April 17th former Board president Bill Houff, minister of the Redwood City Fellowship, spoke on "Accepting the Unacceptable." An Open House for Bill and Donna Houff was held at the home of Frank and Judy Politzer.

The Social committee sponsored a Wine & Cheese Dinner Dance at the Elks Club in April. They also put on a "Gotham City Ball" with costumes, a Coffee-house, art for sale, games and poetry. The Board again planned a series of four Home Meetings, predicting there might not be sufficient turnout for more. Only one announcement appeared in the newsletter, giving dates and addresses. They were not well attended. At the April 27<sup>th</sup> Board meeting Eleanor Taylor mentioned we try to put new people to work too soon, and most need to make friends first.

The Diablo Valley College Madrigal Singers performed at the church the first of May, with music from the 16<sup>th</sup> century and modern compositions. The following weekend Gil was in Berkeley counseling UUSC workers. Bernie Segal gave the service, using visual arts to explore morality, ideas, and goals involved in the learning process.

The Politzer family gave a service entitled "Clean Your Room and You'll Find the Hammer." They described it as an informal study of liberal religion casually applied to family life, featuring type cast actors father, mother, sons and daughter — Frank, Judy, Gary, Stephen and Geneva.

The Program committee sponsored a public lecture at Diablo Valley College by Dr. Garrett Hardin on "Medical and Moral Aspects of Abortion." A biologist specializing in ecology and evolution, Dr. Hardin was particularly interested in the consequences of our actions. Dr. Hardin spoke without a fee, asking that donations be sent to the Society for Humane Abortion. (Abortion was illegal in

1966.) Before the lecture, the committee had trouble posting announcements. They were told they were inappropriate, against someone's religion, or there was no room.

Gil next explored the question, my country right or wrong — what then?" Entitled "The Agony Without the Ecstasy," Gil challenged the morality of the Vietnam involvement. Few sermons were printed in those days. The World Without War committee mimeographed it, and a newsletter announcement urged that copies be sent to friends and legislators.

During May and June the Board discussed the role of the minister, and again expressed the need for a Ministerial Relations committee. Frank Politzer was named chair of a Midweek Service, to begin in the Fall. Bill Tuttle was appointed chair of the Worship committee. Barbara Johnson took over as Membership chair, and agreed to keep the member card file up to date, Eleanor Pound began functioning as a personnel recruiter, attempting to help new members find a place within the church.

The following Sunday Gil's sermon was entitled "Do I Take Away a Man's Faith?" On June 5th, a special dialog service presented the conflicting philosophies adapted from Kazantzakis' book, *Zorba the Greek*, "The Soul is Flesh," with Aron Gilmartin and Robin King. The church year ended with a Flower Communion and Dedication of Parents and Children. Gil and Eve left for Jordan, where they again led an English Language Workshop for the UUSC at Bir Zeit College. They spent two days in Egypt for briefing and sightseeing. The Board granted Gil a short vacation extension for the nine-week workshop.

The church office remained open half-time through the summer. For the first time a secretary could help church members in need of professional services in the minister's absence. I spent a busy summer organizing all the files Gil had kept without help for five years.

Gil had now served for 5½ years and as is inevitable, there were some who had negative feelings about him, the Board, and the church. At the June meeting Eleanor Taylor presented a memo to the Board. In the fall of 1965, at the request of Stan Knoblock, she had attempted to have the Board and church members "do an objective evaluation because of perceived discomfort," with some members and friends leaving the church.

Her memo goes on: We asked the minister to take more leadership in R.E., dispense with an R.E. director, and employ a part-time secretary." Eleanor felt the adjustments the minister made were remarkable. She suggested much of the continued dissension and unhappiness "comes from our inability as a Board and congregation to recognize our wide differences in philosophy, theology, or lack of it. We have made almost no effort to find out why others come to our Fellowship or why they leave or stay." She suggested that over the summer the board examine "what we are like as religious individuals and explore with the congregation how well we represent them: Only then will we be able to evaluate our minister and his performance."

Summer services included Arnold Durlacher exploring pre-school education, Eleanor Taylor's "Testimony of a Liberal," Creative Worship committee chair Don Ford discussing the philosophy of Martin Buber. Church member and lawyer Ed Baltimore spoke about "A Defense of the U.S. Supreme Court," and Rachel and Stan Knoblock shared their ideas of "Fellowship — Unitarian Style." Dave Bortin talked about occupied territories and their foreign governors from Pontius Pilate to Henry Cabot Lodge, in a service he called "Art Thou the King of the Jews? Because it's funny, you don't look Jewish." The last summer service was a meeting after the fashion of the Friends.

The Board again discussed a Ministerial Relations committee, but no action was taken. The financial situation appeared grim, with the prospect of a \$1,400 deficit by the end of June. (It was \$1,643.) The minutes state "Presumably, we have a treasurer lined up for fall." Stan Knoblock and Marty Dimbat offered to co-chair the Finance committee as there was no chair.

The Board discussed again holding Home Meetings, feeling that last year's had been successful, but Marty said that 90 pledgers had not attended. They agreed meetings had to be much better organized and publicized. About 18 gatherings were held. At the November All-committee workshop the Finance committee reported "there were not enough results for the work involved to warrant repeating." Planning began late, and some did not attend feeling the meetings were only for pledging.

The annual Welcome Back Church Breakfast was September 11<sup>th</sup> at the Red Cross, with children at Larkey Park. Gil's first service was entitled "Travel at Your Own Risk," reflecting his summer experiences in Jordan and the Near East. The



next speaker was UUA Religious Education Consultant Mary Mauzey, who spoke about "Freedom in a Framework," and spent the day meeting with parents and teachers. At the first October service Lee and Lucille Davenport, with Eve and Gil, spoke of "Jordan and Berlin." Lucille also taught in the English Language program at Bir Zeit, and attended a special East-West workshop in Berlin.

Gil's next service was entitled "Whitey and Black Power." He discussed an incident at Hunter's Point, playing a tape of testimony by Hunter's Point social worker John Duke before the Office of Economic Opportunity. The midweek service focused on brainstorming ideas for making the services what people wanted. The following week Gil gave his sermon about Hunter's Point at the midweek service, and Ronald Clark, Starr King student and administrator of the World Without War Council spoke on "Facing the Draft — A Happening."

For some time there had been interest in a midweek service. A Wednesday evening potluck dinner was held with a brainstorming session. The first was a family service with a potluck dinner, classes for the children, and a service on John Muir's Sierra Diary. About 100 attended, twice what was expected. The midweek service was off to a rousing start. The following week Gil gave the midweek service, and the Rev. Howard Matson on October 26th. Judy Politzer and Rowena McGregor planned the dinners. Jack Woida and Gary Howard became co-chairs of the Social committee in October. They planned a New Year's Eve party at the Highland Building, and a gourmet dinner at the Elks Club in February.

Two ex-drug addicts spoke in October about Synanon's work with addicts. Gil then spoke about personal identity, "The Masked Player." The following week an experimental service by the Creative Worship committee, with the congregation participating, presented an original play, "I'm So Glad There Are Negroes in Our Congregation!" The cast included Bill and Marge Chapel, Alan and Rowena McGregor, Trudi Selznick and Don Ford. The choir sang original music composed by church members. Unfortunately Orders of Service between 1960 and 1966 were not saved, so we have an incomplete record of the many creative services during this period. This was the church's 15th year, and Gil's service on November 13 asked the questions "Who are we? What are we? Now What and Where?"

A newsletter editorial by Joyce Cass highlighted Gil's activities during October and November:

*“Attended a reception for the new faculty at DVC, gave the Invocation at a testimonial dinner, attended the Mental Health Association Board meeting, Pacesetter’s Committee of Bay Area Girl Scout Council, participated in the “Marriage and Family Relations” panel at DVC, represented the ACLU Board at a meeting in Fresno, reported on teenage suicide at the state Mental Health Association annual conference, met with the National Advisory Committee of the UUA Department of Social Responsibility, chaired the District Social Concerns committee, attended a conference on the Port Chicago Vigil, and attended a UUSC National Finance committee meeting.”*

This must have been an eye opener to those who saw Gil only Sunday mornings!

Church members Ray and Rachel Feichtmeir and sons Kurt, Mark, Karl and Peter spent the summer in Honduras in a building project sponsored by the UUSC at the country’s only mental hospital. They shared their experiences November 20. Agnes Flfving spoke about her work on a similar project at Patsquaro, Mexico.

On November 27 Gil discussed “Little White Lies,” the how and why of deceit. The midweek service had children, parents and teachers together. Sunday, December 4 was the long awaited Groundbreaking event on Eckley Lane. Families brought shovels and spades to participate in the festivities. Board president Dave Bortin spoke from the lofty heights of a bull-dozer. It was an exciting occasion for everyone who participated. Here are excerpts from Gil’s words:

*“As we hallow this ground, we would erect a temple for all people. No creed shall separate us from the rest of [human]kind. Here may believers of every sort come to meditate upon that which is highest and noblest, to aspire toward that life that brings fulfillment as it restores the harmony sought since ancient times, the harmony of the human spirit with the world and the universe.*

*“At this season the rains come and prepare the earth for the seeds from which will come the food to sustain life. As we turn this earth, we plant a different seed, and in the days ahead will grow a different plant that sustains the life of the spirit.*

*“May this simple act be blessed, and may everything that shall come from it bless each of us, our children and our children’s children, this community and all [human]kind.”*

That evening a gala 15<sup>th</sup> Anniversary cocktail party and dinner was held at the Walnut Creek Elks Club. The budget was presented, and new Board members

elected. The annual ecumenical Thanksgiving service was held at Temple Isaiah. Gil and Eve again had Thanksgiving Dinner in their home. They invited everyone to a Christmas Open House on December 10. Eve's genius for decorating always made this the best attended party of the year. Their home was dramatically and beautifully decorated for the Holidays.

A Recognition and Joining Ceremony was held December 11. The midweek service featured District Executive Director Michael Boardman speaking on "Yes, Jack, There is a PCD." Michael was the first Starr King intern to work with Gil in 1960. The Midwinter Festival was at Civic Arts Theatre, the old walnut packing house. Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales" was read by Robin King, with a dance interpretation by Lillie Chase. Music was by Mary Rosenzweig, Ted Owens, Phil Yost and Tom Glass, art and drawings by Bernie Segal. Santa Claus appeared with gifts for the children and refreshments for everyone.

The beautiful ornaments on the tree were given to each family. They were made by Eleanor Pound, who "decided to start a tradition last Christmas" when she thought each family should have a memento of the party. Eleanor continued to make ornaments as a gift from the church to each family for years, with help from Grace Moran and others. Many of us still proudly hang these delightful ornaments on our holiday tree each year, though bedraggled after almost 30 years!

## 1967

New officers were elected at the January Board meeting. Stan Knoblock was elected president, Eleanor Pound vice president, Dave Bortin secretary. George Fujioka continued as treasurer. Other Board members were Carol Cook, Alan MacLane, John Hickman, Orville Hill, Betty Reid, and Eleanor Taylor. Agnes Elfving reported the Service committee had raised \$1,100 during 1966 for UUSC.

The first service in January was "A Service of Meditation," after the fashion of the Friends, presented by the Creative Worship committee. Gil was chair of the UU Ministers Association this year, and he and Eve attended the annual retreat the first week in January at Rancho Mirage near Palm Springs. The Program committee scheduled a lecture in March by Chicago labor organizer Saul Alinsky. They devoted a Coffeehouse evening to a discussion of his work and articles. The midweek service was down to one a month, with no one willing to take over the responsibility for planning.

The Board continued to discuss the role of the minister and Ministerial Relations Committee. They agreed it provided an additional channel of communication — the congregation would be more aware of what the minister does, and Gil more aware of needs and desires. Gil said he did not believe its function should be that of sitting in judgment of the minister or congregation.

At least one member of the Board was concerned about lack of growth. He presented figures showing that Palo Alto, Marin and Sacramento averaged an 18% operating budget increase per year. It was pointed out that these churches all have buildings and did not have to support a building fund in addition to the operating budget. There was also a minority opinion voiced by two Board members regarding our inability to honor a deficit budget.

At the congregational meeting the Board recommended a Budget of \$28,600, and a projected income of \$26,000. A minority report was presented by Orville Hill recommending that expenses be cut \$2,000. Many proposals were made, but in the end two members pledged to raise \$2,000, and the budget of \$28,600 passed. The meeting was attended by 115 members.

Because of the controversy surrounding the budget, the Board, at president Stan Knoblock's suggestion, held four Sunday evening Forums so that members could express their feelings about the budget and the state of the church. More than fifty members attended, with twenty-five or more at each session. Dissatisfactions were expressed about religious education, the minister, Sunday service, the evening service, the congregation, etc. People were heard, which went a long way to dissipating the anger and frustration many were feeling. Verbatim comments were made available to everyone who requested them.

The Gilmartins experienced a disaster in January. Betty Reid phoned early one morning just as Eve came downstairs to a flooded ground floor. Newsletter editor Joyce Cass describes it:

*“Within minutes the Knoblocks arrived — Stan in cowboy hat, a shovel in each hand, while Rachel set up the Field Kitchen. The Scaffs arrived next, (Lloyd attired in a plastic tablecloth to inspect leaking roof and wall, etc.) More appeared, dispatcher Reid arrived, and after consultation among the Hydraulic Engineers, the unavoidable conclusion was reached — a large ditch must be dug to stem the rising waters.*

*A reverse raindance proved non-contributory. While diggers dug, others moved furniture and endless stacks of books to higher ground. Soon order was restored — the waters diverted and soaked carpet appealingly propped up on brooms. Sandwiches and coffee were consumed by the weary storm troopers just as fresh recruits appeared. A warm, damp feeling of disaster averted **was** experienced by all the newly formed and happily dissolved MDUC Flood Disaster committee."*

Gil sent Stan a long memo on the State of the Church. He described in detail several committees without chairs — Youth Activities, Denominational Affairs, Publicity, and church activities for whom no one had taken responsibility — Coffeehouse, Family Holiday Celebration, Summer services, and the annual Hungry-U. Gil raised concerns about exceptions to bill-paying priorities, a building loan, newsletter policy and the place of the Bookshop in the life of the church.

The Board had been forced to deal with a lack of adequate funds for so long little else could command their attention. For a few, the minister was seen as the cause — if his sermons were better, if he provided better leadership, more people would come and there would be more money. For others it was the lack of lay leadership. This created a certain amount of tension on the Board, and surfaced several times during these years.

The midweek service was not well attended, and down to one night a month. No one was in charge of this event, and it was soon ended. On January 22nd, Gil spoke of "A World I Never Made," — looking at youth through his own experience. The following Sunday Gil and members of the Worship committee presented "In Search of Worship." This service generated so much interest that two evening meetings continued the discussion.

Gil was chair of the Social Concerns Committee of the UUA. As acting chair of the Department of Social Responsibility he attended a workshop in Washington, "Vietnam: Challenge to the Conscience of America." He joined 2,000 clergy contacting representatives to urge an end to the war before the vote on appropriation.

Gil thanked those who contributed to the cost of the trip and said in the newsletter: "I know there are differences among us with respect to U.S. policy and action in Vietnam, and I know the sincerity and integrity of those with whom I

must differ. I also know that we are united in our desire for peace and freedom among the people of the world. We share a commitment to human values, the same dedication to life." Gil shared his experience in Washington with a service February 12 on the workshop, "Vietnam: Challenge to the Conscience of America."

The newsletter carried a letter written to President Lyndon Johnson from a child in our church school: "*Dear Mr. President: Why don't we bring our soldiers home? Then there will not be any more of our soldiers dead. I do not like war. I am 7 years old. Respectfully yours, Charles Goodmacher*"

Several years later Chuck was Program Director of the Mt. Diablo Peace Center. American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) staff member Ed Anderson spoke to the church on February 5, about "Creative Humanism — 21<sup>st</sup> Century."

Thirty-five church leaders attended a Retreat at White Memorial in Marin the first weekend in February. Disagreements were aired in an atmosphere of commitment to the church. Gil's note in the newsletter acknowledged that "our differences still bother us, but the realization of our diverse program desires is largely a matter of will. We can help a committee provide what we want, or join with others and do it ourselves. *The time for doing is now!*"

Don Ford, chair of the Retreat, said: "We must seek all these things — self-worth, relationships, building, and community action. Another issue is the need to understand "authority" in UU tradition. It's not part of a creed, it pervades all our activities and concerns — the role of the minister, the Board, committees, even worship. Our decision-making *is peer not parent.*"

A comment from Gil the following week was also about authority. He said, "The principle of individual freedom extends to all aspects of our corporate life. There are no *oughts* among us. We cannot say the church *ought* to do this or provide that — *we* are the church! Each of us must respond to our personal commitment and sense of responsibility." A later note from Gil emphasized two points: 1) we try to create that which we want, and 2) we encourage others to create what they want.

These comments appeared many years before the word "empowerment" became imbedded in our thinking, but that is what Gil was describing.

In February a memo from Gil to Board president Stan Knoblock stated: "The Denominational Affairs committee has been nonexistent, although Inez Smart had agreed to be co-chair if we found a second person. This wasn't done and there has

been no activity. Inez tries to see that we send delegates to district meetings. We are entitled to four, and our minister. Marty Dimbat has been the most regular attender, and I think he should be asked to chair. Members should include regular delegates and others interested who don't want to be delegates. This includes national *and* district involvement."

A big production involving the church was the Tone Poem, "After Reading James Baldwin," written and choreographed by Lithe Chase to the music of Dave Brubeck. The theme was racism in white America. It was sponsored jointly by Jewish Social Action, the Council of Churches, Catholic Interracial Council, area Catholic churches, the Orinda Interracial Council, and MDUUC. It was held at Las Lomas High School during Brotherhood Week. Eve Gilmartin said of the Tone Poem, "No other program or dramatization has ever had such an impact on me."

The service February 19 was entitled "To Be — Or What To Be, That is the Question." Gil explored some conjectures about our future as a religious fellowship. Next, "In Wilderness is the Preservation of the World." On March 5, Gil had a dialog sermon with Ron Clark, Starr King student and administrator of the World Without War Council in Berkeley, on "Peace Education — A Happening."

In March Gil gave the first in a series of sermons discussing the moral issues of our society, "New Morality or No Morality." He quoted Alfred North Whitehead, "The simple-minded use of 'right or wrong' is one of the chief obstacles to understanding." Don Ford began a discussion series on the philosophy of theologian Martin Buber, author of *I and Thou*.

The Program committee sponsored a public lecture at Diablo Valley College by Saul Minsky speaking on "Modern Religion — Comfortable Christianity." Minsky was known for his unorthodox methods of teaching the poor to use the system to become self-supporting. He organized the Chicago meat packing workers, and forced Eastman Kodak to hire minority workers during the 60s.

The church co-sponsored a workshop on Extremism with Temple Isaiah and Valley United Church of Christ about the taking over of a school board by the John Birch Society, and other right-wing groups. Over 150 attended. Three committees sponsored a weekend at White Memorial Retreat in Marin to plan programs for 1968 — Program, Social, and Ways & Means.

The Worship committee presented the Spring Festival March 26, using Walt Whitman's "Song of the Rolling Earth." The service featuring dramatic readings by Robin King, Tom Bell, Rachel Knoblock, Marge Chapel, Gil and Eve. Warner Freeman accompanied on guitar. The choir performed Beethoven and Sibelius, and Aloha Hodgson played two flute solos. Readings were from the "Song of Songs" and other Whitman poems. Everyone brought flowers. The service was held on the hillside behind the Red Cross Building with a view across rolling green hills to Mt. Diablo. As mentioned, this view no longer exists.

At the first April service Gil and his son David discussed "Is there any bridge over the gap between the young and those over 25?" The following week Gil talked about what he had found in Unitarianism, "Seeking is for the Finding."

The Board again discussed a Ministerial Relations Committee. They could not agree whether this committee should have only people in sympathy with Gil, or represent different factions or viewpoints in the church. Betty Reid and Eleanor Taylor volunteered to work with Gil to suggest names. They came up with five, who were asked to serve.

John van der Veen had been appointed Purchasing Agent and was purchasing supplies as requested. He kept in close contact with John Schilling of the Finance committee monitoring the deficit.

On April 16, James Reeb Memorial Civil Rights Worker George Johnson spoke at our church for the first time. His sermon was titled "King Kong and Black Power." George was to have a profound affect our church. This period is covered in the Chapter on Civil Rights.

In a sermon on April 23, Gil addressed the congregation on reflections and questions about religious education, "What Speaks to our Children?" His next sermon was titled "Free Religion and Free Unitarianism." The Diablo Valley College Madrigal group performed on May 7, while Gil and other members attended the General Assembly in Denver. Gil spoke about "GA" on his return, "Responding to a Revolutionary Age."

Gill continued to push for discussion of long range plans. In a newsletter article he stated, 'If you know what you want, you are likely to know what needs to be done to achieve it. How do we define ourselves, and create programs that



further these goals? How will public transit affect us? (BART was under construction). 'There is nothing to prevent us from shaping our future.'

The Board had talked about a survey of the congregation for some time. They mailed a questionnaire to the congregation in June. Of the 500 sent out, over 100 were returned. Orville Hill explored tabulating the returns by IBM machine. He agreed to recruit and instruct volunteers in making tabulations to be ready for key-punching. This was probably our first foray into the world of computers.

On May 21 Gil shared results of a nationwide UUA survey, "Profile of a UU, 1966." The following Sunday the Junior Youth group (JYA) presented the play "Socrates," with a discussion on the individuals responsibility to society. Gil's service on June 4th was "To Stand Alone." The last service of the church year was "Who's Killing the Church?"

Work began on the new building. With the selling of bonds to church members, the building fund was up to \$84,000, enough to begin construction on two of the five buildings (covered in Chapter 3). By the end of June Highland Building classrooms were vacated, leaving only the large office space and Gil's office. In the fall classes met in homes until the new buildings were completed.

Gil moderated a panel discussion at a conference on "Privacy in a Crowding World," co-sponsored by ACLU and San Francisco State College. He also attended a retreat considering the church in suburbia with a group of area clergy, brought together by Gil and Rabbi Robins. Gil and Eve spent the summer in the Northwest.

For some time Beverly Bortin had been holding a Stitchery morning at her home. Church member Clarisse Bois was our master stitcher, helping others with projects. Beverly continued the get-togethers through the summer.

The Worship committee planned the summer services. They included the World Without War Committee, Beverly Bortin's son Peter Lawsy, Don Ford, Robin King and Stan Knoblock. Dr. Les Blades of the Berkeley Fellowship also spoke. Children were cared for at Walnut Creek Recreation Park by two LRY young people. On August 6<sup>th</sup> the service was held at Samuel P. Taylor State Park in Marin, during the church campout.

And so ended the first seven years of Aron Gilmartin's ministry at MDUC.





The Rev. Aron Gilmartin

## CHAPTER II — THE GILMARTIN YEARS

### Part 2 The Later Years, 1967-1974

The last Annual Church Breakfast at the Red Cross was held September 10, 1967. Church school met in nearby homes. Gil's first sermon developed the theme that *initiation* lies at the core of any genuine human life. A model of the five buildings was displayed as the Center of Interest.

Gil was appointed to the UUA Commission on Religion and Race. He continued as chair of the Pacific Central District Social Concerns Committee. Gil's involvement in social concerns was well known and recognized nationally. He also served for many years as national vice chair of the UU Service Committee, and spent two days in Boston in November meeting with the committee.

On September 24th Gills sermon was entitled "Because I Love My Country — the Agony of Vietnam." The country was torn apart by the war, and members of the church in favor of U.S. involvement were in the minority. Dave Bortin led a weekly "Dissent" discussion group, reading and discussing these issues and the right to speak out against established or popular orthodoxy. The World Without War was also actively involved on many fronts.

The Program committee offered a full slate of programs for the fall. "Spanish for Travelers," with Benilda Crouse, A Dissent group discussing Howard Zinn's "*Vietnam: the Logic of Withdrawal*," and "Archeology and the Ancient World," with Lawrence Blackwood, meeting in Rossmoor. Creative Stitchery continued at Beverly Bortin's. Frank and Jean Nickell facilitated a Comparative Cultures group featuring visitors from other cultures.

In October Gil spoke on "Man: The Reluctant Brother." The Rev. Byrd Helligas spoke the following Sunday when Gil was in New York attending an emergency conference called by the Commission on Religion and Race on UU Response to the Black Rebellion. The conference dealt with the riots during the summer and how our churches could help bring a new level of attention to the cities and to everyone. Gil shared the experience of this conference the following Sunday. The next Sunday Starr King intern Harold Wilson gave the service, "Self, Society and the Liberal Church." On October 29, Gil spoke on "... beginning with me."

We met for the first time November 5th at the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Theatre, returning to one service because of the larger space. Sharing the pulpit with Gil were East Bay UU Project Director George Johnson, and Starr King student Howard Traylor. They explored "The Unitarian Response to the Black

Rebellion." All three had attended the emergency conference called by the denomination.

During his service on November 19, Gil showed slides and spoke of the work of the UUSC. The church plunged into a ferment of activity. The congregation had moved into a theatre, and children were transported to classes at six locations. Protests against the war were escalating, and realization of the Black Rebellion was pouring over us in consciousness-raising waves.

A congregational meeting was called to vote on the recommendation of the Board to extend an invitation to George Johnson to be a Minister of MDUUC. The resolution stated "By this action we affirm our desire to deepen the religious life of our people, and to explore and move in new ways in human relations." His primary responsibility would continue as Director of the East Bay Project, and this action entailed no salary commitment

The resolution passed unanimously. After a moving acceptance George Johnson received a standing ovation. This subject is covered in Chapter 9.

The Ways & Means committee sponsored a benefit for the church at Civic Arts November 17 and 18. Church member, author, artist and radio personality Robin King presented "Alexander King & Son," the acid wit and whimsy of the noted author, illustrator, raconteur, and television personality. Robin shared poignant and hilarious episodes of his father's life. It was a great success.

The Annual Thanksgiving Ecumenical Service was again held at Temple Isaiah, and George Johnson gave the sermon, "On Being a Real Person." Gil and Eve again had Thanksgiving Dinner in their home. This celebration was always well attended. One year there were 75 adults and children! The Gilmartins also held their annual Holiday Open House.

Gil's service on November 26, dealt with "The Course of Revolution – The Soviet Union after 50 Years." Gil discussed Conscientious Objection on December 3<sup>rd</sup>. He explored the crisis of decision that confronts every young man of eighteen, as well as each of us. His service on December 10, was titled "A Man is a Man."

At the annual meeting December 10, the congregation approved an operating budget of \$27,400. New Board members elected were Rowena McGregor, George Prall, Jody Schilling, Marty Stuart, and John van der Veen. John van der

Veen, Don Ford, Dorothy White, Peter Davies and Barbara Johnson were appointed to the new Ministerial Relations Committee.

The service on December 17 reflected the somber mood of the racial tensions in our movement. It was called "A Season for Peace," on the struggle and hope for peace and brotherhood. Many voices expressed the vision, apathy, nostalgia, activism, despair, and the longing for community.

The Christmas Eve service was a time for singing carols, and music of all kinds. Gil's sermon spoke of "Christmas — A Season of Hope." The last sermon of the year Gil titled "Tomorrow is unto men

is a door to be opened or closed,  
as a journey, an adventure."

## **1968**

The Board and Gil attended a retreat the first weekend in January. Eleanor Pound was elected president, Alan MacLane vice president, Marty Stuart secretary. George Fujioka continued as treasurer.

The first service of the new year was an interpretation of the poem "George Gray" by Edgar Lee Masters in words, music, and dance. The Diablo Dance Quintet led by Lillie Chase performed, and George Johnson's sermon was entitled "With a Furling Sail at Rest in a Harbor." Gil attended the annual UUMA Retreat this weekend.

UU singer and songwriter Ric Masten was again with us on January 14<sup>th</sup> while Gil was in Washington meeting with the UUSC. On January 21 Gil did a service exploring attitudes and goals as seen in UU Profiles.

Gil sent a two-page memo to Eleanor Pound detailing the areas needing attention, particularly the move to the new buildings. Notice had to be given to the Highland Building and Civic Arts, a Dedication of the new buildings planned and publicized, and new furnishings and maintenance provided. The bylaws needed revision, decisions had to be made regarding the Black Caucus, the Freedom Fund, the Installation of George Johnson, and the General Assembly in May. Gil also asked that the Board establish responsibility for the Church Picnic in June, the Hungry-U, and the Wine Tasting-Art Auction.

Gil devoted a whole paragraph to addressing the concerns of those in the congregation upset by the “social action image” of the church. He felt the Board needed to set aside time to deal with this, inviting concerned individuals to meet with the Board. He stated “I think it is important to hear and understand what they are saying as well as for them to understand why the church proceeds as it does.”

The Board distributed a Goals Questionnaire toward the end of 1967, and Gil’s service on January 21, discussed “the recent Attitudes and Goals self-survey.” A series of informal meetings to consider the survey were scheduled.

Harold Wilson’s address on February 4, was entitled “Dehumanization — the process of making anything acceptable.” The following Sunday the Worship committee presented a service called “Making Masks for You.” On February 18, Betty Reid participated with Gil in a dialog sermon exploring racial violence in the streets, and Black Panther Party leader Huey Newton. Gil’s next service, the first in a series on sex in our society, was titled “The Revolution in Sex — The Playboy Philosophy.”

Gil’s first March service was an important one with broad effects. It was entitled “The American Crisis: The City.” The just published Kerner Commission Report on Civil Disorder began with “You are the last President to have the option of governing one nation.” Gil said, “This is one problem we cannot pass on to our children, it is now or never.” At its next meeting the Board voted unanimously to bear public witness to the nine points of Gil’s sermon, and recommend a steering committee to carry out the program. A special congregational meeting March 24, voted to form a Steering committee, and several resolutions were passed. (See Civil Rights Chapter.)

The Program committee sponsored Dr. S. I. Hayakawa speaking in the DVC gym on “Knowing Where You’re At By Talking To Yourself.” Professor of English at San Francisco State College, Dr. Hayakawa was the author of *Language in Action*, *Language, Meaning and Maturity*, and *The Use and Misuse of Language*. He was a recognized authority in the field of semantics branching out into mass communication, anthropology, and psychology. Those of us who had been introduced to him in college found him a humorous and thought-provoking speaker.

Starr King student David Dalrymple, a former military officer in Vietnam, spoke in March, as did Howard and Rosemary Matson. On March 24, Betty Reid and Harold Wilson reported on the meeting of Black UU's held in Chicago. A "Black Caucus" had emerged in many religious groups, and much of the service was reserved for comments and questions. Gil's next service concerned The Police and the Law."

Gil spent the following week in Philadelphia and Boston. He attended a meeting planning support for the Black Affairs Council, and UU Service Committee meetings as national vice chair. On April 7 the service was to be "Architects of Religious Liberty" — honoring 400 years of religious freedom and the founders of that liberty. It was cancelled because of the assassination of Martin Luther King. On the initiative of our church a Memorial Service was held at Walnut Creek Methodist Church. Recalling the dream of King, Gil said that "we - the white man, are killers of that dream."

Pacific Central District sponsored Camp-outs during the spring and summer each year. In April a group campground was reserved at Pinnacles, an unusual volcanic rock park near Hollister. That weekend the rain poured down. The Mt. Diablo contingent spent a wonderful two days squeezed inside the small trailer the Piersons had rented - singing, eating, and solving the problems of the world.

The Easter Service created by the Worship committee featured a dance choreographed by Lillie Chase. It was called "Man — the Flowering Tree." Seedlings were presented to the preschoolers, children and adults participated. On April 21, church member and Starr King student Billie King presented a service entitled "An Illusion of Sanity." Billie was editor of the district magazine *Contact*, and on the editorial staff of the East Bay Project ghetto publication *Change!* She spoke about the confusing quest for personal values, looking at major value-shaping influences.

At the Board meeting May first Stan Knoblock made a motion to change the name of the church to the "Mt. Diablo Unitarian *Fellowship*." The motion was tabled. The newsletter mentioned this was discussed at the Board meeting May 29<sup>th</sup>. The Board agreed to discuss it when all board members were present, but it did not come up again.



The first service in the new building was held May 5th, "From the Hill — a New Perspective." There was a Joining Ceremony welcoming new members. That evening we celebrated with a champagne social hour and supper presented by the Social committee. It was followed by singing around a campfire between the two buildings, now the brick Patio.

On May 12, Harold Wilson and Don Ford presented "Moment of Truth," on the anxiety of separation, and the drive toward wholeness. Ric Masten was again in the pulpit sharing his "Music of life."

Those who attended the UUA General Assembly in Cleveland in May — Gil and Eve, Betty Reid, Dorothy White, Marty Dimbat and George Johnson, gave the service June 2. They discussed the creation of the Black Affairs Council by Black Unitarians, and a similar group proposed by the UUA Board — a Commission for Action on Race. Much controversy surrounded these events (see the Civil Rights Chapter).

A special Service of Dedication of the Church was held following an Open House June 2<sup>nd</sup>. Aron Gilmartin, George Johnson, and Harold Wilson spoke. Bill Steenberg was honored for the seven years he searched, and guided the planning and construction of the buildings. The choir sang "The Impossible Dream" from *Man of La Mancha* — a fitting song to commemorate the realization of our dreams. A Memorial Service for Robert Kennedy was held June 9.

For several years Gil had suffered from mild emphysema, greatly aggravated by the cement dust of the new buildings. He was hospitalized and unable to attend the Dedication, and his statement was read. Gil was grateful for the way everyone pitched in taking over tasks he normally handled, and that the Board was determined he should make a full recovery before returning to work. He and Eve spent the first half of July in the Northwest, and the remainder of the summer in Walnut Creek.

A Service of Recognition for George Johnson was held June 16. Music was by Booker T. and the MGs, Hugh Masekela, Billie Holiday, Betty Reid, and Project Nitty Gritty with Mary Rosenzweig piano, Ted Owen on drums, and Berkeley Fellowship member Sheldon James on trumpet. Harold Wilson's daughter Stephanie danced, George Johnson's daughter Jocelyn read a poem. Speakers

included the District past president, Gil, Starr King President Jo Bartlett, and Bill Lowe, chair of Corporation of the Poor. It was a memorable, rousing service.

The Ways & Means committee sponsored a Wine Tasting Party and Art Auction in June in the new buildings. A "Hurray, We Made It Party!" was also held in June to celebrate the move into the buildings and the end of the church year. There was a Fourth of July Torchlight Supper with caravans to the fireworks display in Danville.

At its meeting July 17, the Board discussed Gil's improved health and his willingness to take on responsibilities in the Committee on Urban Crisis (described in the chapter on Civil Rights). Gil was asked to become Executive Director of CUC.

Summer services included speakers from Synanon House, and Eve Gilmartin gave a service on "The Human Encounter." Harold Wilson gave his first service with input from the Black Arts Festival — a three-day show with Black artists, poets, musicians and dancers. This festival was sponsored by the church's Urban Crisis Committee with the cooperation of the City of Walnut Creek and other local churches.

The Worship committee created a service called "Gaps and Confrontations," exploring the polarization between authority and subordinates — adolescents and parents, between races, etc. Former LRYer Dal Leite, student at Boalt Hall Law School, gave a service of original songs and music based on Pete Seeger. Church members Jane MacLane and Mike Wickman looked at commercialism through the eyes of youth. The Brotherhood Action Group (church and community young people meeting with youth from North Richmond Neighborhood House) also presented a service.

Harold Wilson spoke August 11th, in a service described as "pre-candidating." Since June the Board had been discussing hiring Harold to serve as a second minister of the church. They envisioned him devoting "third-time to R.E., one-third to administration and one-third to human relationships." They formed a subcommittee to get a feeling from the congregation of support for this idea.

On July 23d the congregation passed a motion that "we request Harold Wilson to spend time with us to explore the possibility of becoming our Associate Minister." The Board agreed to canvass the congregation to determine the

financial support of this action. Meetings were scheduled with Harold throughout the week. Everyone had an opportunity to get better acquainted and hear his ideas about programs, and ways the church community could respond to the racial crisis.

The Board felt having an associate minister would make it possible for Gil to better serve our commitment to the community in the area of the Urban Crisis. The motion to call Harold as Associate Minister was passed by a vote of 58–18 with one abstention. The \$10,500 salary commitment was pledged in that one week period.

On September 1<sup>st</sup> Gil and Harold shared their “Experiences with the Labor Movement.” Gil spoke of his work in the 30s with the National Defense League. Harold discussed his work with East Bay labor unions, particularly Oakland hospital workers.

The Annual Fall Breakfast was September 8. Childcare was provided for infants, but no provision made for older children. This has been a Family event for so long it is hard to imagine how people could attend, leaving children elsewhere. The new church year began with two services and two church school sessions.

The church school embarked on an experimental new beginning. Quoting Laile Bartlett’s *Moment of Truth*, “The church, educationally, is a community of persons of all ages, engaged in a cooperative quest for more abundant living. Shall we dare to move in new and experimental ways? We are at the beginning of something great.” Participants included Judy van der Veen, Sandy Brousseau, Harold and Gil, in a service entitled “Getting Involved.” This theme continued the following week with “The Cooperative Quest for More Abundant Life.” Laile envisioned a new model of education within the church that did not segregate by age. This idea was at the heart of the new experimental Sunday morning activities. (See Chapter 8.)

The Board sponsored a Church Program Conference and potluck supper in September for all committees. They explored how we were doing, and how we were meeting the challenges of the new buildings, the new religious education experiment, the calling of Harold Wilson, and the needs of all the new people coming Sunday mornings.

The Program committee offered two exciting programs. Gil and Harold led a discussion based on *Moment of Truth*, exploring "the Come-Outer Beat," "The R.E. Hangup," "The Man in the Middle," and "God's Frozen People." George Johnson led a six-session series on "Revolution," "Black History," and "White Liberal: friend or foe." Texts for the sessions included Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, *Black Power*, and the Kerner Report.

On September 29, Jo and Laile Bartlett held a dialog and discussion of *Moment of Truth*. She believed that radical changes were called for, that we must let our aims determine what is needed, rather than letting a model imported from elsewhere distort our aims. Conversational Spanish was also offered.

On October 6 Gil's service was called "The Face of White Racism." Assisted by members of the Worship committee, Gil explored the fact that "this probably means your face and mine. We need to talk about it and try to do something about it."

Beginning on October 6, programs for children and adults were available at 9 and 11 am, with one worship service, at 11 am. The following week Gil entitled his talk "What Have You Been Doing Then?" after a question Rat asked in *Wind and the Willows*. It concerned his philosophy of life and religious beliefs.

A Congregational Meeting October 13, was an opportunity to give public expression on the war in Vietnam and the right of dissent. The World Without War Committee presented five positions in the hope that consensus could be reached. The UUA statement on churches as symbolic sanctuaries for draft resisters was approved, as was the UUA position on the Vietnam war. These resolutions were opposed by a minority, and several letters explaining their stand appeared in subsequent newsletters.

The Worship committee presented the October 20, service entitled "Who Ministers in this Congregation. Do You?" It was a time "for us to speak to how we have, how we need, or how we might minister to each other." The next week Harold continued the series of sermons on "Revolution," focusing on major contributors to the literature on the church and its role. Harold Wilson and Gil held an Election Dialogue the following week.

On November 17, Harold's sermon was "The Wizard of Oz." "We are constantly in search of wisdom and courage, looking outside ourselves to obtain

them when they may already be part of us." There were no services November 24. An afternoon Family Vesper Service was held with new interns Rick Neff and David Gilmartin participating with Gil. The joint Thanksgiving service was held at Temple Isaiah, and Eve and Gil again hosted Thanksgiving dinner.

"The Soul of the Liberal Church" was the title of George Johnson's service December 1<sup>st</sup>. The following week Harold and Gil discussed the situation at San Francisco State College with members of the Black Students Union. Both Harold and Gil had been on the campus several times that week during the turmoil.

The first Annual Christmas Bazaar was held December 7th. There were booths filled with homemade food, jewelry, knitted and crocheted items, toys, kitchen goods, candles, baby things, and holiday gifts of all kinds. Prime movers were Jackie Miskel, Alma Davies, Jan Cooper, Grace Moran, Clarisse Bois and Beverly Bortin. Barbara Johnson managed the gourmet luncheon. Workshops were held every Saturday before the Bazaar. A quilt was raffled; it was a huge success.

At the annual meeting in December three new Board members were elected — Don Ford, Dave Miskel, and Howard Gonsalves. The Board struggled with the nuts and bolts of owning our own buildings. They worked to revive the Landscape committee. They were concerned that volunteer janitors were not adequate, and set rules for use of the building.

Don Ford resigned from the Creative Worship committee when he joined the Board. Jane MacLane and Mike Wickman tried to keep Creative Worship going, putting together several programs, but it was some time before the committee was well established. Harold Wilson spoke December 15, on "Education in this Period of Post-Civilization." He explored the implications for education, and the part that the liberal church would play.

The Gilmartins held their Christmas Open House for children and parents in the afternoon, and adults in the evening. A Church Family Holiday Party was held. With Harold assisting, Gil's December 22<sup>nd</sup> sermon was titled "The Hope of Christmas." Five guitarists played carols, George and Barbara Prall sang, and the choir sang Bach. Families brought home-made decorations for the tree, and each family received an ornament again created by Eleanor Pound for their tree at home. A 10:30 pm Christmas Eve Candlelight Service was also held.

Harold Wilson and intern Rick Neff held a Sunday evening Family Vesper Service on "Old Years and New Years." There was also a New Year's Eve Party at the church, with dancing, a light show, and midnight hot buffet.

Gil announced he planned to run for the Presidency of the UUA, "to try to give our continental association a position and program relevant to the crisis in our culture and society, and meaningful to the lives of our people." He invited MDUUC through action of its Trustees to be the first to sponsor his nomination. The Board agreed to fill in for Gil during his candidacy, which would last through July of 1969. The Board was glad to do this as there were many issues that no candidate had addressed, particularly racism in America.

This was not an easy decision for Gil, as he did not want to leave this congregation. A large number of UU's representing many societies across the country persuaded him to do so. Gil's service on January 19th discussed "Why I am Running for the Presidency of the UUA."

## 1969

At the Congregational meeting carried over to January 19, a deficit budget was passed. The combined operating and building fund deficit was between \$10 and \$12,000. An April meeting was planned to review this, and fund raising activities explored. Treasurer George Fujioka attempted to resign, but agreed to continue until a new one was found.

The Board elected Alan MacLane president, Eleanor Pound vice president and John van der Veen secretary. Continuing were George Prall, Rowena McGregor, Jody Schilling. At the meeting January 21, Jim and Alice Anthony were approved as co-treasurers.

Gil's service January 5, was "A Variation on Humpty Dumpty," with a discussion following the talk. DVC History Professor Lawrence Crouchett spoke on "Racism and Curriculum Problems of Minority Groups on College Campuses." Harold Wilson spoke on "The Myth of Prometheus," saying, "the power of myth is an expression of human need, with its validity coming from its persistence."

Sunday afternoon Rick Neff gave a special Vesper Service, "From Whence Cometh my Help." First of a three-part series on Freedom of the Soul, Rick said, "New psalms for a new time — we are each our own psalmist."

Gil attended a two-week Institute at Starr King in January, and was in Boston meeting with his campaign committee and filing nomination papers the first week of February. He spoke on February 9, on "What's Your Game?" followed by a discussion.

The radical new religious education program was explored by school principal and church member Sandy Brousseau, a creator of the new program. His talk was titled "Creativity: You in the Process." On February 16, Robin King gave the service, "Listen to Yourself."

Harold Wilson discussed Michael Novak's *The Experience of Nothingness* February 23<sup>rd</sup>. Rick Neffs second Freedom of the Soul Vesper Service was titled, "Speaking of Freedom — visions of personal freedom."

Rowena McGregor resigned from the Board, and was replaced by Eleanor Greenlee. An All-Committee Workshop was held April 2<sup>nd</sup>. Through the years these meetings, often with a potluck, served to coordinate the diverse activities of the church, and encourage cooperation between committees.

On March 9th Gil discussed "The Pill and a New Sex Ethic" exploring the confusions engendered by the freer climate made possible by the birth control pill. Intern David Gilmartin spoke March 23, on "The Bay Area: A Scenic View" with music, poetry and dance. There was a spring Plant-In on the hill after the service. The following Sunday Rick Neff spoke on "Passover and Palm Sunday: Freedom of the Soul." Rick described and compared political liberation with personal, internal liberation, self-identification and actualization.

### **Alice's Restaurant**

One of the most well remembered church activities was the two years (69–70) of Alice's Restaurant The title was taken from the Arlo Guthrie song and the movie. The van der Veens were at the Pounds' recovering from Christmas festivities. Looking at all her lovely silver and crystal, Eleanor said, "it's a shame we only use this once a year." They began talking about putting together an elegant dinner to raise money for the church, and Alice's was born.

During this period nine memorable dinners were created — each for two nights. Chief Chef Bob Pound was assisted by Chef John van der Veen.

Bill Steenberg served as bartender, with kitchen crew Eleanor Pound, Judy van der Veen, Marilyn Steenberg and Jody Schilling. Thirty guests were accommodated at each sitting. The first six dinners were at the van der Veen's beautifully remodeled home, the last three at the Pounds'. They removed furniture from the living and dining area for the plank tables on old trunks, covered with Eleanor's beautiful linen tablecloths. The simple black and silver chairs from the church completed the seating. The four chefs worked for weeks experimenting and trying out recipes.

Each dinner was a unique dining experience. The first was called "*Fruites de Mer*" – crab, oysters, prawns, and scallops, all fresh, cooked in wine, accompanied by stuffed mushrooms.

Another was "An English Inn." They served beef joints, pork, roast lamb, and Yorkshire pudding. Their third dinner was Italian, every course without tomatoes! There was Mexican, French, Swiss, and International. Everyone fortunate enough to attend these outstanding dinners remembers them as culinary masterpieces and high points in the social history of the church.

The Program committee sponsored a second lecture by Robert Kimball. Since the series in 1964, Dr. Kimball had lived and worked in India, and had become president of Starr King School for the Ministry. His talk was titled "Kings and Queens of Ice Cream." He described the talk as an exploration of the fluidity and transitory nature of our moral and ethical value systems in an exploding "socio-ethnic-morality" revolution. It was followed by dialog with the audience.

The Program committee also sponsored an eight-week class titled "Social Defiance in Jazz and Blues," by jazz pianist and film maker Robert Feldman. The series explored how Black people in America used music to defy, subvert, and ridicule their oppressors. Roots in West Africa, the outlawing of the "talking drums," underground message spirituals, the anger of the blues, jazz that teaches history, and the turning toward Africa were all discussed.

On Easter there was one service for adults and children, a joint effort of Worship committee members Jane MacLane and Mike Wickman, Rick Neff, Gil and Harold Wilson. An Easter Egg Hunt followed the service.



The Board explored the possibility of a place to scatter ashes. John Stevens was willing to donate part of his Sierra foothill property for scattering cremated remains, now legal in California. Lillie Chase began researching the use of the church grounds for this purpose. Howard Gonsalves agreed to check with the city to find out if we could do so.

Gil spoke on April 13, about "Jules Feiffer: Preacher Extraordinary." Gil said that Feiffer's humor is suffused with caring, but he also quoted Mort Sahl, standup comic and social satirist, "If we couldn't laugh about these things we might do something about them."

The budget meeting was held that evening. A budget projecting \$65,200 income and \$64,550 expenses was passed plus a carryover deficit of \$3,300. The vote was 52 to 35. Many suggestions were made to shrink the deficit — an effective continuing canvass, increased fund-raising activities, the research on why people drop out.

R.E. registration was down from a high of 335, to 112, five years later. No figures are recorded during the following five years, but enrollment continued to drop, and virtually no church school classes were offered during 1971 and 1972. There was also a decline in adult membership. These statistics were reflected across the country, in all denominations.

Harold Wilson's service on April 20th was entitled "Experiencing Nothingness." Harold said that individual emotional fragmentation, family life, and our conduct as a nation is badly affected when we fail to realize the structure we impose is not the reality, but the definitions that we and our culture have assigned. On May 11, Worship committee co-chairs Jane MacLane and Mike Wickman, with Don Ford, presented and program on worship that included everyone attending.

George Johnson spoke May 18, on "Why the Liberal is a Fink." One of George's tasks was to bridge the gap between the white suburban and inner-city communities. George was chair of BUBA (Black Unitarians of the Bay Area). His mission was to raise the consciousness of the white suburbanite to the reality of the urban black, and the racism endemic in our country.

Gil next service was to be about "Our UU Movement through the Eyes of a Candidate for UUA President." One of seven candidates, Gil planned to share his

experiences and feelings growing out of his campaign for UUA President, the urgency to address the racism in our society, and the similar concerns raised by George Johnson's service the week before. Because of the riots in Berkeley, Gil spoke about the situation there, emphasizing its seriousness to us and the nation.

Harold Wilson spoke the following week, "Toward a New Style of Life." Harold discussed the connections between the Berkeley riots, women's liberation, the Black Revolution, and the ecological threat to the life of planet. These upheavals all pointed to the immense changes taking place in our society.

Harold resigned effective December 31, 1969. Because of the large deficit it seemed unlikely that a salary for him could be included in next year's budget, and he needed the time to find other employment. Almost everyone was happy with Harold's ministry, but the will to maintain it was simply not there.

The second Sunday in June Gil addressed parents and young people on the Generation Gap, and what to do about it. That evening a special meeting was called to vote on a petition signed by ten members requesting a By-law change on membership from age 18 to 14. The motion was changed to "delete from membership qualifications *those who have attained the age of 18 years.*"

The motion passed by a vote of 42 to 1, with one abstention. The 60s was a period of emphasis on the rights of young people. Instead of lowering the age to 14, the 42 members present voted for no age limit. Some children who could barely sign their name became members. One eight-year-old whose father asked if she'd like to join said, "Well, I'll have to think about it."

The practical consequences took a long time to sort out. Many questioned its meaning for the young people. There was the question of reporting membership to the UUA. Do we pay our "fair share" for each of these youngsters? Should we have a category for junior members?

This crusade existed more in the minds of a few adults than the youngsters. Many older youth continued to value their membership, and a few later became supporting church members. Most of the younger children eventually agreed to be placed on the church's Inactive Member List as they grew up and left the area

Summer services included jazz musician Sheldon James, Antioch College Philosophy instructor Bob Atkins, the Piersons' son-in-law, Harold Wilson, a morning creating crafts, a speaker on minority adoptions, a discussion of the state

Board of Education Moral Guidelines, and a revivalist meeting. Gil and Eve left to work on his campaign, and attend the General Assembly in Boston.

The annual Fourth of July picnic at the church featured baseball, volley ball, songs, games and food. Ways & Means held a “Win-a-Fling” raffle with a variety of goods and services from cakes to mountain cabins. Caravans went to Danville in the evening to watch the fireworks.

The service August 3<sup>rd</sup> featured those who attended the General Assembly discussing the revolutionary changes in the denomination brought on by the forces demanding changes in priorities by a coalition of black, white, and youth groups.

Dave Miskel resigned from the Board in June, and a young person was considered as a replacement. Two were asked, but neither was able to serve. Lillie Chase was chosen as the new Board member.

The committee structure was at an all-time low. Individual Board members met with committee representatives during August to figure out what could be done to strengthen the committees. The Board was undergoing a frustrating period as well. Board meetings often lasted until 11 or midnight. What would normally be handled by committees often was left to the Board.

Board member George Prall felt the church community had lost faith in committees. The expectation of service had disappeared. It was inimical to “doing one’s thing,” and therefore destructive of human values, initiative, and relating to others. In addition it was often “boring.” A popular slogan was “If it’s fun, do it!” The corollary, “if it’s not, don’t,” was also accepted. As George put it, “The idea of enduring boredom or hard work for the sake of doing one’s duty, or making the church more rewarding to others has not met with acceptance on the Board. The development of oneself is more important than service to others.”

George’s perception of the church was not held by many, and of course did not reflect Gil’s. Another view was expressed by Board member Jody Schilling (Shipley).<sup>\*</sup> Jody saw our congregation split the same way the denomination was — those who wanted structure, responsibility and safety, and those who wanted the excitement of doing their own thing, taking risks while trying out new ways together.

---

<sup>\*</sup> Jody later graduated from Starr King, and is minister of the Modesto Fellowship.

Jody's assessment of committees was that we'd tried unsuccessfully to make them work. "We've spent years trying to make the child walk on his ears, and he's not doing it. He is using his feet. Maybe we should look at that." Jody felt human needs got lost in business-like organization. We should *hear* what people are saying and act out of that rather than out of a pre-existing structure.

Some blamed the minister for lack of leadership, others the Board president. The whole society was going through similar changes. The repressed up-tight fifties had become the acting out sixties. The shock of the Vietnam war and the deaths of Martin Luther King, Jr. and the Kennedys created a feeling of powerlessness just as we were beginning to break out of old patterns.

The "Me Generation" was just that — a need to turn inward and take care of ourselves, to find a way through these unsettled times. These forces were played out in the life of the church. The brave new experiment continued a few more years, but the pendulum has swung back to a more structured approach. The openness and creativity of that period has not disappeared entirely. Those of us who lived through those years remember them vividly. It was an exciting time to be part of the church.

Delegates to the General Assembly\* reported on "the most revolutionary changes for UUs of this century." Our delegates were in the leadership of the force exerted by the minority (black, white and youth) demanding radical changes in program and policy priorities. Although Gil was not elected president, he emerged as the leader of the "most dynamic denominational forces." These historic events are explored in Chapter 9.

The Board continued to grapple with their problems. President Alan MacLane suggested informal meetings to get a better picture of how people felt the church was functioning. They formed a committee to develop a plan. The deficit was almost \$7,000. Harold Wilson sent the Board and Gil a memo for discussion at the October retreat. Harold felt strongly the Board was unable to function effectively because of communication problems. He said that unacknowledged hidden agendas resulted in feelings of frustration, fatigue and anger.

---

\*Aron and Eve Gilmartin, Martin Dimbat, Eleanor Pound, Bob Reid, George Johnson and Harold Wilson.

Harold described Fritz Perls' communication breakdowns. Unfortunately Perls' colorful language cannot be included here.

A series of resignations occurred — Jody Schilling from the Board, and chairs of Social, Ways & Means, Membership, Sunday Arrangements, and Finance committees. There was no Religious Education committee or chair. Jim Anthony resigned as treasurer, but was prevailed upon to continue. Almost half the pledging members were in arrears, and half the membership had no pledge at all.

Gil's first sermon of the new church year was entitled "Can The Church Be Saved?" Gil felt the church was at a low point in America, and the world. It appeared to be dying. Even UUs were "talking renewal as a sort of heart transplant." Gil wanted to share these issues with the congregation and explore how we might respond.

Harold Wilson spoke the first two Sundays in October on "Our Common Bond," and "The Rotten Old Tin Can." This was a game Harold played as a child in Oakland. He spoke about the need for non-manufactured toys and games, and about the adult games we all play. Gil's service on October 19 was about "Alternative Futures." He explored ideas about life styles, and developing community.

The Board scheduled four evening meetings for people to share feelings and attitudes about the church. The first meeting was attended by 20 people who discussed "what we are doing now, and how we might enlarge our activities and structure to meet the needs of more of our people."

On October 26, Josiah Bartlett spoke about UU Venture Societies — groups moving in new ways and developing a new philosophy. He identified MDUUC as such a society. They were finding new ways to relate to one another and to professional leaders, new ways of celebration and worship. Jo was the designer of the experimental and innovative thrust of Starr King School for the Ministry, and was now doing research with the Wright Institute.

George Johnson spoke next, on "Who Needs the Church?" George said, "except for a few churches that tithe and obey strict rules, churches across the nation are poor and/or dying. The church appears less important and relevant in the lives of individuals. Mt. Diablo may be swinging with some groovy programs,

but this is not reflected in giving and general support. We have to ask who needs the church?"

The following Sunday Father Mark Sullivan, a New York Catholic priest, spoke on "The Religious Belief of Conscientious Objectors." Father Sullivan was doing doctoral studies at Graduate Theological Union, and was a minister to the Resistance doing civil military counseling to COs. Harold Wilson discussed these same issues at the 9 am service.

On November 16 Gil departed from his planned sermon to talk about the three days spent with twenty UU ministers discussing the ministry, religion, and the life of the church. He said "I do it now while I still feel the experience, and have the courage."

The Annual Thanksgiving Day service was again celebrated at Temple Isaiah. For the first time our new neighbors across the street, Congregation B'nai Shalom, joined the service. Harold Wilson spoke the following Sunday on "A Black Theology." Harold described a new theology emerging from the bitter experiences of another oppressed "tribe" — Blacks in America. "Its implications for America and the world may represent the new salvation."

On December 7, Gil spoke on "The Church as Intentional Community." Two weeks later Harold gave a second sermon on "An Emerging Black Theology." Harold felt that alienation and its cure could not sustain the church. It must deal with institutional sin, not personal sin. The emerging Black theology "represents this religious force — not dividing but unifying."

Preparation for the Annual Christmas Bazaar featured a jewelry making workshop, holiday decorations workshop, sewing and tie-dying, and a flower-making workshop. The Bazaar featured all kinds of food and "Junque and Antikes." A luncheon was served. Fairyland Puppeteer Lewis Mahlmann did a puppet show. Jackie Miskel was again the successful producer.

Six people were elected to the Board at the annual meeting in December.\* Gil spoke of a WA staff person who told him that of the well over 1,000 UU churches, only about 200 were really viable. Only a few were alive to the times and to the youth generation that is the future, and "that we are one, more venturesome than most, and the harbinger of a new church for a new day." Gil went on to say we find it difficult to appreciate this when we are aware of our inner tensions from

the very things that are being praised. "This is what is so great about us. That is why we can take risks — and experiment, and trust one another." He said we had not done all we'd hope to do in 1969, and not everything turned out as we wanted, but a new year is a new opportunity.

A treasurer's report projected a deficit of \$8,500. The meeting was adjourned until January, when the congregation would vote on the 1970 budget. Harold Wilson, George Johnson and Gil shared "A Hope, A Dream, A Wish, A Prayer" at the December 21, service. The Holiday Family Celebration was held that afternoon. A Farewell party for Harold was held at the MacLanes, and the year ended with a New Year's Party at the church.

## 1970

Gil began the new year with a service on "The Changing Church," followed by George Johnson and "Pluck Out Your I." The Board had a hard time choosing a president since no one wanted the job. John van der Veen was elected, Lillie Chase agreed to serve as vice president, and Eleanor Greenlee, secretary. The Anthonys were confirmed as co-treasurers. The Board planned a retreat to discuss "how are we going to keep house?"

## **John and Judy van der Veen**

John and Judy both grew up in the East Bay, and met on a blind date as teenagers. They went steady for four years. They married when Judy, a Home Economics major at UC Berkeley, was a sophomore, and John a junior, majoring in Chemistry.

After graduation Judy worked as a nursery school and kindergarten teacher in a Berkeley private school, and John continued at the University as a lab technician. In 1961 they bought a house in Walnut Creek and commuted to their work in Berkeley.

Judy's father was an architect, and she was always interested and involved in his work. They immediately began remodeling their new home,

---

\*Lillie Chase, Bernie Segal, Dave Pierson, Neil McLean, Eleanor Greenlee, and youth member Brent Partridge.

bringing books home from the library, and learning what they were doing as they confronted each new construction challenge.

In Berkeley they had visited the Unitarian church by the campus and found it "too Protestant." John grew up in a family indifferent to organized religion, even somewhat hostile. His father and the three sons were scientists. John said he might have been willing to attend MDUUC if it had been a Fellowship, but it had become a church the year before.

The van der Veens had Unitarian relatives in Salem, and visited the church there. The cousins visited John and Judy, and Judy took them to MDUUC. The service was "The Chairs," created by Don Ford and the Worship committee, about roles and relationships. It was dramatic, lay-led, and Judy thought it was great. She attended another service she didn't like as well, and might not have returned if not for something in the church newsletter.

The Adult Programs committee announced the third year of the discussion series on "Unitarianism in your Daily Life." It appealed to John and Judy, and they attended the first meeting in Gil's office at the Highland Building. The group was so large it was split. John and Judy continued meeting with Eve Gilmartin. The second group was facilitated by Stan Knoblock.

The group met with Eve for a year, and continued to meet for another two years. It included Pat King, Elaine King, Ted Owen, Norm and Norma Smith, Eleanor Pound, Jody and John Schilling, Dave and Florence Pierson, Gordon and Marge Locklear, and Marge and Bill Chapel. The group broke up in 1966 when several couples divorced.

John did not attend services or sign the Membership book. He had no interest in church. Eleanor Pound wanted John to serve on the Board when she was president. She valued his commitment to honesty and low tolerance of sloppy thinking. One Saturday afternoon she appeared at his home with a bottle of champagne in a silver ice bucket, and the determination to convince John he was needed on the Board.

Eleanor's unorthodox recruiting methods convinced him, and John became a member of the church, serving on the Board for three years. In



1969 John served as secretary of the Board, and as president in 1970. He was active on the Finance committee, the Religious Education committee, and as purchasing agent for the church.

The van der Veens moved to Nevada City in October, 1978. The church gave them a wonderful farewell party with dancing provided by the Marge Chapel Trio.

Friends created a beautiful handmade Friendship Quilt for them. They restore old Victorian homes, and are active in the nationally famous Music in the Mountains.

John and Judy van der Veen were part of the church for only a short time. They left an indelible imprint, and are remembered with great affection by those who shared those years with them.

The weekend of January 17–18th was devoted to a Festival of the Trees. Several thousand small seedlings donated by Frank Cuzzillo — toyons, redwoods, bishop, and Monterey pines — were planted on the hillside. Banners and costumes were created in the R.E. building. Everyone brought snacks to share. Sunday morning the congregation gathered in the Patio in costumes, carrying banners, walking in procession around the buildings and to the hill. Boughs and evergreens decorated the area.

Children scattered wildflower seeds on the hillside, accompanied by music, songs and poetry. A song composed by Dan Baltzo was sung by his mother, soprano Deb Baltzo. Participants shared homemade breads and apple cider after the ceremony. This lovely service was created by Eve Gilmartin, Betty Reid, Audrey Small, and Clarisse Bois.

The following week Gil spoke on “Social Engineering — Black Style,” discussing the flood of imagination and creativity unleashed by the Black Power and self-determination movements. He saw this as a reason to hope amid the despair pervading the racial scene. That evening the postponed congregational meeting was held. A budget of \$52,540 (including a \$1,852 deficit) was passed. No provision was made for an R.E. Director or a pianist, although listed as high priorities by the congregation.

At its next meeting the Board reluctantly accepted the Anthonys' resignation as co-treasurers, and appointed a committee to search for a new treasurer. John van der Veen was elected president, Lillie Chase vice president and Eleanor Greenlee secretary.

Former intern Rick Neff returned to the pulpit with "Mel Lazarus is Alive and Well," on the theology of Miss Peach — the reality approach to life. Rick was now working with the San Jose church. On February 8<sup>th</sup> Gil spoke on "The Pursuit of Happiness, or the Escape From?" He wrote, "What do we mean by the *pursuit* of happiness? Don't we ever catch it? Are you running after or away from?" Gil next spoke on "This sorry scheme of things," taken from the Rubaiyat of Omar Khayyam. He discussed the age-old conflict between the real and the ideal, and how we may bridge the gap. Continental LRY President Robbie Isaacs did the service February 22. Rob later attended Starr King, and serves with his wife as co minister of the Oakland UU church.

March 8<sup>th</sup> was "Conspiracy Sunday." Members and friends were invited to a morning of sharing dreams, improving communication, and deciding where the church would go. Several areas emerged: better communication, an Educational Action group, a Single's group. Members were urged to attend the next Board meeting to continue this discussion.

The title of Gas next talk was "The Sting of Transiency and the Affirmation of Life." He said that one of the ironies of the century is that we've experienced death by violence on a scale hitherto unknown, but are not able to consider deeply the meaning of death. A time to share the feelings raised by this sermon was provided after the service. Gil had an Open Participation Service based on a new form of service pioneered by the Rev. Karel Boterman of the Marin Fellowship. Everyone brought readings, poems, concerns, and affirmations to share.

Gil made a quick trip to Boston at the invitation of the new President of the UUA, Bob West. Along with other defeated candidates Gil learned of the denomination's serious financial problems. President West solicited their ideas and help.

Easter Sunday was a conversation with Gil and Betty Reid, "Life/Death — Despair/Hope." The congregation shared Gil and Betty's talk about the condition of the world, the frustrations they felt, the desire to escape, while knowing

something had to be done. It was about the individual and the community. "Our conversation may well symbolize the human condition," Gil said. The children received seedlings from the minister at the beginning of the service symbolizing new life, hope and expectations.

Song-writer and performer Ric Masten was in our pulpit in April. Ric had been a cook, trash man, cement finisher, artist, sculptor, newspaperman, lecturer, songwriter and publisher. Tired of the Hollywood scene, he began writing and singing his songs about youth, war, sex ethics, civil rights, religion, and ecology. Always popular with UU groups for his insight and humor, it was a pleasure to hear him and participate in his services. People brought instruments and picnic lunches to share with him singing after the service.

Church member and clinical psychologist Dr. Frank Politzer next spoke about a "Passport to Love," with discussion after the service. For his next service Gil said he'd been thinking a lot about hope since his earlier service with Betty Reid, looking at his own despair. Now he wanted to *talk* about hope. There was a discussion afterwards.

Gil again offered an orientation series called The Enquirers. Three sessions exploring the denomination's history, beliefs, and information about MDUUC were followed by a social evening at his home. Gil spent a week in New York City and Chicago meeting with the Black Affairs Council, and the National Steering Committee of the Fellowship for Renewal.

For many years Gil had been an active member of the Clergy Counseling Service for Problem Pregnancies. Abortion was illegal in the U.S., and this service offered information about abortion in Mexico, Japan and Europe. It was not until 1970 that California law was changed to allow therapeutic abortion if a *woman's life was endangered*. Until that time the Clergy Counseling Service had been an underground activity. A safe abortion was denied anyone who could not afford to go out of the country. Gil served on the Board of Planned Parenthood when it opened in Walnut Creek, and was one of the first to take their training, along with church members Rowena McGregor and Mollie Fujioka.

Gil's April 26<sup>th</sup> service was a response to a series in *The Christian Century* by leading churchmen on "How My Mind Has Changed." Gil also spoke about the ways in which he had not changed his mind over the years. The next week's

service, "Ecology: Do We Have the Will to Change?" was provided by church member and Diablo Valley College instructor Allure Jefcoat, county gardener George Nichols, and DVC instructor James Shettler. It featured a slide presentation by DVC Biology teacher Charles Brown. Families were urged to bring lunches and continue discussion into the afternoon.

The weekend Festival of Alternate Life Styles was held in May. The newsletter described it: *"A new culture is growing in our country. It seems to have arisen from a feeling of impending crisis. It's finding solutions to problems technology and social structure have created — alienation, exploitation, racism, pollution, hunger, militarism, irrelevant education, and frustration felt by more and more people!"*

*"Out of our experience, our affluence, of life in the suburbs has come discontent and uncertainty about the lives we are living. They are clearly recognizable among the young. We yearn for something different from car payments, molls, TV, work that doesn't satisfy, fear of aging, confusion, apathy and news that frightens more than it informs. Many are breaking away to experiment with a new way of living. This new culture is not clearly understood. For some it is parasitic, confusing and threatening; for others it offers an alternative way of living!"*

The Festival was an opportunity to talk with many who were moving in new ways, to share information and to explore these changes and the values of different ways of living. Alternative groups included Vocations for Social Change, and the Food Conspiracy. The Center for Ecological Living conducted workshops on ways to live more in accord with ecological principles. Ed Kaltman of The Family Store shared his vast knowledge of Bay Area new style shops and crafts people.

The East Oakland Switchboard was represented. Al Rinker, founder of the SF Switchboard came. There were people from the Institute for Human Abilities, the Pride Family Commune, Re-education Center, and West Coast Counseling Service. Mime groups Women's Theatre and The East Bay Shark gave performances. The Ant Farm, a Sausalito living group, inflated a large plastic "environment" on the church grounds. Psychologist Robert Birnbaum, founder of

Odyssey, conducted informal sessions on “modes of communication.” Norma McClure led a group in African dance.

The family service Sunday celebrated the last day of the festival. Bob Birnbaum led the service, with Robin King, Lenny Williams, and others participating. Everyone brought food to share. Drums, dancing, balloons, and spontaneous gaiety climaxed the afternoon.

The second Conspiracy Sunday was held May 17<sup>th</sup>. The Board served lox and bagels while participants discussed “An Inward Look, or How Did We Get This Way?” This was an opportunity to talk about worship services, the meaning of membership, social activities, religious education, financial health, and “Now that we’ve got the buildings, who takes care of them?” The groups felt better communication was needed, earlier newsletter mailing, political action, and an Arts Committee developed. There were so many ideas the Board appointed an ad hoc committee to bring specific recommendations to the Board for action.

Following the hugely successful Alternate Life Styles Festival, Gil considered the question, “What Are the Alternatives? A Search for Values.” What are the values we are trying to serve by the manner of our lives? For What Are You Living Your Life? This was the same question Gil had asked in a sermon back in 1962, which led to the Encounter movement.

Gil sent a long memo to the Board outlining areas requiring attention during the summer. It included summer services, calendaring for the coming year, better cleaning, procedures for maintaining the buildings and grounds, storage areas, fundraising activities, and social and hospitality ideas.

The Board dealt with some of these issues at its next meeting. A subcommittee on care of the building recommended hiring a professional janitor. They would recruit a Summer Program committee, a Social committee, and a Building and Grounds committee.

Gil’s service on June 7<sup>th</sup> was entitled “Let Me Dream.” It included a Dedication of Parents and Children, and a Recognition of the seventy-six new members who joined during the last seven months, including nineteen teenagers. Gil’s last service before summer was “R & R: Rest and Recreation.” The Gilmartins summer plans included attendance at the Fellowship for Renewal and UUA General Assembly in Seattle. Gil was theme speaker at the Midwest UU Confer-

ence, Lake Geneva, Wisconsin. He officiated at the marriage of his son Peter in Connecticut.

Summer services included Betty Reid, a panel of church members discussing "The Effluence of Affluence," a Fourth of July picnic and the official opening of The Peace Registry. This book contains statements against war written by children and young people to be used as evidence of their religious reasons for choosing to be conscientious objectors. Harold Wilson and others put on a Revivalist meeting with ethnic soul foods. General Assembly delegates shared their experiences, and church members Don Ford, Dave Pierson, and Nan Smith spoke.

Phyllis Crowley, chair of the R.E. committee, talked about the Center for Personal Development, with Harold Wilson, Judy van der Veen and Gary Bodwin. Zel Latner gave a service of her poetry. Allure Jefcoat gave a second service on ways to incorporate ecology into our lives. Church members Randy and Lori Bradd spoke about the Switchboard, coming to the church (see Chapter 7, Part 5).

The Annual Church Breakfast began the new church year while proud workers led by Bob Allen showed off the completed brick Patio. Over 200 people turned out to hear St. Mary's College Professor of Theology Father Peter Riga speak on "The Crisis in Religion." Prolonged applause expressed the feelings of the congregation for his dedication to peace and justice.

Gil returned to the pulpit with a service about "How to Understand the Present." He said "Never have I known so many in confusion about the times and the lives they are living. Living in the present is emphasized as though there were no other value or purpose beyond the NOW." He continued the following week with "The Agony of Despair."

On October 11<sup>th</sup> Gil considered the question "Is It Important What We Believe?" What effect does belief have on conduct? This service was an outgrowth of the Credo series, in which participants developed their own credo — those beliefs by which they live.

Neil and Judy McLean resigned as Board member and treasurer in September, when they left the area. Lynn Pryer, an elementary school teacher and a new church member, agreed to serve on the Board. Alan MacLane became treasurer.

Because of the Hungry-U the night before, there was no service or children's program October 18. Members were invited to Gil and Eve's for an informal time with Gil and leaders of the children's program, including acting director Phyllis Crowley.

For several years the annual Fellowship Dinner had been held at the Walnut Creek Elks Club. With the concurrence of the Board Gil wrote the club advising we would hold the dinner elsewhere because of the policy of racial discrimination for membership.

On the 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the founding of the UN, Gil spoke on "Making Peace." The following week Gil spoke about the other part of our name — the Universalists. He next explored "the renewed, free, underground, liberated church, and how our church relates to these new ideas."

The Ecumenical Thanksgiving service was held at the Lafayette Methodist Church. Temple Isaiah and B'nai Shalom participated. Gil and Eve again offered their home for a cooperative Thanksgiving dinner for about 70 children and adults.

Gil attended the annual West Coast Ministers Association retreat in November. Because he was moving in new directions, he was asked to present a paper on "Where I Am in My Ministry and Why I Got There." Gil read this paper for the service November 29. George Johnson's sermon the following week was entitled "Reflections Half Way Up a Greased Pole." George was on the adjunct faculty at Starr King, and continued to serve as Director of the East Bay Project.

The annual congregational meeting December 13<sup>th</sup> elected eight new Board members.\* Only Eleanor Greenlee continued. The meeting was recessed until January, when the 1971 budget would be adopted. Gil and Eve again held a Holiday Open House for children and parents in the afternoon, and adults in the evening. The All Church Family Christmas Service featured a group of children directed by Lillie Chase, Santa Claus, a Recognition of New Members, and a sermonette by Gil, "Christmas-To-Be." Children brought home-made ornaments for the tree.

---

\*Lynn Pryer, Marge Chapel, Barbara Stevens, Lloyd Scaff, Vince Bacon, Bill Rolls, Margaret MacLane, and Lucille Freuler.

1971

Eleanor Greenlee, the only Board holdover, resigned before the first meeting. The year 1970 must have been hard for that Board! The new Board was apparently no more eager to serve, electing Lynn Pryer president, new to Unitarianism and the church. Lloyd Scaff was elected vice president, and Marge Chapel, secretary. A budget of \$53,800 was passed at the congregational meeting. A deficit of \$1,800 was carried over from the year before.

Several trees had been donated to the church in memory of deceased members. Gil suggested that a small memorial garden be created just outside his office (site of the present garden). On January 17, Gills topic was "All Lines Are Busy," asking, are we defined by our busyness? He exhorted us, "Live a while. BE!" On January 24, Gil spoke on "Business Enterprise: The Human Side." He explained a few businesses were among the first to make use of the new learning of group development – the encounter movement. His next talk was the first of a series on Response to Radical Challenge, "The System: To Change or to Destroy."

Director of the California League for American Indians Adam Nordwall, a Chippewa, spoke on "Man and his Environment through the Eyes of An American Indian." Mr. Nordwall taught at Hayward State College. The following Sunday George Johnson spoke on "The Resurrection of the Religious Avant-Garde."

Starr King interns Al Thelander and Bob Pennington appeared before the Board in February to explain the new directions they developed with Aron Gilmartin, VENTURE. They planned groups of about twelve to fill the needs of intimacy in ways other than encounter. Sunday they described The Venture Experiment – groups meeting ten weeks to discuss Religious Values and Behavior, Ecology, Sexism, UU Philosophy, Family Life Styles, Revolution, and Art. In March four groups were underway.

Gil spoke on "The Transitional Crisis of our Time," and exchanged pulpits the following week with Jon Dobrer, minister of Starr King church in Hayward. Bob Pennington spoke on March 14, on "We Have Nothing to Fear But Fear." He examined the despair and lack of vision infecting the nation, and ways to turn the tide. Next Gil spoke about "Marriage and Honest Sex." A proposal to make marriage a three-year contract with options to renew was before the state legislature. Gil used the quotation, "In the U.S. the state of marriage is a calamity."



Al Thelander spoke on “Keep the Faith,” asking the question, What do religious liberals have faith in? Former Director of the UU Laymen’s League Robert Holler spoke on “Jesus is a Co-Conspirator.” He described himself as a member of a national conspiracy to radically change America.

Gil’s next service was based on his Changing Family Life Styles VENTURE group, which was taking a hard look at the values on which our lives are based. Gil and Harold Wilson attended the Chicago Continental Renewal Conference in May to lay out philosophies, plans and procedures for renewing the denomination. Next Gil spoke on “Toward Renewal: The Church as Community.” He shared his experience at the Continental Renewal Assembly.

A service honoring conscientious objectors was held with Peace Registrar Mollie Fujioka, Peace Center Director Andy Baltzo, Dave Bortin, and Gil. Mollie was keeper of the Peace Registry, where young people recorded their views against war. The congregation wrote answers to the questions asked by draft boards of young men applying for Conscientious Objector status.

The Board and Gil were concerned about our “revolving door.” Gil urged more programs for new people to help them decide to stay. Summer socials in homes were planned, Eve and Gil had one late in the summer. The Board also agreed finally to pass the collection plate. This had been resisted for many years – too much like the churches we had left – but there was a growing realization we needed to be more up front about money.

Gil sent his end-of-year memo to the Board. His comments concerned problems of learning to use and care for our buildings and setting limits for those who share it. Vince Bacon resigned from the Board, and Doug Page agreed to serve. A lawyer, Doug had been mayor of Walnut Creek.

The Spring Lecture series at Pleasant Hill High School began with writer and television commentator Paul Jacobs. He worked with the Center for the Study of Law and Society at UC Berkeley, and taught in the Graduate School of Journalism. Paul had been a union official and organizer for several radical socialist groups. Author of several books, he had just completed (with S. Sandau and E. Pell) *To Serve the Devil*, about racism in America.

“New Approaches to Solving Social Problems,” was the title of Dr. Joel Fort’s lecture. Dr. Fort was the founder of Fort Help, a comprehensive outpatient

service for drug, sex, suicide, crime and other problems. Consultant to the UN World Health Organization, Dr. Fort was the author of *The Pleasure Seekers: the Drug Crisis, Youth and Society*.

Last in the series was Aileen Hernandez, president of NOW (National Organization for Women). She was consultant/lecturer on urban affairs to National Committee Against Discrimination in Housing, and labor education specialist for the State Department on Latin American countries.

Rachel Wilshire was general chair of the May Day Multi-media Art Festival featuring artists of the church. There was a special display of children's art, and all kinds of crafts – stitchery, mobiles, pots, candles, jewelry, macramé, sculpture and paintings. There was poetry, music, film, dance, a delicious lunch and dinner, and a May Pole ceremony. The Festival made over \$400 for the church.

Bob Pennington's service May 2, was titled, "Everything You Always Wanted to Know, or The Messiah Complex." Al Thelander spoke about "Being in a Cage." He discussed the cages that restrict our freedom to be what we want, and how to break out of them.

About 25 members and friends attended a reunion of the Diablo Unitarian Fellowship and the Pine Street House, the Fellowship's first home. Charter member David Bortin showed slides of the early days, mostly the children's activities at Pine Street. In July the church held a Dinner Dance at Heather Farm Community Center, featuring the Mark Phillips Trio.

Gil received two honorary Doctorates in 1971. Meadville Theological School in Chicago awarded Aron Gilmartin the degree of Doctor of Divinity, *honoris causa*. "Faithful minister, valiant reformer, exemplar of freedom, you made the cause of oppressed people your cause ... you have composed the music by which many have marched, and shown yourself a true embodiment of the prophetic genius of Unitarian Universalism."

Starr King School for the Ministry awarded Gil the honorary degree Doctor of Sacred Theology at its commencement in November, at the Mt. Diablo church: "Courageous statesman of humaneness; enabler of congregations to plumb their depths of strength; ageless fighter for civil freedoms; intimate sojourner with all people at home and abroad."

The Board took responsibility for planning the summer services because there was no committee. Speakers included church member and Security Bank president Fortney (Pete) Stark, now in the House of Representatives. Betty Reid, Harold Wilson, George Johnson, and Margaret Williams, UUA Department of Education and Social Concern consultant, each gave a service. Director of Volunteer Enterprises (for ex-convicts) Bob Aldridge spoke, and Dr. Renford Gaines, minister of the Boston Arlington Street UU church.

Barry Stevens spoke the 1<sup>st</sup> of August. Associate of Fritz Perls at Esalen and the Gestalt Institute of Canada, she co-authored (with Carl Rogers) *Person to Person* and *The Problem of Being Human*. She also wrote *Don't Push the River*. A group of De La Salle (Catholic) high school students did a service from the rock opera "Jesus Christ Superstar." Ted Merrill, 18-year-old church member, spoke on "Fears, Resentments and the Use of Force." Dr. Heydar Reghaby, leader of the Revolutionary Iranian Student Movement, spoke on "The Essence of Existence." There was a panel discussion on "Teaching as a Subversive Activity." A varied summer program!

The Board met twice a month throughout the summer and held a workshop in July to explore how to get new people involved, finances, Sunday morning worship, social action, the need for a high school youth group. They held a retreat in August. Barbara Stevens resigned from the Board and was replaced by Carolyn Campbell, an engineer with the city of Walnut Creek.

Committees needed to be strengthened so the Board would not handle so much routine work. They explored how to create an environment in which individuals could express their feelings, rather than leaving the Board or the church. They explored ideas they thought people would be enthusiastic about. A monthly theme was chosen. October was "Family." Programs were discussed — yoga, meditation, dance, art films. Gil had suggested Sunday evening potlucks to involve new people. Jean Nickell agreed to hold them twice a month for two months, and if successful, turn them over to someone else.

The Board questioned the church's role in the community: Changer of society? An intentional community? They proposed a Directory of Services so that members and friends could exchange skills. Plans were made to improve the grounds. Advisors were recruited for a junior and a senior youth group, and a

religious education committee. In September Bill Rolls resigned from the Board, the fourth to resign this year. Barbara O'Meara (Hill) was appointed in October.

Nominations for the 1972 Board were needed by December, and the Nominating committee had not yet met. Art Ungar advised the Board there was no religious education committee, no teacher for 3<sup>rd</sup> & 4<sup>th</sup> grade class, the R.E. building was filthy, the space used by the Switchboard was needed for classes. He stressed the need for an R.E. director and a committee.

Board president Lynn Pryer asked for more support from Board members. Each agreed to act as convener for a month, be responsible for preparing the agenda, and chairing the meetings. At the suggestion of new Starr King intern Tom Richard, they agreed to hold their next meeting following a potluck dinner and urge church members to attend.

There was no service Labor Day weekend. The Annual All-Church Breakfast, arranged by Board member Lucille Freuler, was the following Sunday. Over 175 attended. While not intended as a fundraising activity, the church made over \$100 as Lucille had most of the food donated. Bob and Gloria Havlan started a new Bookstore, inactive for some time. Joy Bradley led a discussion of Charles Reich's *The Greening of America*. In December the group explored Alvin Toffler's *Future Shock*, facilitated by Bob Havlan.

Dr. Stephen Fritchman, minister emeritus of the Los Angeles church, spoke September 26, on "When Does a Man Learn to Say No?" Dr. Fritchman was a controversial speaker of rare eloquence, daring and provocative. Author of *Men of Liberty*, he edited the *Christian Register*, precursor of *The World*, and was Religious News Editor of the *NY Herald Tribune*.

Gil's first service of the new church year began the month-long theme of Family, entitled "Will the Family Survive?" The following week The Rev. Ted Webb, new minister of the Sacramento Church, spoke on marriage and non-marriage. On October 24<sup>th</sup> Gil explored the question, "Are Religion and the Church Support or Hindrance for the Family?"

For many years men working in the area lunched together at a local restaurant. The newsletter of September 28, 1971 announced "Liberated Luncheons." For the first time women were welcomed.

Another first was a Meditation Service before the Sunday Service the end of October. It was a period of quiet, poetry, meditation and prayer led by Tom Richard. A Meditation Service has been a part of our worship for many years.

The Board and the congregation needed to define their spiritual and religious values and purposes. Board members and Gil met with facilitator Stan Knoblock to explore what they wanted to accomplish. They wanted to promote individual and community search for growth, meaning and awareness, and learn to function more effectively so that service on the Board would be rewarding. Many committees needed to be revived — Program, Sunday Service, Religious Education, Building and Grounds. The Board was trying to handle all the work of the church, and it was not working.

In November 1971, the church held its fourth annual Christmas Bazaar and Luncheon, chaired by Marge Chapel. A David Pierson painting was raffled, and there were booths of every kind, including a Tool Booth, Books, Peace Center booth, a PCD/Starr King booth, Body Basics, Candles, and piano playing by Dave Capps.

“Voices of Thanksgiving” was the theme of the service November 21, with Gil, Robin King, Tom Richards, and Eve Gilmartin. Fifty new members were welcomed at the Joining Ceremony. The interfaith Thanksgiving service was at Temple Isaiah, with B’nai Shalom and Lafayette United Methodist again participating.

Gil described his service November 28, “The Groaning of America,” as follows: “The Seventies will be a decade of questioning, uncertainty, potential turmoil and confrontation. There will be a major re-formation or re-ordering of our public and private value systems.” Intern Tom Richard’s December service was titled “Forgiveness, Trust and Love.”

Board members elected at the annual meeting were Jean Nickell, Barbara O’Meara, Doug Page, Carolyn Campbell, Lucille Freuler, and Margaret MacLane, all of whom served in 1971. Continuing their term were Marge Chapel, Lynn Pryor and Lloyd Scaff. Everyone was willing to continue serving on the Board. Treasurer Alan MacLane estimated income for 1972 should be \$51,850. A budget of \$58,200 was passed. The congregation voted a \$6,000 deficit. Gil’s report stressed the

rewards of being an active member, saying the church is what those who are active make it.

Ways & Means sponsored a Gala Christmas Festival featuring a progressive gourmet dinner in Rancho San Miguel. Starting at the Scaffs' with champagne cocktails and fondue dishes, they moved to the Bortins' for an entree and wine. Next was Eleanor Greenlee's for dessert and carol singing, ending at the Chases' for wine punch and dancing.

On December 19<sup>th</sup> Gil talked about "The Man from Nazareth." The Family Christmas Eve Service and Party featured stories, carols, Santa, and refreshments. Children brought ornaments for the tree. Each family again took home an ornament for their tree, lovingly made by Eleanor Pound. A cooperative Christmas dinner was held at the church, and a Do-It-Ourselves New Year's Eve Party.

## 1972

At the January Board retreat Doug Page was elected president, Carolyn Campbell vice president and Marge Chapel, secretary. Church events for the year were calendared. Gil announced his intention to retire at 65, in three years. The Board approved a sabbatical for him.

Tom Richard's Meditation service resumed after the holidays. Jean Nickell formed a new Worship committee with Polly Padgett, Lynne White, Robin and Jennifer Scaff King, and Gordon Locklear as chair. Jennifer made heavy drapes for the sanctuary windows for movies and slides. Polly facilitated the service January 2, a discussion of values. George Johnson spoke the following Sunday, "On Being a Religious Liberal." George said, I want to share the odyssey of my beliefs, and hope you will share something of your experience with doubts and changes of belief."

Gil's service on January 11, also dealt with values. He quoted David Reisman, "The anxiety manifested by so many intellectuals about values, especially those of others, may be on the point of being overdone." The new Worship committee presented the next service: "Darwin was Wrong." They quoted a leading anthropologist, "We have discovered the missing link between the ape and modern man is US." The service was based on Charles Erskine Scott Wood's

“Heavenly Discourse.” Participants were Gordon Locklear, Robin and Jennifer King, Gil, George Ponomareff, Jan Janssen, Chuck Keown and Lynne White.

“Getting in Touch with Your Feelings Through Music” was the Worship committee’s offering February 6. Musicians included Marge Chapel, Jennifer King, Jeanne Joncas, Gordon Locklear, Betty Reid and Lynne White, with plenty of congregational singing. The following week Gil and Robin King presented a dialogue sermon from *Zorba the Greek* by Kazantsakis. Music from the movie sound track accompanied the talk.

Gil next discussed “About Your Sexuality,” the new Beacon curriculum for junior highers. A special service was planned February 27, called “Involvement Sunday.” It began with breakfast and a discussion of ways to relate to the church, from serving on the Board or chairing a committee to fixing coffee or folding the newsletter. Tom Richard described involvement as an expression of values and commitment to living one’s deepest theology. Tom was no longer offering the Meditation service Sunday mornings. Bruce and Georgia Thom announced a weekly meditation group meeting in their home.

At the Board meeting February 23, Lynn Pryer resigned, as did newsletter editor Bob Bowers. The minutes report [that] the Board spoke of its frustrations with Gil, and Gil spoke of his with the Board. After 22 years, memories of this period have grown dim. Some have said it was such an unpleasant time they don’t remember it. At its next meeting the Board decided to meet every other week. President Doug Page said he would like the Board expanded to 11 or 13 members, presumably so there would be more to share the load.

Gil’s eight months’ sabbatical was set for January through August, 1973. The Board began arranging for the work of the church in Gil’s absence. Doug was anxious to form a Long Range Planning committee.

A Congregation meeting approved the sabbatical for Gil with the understanding that he would serve at least one more year. Members were concerned about how the church would function without Gil’s administrative, counseling, and many other skills.

The reputation and success of the church was due to a large extent to Gil, but the consensus was that he deserved this time away, and the church needed the time to explore its resources and potential. Both Gil and the congregation would

benefit from the “recharging” of Gil’s resources. The vote was “overwhelmingly carried.”

In March 1972, the church held a Bacchanal at the home of Margaret and Alan MacLane, with wine and cheese, and dancing to Dixieland jazz. They held an April Fool’s costume party at the church, and another Bacchanal at Diane Houle’s, a sing-along.

The Board recommended the bylaws be amended until the next regular congregational meeting to provide for a Board of 14. Many doubts were expressed. Wouldn’t this be an unwieldy number; could 14 serve to involve more of the congregation than 9? Some felt this would encourage more Board power instead of spreading it among the members. They agreed to try it until the end of the year to ease the burdens and frustrations Board members were feeling.

New Board members proposed by the Nominating committee were Randy Bradd, Frank Holtemann, Dick Verrilli, Lynne White and Bruce Thom. Peter Davies was nominated from the floor. Some felt this was an unconventional way to add to the Board, others should have been able to nominate people, and nominees were not well known. The motion passed with four No’s and five abstentions.

Meanwhile, the Worship committee continued to provide unusual services. Berkeley photographer and author John Pearson presented his film, “I Am In Love With the World.” The film was narrated by Robin King. Mr. Pearson said his chief concern was to “portray the immense diversity of life.” The following week the Rev. Paul Sawyer spoke on the Chinese guide to living by Confucius, “I Ching Tao Spirit.” The next service, “Beyond Mud-pies, or I Do Care,” was presented by Bay Area recording composer and singer Victoria, and poet, musician and church member Jennifer Scaff King.

The Easter service was entitled “The Miracle of Rebirth in Religion, Myth, and Music.” The service was written by Robin King, and performed by Gil and members of the Sunday Service committee. It was a “journey through man’s eternal preoccupation with death and resurrection from Rama to Jesus, Zoroaster to Odin, Osiris to Dionysus.” There was also a new member Joining Ceremony and a flower ceremony. An Easter Egg Hunt followed.



On April 9, church member Hank Basayne, Executive Officer of the Association of Humanistic Psychology, and American Humanist Association counselor, gave the service, "I Used to Think I'd Live Forever, But Now I'm Not So Sure." Hank explored fears of death, dying and bereavement. This was followed by Hank and Gil discussing alternatives to the American way of death.

Board member Barbara O'Meara led "A Celebration of Our Community" April 23. This was a time to hear what the church means to individuals, and express disappointments and dreams. It was a celebration of similarities and honoring of differences that make up this community. Next Polly Padgett presented "The Rip-off of Being Cast in Roles," skits illustrating various role-traps, discussing how they constrict us.

The May 14 service was called "Beg You Mothers, Let Your Children Live." In a composite voice of pride and conscience, radical and conservative, participants told a story in prose, poetry and song, about love, hate, war and peace, patriotism and Gold Star Motherhood. Narrated by Gordon Locklear with music and poetry by Jim and Anne Irwin, Lynne White, Jennifer and Robin King.

Meanwhile, the Board was working to involve more people in the work of the church. Responsibilities were divided into twelve categories: (Office, maintenance, Sunday service, program, R.E., etc.) with each Board member responsible for one. People were recruited for various tasks. An interest questionnaire was prepared. Board members were responsible for the pledge drive since there was no Finance committee. About 476 people were pledged, with the Board each canvassing ten, and asking three of those to canvass eight others. An ambitious undertaking!

"A Day for Peace and life" was held at the church May 13, with films, drama, poetry, music, and dancing. Featured speakers were Congressional candidate Fortney Stark, St. Mary's College professor Father Peter Riga, and Joyce McLean of Womens International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Betty Reid and Gordon Locklear sang. There were many peace related booths, and a Fiesta Supper.

Summer services began with a Family Day and Service Auction followed by a picnic on the church grounds. Donna Pierson led folk dancing, and all kinds of games were available. Members and friends were asked to complete an Offer of

Service form. Posters advertising offers were displayed at church, with space to write in bids, and auctioned off to the highest bidders at the Auction June 11. This was the precursor of the Serve-U, an annual event that continues to this day.

Summer services featured Tom Richards, just returned from India, speaking about the country and their music. Church members Arlene Gierke, Betty Reid, Doug Page and Ben Bortin each gave a service. Ministers Emily Champagne, Harold Wilson, and Sid Peterman also spoke. Fr. Anthony Mills, summer teacher at Starr King, and head of the Anglo-African division of Vatican Radio in Rome, spoke.

A service of song was provided by James Young of the group "Eyes of Day." Doug Page and Nancy Sours did a service on yoga. In July a Summer Dinner Dance was held at Heather Farms, with music by the Marge Chapel Quartet, and singer Lynne White. A Newsletter Service Exchange was offered in the summer of 1972. A total of 58 services were needed or offered, with donations going to the church.

The Board made plans for Gil's sabbatical. A Crisis committee was formed with 25 recruited to be trained by Gil. Howard Diller would serve as bereavement counselor. George Johnson agreed to be available in Gil's absence, particularly with VENTURE programming. The Board asked that he remain a minister of the church with no salary. A "Concerns of the Church" day with Starr King faculty Ed Setchko and Til Evans was planned

After a successful 1972 Welcome Back Church Family Breakfast, the new church year began with Gil and church member Dr. Ron Ellis discussing "What Values in a Valueless Society?" Ron was in charge of the children's program, which began the following week. Gil gave a sermon. on "Equality: Life-Style of Tomorrow." On October 1<sup>st</sup> an American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) slide show was presented by the Sunday Service committee, "The Automated Battlefield." Bombs dropped in the tiny area of North Vietnam were already three times those used in World War II. Workers from Bread Not Bombs, formed by Ira Sandperl and Joan Baez, conducted the discussion, and \$105 was collected for them.

A successful second annual Arts Festival was held on October 7, 1972. Everyone brought sheets, nylons and sewing notions the Thursday before to prepare materials for the "tie in." Rachel Wilshire was in charge of the Festival.\*

\* Assisting were Joyce Mohrman painting, Jeanne Joncas sculpture, Jan Cooper pottery, and Marilyn Steenberg stitchery.

There was stitchery, textiles, weavings, pots, ceramics, jewelry, candles, leather goods, a strolling troubadour, body painting, a glue-in, and plenty of food and drink. There were demonstrations, including Clarisse Bois' Project Entanglement, tie-ins, get-involved happenings, and special Art in Action activities for children. Zel Latner conducted a poetry reading. A delicious dinner was provided by church member Judy McLean.

Rachel Wilshire had for several years provided monthly showings of church and community artists in the sanctuary. She resigned in September, and Harriet Fisher took over this responsibility. Many church and area artists have been displayed with painting, sculpture and photography exhibits. David Pierson has held many art shows at the church. Artists' works were displayed in the sanctuary monthly from 1968 through 1974.

When Dick and Miriam Hurley returned to Walnut Creek, Miriam joined the Sunday Service committee. Miriam's first love was creative worship. It was a strong committee, with Ludell Deutscher, Dave Pierson, Suzan Lawrence, Judy van der Veen, and Dave Bortin chair. Interns Mark Belletini and Doug Strong were also active. These were creative people who together made an exciting, creative community that provided many wonderful services.

### **Miriam. Hurley**

Miriam created the "This I Believe" tradition, working with individual members to do a service sharing their values and religious journey. This was the most rewarding of all her church activities. People who said "I could never do that!" were affirmed and empowered by the process of putting

---

\*\* Lloyd Griffith, Gary Bogue, Bernie Segal, Ludell Deutscher, Joyce Mohrman, Florence Nesbitt, Pam Glover, Gary Politzer, Frank Politzer, Betty Travis, Esther Roseman, Clarisse Bois, Sylvia Rhoades, Ginny Weis, Selma Grossman, Sandy Kent, Marge Minger, Charles Marshall, Barbara Boneysteele, Nancy Freeman, Fernando Mercado, Margaret and Alan MacLane, and others.

their service together, and by the positive response from the congregation. Creating a supportive place in which individuals are free to grow is for Miriam the essence of her religious values and of Unitarian Universalism.

She saw that Gil handled all the arrangements Sunday mornings, as he had not found someone to help. Miriam set up the Sunday morning Coordinators, recruiting a person each Sunday to be responsible for greeters, ushers, the collection, etc.

Miriam returned to Oakland, and has spent several years studying Creation Spirituality with Matthew Fox and Brian Swimm. The underlying bedrock of her belief is still Unitarian Universalism and the freedom to find one's own values and beliefs. Miriam made a difference in the life of our church in her commitment to our physical surroundings as well as the growth and affirmation she brought to so many of us. She gave so much to the church. We are forever grateful.

The church (and Gil) had an exciting and satisfying relationship with Middle Eastern dancer, Rhea, and her class of advanced belly dancers. Rhea was so grateful that we provided a place to hold her classes that she donated several evening performances to the church. She taught at Hayward State College, and performed at the Greek Taverna in San Francisco. Turkish coffee and Middle Eastern desserts were served. The first performance was a huge success, making over \$400 for the church.

Probably the worst thing that happened at the church was the loss of Nancy Freeman's paintings. The daughter of George and Barbara Prall, Nancy is an accomplished artist. An exhibit of her work was stolen from the church. The young boys who took the paintings tried to dispose of them by ripping them up and burying them. The church's insurance covered the loss, but did not make up for the loss of all Nancy's work.

Soon after moving into the new buildings drinks were delivered on Friday for the party Saturday evening. They were in the sanctuary. Those who arrived to set up for the party found several louvered panes carefully removed, and the drinks gone. A typewriter and adding machine were taken once, and there were minor acts of vandalism, but they have been far between. One other incident was

the time church funds were diverted to personal use. A small amount was borrowed, and soon returned. Few were aware of it, and the incident was soon forgotten.

George Johnson, just returned from Africa, next spoke about his experiences “going home.” New Starr King Intern Jerry Sylvester was approved, to serve while Gil was on leave. He spoke in October, and Gil did a service UN Sunday on the United Nations. Jerry spoke again before Thanksgiving on “What Are We Thankful For?” The 9<sup>th</sup> annual Thanksgiving Day Service was held at MDUC, with Temple Isaiah, B’nai Shalom, and Lafayette Methodist Church participating. Berkeley songwriter and singer Malvina Reynolds gave the first service in December.

The Board approved a notice in the newsletter: “Because there are some whose health is jeopardized by smoking, the Board asks that there be no smoking in the assembly room [sanctuary] during the service and discussion following.” This was an unpopular stand to take at the time.

The Crisis committee (to function while Gil was on sabbatical) continued to plan for the months ahead. I met with the Board to coordinate the work of the church. Doug also asked that I take minutes at Board meetings to facilitate communication. The job description was changed to include these new duties.

Board president Doug Page was unhappy with the minister, the Board and the church. He wrote to Board members in November explaining his criticisms. He felt that Unitarianism was obsolete, having degenerated into one idea, freedom from — tradition, restraint, family, ceremony, morality, and worship. He said this resulted in loss of self-respect, self-discipline, values, commitment and responsibility.

Doug described the minister as “psychologically and intellectually immobilized.” He felt many people were leaving the church failing to express their reasons. Board members resigned in silence, leaving a new Board to the same fate.

Although his criticism was harsh, it contained some truth. Membership was not growing, pledging was down, few committees were functioning, and children’s religious education was almost nonexistent. Other churches experienced similar problems. The larger society had come through a period of turmoil and the loss of traditional values. Whenever new ideas are being tried out, old ones are

threatened. What seemed to some a time of exciting beginnings appeared to others as chaos.

The annual meeting was held December 10. There was a \$5,000 deficit, although only \$30 of our pledge had been paid to UUA. A letter to the congregation was approved, explaining the minister's salary could not be paid until pledges were paid. A By-laws amendment calling for twelve Board members, six to be elected each year, was approved.\* The meeting was continued so that pledges could be raised.

Doug Page publicized an eleven-page statement of his "Proposed New Directions." He urged the reading of the "outpouring of inter-disciplinary writings on God, man, and existence." (Maslow, Fabry, Berger, Castaneda, Roszak, Sam Keen and Carl Jung.) He envisioned a more intentional, participatory religion that would enable self-actualization, responsibility, and "freedom to."

In talking with those on the Board then, they agreed that most of the Board was in sympathy with Doug's opinions. But his increasing criticisms of the minister caused them to back away. Doug sent a letter to Gil listing confrontational questions to be answered at the December Board meeting. Gil read his reply at that meeting.

The Christmas Bazaar chaired by Jeanne Joncas featured a raffle of huge and wonderful "Hamburger Pillows," big enough for kids to sleep in, handmade by Margaret MacLane. It included two bun halves, a hamburger, lettuce and a sliced tomato. Everyone was invited to a party at Jearme's home to sing and record Christmas carols to play at the Bazaar. There was also wine tasting, palm reading, decorations, and white elephants. Gini Merrill was in charge of the food table, which included preserves, breads, cookies, and all kinds of edibles. Gourmet clothing was a hit. There was a huge plant booth. There were batik wall hangings, Bolivian rugs and ponchos, and "things from the sea." The church made over \$800.

Christmas Eve fell on Sunday, with carols and a sermon by Gil. An informal group of carolers sang. The Family Christi as Party was at five, with a story by Robin King, carols and Santa Claus. Children brought hand-made ornaments for

---

\*New Board members elected were Dick Verrilli, Ed Schruers, Arbert Hall, Jeanne Joncas, Peter Davies, Bruce Thom, and Rose Texeira.

the tree, and took one for their tree at home. There was a Candlelight service at 10:30 with Gil, Eve, and Betty Reid, and mulled wine and home-made "goodies."

Gil's last service was December 31. He left the next day for Mexico where he planned to spend the first two months of his sabbatical. Revelers attended "The Taming of the Shrew" at Civic Arts on New Year's Eve, returning to the church to celebrate the coming of the new year.

### 1973

The Congregational meeting in January adopted the budget, but did not consider an announced By-laws amendment to require a two-thirds secret vote to retain a minister after five years. Vice president Carolyn Campbell, who chaired the meeting, announced it had been illegally submitted, and was therefore dropped. Ron Ellis was elected as the 14<sup>th</sup> member of the Board. Doug Page was again elected president, Carolyn Campbell vice president, John Cline secretary, and Alan MacLane continued as treasurer. Newsletter editor Georgia Stewart had served for six months, resigning in December. Ted Merrill became the new editor.

The service January 21<sup>st</sup> was presented by Brian Harvey and members of his year-long discussion group, "God, Man and Myth." Writings of Kazantzakis, MacLeish, Dostoevsky, Hesse, and the Bible were discussed. George Johnson gave a sermon on Jonah. Board member John Cline read his poetry one Sunday, and the Sunday Service committee presented a Valentine's Day service on love.

The Board received Intern Jerry Sylvester's letter advising he was ending his placement at the church, and was on leave from the school due to illness. It was too late to place another intern, but students agreed to help with weddings, memorial services, etc. The church was without an intern during the critical period of Gil's sabbatical.

Gil wrote from Mexico City he was serving the Fellowship there, living in the house in which they met, enjoying the wonderful museums, and the luxury of reading endlessly, "a gift without equal." In May he returned for a short visit, and left with Eve for Japan, Hong Kong, Bangkok, and Manila. Upon returning they attended a month-long residential workshop in family therapy led by Virginia Satir, author of *Conjoint Family Therapy* and *Peoplemaking*.

The Crisis Committee consisted of about 40 physicians, attorneys, nurses, social workers, and others in the church trained to act in Gil's absence. The resource people were recruited and trained by Board member and school psychologist Lucille Freuler. As church secretary I coordinated the program, making sure calls were referred to the right people.

The Program committee sponsored a series of six lectures at the church on "The Occult Revival, What's Behind It?" by Davis Unitarian church minister, Charles Slap. He was a long-time student of witchcraft and the occult. The lectures covered ESP, telepathy, clairvoyance, precognition and psychokinesis. He gave a history of the occult, discussed poltergeists, apparitions and ghosts, and ended with survival and reincarnation.

The second meeting also began with this discussion. Members voted to sell church bonds to pay for carpeting, lawn and sprinkler system, and kitchen. The motion to adopt financial support as a condition of membership did not pass. The motion regarding "termination of the minister's contract after three years by majority of those at a congregational meeting" did not pass.

Florence Pierson made a motion "that the congregation express a vote of confidence to Gil and Eve, that we express our love and appreciation for all they have done for us, and that this notice appear in the newsletter." This motion was passed unanimously.

Doug wrote the Board saying he was "appalled" so few attended the two meetings (69 and 51), and no one was willing to face the problems of making the church interesting and attractive. He suggested a professional counselor meet with the Board, minister and others. On August 3, Doug wrote the Board he was resigning from the Board and the church. He felt "those who choose to remain active in the church want to keep it as it is." So ended a sad chapter in the life of the church. Many of Doug's visions were shared, but people were alienated by his feelings about the minister. This created a barrier that no way was found to breach.

There was another Gourmet Potluck Dinner Dance in July at Heather Farm Park with the Marge Chapel Trio performing. The Fall Festival Get Together began the new church year with a gala Breakfast. It was arranged by the new Extended Family group to welcome Gil and Eve after his sabbatical. In his letter to the



congregation Gil said “I feel I have lived a lifetime — so meaningful have these new experiences been.” He continued, “Underlying all my hopes is the wish that we create here a place for new learnings and discoveries, self-awareness and growth — programs to serve these ends that bring us pleasure in the doing.” The new church year was off to a hope-filled start.

Gil’s first service described visiting the Philippine spirit healers. A Welcome Home Gil and Eve luncheon followed the service. Gil’s next service was titled “If You Meet the Buddha on the Road, Kill Him,” from the book by Sheldon Kopp. The service explored the wisdom of not putting our faith in any authority, and continuing to create our own.

Carolyn Campbell agreed to serve as president until the end of the year but not as chair of the Board. Treasurer Alan MacLane and Betty Jirucha agreed to fill two of the three vacancies. In October the Board appointed Gail Rodens to fill the third. Because of the decline in interest in an R.E. program, the Board agreed to offer child care during the service at 50¢ per child.

The church enjoyed a return engagement of an exotic evening of Middle Eastern pastries, a traditional Middle Eastern orchestra, Turkish coffee, with Rhea and her students in an evening of exotic belly dancing. A Harvest Fundraiser featured a sharing of the rewards from our gardens, and home-baked goods and crafts.

The next two Sundays explored the development of Extended Families and the experiences of those involved, so that new groups could be formed. The Gilmartins invited new members who joined during Gil’s sabbatical to a get-acquainted evening in their home. Gil gave two sermons on “Who Are We Unitarian Universalists? — Where we’ve come from and where we are now.” He also spoke on “The Courage to be a Failure,” citing Benjamin Franklin: “The things which hurt, instruct.”

Five churches and synagogues joined for the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service at the new buildings of Congregation B’nai Shalom across the street. New were Walnut Creek and Lafayette United Methodist churches. Everyone brought offerings of canned food for Friends Outside, an organization aiding families of prisoners.

George Johnson resigned from the church on November 28, to become minister of the Redwood City church. His association with our church was a rich and rewarding one. For many he provided an opportunity to work with the people of West Oakland that was unique and conscience-raising. We were inspired by working with George, becoming more sensitized to, and aware of "the American Dilemma," Gunnar Myrdal's phrase for racism in this country.

The December congregational meeting included a report from treasurer Alan MacLane advising a \$3,700 deficit. Alan resigned, having served off and on for ten years. Dave Tucker became the new treasurer. A small R.E. program with about 35 children was underway. The congregation voted to return to a nine-member Board. Elected were Gail Rodens, Mickey Moberg, Art Ungar, Ernie Jackson, Margi Stern, Ron Ellis and Joyce Mohrman. Ideally, only three members are replaced each year. During these years there was a great deal of turnover in Board membership.

The year ended with a special holiday family program created by the Sunday Service committee. Each family brought juice, cookies, and food for Discovery House. Each child brought an ornament for the tree and took another home. In the evening Stephen Vincent Benet's poem *A Child is Born* was read.

### 1974

Newsletters from 1974 and 1975 are missing, so the record of these years is sketchy. Ron Ellis was elected president of the Board, Peter Davies, vice president, and Joyce Mohrtnan secretary. Margi Stern resigned before the first meeting, and Randall Wiley was appointed. Mickey Moberg was removed from the Board because of continued absence. Dave Tucker presented a budget of \$51,200 with expenditures of \$51,350. Starr King intern Don Dyne was approved by the Board to work with the church until June.

Gil sent a memo to the Board in January about existing programs and suggestions for new ones. There were two daytime classes — yoga and drawing (also offered at night), and evening groups: book discussion, meditation, bridge, Human Transformation with George Johnson, and Parts Parties with Eve and Gil, based on the work of Virginia Satir. He also mentioned ongoing activities — Round Robin Dinners, Encounter groups, and art displays. He proposed new

programs such as a film series, a group led by Bob Birnbaum, Sexuality class for both young people and adults, singles activities, and camping trips.

### **Sharing in Growth**

Former church member and district administrator Jody Schilling presented the WA Sharing in Growth project to the Board. This was a program of sharing with other societies in goal setting and implementation. Twenty-five members attended the informational meeting, and were excited about the program. The Board voted to accept this opportunity.

The UUA welcomed us to the program and sent a congregational questionnaire to begin the work. They advised us that Team selection was very important, to involve the widest possible congregational participation.

Eve Gilmartin was chosen as contact person. Jody arranged a planning meeting in October with four church members and four District participants to prepare for the service to introduce the program. The questionnaire was mailed to members and friends. The Rev. Chris Raible, founder of the program, spoke the week before the service.

The service was devoted to setting goals for the church, and stressed the importance of completing the questionnaire. There was a delicious luncheon after the service. The four church members chosen to serve on the committee were Betty Reid, Ron Ellis, Dave Fisher and Judy van der Veen. Judy said this was one of her most important church activities. Judy traveled to Boston to participate in the UUA leadership training program, and feels she learned leadership skills invaluable to her in her work with many organizations since.

Services began with Gil, "I'll Never Forget What's His Name," a service about living with attention in the present. Monterey ministers Fred and Marge Keip presented a service celebrating the Plains Indian People. Sam and Billie (King) Wright shared their years in an isolated log cabin on the Alaskan tundra inside the Arctic Circle. Sam had been the minister of the Marin church and served on the faculty of Starr King. Former church member (then wife of Robin King) and

Starr King graduate, Billie had written a book of their experience, *Four Seasons North*. They presented another program at the church that evening.

Gil next spoke about The Unprepared Society: What Future?" and then, "Man Alone Asks Why?" Gil and Eve (and others) presented a "family drama" service based on Virginia Satir's work, "The Can of Worms in Action." In March long-time member Betty Reid presented a program of songs, and discussed her work with the experimental school program, Project Community.

Intern Don Dyne worked with Barbara OMeara and Nancy Blevins to create an evening service. The first "Joyful Whatzit" on St. Patrick's day began with Irish harp music, folk dancing, and poetry, followed by an Irish potluck dinner and rap session. On March 31, the Family Whatzit was about "Being Born," and after dinner a filmstrip by Dr. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross on "Living with Dying," particularly suited for children. A Seder dinner was held in April.

Earth Day was celebrated March 17, with worship and a service of labor. All the areas around the property were weeded, planted and watered as part of Sunday morning worship. Don Dyne gave a service entitled "To Die or Not to Die." David and Beverly Bortin did a Passover service. Easter was celebrated with a sunrise service on our hill, and a sermon by Gil on the meaning of Easter, with a special flower ceremony by the children.

On April 21, Pacific Central District program facilitator Jody Schilling and Jim Mills of Planned Parenthood presented the service. It following a weekend "About Your Sexuality" seminar at the church, and included those who attended. It was called "Love: A Dialogue Between a Man and a Woman." The evening Joyful Whatzit featured a Gestalt Art Experience with clay modeling, led by Til Evans from Starr King.

The following weekend the service was atop Mt. Diablo, where church members and friends spent the weekend camping. The theme was "Save Mt. Diablo." George Johnson's service in May was about a remote Ugandan tribe, "Lessons from the Ik." Gil spoke at George's Redwood City church. The opening of the new kitchen, designed and built by Bill Gehres and others, was celebrated after the service. A luncheon was served with tours of the kitchen, a welcome addition to the church facilities.

Gordon Locklear and Lynne White facilitated an all-day workshop on sexuality using the Beacon Press "About Your Sexuality" kit. The Joyful Whatzit featured foot massage with church member Judy McKinnon, who later created a successful massage therapy institute in Berkeley. Finger-painting with artist Dave Pierson was featured the following week.

Gil next spoke on "Moral Decisions: Where Would You Draw the Line?" Don Dyne spoke on "Loneliness" on May 19, while Gil and Eve gave the service at the Berkeley Fellowship. Radio personality Stan Dale explored "Freeing the Human Mind." A former clinical psychologist and speech lecturer at Loyola University, Stan was a radio news director.

The next Joyful Whatzit featured "Ethnic America," tracing our roots and wanderings. Dancer Lillie Chase taught folk-dancing. The following Sunday, after the Hungry-U, there were no services. Traditionally, the Sunday morning after was reserved for the post-Hungry-U gin fizz party and cleanup to restore the church.

Barbara O'Meara resigned from the Board in May, citing the demands of career changes. In June Marge Minger was appointed, replacing Mickey Moberg. At the Retreat in June the Board voted to close the office for a month during July and August. Summer services were discussed and Fall programs planned. They discussed ways to widen personal contacts and recruit committee members. Barbara Bowers became the new Board member, replacing Barbara O'Meara.

Gil gave a service of reflections on Studs Terkel's book *Working*. The Joyful Whatzit featured a rap with our former associate minister George Johnson. The following week the Whatzit held a School's Out Celebration. Church members George and Mollie Fujioka gave the service about their experiences at the Tulelake Detention Camp during the war, an emotional service for all of us. Summer began the end of June with services by former members John and Judy van der Veen, Harold Wilson, Al Thelander, and the Rev. Dr. Dorothy Spoerl from the UUA on the summer faculty at Starr King.

The new church year got off to a good start with the Annual All-Church Pancake & Sausage Breakfast, and displays of the new R.E. programs, the Sharing in Growth pilot project, and the active, growing Singles group (Chapter 6). Gil's first service was an introductory exploration of the paranormal called "Blow Your

Mind," an exploration of facts that don't fit our reality, other views of reality, and altered states of consciousness. He next discussed "The New Wedding and Marriage."

New intern Lisa Wiggins was introduced to the Board in October. Lisa wanted to work with The Joyful Whatzit and the Extended Family program. Lavonne Gates was welcomed to the Board, replacing Ernie Jackson, who moved to Sacramento.

Gil's service on November 3, was titled "Global Development or Global Breakdown." The following Sunday WA Department of Extension Director Chris Raible spoke on "Our Claim to Fame." He also discussed the new Sharing in Growth program. The Fellowship Dinner was held at De La Salle School on November 9. Gil's next service was on "A New Manifesto of Humanism,' a positive declaration for times of uncertainty.

The annual Thanksgiving Day service was held at Walnut Creek Methodist, with Temple Isaiah, B'nai Shalom, and Lafayette Methodist participating. The last Joyful Whatzit service and potluck was held the first Sunday in November. The following Sunday Lisa Wiggins led a new Vespers service with a program by church member and sculptor Ludell Deutscher, followed by a potluck dinner. The next week Lisa's Vesper service was about "Reverence,' and the following week, Hanukkah.

Church member and third year Starr King student Ben Bortin gave the service November 24, about William Ellery Charming. Ben is the son of founding Fellowship member Dave Bortin, and minister of the Staten Island church. Gil next spoke about "The Language of Liberal Religion." The following Sunday Gil and Lisa Wiggins gave the service honoring Thomas Starr King, first Unitarian minister on the West Coast. Lisa's Vesper service Sunday evening was "On Giving."

For the last few years a service auction had been held. This year it became the first annual Serve-U. This was the beginning of an annual fund-raising event continued ever since. The following week a Mini Christmas Bazaar was held after the service, chaired by Miriam Hurley.

Gil and Eve held their annual holiday Open House. Holiday observances included an All-Church Winter Holiday Celebration on December 22, and on

Christmas Eve an afternoon carol sing and family story time, with a 10 pm quiet carol sing at the church. There was a New Years party.

Seven Board members were elected at the annual meeting December 15. A \$59,000 budget was held over to the continued meeting due to a projected income of \$50,800. Other areas were prospering. R.E. had 120 children registered, the Singles group numbered about 200, Sharing in Growth promised to be an exciting adventure. The high school youth group was flourishing, Sunday evening Vesper services and potluck served many families, and six Extended Families were active.

### 1975

The new Board met in January and elected Art Ungar president, Gail Rodens vice president, and Elena deProse secretary. At the continued congregational meeting a budget of \$53,260 was passed. Gil's service January 12 recounted the months in his life "From Selma to Boston," and his dedication to Black empowerment. Older people were invited to a meeting with Gil to seek better ways to serve their needs. Lisa Wiggins gave the service January 19th, "The Gift of Ourselves."

Dr. Joseph Fabry's service on "The Pursuit of Meaning," explored Victor Frankl's Logotherapy. The leading interpreter of Frankl's work, Dr. Fabry gave an all-day workshop the following Saturday for the spiritually searching, "What's Right With Me?" In January), Gil presented his resignation to the Board, effective August 31, 1975. In his letter to the congregation Gil said, "I am grateful to have had some part in the lives of so many people. I shall always cherish each of you in my heart and fondly remember all the days of my life among you."

Gil and Eve planned to remain in their home, while Eve continued in the school district. Gil looked forward to doing new work. He closed with "... all of my life with Eve has been spent among you ... We rejoice in our decision to remain here. We look forward to the coming of a new minister, who will be ours as well as yours."

A special congregational meeting was held March 9. Board president Art Ungar read a resolution created by Dave Bortin (with artwork by Dave Pierson) recognizing Gil's 15 years of leadership as Charter Minister. The congregation commenced planning for "ceremonies and celebrations in appreciation of his long career and years of service to us."

Church member Bill Bechtel planted three birch trees in memory of his father, and agreed to contribute to a permanent Memorial Book. Unfortunately these trees were on the site of the new office building, and did not survive transplanting.

San Jose Assemblyman John Vasconcellos spoke in February on "A Humanistic Alternative in Politics." A liberal politician, Vasconcellos worked tirelessly for the development of self-esteem in education. That evening the Gilmartins held a party for newcomers at their home. The Board spent the following weekend at Bolinas getting acquainted and learning more about the Sharing in Growth project.

Miriam Hurley wrote the February 23 service, "The Drama of Difference." The first part, We Are All Alike, featured masks created by Dave Pierson, George Prall directed the People of the World Chant, and Miriam moderated a discussion of Super-Persons' World Court. Gil's next service was on Hope and Fear. In March Gil began a consideration of "Permanence in Marriage," featuring an interview with an 80-year old celebrating his 60th wedding anniversary. That evening the second annual Irish Fest and Feast was held, with music, dinner and dancing, led by Lisa Wiggins.

The Easter/Passover/Spring celebrations began with a sunrise service on our hill, a service with Gil and Lisa on the theme: "Life springs from death and shatters every fetter, and winter yields to spring eternally." The service ended with an Easter Egg Hunt. Lisa's service the following week was entitled "Spirit Searching," and the Vespers, "Magical Stones." Gil next reported on the UU Ministers Association and Liberal Religious Educators Convocation, with a discussion after the presentation. The following week Gil spoke in Monterey and Marge Keip, co-minister of the Monterey Peninsula Church, spoke at MDUUC on "Categories and Bird Cages."

On May 4<sup>th</sup> Lillie Chase directed the children's dance class of fifteen young people, during a participation service presented by Carol Alosi and the Finance committee on "Our Church and the Money Game." Gil gave a sermonette on "The End of War." Church members gave a reading of Thornton Wilder's *Our Town* on May 18, followed by a discussion of the play. The Ber-Oak Quartet (three recorders



and harpsichord) performed. Howard Matson spoke at Vespers on "Why We Boycott."

The Pulpit committee received four retired ministers resumes from the UUA. They suggest retired ministers, feeling a young person might want to stay on. Art talked with Rosemary Matson about Bay Area ministers. The committee proposed a budget of \$1,100 for 1975, and \$2,500 for 1976. The Board authorized an immediate \$500 in May.

The Board was again hearing comments about lack of communication. Beverly Bortin agreed summarize meetings in the newsletter, and meeting dates, so that interested members could attend. Bill Gehres resigned from the Board, and was replaced by Gottfried Hesse.

After discussions with several ministers, the Board chose the Rev. Josiah Bartlett to serve as part time interim minister, from September 1975 through July 1976. The salary would be \$820 per month for eleven months, with a month's vacation. They included a \$500 Minister's Discretionary Fund.

Gil shared with the Board ethical problems of the retired minister who remains in the congregation, i.e., not involved in any ministerial function except at the request of the new minister. Gil planned to be very uninvolved especially during the transition. This was Gil's last official Board meeting.

On the 150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the American Unitarian Association Gil spoke about a theology of human hope, "The Emergence of Unitarianism." Vespers held an evening service on the hill followed by dinner in the church. Saturday night was the Hungry-U XIV and Art Auction. "The Mourning After service returned to the scene of the grime" with a Continental Breakfast for everyone who shared the cooperative cleanup.

On June 22, Gil and Eve shared memories of the 16 years since he was called as our minister. In his last service, "Hail and Farewell!" he spoke about his life as a minister and ministry with us. Gil was available for emergencies during the summer, but his active ministry at MDUUC had ended.

Summer services included Dave Bortin's traditional Independence Day service, "Patriotism for Non-Scoundrels." There were readings from the play "Inherit the Wind," and services by Lisa Wiggins, John and Judy van der Veen, Beverly Bortin, Miriam Hurley, and Suzan Lawrence.

Meanwhile plans were in the making for Gil's retirement celebrations in September, coordinated by Jean Nickell, Carolyn Campbell and Margaret MacLane. Art Ungar asked Dave Pierson to be Master of Ceremonies. The committee began meeting in April, with Art as chair.

There were three celebrations. Saturday, in recognition of his service to the community at large. Community leaders spoke — the County Superintendent of Schools, and the President of the Mental Health Association, who said of Gil "he put our organization together." A Suicide Prevention Board member spoke of his work with young people, as did members of the Mt. Diablo School District Board. A letter from church member and Congressman Pete Stark told of important decisions in his life influenced by Gil.

A moving tribute came from Charles Patterson who knew Gil as minister of the Fort Wayne, Indiana church thirty years before. "An embittered young black WW II veteran, I watched Gil turn a paternal community center into an Urban League." He said that Gil led the fight against segregation long before that battle became a national cause.

Sunday the church service was presented by eight UU ministers who had worked with Gil as Starr King student, his son Dave, current intern Lisa Wiggins, former member and Board president Bill Houff, Byrd Helligas, Ben Bortin, Harold Wilson, and Jody Schilling. The following Saturday was a family affair with slides and movies, singing and dancing, and a party Saturday night with skits, entertainment and refreshments. It was a rich and fun-filled goodbye to two well loved and important people in our lives.

In looking back over their years in the church Eve spoke of Gil's ministry in these words: "Our church developed as a community of people not afraid to risk and to try new things, and to let them go when they had served their purpose. It has been a timely church — in touch with what was going on in the world." Eve says "the church community never asked me to be anything other than myself. They were appreciative of the efforts I made as a member, but never expected anything because I was the wife of the minister."

Gil feels an important aspect of his role was to be sensitive to what was needed by the individual members, and the congregation as a whole, and to lay this out before them so they could deal with it. He feels the exciting potential he

saw when he first came over thirty years ago continues to be realized. Gil described his years at MDUUC as a time of great personal growth. During the '60s and '70s it was a time of openness, experiment and willingness to change. We were deeply committed to social action, working for peace and black empowerment. Gil feels the church maintained a good balance between the quest for personal growth and the commitment to social justice. It was also a time of great growth. The little group of 80 members whose highest budget had been \$3,000 soon made a name for itself in the community. There was a place of liberal religious values where none had been before.

The Mt. Diablo church was fortunate to have Aron Gilmartin as its first minister. This long period of stable, somewhat non-directed leadership left us free to develop in ways that were individually fulfilling, creating a foundation for a solid community that has continued to meet the challenges it has faced. Gil's honesty and commitment to ethical standards was a source of inspiration for us. His deep commitment to action for social change gave us a sense of hope that we could build a better world.

Art Ungar believes Gil is the most honest, moral, and centered person he has ever known. He illustrated this with the time inter-generational classes were available during the worship service. Art said that any other minister would not have accepted this, but Gil wholeheartedly supported the program. We haven't been afraid to take risks, or of facing the consequences of failure. Gil's attitude supported those who took risks, and did not judge them if they failed. He was committed to helping people grow, and each of us honors that commitment, for ourselves and for each other.

Art also believes our ability to tolerate change, and our commitment to support people comes directly from Gil, and cited the love and respect that Rhea, the belly dancer who taught at the church for years, felt for Gil. Gil was happy to offer Rhea space when she could find none. Belly dancing was not acceptable in our community twenty years ago. Rhea gave many benefit performances for the church. She performed at Gil's retirement party to show her appreciation of him. Our acceptance of gays and lesbians long before even our own denomination was a direct result of Gil's commitment to all people, according to Art.

While many saw these years as self-absorbed and the “me generation,” these experiences helped us become more confident and caring of others. This resulted in a congregation now seen as warm and welcoming, and committed to caring for each other and this interdependent web of all beings.

The times we lived through created tensions and divisions difficult to deal with. But these were years of great ferment and turmoil in our society, and the church reflected the times. For some we went too far, but no one accused us of refusing to face the issues of those years. While Gil was sometimes faulted for not being a strong enough leader, his style of leadership forced us to do more thinking on our own. We learned to make our own decisions, to take responsibility for our actions, and to build a community about which we could say, “this is our church, there is room for all who want to belong here.”

When Jackie Miskel was president in 1977, the Board voted to declare Gil *Minister Emeritus*. On October 23, the congregation unanimously voted this honor to Gil. Recognition was included in the service on December 18, with a party honoring him that afternoon.

George Merrill served as chair of the district Marriage Encounter committee in 1977. Qualified ministerial couples had to be recruited and trained, and George and Gini worked hard to find them. They recruited Gil and Eve, who attended the training session in Santa Barbara. The Gilrnartins are still offering these workshops twenty years later.

In 1984 the church celebrated Gil’s 50 years of ministry. Honoring Gil on this memorable occasion were Starr King School for the Ministry president Gordon McKeeman, First Unitarian Church of Oakland minister emeritus Arnold Crompton, Vice-president of World Airways and former parishioner Charles Patterson, and Josiah Bartlett — former president of Starr King and interim minister of our church following Gil’s retirement.

Jann Schaub spent many hours taping reminiscences of church members that were played, and others shared their memories of Gil over the years. It was a wonderful celebration and an inspiring recognition of Gil’s 50 years of ministry.

Gil has gone right on, serving as interim minister at churches throughout the United States and Canada. He and Eve continue to lead workshops and seminars.

**174    *So Great Vision***

He continues to lead SAGE classes, is active in an Ecumenical group in East County, and a host of other activities.

At his speech before the 1983 UUA General Assembly Gil said, “There is something about this ministry that speaks to the deepest part of my being, and evokes the commitment of my whole self.” Those of us who have been privileged to know Gil can attest to the truth of those words. Aron Gilmartin remains the model of what it means to be a truly honest, effective, and good human being.







## CHAPTER III — The Road to Eckley Lane

The longing for “A Home of Our Own” existed in the Fellowship from the beginning. As early as 1955 members approved a \$300 budget item for a Building Fund. In 1958 Orville Hill chaired a committee looking for property. They continued to explore buildings and sites. A majority felt the most immediate need was acquisition of adequate space through purchase of an existing building.

The Planning committee recommended a Building Fund drive. The Board set up a continuing canvass to contact new people throughout the year. Don Houser was now chair of the Property committee. They investigated a large Concord house on sale for \$18,000. They looked at an Ygnacio Valley house for \$200 per month, and investigated many other properties.

A preliminary Building Fund was included in the annual canvass to use when a site was located. The Board created a Building committee with Carl Stromberg as chair. In February 1959, the congregation approved a \$10,227 budget, including \$3,000 toward a Building Fund. This was an increase of 345%! Since an increase of 10% is usual, we can only marvel at their courage. The members of the fellowship were determined to have a home.

At the annual meeting, in a complete turnaround, the congregation voted to use the \$3,000 to call a minister. Aron Gilmartin became the first minister of the newly named Mt. Diablo Unitarian Church on January 1, 1960.

Efforts to work toward a permanent home continued. In March 1960, the Board approved a Site & Building Plans committee with Jack Cook, Kim Kimball, and Carl Stromberg, chair. In July the committee reported on a site near St. Mary’s College, and another off Gregory Lane in Pleasant Hill. Neither was just right. The Board felt it urgent, and asked the committee to bring at least three sites to the December meeting.

The Board called an important Church Conference: “Our Growth and a Future Building Program.” Even with double sessions, the Highland Building was crowded. Dropping off children at the preschool, then the Highland Building before driving to the service, and picking them up afterward made for a long Sunday morning. The meeting explored five subjects: the future of the area and potential for Unitarianism, timing, financing, site selection, and facilities needed.



By December the Site committee reported on six parcels, none of which they could recommend. A permanent Building committee replaced the Site committee in February, 1961. At its April retreat the Board spent most of its time discussing this issue.

Careful preparation preceded the May congregational meeting. Each Board member and the minister wrote a statement, "I Ask Myself," answering their questions about the building process. The congregation learned the cost of land in the area was "doubling every three years." A firm commitment from the congregation was necessary. They voted unanimously to go ahead with the building plans.

August 1961 Board minutes state the Building committee "must be reactivated, given goals and effective leadership." After discussion of many alternatives the Board voted to have Bill Houff work with Carl Stromberg on the committee temporarily. By September Bill Steenberg was named chair, with Stan Knoblock, Dick Hurley, and Betty Allen. Under Bill's leadership they worked ceaselessly exploring almost 100 sites over the next several years.

### **Bill Steenberg**

Bill grew up in San Francisco, attending college there. World War II intervened. While piloting a Navy torpedo bomber over Japan, Bill's plane was shot down in the Pacific. He and his crew were picked up by a search and rescue submarine. After discharge Bill returned to school, graduating from Stanford in 1948. He and Marilyn were married, and moved to Milwaukee where Bill worked at Allis Chalmers.

Although raised in the Presbyterian church, the Steenbergs began attending the Unitarian church and found it just what they wanted. When they returned to the Bay Area in 1958, they bought a home in Danville and began attending the Fellowship. Bill's work as an engineer entailed locating sites, and building plants all over the country, so it was natural that he was chosen to chair the Building committee.

After completion of the church buildings Bill's work took him out of the area for months at a time. During 1968-69 Bill was building factories in San Leandro, New Jersey and Camarillo. The Steenbergs' church attendance was limited to a few social affairs.

Bill has given a great deal of time, energy and love to the Fellowship and the church, and we owe him an enormous debt of gratitude. He and Marilyn are sensitive and caring people — and the church is central to their lives. We are fortunate to have such dedicated members.

The committee reported on an eleven acre site on Taylor Boulevard. The Board approved an offer, later withdrawn because of expensive sewer connection problems. They explored financing. A few Board members doubted a successful fundraising campaign could be mounted “when our financial situation is not the best.” Others felt if the plan were presented in a positive light it would succeed. The Board called a congregational meeting in February 1962, to recommend the first phase.

The Board voted to hire professional fundraiser Howard Hauze contingent upon the vote of the congregation. They distributed a five-page summary of a proposed Building Fund campaign to everyone on the mailing list. They scheduled neighborhood meetings so that members and friends could explore and discuss the plan. Membership was now 232, and about 170 members came to the meetings.

There were 87 members and 14 nonmembers at the March congregational meeting. Members unanimously approved a Capital Fund Drive to be held during the annual canvass. They voted to hire a professional fundraiser. The Board was authorized to borrow funds for the purchase of land, subject to congregational approval.

A contract with fundraiser Howard Hauze was signed, and Howard’s wife Betty chosen canvass secretary. The campaign began with a catered dinner at the Walnut Creek Elks Club. The Board felt the campaign was a success. A total of \$6,102 was raised.

The Site committee continued to look for land. Several attended a Conference on Church Architecture in September. Howard Diller asked the Board to form a Preliminary Building committee to study future needs. A meeting was called in November, and Jop van Overveen was elected chair.\* They created

---

\*Attending were Jim & Lois Jennings, Bruce Robbins, Frank & Eda Bobo, Tim Diller, Bob Harrigan, Susan Moseley, Felix Kleeberg, George Fujioka, Rachel Feichtmeir, Jack Webb, Alan MacLane, and Aron Gilmartin.

subcommittees to analyze all areas of church activity before calling a meeting of the entire congregation.

By January 1963, selection of a site was urgent. The three-year building fund canvass would be jeopardized if a site were not found quickly. The committee had been working three years. The Building committee recommended a site on Livonia Road. It was zoned for single family dwellings, and property owners appeared to have the will and financial resources to prevent re-zoning. The congregation voted the site down, and the committee was urged to consider a flat, no-view site.

Rachel Feichtmeir was chair of the Church Architecture subcommittee. They researched church design, visited many churches in the area, and included the congregation in design exploration. An Architect Selection committee looked for architects. The Building committee distributed a questionnaire that included items from each subcommittee — Religious Education Kitchen, Sanctuary, Office, Adult Program and Youth. The results emphasized an R.E. building should be constructed first, “of simple design of wood and masonry, no steeples, no bells!”

Church member and developer Ray Feichtmeir told Bill about a property he was interested in, but would defer to the church if we wanted it. This was the 13.7 acre Stanger property on Eckley Lane. The Building committee and the Board visited the site and knew this was the one. Events moved swiftly. The committee met with residents on Eckley, convincing them we would make good neighbors. (Neighbors across the street, Bill and Sylvia Gehres, later joined the church.) The committee obtained the neighbors’ support to develop a road up to the property.

At a special meeting in March the Board voted to apply for a Land Use Permit on the Eckley Lane property. They met with the Site committee and agreed to submit a plot plan to the Walnut Creek Planning Commission. By April 10, Bill Steenberg reported the Planning commission saw no reason to deny the permit. An heir, Mrs. Stanger, gave her approval with two restrictions — contribute \$2,000 toward extension of the sewer line, and deed five feet along Eckley frontage for road development.

The Eckley Lane property was just outside the city limits, near the junction of Walnut Boulevard and Walker. The purchase price was \$25,000 cash plus \$19,040 for water, sewer, paving, curbs and gutters. The congregation unani- mously approved the site on April 15, 1963. In June Dub Blackwood replaced Jop van Overveen as chair of the Architect Selection committee. Board member Bill

Steenberg served as liaison to the committee. He obtained a topographic survey of the property for the architect.

The Highland Building was for sale, and the Board considered buying it, but signed a two-year lease instead, adding the large room adjoining the office workroom for Gil's office. In April 1964, the Board approved the Architect Selection committee's recommendation of Frank Ehrenthal to design the buildings. Frank designed the remodel of Starr King School for the Ministry, the San Francisco Church, and the Unitarian church in Sepulveda. An Architect Coordinating committee was formed.

Frank met with the Board and committees many times to determine what we wanted. The meaning of worship, religious education, social activities, community, were all fully explored. The Board spent a weekend at White Memorial Retreat in Marin sharing their visions and concerns with Frank. Bill Steenberg found working with Ehrenthal a wonderful experience. He feels the building Frank designed is unique and has served us well. It has been flexible enough to adapt to our changing needs over the years.

Dave Bortin remembers the 1964 canvass, "because I was president and Training chair, and gave the pitch at the canvass dinner. I remember the date, November 22, because it was my birthday and the first anniversary of the Kennedy assassination. I even remember what I said. Our goal (met) was \$90,000 over a three year period, without reduction in the operating budget of \$30,000 a year."

Preliminary sketches were presented at the January 1965 congregational meeting, and preliminary drawings approved by the Board in April. The Board authorized Ehrenthal to proceed with detailed drawings, an estimate of costs, and a three-dimensional model.

Investigating building loans was the next phase. They considered selling some of the land as a way of financing the buildings. Others felt the land would be valuable for borrowing funds. The Building committee\* did not want to sell any of the land. Lenders were charging 7% interest, covering 70% of the total with a 20-year loan. A congregational vote approved the recommendation to go ahead with site development and the first phase of building.

---

\*Howard Diller, Lillie Chase, Robin King, Florence Pierson, Stan Knoblock, and chair Bill Steenberg.

In July 1965 the Superior Court approved the sale of the Eckley Lane property to the church. There were no other bidders. The Board paid \$25,000 cash for the property.

During the remainder of the year efforts continued to secure loans. Stan Knoblock reported at the March 1966 Board meeting that money was becoming increasingly tight and prospects for a loan dimmer. Other possibilities were considered: sale of bonds to church members, second home mortgages with the church paying interest, and a UUA loan of \$30,000.

The following month Bill Steenberg reported we could not obtain a loan. Building could not begin that year unless money was raised before June, an unlikely possibility. Fall would be a bad time to sell bonds as it would conflict with the annual canvass. A letter was sent to the congregation detailing the history of the building plans, and advising that final plans would be displayed at the Red Cross Building.

Gary Howard, representing a small group of church members, came to a Board meeting with a well-documented proposal recommending selling the Eckley Lane property. Money from the sale would finance the purchase of the Scripps estate in Lafayette with beautifully landscaped grounds, a pool, tennis court and other amenities. Board members were shocked that all this effort and research had been done without consulting the Board or Building committee. Many church members visited the estate. Rachel Knoblock said it was fun to fantasize about this beautiful estate, but it was impractical as a place of worship and for children programs.

People were aware of the high cost of maintenance to keep it in such beautiful condition. Gary prepared a proposal to show how church activities would fit into the space. In March he presented figures showing it would cost between \$15,000 and \$17,000 per month, for 15,000 square feet of usable space and parking for 150 cars. The Board visited the property again, this time with the Building committee and others interested.

The next Board meeting discussed this property until midnight. Bob Cass suggested it be purchased, using Eckley Lane as security for the loan, eventually selling Scripps and building on Eckley with proceeds from the sale. All Board members and the 12 others present shared their views. Herb Moran expressed the majority opinion in colorful language: "... it has a playboy-country club atmosphere and would not give us a good image. The house is full of 15-year old

intricate machinery ready to go out of whack, requiring extensive maintenance ... if you turned a bunch of kids loose they could destroy it in about a week."

An All Committee Workshop discussed the issue. Gary Howard distributed a five-page report entitled "Is Our Church Faltering?" It was an impassioned plea to purchase the Scripps property to save the church community. The long and difficult discussion ended when Bob Cass offered to call a friend who could assess chances of securing a Use Permit. There was unanimous appreciation of Gary and Judy Howard's hard work and dedication in bringing this matter before the congregation.

This was a potentially explosive situation and Stan felt it could tear the church apart. He set up Sunday evening meetings for several weeks for church members to hear the pros and cons of both properties and voice their feelings. They voted not to buy the estate. Stan considers this a landmark in his development as a leader. He realized for the first time how necessary it was for everyone to be a part of the decision-making process.

Jean Nickell remembers this controversy, and thought the Scripps property was lovely, but she realized it was probably not a suitable home for the church. Jean said that many years later this experience was used as a training exercise in conflict resolution at the district Leadership School summer program.

In May the congregation voted to sell bonds to church members. The proposal specified 10% of the money raised would be kept in a reserve account to insure that notes would be redeemable. Maturity dates were two to twenty years. The cost of three buildings was estimated at \$186,000 with another \$50-70,000 for road and site preparation.

Dave Bortin proposed the selling of building notes. He carried the ball with the Corporations Commissioner for their issuance, and did the time-consuming legal work that made it possible for us to finance the building in this way. The congregation voted to approve up to \$250,000 indebtedness with three against and four abstentions. Members were ready to move ahead as quickly as possible.

The Board issued \$150,000 worth of bonds at 7% interest. They immediately applied for a \$10,000 loan from the UUA. Notes would be issued September 1, 1966, so the Board set October first the date construction would begin.

The church received a gift of \$10,000 for the Building Fund from Marty and Jo Dimbat, following the tragic death of their son Jerry, killed in a bus accident en route home from Reed College the previous Christmas. This gift brought the total

of funds available to \$185,000 — enough for road and site preparation, the architect and engineer, and two buildings. An assessment district was formed to build the road and connect the sewer line, with all those along the road sharing the cost over several years.

By September only \$4,000 worth of notes had been sold. At least one Board member felt we should sell the Eckley Lane property, buy a smaller site, and erect a smaller building. The consensus was that too much was already invested, and we would never get anywhere if we kept changing our plans. The opinion was also expressed that the Board had a mandate from the congregation to raise the money and build on the Eckley Lane site.

A brochure describing the notes was prepared, and tables set up to sell notes after services. Coupons were to be redeemed at Security National Bank. The engineering firm of Gallagher and Burke was chosen to begin preparing of the site. The official Ground-breaking Celebration was held Sunday, December 4, 1966. The church also celebrated its 15-year anniversary. Families brought shovels, spades, and excitement to this joyous event. Everyone turned over the dirt, symbolically participating in the creation of the buildings.

The congregation voted on the low bid for construction of two buildings, \$163,857, by Kirkham, Choam and Kirkham, whom Bill Steenberg felt performed well and finished on time. By now \$90,000 worth of bonds had been sold. Church offices remained at the Highland Building, but classrooms were given up for summer. In the fall of 1967 classes met in homes until the buildings were completed.

Construction began July 1967. By September cement columns and beams had been poured for one building, and begun on the other. Underground plumbing and electrical work was completed. Services moved from the Red Cross to the Walnut Creek Civic Arts Theater in November. The larger space made it possible to hold only one service each Sunday.

By March 1968 construction was complete except for parking lights and movable partitions. In another week or two final inspection was completed. The parking lot was not finished, and road construction had to wait until the end of the rainy season.

One memorable controversy concerned the assembly building (sanctuary). The architect specified louvered clear glass in all windows. Two restroom windows face the parking lot, a third the front entry. The contractor installed the

glass as directed, with doubts about the common sense of architects. Restroom windows were replaced with opaque glass, although the architect felt this destroyed the aesthetic harmony of the building.

May 5, 1968, was the date of the first service in the new church. It was a day of celebrating, rejoicing, and being together. There was a champagne party and family supper with a big campfire and songfest between the two buildings (now the brick Patio). People brought banjos and guitars and we sang into the night, with the little ones falling asleep one by one. It was a night to remember!

After 17 years the dream of a home of our own was a reality. Except for a short period when adults and children met in the Pine Street house, the children and adults had never been together. This was a significant development in the life of the church community.

The dream of the five buildings was not to be realized. Loans remained difficult to obtain. Although the church experienced significant growth after moving, it was not enough to finance further construction. Inflation rose and construction costs escalated. A period of sixteen years elapsed before the congregation began another major building project.

### **The Building & Grounds Committee**

It was immediately clear that a committee was needed for the upkeep of the land, and maintenance of the two buildings. Preliminary landscape drawings were obtained for the area around the buildings, and plans to enlarge the inadequate parking considered. Alan McGregor was the first chair of the Church Properties committee.\* When he resigned Roger Miller took over as chair, and Bob and Betty Allen chaired the Landscape committee.

When the buildings were completed in 1968, Lloyd Scaff joined the Building & Grounds committee, and with few interruptions, has served ever since. He built storage areas, replaced louvered windows, and painted the buildings inside and out. Lloyd still takes care of maintenance and repairs, and continues to be a dedicated member of Friends of the Garden, working the first Saturday each month caring for the Memorial Garden. In 1971 Lloyd served as vice president of the Board when Rurban School occupied the RE building. It was a difficult time for

---

\*Lloyd Scaff was in charge of repairs, Bob Allen of new structures, Jim Nixon worked with contractors, and Alma Davies with interiors.



those concerned about the upkeep of the church property. Since retiring in 1985, he has devoted many hours to the care of the church.

Bob Allen is another familiar figure working on the building and grounds over the years. Bob and Betty served as co-chairs of the committee for two years. Bob enlarged the parking lot and provided the parking lot islands at a cost of about \$800.

He created and promoted the buy-a-brick program for the patio. Bob, Lloyd Scaff, Alan MacLane, Don Ford, and others designed and built the brick Patio in 1969 and 1970. The Patio was finished with a donation from Lucille Freuler in memory of her son Jon, killed in a hiking accident.

Betty served on the Board and has helped to prepare the newsletter mailing for years. Bob has served on the Board, and has been a coffee and tea preparer for many years. They are dedicated, committed, and caring people, and have contributed an incredible amount of time and love to our church community.

To keep construction costs low Ehrental designed the buildings with almost no storage. Bob Daines, Chuck Kaplan, Lloyd Scaff and others added many inside and outside storage areas.

Adequate maintenance of the buildings and grounds is a continuing issue, there is so much to be done.

In his fifteen-page memo to the Board on January 1, 1971, Gil addressed the responsibility we have to care for our land and buildings.

*I think there has been neglect and abuse. I suggest we take steps to reduce this. It entails much more than adequate janitorial service.*

*I suggest the Board go over the property in all its aspects to become aware of the situation, our continuing needs, and future repair and replacement factors. A policy and program may then be formulated. Administrative responsibility may then be placed in an individual, a committee, or shared with Board and staff.*

Before leaving for their annual retreat the Board toured the property and buildings, noting each item that needed attention. It was a depressing experience; no one was aware how bad the situation had become. Lloyd Scaff agreed to be in charge of general cleanup in cooperation with the nursery school parents. A chair for Buildings & Grounds had not been found.

In 1972, Security National Bank president and church member Pete Stark established an employees' Day Care Center on the church property, setting up a modular building near the parking lot. This was a progressive undertaking for a bank almost a quarter century ago! The bank renewed the program for the second year, but in March the program ended. When he ran for congress Pete sold his interest in the bank and the experiment was not continued. The building was sold and moved.

Bill Gehres and Peter Davies made building repairs in 1973. Harriet Fisher was chair of a Short Range Planning committee. She had the sanctuary walls stained and new carpet installed. When she resigned in November, architect Bob Hill agreed to chair the committee, and prepared a Master Plan to coordinate building and grounds improvements. George Gates agreed to chair the committee.

In March 1975, Barbara Winslow did a color rendering of a landscape design for presentation to the congregation, and donations were requested to complete this project. Judy van der Veen, Rachel Knoblock, and Eve Gilmartin served as the first Interiors committee.

In May Bill Gehres reported \$400 was spent on landscaping and plumbing repair. He was still trying to recruit a landscape coordinator. In August Bill resigned from the Board, but continued to work on the grounds. Bill joined the church in December 1972, doing an incredible amount of work in those three years. In 1974 Bill designed and constructed a kitchen in the R.E. middle room facing the Patio. After the service May 5, the Church Kitchen Opening Celebration was held with lunch, music, and requests for donations of all the things needed for the kitchen.

He also designed and built a drainage system for the Patio. Bill built the first memorial bench (with help from Chuck Goodmacher) in memory of Dorothy Caton's mother, Mildred Eastman. This area became the Memorial Garden. He gave a wood-working class for young people. Bill retired to 60 acres of Oregon forest, with construction and gardening projects to keep him happily working for years!

### **Night Watch Person**

Lights were left on and doors and windows often left unlocked at night. Vandalism was a problem when no one was at the church. From time to time the church agreed to have someone live on the grounds.

In October 1975, Ted Merrill, church member and son of George and Gini Merrill, asked to park his trailer on the property. The Board approved his request. In exchange for an electrical hookup, use of restroom and refrigerator space, he agreed to provide security at night.

The Merrills appreciated the way the congregation accepted Ted (and other teenagers). Ted was an extremely bright young person, a writer and poet. He attended Diablo Valley College while he was night watch person, and had many adventures shooing away beer drinkers from the parking lot. Many of us remember his green van parked where the office now stands.

Ted obtained a Master's in mechanical engineering at UC Berkeley, and married Marley Smith whom he met at church. He is a software engineer in the Santa Cruz area. He has many happy memories of the people in our church.

In April 1978, the Board asked Ted to remove his van, as many objected to this semi-permanent homemade van so close to the building. In May church member Daniel Zwickel made the same request. The Board agreed to come up with guidelines for use, but suggested he take his request to the Peace Center. Nothing further about this appears in the minutes.

Board member Deanna Egan and intern Ann Tyndall proposed guidelines as follows: *Permit one person to live on property in appropriate and well-placed vehicle, with use of kitchen and bathroom in exchange for:*

- 1) checking all windows, doors and lights,*
- 2) investigating anyone at night not on church business*
- 3) changing outside lights, reporting leaky faucets, broken windows, doors, fences, etc.*

In February 1979 Jeff Jochim asked to park his trailer at church in exchange for watch-person duties. Jeff was employed full time at EcoHouse. Board president Charlotte Brown and Bill Stevens agreed to discuss this with EcoHouse director Mark Maloney. The Board approved, the contract with Jeff was signed, and he moved his trailer to the edge of the parking lot where Ted's had been.

By August 1980 the Board was upset about Jeff's multiplying cat population. They told Jeff new pets would have to go, and he should accept no more. In February the Board voted to terminate Jeff's duties since he now had a night job three nights a week. This was the end of our night watch-person. experiments.

[At this point the Editor, Daniel Zwickel would like to interject a little personal history:

I first came to the church in 1976, and joined it in April of that year.

I had moved up from San Diego to the Bay Area in 1971 ironically, to Walnut Creek. Although I had worked a summer at DeBenneville Pines in the San Bernardino mountains in Southern California, my first introduction to Unitarian Universalism, I knew virtually nothing of my Unitarian family history. Growing up, I'd never lived in a community with a Unitarian church, and my mother, Jean never pushed religion on me or my brother, David perhaps, partly because my father Abraham was a Jew, ostracized for marrying outside the "Tribe."

And so it was a revelation when folks headed for MDUUC virtually the moment they arrived, following me up to (according to TV Channel 5) "the best place on earth." My mother had known Gil's sister, Bertha, from Star Island on the East Coast from the 1930s, and knew of Gil, but had no idea where Walnut Creek was until her son moved there!

*Flash #1:* When I first entered the church, a sermon (#275) my grandfather had published in January, 1914, titled "Good Men In Hell" was on the literature rack, in its 45<sup>th</sup> printing, January, 1963, still being distributed in 1976. My mother's father was the Rev. Dr. Scott Corey Wicks of All Souls Unitarian Church, Indianapolis, Indiana.

*Flash #2:* My first Sunday, I walked in the door and saw a gray-haired woman with a guitar and an electric bass player and thought, "Hey, it's a Malvina Reynolds Sunday!" I am a professional musician, gigging, then, at a Mexican restaurant in Walnut Creek, Arturo's, and some of my fans recognized me, dragging me over to the choir and installing me there. Getting George Prall's attention, they pointed to me and said, "He sings."

How could I resist a welcome like that!

My parents and I immediately became involved in the Peace Center, joining the Continental Walk with my folk's Chevy van as the support vehicle as far as Indio, in Southern California. Having met on a civil rights march, walking from New York City to Washington, D.C. to protest Jim Crow in 1943, my parents devoted their entire lives to peace and social justice causes.

I myself became involved, pretty much immediately, in music, and also in running the sound system and recording the services. I even went so far as to

produce cassette tapes of the services, with all the elements equalized so that the volume levels were consistent.

Dave Bortin once joked that the church ought to buy me a skate board, as I'd fly from the sound board to the front of the church to lead the singing, then back, again for the next sound cue.

Life always being interesting and challenging, one morning I came in to see "Congregational Song led by Daniel." This was five minutes before the start of the service, so I got up at the appointed time and announced that the OOS said 'Song-leading by Daniel; and asked, "What would you like to sing?" After a pause I asked those with high voices to sing a "La, la, la, la, la" line, and demonstrated it; then gave the lower voices their line, and finally telling them, on my signal, to sing "Feelin' Groovy!"

Another time, several years later between the pastorship of Peter Christianson and David Sammons, Bob Forbes, our interim minister, had asked me to sing a song for his service, only to discover, walking with him to the parking lot after the Saturday night's festivities, that I had misinterpreted the sermon he was to give. So I wrote a song just for it. Thereafter, Bob would ask me, when he had a special sermon to deliver, to write a song. I did that several times, once, memorably, about Thomas Paine.

Though I was hired away to be the Bass Section leader for the Kensington UU church for three-&a-half years, then for sixteen years as cantor for a Catholic Church in Berkeley, I returned ten years ago, in 2004, and now sing in the choir and play violin in the "House Band" for second services.

I am a composer, as well as a songwriter, and have had works performed, both in my early years, and, more recently, particularly choral works.

I might say that I am noted for my puns, having penned this one when we instituted a class on Pantheism:

There was a composer, Franz Listz,  
 Whose fine cooking was not to be missed.  
     While sauteing some millet,  
     Saw *Gawd* in the skillet  
 And thus became a *Pan*-theist.

—D.B.Z.]

Peter Christiansen dedicated the new Fireplace in the room next to the kitchen, after the service on April 24, 1977. It was designed and built by John van der Veen, with beautiful ceramic tiles created by Ludell Deutscher, Betty Kunkel, and Jan Cooper. Agnes Elfving donated the fireplace as a memorial to her late husband. Money left was used to buy furnishings for the new Fireside room.

Eight years later Gini Merrill learned that no recognition had ever been made of this. Gini discussed this omission with Katie Wills, Grace Moran, and Agnes. They purchased a plaque for the fireplace and held a celebration to honor Agnes' gift. This was the beginning of the tradition of memorial plaques.

The main building was constructed with a lounge and foyer, leaving a small seating area for services. In July 1977 the Board decided to remove these walls to enlarge the sanctuary rather than return to double sessions. Bob Daines acted as contractor for this complex renovation. He and a crew of volunteers removed the frames, tracks, and huge folding doors. They removed the upper storage and small kitchen in the lounge, and constructed music and sound equipment storage in the sanctuary. They also created overhead storage in the office.

Electrical circuits were re-routed, carpeting patched, and plumbing sealed. Many volunteers worked on this enormous job. At the opening service in September the new (and beautifully) enlarged sanctuary was dedicated. According to Dave Bortin there was some opposition to removing the partitions because, "Where would we have coffee? Where would we gather in rainy weather? Why do we need to grow so much as to need a larger sanctuary, anyway, aren't we about the right size now?" Thus was it ever.

## **65 Eckley Lane**

The congregation voted to purchase the house adjoining our property in 1977. Mark Maloney requested it as a demonstration project of an ecological home and garden. The basement was renovated for the Peace Center. Charlie Kidwell did much of the renovation in exchange for staying at the house. Marty Dimbat was in charge of the remodeling. Marty obtained a Land Use Permit for the garden, a building permit, and a flood control assessment. The foundation was reinforced. The renovation was done by Marty, Bob Daines, Arne Westerback, his son David, and Peace Center members. Randall and Ingrid Wiley donated central heating.

By April the dream of an Ecology Center was a reality.\* The church and EcoInfo joined in a cooperative venture to establish an environmental living center to experiment and demonstrate new techniques for ecological living. In Mark Maloney's words, "the task is to design a lifestyle based on an environmental ethic that acknowledges our place in the world community, appropriate for the climate, geography and population of Contra Costa."

They envisioned ecologically sound heating, cooling, waste water recycling, and energy generation. There would be fruit trees, model gardens and ornamental edibles using drip irrigation and moisture retaining soil techniques. Each step would be an opportunity for learning and sharing.

Much of the passion and drive behind the Center came from Peter Davies, our beloved latter-day John Muir. Peter had completed two years on the Board, the last as president. He eloquently urged us to adopt a simpler lifestyle, feeling it immoral that we were 6% of the world's people using 40% of its resources. Peter saw this environmental living center as the catalyst that would bring our communities at last into balance and harmony so that all life could prosper. The experiment lasted for several years, but eventually Mark Maloney moved on to other projects and the Peace Center moved upstairs, where it continues to this day.

### **The Open Space District**

In 1977 Art Ungar presented alternatives for portions of our property on the hillside near Shell Ridge. One would offer the 12.5 acres as open space to the city's Open Space District; the other would be to sell it to the district. The first would result in a tax savings, as only those portions of the property used for religious purposes are tax deductible.

At the annual meeting in December the congregation voted unanimously to approve granting an Open Space Easement to the City of Walnut Creek. The contract was revocable by either party after ten years, and renewable every ten years. The contract was signed at a City Council meeting in February. The Council commended the church on our interest and determination to protect our dwindling reserve of open space. The contract was a tangible example of our religious community acting to benefit the larger community. Board president Bob

---

\*The Steering committee included John van der Veen, Bonnie Daines, and Peter Davies from the church; Mark Maloney and two other EcoHouse members.

Daines expressed our appreciation to Art Ungar and Charlotte Brown for their work in making this a reality.

The Peg Kovar trail now runs from Howe Homestead Park on Walnut, along the edge of our property, across the bill above the parking lot, all the way to Shell Ridge and Mt. Diablo. The Open Space easement is still in effect almost 20 years later, a source of pride to the church and the city of Walnut Creek.

### **Planting and Maintenance**

Bill and Marge Chapel, Don Ford, and Alma Davies planted one hundred seedlings in January 1978. A Handy-person committee for maintenance and repair met with Bob Daines and Alma in April, hoping to recruit a chair for landscape and interiors. Alma reported there was not enough money for lawn, and requested it be budgeted the following year. Thanks to a donation from Bob Havlin, the area in front of the church was graded and seeded. Alma held a work party in June to water the trees and cut the high grass.

In August 1978 Alma suffered a mild stroke and resigned as chair of the Landscape committee. She took responsibility for the grounds when we first occupied the buildings, continued it for years, and started what eventually became our beautiful Memorial Garden.

Forty-five people participated in the church cleanup in September 1978, thanks to organizer Jewell Ford. A Landscape committee was formed in April 1979, with Marcia and Larry Weingarten, Marjorie Wade, Carol Kiplinger, Alma Davies, Bill Gehres, Bill Chapel, and Jewell Ford. Landscaper Dal Leite helped design the plan. Nursery owner Nancy Leite, Dal's mother, donated plants.

### **Land Use Committee, Long Range Planning**

The congregation voted to form a committee to consider selling land at the south edge of the property because of continuing budget deficits. We learned of a need for senior housing, and funds were available for low income housing. In September 1979 Jean Nickell reported other churches were building a Seniors complex, so it was impractical for us to do so. We tried for several years to develop senior housing, but this idea was eventually laid to rest by zoning restrictions and opposition from neighbors.

The committee met to explore sale of the lower property. They discussed our relationship to Howe Homestead. In May the Long Range Planning committee



asked Judy van der Veen to design a questionnaire to learn what the congregation wanted to do with land.

The 1977 the Land Use Committee disbanded, and a new one formed with Bob Daines chair, Art Ungar and Charlotte Brown co-chairs. In March 1982 they were still exploring selling the lower property, twice approved by the congregation. Sale of the land would solve the financial shortfall and provide capital to make needed repairs and improvements. Tom Dragavon reported this piece of land was too narrow for lots. It was never sold.

### **Miriam and Dick Hurley**

In 1979, appalled by the rising PG&E bills, the Hurleys devoted a year to retrofitting the buildings to conserve energy. Although Miriam's first love was planning services and worship, she resigned from the Sunday Service committee to become chair of the Building committee. Miriam insisted it was a husband-wife team effort along with a dedicated working committee that accomplished so much.

From a PG&E audit they learned the greatest savings, about \$4,500, would result from replacing the louvered windows with insulated tempered glass in both buildings. Miriam formed an Ad Hoc Window committee with Jewell Ford, Dave Pierson, Bill Gehres, Eleanor Pound and Dave Tucker. Bill Gehres purchased windows at half price. Donations financed the windows, but 15 years later a few louvered windows remain as other maintenance needs took priority.

Miriam presented an analysis of the sanctuary heating problems. They were aware of problems in the R.E. building but felt the sanctuary and office had priority. The Unique Caterers donated a Sweetheart dinner in February 1980 to help finance a new furnace. The committee held a raffle to help pay for maintenance work. They raised \$350 for the furnace, and the raffle brought in \$133 for new door closers. The small new furnace made it possible to save \$140 in heating costs the first month. The sanctuary no longer had to be heated to heat the office.

Dick researched the church fire extinguishers and brought them up to code, resulting in an excellent rating from the fire safety inspector. Lloyd Scaff and John Morgenthaler were added to the committee. Miriam renovated the bride's room, installing new linoleum. She made curtains

from the old sanctuary drapes made by Jennifer King. She formed an ad hoc group to replace the carpet in the kitchen with linoleum.

Dick had served on the Board, and on the site committee that procured the church property. He built many beautiful things we enjoy in the church — name-tag holders, the lost and found box, the membership desk, and much more. Dick suffered from emphysema, and died in December 1982. His memorial service was held at the church. He requested that friends who wanted to do something in his memory choose what was important to them. He particularly cared about the buildings.

Dick and Miriam Hurley left an enduring record of their commitment to our church home. We are deeply indebted to them both.

By April 1982 a new member, Joanne Gerow, agreed to chair Buildings & Grounds. The Board approved \$250 for landscaping. The committee held a potluck lunch to discuss landscaping and building repairs. But by June Joanne had resigned from the church. The janitor was asked to do minor maintenance. Board member Sylvia Gehres recruited a work party to mow the fast growing grasses. Cevina Tara Im planted crepe myrtle trees along the edge of the parking lot, a gift from Marjorie Wade. Her gift included a year's care by Cevina, who supervised plantings and maintenance of garden areas.

The energy awareness that Miriam inspired lived on in the Building committee. They made many changes that lowered the use of energy and raised the consciousness of the congregation. In December 1983 ceilings of both buildings were insulated at a cost of \$1,450. Lloyd Scaff caulked all the door and window frames, and fluorescent lights were installed in the office.

By November 1984 Sonja Christopher agreed to chair the committee and act as coordinator for problems. Allison Carter recruited volunteers. Lloyd Scaff was the handy-person, painter, and window replacer. Sonja's women's group further remodeled the brides' room, installing new linoleum and light fixtures.

Ted Miller and Bill Todd installed a dishwasher in the kitchen, termite work was done, Jerry Wilski and Tom Lindemuth upgraded the sound system, and handicap access was improved. Outside lighting was installed. Sonja and Allison resigned in December 1985. A great deal was accomplished caring for our buildings during the year Sonia and Allison co-chaired the committee.

**196**    *So Great Vision*

We are fortunate to have almost 14 acres in the heart of Walnut Creek, still secluded, quiet, and affording a beautiful view of the city and surrounding hills. We have a church home of which we can all be justifiably proud. This sacred space is truly “the cradle of our dreams.”



## CHAPTER IV — Years of Transition, 1975-1984

### Part I Josiah Bartlett, Interim Minister, 1975

When Gil announced his resignation, the Board began discussions with the UUA and district ministers liaison Rosemary Matson, and with WA settlement minister David Pohl. A pulpit committee of eleven members was elected at a special congregational meeting.\* The UUA recommended hiring an interim minister for several months who would not be a candidate. Another alternative was to hire an administrator for an interim period.

At a congregational meeting in March small groups discussed questions for the Pulpit committee, and approved a two-year budget of \$3,500. The pulpit committee gave a service in November. Small groups each interviewed a committee member acting as a candidating minister. Their questions helped the committee define what we wanted in a minister. Another meeting with Rosemary Matson and district R.E. person Til Evans explored alternatives for the interim year: debt reduction, capital improvements, R.E. staff person, outside counselors, adult educators, outside speakers, a team for shared functions, etc.

The Board began negotiations to hire an interim minister. The UUA recommended an older person, as a younger one might wish to stay on. They interviewed several excellent candidates, and on July 9, chose Dr. Josiah Reed Bartlett. Jo was well-known to members of the church. He served for many years as Dean, then President of Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley. After leaving Starr King he served UU churches across the country as interim minister and consultant. Jo developed a methodology called VANGUARD for evaluating congregations' needs and creating and creating new programs.

The Board was enthusiastic about the possibilities Jo's ministry would bring to the church. His contract was for ten months half-time, with one month vacation, September 1, 1975 to July 31, 1976. Compensation was \$820 per month, plus a Minister's Discretionary Fund of \$500. The Board and Jo would jointly establish priorities.

---

*Dave Bortin	Barbara Bowers	Peter Davies	Ludell Deutscher
Ron Ellis	Don Ford	Dana Fisher	Randall Wiley
Joyce Mohrman	Jean Nickell	Pat Poster	Harry Wyeth

Jo attended the next Board meeting and asked members to share their dreams for the coming year. Board members wanted more music, a strengthened Finance committee and successful canvass, and improvement of the grounds. They hoped for a strong Religious Education committee, better services for children and adults, and better integration of Vespers services. They wanted more community outreach, more social activities, adult programs, aid and support in personal crises, etc. Jo wanted to learn from the congregation what they felt his priorities should be. He was eager to learn how this church functioned, and how we integrated new people.

He wanted to focus on membership, integration of new people, and the caring community. Intern Lisa Wiggins, with us since October 1974, asked to stay on. The Board agreed to request another intern as well. Jo's first service explored "Some Things I Live By." The church held an Ecology Fair with films, slide shows, and graphic displays from area environmental and conservation groups. Senator John Nejedly spoke. It was an important consciousness-raising experience. Minister of Ecology Dennis Kuby gave the service the next day as a culmination of the Fair.

The UNI-Players presented two evening dinner theaters featuring "The Unsatisfactory Supper" by Tennessee Williams, and "The Visitor from Forest Hills" by Neil Simon. Jo's last September service was about the revolution in the world of work, "Is Your Life a Sideline?" Creag Rowland and Charlotte Brown planned Evening Vespers, "Getting in Touch with Growing Things." Everyone was asked to bring a favorite plant.

Jo was encouraged by the response to the integration of newcomers. Four members were phoning newcomers, and several had agreed to give newcomer dinners. The Finance and R.E. committees were doing well, enrollment was up and church school off to a good start. Friday evening singing, snacks and book discussions were planned. Jo was concerned about funding for maintenance, and talked with Bill Gehres to be sure there was an item for Building & Grounds in the coming budget.

In 1975 we were blessed with four Starr King interns. First year students Doug Strong and Mark Belletini joined us. Doug served as high school youth (LRY) advisor, and Mark worked on the canvass and brochure. Doug and Mark were with us a year-and-a-half. Alicia Forsey worked with Til in R.E., and set up a caring committee. Lisa continued with the Sunday service committee. She

reluctantly left us in February 1976. In October another student, Agnes Zuniga, began working with Til.

### Mark Belletini

Mark grew up in a large Italian-American Catholic family in Detroit. While in college he went to a Universalist church because his best friend married a UU minister, Jane Rzepka. This was Rick Neff, a Starr King intern at our church during the '68-69 year.

Mark had worked in a school for disturbed children, and found he had a knack for listening to the problems of others, without judgment. A friend who moved away called Mark, saying her husband had killed himself. Mark immediately drove the three hours to stay with her through this traumatic time. On the way home he realized he had been "called" to the ministry.

He sent his application to Starr King the next day. Rick Neff told him to "make Walnut Creek your church." The Mt. Diablo church had a reputation for being a warm and caring congregation, and former intern Rick Neff felt Mark would find a home here. Sometimes newcomers are put off by the closeness and hugging, thinking "there is no place for me here." But when Mark first walked in his response was, "*this* is where I want to be!"

When Mark arrived Jo Bartlett was Interim minister. Six months later we called Peter Christiansen. Mark learned how a church works, attending Board and committee meetings, participating as much as possible. He feels Mt. Diablo prepared him for the ministry. He performed enough weddings to pay his way through school, and gave more sermons than is usually the case. Art Ungar taught him to do Seder. The congregation appreciated his talents as an artist and Italian chef. Mark's creative flyers and gourmet dinners were high points in the life of the church.

Soon after arriving, Mark attended the Memorial service for Ben Chapel, killed on a youth group outing. This service amazed and profoundly moved him. Ben's friends shared memories of him with laughter and tears. Mark felt the hardest part of being a minister would be preaching. He soon found the rituals so important to him from his Catholic heritage brought a deeper dimension to an often intellectual liberal service. People

were beginning to want something more, and Mark's services answered that need.

The congregation collected funds for Mark to return to Michigan to perform Rick Neff's wedding. They gave Mark and Doug a lovely Farewell Party. They were interns who gave unstintingly of their different and wonderful talents.

After completing his internship, Mark again preached at our church. Speaking for the first time, without notes, he came out publicly as a gay man. This was almost a quarter century ago, and even in our denomination openly homosexual ministers were not accepted. It took a great deal of courage. Mark said had this sermon not been accepted it would have destroyed him. But Mark was so well loved by the congregation that after the first gasps of surprise, he was embraced wholeheartedly. Church members were convinced he would become a great minister.

And he has. After serving as assistant minister of the San Francisco church, Mark was called to Starr King Church in Hayward, where he has served for 15 years. The UUA asked Mark to serve as chair of the Hymnbook Resources Committee because of his expertise in liturgy and informed by his song-leading ability, and his ability to get along with people. He served the six years it took to produce the new UUA hymnal with distinction.

Mark is in demand as a guest speaker at workshops, summer conferences, and churches throughout the U.S. and Canada. He has been called to preach and lead a workshop in Heidelberg. Those of us whose lives have been touched by Mark Belletini know that we have been fortunate indeed.

Results of a program questionnaire sent to members and friends defined what was most wanted: choir, drama, couples group, orientation to Unitarianism, family celebrations, and a Vespers coordinator. New people calling and the welcoming dinners were a success, but we needed a coordinator and more callers. The new choir began rehearsals in October. Repair and maintenance of buildings was a continuing problem.

Jo Bartlett introduced George Merrill's "This I Believe" service in November with the following remarks:

*"I first became aware of the Merrills when I met Gini. We had this bright, cheerful, peppy person who kept the Pacific District office operating, an office that had joined with Starr King. We were fortunate that Gini had come straight from Mecca (our headquarters in Boston). That gave her additional authority. Among the people who tried to take her away from us was one George Merrill.*

*"George is an engineer at Fiberboard. He's always been interested in all kinds of engineering, in the Bible, and in Boy Scouts. The Merrills have been in the church almost from the beginning. George is also interested in psychology, spurred by the encounter experience the church had some years ago. This makes for a nice balance in his intellectual and professional interests. He's working on a Masters degree in Psychology."*

Jo asked the Board to create a Membership committee and appoint a chair. They planned a luncheon to recruit. His report to the annual meeting listed over 200 newcomers called, ten welcoming dinners, and the choir was on its way. Services began with a "family style opener with the children (which continues to this day)." Doug Strong was the new high school group advisor. Jim and Banda Locke started a Married Couples Group for 20 and 30-year-olds, and Alicia Forsey had created a "Care and Concern" project.

Unitarian Universalist songwriter and singer Malvina Reynolds was in our pulpit in December. The following Sunday bellydancer Rhea and her troupe entertained us with another evening of middle eastern dances. We enjoyed a Christmas Bazaar and luncheon with arts and crafts featured for holiday giving. A special section of inexpensive items was for kids to purchase for family and friends. Grace Moran and Jan Cooper were in charge of the Bazaar.

The family party celebrating the Season of Hope included planting a redwood Tree of Peace as a monument to the courage of conscientious objectors. The evening Candlelight Ceremony gathered round the tree, each of us voicing a prayer for a peaceful world, as individual candles were lit. The Christmas service featured the new choir, dancers, a play, "The Story of the Christmas Guest," stringed instruments playing Mozart, carols, and good food. Christmas Eve the choir, directed by Tom Lindemuth, and the congregation sang all the traditional carols and some unfamiliar ones. Jo Bartlett read "The Gift of the Magi."



## 202    *So Great Vision*

The year ended with a service by church member and Starr King student Jody Schilling, "Let Us Begin Again." The New Year's Eve party was a smashing success thanks to the Marge Chapel Trio and singer Lynne White.

### 1976

"The Volunteer: A Vanishing Species?" was the title of Jo Bartlett's first service of the new year.

R. E. Director Til Evans gave the service entitled "As We Love, So Do We Serve," from Robert Louis Stevenson, the following week. Church member and sculptor Ludell Deutscher's "This I Believe" service was next. Doug Strong spoke on "Death, a Living Reality" in January.

The Board and staff held a weekend retreat in January. In his next service Jo Bartlett discussed UU's and the Bible. Lisa Wiggin's last service, "Moonbeams and Incantations," was followed by a Farewell Party for her. An Arabian Nights Valentine Party featured a Greek dinner in a bejeweled Ali Baba's cave (created by Jackie Miskel). Rhea and her belly dancers performed with live music.

The service February 22 was on Creativity, and featured The Young Performers String Orchestra. Art Ungar played bassoon, and Lauren Ungar, flute. Ludell Deutscher threw a pot on the wheel as the Center of Interest.

Mark Belletini spoke on "Faith, Hope, and Love" on March 7. He described the service as "from the tongues of humanity: David, Jesus, Gandhi, King, Mother Theresa, words of poetry, eternal words. Let us hold them up to the light and refresh ourselves again in their grandeur." He quoted e.e. cumming's poem: "be of love (a little) / more careful / than of everything"

Ways & Means put on a New Orleans Riverboat Evening with an elegant Creole dinner and entertainment. Board president Peter Davies reported at the All-Committee Workshop it was a truly memorable experience, with a real sense of community, and a \$500 profit. The Women's Luncheon group began creation of a Bicentennial Quilt for the church. Mark Belletini and Art Ungar held a Seder dinner in April.

The Couples Group continued to meet monthly throughout 1976. They had a potluck and games night. They enjoyed a Chinese dinner San Francisco and saw "A Chorus Line." They went clamming in June, had a barbecue in July, and a picnic at Briones in August. In November they held a Revival Sock-Hop.

### Family-U

Judy van der Veen and the R.E. committee conceived the idea of a children's Hungry-U, with the kids putting on their own show. The Hungry-U was such a success each year Judy thought the kids should have their own. She put out a call for young people to participate in a Family-U with their own show, their own art, and lots of good food. They served hotdogs, chili beans, banana splits, sno-cones, candy & cookies, brownies and pickles. They provided a geriatric beer & wine wagon for the grownups.

The Special Events committee (Jackie, Eleanor & Grace) held a crafts workshop the week before to help kids create their work — macramé, woodwork, ceramics, stitchery, etc. They provided materials, teachers and lunch. Jo Bartlett helped Joyce Mohrman mount and label art work. Adults also donated things for the Art Auction. Tickets were 50¢ for adults, 25¢ for kids. The performers rehearsed, and the young people shared their music, crafts, and talents in a wonderful show. It was a rousing success. Parents outbid each other vying for the young artists' work, and cheering the performers.

Jo Bartlett next spoke on "I'm Betting on Humanity," discussing reasons for some light at the end of the tunnel and along the way. At the All-Community Workshop in April Peter Davies urged everyone to take advantage of the Caring & Sharing Clearing House, for those who had a need or could meet one. "We really become a religious community when we swap services and help each other meet our needs," he said. This was a mini Yellow Pages of services offered by members and friends, with donations contributed to the church.

Former church president and urban planner Art Ungar gave a "This I Believe" service in March entitled "A Planner's View of the Church." Doug Strong preached on "The Magic of Music," and Jo on "Prophecies and Promises." Jo led a joyous celebration of Easter at Wildcat Campground on Mt. Diablo. Five dogs, 15 children and 27 adults spent the weekend camping on the mountain. They enjoyed a sunrise service. Later 140 gathered in the meadow overlooking Diablo Valley for the Easter service, followed by an Easter Egg Hunt. A Passover Seder was the work of Art Ungar, Helen Miller, Grace Moran and Jan Ghent.

Meanwhile the Pulpit committee was surveying candidates. They unanimously and enthusiastically chose Peter Hans Christiansen. The committee worked for a year, meeting more than 30 times, reviewing material from 37 ministers, interviewing five in depth. They scheduled May 1-9 as Candidating

Week. Peter spoke at both Sunday services, and met at least once with each committee, the Board, the staff and the interns.

There were luncheons, coffees, cocktail parties and dinners planned so that everyone could get acquainted with him. At the congregational meeting following his second service, the congregation voted 145 in favor, two opposed, and called Peter Christiansen as their minister, to begin in September. Peter's contract specified a salary of \$20,500, a month's vacation with a second month of no services during the summer, and a sabbatical after "some years of service."

Mark Belletini led a Flower Communion — a UU tradition established during the early part of this century by Dr. Norbert Čapek, pastor of the Prague Unitarian Church. Former Board president Jackie Miskel gave a "This I Believe" service in May, which included poems of her husband, Dave. Mark's Father's Day sermon was about his two Italian grandfathers "whom I love with all my heart." Doug Strong's May service discussed Universalism — at one time the sixth largest religion in this country.

After the service June 20, Ways & Means held an arts and crafts boutique featuring artists of the church, and a fabulous Strawberry Festival. We had strawberries and sour cream, and strawberry shortcake with whipped cream. This second Boutique made \$72 for the church after the artists received their 75%.

Jo's last service on June 27, "As Our Ways Part," included a special recognition of him, followed by a luncheon and presentation of a gift. Jo Bartlett served the church well as our year-long interim minister. The Board wrote, "his special perspective as a consultant blended with his skill as a minister to give MDUUC loving guidance in making the transition between Gil's ministry and the calling of Peter Christiansen."

Til Evans gave a service titled "What do you say after you say Hello?" With poetry, prose, music and slides she explored the hellos and goodbyes we say during our lives together, and the religious questions they call forth. UUA Migrant Ministry Director Howard Matson spoke about "Three Cantos on Higher Confusion," referring to a saying that UUs are confused on a higher level. Fellowship founder Dave Bortin gave the 4th of July service. Dave is a lawyer with a passion for civil liberties.

Helen Miller gave a "This I Believe" service in July. A Unitarian since childhood, she shared the love of life that enabled her to live fully even though a quadriplegic, "Sharing is the Essence." Doug Strong's service in August was about

working too hard and playing too little, “Rainbows, Apple Trees, Puppy Dogs, and Ice Cream.” “Bursting the Bubbles of Self-Illusion” was the title of Board member and social worker Suzan Lawrence’s service. She said our greatest illusion is that we have no self-illusion. Fulfillment, acceptance and happiness depend on knowing who we really are. Mark Belletini’s service, “Look You!” discussed humankind’s proper citizenship in the universe.

The dedicated Special Events committee (Grace, Eleanor and Jackie) put on a fabulous Hawaiian Luau in July. They served Polynesian *pupu*, barbecued *mahi-mahi*, stir-fried vegetables and rice, sweet and sour sauce, and roasted bananas with pineapple macadamia nut sauce. This feast was prepared by master chef Bob Pound. The bar featured mai-tais and *no mo pain*, a Polynesian melon drink. There were Hawaiian hula dancers to round out the evening.

In July the Couples group had a potluck barbecue at the home of Dave and Suzan Lawrence. They held an end-of-summer picnic at Pear Orchard Valley in Briones Park. John van der Veen gave the service August 29, on “The Scientific Process — Friend or Foe?” A former chemist, John had been an elementary teacher, and performed experiments to explore the effect of science on society.

As an example of Mark Belletini’s enormous musical knowledge, his service in August included the music of Rossini, about whom he said “... after composing the opera *William Tell* he stopped composing ‘because I’m lazy.’ (He was also filthy rich.) He broke his musical fast to compose *Little Solemn Mass* which we will hear this morning. Although deeply religious, it does not fit the traditional idiom, but was done in the zany *opera buffa* style that delights us in *Barber of Seville*.”

Long-time church member Agnes Elfving gave her service, “The Journey” September 5. She struggled to the podium weighed down by suitcases, bags and notebooks, all the excess baggage she carried through life. A former school teacher, Agnes is a natural comedian, and has contributed laughter and enjoyment over the years. Her dance recitals in the guise of Isadora Duncan are legendary in the annals of the church.

In September 1976, Miriam Hurley created “Helping Hands” to connect people and activities. Miriam helped find new members for the Finance and Landscape committees. She recruited a Center of Interest coordinator. A new Interiors committee had exciting ideas, such as a Fireplace room. We needed a pianist. She started On-Call Folks to help those going through difficult times. “If you want to create your own job give Miriam a call.” Among those who offered: Art Mancini wanted to help with special

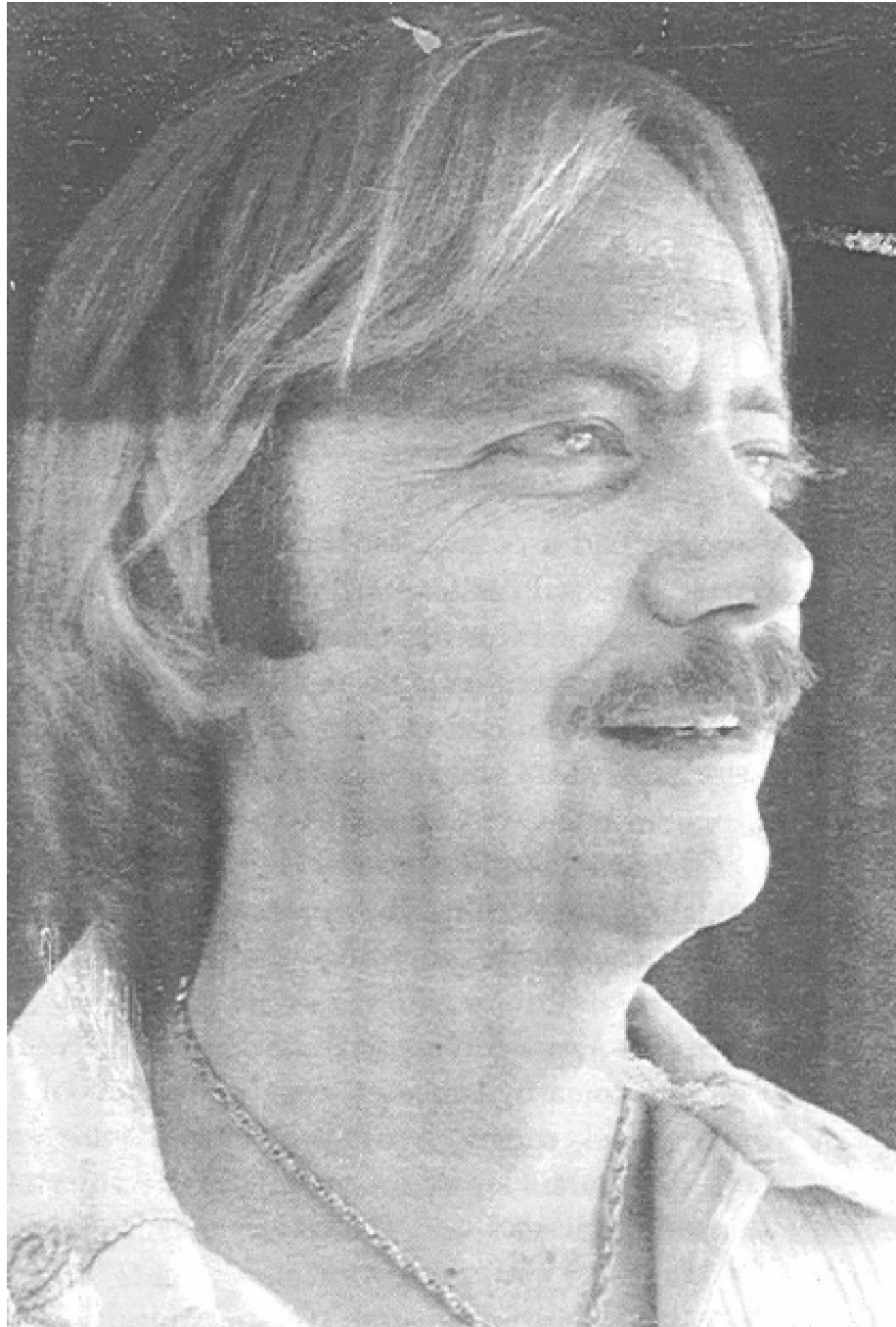
**206**    *So Great Vision*

family services and play reading, and Dina Summers offered to coordinate a writer's group.

Summer drew to a close as we prepared for the coming of our second minister.







## CHAPTER IV — Years of Transition, 1975-1984

### Part 2 Peter Christiansen, Minister, 1976-1982

Everyone was excited about the coming of Peter Hans Christiansen. Pulpit committee member Don Ford said they were impressed with Peter's sermons, his social activism, and how much he reflected the times our society was living through. Don was concerned that Peter was recently divorced, young and good looking, and wondered what effect this would have on the congregation.

**Peter Christiansen** received his undergraduate degree from the University of Miami, majoring in Psychology and American Civilization. He edited an underground newspaper. After graduating he did social work, and served as vice president of the Miami Beach NAACP, organizing sit-ins and demonstrations. Peter was on the board of ACLU, was elected chair of the Miami chapter of CORE, and participated in the Mississippi Freedom March when James Meredith was shot. He served as a neighborhood organizer with the Miami poverty program, organizing many antiwar protests and one of the earliest Vietnam teach-ins.

Protesting the war, he returned his draft card and was ordered to report for induction, and threatened with imprisonment if he refused. He brought legal action against Selective Service Director General Hershey and won a favorable decision from the Supreme Court. Peter entered Starr King School for the Ministry in 1966, graduating in 1969. He served as Assistant Minister of the Los Angeles church, then Berkeley First Church. The Los Angeles church called him as minister when Steve Fritchman retired. Peter was also a licensed marriage and family counselor, and a member of the American Association of Marriage and Family Counselors.

A member of the editorial review Board of a theological journal, he contributed to many publications. In 1971 Peter founded the Southern California Prison Coalition — a major prison abolition organization. He conducted a weekly Pacifica radio program on theological questions, co-hosted a PBS public affairs program, and served on the board of the National Association for Better Broadcasting.



In 1973 he served as president of the Southwest District UU Minister's Association. He was a signer of the Humanist Manifesto, and was listed in *Who's Who in Religion in America*. Active in Amnesty International in Los Angeles, he started the first chapter of A.I. in the county, meeting at the church. He initiated the nomination of Amnesty International for the Nobel Peace Award. The Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to A.I. in 1977.

Peter and Roberta Wright divorced shortly before this. Roberta is the daughter of [then] Starr King faculty member Sam Wright. Peter's son Jason later came to live with him.

The congregation was excited about Peter, and looked forward to his coming. He was warmly welcomed at the Annual Church Breakfast on the patio, with pancakes provided by chef Randall Wiley. "Passages" was the title of Peter's first service. The next Sunday he spoke of "The Ethical Dilemma of a Unitarian-Universalist." Peter's article on Solzhenitsyn was the lead article in the journal of religious humanism, *The Churchman* in October.

The church held a Silver Anniversary celebration in September 1976. The Fellowship and church had been in existence twenty-five years. They showed cartoons, slides, and the famous 1968 movie made by the photography group during the Center for Personal Development era. Sonja Shumaker (Christopher) provided singalong music, and there was 50s and 60s music for dancing. A "This is Your Life MDUCV TV!" show was part of the festivities. Those who had been members for more than 15 years got free tickets. There were buckets of ravioli and spaghetti, garlic bread and salad, popcorn, drinks, and memorabilia from "the olden days."

Peter spoke in October about the many meanings of power, "The Bind that Ties." Peter and R.E. Director Til Evans gave the service October 31, called "Masks: A Dialogue." Together they began a four-week seminar on "Sharing Our Religious Journeys." Ron Ellis chaired a new Program committee. They envisioned lectures of interest to the community, and on-going classes on social problems, the arts, politics, ecology, and war and peace, etc. Serve-U III was another exciting event.

Ric and Billie Masten again shared their songs and poetry in October. The UUA Fellowship committee granted Ric full Fellowship. He has been described as an "Ordained Poet." He and Billie Barbara continue to perform at UU gatherings

and churches across the continent. The church held a reception welcoming Peter to the community October 17. Community leaders from the greater Bay Area, and UU ministers and friends from all over attended.

Peter led a book discussion of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*. He spoke November 14, "On Courage." To support himself through Starr King Peter worked as a Union Business Agent for the International Laundry and Dry Cleaners Union. He gave a sermon based on a favorite book, Studs Terkel's *Working*.

Mark Belletini and Doug Strong continued to give innovative services. Mark's service in November was based on the Benjamin Britten opera *Peter Grimes*. Here are excerpts from a poem he included by Archibald MacLeish:

*"... they sell their treasuries of dreams for dreams' realities...  
their gods for shapes of tortured stone,  
their faith for shrines that fall,  
the unknown for the touched and known...  
...their eyes forget the star ...  
they build them tower and high wall, to bolt against the spring  
to shutter out the [songbird's] call, and heart's remembering.'*

Temple Isaiah hosted the Thanksgiving service. The Bahá'í faith participated. A Pilgrims Feast, planned by Beverly Bortin, was held at the church. A family potluck and service, it explored our heritage and history. Church members participated in the annual Thanksgiving day potluck at church.

Holiday festivities included a Family Festival and Potluck dinner, followed by the "Hanging of the Green." Participants climbed our hill, picked out a tree for the sanctuary. They decorated the tree while singing carols and enjoying refreshments. A Family Christmas service with the choir, Peter, Mark, Doug, Til, and the children of the church school, featured the new Baldwin piano, purchased by the generosity of ten families. The Music committee also purchased a Baldwin organ with donations. We had a Family Christmas Eve service. The New Year's Eve Party at church featured the Marge Chapel Trio, babysitting, and a sumptuous midnight feast.

1977

Peter titled his first service of the new year "Love Is ..." The following Sunday Peter Christiansen was installed as the church's second permanent minister. The sermon was given by the Rev. Steven H. Fritchman, minister emeritus of the Los Angeles UU Church, where he served 22 years as minister, preceding Peter Christiansen.

Dave Bortin led the act of installation. A founder of the Fellowship, twice president of the Board, Dave was a member of the pulpit committee. Other participants were Aron and Eve Gilmartin, Berkeley church minister J.R. Cope, Sacramento UU minister Ted Webb, Til Evans, Director of Religious Education, Peter Davies, Doug Strong, and Mark Belletini.

Suzan Lawrence gave the Board an evaluation of the Membership committee in January. During the year they initiated Recognition Sunday each month to honor new members. There were three get acquainted parties for newcomers, and a potluck dinner following Peter Christiansen's orientation service. They provided greeters every Sunday. The committee added an "Are You Interested?" tear-off section to the Order of Service. Newcomers could request the newsletter, a meeting with the minister, or information about the church.

In January 1977 Art Ungar introduced new intern Jim Bell to the Board. Jackie Miskel was elected president, Bob Daines vice president, and Suzan Lawrence secretary. Dave Tucker continued as treasurer. The long-term Ways & Means committee (Jackie Miskel, Grace Moran and Eleanor Pound) resigned at the end of the year. They agreed to put on several dinners, but not major fund-raisers, including the Hungry-U and Serve-U.

The newsletter January 19 reported the Couples Group was reorganizing to include couples age 25-45.\* They planned a series of once a month social activities. A Chinese dinner was followed by a Civic Arts performance of "Lysistrata." In February they held a House Party at Sloanes' for rock dancing, and a picnic in March. They attended a Warriors' game in October.

Peter gave a sermon on Loneliness. He and Til held a dialogue sermon on "Roots." Peter's sermon on the death penalty, "They Shoot Horses Don't They?"

---

\*Jan & Jeff Ghent, Nancy & Chuck Kaplan, Jackie & Art Mancini, Andrea & Bob Sehr, Pat & Dan Cook, Suzan & Dave Lawrence, Doris & Ted Silen, Nancy & Bill Thomas, Sandi & Pat Baker, Jann and Gary Schaub.

was among the ten finalists for the UUA Clarence Skinner Award presented each year for the best sermon on the social implications of our religion. Til next spoke of "The Many Faces of Love," and Peter on "A Universal Faith."

The Social committee was reactivated. They planned a host of exciting activities, beginning with a House and Dance Party. They had four camping trips during the year, clamming trip, snow trip, and a Uni-Uni picnic in May. Fifty adults and children participated with Doug Strong in the INTERGEN experience. They spent two days living at church, sharing intergenerational fellowship and communion, culminating in their service February 27, followed by a luncheon.

Peter's service on Buckminster Fuller was titled "Prophet of our Time." "No One Ever Died From Old Age," was Doug Strong's last service as an intern. The church held a two-night Arabian Nights Dinner with belly dancer Rhea and her dancers in March. Long announcements was a continuing concern. In March the Sunday Service committee and Bob Daines developed Three Open Minutes to alleviate the problem. Church members reserved three minutes during a service to speak of a concern. Announcements would be short, church related, and one time only

The congregation held a Farewell Reception "honoring our beloved Mark and Doug" March 13, with a potluck dessert buffet. They had been with us almost two years. They each received a beautiful leather attache case. Mark said that he used his for many years until it was worn out. Doug and Mark gave the church two big boxes of coffee cups with connected circles symbolizing our denomination.

Later in March the retired Ways & Means committee produced a wonderful Italian Renaissance dinner, prepared by Chef Mark Belletini. Fifteen recorder players strolled through the tables; there were jesters and renaissance dancing. We had an "Extra-Ordination" Ceremony for Ben Bortin. A graduate of Starr King, Ben is the son of Dave Bortin, and grew up in our church school. Ben's Syracuse, New York church had just ordained him. This was our chance, as his home church, to recognize him. The Bortins invited the congregation to a luncheon after the service prepared by the Uni-Caterers.

The Board agreed we would have only one intern. New intern Jim Bell saw his work in finance and social action. He also wanted to start a men's group, and an "About Your Sexuality" class. The Board agreed to sponsor a United Farm Worker fundraiser free soup dinner and film in May requested by Jim. They asked the Social Concerns committee to sponsor the dinner.

Peter Christiansen led the book group discussion of Smith's *When I Say No I Feel Guilty*. A long standing problem for many of us! Starr King student Charles Briody asked to work at church through the summer for no money, and the Board agreed. Programs in April and May included a running workshop, Myths and Realities of Aging, Psychic Development, What is a Work of Art, and Re-evaluating Career Patterns. The Program committee included George and Gini Merrill, Sara Mouser, Margaret Novak, Bill Tuttle, Al Smith and Joyce Mohrman. Ludell Deutscher was chair.

In April I gave my first service at the church, "The Courage to Trust and To Care." I explored the question, "Living in a world where violence, suspicion and cynicism surround us, where do we find the courage to face these realities and deal with them?"

Art Ungar held a Passover Seder at the church, assisted by Helen Miller, Jan Ghent, and Grace Moran. This was the first time the newly purchased church dishes were used.

The Friday before Easter Til and Peter led an evening of sharing on "Death and Rebirth." Participants brought prose and poems on the meaning of death, ending the evening with a celebration of rebirth. Saturday Til held a Family Festival of Shared Preparation with bread making, hot cross buns, and egg decorating. The Easter service celebrated spring, Easter and Passover. The delicious home-made breads and decorated eggs created the day before were shared.

Peter Christiansen led an Easter Service in a meadow atop Mt Diablo. It was a beautiful spring morning with music, songs, and a Dedication of Children. A picnic lunch and Easter Egg Hunt followed the service. Many members and friends spent the weekend camping on the mountain. Peter spoke on "Is Freedom Obscene?" April 24. A court in Ohio had ruled no one is free to be obscene. Peter considered this an important question. That evening featured the first Family Game Night with games for children and adults, free babysitting for little ones, and desserts.

In May 1977 Judy van der Veen produced The Brand New Family-U. This was a Hungry-U by and for kids, with a show, food, art auction for all ages. Everyone donated things and created art objects at the Crafts Workshop Sunday, a week before the show — macrame, paintings, ceramics, origami, woodwork and set design. It was a great success. "The Spirit of Love that Works for Justice" was

the title of Jim Bell's service on May first, honoring the Farm Workers. He displayed a collection of Howard Matson's farmworker photographs. The Social Concerns committee sponsored the Farmworker fundraising dinner May 13, with entertainment, films, child care, and a delicious dinner.

We enjoyed the last offering of the Spring Dinner Series, an Evening of Elegance, in May. Music for dancing and listening moved through the 40s to the 70s. Marge Chapel, Lynne White and the "Casual Quartet," (Bob & Bonnie Daines, Jody van der Veen and Dave Miskel), led a rousing sing-along.

Til offered a four-week seminar, "Telling Your Story," an inter-generational values clarification series for young people and adults. May 15 was "Switch Sunday" when adults met in religious education classes, and young people heard Peter Christiansen in the sanctuary. Peter's service May 29 was an anatomy of a religious journey, "I Haven't Found It, But I'm Still Looking."

Church member and former Starr King student Jim King gave a service in June titled, "True Religion is Non-rational." Jim didn't believe what happens in church had much to do with the essence of religion. It was more likely found in states of altered and non-rational consciousness. "Life is What Happens While You're Making Plans," was the title of Peter's service June 26.

Art Ungar introduced new intern Ann Tyndall to the Board in June. Ann wanted to work in worship, finance and administration, and revive the Vesper service. Because no advisors could be found for the high school group, Ann agreed to serve as LRY advisor.

Church member Dave Miskel gave a service of his poetry called "Reflections in a Glassy Eye — insights from a sometime poet — the poem as a peak (religious) experience." Dave Bortin's service in July looked at some of the historic differences which unite us as a denomination, "We Have Seen the Past and it Works." Beverly Bortin also spoke about "Why I am no longer a Unitarian." Returning from the UUA General Assembly, she considered herself a Unitarian Universalist.

Jim Bell's service on "Jesus of Nazareth," shared his ideas about the teachings of Jesus and the importance of living **our** own truth. Jann Schaub presented the play "The Male Animal" written by James Thurber and Elliot Nugent about Sacco and Vanzetti, executed for their political beliefs. A comedy, it is also a powerful statement about freedom.

School counselor and member Lucille Freuler gave a "This I Believe" service, and Jody Schilling's sermon, "We Used to Bum Heretics," was about the heresy of

freedom. Peter spoke at the last summer service on “Looking Backward, Forward, and a little to the Side.”

The church year opened with the “Annual Unitarian Style Revival Meeting – food, people, and the revival of church spirit. A time to renew old acquaintances, make new ones, and recharge our batteries. Come early to eat delicious pancakes and sausages.” Everyone agreed the committee skits were wonderful.

Peter began a series to identify, strengthen and expand our Unitarian Universalist roots with “Ever On Sunday.” He next discussed violence, its causes and cures, in a sermon entitled “Be Gentle With One Another.” The Program committee chaired by Ron Ellis provided an excellent mix of Fall workshops and programs. They included a discussion series on UU identity, assertiveness training, and “Knowing Self with Clay and Fantasy.” There was a book discussion class exploring moral and ethical issues. They offered “About Your Sexuality” for teens, another for adults, “Project Listening,” “Growing Older,” and the uses of stress.

In September Peter spoke about “Rites of Passage.” He quoted Gail Sheehy from her book *Passages*, “... we never really grow up but are reborn several times during our adult life. These rites of passage are critical, predictable, and great opportunities if we don’t panic.” Spouses of the Uni-Caterers, Bob Pound, Herb Moran, Bob Daines, and Dave Miskel, provided a western style Cook-out at the Big Round-Up dinner in September.

The Board held An All-Committee Workshop the same day, with more than 30 attending. Over the years this vital coordinating function waxed and waned. It was a place for committee members to exchange new ideas, and talk about accomplishments, plans and needs, so that no committee existed in a vacuum. It was possible to negotiate conflicts and get a dearer picture of the whole church. Working together helped coordinate the work of the church, and enriched our sense of community.

Peter’s next service addressed “The Ethical Dilemma of Being a UU.” He described our shared values as often in conflict with the world we live in, and how we might resolve this. Til spoke in October on “Participation and/or Witness.” She discussed community and the world, home and journey, love and work, and our inner and outer lives.

The Uni-Players Dinner Theatre returned for a two-night engagement with an evening of comedy. Plays of Neil Simon featured Dave Pierson, Betty Kunkel,

Al Paltin, Ellie and Bernie Segal, and Jann Schaub, who directed. John van der Veen acted as producer. Peter's sermon October 16 was about The Sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the Unitarian minister who authored America's literary and philosophical declaration of independence. His sermon "Come Build a Church," October 30<sup>th</sup> got Canvass Week off to a rousing start.

An October pre-budget congregational meeting made decisions about what people wanted next year. Jewell Ford and Barbara Wahlstrom served lunch, the Board provided babysitting. The congregation voted Aron S. Gilmartin Minister Emeritus. After much discussion a preliminary budget passed.

Ann Tyndall created a new Sunday evening service called a Tribal Celebration, so families could share the harvest, tell their stories and sing songs. Ann gave her first service December 4, called "Hours of Judgment." She spoke of times when something so powerful intrudes in our lives we can do nothing but answer from just where we are at that moment.

Peter spoke on "Getting Back to Fundamentals," and "Don't Start the Sexual Revolution Without Me." A Patio Boutique after the service featured small items for young gift givers. It made over \$800. "Tis the Season to be ...," was Peter's last service of the year, reflecting what this special time really means to us. The congregational meeting December 4 elected new Board members. They passed a budget increasing staff salaries 7%, added \$960 for a copy machine, and \$560 to insure continuation of a weekly newsletter.

Our church welcomed the 1977 Ecumenical Thanksgiving celebration. Representatives from the Baha'i faith joined us in "Being Thankful for the Future." We again sent donations to Friends Outside. A Pre-Christmas House Tour December 10, featured homes of the Freulers, Politzers, Rosemans, and Segals, all with studios for painting, sculpture, miniatures and antiques. A Family Holiday Celebration December 18, honored Aron Gilmartin as Minister Emeritus of our church.

Christmas Eve service included Peter Christiansen, and new member Peggy Diel. Robin King gave his famous rendition of Dylan Thomas' "A Child's Christmas in Wales," with music and carols written by Unitarians sung by the choir. Peter told us the first Christmas tree in America was imported from Germany by Unitarian Minister Charles Follen. The Christmas service was entitled "A Child is Born," with Bob and Bonnie Daines and their daughters Barbara and Laurie, the Pierson family, and Donna Barnes.



1978

Interns Ann Tyndall and Jim Bell offered an experiment in worship and spiritual discovery Sunday evenings, with Tribal Celebrations the first Sunday, and worship other Sundays. Each had a theme — personal spiritual experience, sin, confession, forgiveness, grace, gratitude, fear and love. They also included group dancing and communion “recast with our own religious meanings.”

Those who shared the annual Board and staff retreat found it memorable. We were moved by the depth of feelings and trust that emerged. Ann Tyndall described it as a circle reaching out like ripples from a stone dropped in the water. Bob Daines was elected president, Charlotte Brown vice president, Deanna Egan secretary and Helen Nott treasurer.

A Poetry afternoon was offered by Zel Lamer featuring well-known local poets. Jim Bell gave a service on “The Discovery of Strength” the weekend of the Board and staff retreat. Aron Gilmartin and Don Ford led a group on growing older — aging parents, loss and grief, meaning and beliefs, and approaches to death.

Ann Tyndall’s service in January, “Life’s Journey and Community,” discussed the religious journey inward toward the self, and outward into the community. Peter Christiansen spoke on “Choosing to be Different,” and “Close Encounters of the Best Kind.” Peter, Bob Daines, and I presented a Canonization Ceremony with a Dedication of the new Canon copier. Retiring the mimeograph was a happy occasion. MDUUC had at last joined the technological age.

A Board and Committee Workshop was held in January, with 30 attending. Bob Daines gave a history of these meetings, and how they facilitate direct participation of committees, keeping people close and in touch. Art Ungar described it as a “religious community” where committees and board members receive help and support. All-Committee workshops provide integration and coordination of church calendaring so that activities are reasonably spaced throughout the year. Bob Daines saw it as a place to exchange new ideas. The Board planned several more.

The annual Serve-U was held February 11, a pre-Valentine’s Day service auction. It featured gourmet box lunches and more than 40 services: calligraphy, dance lessons, apricot brandy, wine country tour and lunch, spinning lessons, travel consultation, etc. The Serve-U realized about \$1,200.

The Program committee was meeting regularly, with Ludell Deutscher chair, the Merrills, AI Smith, Bill Tuttle and Joyce Mohrman. Spring programs included a Running Workshop with Jim Woessner, and Bill Tuttle's Myths and Realities of Aging. An excellent tennis player, Bill had retired from the State Department of Aging, and taught at Sacramento City College. Psychic consultant Amrita Forest gave a class on Psychic Development, and Lisa Bennett gave a class on "What is a Work of Art?" Marley Smith gave a series on the Bradley Method of Natural Childbirth.

Mark Belletini returned to our pulpit in February, after serving as Intern at the Rockford Illinois church. He spoke on "The Injustice of Tolerance, the Wrath of Love." He called for abolishing tolerance, and vigorously linking the concept of love to those of moral indignation and wrath. Jim Bell spoke on "Loving and Dying." As his internship drew to an end it called up feelings of love and death for Jim. Peter Christiansen spoke on "The Healing Power Within" after attending a conference of physicians and psychologists using psychotherapeutic techniques to treat physical illness. This is an idea more accepted today than 20 years ago.

Bob Baker organized a party for church artist Dave Pierson when he retired from the Co-op. Over 150 of Dave's "tribe," as he calls his church community, celebrated with him. The service March 19, "Lost and Found," was given by members of Single-U. "As singles, each of us has experienced feelings of being lost and found." Eleven Single-U members spoke. Being Together with the children featured an original story by Lynne White. In April the Ways and Means committee held a Marx Madness Dinner Theatre. They showed Marx Brothers movies, and dinner featured "Groucho's Beef, Chico's Beans, Zeppo's Corn, Harpo's Hollywood Salad with supporting Rolls, and Pie ala Monroe."

The new Ministerial Relations committee, Art Ungar, Jackie Miskel and Florence Pierson, were introduced at the March Board meeting. Its purpose was to facilitate communication between the ministerial staff and congregation, making sure concerns were heard. The committee met every other month. Dave Bortin replaced Jackie when she resigned in September. The Piersons left for a year in Mexico in November 1980, and Eleanor Pound took Florence's place

Easter observances again included a camp-out, and service at Wildcat campground on Mt. Diablo, with Ann Tyndall and Peter Christiansen. At the church, beginning with lunch on Saturday at noon, participants baked bread and dyed eggs. The Board provided roast turkey for an Easter potluck feast. Til Evans

gave a workshop on death and rebirth with Jim Bell and Art Ungar. Participants spent the night at the church. Sunday morning Jim Bell and Barbara Bowers led a sunrise service on our hill. The children romped through an Easter Egg hunt. There was breakfast, a service for the affirmation of life, and a picnic lunch.

Chris Bailey asked to serve as an intern through the summer. She wanted to work with Membership and other committees. The Board appointed Chris the second intern, to serve from April through August.

Three Starr King graduates, Jody Schilling, Meg Whitaker-Green, and Lucy Hitchcock requested a team ministry Ordination from the Hayward, Oakland and Walnut Creek churches. They wished to embrace a wider definition of church, to reach across the limitation of congregational lines and encourage the supportive connection between UU societies and clergy. Meg hoped to strengthen the relationship between UU communities and the mental health system. Lucy was creating a religious center for women, with counseling and study groups on theology and women's issues.

Church member Jody Schilling was seeking parish ministry, working to broaden the vision of religious liberalism, particularly the inclusion of women in religious life. The Board endorsed their proposal. At a meeting in April the congregation voted to ordain them as a Team Ministry. They were ordained at the Oakland church. It was an inspiring, beautiful service. Those who attended hoped it would lead to closer communication between the three churches.

Ann Tyndall presented a service based on Adrienne Rich's book, *A Dream of a Common Language*. Jim Bell, Peter Christiansen, Bob Daines, Til Evans, and I participated. "All That Jazz" was the title of her May 7 service. Jazz pianist Marge Chapel and dancer Jan Helm joined Ann, exploring life lived fully, spontaneously, and powerfully — like jazz, like a dance.

Ways & Means and Membership sponsored a Wine & Cheese Party for Newcomers in May. It was designed to help newcomers and new members get acquainted and learn more about the church.

"The Way, the Truth, and the Life" explored Peter's personal search for the Jesus story. He gave a graduation sermon, "As We Went Forth." His last service of the church year was a discussion of his philosophy of psychotherapy, "Compassion and Self-hate," the title of a book by Theodore Isaac Rubin.

Long-time heretic and rebel Steve Fritchman, Minister Emeritus of the Los Angeles church, gave an Independence Day sermon on "The Coalition of the Fed-

up." He became famous (or infamous) during the 50s, speaking out when everyone else "quaked in their boots," according to Peter.

The Board approved Chris Bailey to serve as acting minister during July, and Ann Tyndall during August. The Board asked them to reach out to new people during the summer as there was no Membership committee. Chris gave a service in July entitled "Singing Sisterhood while Manning the Plow," a service of reminiscence and personal statements of the journey.

General Assembly delegates Ludell Deutscher, Rosemary Matson, Jody Schilling, Art Ungar and Barb Wahlstrom shared their impressions in of GA in "Paths that Connect Us." The discussed the links we have with other UUs separated by distance and time. The following week Ann Tyndall gave her last service, "A World at Peace." She spoke in remembrance of Nagasaki and Hiroshima and renewing our commitment to world peace.

Peggy Stuart Diel and Peter Hans Christiansen were married at the church on July 8, 1978. Peggy had come to the church from Boulder, Colorado. Howard and Rosemary Matson performed the ceremony. Margaret MacLane and Dave and Florence Pierson transformed the Patio into a garden of white chrysanthemums. The Uni-Caterers provided wonderful food — our almost professional church caterers Eleanor Pound, Jackie Miskel, and Grace Moran.

In August intern Chris Bailey spoke on 'Tiger in the Closet! Dragon in the Forest!' sharing her view of occasions when we encounter mythical beasts on our journey that can turn us back or turn us off. Ann Tyndall's last service was the end of August, "Thank You and Goodbye." She shared how much she appreciated all she learned working with us. A Farewell Reception was held for Ann after the service. She was a well-loved intern, and has gone on to be a successful minister, serving churches in the east.

Peter spoke of "Laboring in the Vineyard" on September 3. The Fall cleanup drew a record 45 people, thanks to Jewell Ford. The Annual Fall Breakfast the following Sunday was a UU revival with good food, renewing friendships and church spirit. A special program followed pancakes and sausages, with each committee presenting a short skit.

Peggy Christiansen gave a 'This I Believe' service in September, on the art of believing. Peggy said, "the practice of any art has certain requirements — carpentry, dance or love." She shared her exploration of belief as an art, and her discovery of what it means to believe.

In October there was an Evening of Elegance Dinner: Paté, pumpkin shell consomme, Coquille St. Jacques, and spiced apple crepes. It was a tremendous success, with a \$526 profit. The Program committee presented a full selection of Fall programs. They offered a drawing class, play reading, "Disagreements that Unite Us," and consciousness raising for men and women. There were classes in disco dancing, Feldenkrais movement awareness, relationships, Getting Older, Running, Moral Development, Stress, Dreams, Mothering, Crises, Parenting, and Her Story in Western Religion. An incredible offering!

Starr King student Anne Hines, music coordinator since April, asked to serve as intern minister. Starr King student Philip Wellford began working part time until the end of the year, when he would begin as an intern if money was available.

Peter spoke in October on "Rational Faith," saying that expansion of knowledge makes for an expansion of faith. He believed that reason nourished his faith, and his faith nourished his reason. The following Sunday he spoke of "Laws Against Love," in opposition to the Briggs Amendment making it unlawful for homosexuals to teach in public schools. He also spoke on UUs and the United Nations.

Peter and Peggy, Til Evans, Anne Hines, Philip Wellford, Dave Bortin, and I gave a service in November. It celebrated the joys of a community of religious liberals, "Everything You Bring Has Value." A potluck lunch of Thanksgiving leftovers followed the service, and a Holiday Boutique of hand-crafted items.

Peter held a Memorial Service December 10, for the tragic victims of the mass suicides in Jonestown, Guiana. We mourned the death of San Francisco supervisors George Moscone and Harvey Milk. Both Peter and Dave Bortin spoke of how religious belief can serve evil if we do not question authority.

In October the congregation voted to change the fiscal year from the calendar year to July 1, to June 30. A preliminary deficit budget was adopted. A budget with no deficit was approved at the annual congregational meeting. They voted to change the name of the church to "Mt. Diablo Unitarian *Universalist* Church." Motions to change Church to *Society* or *Fellowship* were defeated. New Board members were elected.

Anne Hines' service was titled "The Shadow Knows!" She explained the parts of ourselves we are unwilling to accept, we project on to others. She spoke about their personal and political implications, and why we need to face them.

B'nai Shalom across the street acted as host for the Ecumenical Thanksgiving service, "Surprises and Wonders." Cantor Richard Silverman of Temple Isaiah conducted a special interfaith teenage choir. For the first time the Catholic faith was represented, a truly interfaith service.

Ways and Means again presented a Uni-Players Cabaret Theatre, and dinner by the UniGourmetts. Both performances were sold out. It was a huge success, adding \$900 to our treasury. Over sixty people put it together, truly a community affair. A Gala Church Family Celebration, the Family-U, was held on December 9<sup>th</sup>, featuring a supper, talent show, and art auction. The kids did a wonderful job according to Alma Davies, and the church made over \$500. Also successful was the Holiday Boutique, taking in \$1,060.

The Extended Families welcomed everyone to the holiday tree trimming party and shared dinner. Peter and Peggy had an Open House at their new home in Pittsburg. December 24, was a celebration with Peter, Anne and Philip, the choir, and the singing of carols. Anne directed a Christmas play with Santa (Peter), Mrs. Claus (Anne), and Elf (Philip). Families brought ornaments from home for the church tree, and each family took home a lovely bell, knitted by Jackie Miskel's mother, Rose Berlin.

The last service of the year, "Letting Go, and Welcoming What is New" was a family service with Til Evans, Helen Miller, Ann Tyndall and Daniel Zwickel. People brought old candles and thoughts we would like to let go. A New Year's Eve Party featured the Marge Chapel Trio.

## **1979**

Intern Philip Wellford gave his first service in January, about his life-threatening experience rock climbing, titled "Conquering the Rock of Promise." He described it as "beginning at the precipice of promise, across the ledges of temptation, despair and futility, and ending at the summit of hope and fulfillment. Philip had discovered the Old Testament, Zen, and juggling at Starr King. He was working toward a specialized ministry as a traveling troubadour minister.

Peter next spoke about the controversial aspects of parenting. Bob Daines, Anne Hines, Florence Pierson, Eleanor Pound, Art Ungar, and Philip Wellford, and I presented a service on the roles of women and men, and transitions in the denomination's ministry.

At the end of 1976, the Board struggled with a long-smoldering controversy becoming more and more of an issue. It began with a request for no smoking during services. Later the Board extended it to no smoking in the sanctuary. Several people made the point that since so many homes were being closed to smokers, it was important to keep the church as neutral ground so that smokers could attend meetings. Feeling ran high on both sides.

The Board discussed smoking at their December meeting, and voted to support the rights of smokers and nonsmokers. The sanctuary and R.E. building (excluding office, kitchen and restrooms) were no smoking areas. The committee in charge of a large event must announce no smoking areas in advance. Bill Stevens and Bonnie Daines drafted a policy for the January 1979 Board meeting. After lengthy discussion it was accepted with one No vote and one abstention. Board president Charlotte Brown appointed a committee to work on this.\* The policy designated the Fireside Room a smoking room Sundays from noon to 12:30, and the sanctuary during non-worship activities. Unless unanimous consent, committee meetings would be smoke-free, with another room a smoking area. This policy was to be applied with common sense and goodwill.

Newsletter statements and Board minutes do not reflect the emotional upheaval and pain of the controversy. The concept of non-smokers' rights was new, and smokers were hurt and angry. They felt rejected and condemned. Guilt, resentment, ambivalence and confusion had to be worked through. As attitudes changed the church eventually became completely non-smoking. The following appeared in the newsletter (author unknown):

*TO SMOKE OR NOT TO SMOKE — in church — That is the question  
Whether 'tis nobler to permit clean air in meeting rooms  
And sprint outside for a smoke —  
To snarl and stalk out of the place when someone says,  
Cigaret smoke makes my head ache'  
To inhale, to exhale; no more.  
Or while exhaling say, Then end thy headache and those thousand irritations thy*

---

\*Jackie Miskel convener, Deanna Egan, Til Evans, Beverly Scaff, Jim King, Peter Davies, and Anne Hines. Bonnie Daines became convener when Jackie resigned.

*throat is heir to go YOU to the patio for fresh air. 'Tis a solution devoutly to be wished!*

*To inhale, to exhale - perchance to blow smoke rings, ay, there's the rub  
for as we waft a cloudy ring your way,  
what rubbing of eyes may ensue, must give us pause ...*

*OH ALL RIGHT! smoke outside!*

*Thus conscience doth make valiants of us all.*

Board and staff attended the annual retreat in February. Charlotte Brown was elected president, Bonnie Daines vice president, Deanna Egan secretary and Peter Davies treasurer. They chose the theme "Inreach-Outreach," a year of growth for our ever widening church family.

The Program committee was discouraged. The excellent programs were not well attended. Everyone agreed pre-registration was essential. They did not want presenters preparing for programs when no one showed up.

Anne Hines' service in February traced her personal journey toward feminism and wholeness with poetry, music, and song, "Springtime will never be the same." "Crisis — Danger and Opportunity," was the title of a service presented by Til Evans, Janet King, Connie Schwarz, Lynne White and Ingrid Wiley. The Chinese symbol for Crisis is a combination of these two words. They talked about the crises in our lives, and how they deepen our understanding of what it means to be human.

Philip Wellford's service was "Just Some Fool Trying to be a Clown." He said, "Contained within the clown are all the errors, follies, stupidities and misunderstandings which plague humankind. The clown teaches us to laugh at ourselves, because in truth, we are all clowns." This service was for children and adults, and was probably the most hilarious the church ever experienced.

Philip was perfecting a juggling routine that involved God (a golden ball), Adam and Eve (colored balls), the snake (rubber), and the apple (real). God, complete with wig, spoke in the voice of a Jewish patriarch. Adam, Eve, the snake, and the apple (missing a bite after each pass), flew by in quick succession. At one point the snake became ensnared, dangling from the light fixture, creating a disruption in the fast-moving story that had us all consumed with laughter. Philip



has appeared on national television, and is a circus performer, practicing his ministry with insight and laughter for all ages.

Bob Baker asked to serve as Board liaison to the Program committee to help with calendaring and priorities. He suggested Family Game Evenings and Adult Game nights. He was willing to serve dinners if help were available. The first Family Game Nite featured card games, board games, and floor games, with a special all-night session of Dungeons and Dragons. Monte Carlo Adult Game Nite featured bridge and poker in addition to the above games.

After the service March 25, there was a special celebration honoring Jackie Miskel, Grace Moran and Eleanor Pound, the church Uni-Caterers. These three women had organized, led, and participated in all the following church activities (and probably others!):

Women's Group	Serve-U's	Holiday Bazaars
Ways and Means	Alice's Restaurant	Theatre Dinners
Evenings of Elegance	Yellow Pages	Membership comm.
Canvas Drives	Luncheons	Kitchen comm.
UUWF	Nominating comm.	Denomination Affairs
UUSC Board member	Board President	Ministerial Relations
Center of Interest	newsletter crew	Peace Center
office volunteer	Hungry-U's	Art Auctions
Boutiques	Bldg. note program	Memorial comm.
Caring comm.		

It is hard to believe three people could have done so much. Jackie Miskel now owns and manages a thriving book store and coffee shop, so has little time for church activities. Grace and Eleanor continue to be as active as ever.

At a congregational meeting in February 1979, the Board recommended that we ordain Til Evans as Minister of Education. It passed unanimously. The Ordination service was held March 25. Til's response: "There are no words to describe the joy and community we experienced. So much upswelling of our spirits together is a rare event. It is impossible to say thank you for all that you gave of yourselves, but I am tremendously moved by so much love. I do thank all who did so much work, especially Art Ungar, Dave Pierson, Margaret MacLane, Joyce Mohrman, Beverly Scaff and Ingrid Wiley."

### **Til Evans**

Til grew up in England, served as a nurse during World War II, and came to the U.S. as a war bride, joining her husband in southern California. She discovered Unitarianism when she searched for a religious education for her five children. Those were Sophia Fahs days, and it became a lifetime career of learning and teaching children and adults — at Unitarian churches in the Los Angeles area, at UC Berkeley, at MDUUC, and at Starr King School for the Ministry. She also served as educational consultant to the Pacific Southwest District, which included weekly trips to Starr King.

Following her divorce Til moved to Berkeley and joined Starr King's core faculty part-time. Long before Til came to Walnut Creek many of us were aware of her as a new voice in the tradition of Sophia Fahs and Edith Hunter. We were thrilled when Til agreed to be our Director of Religious Education. This was a truly new beginning for us. Her approach to religious education has always been an inclusive one involving our whole lives. Eve Gilmartin said of her, "Her spirit permeated everything we did — in interpersonal growth, in helping us look toward a real blending of heart and mind, and thus discovering our wholeness."

In 1979 MDUUC ordained Til as Minister of Religious Education. After Peter's resignation she served as minister four months, until she became a full-time faculty member at Starr King. Til Evans and Bob Forbes were married on the Patio by old friends Howard and Rosemary Matson, October 23, 1992. It was a brief and special time for them. Bob lived only a short time after completing his year as Interim minister.

Til left us in a "growing place" which continues to this day. Her ability to nurture growth in others is magical. Many people attribute the great strides they have made directly to the way Til was able to communicate her trust and confidence in them. She never seemed to lead. You felt that she was coming along with you. Til brought a special kind of caring to us. We were fortunate indeed to have the years she shared with us.

### **Caring Community**

Barb Wahlstrom reported to the April Board meeting we had no way to help with care of ill children of working parents. The Board discussed a Caring Community. Jewell Ford agreed to contact the Extended Family committee, and ask each to meet with Barb, who hoped to a Day Care Center.

In May Barb discussed a home for older people in connection with a Day Care Center. The Board was enthusiastic, and several people were ready to support it financially. Barb agreed to discuss city planning with Art Ungar. Someone suggested the Veatch committee (a large endowment administered by the Plandome, New York Unitarian Church) might fund such a program.

Board member Deanna Egan recruited Agnes Elfving and intern Sydney Nugent to begin the Caring Community. Eve Gilmartin suggested separate groups for transportation, food, child care, etc. They described the committee as a nurturing support group, a center for those in need of aid, chicken soup, transportation or a sympathetic ear. "We will focus on giving and receiving support. Everyone is invited to share caring and ideas at the first gathering, facilitated by Sydney Wilde-Nugent."

The committee included Dave and Beverly Bortin, Janet King, Jewell Ford, Bonnie Daines, Deanna Egan and Til Evans. Workshops were offered on Hospital Visiting and Bereavement Outreach. They recruited drivers, hospital and home visitors.

In April Arliss Ungar reported coordinators would handle talk-backs after services. The Order of Service would list everyone involved each Sunday – speaker, coordinator, music coordinator, greeter, hospitality person, and technical coordinator.

Spring programs included "Meditation, Centering, Focusing," with Ludell Deutscher. Beth Snortum gave a series on "The Mid-life Years: Crisis or Opportunity." Jim King showed us "How Everything in Your Home Works; What to Do If It Doesn't." There was also another running workshop, and Joseph Fabry's Logotherapy class.

The annual Serve-U featured desserts made by the men of the church, with Bob Baker coordinating. More than 50 services were auctioned. There Serve-U was publicized with the following poem, author unknown:

*Mop a floor, paint a door; cook a feast, walk a beast.  
Have a party on your boat, embroider a rainbow on your coat.  
Repair a crack, massage a back; shop for cars, chart the stars.  
Wash a window til it shines, share a cottage in the pines.  
Bake bread, make a bed; share your tickets, whitewash pickets.  
Giggle with babies, gossip with ladies.*

*Feed a fish, grant a wish; design a room, build a loom.  
Cater a dinner, photo a winner; teach a dance, or alter pants."*

Everyone had a great time, and the Serve-U made about \$1,426 for the church.

### **Personnel**

At an April 1978 Board meeting Art Ungar raised the question, who proposes salary changes for the staff? He recommended a personnel policy to handle this. He felt it was not a function of Ministerial Relations, who propose salaries only for ministerial staff. The Board voted to create a Personnel committee. It was structured with one person appointed by the Board and one by staff, who appointed the third. The committee would make recommendations for salaries working condition, and benefits. The Board appointed Bob baker as their representative.

At the next Board meeting Bob introduced Dave Pierson and Jann Schaub as the other members of the Personnel committee. They met with the Ministerial Relations and Finance committees to discuss salaries. In March 1979 the new Personnel committee consisted of Gerry Egan, Rowena McGregor (staff), and Beverly Bortin for the Board. The Personnel committee began work on a policy for paid staff, and tackled job descriptions.

Peggy Christiansen and several other women formed a UU Women's Federation chapter in May, with 33 members. This was a local unit of the continental organization. Its purpose: "Women joining together to develop supporting relationships and friendships with like-minded women, collectively and creatively build our own inner religious resources, provide opportunities for learning, leadership training, self-expression and intellectual growth, and become involved in the larger causes which concern women." Officers were elected.\* Peter Davies presented a motion to the Board stating that the Board highly favors the UUWF, viewing it as a huge asset to us.

---

\*Peggy Christiansen, president, Jean Nickell vice president, Sharon Jensen secretary, Donnie McMannus treasurer and social action, Jann Schaub and Judy Erb program, Joanne Worcester service, Joyce Mohrman reporter.

In October 1979 the UUWF collected furnishings for the County Battered Women's Shelter. Their November potluck featured paralegal Jean Nickell speaking on Women's Property Rights — divorce settlement, probate and family law. During the year they held monthly potlucks with programs relevant to women (NOW speakers, abortion rights, etc.) as well as an on-going consciousness-raising group. They hoped to become more active in the community in education and service.

Peter's April 1<sup>st</sup> sermon was on "Fooling Ourselves," how we hide ourselves, our delusions and illusions, etc. Mark Belletini was in our pulpit April 8: "Long before humans spoke they danced their religious fervor. Druids, pagans, and early Christians danced during their communions. Only Protestantism was able to make this most ancient religious expression a sin. We will overturn the sin and dance." The service included a flower communion.

Peter Christiansen and Anne Hines gave the Easter service on Mt. Diablo, "Let the Sunshine In," a celebration of *Soular* energy. Til Evans and Philip Wellford served an early breakfast at church for everyone. They gave the service at church, "In Our End is Our Beginning," with music, stories, dancing, and balloons released to float up toward the service on Mt. Diablo. Former Intern Mark Belletini led a Passover Seder at church in April. Fifty people attended, each bringing one of the ritual dishes, including Art Ungar's famous matzo balls.

The Serve-U in April featured tickets to the King Tut exhibit, vacation cabins at Tahoe, dinners, sailing, medicinal herbs, piano lessons, counseling, and much more. Bob Baker put it all together, making \$1,426 for the church.

Anne Hines spoke of how we are touched by Holocausts, past and present, and what they have to do with us. Peter's Mothers' Day sermon, "What Does It Mean to Mother?" had a Boutique after the service. The following week Bob Daines and others presented a service of music. A high point of the service was "Sparky's Magic Piano." Anne Hines was Sparky, and I was the magic piano.

The congregation approved the budget at the meeting June 3. They approved a by-law amendment recognizing Single-U as an Affiliated Group. The 18<sup>th</sup> annual Hungry-U was held in June, a Gay Nineties Revue. It was a rousing success, bringing in \$2,242. Over 200 attended.

Art Ungar introduced new interns Sydney Nugent and Craig Roshaven\* at the May Board meeting. Sydney was with us from June til Christmas, Craig from June to June. Peter's service in May was a discussion of men's liberation, "No Man

\*I believe it was Craig who coined the term "Cross-tingeans" for UUs who, whenever they see a cross, *cringe*. — Editor

is an Island." The following week he did a Question Sermon, inviting questions for discussion during the service. June 24 was designated "Dorothy Caton Sunday." A reception after the service honored our oldest, long-time and best loved church member, moving to Oregon.

The Sunday Service committee gave a service in which members spoke on "I participate in this church by ..." Peter's next sermon was based on a book by Peter Vajk, *Doomsday has been Cancelled*, concerned with space colonization. On June 24 Peter gave a service entitled "The Best Is Yet to Come." The Winter 1980 issue of *Kairos* published this sermon in "The Pulpit: A Review of Current Preaching." Jeremy Taylor spoke on "The Politics of Dreams" the 1<sup>st</sup> of July.

The following Sunday Peter and Peggy Christiansen gave the service, "On Marriage." "Christmas in July" was the title of Til Evans' service in celebration of gifts. She spoke of the gift of time and space, so often forgotten in December's pressures and tensions, to remember and honor the meaning of our lives. In July Peter Davies resigned as treasurer, and Bob Daines was welcomed warmly as the new treasurer. Peter replaced Bill Stevens, who resigned, as new Board member.

During the summer Ben Bortin, minister of the Duluth church, gave a service, as did former intern Doug Strong, minister in Westport Maine. Interns Craig and Sydney were in the pulpit. The Welcome Back Breakfast was called "The Annual Unitarian Style revival meeting — food, people, renewal of church spirit. This is the time to renew old acquaintances, make new ones, and recharge our batteries. Come early to eat delicious pancakes and sausages." Committee skits were wonderful.

Peter began the new year with "The Myths We Live By." The following Sunday he introduced Ginetta Sagan, co-founder of West Coast Amnesty International, and a member of the Italian underground during World War II. She spoke on "Human Rights: You *Can* Make a Difference." Peter next spoke on "Come Build a Church," and "Religion as Science Fiction." Sydney's service was "Living your own theology and telling your own story."

The Program committee put together an excellent Fall program series — Wellness with Dr. Peter Kunkel, and Explorations in Drawing with Dave Pierson. Bob Baker offered Family Feed and Fun Nights, and Ludell Deutscher led a

Meditation class. They provided a series on Hazards of Being Male, Jeremy Taylor's Meaning of Dreams, and enrichment workshops with George and Gini Merrill.

An all-you-can-eat 99¢ spaghetti dinner, garlic bread, and salad, preceded Serve-U '79 in October. Offerings included bagpipe music, a weekend at a nudist camp, airplane trip around the Bay, professional carpentry, dance lessons, moving and hauling, a trip to the zoo, and hanging flower baskets. The church made over \$1,800. Til's service October 21<sup>st</sup> was "Being in the River," a UU journey toward power, wholeness and holiness. Peter next spoke on "What You See is What You Get," a discussion of the different ways we look at things and how our attitude influences our behavior. His sermon in November was "Gimme that old time Religion," discussing a counter-revolution, a return to old-time religion. His next service dealt with love when it becomes an addiction, "Stoned in Love."

All the efforts to make the Church Council, or All-Committee Workshops, self-supporting seemed not to work. Bonnie told the Board that people see attendance a request of the Board rather than their own self-interest. Bob Baker agreed to chair the next one. The Board embarked on a period of education to raise the consciousness of the congregation so they could formalize an annual meeting of the Council in the bylaws.

Dave Bortin remembers how successful the Church Council had been years ago, and how much fun. As many as thirty or more enjoyed a potluck dinner and talked about what each committee was doing, coordinated activities, and discussed how we could help each other. Dave feels the Encounter years were responsible for the decline of the Council and the committee structure of the church. The church reflected "if it doesn't feel good, don't do it." This was not entirely true because the Council functioned well off and on since then.

Art Ungar does not feel the All-Committee Workshop was ever successful for long. Committee members perceive it as just another meeting, and it is hard to see how it can help them or the church. He feels that a church Council, responsible for programming, will become more important as we grow.

The Board appointed Dave Tucker chair of the Denominational Affairs committee. Miriam Hurley again agreed to serve as Coordinator of Coordinators. In November Carol Wrazen called a meeting of the Service committee. Eight people came, and the committee began functioning at last. They sold UUSC holiday cards, collected food for the Food Pantry, and helped the two Vietnamese

families the church was sponsoring. They asked that more Sunday services be devoted to social concerns, and planned a survey of what UUs were doing in the community.

St. John Vianney Catholic Church in Walnut Creek hosted The Ecumenical Thanksgiving Service. Deanna Egan organized Thanksgiving Day dinner at church. 42 attended. The Board voted great appreciation to Deanna for her work in making this happen.

The Caring Committee held a Dessert in December at Janet King's to recruit new people. They publicized "SOS," Support Our Steering Committee, which coordinated and supported volunteers. Frank Cuzzillo was the new SOS coordinator, and Beverly Bortin phone coordinator.

Woody Allen's play "God" was presented as the fourth annual Uni-Players Cabaret Dinner Theater in December.\* It was sold out, making about \$1,000 for the church. Everyone agreed the food was great [Margaret MacLane, chef], the acting superb, and a well done and funny play. Artists and craftspersons again offered hand-made work for the Christmas Boutique. December 2, was a special service in the life of the church, entitled "Belonging: A Celebration of Membership." Eve Gilmartin and the Membership committee created this service. Eve had the tattered Membership Book rebound, and commissioned artist Clarisse Bois to create a new cover. Clarisse described the colors and symbols:

*green for the richness of the earth  
white for dignity, serenity, and elegance  
silken threads from my grandmother for tradition  
gold and silver threads symbolizing the preciousness of life.*

New members were honored and several members spoke of what the church meant to them. Former ministers Aron Gilmartin and Harold Wilson shared the service with Peter Christiansen. This service, celebrating our past and vision of the future, ended with wine and cheese for everyone.

---

\*The cast included Peter and Peggy Christiansen, Dave Pierson, Bernie and Ellie Segal, Leanne Spaulding, Lynne White, Betty Kunkel, and Wayne Johnson. It was directed by Jann Schaub.



## **234    So Great Vision**

The Board distributed the first Annual Report at the congregation meeting in December. It included a statement of the year's activity from the Board, the treasurer, and every committee in the church, plus the Peace Center, Single-U, and LTU Women's Federation. Frank Cuzzillo, Janet King, Joyce Mohrman, Creag Rowland, Dave Tucker, and Arliss Ungar were elected to the Board.

Bob Baker and Charlotte Brown were married by Til Evans in a festive service December 17. Bob was literally a church pillar, putting on hundreds of dinners, and bringing people into the church through his wonderful Kitchen Witches program. He put on the Serve-U auction and dinner every year, and was responsible for dinner-music evenings of jazz, opera, and classics. He taught bridge classes, and participating in practically everything. Charlotte was a former Board president, and active in Long Range Planning. She graduated from Starr King, and is currently serving a church in southern California, but MDUUC is still their "home."

Each year Bob put together the annual Christmas Clam Chowder and Carol Songfest. The Family Christmas service was December 22. Children brought decorations for the tree. There were readings and poetry by Peggy and Peter, Sydney and Craig, songs by Deanna Henderson and the choir, carol singing, and refreshments. The staff gave a Christmas Eve service with songs, carols, stories, and candlelighting ritual. The New Year's Eve Party featured the Marge Chapel Trio and the Freedom Band. Lynne White provided songs, and the year ended with a champagne breakfast.

### **1980**

January began with a service of Installation of the new Board, and appreciation to Board members leaving. Each spoke about what membership on the Board had meant to them, and new members talked of their hopes and dreams for the new year. Bonnie Dairies was elected president. Peter's first sermon of the new decade was "Looking forward to 1984," discussing George Orwell's predictions.

In 1979 Bob Baker started serving free dinners at the church once a month, followed by a program. Spaghetti or chili, each dinner ended with his famous bread pudding. He constantly requested stale bread for this delicious dessert. He served rice pudding when donations were low. On April 12, 1980, after a

wonderful dinner, ten young church musicians provided a concert, Emceed by Lowell Ungar. There was also a magic act by Daniel Longnecker.

A Sing-along followed the September Saturday Night Supper. Dave Bortin, Lynne White, Craig Roshaven, Dave Hudspeth and John Mahoney led the singing. At a later Saturday Night Supper Deanna Henderson, Sarah Rosin, and Deb Baltzo presented vocal music by Handel, Romberg, Puccini, Victor Herbert, Gilbert & Sullivan and others.

In January 1980 Ludell Deutscher resigned as Program committee chair. The Board invited Ludell and the committee to meet with them to help find a chair. Ludell was toasted for the wonderful job she had done the last two years. The Program committee included Mary Lou Rudd, Al Fisher, Gail Rodens, George and Gini Merrill, Larry Weingarten, Joyce Mohrman, and Bob Baker. The Board appointed Jim King chair in March.

The Uni-Caterers put together "The Fabulous Sweetheart Dinner Dance" in February as a benefit for the new furnace. They raised \$350 for the furnace, and \$133 from the raffle to pay for new door closers. Miriam Hurley, in charge of the retrofitting for energy savings, the NRG program, was grateful to Jackie, Grace and Eleanor for this labor of love.

Deanna Egan resigned as coordinator of the Caring committee, and Dora Gonsalves agreed to help. Beverly Bortin reported that the Caring committee had been in operation since November 1979, and averaged two calls per month. They discontinued the hotline, using home phones instead, and donated the answering machine to the church. Beverly was willing to function alone, but needed a committee to send cards, make visits, etc. Board liaison Tom Dragavon agreed to schedule a meeting to recruit a chair.

Peggy Christiansen resigned as president of the UUWF chapter. They met in February to develop new leadership. They were proud of their accomplishments in 1979 — with topics such as ERA, Improv feminist theatre, UU women in history, adoption, and domestic violence, and a NOW/UUWF Christmas Party. Only ten women attended, and none was prepared to take over leadership. They scheduled informal discussion/raps. By January 1981 UUWF disbanded. The treasury was distributed, \$75 to NOW ERA, and \$75 to the church to Buy a Day in June, a program to balance the budget.

Ways & Means held an Elegant Dinner, Art & Collectibles Auction in March. Original art work and unique collectibles were offered. Chef Bernie Segal prepared

the dinner. Servers were the talented Uni-Players. Classical music was provided by Art Ungar and others. The auction netted over \$1,550 and the dinner about \$200.

Long-time church member (22 years!) Lillie Chase gave the first service of a series on religious roots, "Growing Up Can Be Hazardous to Your Health." Lillie shared growing up in a Mormon community, and her search for Unitarian Universalism. Mark Belletini discussed "The End of Piety and the Beginning of Justice." Mark asked, "Is ritual empty? Is social action the only religion worthy of the name?" He proposed a solution to the conflict between the church as a community of prophets versus as a nation of priests, the life of the spirit versus the life of the flesh.

Peter's next sermon was entitled "The Impossible Takes a Little Longer, Sometimes." The following Sunday Til Evans spoke on "UU and You." She shared reflections on our past, our present, and a glimpse into the possible future. Small group discussions followed, with fruit, cheese and coffee. Jane Barlow served as Coordinator of Coordinators, who provided music, Center of Interest and coordinated the service.

Art Ungar introduced Kirby Lewis, Ministerial Relations' recommendation as the new Starr King intern. The Board approved Kirby to begin in April, for one year. Art expected to have a second intern when Craig left in June. Minister Emeritus Aron Gilmartin spoke in March on "Unitarian Universalism: A growth movement?" Peter's next sermon was "Onward and Upward Forever." On March 23, former Board president and Starr King graduate Bill Houff spoke on "The Possible Person in the New Consensual Community."

Art and Arliss Ungar gave a service on Pablo Casals, with music of Bach, Schumann, Casals, and others. Easter celebrations included a campout on Mt. Diablo, with Peter, Craig Roshaven, the choir, and special music by Laurie and Barbara Daines. Bob Baker provided breakfast at church, followed by a family service with Til Evans and Kirby Lewis.

The minister of a Concord Baptist church began a crusade to have *Ms. Magazine* removed from the high school libraries. Peter's eloquent letter in defense of the magazine appeared in the paper and precipitated a widening of the controversy. Peter was one of six witnesses who testified at a public hearing at the Mt Diablo Unified School District. He received a long letter from *Ms.* editor Gloria Steinem thanking him for speaking out on the First Amendment rights of students

and teachers. Staff members at *Ms.* followed this struggle closely, as well as others across the country. Peter spoke before the ACLU chapter on this issue in August.

In March 1981 Gloria Steinem was featured speaker at the Contra Costa County National Women's Political Caucus. She devoted much of her talk to praising Peter's efforts to keep *Ms. Magazine* in the local high schools. Applause repeatedly interrupted her extended tribute. Peter spoke to the Annual Conference of the American Library Association on the subject of 'Intellectual Freedom in the 80s.

Intern Minister Craig Roshaven gave a service titled "The Gnostics: the First Heretics." Craig described them as religious liberals who valued the truth discovered within rather than the dogma of the church. A Dinner Concert Dance May 10<sup>th</sup> featured the Marge Chapel Trio in concert with an evening of jazz. It was followed by music for dancing by the trio. Art introduced new intern Sallirae Henderson at the April Board meeting. She began in June, 1980. Dave Tucker resigned from the Board, and Arliss Ungar agreed to serve as vice president. Bob Baker agreed to stay on as Program chair for six months, until October.

Peter spoke in April on "Promises, Promises." Former intern Anne Hines spoke on the women and men who dared to bear witness to their theology, and have refused to be silenced or ignored for their religious quests and visions, "Let Us Now Praise the Heretics." The following week Gail Miller and intern Kirby Lewis gave the service titled "Despair." Peter's service on May 11 was titled "Now That We're Organized – What the Hell Do We Do?"

A group of church members\* created a weekend retreat for children and adults at the church in May. They began with a potluck supper Friday evening. They had play reading and poetry groups, the youth group movie "Invasion of the Box People," and a slide show, "Unitarians of Walnut Creek." After breakfast Saturday there was bread making, mask making, gardening, a music retreat den, and adventures in listening, seeing and drawing.

After lunch banner making, games, and conversation groups were available. A smoked turkey dinner with songs and sharings of the day led into an evening of folk-dancing, telescope viewing, conversations, and drama performed by the play-reading group. After Sunday morning breakfast the group presented the

---

\*Dave Bortin, Jim King, Bev Smrha, Dave Pierson, Cecil Alberts, Leanne Spaulding, with Til Evans and Kirby Lewis.

Sunday service, “For What Do I Live My Life?” Peter’s next service was an adaptation of San Francisco UU minister David Rankin’s “Reflection on Violence,” which he titled “A Dead Soldier Looks at the War.”

June 7 was the date of the 19th annual Hungry-U. It was called the First Annual Traditional Old Fashioned Hungry U-All 19 Hoedown, with beef stew and cornbread, followed by a Down Home Star Studded Jamboree. About 75 people participated in the dinner, show, and clean-up, and the church made \$1,028.

There was no service the following day. The Sunday after the Hungry-U was traditionally clean-up day to reassemble the two buildings and share breakfast. In the early days Eleanor Pound brought gin fizzes, but times changed, and a more suitable continental breakfast was provided. This year it included champagne. If newcomers arrived not knowing about this annual tradition, they were welcomed with open arms, and sometimes joined the church after this delightful community-building experience.

The Church Council did not prove as successful as the Board had hoped. Only five attended the June meeting convened by vice president Arliss Ungar, to schedule activities for the coming year. It was becoming more important to coordinate calendaring as increasing use of the buildings created conflicts and the need for more careful planning of activities. Summer services included church member Bob Forbes, intern minister at the Monterey church, speaking about Buber’s dialog and community, “Martin Buber: Is I–Thou Possible?” The Social committee scheduled Summer Sociables — barbecues, pool parties, picnics, hikes, etc. Sponsors provided the place and supplies, guests brought food and drinks to share.

Former intern Ann Tyndall and Stan. King graduate Barbara Pescan spoke on “In the Beginning Was the Word.” Language focuses on reality, describing our relationship to ourselves, one another, and our planet. At some point we enter the process and name ourselves. They discussed the journey through unexamined assumptions, sketchy road maps, relics by the wayside, with ourselves as guide *and* destination.

“Potentials: Awesome and Absurd,” was the title of intern Sallirae Henderson’s sermon. Church member Sylvia Gehres’ “This I Believe” service shared how she had incorporated her Catholic background into her religious beliefs. Stockton UU minister Harold Schmidt spoke on Thoreau in August. Harold retired, and is married to the former Elizabeth Spafford, a member of the church.

Peter gave the sermon June 15, "Who Will Protect Us From Our Protectors?" On June 29 his sermon was taken from a story by Ray Bradbury, "Door Into Summer." A cat asks to be let out at every door, looking for the one that has summer rather than snow on the other side.

One memorable event in 1980 deserves mention here. Charlotte Brown set in motion the process of getting in touch with the daughter she gave up for adoption. The young woman was located and was willing to communicate with Charlotte. Charlotte visited her in Boston, where she had grown up in a Unitarian Universalist family. The young woman came to California to visit and meet her two half-brothers. Kirby Lewis performed a Ceremony for the Reunion of Parent and Child for Charlotte Brown and Helen Graham. The whole church community rejoiced in their happiness and in the completion of this circle. In this beautiful and moving service Kirby concluded:

*"Others have been nurturing parents to this daughter. Others have aided these two in the fulfillment of their yearning. We honor these people.*

*"There is mystery here: that these two lives should be so similar, that these two have come together. The planning of the unplanned, moving of the unseen, completing of our actions and desires by what is beyond us. We honor this which we cannot name. We honor the holiness here."*

A successful Welcome Back Breakfast began the church year. We participated in the Co-op Flea Market Beer Booth, which netted over \$300 for the church. Treasurer Bob Daines resigned, but agreed to stay on the Finance committee. Fall programs included "Loving: a worship and study group" with Kirby Lewis. Arby Hall had a book discussion group. Dave Pierson and Tom Dragavon had an Art & Drawing class. "For What Do I Live My Life" was offered with various church leaders, Meaning of Dreams class with Jeremy Taylor, A Mens Group, and "Exploration of Wellness" with Peter Kunkel. Ongoing programs included Friday Night Specials for Singles, a Single Parents Group, Single Support group, the Coffeehouse and Saturday Night Suppers.

Eve Gilmartin shared her religious journey September 21, which began in a fundamentalist minister's family with no room for questioning. Her family sought salvation, never new ideas. Change came with dramatic impact and the quality of "being born again." Eve is the wife of Minister Emeritus Aron Gilmartin.

Til and Peter gave a dialogue sermon on “Happy Families” with participation from the congregation.

In October the UniPlayers presented two hilarious one-act parodies on the 1960s: “Adaptation” by Elaine May, and “Next” by Terrance McNally, directed by Jann Schaub. Tom and Carolyn Tambwekar prepared an Indian Mogul Feast. The church made over \$850. This was the 5th annual Dinner Theater.

Religious leaders from the UUA and across the country attended a National Religious Education Conference at the church the first weekend of October. Peter gave the concluding service Sunday morning entitled “Exponential Education.” Til spoke the following Sunday discussing “Circumstances.” How do we live with the “givens” in our lives — earning a living, cars breaking down, demands of family and friends? How do we find the energy to create and the courage to say YES?

In honor of United Nations Sunday Peter gave a sermon entitled “A World To Win.” The Board approved a special collection for our UU-UN office. Kirby Lewis and new member Nancy Daubner gave us a service the following Sunday on “Acceptance.” An article by Peter Christiansen, “Religion and Science Fiction,” appeared in the liberal religious journal *Kairos* in October. Peter spoke about “UUs and Guilt” at his service November 16, speaking about Alan Harrington’s book, *The Immortalist*.

Bob Baker received a letter from Joan Goodwin at the UUA in Boston in November: “... When the Program Fall ‘80’ came from Mt. Diablo I shared it with others here because it seemed to be a near-perfect example of adult programming to meet the needs of people in all stages of UUism. Til told me you were the person most responsible. Congratulations! I hope you wont mind it being promoted with ministers and others we work with in our extension conferences.”

St. Paul’s Episcopal Church was the site of the annual Thanksgiving service in 1980, “A Covenant of Hope.” We welcomed Metropolitan Community church minister Bob Cunningham for the first time. Sallirae Henderson offered a beautiful prayer in sign language. Temple Isaiah was now meeting with other groups in the Lafayette area. We had our usual Thanksgiving dinner at the church.

The Board decided to hold Council meetings only at the beginning of the church year to coordinate the year’s events. On November 30 Sallirae gave a sermon on “De-mystifying the Bible.” She explained, “Most often we see it used

as a tool of oppression by conservatives." She asked, "How did it come to be? And what is its relevancy for us?"

Peter spoke in December on "Pastors and Politics," an irreverent look at the moral majority. The congregation elected Board members and a Nominating committee after the service, followed by a big stone soup luncheon. The annual Arts & Crafts Christmas Bazaar was held that day. Peter and Peggy's Holiday Open House was that evening — a full church day!

Church member Joyce Mohrman gave a "This I Believe" service on December 14. Unlike others in this series Joyce did not come from a religious tradition. She had nothing to rebel against, reject, or draw on for her beliefs, and asked, "Does this make a difference?"

On Saturday before Christmas the Extended Family's Hanging of the Green party was held to decorate the tree, followed by Bob Baker's Annual Clam Chowder/Carol Sing with the choir. "Don't Let the Grinch Steal Your Christmas" was the title of the holiday family service, with refreshments for everyone. The Christmas Eve Candlelight service was a re-telling of the Christmas story in songs, words, and pictures. Kirby Lewis ended the year with a service on the meaning of Love.

## **1981**

The new year began with a service by dream-worker Jeremy Taylor, "Nurturing the Creative Impulse." After the service Ludell Deutscher was honored at the new Walnut Creek Civic Center Council Chambers, where she spoke about her art. We viewed her powerful mural installed in the entrance. Afterwards Betty and Peter Kunkel presided over a potluck luncheon at their home.

Dave and Florence Pierson, off to Mexico for six months, were honored at a goodbye potluck party. The Board held its annual retreat at Pt. Bonita in Marin. January 11 was the Board Recognition service in appreciation of retiring Board members, and new Board members and officers. Janet King was the new president, Carol Alosi vice president, and Frank Cuzzillo secretary. A waffle breakfast followed the service.

Peter's sermon January 18 was "A Nation of Boat People." The church had adopted two families, refugees from Vietnam. It was a fitting time to reflect on America's origins, a place of refuge for all oppressed people. Sallirae Henderson



began a Vespers Service Sunday evening in February. She also gave the sermon that morning on "Coping."

The following week Peter and I gave a dialogue sermon on "Freedom and Connection." We shared thoughts and feelings from our (sometimes heated) discussions of the struggle between doing and having what we want, and the need to belong and be cared for. In addition to ten ongoing programs, three new ones began: Improvisational Theatre with Tom Wills, a beginning bridge group, and "The Ultimate," the meaning of existence, with Kirby Lewis.

We enjoyed a Saturday Night Supper and Evening of Classical Music in January, with soprano Barbara Prall, flutists, violinists and pianists. Art Ungar played bassoon with the Moraga Woodwind Quintet. February featured Young Performers of the church., and the first performance of the UU Madrigal Singers, ten voices under the direction of Dave Bortin.

Kirby Lewis next spoke on "Hope." And Peter on marriage, "Dearly Beloved, We Are Gathered Here ..." Peter said, "In the past 15 years I have committed matrimony about one thousand times, and committed to it twice. As spring approaches I want to discuss the institution of 'wedding' and that of marriage as well." Bob Baker again put on the Annual Serve-U and Spaghetti Dinner and Auction. Some of the offerings: five hours work in your garden, ten car washings, champagne breakfast, airplane tour of the Bay, three hour's instruction in horse management. This year the Serve-U made over \$3,000.

Til spoke on "Tradition" in March, followed by church member and Starr King student Bob Forbes speaking on "Renewal: There is Life After 50"\* Peter's next service was "Intelligence: The Ultimate Aphrodisiac." Kirby Lewis led a Quaker style service inviting personal statements on the faith we live by. Peter spoke on "The Message of Gemini," in which he discussed current research on twins. (Peter has an identical twin brother). Church member Lloyd Scaff gave the service on April 12, "O God, What Changes Thou Hast Wrought! — (particularly in the last sixty-one years)."

In April Peter asked the Board to replace Dave Bortin on the Ministerial Relations committee. Peter believed Dave was functioning in an advocacy position.

---

\* I believe this was the first of several of Bob's services for which I custom-composed songs — Editor

The committee was not fostering open communication and dialogue among the ministers, board and congregation. They replaced Dave with Bonnie Daines.

Saturday Night Supper in April featured a lasagna dinner followed by Bob Daines' video of the 1978 Hungry-U. This was the first non-professional video most of us had seen. The technology was new and because of his work, Bob was able to record this show.

An April bon voyage party honored Lloyd and me as we embarked on our once-in-a-lifetime trip to Greece, and my fifteen years as church secretary. Everyone brought anecdotes and favorite desserts to share. This was the work of Bob Baker, always on the look-out for people to honor.

"Make a Joyful Noise" was the title of the Easter service on our hill, followed by a pancake breakfast, and service in the sanctuary. Blown eggs were decorated during the breakfast for the service. This was followed by Sallirae Henderson, "Its Mothers' Day and the Topic is Sin!" Peter titled his next service "The Fires Below and the Heavens Above." He then talked about "The Wizard of the Dome." We held a joint Passover service with Mark Belletini and Starr King Unitarian Church in Hayward.

In May the church held a Grand Old All-American Picnic, Revival & Milk Chocolate Bacchanal & Spring Boutique. There were snail races, games, a raffle, a juggler & mime, a cake walk, dunk-a-deacon, fortune teller, kissing booth, and cotton candy. Everyone had a wonderful time, and the church realized a \$100 profit. June 6 was the Hungry-UU review. A chicken barbecue on the patio preceded the songs, skits, a raffle, and desserts after the show. There was no art auction, but the show made a profit of \$711.

Sallirae's last Vespers service as our intern was "A Sharing of Selves." Everyone brought something of significance to share. Sallirae titled her last service "In the Beginning Man Created God (Women had their own)." Jim and Janet King hosted a Goodbye Swim Party for Sallirae. Peter gave his last service before summer, "How Can We Tell the Good Guys from the Bad Buys Without a Program?" Church member John Cline gave a service about "The Creative Process in Art and Science."

During the annual canvass comments are carefully preserved to learn how people feel about the church. These comments are always hard to generalize, ranging from "I don't like the minister" to "I don't come if the minister isn't speaking." One commented, "The congregation is too laid back, Me generation,

pop California liberal ... lacking understanding of good religious tradition." Over the years there has been a trend away from the early humanism toward a more "spiritual" emphasis. Our whole society reflects this change. Possibly one-quarter of the books for sale at COSTCO are religious books. Just a few years ago there were none.

At the May 25 Board meeting Peter announced he had met with the Ministerial Relations committee to tender his resignation, effective the end of August 1982. The Board accepted his resignation with regret. They planned a mini-retreat in August to consider ways to communicate effectively with the congregation on what we needed or expect from a minister. They also discussed how to deal with Peter's leaving. Peter announced it at the service the following Sunday.

The newsletter of June 4, 1981, contained Peter's letter advising the congregation, "I am resigning as minister of MDUUC and leaving the active ministry at the end of the next church year, August, 1982. This has been a turbulent time for liberal churches. Membership in our denomination has steadily declined." He referred to a study of more than 100 crisis situations in which ministerial leadership was challenged, with no effective means of handling these conflicts. He planned to go into private counseling and writing. Peter concluded by saying he wanted to make his last year a great year in the life of the church, and "I will need your help more than ever."

The conflict between Peter and some members of the church had been building for some time. Perceptions of the role of the minister changed as we made our way through the 60s and 70s. Peter felt his style of ministry was no longer what was wanted. At Peter Davies' request the Board formed a committee to explore alternatives to a traditional minister. What are various roles for professionals? Do we want a Search committee?

The Board held informal discussions every Sunday after the service to help the congregation deal with Peter's resignation, and what we should do in the future. Board members took turns facilitating. These proved valuable, and were continued through September.

The Board formed a Professional Leadership Task Force, chaired by Bonnie Daines, to:

1. Continue discussion groups
2. Design an easily tabulated questionnaire to survey the needs of the congregation
3. Research alternatives and options
4. Create an ongoing Communications committee to learn what people want, promote dialogue with coffees, dinners, etc.

The Board welcomed new interns in April, third year student Michael Seider, and second year student Carol Hilton. Joyce Mohrman resigned from the Board to spend six months in Santa Fe. She was replaced by Jann Schaub.

A Goodbye party was held for Bob Daines, moving to Portland. Bob had given immeasurably to the church, doing complex remodeling, rewiring, repairs, creating a sound system, serving on the Finance committee, the Board, as treasurer, and as president. Gifts included a UU medallion, a Rubber Ducky symbolizing his creation of M-DUUC, and a packet of felt tip pens which he always had ready to illustrate a point. He also received an umbrella, a welcome gift, as it rained the first 21 days he was in Portland!

"Report from Lindisfarne" was Carol Hilton's first service. This community in Colorado was founded by cultural historian William Thompson, a community of scholars who share a vision of planetary culture as well as personal transformation. Carol participated in a conference at Lindisfarne, and shared her experiences with the congregation.

Michael Seider spoke of "Calvin's Insidious Legacy," discussing the influence of predestination, and comparing Calvin's ideas with our way of perceiving our (and others') place in the world.

Mark Belletini spoke on the message no one knew Jesus preached. Mark said, "the meaning of Jesus in our culture has been a challenge to me for many years," and he spoke about Jesus from his perspective, "And Now for the Good News!"

Starr King held its summer session in Crete, the largest Greek island. Til Evans, Bob Forbes, Beverly Smrha, and the Ungar family, all from our church, attended. They gave the service August 23, "From Ariadne to Zorba — Lessons from Crete." Til and Bob's service spoke of "Summer Ripening." They shared views from five places — England and family, Crete and embracing, Delphi and

power, Florence and richness, and England revisited. All were places Til and Bob had traveled during the summer.

The newsletter reported what the Service committee had accomplished:

- Co-sponsored two Vietnamese families
- Participated in "Walkers for Hunger," contributing \$293 to Church World Services
- Presented speakers, films and study of El Salvador
- Sold cards and jewelry for support of UUSC world projects
- Sponsored a UUSC Sunday service

All this had been done with the leadership of Jean Zwickel. Jean and Abe were leaving for Puerto Rico to work for its independence. The newsletter article asked, "Who will step forward to take Jean's place?"

Bob Forbes agreed to serve as chair of the Service committee. The group began work on the Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze, and the Board approved a vote on this issue at the December congregational meeting. Those present voted to endorse the Freeze Initiative. The Board approved a monthly before-service Current Affairs Forum, and asked that different views be expressed. Bob Bovard was the first speaker, discussing his experience at the Diablo Canyon nuclear power protests.

Kitchen Witches, Bob Baker's crew of kitchen workers was grateful to Bill Gehres for the hours of skilled work he put in making the huge barbecue grills "for our great cooking and eating parties." This announcement by Gwyn Reid, appeared in the July newsletter. Gwyn was one of many church members who found her way into the church community through Bob's inspired Kitchen Witches.

Michael Seider spoke the first Sunday in September on "The Truth Shall Make You Free," celebrating and affirming individual and communal quests that make us free to love and live. Included were dances, jazz chants, dramatizations from scripture, concluding with a symbolic affirmation of our indebtedness to each other.

Forty-five young people and adults, under the direction of Carol Alosi, showed up for the annual fall clean-up to wash windows, shampoo rugs, paint,

weed, repair, haul trash, and enjoy a delicious lunch. The building and grounds looked wonderful for the beginning of the fall season.

The church year began with the Welcome Back Annual All Church Family Breakfast September 13, with pancakes, sausages, and fresh fruit. The following Sunday Peter opened the new church year with a sermon titled "God is a Millionaire."

Bob Baker began the year with a Dinner for Newcomers in September. It included hors d'oeuvres, dinner, and discussion. It was a relaxed evening where newcomers met the minister and people from various church activities, shared a meal, and joined in discussion. "You don't have to bring anything, make a reservation, or pay anything. Just come!" urged Bob. These dinners became a tradition which Bob continued for many years.

Also in September, the first Saturday Night Supper, also Bob's creation, featured hotdogs, beans, corn, and bread pudding, plus a songfest around the campfire for the whole family. Children were in the Fireside room roasting marshmallows, s'mores, popcorn, and telling stories.

Arliss reported to the Board that of the 400 surveys distributed, 122 had been returned. People were evenly divided between those who did and did not want "more spiritual experience." Most (71-39) preferred a search for a full-time minister. A meeting to explore what form of ministry we wanted was held at the church the end of November, with Bonnie Daines facilitating.

The Board decided to participate in the District's Review & Renewal program. It was a way for the total church to look at itself and how it wants to be, including discussion of alternatives to ministry. Twenty-three attended the first meeting with facilitators Patti Teague and Dwight Smith, discussing who and what the church is.

Carol Hilton gave the sermon on October 4, "Beyond the Intellect," celebrating those whose actions match their words and feelings. Next Peter answered the question, "So What Do You Believe?" Someone had recently asked Peter this question, so he discussed his religious beliefs. Til's service spoke of "A Celebration of Being and Doing."

New Fall programs included "Spiritual Meanings in Our Lives," with Til Evans and Bob Forbes. Along with the Vespers service Carol Hilton taught a folk-dance class, and Allison Carter a recorder class. Ludell Deutscher had a study

group of Alan Watts' *The Wisdom of Insecurity*, using tapes and the book, and Margaret MacLane gave a class in stress reduction.

A Saturday Hands-On workshop in October for children and adults featured mask making with Mary Lou Rudd, Carol Alosi, and Sharon Jensen. Carol showed slides of ethnic masks from around the world. There was also bread making with chef Frank Cuzzillo. The sixth October Dinner Theatre presented *Comings and Goings*, by Megan Terry, directed by Tom Wills.\* Art Ungar prepared a gourmet Italian dinner. It was a huge success, making about \$600. The first November Saturday Night Supper featured pianists, singers and musicians of the church. The Moraga Woodwind Ensemble also performed.

On U.N. Sunday Peter spoke about the United Nations, "At Last — A Chance!" A special collection supported the work of the UU-UN office. Peter had visited the UN and found it a fabulous and fascinating experience. Bob Forbes service was titled "Thomas Paine, a Prophet Without Honor." Bob said Tom Paine was one of his personal models — an international rebel, a universal seeker after religious freedom for all people for all time. [Editor: A tradition having been established, I composed a song about Paine for Bob's service, at his request.]

Peter spoke about "How to Live a Greater Life" in November, and then "The Virtue of Sin." Next, Michael Seider spoke on "Paul's Letter to the UUs of Walnut Creek." Church members and artists Ludell Deutscher, Bernie Segal, and Dave Pierson gave the sermon December 6<sup>th</sup> on "The Creative Process as a Religious Experience." Aron and Eve Gilmartin held an open house for signing the initiative petition for the Bilateral Nuclear Weapons Freeze.

MDUUC was the site of Starr King Commencement in 1981, with former interns Craig Roshaven and Philip Wellford graduating. Our own Madrigal singers led by Dave Bortin performed.

Saturday Night Supper Musical program included young and old church musicians: Marge Chapel, Deanna Henderson, Jeff Morganthaler, Barbara Prall, Sarah, Andrea and Nicole Rosin, Art Ungar, Eric Wiley, and Ginger Young. Members of the Livermore Fellowship and Hayward church were guests. They had shared the afternoon in discussions of ways each group operates, and how to help each other.

---

\*Peggy Christiansen, Dave Pierson, Bernie and Ellie Segal, Gail Rodens and Randall Wiley were in the cast.

The 1981 Ecumenical Thanksgiving service was at Walnut Creek United Methodist Church. The theme was "The Covenant of Liberty," and the diversity that exists within this setting. There was music, covenanting with bread, and the combined choirs. Deanna Egan again organized a communal Thanksgiving dinner.

Four new Board members were elected at the congregational meeting in December: Barbara (Isabel) Johnson, Jann Schaub, Bob McNally, and Marcia Weingarten. In November the Hands On workshop featured George Nichols leading science and nature explorations, and "Cooking with Pumpkins." Jewell Ford arranged for the Bloodmobile to be at church in December, and thirty-two people contributed blood.

Peter and Peggy held their annual Holiday Open House. Bonnie Daines continued to facilitate meetings to discuss Ministerial Alternatives. The Board provided opportunities for everyone to have input into this important decision. The annual Christmas Boutique featured handcrafted delights for holiday giving, a great time for children to find holiday gifts for their friends and families. Church artists Ludell Deutscher, Bernie Segal, and Dave Pierson gave the service December 6, "The Creative Process as a Religious Experience."

Holiday observances included the Extended Family Tree Decorating Party and clam chowder dinner, with the MDUUC Madrigal Singers, the choir, and carol singing. "Celebrating the Promise" was the title of the family Christmas service and party. We enjoyed music, stories and songs for the whole family with Peter, Til, Carol Hilton, Michael Seider, and me. Deanna Henderson and the choir sang Christmas music and carols. Each family received a gift for their tree made by Eleanor Pound.

The afternoon of Christmas Eve celebrants made luminarias, ate stone soup, listened to stories, and wrapped gifts in front of the fire. The service in the evening, "The Hopes and Fears of all the Years ..." ended with the candle-lighting ceremony.

This year the New Year's Eve Party featured a gourmet Chinese dinner, Chinese bread pudding, and a show, all put together by Bob Baker. Hosted by Walt Peterkin, the stage show featured church musicians and performers. There was champagne at midnight and dancing til dawn.



1982

Interested people and Board members attended a Review & Renewal retreat in January 1982. Review and Renewal second stage permitted participants to contrast their ideal images of the church with perceptions of reality. This led to discussion of recruitment and leadership development, improving procedures, how to facilitate self-criticism, and “what we are becoming.” The third stage would involve the congregation in this exploration.

Carol Alosi, Board Liaison to the Service committee, requested a special collection to raise money for an airlift of donated medical supplies to Poland. This totaled \$236, a marvelous response. The Membership committee held a Recognition for New Members at a January service, followed by a reception honoring the new members. They sponsored a Newcomers Dinner in January, to discuss the denomination and our church community.

A performance of “Spoonriver Anthology” by Edgar Lee Masters, was presented in January. Marcy Straw directed, and producer was Gail Miller. Charlotte Brown, Peter Christiansen, Wayne Johnson, Dave Pierson, Sonja Shumaker performed. This was also a Dinner Theater.

Former intern Anne Hines spoke on “Prayer: A Personal Struggle.” She raised questions she’d been dealing with on the issue of prayer. Intern Carol Hilton spoke on “The Chosen,” exploring the mystery, horror and blessedness of existence. “Why me? Why them? Why Us?” Til Evans spoke next on “Offerings,” sharing our particular gifts at the different ages and stages of our lives.

New officers were elected at the Board retreat. Tom Dragavon was elected president, Jann Schaub vice president, Bob McNally secretary, and Dave Hudspeth treasurer.

Billie Barbara Masten and daughter April Masten conducted the service February 14, “Owning the Beast and the Bad Girl,” their poetry and songs. Art introduced first- year Starr King student Dwight Smith, our new intern, at the March Board meeting. The Board approved his year-long internship. Dwight was one of the facilitators working with us on Review and Renewal.

Bonnie Daines reported on the five open Ministerial Options meetings in February and March, listing the five alternatives being considered:

1. Traditional — one full-time minister (plus Til Evans half-time) — 3–12 months with no senior minister

2. Co-Ministers, Triad (Til, congregation, and ? each one-third)
3. Multiple — 3 or 4 ministers and administrator (trial interim)
4. Lay Mini stay — (with 1, 2 or 3)
5. Individuals in Process — (no ministers or administrator)

Peter spoke about “The Right to Bear Arms?” Carol Hilton’s service was entitled “Letting Go.” This was in preparation of Review and Renewal Sunday the following week. Dwight Smith and Sara Barber-Braun described the program, Carol talked about sorting out who we are and what we believe, and where we’ve been, where we are, and where we’re headed.

The Serve-U again featured Bob Baker’s Spaghetti dinner, with sailing trips, wine country picnics, whale watching, champagne lunch, weekend at Tahoe or Lake Berryessa among many others. It made \$2,800.

Peter wanted to do something special for the church during his last year as a UU minister. With the approval of the Board he formed a committee to review organizational forms to modernize and improve them. He gathered a committee — Tom Dragavon, Sylvia Gehres, Gail Miller, and John Morgenthaler. They identified three problem areas:

1. Continuity of committee leadership. Board liaison becomes chair until a chair is found.
2. Each committee prepares written year-end summary of its activities and goals for the coming year to be passed on each year, and also published in annual report.
3. Experiment with Committee Night. Following potluck supper and brief program, all committees would hold a regular meeting. We would form new committees and recognize inactive ones at this time.

The Board was enthusiastic about the third. They planned an All Church Activities Potluck March 22. Liaisons would share this with their committees and bring back ideas as to how this experiment could meet their needs. Perhaps they could do goal-setting. The main purpose was to introduce people to all the church activities. They asked Peter’s Organizational Task Force to help plan this.

The Board decided the June Activities night would do fall calendaring, as there was no place where this was happening. They formed a committee to plan

future meetings with Jann Schaub, Joanne Gerow, Janet King and Tom Dragavon. Charlotte Brown gave a service on "Grief, Denial, and Transformation, from the Adoption Experience."

On April 18, 1982, we had our first Meditation service for some time in the sanctuary prior to the 10:30 service. It was a time devoted to silence, to meditate, explore inner spaces, and "listen to your own music." Participants brought a pillow and were asked to be prompt so that the mood was not interrupted. The Meditation group was begun by Ludell Deutscher and Lynne White. It has continued since then.

Til and Peter gave a dialogue sermon, "UU Reflections on God." Michael Seider's last sermon was "This I Believe." Til Evans led a Tenebrae service Friday evening before Easter, a quiet, participatory service to remember things we have let go of, as we prepare for renewal. A time to honor lost relationships, ways of behaving we no longer need, the last of the rain, and to recognize the lack of freedom of many of the worlds people.

Easter began with breakfast followed by "Affirming Life: A Celebration," and the annual Flower Communion. The service on April 18 was "Creative Process II: Theatre Arts, The Creative Process in Action." Tom Wills, Sonja Shumaker, and Bernie Segal did a scene from Neil Simon's play, "Chapter II," as a working rehearsal, illustrating their experiences as performing artists.

Peter's service on April 25th was "Why I Read Banned Books (and You Should Too)." May Day on the Mountain featured weekend camping and a worship service by Carol Hilton, followed by a potluck lunch. Bob Forbes, Til Evans and Dwight Smith facilitated a participation service at the church, "Choice and Reality." Art Ungar organized a cooperative Seder with the Livermore Fellowship and the Hayward church, with Til Evans, Hayward minister Mark Belletini, and Livermore minister Elizabeth Jones.

The Service committee held a Rummage Sale in May, with proceeds to strengthen county families. It was the Year of the Family. They also held two Bake Sales each month to support UUSC. Bob Baker served a luncheon with proceeds for UUSC. The Forum discussed the anti-nuclear film "The Last Epidemic."

In May we had one of the best children's productions ever staged at the church. It was the Children's Dinner Theater, "Did You Ever Wonder?" Young people put on a show they created with director Tom Wills. They created each scenes, and performances attested to the acting ability in young people who are

fortunate enough to work with a skilled director.\* Bob Baker and the Kitchen Witches prepared the delicious dinner.

After the Ministerial Alternatives meetings the Board created the following schedule so that everyone would be heard:

- May 1 Last date to submit written proposals to the Board
- May 9 Copies of proposals distributed at Sunday service
- May 16 Worship service led by Art Ungar, presenting alternatives and moderating small group discussions
- May 19 Open Forum to discuss alternatives
- May 23 Congregational meeting to choose alternative, with provision for absentee ballots.

The congregation vote May 23 was 75 in favor of a full-time minister, 34 for part-time supervising minister with outstanding ministers and lay people serving under contract. Three votes were cast for "other." The Board met with Joy Atkinson, Ministerial Settlement Representative who explained the process of calling a minister. She said it was important to have an Interim minister, and that the process would probably take a year.

Rev. Atkinson stressed the need for a Search committee that represents the congregation as closely as possible. They must maintain strict confidentiality, be willing to put in a great deal of time, and appreciate the long-range consequences of this responsibility. Board nominees for the Search committee were: Andy Baltzo, Bonnie Daines, Jim King, Jackie Miskel, John Morgenthaler, Gail Rodens, Dave Pierson, Ellie Segal, Janet Smith, Bruce Bignami, and Arliss Ungar. Nominations could be made by petition. The congregation voted unanimously to accept this slate. The committee elected Jackie Miskel chair.

New intern Holly Horn Neuman was introduced to the Board. A born UU, completing her second year at Starr King, Holly served on the staff of Common Ground, the UUA youth organization in Boston. Holly was doing a Clinical Pastorate at the County Hospital working with disturbed youth and their families.

---

\*Performers included Jason Christiansen, Nicole Ghent, Alison Sinookler, Selena Steinmetz, Anil Tambwekar, Sandra Weingarten, Heather Wiley, and Ginger Young

Among her talents, Holly played the Irish harp. The Board asked staff members to prepare written descriptions of duties to help plan for the interim period. The 1982-83 budget provided four hours per week additional secretarial time, the first increase since the job began in 1966.

Til's service May 23 was "Loss of Innocence — Search for a New Vision." Once we glimpse another reality we are no longer innocent, and must make choices based on the new knowledge. To not choose is to choose by default. Carol Hilton spoke on "A Chorus Line?" interweaving thoughts on the cosmic dance with the inner dance. Peter's next service was "Reflections on Roles."

The Hungry-U Barbecue and Art Auction, the annual end-of-the-year bash and fund raiser, was held June 5. The show, "You've Come a Long Way, Baby!" was directed by Lillie Chase. The show and auction made \$1,825.

June 27 was Peter's last service at our church, and as a minister, "Farewell." Peter was honored at a reception after the service. Peggy and Peter were honored at a Gala Gourmet Potluck July 25. The fabulous show starred Agnes Elfving, Annelle Rouse, Joyce Mohrman, Dave Pierson, Jann Schaub, Sonja Shumaker, Randall Wiley and me. A recipe book with members' gourmet delights was presented to Peggy (cooking was not among Peter's many talents). A book of mementos from his six years with us was presented to him, and we wished him well in his new ventures.

"American Dreams" was the title of Kirby Lewis' 4<sup>th</sup> of July service. The following Sunday Carol Alosi gave the service, "The non-Newtonian Religion of an Obscure 20<sup>th</sup> Century Scientist." Carol had just completed her doctorate in Plant Physiology, and led the exciting summer science program for children.

On July 11, Intern Dwight Smith discussed Francis David, founder of the Unitarian movement in Transylvania in the 1500s. Dwight thought Francis David would fit right in at MDUUC, as much had not changed in 400 years.

Peter Christiansen's seven years as our minister started out with high hopes. Art Ungar feels that, as is often the case, a Search committee emphasizes traits in the new minister that were felt lacking in the one being replaced. While no one ever faulted the content of Gil's sermons, most felt a lack in his delivery, and hoped for a minister who would have a more exciting style. Peter had this, and with his background in social action, he seemed the perfect choice.

Peter's ministerial style reflected the laid back 60s and 70s. As the 70s drew to a close we wanted a more intentional, committed person as our minister. Peter

felt this was not a role in which he was comfortable. He said he realized the ministry had changed, and it was no longer what he wanted to be. Peter left the ministry, and went into private counseling. Later he became Program Director for Contra Costa County prison population. While people admired many things about Peter, most felt it was a wise decision for him to leave. The church was ready to move on to a new kind of ministry.





### Part 3 TIL EVANS AND BOB FORBES, 1983

The Board asked Til Evans to serve as minister during Peter's vacation in August through the end of the year, when she would assume full-time faculty duties at Starr King. We were fortunate to have a minister of Til's religious commitment and skill during this period of transition.

Art Ungar feels it was the greatest good fortune that Til was available to become our half-time Director of Religious Education. Because Jo Bartlett was half-time, money was available to hire her. Our confidence in Til and our love for her was evident in our decision to ordain her, and ask her to serve as our minister the five months until Bob Forbes was called as Interim Minister. Til's ability to nurture growth in children and adults has stayed with us. We are all better at this because of her.

The Program committee offered Summer Sunday Sociables, leisurely afternoon cookouts, facilitated by Gini Merrill. Hosts provided the home, barbecue and (sometimes) pool, guests brought food and drink. Everyone enjoyed the Sociables, a great way for new people to get acquainted.

Those who attended the General Assembly in Maine shared their experiences of "Connection and Independence – a Collective Journey," at the service August first.\* Dwight Smith spoke the following week on "Erasmus: the Man who Laid the Egg that Luther Hatched." The Reformation and several important ideas in Unitarianism came from Erasmus, an unusual Catholic in the early 1500s.

Several church members talked about "Becoming a Unitarian" in a service led by Dwight Smith, Bob Maxwell, Daniel Zwickel, and I. Bob Baker and bassoon player Art Ungar gave the service the following week, "Participating in Music as Listener and Performer."

The All Church Breakfast began the new church year by planting a ceremonial tree. Claire Fischer, Aurelia Reinhardt Professor at Starr King, gave the first service. She spoke on "Celebrating Connections," exploring the meaning of beginnings and memories. Jeremy Taylor gave a service about "Dreams and Wisdom Stories."

---

\*Bob Forbes, Til Evans, Dave & Florence Pierson, Dave & Beverly Bortin, Judy & Beverly Smrha, and Lynn Ungar.



October 3 Til Evans' service was titled "A Unitarian Universalist View of Sin." Til said we often deal with our negative feelings about sin by ignoring or denying it exists. She explored a more inclusive way of looking at this unsettling concept. Following the service members and friends joined in a Service of Celebration of Til Evans as our minister.

New offerings from the Program committee included Lynne White's Monday Morning Music Movement and Meditation, "while befriending our bodies we will touch into the power and energy of movement and dance." Til Evans gave a class called "How Do I Fit In?" for newcomers to meet people of the church and share a variety of ideas and understandings about those of us who are UU's. Handywoman Around the House featured various woman demonstrating their home remodeling projects.

At its October meeting the Service committee showed the film, "No Frames, No Boundaries," and held a discussion about what we can do to prevent a nuclear war. In November the Service committee presented "The Service Committee is You and Me." Members were Agnes Elfving, Dave Bortin, Marge Trumpler, Bob Forbes, Florence Pierson, and Andy Baltzo.

Dwight Smith reported the staff planned to revitalize the Caring committee. They felt it should be a function of the whole church, not a committee. Eve Gilmartin agreed to be involved. They were recruiting individual coordinators of transportation, meals, visits, etc. They planned to train counselors. Dwight's October service was the last in a series about our early UU roots, back to Quoheleth, who supposedly wrote Ecclesiastes. Holly Horn Neuman spoke about "A UU Journey." The service included a Recognition of New Members led by Holly and Eve Gilmartin. Twenty new people were welcomed into membership.

The Meditation group presented the first November service. They met in the sanctuary every Sunday before the regular service. This was an experimental service of chanting, Tibetan bells, and silence, to enjoy the connection with the inner self. Til's service on November 14 celebrated the "Circle of Life," and the longing that is part of all the ages of our lives. It included a Dedication of Children, a service in which parents commit themselves to the well-being of their children, and the church community honors and supports this commitment.

"We Are Family," was the title of the ecumenical Thanksgiving service, at B'nai Shalom's new synagogue across the street. A combined choir sang, and food was collected for St. Paul's Food Pantry. Lynne White, Gail Smookler, Ludell

Deutscher and Leanne Spaulding (Schlegal) coordinated the annual church Thanksgiving dinner, enjoyed by more than 50 adults and children.

The Annual Uni-Players Dinner Theater in November presented "The Night Thoreau Spent in Jail" by J. Lawrence and Robert Lee, directed by Tom Wills.\* The Tambwekars prepared an Indian chicken curry dinner, and the church made about \$600. The Christmas Boutique was held after the December 5 service.

Jackie Miskel resigned as chair of the Search committee because of her growing business, and Arliss Ungar was named chair. Bonnie Daines facilitated a series of meetings with members for their input into the selection process. The committee devised a detailed survey, completed by members and friends, and sent to the UUA, one factor in helping the UUA recommend candidates.

### **Bob Forbes**

At its meeting November 22, the Board interviewed three candidates, and chose Bob Forbes to serve as half-time Interim Minister, beginning January 1, 1983. Bob had just graduated from Starr King, was a member of the church, and the person we wanted as our interim minister.

After retiring from a distinguished career as an educator, Bob attended Starr King School for the Ministry, graduating in November, 1982. Also graduating were Carol Hilton, Kirby Lewis, Michael Seider, Sallirae Henderson, Anne Hines, and Albione Mahoney - all former interns or members of our church, a record number!

A former member of the Hayward church, Bob had been an active member of our church for some time. He was devoted to our community. A sensitive and caring person, he was a dedicated social activist. Some were concerned that because of his illness it would be difficult to fulfill this demanding role. As it turned out, whatever strengths he lacked were more than compensated for by his empathy, caring, and support of others facing serious illness, and his passionate support of peace.

---

\* The cast: Randall Wiley, Bernie Segal as Thoreau, Ellie Segal, Dave Pierson, Tom Dragavon, Jann Schaub, Peggy and Jason Christiansen, Jerry Turner, Sarah Rosin, and Dave Birmingham.

Holly Horn called her December service "Revisioning Community." Dwight Smith shared his impressions of the past year in his service, "A Shotgun Wedding." At the congregational meeting new Board members elected were Bob Allen., Dave Hudspeth, Jean Nickell, Thelda Poteet, and Jill Thomas-Bignami. The congregation approved the Ordination of church member and Starr King graduate Albione Mahoney.

The Saturnalia Extended Family invited everyone to help choose the Christmas tree from our hill, and decorate it with home-made ornaments from home. Later we enjoyed the Annual Christmas Carol Dinner of clam chowder and carol singing with the choir and the Madrigal Singers.

"In Praise of Darkness and of Light" was the theme of the Family Christmas service and party. It included "a beautiful ornament made by Eleanor Pound for your tree, a symbol of appreciation from the church community of your involvement and belonging." There was as always the Christmas Eve Candlelight Service for all ages.

### 1983

Gail Miller, church member and chair of Sunday Service committee, gave the first service of the new year. We honored Til Evans with a Goodbye party January 9, following Bob Forbes' first sermon as our Interim Minister, "The Holy and the Aweful."

The Board and staff held their retreat in January. Bob McNally was chosen president, Jill Thomas-Bignami and Jann Schaub vice presidents, Jean Nickell secretary, and Marty Dimbat replaced Dave Hudspeth as treasurer. Bob Forbes asked Bill Chapel to serve as his representative on the Ministerial Relations committee. Bonnie Daines continued as Board person, and Eleanor Pound the third member of the committee.

Dwight Smith gave his fourth Roots sermon, "Unitarian Roots, Sophia Fahs, and Diving Deep." Dwight said we are like stones skipping over water, not knowing when the edge will cut into the water. "When it happens, dive deep and trust yourself." The Board Recognition service January 23 honored retiring Board members, and welcomed new ones in a Ceremony of Installation. The congregation voted to ordain Bob Forbes.

Bob called his service February 13, "Let's Be Careful Out There." The Search committee held a talkback after the service to share results of the survey. They

were preparing the packet to send prospective candidates. The next Sunday, Holly Horn Neuman spoke about "Hosea, Prophet of Unrequited Love."

Fifteen attended the meeting Bob Forbes called a to re-establish the Caring committee. He asked Board members to attend to emphasize this as a whole church activity. Eve Gilmartin agreed to act as chair. Another meeting was scheduled in March, to plan a Sunday service to launch the revitalized committee. Resource person Beverly Bortin continued to take calls. Kirby Lewis trained hospital visitors, and Albione Mahoney trained phone answerers. They distributed a questionnaire before the May 8 service. The Board felt Eve and the committee were doing a great job.

Bob Forbes' Ordination Service was held Sunday, February 20. Bob Kimball, Claire Fischer, Ron Cook, and Til Evans participated from Starr King, and interns Anne Hines, Dwight Smith, and Holly Horn. Oakland UU minister Rob Isaacs, and Harry Scholefield, Minister Emeritus of the San Francisco UU Church spoke. Board president Bob McNally and Daniel Zwickel also participated.

Art Ungar introduced new intern Robert Flanders at the February Board meeting. He was approved for a six-month internship beginning in April. Bob Forbes spoke March 13 on "An Invitation to Peaceful Revolution." Dwight Smith's last service was "Moving On and Staying," about boxes — the religious, Jung, and MDUUC. We held a celebration in his honor after his service.

The Oakland church was the site of The Passover Seder this year. Another wonderful Serve-U "99¢ Spaghetti Dinner and Auction" produced by Bob Baker, made \$3,800 — a record.

### **Bob Baker\***

Bob was born and raised in New York, and attended Albany State Teachers College. He spent two years teaching at an Army junior high in Germany, visiting many countries. His first child was born in Germany. In 1966 he and his family moved to California where he obtained an MA at Northridge College. They moved to Concord in 1973. Bob was a teacher/counselor in the San Francisco School District, working with dropouts in alternative high schools, which he loved. After a divorce in 1975 he attended a UU church at the suggestion of a friend. In the exuberance

---

\*Adapted from a newsletter biography by Joyce Mohrman, March 1983.

with which he does everything he discovered MDUUC, and the rest is history.

Bob loved his grandmothers bread pudding, so it became a part of the countless dinners he served so effortlessly. He gathered a group of loyal and eager Kitchen Witches, including young people, who helped prepare these wonderful dinners. Several have said they would have had a hard time finding their way into the church if it hadn't been for Bob making them feel so accepted, and how much fun it was to work with him.

Bob served on the Board, was chair of the Program committee, and he and Charlotte Brown were married in the church. Bob's sense of the religious is deeply connected with his sense of community. He expressed this by helping provide an environment where people come together through celebrations and the sharing of good food lovingly created. His most valued community was nurtured and expanded. He blessed us with Saturday Nite Suppers and conversations, the Serve-U and Hungry-U every year, musical evenings, church breakfasts, Summer Socials, Dinner Theaters, Weekend Retreats, Christmas clam chowder sing-alongs, Fellowship dinners, and countless other high points in the life of the church.

Since Charlotte serves a UU church in southern California, Bob is no longer an active participant in our community, but he says that MDUUC will always be his home, and someday he will return to us. When Bob left, there was a very large hole in the life of the church, and we look forward to having him back here again with us.

Interested members held a Service committee organizing meeting in March, attended by Frank and Barbara Cuzzillo, Dave and Florence Pierson, Agnes Elfving, Dave and Beverly Bortin, Carol and Jerry Hensel, and Jill Thomas-Bignami. They planned a Three Open Minutes during Sunday service to recruit more people interested in social concerns, particularly Nicaragua.

George and Gini Merrill were founding members of the new Couples Club, which met in the Fireside room. At their first get together in March 1983, they explored "What ever happened to Cinderella?" Jan Ghent led an evening of improv theatre and discussion. George Merrill facilitated the Marriage Enrichment group. Their next discussion centered around "What Makes a Good Marriage Better?" In May they explored "The Trivia of Marriage can cause Big Problems."

They held picnics every month during the summer. In September the Gilmartins discussed their impressions of Chinese family life. They discussed Dan Beaver's book "The Marriage Fantasy." Bob Forbes met with them twice a month. They held a New Years Eve Party at the Ghents.

The Spring Program announcement included another Dream class with Jeremy Taylor, Bridge lessons with Bob Allen, and beginning and intermediate bridge classes with Bob Baker. There was a class in Reducing Stress, Great Decisions, book discussion, and a Mens' group. The Program committee also offered a UU discussion series, Improv Theater, Job Transitions, and the Newcomer dinner and discussion evenings.

"Seed Time" was the title of the Easter celebration, with a family service following the Easter breakfast. Kirby Lewis, Nancy Lineburg, and Jill Thomas-Bignami joined Kathleen Hepler, Holly Horn, Dwight Smith, Bob Forbes, and I, celebrating this time of darkness coming into light. Bob performed a Dedication of Children, we participated in a Flower Communion, and the children each received a newly planted seed.

MDUUC's Improv group put on an Evening of Improv in April. Directed by Tom Wills, the skits included Sarah Rosin, Gail Rodens, Ludell Deutscher, Jim Woessner, Dave Pierson, Mike Smith and Niki Kirshner. Dessert and coffee were served after the show so that everyone could talk with the cast.

Holly Horn called her service April 24, "An Island in the Stream, An Island in the Lake." Robert Flanders' next service was "Spring is Sprung." Bob Forbes was unable to give the service on May 8, hospitalized with an infection, so Holly Horn filled in admirably with "The Family Crucible — A Communion of Caring." Church member Dave Pierson gave the service May 15, "The Artist and Child in You." Members' crafts and art works were on display in the sanctuary through May.

Bob Baker resigned as chair of the Program committee in May, but agreed to plan a host of special events during the year. Joyce Mohrman and Katie Wills became co-chairs. The Program committee sponsored a gender empathy workshop, "The World of the Other." Led by a male and female workshop leader, they explored the experiences of men and women with visualization, active listening and psychodrama.

## 264 So Great Vision

Bob Baker put together a First Annual All-Church Art Festival for artists and craftspeople to display their work, especially closet artists, photographers, potters, and children.

The Bortins hosted a supper for seventeen people involved in the Caring committee. Kirby Lewis was training thirteen hospital visitors. Still needed were a child care coordinator and backups. Coordinators were:

Beverly Bortin	Community Resources
Albione Mahoney	Crisis Intervention
Kirby Lewis	Home/hospital visits
Deanna Egan	Household help
Kay Gregor and Frank Cuzzillo	Transportation
Dora Gonsalves	Companionship

Bob Baker again produced the MDUUC Young People's Production Story Theater May 21. He provided dinner, and helped the young people put the show together. There were 15 performers, with a production cast of four. After the show we enjoyed dessert and coffee with the cast. A Memorial Weekend Dream, Meditation and Massage Workshop was held in Marin, again arranged by Bob. He also organized the annual Hungry-U and art auction the first of June. He and the Kitchen Witches produced a barbecue dinner. Single-U provided the gourmet desserts. The church netted a whopping \$1,500.

R.E. Director Kathleen Hepler gave her last service June 5, "Brief and Holy Moments." Kathleen was well loved and much appreciated even though she was with us only six months. Everyone was invited to a breakfast before the service to honor Kathleen, and to a Celebration after her service with a special farewell cake. The congregational meeting after the service adopted the 83-84 budget, and elected a new Nominating committee.

Before her service June 9, Holly Horn invited others to join her, Marty Dimbat and Darren McNally in a silent, prayerful walk around the boundary of the church property. She called her service "A Celebration of the Spirit of Place." This was Holly's last service with us. We held a party honoring her after the service.

Carol Alosi and Florence Pierson arranged a public meeting at the church featuring UUSC volunteer Dr. Jeff Ritterman and Congressman George Miller. Dr.

Ritterman showed a film and discussed the medical conditions and plight of the people caught in the El Salvador war. Over 170 attended, and \$1,045 was collected for medical relief. Within a week the needed drugs were in El Salvador.

Robert Flanders spoke about "Love, Fear and Anger" at his service June 19. Robert said have had great difficulty reconciling these emotions — can it be done?" The following week former intern Kirby Lewis gave the sermon, "Peace — An Experimental, Liturgical Service for Violent People." Bob Forbes gave the July 3 sermon titled "Reflections on Independence Day." The following week the 22 members who attended the UUA General Assembly (GA) shared their impressions. Summer services included new district executive Robbie Cranch, women's peace activist Rosemary Matson, and the Krishna Hari Indian dancers.

Robert Flanders gave a special service August 7, with his parents and his two children visiting for the summer. It was a service of songs, poetry and ritual in our dance with and in nature. The following Sunday we had a "Midsummer Day Dream," with pianists Nicole Rosin, Connie Schwarz, and Nancy Lineburg, cellist Tony Newey, and Art Ungar, bassoon.

Jean Bovard gave the service on August 21, "How my training sustained me while I was in jail." Jean had been released from Santa Rita prison for civil disobedience at the Livermore Lab nuclear protest. Andy Baltzo went immediately to the meeting of the Search committee as soon as he was released. An example of courage, and devotion! The following week Leadership School graduates Jean Nickell, Isabel Johnson, Joyce Mohrman, Charlotte Brown, Tom Dragavon, and Jann Schaub gave the service. They shared Credo statements created at the school. Eve and Aron Gilmartin were on the faculty. Church member Bob Maxwell spoke the following week on "Roots of Conscience." Bob spent more than four years obtaining conscientious objector status. He gained new insights into what it means to be "religious."

The Board welcomed new intern Carol Byrne in September. The annual Welcome Back Church Breakfast Opening of the New Church Year was held September 11<sup>th</sup>, lovingly prepared by the Board and staff, followed by a short worship service. The Rev. David Sammons was enthusiastically welcomed into our church community during Candidating week, September 18-25<sup>th</sup> (see below).

Former intern Anne Hines requested ordination by our church. At a congregational meeting in October members voted unanimously to ordain Anne. Her Ordination Service took place November 27<sup>th</sup>. Anne wrote in the newsletter,



“Your presence carried me through the celebration, and will continue to carry me throughout my ministry.” George Prall agreed to resume as Choir Director for the coming year.

Bob Forbes’ services in October and November were “Families Are For Loving,” and “Thou Shalt Not Murder.” Bob asked the congregation to look deep in their hearts and find the God within as a source of commitment and strength. He acknowledged it was a difficult concept for many UUs, but Bob knew it to be a source of his survival, and commitment to social justice. He hoped this dialog would lead to a series where people could deepen their understanding about our beliefs.

The Caring Community presented the service October 9, sharing their work providing ways to help in times of need. Everyone was encouraged to become a part of this network, and to feel comfortable using it.

Bob Forbes led a new program in October — “On Being Married, A Dialogue.” Margaret MacLane presented a program on stress reduction, “The Quieting Reflex.” Movement, Music and Meditation continued with Lynne White.

Intern Carol Byrne spoke on “A UU Prayer of Petition — Can Horatio Alger ask for help?” Special services in October honored the work of the UUSC and the United Nations UU office. We had special collections for these organizations. Til Evans facilitated a special workshop on “Pilgrimage: a way of looking at how our personal spiritual journeys are enhanced and nourished by the way we work in the religious community.” Bob Forbes’ sermon November 6 was “Thou Shalt Not Murder.”

New Board members elected at the November congregational meeting were Bill Chapel, Bob Maxwell, Eleanor Segal (Nelson), and Judy Young. The Women’s Open Group started by Beverly Bortin, had been meeting once a month for several years. They enjoyed a church member or outside speaker, followed by a potluck lunch, or a trip to a museum or other facility, and lunch at a nearby restaurant.

The Ministerial Search committee shared with the congregation the difficult and rewarding process of selecting the new minister at the November 27 service. They were honored at a celebration for the successful completion of their task after the service. That afternoon we participated in the Ordination of former intern Anne Hines.

In December 1983, Gil was called as Interim Minister at the Sacramento church. He and Eve lived in Sacramento during this period. Margaret MacLane

took over as chair of the Caring committee. Our own Charlotte Brown graduated from Starr King at Commencement exercises at the Oakland church.

A special Thanksgiving Family Celebration included a Recognition of New Members. The children of the church school put on a play titled "Frederick." Wallace Oman, Agnes Elfving, Jean Zwickel, and Bob Forbes, older church members, shared stories of their lives.

Temple Isaiah in Lafayette was the site of the annual ecumenical Thanksgiving service. Members of the choirs participated. Kate Olsen organized Thanksgiving dinner at the church. She also put together the church Christmas dinner.

Til Evans and Bob Forbes spoke together "In Honor of Boundaries." Bob's last service as our Interim Minister was December 18, entitled "Reflections." Bob spoke about his experiences during this year, and suggested an agenda for our future. We held a reception honoring Bob after the service.

Bob's last service as our minister was an emotional one for members and friends who had come to know and love him. Bob said, "I will be with you in spirit, faith and hope. You have sustained me when I needed it. May God's grace shine upon you and may love always illuminate your life."

Newsletter co-editor Deanna Egan commented: "I have had many moving and spiritual experiences throughout the years at our church. This service will go in my volume of memories. Thank you Bob for being a part of all of us."

A personal note. In his last memo to Board president Bob McNally, Bob Forbes wrote, "Please pass on to the new Board my recommendation that the position of Church Secretary be upgraded to the position of Church Administrator. This is precisely the work that Beverly does with passion and distinction." I found the memo while working on this history, and had no idea he had written it. It is typical of Bob to do this generous thing without wanting others to know. He was a truly kind and loving person.

The customary evaluation of the Interim minister by the Board and Ministerial Relations committee was sent to the UUA, ending with the following comments:

*The congregation is grateful to have had the opportunity and privilege of Bob's leadership the past year. Bob has a spiritual center that clearly projects to everyone whether in the pulpit or relating on a personal level.*

*His strength and courage in the face of catastrophic illness have been an example and source of inspiration to us all. Bob's choice for life and involvement with and for others in clear. His concern for individuals and for wider social action causes are continually stated and reinforced by his own actions.*

*It has been a privilege to have Bob Forbes as our Interim minister.*

The Mt. Diablo UU Church can always be proud to have had the trust and love that made it possible for Bob Forbes to realize his dream of serving as a parish minister. This was an act of rare courage and generosity. Art Ungar speaks of the gift we gave, knowing it was a risk, and that it would mean that we would have to make sacrifices. After a long battle, Bob Forbes died of cancer on October 16, 1984. At his Memorial Service David Sammons said of him,

“The humor, enthusiasm and common sense he shared with us will remain a part of the ongoing life of this church. Bob was able to live well even with the cancer and the pain that went with it. He fought to stay alive. But the time came when, having lived and loved as fully as he could, he moved into his death, with dignity, leaving those of us who knew him enriched because of our sharing with him.”

xxxxx

The annual holiday festivities began with the Tree Trimming Party in the afternoon, with musical program and carols in the evening with Til and Bob. The Madrigal Singers and the choir performed. Christmas Eve featured hot mulled wine and cider, carols around the fire, and “The Grinch Who Stole Christmas.” Luminarias were made to light the way for the traditional Candlelight service. Sunday was the Family Christmas Party, with carols, stories, and the traditional exchange of ornaments. Eleanor Pound again made ornaments for our trees at home.

### **The Calling of David Sammons**

Meanwhile, the Pulpit committee had chosen a candidate as the new permanent minister of MDUUC. On July 21, 1983, they announced the selection of

David Sammons. A graduate of Starr King, David held a Doctor of Ministry degree from Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley.

David had served as minister of the Evanston, Illinois UU Church for five years. Previously he was minister of St. John's Church in Cincinnati, and Associate Minister of First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York. He had been in active ministry eighteen years, and was the author of a Beacon Press book, *The Marriage Option*. He served as president of the Chicago Area Liberal Ministers, and chair of the Task Force for Social Justice of the Evanston Ecumenical Action Council. He was on the Board of the UUSC and the Urban Church Coalition.

Dave and his wife Jan have a son, Matthew. His four older children were in college or on their own. Jan was active in religious education, and a reading specialist. They were with us for Candidating Week September 18-25. The Search committee planned a full week of activities so that everyone had an opportunity to get acquainted with Jan and Matthew, and meet with Dave. We enjoyed a welcoming barbecue at church Saturday evening. Dave's first service was entitled "Loving, Trusting, Risking." Dave, Jan, and Matthew shared with the children "Why We Would Like to Become Part of Your Church" during Being Together.

David met with the Board, the staff, the Peace Center, Single-U, and every committee and group in the church. The Search committee scheduled Open Houses throughout the week. Dave was available at the church office to drop in and talk. The following Sunday his service asked the question, "How Would You Like a Rabbi In Your Midst?" The congregation voted to call David Sammons 132-yes, no-3, beginning January 1, 1984. A luncheon to celebrate and welcome our new minister and his family followed the meeting.

And so the years of transition drew to a close. We survived the disillusion that followed the civil rights and black empowerment years when we thought we could change our society to one of equality and justice for all. We had come through the bitterness of the Vietnam war, the turning inward of the encounter years and human potential movement, the drugs and if-it-isn't-fun-don't-do-it years. We were again ready to get on with the work of building a solid, liberal religious community.

In spite of the excesses of these years (some would say because of them!) they provided a rich soil for individual growth, respect for diversity, and experience in how to live and work together, and care for each other. We

**270**    *So Great Vision*

welcomed the coming of our new minister with excitement and anticipation, and looked toward the future with hope and commitment to years ahead.

