

# Spirit of Life

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The First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo

1956-2006

A Brief History of the First Fifty Years

Edited by Susan Deefholts  
Waterloo, Ontario

# Acknowledgements

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Lastly, a big thank you to all those who have helped support the community by purchasing a copy of this book.

This book is dedicated to all the members and friends of the First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo and the Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship, who have enriched our community through the past fifty years—and to all future friends and members who will make their own unique contributions for the years to come.



Spirit of Life:  
Stories of the First  
Unitarian Congregation  
of Waterloo

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Copper Chalice from Founders'  
Hall

## Introduction

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When Steve Lill approached me to undertake this project, I won't deny it: I felt intimidated. The prospect of trying to encapsulate the 50 years of congregational history into a slender volume was daunting, to say the least!

But I was also excited about my unique opportunity to delve into the past. As a newcomer, I knew very little of the congregation's history; it was thanks to this project that I was able to learn so many fascinating things about the events that had shaped First Unitarian.

It was a privilege to be able to sit down with so many of the amazing people who have created, shaped and nurtured the congregation, through the years of plenty as well as the years of scarcity.

As I read through the archives, looked at the yellowed newsprint of the original ads, and spoke with the members and friends, I began assembling in my mind a burgeoning and complex portrait of a unique group of people. A culture, a community and an extended family that weathered both the bumps and the boons to be found on the open road. And though individual members may have come and gone—or moved on to a place beyond our reach—the community has endured.

And so it is that I began to

develop a profound sense of something bigger than myself—and that something is the articulate, often contentious, free-thinking and earnestly seeking whole that we comprise.

This book is a celebration of our community—though of course, any kind of historical text must, almost by definition, be a partial undertaking. Partial, in the sense that, any account must carry its own biases, no matter how earnestly the writer has attempted to give voice to all points of view.

But partial, also, in that no matter how comprehensive we would like such a text to be, it must, by necessity, tell only a small portion of the story.

My apologies for any errors or oversights which may have occurred in the pages that follow—as a newcomer, I haven't any memories of the history to draw upon, and so there may have been instances where I misconstrued what I read or heard.

My other regret is for those stories I have not been able to include here. I can only encourage you to consider creating your own account—either by writing it yourself, or by dictating the story into a tape recorder. It will be important to generations to come. Trust me on this one.

Susan Deefholts,  
Waterloo, 2006



## Verbatim...

From an article by Bob Whitton, written in 1979, about the early days:

I had first heard of Unitarianism when a young woman said to me one day, rather deprecatingly: "Oh, you'd like the Unitarians; they believe in free love."

Then one day I happened to mention Unitarianism to my mother and she spoke quite highly of them because she once had a neighbor who went to the Unitarian congregation on St. Clair Ave. and she thought they must be pretty impressive people because, in her words "he was quite an intellectual."

Well, the concept of a group of intellectuals who also believed in free love was intriguing to say the least, so I thought I'd find out more about it.

## Setting the Scene:

### A Snapshot of Waterloo in 1956

*Excerpted from an article by Bob Whitton on the occasion of the 25th anniversary of the WUCF, in 1981.*

In 1956, there was no Unitarian fellowship in this community. There was no place where a person whose religious views tended to be untraditional could go and express himself or herself frankly, freely... and continue to be accepted.

There were no universities, though there were a couple of church colleges with fewer than 200 students each. There were no cocktail bars, coffee shops, very few boutiques, far fewer bookstores and record stores. There wasn't a movie open on Sunday and there was an even poorer choice of movies at other times than we now have [in 1981]. There were almost no highrise apartment buildings ... and the ones that were up stopped at six stories.

There was a blacksmith shop and a cider press and a flour mill in town, right on or close to the main street. There were lots of people at the Dutchmen hockey games on Saturday nights and in the church pews on Sunday mornings. By and large, it was a clean, well-run community.

Well, I could go on about what was here and what wasn't. What we did have was three Unitarians...

## Verbatim...

From *Organizational Guide: Aids and Suggestions for Establishing a Unitarian Fellowship*, by Monroe Husbands:

### How To Begin

This Guide has been sent to you in the belief that you are a person who would wish to see a Unitarian Fellowship organized in your community. As such, you are willing to expend a certain amount of time and effort in working toward this goal. You may know of several others who insist upon freedom and the use of reason in religion—or you may not. How to begin?

You are not alone!

Though you may believe you are a religious "outcast" in the community since you reject the supernatural as expressed in creed and dogma, you may be certain you are not alone! Depending on the community, there are scores—perhaps even hundreds—who insist upon a rational approach to religion.



## In the Beginning...

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By Bob Whitton

*Bob Whitton is one of our founding members; he has been with the congregation from the start. He was the first lay chaplain in Ontario and was the driving force behind the congregation during its early years: he arranged for guest speakers, often led the services and provided accompaniment on the piano. He also put together the orders of service and wrote the newsletters. Here is an account of the early days, as described by Bob. —SD*

The Waterloo congregation held its first meeting as a lay-led fellowship in November of 1956. I no longer remember the exact date, but it was about the middle of the month. I am fairly certain that I was the only one who attended who is still around. I know Don and Sally Bastedo didn't get to the initial meeting . . . but they have been to a great many services ever since.

Among those who attended at the outset were John and Hilda Naylor; once our early meetings got under way John became our first president, though he didn't remain with us long. He moved to a job in Rochester, N.Y., in the spring of '57 and I haven't seen them since. Hilda and John had three children, who were among the reasons we established a Sunday school from the outset.

Other founding members included Maurice and Lois Graham, who had been Unitarians earlier, in Hamilton, where there was a minister named Bob Brockway.

The Grahams were the only "experienced" Unitarians among us. I think the company Maurice worked for ran into business problems and they too had to leave the community, in about 1960. There was, however, a middle-aged couple, Carl and Ann Ott, who had for some time belonged to Boston's Church of the Larger Fellowship. Carl died about 15 years ago and I believe Ann has gone now too . . . well into her nineties. I visited her a few times over fairly recent years. She remained a bright little person, though frail. She was in the Fairview Mennonite Home on Concession St., in Cambridge.

Carl Ott served as president after the Naylor's moved away. He

Timeline	1956 First meeting: November 18 8 pm	President:
	Smithson School Gym, Bellview St., Kitchener	John Naylor

was a somewhat reluctant president, but he stuck it out and got us by nicely. I think his theological background was Lutheran but he had long since gotten far away from it. He was clearly a political left winger (a CCFer in those days) and a staunch union supporter . . . in the firmly non-union Schneider's Meats. He was skeptical of "authority" at all levels, including old J. M. Schneider, the founder of the company. Carl was a pleasant, serious, bright person and most likeable.

There were others, who were in on things from the very first; all of them now long gone. They include Harvey and Doris Burkholder (an old Mennonite name in the community) and Jack and Mary Howard. I think the two husbands found their way

to seek and receive the truth, both old and new, believing...that a living religion must change as thought advances...

-Newsletter Vol. 1, No. 1, November 9, 1956

into Unitarianism as a consequence of some of their experiences during World War I. They were both veterans and when they got talking about it, they still relived the shock and the intensity of feelings they experienced during their war

years . . . including their reactions to one of their padres who had urged them to go out and "bayonet the enemy." John's voice would shake with emotion. I guess because the padre's advice somewhat belied the "love thine enemy" message of Jesus. John and Harvey seemed to struggle with this inconsistency until the end of their lives. I think the group meant a great deal to both.

Harvey could be a little "vinegry," as Lee Dickey once described him. He could get not just a little annoyed—he could get very annoyed when something displeased him. Jack was a little more calm. He was also a talented amateur photographer and at one point we had a print of a picture he had taken, of a northern river, and it hung for years on the walls of our building on Allen Street. It might be worth noting that this community was quite different in those days. It was a lot smaller, and what might be called its "intellectual community" was much smaller still. Higher education consisted of Waterloo College, which was a small college run by the Lutheran Church, with a student

population of about 400. It was affiliated with University of Western Ontario and offered only two years of university level study; students would finish their degrees in London. There was no community college. St. Jerome's was essentially a high school.

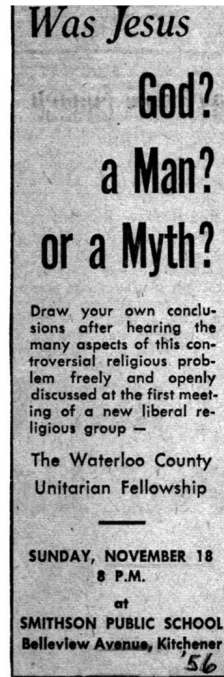
I remember that I had only been in the community a short time when a neighbor knocked on my door offering to take my children to a rather fundamentalist Baptist church, Benton Street. This was followed by another who wanted to take them to the Swedenborgian church.

Moving from suburban Toronto to KW proved to be something of a cultural shock to me; much more so than it would be today.

I recall one woman remarking, after a visit to a King Street drugstore, in Waterloo, that the druggist had noticed she was wearing a University of Toronto ring and remarked that she would find that those who also wore such a piece of jewelry were "few and far between in this community."

Now I had heard of Unitarianism before moving to this community, and shortly thereafter I also learned about the American Unitarian Association's service to isolated Unitarians through what was called the "Church of the Larger Fellowship" . . . which offered support to Unitarians living in communities where there were no such congregations. This help included programs they could run for their children, and suggestions as to relevant activities parents could offer them. The AUA, based in Boston, could also provide interesting readings and a regular denominational newsletter. I joined it, and soon learned that my family and I were the third Unitarian family in Kitchener-Waterloo.

The fact that there were now three such families seemed to stimulate Boston to ask if we (the Whittons, the Bastedos and the Otts) might



Advertisement:  
The first meeting

1959 President:

Dr. Towson

Members:

30

1960 President:

Dr. Towson

be interested in a visit from a traveling AUA recruiter, Munroe Husbands, who would be willing to come to our community, hire a nice hall (e.g., a meeting room in the Walper Hotel) and put on a meeting designed to explore the possibility that a Unitarian fellowship might come into existence in Kitchener-Waterloo at some future time. It sounded interesting and we (Carl, Don and Bob) proceeded to get in touch with each other and started planning for such a meeting. It was held about mid-August, 1956.

Munroe Husbands came up from Boston and the meeting attracted more than 20 persons; we felt that seemed promising . . . so we set about, almost immediately, planning for a first meeting of a proposed new fellowship. We rented a meeting place (in Smithson Public School, Kitchener). We purchased a little spirit duplicator so we could put out a newsletter, order-of-service sheets, and so on. We got programming materials and Sunday school materials from Boston . . . and we prepared for our first meeting, to take place on a Sunday evening about the middle of September.

We agreed to advertise our meeting in the Guelph and Cambridge newspapers as well as in the Record. And as a result, we attracted a branch of the Valeriote family from Guelph, and also from that city, Rudy and Tamara Puthon. We also had Monte Kaye, and George and Hazel Detlor, and later Jack and Margaret Macredie from Cambridge.

Fairly early on we attracted to our group Joan Finnigan, a well-known Canadian writer and author of "The Best Damned Fiddler from Calabogie to Kaladar" which ran on CBC television a few times. She was also the daughter of an old Toronto Maple Leaf hockey player, Frankie Finnigan. Her husband, Grant Mackenzie, was a psychiatrist.

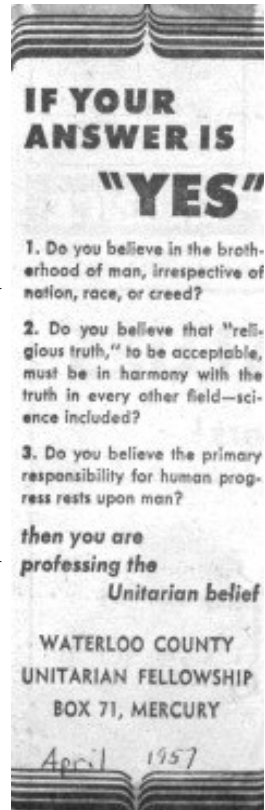
We had another writer, Margaret Leatherbarrow, who lived near Elora with her husband, Alfred. She had written a book, *Gold in the Grass*, which was a pretty interesting contribution to the "green" movement in its earlier days . . . before it was even called the green movement. Local writer Edna Staebler also dropped in on fellowship meetings once in a while, early on. She

was a friend of my late wife, Elsie. For many years, Elsie was a significant contributor to this group, though she didn't attend the very earliest meetings. For quite a few years she served as an unofficial greeter at the door, and helped make many people feel welcome. She also made it easy for me to devote time to putting out a newsletter, selecting hymns, arranging programs, preparing order-of-service papers, putting the ad in the Saturday Record, and so on.

John Naylor (whom I mentioned earlier) had worked for the Wright family, who ran an office supply business in downtown Kitchener. Several members of the family attended from time to time, during the Fellowship's early days, including Grace Saunders, who had lived most of her life in Saskatchewan before returning to her home community, and Jean Barclay who still comes once in a long while (at least I saw her here on Dunbar a couple of years ago).

We had Mabel Hedley, who was a school teacher and a pioneer guidance person in the Kitchener school system. And John Walter Jr., and his wife, Leila. John was the son of a local industrialist who later came faithfully, for many years, and served as our president for some time.

The University of Waterloo got its start in 1957, less than a year after the Fellowship's first meeting, and we thereafter began getting attendance from a few faculty members including Kon Piekarski and Halla, who is of course still with us from time to time; from the Batkes—Ted and Vivian—Goff and Helen Barrett-Lennard, and a good number of others, including Herb and Barbara Lefcourt. I remember, fondly, a chemistry professor, Jack Mills, who later moved to British Columbia. He died fairly recently. We also used to have university students show up



1963	President:	Location, as of October, '63:	Members:
	Jim Ronback	Unitarian House, 136 Allen St. East	56

occasionally—Jim Ronback, for example.

For a while we came to rely quite a bit on the new university in Waterloo, and later on, on Wilfrid Laurier and Conestoga College as well, for speakers who shared their views with us on a wide variety of political, philosophical, and social questions, as well as on religious matters.

I would say that by and large, we got along. We didn't flourish as we have been doing recently, not remotely, but we kept going.

Almost from the first, we started thinking about the day we might have a place of our own. We looked at and thought about one building or another, sometimes several miles off in the countryside. But finally we settled on a central Waterloo location, on Allen Street, and purchased, and then adapted to our needs, a moderately sizable (three storey) house. That would have been in the early '60s, I think. It coincided with a period of membership growth and a feeling of optimism about our future in the community.

We subsequently experienced all kinds of ups and downs—moments of great hope and moments of considerable discouragement—but everything hung together somehow, and finally we must have passed some kind of a threshold. I think we achieved a "critical mass," if you will, of leadership talents and membership numbers, and one result was that we became able to undertake the hiring of a part-time minister. We have continued to have problems ever since, but we have also continued to make a fair amount of progress, outgrowing our old Unitarian House some years ago, and eventually becoming strong enough to purchase this much larger building on Dunbar. And of course we now have, for years, been served by a full-time minister. We're a Congregation!

Now we feel we need some place larger still. It's good to be able to even consider such a challenge, especially when I think back to our very modest—downright shaky—beginnings.

I feel fortunate to have come to know so many thoroughly admirable people here. I am sure I have benefited in many ways.

This doesn't mean everything is perfect. Surely, we all still have many serious problems ahead of us . . . but we also have reason for some amount of confidence in our ability to cope successfully with future problems. We have seen a lot of things that worked out well for us.

I remember a conversation, a few years ago, with a young undergraduate student at the University of Waterloo. He was a Systems Design Engineering student, his name was Michael Lazaridis and he told me about a company called Research in Motion that he and some buddies had formed to take advantage of what they had learned about LED technology at the University of Waterloo. Now when I look at the amazing growth of high tech industry in Waterloo Region since then . . . RIM and DALSA and OPEN TEXT, and so many other success stories . . . I like to think about how many other such successes will almost surely be occurring in this community in the future, and of what some of them could spell out in terms of the future for this particular Unitarian Universalist congregation.

As Phil Harris, the old dance band leader of the '30s, used to say, "Folks, you ain't seen nothin' yet."



### **A Sign of the Times**

From *Organizational Guide: Aids and Suggestions for Establishing a Unitarian Fellowship*, by Monroe Husbands:

#### The Fellowship Hymn and Service Book

This is available in any quantity desired (\$1.00 per copy). Single copies of printed sermons on many different subjects, written by Unitarian ministers, devotional materials and other program aids may be secured through the Fellowship Office.

**1965 President:**

Harley Forden

**Members:**

84

**1966 President:**

Ann Johns

## Verbatim...

From *Fellowship Guidelines*, prepared by the Fellowship Committee of the Prairie States Unitarian Universalist Association under the chairmanship of Ruth W. Cole, 1964:

### TRAVEL EXPENSES

Mileage: One Fellowship has been paying 6¢ per mile but believes that this should be raised to 10¢. One has been paying 7¢. One believes that 11¢ should be paid. However: all but two agreed that mileage was paid. The majority believed that 10¢ was proper.



# Archival Clippings

## New Church Group Forms

17 1956  
11 '56  
A new religious group, the Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship, was formed this week at a general business meeting at a Smithson School.

John Naylor was named first president.

Mr. Naylor said the group is now in the process of affiliating with the American Unitarian Association, an organization of religious liberals.

"The church offers its members neither creed nor dogma," he said, "but the obligation to search intently for the truth wherever it may be found."

Twin City Unitarians now are actively aiding a Vienna hostel for Hungarian refugees, operated by the Unitarian Service Committee.

Other officers elected are Robert Whitton, vice-president; Miss Brunhild Warkentin, recording secretary; Miss Mildred Boyle corresponding secretary; and Maurice Graham, treasurer.

## WHEN CHRISTOPHER ROBIN WAS SAYING HIS PRAYERS/2-56

Christopher Robin, in A. A. Milne's charming song, was obviously much more interested in dressing-gowns than in his "God Bless" list.

But what is prayer? Talking to God—expressing repentance and asking for forgiveness and strength? Or, would you prefer to regard it as a time of reflection upon life's vital experiences?

The Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship will discuss "Prayer: To Whom and For What?" Sunday evening, at eight o'clock, in Smithson Public School, Belleview Ave., Kitchener.

Unitarians are religious liberals, believing that it is more important to strive to live nobly and constructively than to adhere to a strict creed, and believing also that the primary responsibility for human progress rests upon man.

December 1956

## Unitarian Christmas

Rev. J. R. Mutchmor's letter shows commendable forbearance, and I am happy to be able to relieve Dr. Mutchmor of further anxiety. This time of the year has been universally associated with a re-affirmation of faith and a re-dedication to religious ideals. Unitarians are happy to share this occasion with all mankind.

Far from keeping Christ out of Christmas, a glance at our church school program indicates that we are broadening the base of the festival by bringing Buddha and Confucius in. These great religious leaders share with Christ the legend of miraculous birth. This, I confess, is for the children. Unitarian adults are much more concerned about the mighty Ethic of Jesus Christ than the folk-lore surrounding His life.

Don Mills.

John Hearn.

Some ads and  
clippings from  
the archives...

A Stern Rebuttal!  
December, 1957

1968 President:

Dorothea Sprung

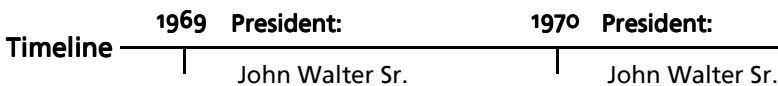
Members:

102

## A Sign of the Times

From the December 2, 1970 Newsletter:

Contributions are down, Sunday school attendance is down (way down), adult meeting attendance is also way down. It would appear that we neither need nor can afford Unitarian House... There are many possible reasons for this [including] the possibility that the community has changed over the years and scarcely needs this type of a group anymore.



# A Crisis of Faith

By Susan Deefholts

Eleven people sat in a small circle, staring at each other grimly.

Through the '50s and '60s the growth of the Fellowship had been steady, climbing as high as 102 members in 1968.

And then, with little warning and no explanation, membership and attendance dropped abruptly—a demoralizing change for those who continued to participate in the weekly services.

Now, on this particular winter's afternoon in November of 1970, there were a mere eleven regular attendees.

It seemed obvious that the Fellowship had reached a crossroads. The situation was aptly summed up in the newsletter of December 2:

“Due to the Fellowship's economic difficulties and the poor attendances at our meetings, the Board will arrange to sell Unitarian House.... The situation is, in the eyes of some, becoming critical.”

Indeed, a few long-standing members were ready to throw in the towel—and Bruce Torrie suggested going out with a bang, by using the proceeds from the sale of the house to throw a big party.

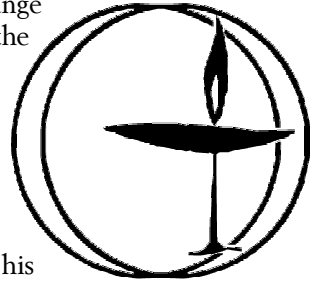
Lee Dickey, who was also present, expressed his dismay at the notion—he had only just joined, and the last thing he wanted was to see an end to the Fellowship!

But something had to be done.

Bob Whitton had once heard that so long as the orders of service and the newsletters continued to be a part of the Fellowship, there would remain a sense of continuity and community.

And so it was that a call to arms was issued, via the newsletter. The congregation rallied. Short weeks after that dismal meeting, the December 27th newsletter hinted at a brighter future: “That was a fine send-off for the Christmas we enjoyed at Unitarian House.... Good turn-out, good fellowship, good program, good food and egg nog.... We have had a couple of soul-searching sessions recently, and these seemed to reflect a considerable consensus that the Fellowship can continue to function and should find ways of doing so.”

It wasn't easy, however. Congregational expectations all amounted to what seemed like a tall order: “People want more philosophical



Attendance

plummets drastically

1971 President:

Bruce Torrie

talks and discussions... they want shorter talks... some recognised that we can't be too abstract with our philosophy—that some relevance to the real world... is desirable.”

The congregation had to pull together and work hard to revitalize the programming and format of the services. In addition, the remaining member families were forced to think up creative ways to keep the chalice alight.

They decided to bond by creating an extended family network between them, called “clusters”. Co-ordinated by Carol Dickey, these clusters would get together for games nights, potlucks and activities. Childless couples, singles as well as nuclear and single-parent families were invited to join in, initially meeting under the auspices of a trained leader. By all accounts, the initiative was a rousing success, such that the bonds between the members of the community were strengthened and intensified over the years.

And so it was that the Fellowship continued—and thrive!



UNITARIAN HOUSE,  
136 ALBANI ST. E.,  
WATERLOO, ONTARIO.

Timeline	1972 President:	1973 President:
	Tom Proctor	Charlie Macdonald



## Principles

We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote:

- the inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- justice, equity, and compassion in human relations;
- acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- a free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

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**1974 President:**

Charlie Macdonald

**1975 President:**

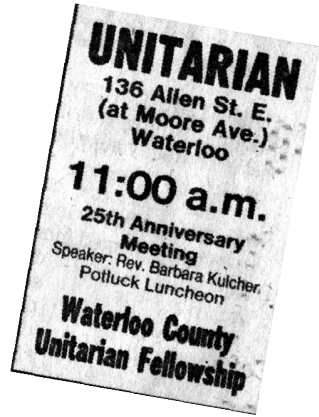
Lee Dickey

# 25 Years...

Some highlights from the 25th Anniversary book commemorating the celebrations held on November 25th, 1981:



Bev Sawyer, Bruce Torrie and Bob Whitton



Lighting the chalice seems such a fundamental part of our weekly ritual—but it was not always so. Here, Ida Semple—better known to many of us as Ida Fisher—presents the congregation with the flaming chalice (still en route at the time of the photo) that has become so central a symbol for us.

**Timeline** —————

<p><b>1976</b> President: Ruth Kelly</p>	<p><b>1977</b> President: Bruce Torrie</p>
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## ...And Still Going Strong!

Kitchener-Waterloo Record, Sat., Nov. 21, 1981

### Fellowship marks 25th anniversary

The Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship will celebrate its 25th anniversary with a number of activities beginning Saturday.

There will be a dinner and dance tonight at the Court Tavern at 7:30. Sunday Rev. Barbara Kulcher, a Unitarian minister from New York and a long-time member of the Hamilton fellowship, will be guest speaker at the 11 a.m. service.

Her topic will be: Promises, Realities and Possibilities.

The fellowship will also hold a social evening on its actual anniversary date, Wednesday (Nov. 25), at its meeting place at 136 Allen St. E., Waterloo.

A free-thinking church with no set dogmas, the Unitarian Fellowship has 70 members locally.

#### Verbatim...

From a telepost mailgram sent by Eugene Pickett, president of UU Association in Boston:

YOU'VE COME A LONG WAY, FRIEND, SINCE THOSE DAYS IN 1956 WHEN YOU HAD YOUR FIRST MEETING IN THE TERRACE ROOM IN A HOTEL IN KITCHENER... WE ARE ALL PROUD OF THE FINE EFFORTS YOU ARE MAKING FOR LIBERAL RELIGION... HOW THE WORLD HAS CHANGED SINCE YOU WERE FIRST ORGANIZED. IT IS LITERALLY A NEW AGE WE ARE MOVING INTO AND I KNOW OF NO RELIGIOUS GROUP MORE FITTED FOR WHAT LIES AHEAD OF US THAN THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISTS.



Bob Whitton reminisces about his 25 year association with the Fellowship.

**1978 President:**

Bruce Torrie

**1979 President:**

Reuel Amdur

**Members:**

40

### **What's the Story, Morning Glory?**

There is only one window in the sanctuary at the Dunbar Street location—and it doesn't look out onto the street or the parking lot. It looks out onto our past. When Unitarian House was sold, many expressed regret that none of the beautiful stained glass windows—which some described as “having a mystical quality”—could be taken to the new location. Ida Fisher came up with an ingenious solution: she commissioned her sister-in-law, Zara Leff, to create a reproduction of one of the windows in stained glass. Using only antique pieces of glass, Zara worked from a photograph and meticulously recreated the beautiful window that glows at the front of the sanctuary, in all its jewel-toned glory—and adorns the cover of this book.



# Where the Heart Is

By Susan Deefholts

## Early Days

During the early years, the Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship enjoyed a vagrant existence, meeting in various rented spaces about town. For seven years, they gathered in a variety of venues: public school halls, the YM and YWCAs. These locations weren't always particularly inviting—for a time, the meetings were held in the dingy, rather disagreeable basement of the YWCA on Frederick Street—but, as Bob Whitton put it, it was available and the rent was modest.

Even as early as 1957, when the small Fellowship suspended service in order to visit First Unitarian in Toronto, the dream of one day having a building of their own was born.

In the years that followed, the Fellowship yearned for something more pleasant than the dismal basement, and so they moved to the auditorium at MacGregor School. They were also permitted to use a few classrooms and—what unprecedented luxury—they were allowed to store the Sunday school materials in the storeroom during the week!

Still, as time passed, friends and members yearned for a permanent home.

It was Don Bastido who, upon learning that a house at Moore and Allan streets had gone up for sale, suggested that the Fellowship take the plunge and purchase the property. And so it was that the Fellowship acquired a place to call its own in October of 1963 for \$18,000.

## Unitarian House

The house at Allen Street was built as a family home in 1905 by

### **Dr. R. W. Brockway** of First Unitarian Church Hamilton, Ontario

will be guest speaker at the  
regular meeting of the

### **WATERLOO COUNTY UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP**

**Sunday, Nov. 17th**  
at 10:30 a.m.

at the Y.W.C.A.  
(Tunnel Entrance)  
Frederick Street, Kitchener

Dr. Brockway, a historian of religion and a stimulating speaker and author, will discuss humanist philosophy in a talk entitled:

**"RELIGION WITHOUT GOD"**

**Visitors Welcome!**

**1981 President:**

Bruce Torrie

**Milestone:**

Fellowship turns 25!

Jacob and Liza Elsley Uffelman. Years later, it was sold by their children to a German couple, who converted the house into two apartments, and later sold it to the Fellowship.

The house soon became home to a rapidly growing Unitarian culture. A lovely old structure, the building boasted hardwood floors and exquisite stained glass panels set in the windows.

It may have gotten a little drafty during winter services—which couldn't have helped with keeping the stalwart but pitch-challenged piano that was used for services in tune—and the kitchen may have been a little cramped during social hours and get togethers, but the house soon became the hub of the Waterloo Fellowship, with the services and adult goings-on taking place on the main floor and the children's activities held on the second floor.

The garden in the back of the house is a rich source of fond memories for many. Friends and members pitched in to take care of the smaller plants, the lawn and the trees.

The cycle of the seasons provided a stunning backdrop for the gatherings, and many recall with fondness the transformations they witnessed through the years, as the spruce trees grew. The pear tree, by contrast, changed with the seasons, its tight nubs unfurling into the bridal blossoms of spring. Summertime leaves rustled in the dappled sunlight, before coming alight with blazing autumnal glory, and then subsiding into the white-limned branches of winter.

Others recall the beauty of the light, playing through the faceted panes of the stained glass panels, creating enchanting, coloured speckles on the wooden floors. Some even felt that the beautiful stained glass lent a "mystical quality" to Unitarian House.

And then, of course, there were the more mundane aspects of life at Unitarian House. At one point, the Fellowship decided to loan out the building for use by a school, but many were distressed to discover that this particular school



Unitarian House, 1965

**Timeline** —————

<p><b>1982</b> President: Ross Beauchamp</p>	<p><b>1983</b> President: Elinore Torrie</p>
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allowed the children to share the joy of their artistry—in the form of crayon drawings on the newly-decorated walls!

Later, the top floor of the house was rented out to students—which was a good thing indeed, as it turned out! One night, one of the students heard suspicious sounds coming from below. Alarmed, he called the police, who were at the house in record time—and caught a couple of burglars red-handed!

Unitarian House was home to the Fellowship from 1963 to 1994. Over that 31-year period, it bore witness to numerous changes. There were ups and downs in the life cycle of the congregation, as membership ebbed and flowed through the years.

The house hosted a number of the landmark events—the 25-year anniversary celebration. The hiring of the first minister. The gradual emergence of a community.



Kingdom Hall for Sale

A number of illustrious speakers came to the house—as did a variety of excellent musicians—through the years.

It was at Unitarian House that the Fellowship lived through its hopeful childhood, its somewhat troubled adolescence, and matured into a thriving, growing community—a community that, eventually, outgrew the limited space the house could provide.

By 1993, the Fellowship had come to a crossroads: they could stay at their beloved house and risk losing members and friends to overcrowding, or they could move, thereby fostering continued growth.

After a veritable roller-coaster of debates and discussions, the membership agreed that the time had come to move on—but not before bidding a loving goodbye to the place that had become hearth and home to the Fellowship.

In July of 1994, a farewell service and parting ritual was held—the last to take place at the beloved Unitarian House.

Club Willowells

For one church year, the congregation returned to its early roots, renting a temporary space in which to hold its meetings at Club Willowells. A capital campaign raised funds to supplement the proceeds from the sale of Unitarian house, and the search was on for a new home!

Dunbar Road

The Dunbar Road location had its origins as a window factory—an irony not lost on many, given that the main sanctuary at present has no windows at all!

At the time we purchased it, the building was being used as a Jehovah’s Witness Kingdom Hall.



Founders’ Hall with a decoratively adorned pole.

The first service at 96 Dunbar Road took place in September of 1995, and it was certainly something of a relief to no longer be bursting at the seams!

The sanctuary is spacious and flexible—and the pole at the centre is ideally suited for Maypole dancing, come spring.

Of course, there were the inevitable frustrations as well: the wall-to-wall carpeting did an exemplary job of establishing an acoustically dead space for any musicians or singers hoping to make an impression. Others chafed at the lack of windows and the low ceiling.

But that didn’t stop the congregation from making a home of the new space! Flowers and candles brighten the chancel, while the Aesthetics Committee keeps the garden in tip-top condition and makes sure we have wonderful hangings and images to contemplate on the walls.

There are beautiful murals on the walls in the children’s areas and the sanctuary, despite its large capacity, is homey and intimate.

With a few willing hands, the space can be transformed within minutes to accommodate a variety of configurations—such versatility allows us to get the most out of our space.

Throughout the year, the rooms are alive with laughter and life:

between weekly services, there are fascinating Adult Religious Education classes, social events, such as potlucks, sing-alongs and the annual coffee house. There are also committee meetings, lunches with the minister and Children's Religious Education classes to keep things lively.

And so it is that we have continued to grow over the past 10 years, and what once provided us with plenty of room is again beginning to seem cramped.

We are at a crossroads once more—and again, the choice seems to be between moving or stunting our growth.

The congregation has, once again, risen to the challenge.

### Sydney Street

In late 2007, we will be creating a new home for ourselves. The Sydney Street building is spacious and high-ceilinged, with excellent acoustics. The ceiling of the new sanctuary is made of beautiful wooden beams—and there are windows!

There is even a green space out back, behind the parking lot.

Of course, as with any new home, some changes will need to be made. No doubt, there will be growing pains—and perhaps a few new frustrations to be found—as we settle into our wonderful new space.

But, as we have proven again and again, it is the community that defines the space it inhabits. The Sydney Street building is a beautiful space from which to contemplate the new millenium—and, it is hoped,

many more years of growth, warmth and community. Home, as they say, is where the heart is, and so it is that we will make a wonderful new home for ourselves as we move into the future as a vital, growing community.



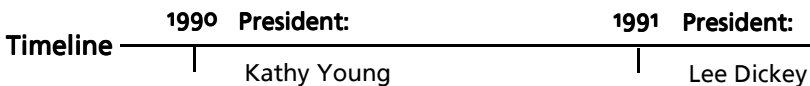
View from the loft, Sydney Street



## A Sign of the Times

From the October 2, 1973 Newsletter:

A note came in to Unitarian House the other day in connection with an open line talk show on religion run by the radio station CKKW. It was signed by Father Peter Feherenback and addressed to "Dear Rabbi." Guess the Father thinks if you don't believe in the divinity of Jesus you've gotta be Jewish.



# The Evolution of a Newsletter

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By Susan Deefholts

## The Origin of the Species

The newsletter began early on in the history of the Waterloo County Unitarian Fellowship. In fact, the first newsletter we have in the archives dates back to November 2, 1956—before the first meeting of the Fellowship.

For many years—indeed, for decades—the newsletter retained a similar look and feel, even as it cycled through a series of different editors.

The single sheet, with its tightly-spaced, newsy, type-written format provided ample forum for a variety of fascinating observations, reflections and updates. It was the newsletter that documented the ups, downs and developments of the community as it evolved through the years.

Wonderful tidbits can be gleaned about the day-to-day fortunes of the Fellowship. For instance, the May 3, 1961 newsletter reveals, “The oldest member of the Fellowship joined last Sunday. William Stolts, 96, living in the Fairview Mennonite Home, Preston, signed up after a visit from Carl Ott. Mr. Ott reports that Mr. Stolts is ‘on the bit’ and ‘no slouch’ when it comes to discussions.”

Sometimes, the newsletter is the only written evidence we still retain of a phase, an initiative or a movement within the Fellowship. For instance, few may be aware of the fact that in 1961 the Fellowship undertook a very specific kind of outreach in the community: “Arrangements are being made to establish a Unitarian Club at the University of Waterloo. The outlook for this event is encouraging.” So encouraging indeed that one week later, the nascent “University of Waterloo Unitarian Club” had already sponsored a talk, rather forbiddingly entitled “The Use and Misuse of Leisure Time.”

The newsletters also give a hint as to how the Fellowship was perceived by others in the community, as well as demonstrating what kinds of people were attracted to Unitarianism through the years, via the kinds of talks being offered, as well as through a

series of asides. In January of 1971, for instance, a few Laurier sociology students studied the Fellowship, observing that 35 percent of the membership had post-secondary education (compared with 8 percent in the larger community). The editor concludes that “they were most impressed with our discussion periods—the way we respectfully listen to each other.”

And yet, though the newsletters of those early years documented so many details of day-to-day affairs—fundraisers and mortgage payments; slideshows and wilderness walks; recent and upcoming speakers—reading through them also, paradoxically, provides a larger picture.

When the community was filled with hope and bustling with activity, the weekly newsletters, too, were bursting, and seemed scarcely able to contain all the information that needed to be conveyed.

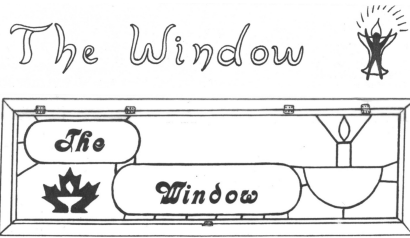
By contrast, when the fortunes of the Fellowship were in decline, the tone of the newsletters was more subdued and sombre, reflecting the low morale that prevailed within the community.

### Intelligent Design

Through the years, the simple, typewritten format served the Fellowship admirably, conveying the announcements and updates according to the varied styles and “voices” of the editors who took on the task of producing the weekly missive. But, in the mid-80’s there were some who saw in it the potential for something even greater. Thus began the change, in late ‘86.

By the end of the year, what had once been called simply “Newsletter” had acquired the name by which we know it today, courtesy of Lee Dickey: “The Window”. The accompanying logo was designed by Sylvia Knight.

In the year that followed, the newsletter went through a series



“Windows” into history: logos from past Newsletters



of transformations in format, appearance and layout. By the end of 1987, a graphic, similar to the one we now associate with “The Window”, had been designed and added to the front page.

The content continued to be lively, and it was now supplemented by drawings and graphics framing the various articles and texts.

Of course, looking at the finished products, a computer-type like me had initially assumed that there was some sort of early onscreen formatting involved—it was only upon discovering the occasional original that found its way into the archives that the real work involved became obvious: each graphic or image has been carefully cut out and meticulously taped to a master sheet. Often articles were assembled in column format the same way—via the liberal use of scissors and tape. Dabs of liquid paper conceal the edges of the paper, to make for a seamless result, once photocopied.

In the early 90’s, Mark Paul took over the venerable position of newsletter editor. He has shifted over to a computer platform and taken up the Herculean task of keeping our community informed, via the elegant, well-laid out and informative newsletter we enjoy today.

### The Missing [L]Ink

What article about the evolution of a newsletter would be complete without a missing link—or in this case, some missing ink?

And so it is that there are, indeed, some gaps in our collection of newsletters. It is not clear, after all these years, whether the lacunae that are found in the older files, through the ’50s, ’60s and ’70s, are because there were occasional weeks where the newsletter was not issued—and was therefore not available to be included in the archives—or whether these are, indeed, legitimately missing issues of the missive.

There is, however, a far more significant case of a “missing link”, for if we are to believe the newsletter archives, the year 1989 simply did not exist.

It’s unfortunate that we do not have these newsletters, as it seems to have been a year of some significance: reading between

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**Milestone:** Unitarian House is sold. From September ’94 to June ’95,

the Fellowship meets at Willowells.



## “Women as Persons” and Other Memorable Pieces

Though the newsletters are essential to anyone who wishing to follow the fortunes and history of the WCUF, and later the FUCW, they also carry within them a number of articles and short essays that are memorable in themselves. Of course, there have been too many wonderful writings through the years to enumerate them all, so I shall just touch on a few that happened to catch my eye.

In 1987, Janet May contributed an interesting piece entitled “Women as Persons” which reveals that women were not officially recognised as persons in Canada until ‘29—and considered the property of their husbands by Ontario Law until 1970!

Lee Dickey contributed a fascinating series of articles about his visits to a series of UU churches in the Boston area, describing the different kinds of architecture, services and community he encountered at each location.

In another article, Bob Whitton reminisces about some of the more unusual weddings he has performed over the years—including one in which the “groom looked just like Tom Selleck and the bride like Linda Evans”. It turns out the entire wedding party consisted of professional models from Toronto. Another wedding was conducted in secret: the bride and groom had been together 30 years and even their own children didn’t know that they had never officially married!

In one case, he even had a repeat customer—a groom returning after five years, with a new bride at his side. Her remark: “That first one was just the dress rehearsal!”

**Milestone:** The first meeting at Dunbar Road takes place in

September of 1995.

### Verbatim...

From the January, 1986 Newsletter:

*Lee Dickey reports New York isn't as bad a city to visit as he'd been led to believe—he even got lots of help from a fellow subway passenger on one occasion. We thought people only got mugged there.*

# A People's History

By Felicia Urbanski

*Felicia Urbanski had only been with our congregation a few days—and she had not even begun her official duties with us—when she responded to my call for submissions. She volunteered to go out to meet and interview long-time members and friends, some of whom had, over the years, drifted away from the community for various reasons. The result is a wonderful article highlighting these vibrant personalities and their unique contributions to the fellowship over the years.—SD*

Let's hear these names: Bob Whitton... Lois and Charlie Macdonald... Lynn Watt... Halla Piekarski... Carol and Lee Dickey... Herb and Barb Lefcourt. These are some of the names that have been depended upon and appreciated over much of our 50-year history. These are names that form the strong strands in the fabric of what comprises the First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo.

I have been privileged to hear personal stories of their spiritual journeys, of their work in and for the congregation, and of their families and friends.

You may personally know some or all of these people, or you may not. If you don't know them, then as you read on, think about how you might introduce yourself to them. You might want to call them, chat on the phone, or even arrange a visit. Bring your questions, be open to listening. I guarantee that you will find a wealth of memories and treasures.

## The Early Days: 1956-1970

Bob Whitton is fondly remembered by all as a kind of "Mr. Unitarian," although he does not brag about his accomplishments! He and seven other people met at a home on McGregor Street. Bob was the information officer at the then-new University of Waterloo. Halla Piekarski was a librarian there, and when Lynn Watt arrived on campus, his office ended up being right across from Bob Whitton's.

From such a richly intellectual environment arose a wealth of personal contacts from various departments of the university—those who were generous in sharing their time and knowledge of a vast

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**1997 President:**

Stephen Preece

array of topics with the fledgling Unitarian group. There were presentations on spirituality, science, religion, ethics, philosophy, and physics, to name a few. Halla served for 22 years on the Program Committee, and worked many of those years with Charlie Macdonald and Philip de Gruchy. In 1984, Halla organized the discussion period following the services, which took place in the Allen Street kitchen.

For a long time, Bob Whitton printed orders of service on his own mimeograph machine and created the congregational newsletter. Bob's writing and publishing experience with *The Record* and as a publicist at the university gave him the tools to accomplish this. His ability to play piano added beautiful music and hymn-singing to the services. He would then give the main presentation!

Soon, the attendance figures got so high, they were running out of room! The large meeting room was filled to the brim every Sunday. All the various rooms were used simultaneously for classes. There are stories about "meeting even in the bathroom—sitting on the edge of the old tub." That bathroom eventually became a coat room during this flourishing era of the mid-1960s. As the public schools exerted social pressure on children to "attend a Sunday school," parents were relieved and pleased to find an open-minded, liberal religion *with* a Sunday school for their children.

During the Vietnam War, individuals in our congregation provided havens for U.S. draft dodgers.

The congregation's attendance would go in cycles of highs and lows. Bob Whitton, Lynn Watt, Charlie Macdonald, and the late Don Bastedo would gather together and discuss "What should we do?" every so often.

### Years of Change: 1971-1995

"What do you mean—I just got here, and you're going to close it down?" asked a distraught Lee Dickey on the first Sunday he attended the Fellowship in 1970. He and his wife Carol had just moved to Waterloo from Wisconsin. The congregational vote on that fateful day resulted in the brave decision to continue on. By this time, the attendance had dwindled significantly. Some cite lack of professional leadership as one of the reasons.

Professional ministry was discussed at various times. There were a number of part-time Unitarian ministers over the years who had a

variety of leadership styles, from one who "played the guitar, dressed in jeans and brought his pet dog—he was lots of fun!" to one who "looked like the prophet Jeremiah." The latter was Rev. Carl Thitchener, who served with his wife and ministry partner, the Rev. Maureen Thitchener.

The Allen Street house sold in 1994—a significant event. Theo Raynham remembers that when he moved to Waterloo from Sarnia, he felt wonderful about a congregation with a building, a street address, and a minister. When he arrived, it had just been sold!

When the current Dunbar Road property was found, it was noticed by someone just driving around the neighbourhood and spotting the "For Sale" sign. By then, Carol Dickey, chair of the capital campaign, proudly announced that the congregation had *exceeded* its goal!

#### New Horizons: 1996-2006

Many who were elected to positions of lay leadership had moved here from other Unitarian congregations, and had some close family connections. Kathie Keefe, a former Sunday school student of Charlie Macdonald when they were both in Hamilton, became an active member here in Waterloo.

The congregation attracted more young families with children, and became more active within the Canadian Unitarian Council (Lee Dickey served on the CUC Board for six years) and the Unitarian Universalist Association, before the two organizations split in 2001.

There are others who have made their own, unique contributions to the community through the years. People like Herb and Barb Lefcourt, Dick and Sylvia Knight, the Torries, Ida Fisher, Bev Sawyer, Mavis Kerr, Janet Schenk, Irving Ilmer, Jack and Mag Horman, Mark Paul, Rhoda Riemer, Dorothy Harder, Helga Tewfik and Olga Taylor, among so many others—all of them have enriched the community with their inimitable presences, contributions and personalities.

Past boards and presidents have all made incalculable contributions, ultimately helping to carry the fellowship through the hard times. As well, we have those whose names, ironically enough, are not as well documented, the past newsletter editors and Directors of Children's Religious Education.

All of these people have helped to bridge the distance between an assembly of people who meet regularly and a true community—they

have made the difference between a short-term group that met for a period in time, and a thriving culture that is still evolving and growing after 50 years.

The First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo continues its tradition of strong lay leadership in many areas, including bold decision-making! In July 2006, the Shopping Committee, responsible for finding yet another new property to house our overcrowded congregation and staff, presented a proposal to the membership for a special vote—in the middle of the summer! Amazingly, while other churches were on vacation, our quorum was easily reached for this important decision, and 88% voted in favour of purchasing the building at 299 Sydney Street in Kitchener. Bravo!

Occupancy is projected for October 2007. As we look back on these first 50 years, let us use our insights and compassion to serve one another and the wider community. As we develop and refine our mission and vision, let us remain open to the challenges of the future, knowing that we are the keepers of the dream.



**Verbatim...**

From an unpublished 1979 article by Bob Whitton:

One day, fairly early in 1957 as I recall, we thought it would be a good idea to find out what usually happened in a Unitarian service and we suspended our own meeting for the Sunday and drove down to Toronto to attend the services at First Congregation on St. Clair Ave.

It was very impressive... The building was beautiful, the music was lovely. We looked forward to the day when we might have a building of our own and a minister of our own. It was very inspiring."



# Ministry and the Lay of the Land

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By Susan Deefholts

Fifty years' worth of Unitarians in Waterloo also means that there are fifty years' worth of weekly services. That's a lot of Sundays!

Early on, the Fellowship made use of resources Bob Whitton had acquired from Toronto and Boston, including a set of programs that guided a fledgling group through a series of services:

“There were papers discussing all sorts of religious subjects; there would be a set, say, on Jesus. One paper in the set would discuss why Jesus was really God.... Another would support a rather modified Christian viewpoint; still another would be agnostic; a fourth would be Unitarian, and a fifth would be violently anti-Jesus—perhaps arguing that he was evil and so on.”

The readings would be handed out, shared and discussed by those assembled.

Still, being Unitarians, they also thirsted for variety. Given that for the first 30 years, the Fellowship did not have any kind of professional ministry on staff, the programming committee was kept exceptionally busy, organizing speakers and topics for discussion every week. And yet they came through heroically, searching high and low for speakers who would stimulate the attendees, and filling in the gaps themselves as often as not.

People like Herb Lefcourt, Bob Whitton, Bruce Torrie, Larry Maki, Leo Hagedorn, Lynn Watt and Ida Fisher were the ones who rose to the challenge, with the result that the weekly meetings for the Unitarians were diverse and stimulating. Halla Piekarski, meanwhile, kept things going through the summer, leading the smaller discussion groups that took place at that time. And into today, we have people like Craig Beam and Marc Xuereb continuing the good work.

The first guest speaker was from Hungary—he spoke of the 1956 uprising and inspired the Fellowship in one of their first social action initiatives: the sponsorship of one of the Hungarian refugees, fleeing the fallout.

There were also celebrity speakers from time to time: Edna Staebler, a local philanthropist and celebrity, would speak at the fellowship on occasion. As well, back in February of '68, Earle Birney, the award-winning Canadian writer best known for his

narrative poem “David,” spoke to the group.

But even amid the celebrities and professors, the speaker who made a very deep impression on the fellowship was one of their own members: Kon Piekarski, an Auschwitz survivor, who spoke of his experiences and later wrote a book about them.

There were talks on Hinduism, Buddhism, Judaism and Christianity. Nor did the Fellowship shy away from discussing difficult subjects like mental illness, discrimination, sexuality and civil rights.

Still, the format of the meetings remained informal and discussion-oriented. Ritual elements, such as the lighting of the chalice, the prelude and postlude, and other structural elements are relatively recent developments, though the orders of service have been with the fellowship from the start.

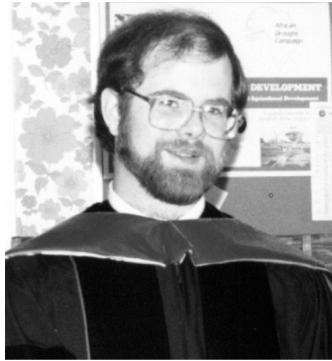
There have also been more recent lay-led successes, including some fantastic presentations from the congregational Youth, a seed service last fall that used the motifs of dormancy and regeneration to powerful effect, and this past summer’s compelling “Gospel According to Woody Guthrie,” written and led by Jay Moore.

One of the enduring classics of the lay-led repertoire, however, is the famous “restaurant skit.”

Originally written by Mavis Kerr for the yearly canvass fundraiser back in ‘88, the restaurant skit depicts the diversity of people who come to Unitarianism as customers at a restaurant, ordering up their customized service like courses in a meal. The waitress is sassy, scrappy and ready for trouble. Her first customer orders up a secular service, insisting there be no prayers involved, as he is terribly allergic: whenever he hears a prayer he breaks out in “cross-shaped blisters,” a phrase that has found its way into the popular parlance of the congregation.

But, the restaurant skit’s fame has spread even further: after it was performed at one of the leadership schools, other congregations purchased copies of the script, with the result that it has been performed at Unitarian venues all across North America. Mavis has generously donated all proceeds from the sale of the script back to First Unitarian. What better fate for a skit that was originally conceived to kick off the congregational fundraiser?

## David Herndon



David Herndon hailed from Royal Oak, Michigan. His background was in nuclear physics, before he underwent a change of heart and decided to go into ministry. He had only just finished his studies when he joined the WCUF at quarter time in 1986—the rest of the month he spent with the London congregation.

David was very interested in experimenting with service format and with the use of symbols in his talks. His arrival therefore introduced a new kind of ritual and structure to the services, which at that time followed a more secular, lecture-and-discussion, with the occasional song thrown in, format.

His presence boosted both morale and attendance. It also reinforced the impression of a well-established Unitarian organization to the wider community. After one of his first sermons, the newsletter exulted, “That was quite a meeting back on April 20 when David Herndon... paid us a visit. It had to be our largest attendance in the past 22 years.”

His style of service is fondly remembered by many. For Mavis Kerr, one of his Easter services was particularly moving. In “The Strength to Go Below,” David sang Stan Rogers’s song “The Mary Ellen Carter,” before ruminating on its message of persistence in the face of great odds, and the hand we can each take in creating second chances for ourselves.

David’s presence marked a significant milestone for the Fellowship—and was our first incursion into professional ministry.

## Carl and Maureen Thitchener

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Carl Thitchener's reputation preceded him: in early 1987, after giving a persuasive talk on the subject of safe sex and AIDS to his NY congregation, Carl distributed condoms. The action gained widespread notoriety—it was covered in the K-W Record as the springboard for discussion about what was then a sensitive topic—and earned Carl reprimands from both the U.S. government and the Vatican.



By contrast, Unitarians were for the most part delighted by the gesture—even before it became evident that the condom incident had resulted in an unintended benefit: a number of new people were drawn to Unitarianism, as they wondered “what kind of church would hand out condoms?”

With their visibility boosted thanks to the media and the controversy, attendance at a number of different congregations in the States and Canada went up.

A few years later, in 1989, Carl joined the Waterloo Fellowship quarter time. He didn't mind the long drive up from Williamsville, NY—but he didn't like driving at night, with the felicitous consequence that he tried to ensure that committee and board meetings remained focused and adhered to their agendas.

Carl was an excellent raconteur—both in the funny and serious veins—and so he was able to use humour and anecdote to introduce serious and often touching topics. One of the memorable talks he gave was on the subject of sexuality, and it was then that the question of undertaking the steps to become a welcoming congregation was first raised.



On another occasion, he spoke on the subject of different kinds of beliefs about God: deism, theism, atheism and agnosticism. Afterwards, he polled those assembled to see where everyone placed themselves with such beliefs about deity—and Lee Dickey recalls thinking at the time that he believed in “at most, one god.”

Carl was also a flamboyant performer on the piano, and one of his dream auction offerings was to perform at the event of your choice “in the key of C.”

Not long after he began with the Fellowship, Carl’s wife, Maureen, also became ordained. After a stint at the Olinda congregation, she joined our Fellowship—and so, between the two of them, we had half-time ministry!

The differing approaches and perspectives of the pair made for an enjoyable contrast from week to week, and attendance continued to rise.

Maureen had a very different style to her presentations. She often spoke on subjects of identity—both spiritual and personal—and how we can approach the process of fashioning and defining our own identities. Her talks were eloquent, enjoyable and well prepared; people remember her as a sweet, friendly person who spoke very much from the heart.

The Thitcheners were also with the congregation during the challenges of selling the Allen Street house and searching for a new building.

They saw us through the difficult transition into the Dunbar Road property and said their farewells in December of 1995.



## Beryl Baylis

Beryl Baylis was born in Britain. Her parents immigrated to Canada, in search of a new life in the wake of World War II, sailing to the New World on the S.S. Franconia, before settling in London, ON, with their children.

Like her parents, Beryl was a seeker who followed her heart. For a time, it led her, along with her young son, Danny, to our congregation. She joined us in 1996, when she was still an intern, in the process of being credentialled as a minister—but that didn't hold her back from getting fully involved with the community. It was Beryl who introduced the "lunch with the Minister" every week—a gathering that has now become a valued tradition and a way for people to connect with the minister on a more personal level, outside of the hustle and bustle of Sunday mornings.

Beryl also gave wholeheartedly of herself. She cared about the people of the congregation and in turn was well-loved by them.

Her Sunday talks were "heartful," filled with metaphor and the power of symbols. She touched on a number of the old traditions, as well as talking of personal growth and self-examination.

Though the Congregation very much appreciated Beryl's guidance and ministry, other circumstances—including complications surrounding the granting of her final Ministerial Fellowship—meant that in mid-1998, she ultimately chose to follow a different road. Wherever that may have led, we wish her well!

## Anne Treadwell

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Anne Treadwell was in Hamilton—where, as chaplain, she dedicated Mavis Kerr’s eldest son—before becoming ordained and serving as full-time minister to the Olinda congregation. She came to First Unitarian in Waterloo in 1998, initially dividing her time between our congregation and Elora-Fergus.

She conducted her first service with us in September of ‘98 to a great turnout.

Over the next six years, she was an essential part of the Congregation, helping to shape the direction of its development and growth—from 70 to 120 members. Under her ministry, First Unitarian matured further and began to assume many of the aspects of its current form as a thriving, growing community.

Anne’s style of ministry was uniquely her own. Her love of poetry meant that she often took the opportunity to weave favourite snippets of verse into her talks. She had the ability to craft language well and she read beautifully. Between her self-contained dignity and her lovely English accent, she brought to the services an impression of elegance and occasion. She was known for her sense of perspective and her ability to step back and look at the big picture in her Sunday reflections.

And yet, for all that, Anne did not shy away from controversy. When she believed in an issue, she did not hesitate to articulate her perspective, explain her rationale and then stand by her decision.

After six years—and the transition from part- to full-time ministry in our congregation, Anne retired in December of 2004, with many good wishes and fond farewells.



## Roberta Haskin

Roberta Haskin came to our congregation as an interim minister in 2005. She had previously worked as a teacher and as a chaplain at a hospital.

Her term with us was fixed at one year because she and her husband Dennis had made a promise that they would keep moving, seeing new places and making the most of her interim placements.

And yet, despite the brevity of her tenure, Roberta didn't hesitate to jump into the thick of congregational life, working with us through a highly transitional period in our history, as we continued to grow and explore new directions. She was ready to try new approaches and take the initiative on changes that would help to accommodate the evolving culture of the community.

Her husband, Dennis, also didn't hesitate to jump in, and he, too, joined committees and helped initiate changes in different facets of the community.

Roberta also crafted wonderful, thoughtful talks, making eloquent use of metaphor and imagery. One Sunday, she spoke of what it was "To Love a Place," and how the notion of place—be it metaphysical, conceptual or literal—can be a powerful motif in our thoughts and outlooks.

It was during Roberta's ministry that we implemented a number of positive changes, including the hiring of a part-time administrator and the creation of the Caring Network to help those members and friends in need.

We wish Roberta the best on her many journeys and adventures, as she and Dennis experience the challenges and exhilarations of the years to come!





## Felicia Urbanski

Felicia Urbanski and her husband, Larry Squire, joined us in the summer of 2006. They had met years before, when Felicia played the violin for the Thunder Bay Symphony Orchestra.

Though it has only been a few months since Felicia joined us, she has already taken steps to help move us forward in realising our goals—including the fundraiser concert “An Afternoon in Vienna” that she and Boyd McDonald presented on violin and fortepiano.

She has also implemented a number of positive changes to the order of service and introduced a component in which congregants have a chance to greet each other, and then introduce newcomers.

Her services have often been on topics of building community and strengthening bonds, including a bread ceremony for Thanksgiving, in which everyone was invited to bring breads that were relevant to their culture or upbringing, speak a little about their significance and then share the loaves with the congregation.

With her background in pastoral care, Felicia has also made a point of visiting less-mobile congregants and those who have moved away from the community over the years—with the result that, within short months of arriving, she has written the wonderful article “A People’s History” about the amazing people who have helped build and shape this congregation across the decades.

Thank you, Felicia, for your irrepressible energy and your invaluable input!



## Sources

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbours as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- spiritual teachings of Earth-centred traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

# A Year in the Life of a Congregation

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By Fiona Heath

The congregational year begins in September. The heat of summer lingers, the leaves on the maple trees begin to turn orange and red, the children head back to school, and First Unitarian gathers to share stories and water. The water communion service, the first weekend after Labour Day, brings us together to fill a bowl with the water of our summer adventures. The new year's teachers are introduced and honoured.

Our service styles range from the traditional hymn and reflection to participatory ritual, with key elements always present. The chalice is lit, the children are offered a story, joys and sorrows are shared, and we sit in meditation together. Our meditation time is usually preceded with "Spirit of Life"—a hymn of great meaning to many of our members. We enjoy inspiring reflections and engaging rituals.

Groups that have been quiet over the summer begin again: chalice circles, the women's meditation group, the Gospel Refugees—a men's singing group—and the women's book club. Committee work resumes.

Downstairs, in the classrooms, we are filled to overflowing with children. The younger classes have anywhere from 5 to 12 children each, while the pre-teen group starts with a half dozen kids. Upstairs, in Founders Hall, the room is comfortably full with all ages, from babies to young adults to seniors. Recent years have seen an increase in the numbers of new families and young couples.

Every Saturday the kitchen is used by the local chapter of Food Not Bombs to prepare a meal served to the homeless and poor outside Kitchener City Hall. Founders Hall is rented out to a variety of groups and special events throughout the year, including a mediation group and the K-W Pagan Temple.



The end of October brings crisp sunny days and cool nights. Samhain is celebrated with a moving service that remembers our lost loved ones. Adult religious education classes, some offered by the minister, others by members, keep the evenings busy. Classes may include learning about archetypes, perspectives on Christian history, or nature and spirituality. A Buddhist meditation course was particularly popular. The UU newcomers' course is offered.



The sign of a cold winter.

Social events in the fall may include a newcomers breakfast, a singing night, a pizza and games night, or a drumming workshop. The Social Action Committee will organize the congregation to supply lunch at a local Habitat for Humanity building site.

November brings our annual fundraiser: the Dream Auction. Members and friends offer special evening events—such as theme dinners or movie nights—and all fill up quickly. Some members will also attend the Central Region Networking Gathering, which brings together Unitarians from around the province for a weekend of workshops.

November is also our pledge time. Some years we hold a large potluck at the church, other years we have small group potlucks at members' houses, or the canvas committee may phone or meet with everyone on an individual basis.

Winter has arrived by early December. There may not be much snow, but the dark comes early and stays late, and the wind can be biting. We celebrate the holiday season with an intergenerational service, with the children creating a pageant and an adult choir singing carols and other seasonal songs. Some years we may focus on the Christian story, others winter solstice. We might perform a Unitarian pageant written by one of our members. No matter what story we tell, the highlight of the service is singing "Silent Night" by candlelight.

After the evening intergenerational service, the holidays are quiet at First Unitarian. The New Year's service is intimate and informal,

often focused on musical offerings.

In January the round of activity begins again. Children's religious education classes are back in session. Adult religious education begins at the end of the month. Members are busy participating in the special events from the Dream Auction. At the end of January is our annual Fair Trade Coffeehouse, an evening of musical talent and homemade treats. Founders Hall is filled to overflowing for this event. Fair trade goods, from coffee and chocolate to jewellery and clothes, are for sale.

In February the earth spirituality circle celebrates Brigid. This informal group meets at the church on most pagan holidays to honour our connections to the earth. Open to all Unitarians, older children are also welcome.

The Child Haven International dinner is another highlight of late winter. Child Haven is a network of orphanages in India, Tibet and Nepal, run by the Reverend Fred Cappuccino and his wife Bonnie. Fred and Bonnie, members of First Unitarian in Ottawa, come to Waterloo Region every year for this event. Many of our members organize and attend this event, which includes an Indian meal, a silent auction, and Fred's infamous stories.



The Gospel Refugees

At the end of February, Toronto congregations organize a Mid-Winter Retreat, a weekend away that includes both workshops and relaxation activities. This is a chance to share stories with friends from other congregations. Training for lay chaplains also happens at this time.

In late January or early February, we hold our Annual General Meeting after Sunday service.

The Social Action Committee will be busy educating the congregation on a particular issue. Last year we focused on demonstrating religious support for same-sex marriage, as the federal legislation was debated throughout the country. As well as a letter writing campaign to our federal members of parliament, we organized an inter-faith demonstration for same-sex marriage.

Spring comes at last as we celebrate May 1<sup>st</sup>, or Beltane, an

intergenerational service. Last year included a maypole dance at which children and adults enjoyed learning to the sounds of chanting. The days are brighter, the grass is turning green, and crocuses and daffodils are blooming. It is almost time for the porch furniture to be brought out.

We may have a coming-of-age ritual for older children who are moving out of the formal programming during Sunday services.

The long weekend in May brings the Canadian Unitarian Council Annual Conference and Meeting. There are always a few Waterloo Unitarians who attend, whether the meeting is close by or on the other side of the country. A service shortly after allows attendees to share their experiences with us. At the Hamilton ACM, FUCW Social Action Committee members helped collect photos for the Project Ploughshares Million Faces campaign against weapons of war.

In June, the formal church year comes to an end as we celebrate a flower communion. Members bring in flowers to share, and everyone gets to take a blossom home to remind them of all the beauty in the world. Irises, peonies, late tulips, and poppies may be brought. Our dedicated teachers and Director of Religious Education are honoured at the same service.

The congregational calendar wraps up with a picnic in Waterloo Park. There is a potluck lunch followed by games for the kids. Water balloons are always popular while the adults relax and chat.

In July and August, services continue, led by lay leaders and guest speakers. Attendance drops only slightly as the coffee hour becomes the juice hour, children engage in crafts and games rather than curriculum, and the services are more informal and experimental.



## Piano is our Forte

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By Boyd McDonald

*Over the years, First Unitarian has been privileged to host a wide variety of talented musicians. We have heard diverse styles—everything from classical to varieties of folk, jazz and contemporary music—and we are now moving into yet another musical era, with the presence of an all men's choir, the possible revival of our regular choir and rumours of a women's choir being bruited about. We have also seen the recent emergence of our very own house band: Blind Faith and the Lost Crusaders.*

*Overseeing it all is our fabulous Music Director, Boyd McDonald, an award-winning pianist and composer. Below is an article he wrote several years ago for the ministerial search package, detailing the history of music in our congregation. —SD*

In the early years, Bob Whitton played piano for the Fellowship's services, in addition to leading the congregation from the pulpit. Later, at Allen Street, Irving Ilmer, concertmaster of the K-W Symphony, persuaded colleagues to join him in performing chamber music on Sunday mornings. Once the upright piano was supplemented by a KORG electric keyboard, a far wider scope of music became possible during services.

Vocal enthusiasts formed a fledgling group of choristers who met when we moved to Dunbar Road in 1995. Erna Van Daele conducted, providing structure and purpose to the rehearsals.

The choir met Thursday evenings to practice for their monthly performances.

More ambitious programming occurred at Christmas time and at year-end celebrations. The acquisition of a grand piano in 1996 added another facet to the congregation's repertoire.



Boyd at the  
fortepiano

A Music Committee formed in 2001 to deal with activities within Unitarian House and in the community. Community projects included a performance in conjunction with the Wilfrid Laurier University Chapel Choir and the production of a Choirfest with the participation of several Unitarian choirs and musicians in the area.

To accommodate those who liked to sing but couldn't commit to evening rehearsals, an early morning sing-a-long called the "Early Boyds" was initiated. This drop-in music making before the service continued for two years in the large classroom down stairs.

Busy schedules and a reluctance to commit to long periods of time prompted the choir to take a sabbatical and to experiment with Vocal Modules. Here, music for specific occasions could be rehearsed for four to six weeks under professional guidance.

Other modules such as recorder playing, drumming, chant, sound exploration, sound art and folk song have

been explored. In December 2004, the Music Committee cooperated with the Director of Religious Education in the presentation of A Children's Winter Pageant by Joyce Poley.

While our strength continues to be classical music, there is increasing interest in expanding our music repertoire; several services have experimented with taize chant, drumming, folk and jazz music.



The Choir, June 1999





# CRE-ating a Future Together

By Susan Deefholts

The history of the Children's Religious Education—or CRE—program goes almost as far back as the Fellowship itself. In fact, part of the impetus behind forming a UU fellowship in the region came from some of the early members' experiences with trying—unsuccessfully—to find an appropriate religious education class for their children.

According to Bob Whitton, the CRE program had relatively humble beginnings: “Those of us who had children operated a religious education program Sunday mornings, going around to each others' homes.”

After a visit to Toronto's First Unitarian in early '57, a number of changes to the format were implemented. The service time was lengthened to give the CRE teachers a better scope of time in which to work with the children. Also, since the Sunday school class and the services were initially held at different times, the thought of consolidating the two events began to make more sense.



CRE-kids in the mid-70's

In the ensuing years, the program developed alongside the congregation. “We started off with the ‘Martin and Judy’ books, but we added ‘Joseph the Carpenter’s Son’... and ‘The Church Across the Street’, and other things. I think in about 1959 we launched a program whereby the children in the older class were taken on a series of visits to other churches.”

In the ensuing years, the CRE committee designed a variety of different programs for the kids. Some of the names associated with the committee are Barb Lefcourt, Dorothea Sprung, and Faye Elsdon. The classes themselves were diverse, including everything from puppetry, carpentry, and cooking, to wilderness hikes. There was even a series of classes in which the youth created and printed their own newspaper.

Over the last 50 years, the CRE program has been an essential component of the Fellowship—and yet, so many of us are unaware of the diversity of activities and programs that take place in the CRE classes. The pages that follow might help rectify that oversight.

## A Legacy of Roots and Wings

*There are two things we should give our children: one is roots and the other is wings.*

—*Hodding Carter*

By Margaret Insley

I visited WCUF for the first time on Allen Street in January of 1993 and was greeted warmly at the door by Dorothy Harder. I had my five-year-old son Peter by the hand and was expecting another child soon.

There were four children in the program at the time, plus some babies and toddlers being cared for in another room. The children included Ian and Geordie McRuer and Michael and Richard Coburn. The parents of these four boys acted as the teachers. Occasionally other children would visit, enlarging the class size, but generally it was a small group. Graham Kent attended every so often. Kathy Young (Dorothy Harder's daughter) brought her two children, daughter Victoria, and son Zack, who was still a baby at the time.

The children's class was upstairs in what had been a bedroom of the former home. Since it was an old house, the floor was very creaky. The children were asked not to move around too much as every thump and bump could be heard in the downstairs living room area where the service was going on.

I was very intrigued by my first few visits to WCUF and Peter seemed to enjoy himself. I soon began to attend regularly and volunteered to teach the children. I recall attending a meeting of the Children's Religious Education Committee that was chaired at the time by Kathy Bissett. When Kathy stepped down from that role, Mavis Kerr and I shared the role for a while.

One nice feature of the house on Allen Street was that it had a lovely yard that the children would play in during coffee time. The old house had a friendly feeling to it, and I think the children liked all the nooks and crannies that they could explore. The upstairs rooms had lots of lighting and a nice view of a treed street.

The children's story was a regular part of the service back then, as it is today. The adults seemed to enjoy it as much as the kids did. Another thing that has not changed is how much the children enjoyed the after-service cookies, sometimes making it difficult for the adults to procure one. Children darted around the adults at coffee time—to the best of my knowledge no one had coffee spilled on them.

It wasn't long before the Allen Street house was sold and we moved

into rented space in Club Willowells. This was not ideal as there was very little storage space, so that supplies for the children's program had to be transported each time. The numbers in the children's program were up and down. The Preeces had joined us with their young son Jasper and baby Erika, but the Coburns had moved away, so there wasn't much net growth. Stephen Preece and Lisa Rowe joined on as teachers.

During this time at Willowells, our Sunday morning programs kept going for the adults and children, but there was much less going on at other times due to our lack of a permanent home.

After only a year at Willowells, we purchased our building on Dunbar Road. This was a turning point for our congregation. More families with children began to come regularly. We started having occasional pizza nights on Fridays, as an opportunity to socialize at a time other than the Sunday service. This helped parents with young children to get to know each other and integrate into the community.

Another turning point for the children's program was the hiring of a part-time DRE—eight hours per week to start. Alice Rushing was our first DRE, beginning in 1998. It made a big difference to have someone who regularly devoted time to organizing and planning programs and activities for the children.

Another positive thing that has happened during my almost 14 years in the congregation is the extent to which children and youth are integrated into congregational activities. There has been a real effort made to provide opportunities for adults and young people to do fun things together—such as at intergenerational services, music and drumming events and the annual picnic. This reflects a trend that has been encouraged by the CUC and the UUA throughout our congregations. Over the years, we have had several skilled DREs, and others have worked hard at these intergenerational events. In addition to Alice Rushing, those individuals who took on the DRE role have been Nancy Oldford, Deborah Wood, Dianne Heise-Bennett, and our current DRE, Sherry Lawlor Alexander.

Our successes in connecting with young people and their families is an important reason why we are now ready to make the move to a larger building. This is something we can all be proud of.

## Glads, Sads and Apple Communion

*Lighting the Chalice and Joys and Sorrows are two important components of the weekly services—ritual elements that draw us together, create a sacred space to inhabit, and build a community united by our shared tragedies and triumphs.*

*But, we are not alone in this sharing. Every week, we see the children gather at the front of the sanctuary for a story time in which we also partake—and then we sing them down to their classes.*

*But for the younger members of our congregation, that is only the beginning of the weekly rituals that create safe spaces for them, and encourage a warm, supportive atmosphere of learning and sharing.*

Storytime is the  
prelude to the  
weekly rituals of the  
CRE classes.

The Congregation of  
Kids prepares to light  
their chalice.

The Explorers light their chalice, while speaking the words,

“We light this chalice to celebrate the love within us, among us and all around us.”

The Chalice Children begin their “Glads and Sads,” the CRE equivalent of Joys and Sorrows. Each person takes a stone and places it in the bowl of water while sharing the week’s highlights and lowlights.

The Apple Communion is another element in the weekly ritual. The apples are sliced—a popular job in the older classes—and then shared around the class.

# Changing the World...

*Another essential facet of CRE is social action—and teaching kids that they can make a difference in the world. It's an empowering message.—SD*

**Hurricane Katrina Benefit**  
 September, 2005  
 The young people and teachers cooked and served a lunch, passing along donations to relief funds.

**House of Friendship**  
 We went on an excursion to help sort food for packing into emergency food hampers. You wouldn't believe how much fun we had sorting potatoes and bagging rice!

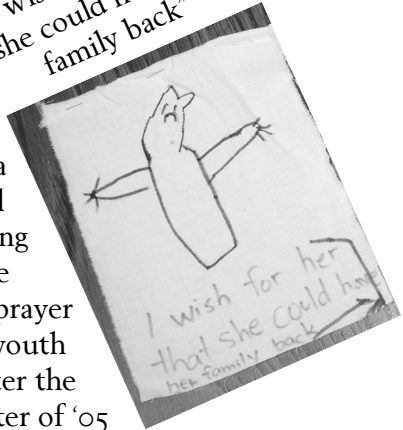
**Food Not Bombs**  
 An unforgettable experience for the UU Whatevers, as they helped Food Not Bombs serve food in downtown Kitchener on a Saturday afternoon.



"Love to all"

Just a small sampling of the beautiful prayer flags the youth created after the tsunami disaster of '05

"I wish for her that she could have her family back"



### **Dream Auction**

*In November of 2003, the CRE youth decided to make their own offering for the annual Dream Auction. In total, they raised over \$250. Here is an excerpt from an article by Erika Preece in the December 2003 Window:*

We were in a mad rush planning and purchasing items for the social. The toy/book/video sale was a big hit, and many people purchased fun, inexpensive items. The vinyl rip-off was a challenge of strength, ripping off wallpaper. Kids could come and decorate cupcakes with candy and icing at the cupcake station. We all had fun making sales to nice people, and enjoying ourselves (and watching kids enjoy themselves too).

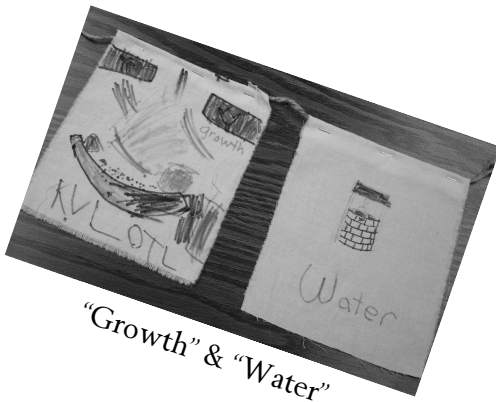
### **ROOF**

*From an article by Scott Forsyth in the January 2004 Window:*

ROOF is an organization that helps homeless youth. Some are from wealthy families, some from poor families, and some from broken families. ... The UU Whatevers had money to buy presents for 6 youth.... We went shopping at Conestoga Mall for these gifts. On the same night we delivered the gifts to ROOF.

### **Nonprofit Popcorn**

One afternoon, the Explorers class made popcorn and sold it to raise money for a nature preserve.



## Interwoven Generations

*Intergenerational services are those in which the young people stay upstairs and participate in the activities with the adults. Over the years, we have had a number of very special intergenerational services, including a number of wonderful Solstice Pageants. Here are a few highlights. —SD*

May 1st, or Beltane, is a traditional celebration of spring and the earth's fertility. As part of the Beltane celebration, for the last two years, we have made excellent use of the pole that adorns the centre of our room.

The first year that we attempted to dance the maypole resulted in chaotic merriment. The second year, we successfully wove the colourful ribbons into an exquisite pattern, demonstrating the beautiful diversity that can result when people work together.

The Honour the Animals service was another wonderful experience. One Sunday in spring of 2006, everyone brought along the animals in their lives. The sanctuary was alive with our furry, feathered and fishy friends. What made this event even more special was that it originated with the youth of the congregation, who helped to create and lead the service.





# ARE You Ready to Learn?

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By Susan Deefholts

From one perspective, the Adult Religious Education—or ARE—program began with the first meeting of the Fellowship, given that the weekly services often seemed to involve a process of seeking, of education and of discussion.

The Sunday sessions were often presented as a series on a set of related topics, such as the religious traditions of India. And, for those whose intellectual insatiability was not satisfied by the Sunday discussions, there soon emerged another alternative.

The Adult Study Group of the late '60s was part book club and part ARE. At one point, they met to discuss Pierre Berton's *The Comfortable Pew*, while on another occasion, Barb Lefcourt, who was chair of the study group, organized a study course on "Life, Time, Work and Leisure: A Case Study of Shifting American Ethics."

But, in the ensuing years, the Adult Study Group seems to have faded into obscurity.

There were, of course, short-term courses, including an "edible wild plants" excursion offered by Mavis Kerr as a Dream Auction event. At other times, a variety of slideshows were offered about different parts of the world, based on the travels of various friends and members—but none of these were officially classed as ARE.

It was not till the '80s that the inklings of an ARE program began to emerge once again. The "Cakes from the Queen of Heaven" course was offered in March of '88: "A ten session adult seminar on Feminist Theology." Of course, the spelling was intentional—a nod to the feminine form of the Greek word for "god."

Later that year, a program called "The Interdependent Web" was offered, a class that explored the principles of Unitarian Universalism and how they might be implemented in life and within the Fellowship.

The 90's ushered in the beginnings of a more developed program, with classes such as U2, which included "adventures in mythology and theological developments."

In recent years, the program has continued to develop thanks to Jack Horman and the ARE committee. There have been a number of exciting recent offerings, including Peggy Hagen's class on mythology, Ian McGregor's class about the psychology of faith, and Jack Horman's "Ancient Controversial Texts about Jesus."

For anyone with the time and the interest, ARE is a fantastic way to learn about an astonishingly diverse range of subjects.

## A Sign of the Times

From the October 14, 1970 Newsletter:

*... Did you know that the wage gap between men and women has increased for the past 25 years; that men are steadily taking over the better paid "women's jobs" (librarians, etc.)... That only 1 in 10 PhD's is being granted to a woman—fewer*

There have been times when we Unitarians have tended to feel, perhaps, that it wasn't enough for us just to meet together Sunday mornings... that we ought to be involved in all kinds of righteous causes as well...

-Newsletter, October 14,  
1970

# Making a Difference

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By Susan Deefholts

Long before there was a Social Action Committee at the WCUF, there was social action.

One of the first initiatives undertaken by the fledgling Fellowship was the sponsorship of a Hungarian refugee, in the wake of the 1956 uprising.

In the ensuing years, a number of other initiatives were also undertaken by members of the Fellowship, including a confrontation, in 1966, between Herb Lefcourt and Reverend Lloyd Pierce on the subject of religion in schools.

The question of religion in schools would prove to be a recurring motif for the Fellowship: in '79, they approached the local school board with readings from a number of faiths—Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist, among others. When the school board tried to stall the process, they would have none of it. Bruce Torrie wrote, speaking of “unfair and inequitable” treatment.

The Social Action Committee itself had its origins with Phil de Gruchy and Marnie Morrow’s involvement with Amnesty International.

Mag and Jack Horman, and Colin Read have also been very active with the Social Action Committee. It was Jack who suggested that fair-trade coffee be used at congregational events—an idea which, in turn, led to the introduction of the annual Fair Trade Coffee House.

The Congregation has also sponsored two different refugee families, in cooperation with the Lutheran Refugee Committee. The first family was from Somalia and consisted of a mother and seven children whom we raised money for and helped to settle into their new country.

The second family we sponsored were from Afghanistan—Rameen Danish, his mother, grandmother and two younger siblings. Rameen’s father had been a pharmacist in Kabul, and because he had been non-traditional and had shaved his beard, he had been murdered after the rise of the Taliban.

Rameen and his family had been forced to flee the country. For many years, they lived in a Pakistan refugee camp, and Rameen had learned his English from a neighbor in Pakistan.

But, despite the difficulties of his life, when he arrived in Canada, Mag Horman recalls his lively intelligence and his insatiable curiosity about everything, as he made excellent use of his English, asking questions all the way back from the airport!

Today, Rameen is studying political science at Carleton University.

A number of other initiatives have also been undertaken by the Congregation. There have been several letter-writing campaigns—and we participated in the ambitious Million Faces Petition, launched by OXFAM, Amnesty International and IANSA. We also served as a main contact in coordinating the Million Faces undertaking with other Unitarian congregations across Canada.

We support Habitat for Humanity and the Working Centre, a local resource centre for people who are in search of employment, as part of our community outreach.

In addition to the important work undertaken by the committee, there are also many other exciting initiatives within the Congregation, such as the work people like Ida Fisher have been doing with Child Haven International, a program started by Bonnie and Fred Cappuccino, founded on Gandhian principles and focused on helping children in South Asia. Theirs is an extraordinary story of love and persistence.

The youth of the Congregation are also enthusiastic participants in a wide selection of social action initiatives—with exciting results. They have worked to send aid to Iraq, making posters and collecting items for basic supply kits to send to war refugees. After the tsunami struck in 2005, they shared ideas about what could be done and started a collection. Aidan Davis Hess and his mother, Joanne Davis, organized a bake sale to raise money for Mary's Place.

In all, the work of the Congregation as a whole and the individuals who form a part of it is an amazing testimony to the kind of difference a strong intention and a little bit of determination can make—within the community and in the wider world!



# Welcoming Congregation

By Susan Deefholts

Whenever I see the beautiful flag and plaque in the front foyer at First Unitarian, I am reminded of how lucky I am.

As a woman of ethnically mixed background, I have, over the years experienced some instances of prejudice. I have walked down the street and heard hissed or even shouted slurs—usually racially-based, but occasionally with a sexist insult thrown in for good measure.

Even worse, of course, are the more subtle condemnations I have encountered in certain contexts—the sudden, unspoken chill in the air when someone who hadn't known of my background learns it and something shifts in their eyes and their manner. Suddenly, I



feel I am being judged, not on the basis of my interactions with that person, but as a result of a facet of my being that I cannot change—even assuming that I wanted to.

And yet, I have been fortunate to have grown up in a time and place where, for the most part, I am accepted. Though these isolated incidents can be corrosive, living in an atmosphere of acceptance means that I have been able to develop a strong enough sense of myself to dismiss them as best as I can.

I am happy to say that we have come a long way. In the course of my day-to-day existence, I can walk into virtually any place—with the possible exception of the men's washroom—and know that my welcome is implicit. It is not something I even think about—except when I hear about other areas in which we still have a long way to go. Recently, this has been highlighted via the endless controversies surrounding gay marriage in the news.

The issue is one that is close to my heart: I have been blessed in

having relatives and dear friends who are proudly queer. I was privileged, and deeply moved, to be one of the first people my cousin confided in, many years ago. At the time, he was just entering adolescence and unsure of how his father in particular would react to his coming out. He is now openly gay and his father has come to accept and respect that truth.

And so, when I walk into UU, though I am glad that the flag is there, another part of me is sad that it has to be—that we have not yet reached the stage where it is simply assumed that people of all sexualities and sexual orientations are welcome everywhere, in the same way that women, and people of diverse ethnicities have come to be welcomed, at an implicit level, in our society.

Over these past months, seeing the flag and the plaque every Sunday piqued my curiosity. I wanted to know more about the story behind them.

The “Welcoming Congregation” program was first introduced by the UUA—amid some controversy—in 1987. It consisted of a series of exercises and workshops that a congregation would undertake in order to achieve Welcoming Congregation status.

A few years later, Lyn McGinnis suggested that we move toward acquiring the Welcoming Congregation status here in Waterloo. It was a bold idea, and Lyn’s hope was that the Fellowship would be at the vanguard of change in the region.

Though the motion found some support, both by the Thitcheners and by other members of the congregation, the idea had not yet reached its time, and so it was shelved for several years.

In September of ’92, Lyn McGinnis and Mavis Kerr offered a series of Adult Religious Education workshops, including one that focused on sexual diversity. In ’95, Lyn McGinnis and Lisa Rowe led a series of workshops based on the book *The Welcoming Congregation: Resources for Affirming Gay, Lesbian and Bisexual Unitarian Universalists*.

The next year, First Unitarian hosted a “Rainbow Making” program that encouraged diversity and tolerance of all sorts.

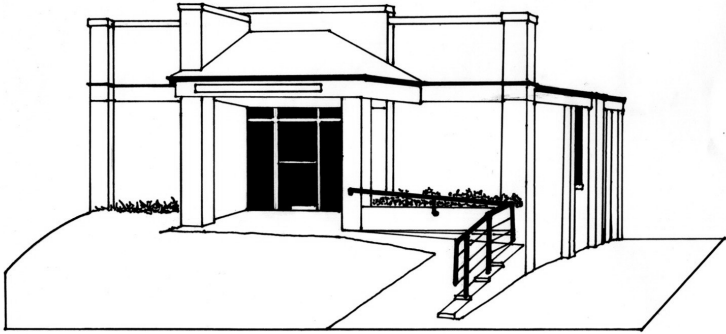
Then, in 1999, a survey was taken of the congregation, with largely positive results. Guest speakers came and spoke on the subject, including folk from the Hamilton congregation, which had

already acquired its Welcoming status. And so, the Welcoming Congregation initiative was introduced once again.

The move was still not without its controversy. The vote eventually went through in 2001 with a clear majority, but a number of longtime members felt alienated by the controversies surrounding the issue.

Naturally, when I first entered the Dunbar Road building, I didn't know anything about the background: what I did know was that First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo had chosen to take a stand—a stand that I could feel proud to be a part of.







## On-Board with a Committee

By Susan Deefholts

The work done by so many volunteers over the last 50 years is incalculable—without it, we wouldn't have a congregation. And while pledges are important, it is these contributions—the kind that don't earn tax receipts and whose biggest reward is often the knowledge of a job well done—that continue to sustain us.

There are numerous individual volunteers who have done heroic work through the years—putting out the newsletters, the directories, helping with the upkeep of the building and grounds, doing the bookkeeping and in all ensuring that everything is run smoothly.

But, there are also those who graciously agree to be on the Board or join a committee—and this requires a different kind of heroism. Though the work of individuals can be long and demanding, the work of those who are on committees or have joined the Board is further complicated by our Unitarian love of discussion.

What works well for us in a spiritual context is not always ideal when it comes to trying to pass resolutions or push ideas through into development.

And yet, dedicated individuals still give of their time, their skills, their knowledge and their opinions in these various positions.

In the early days, it seemed as if everyone had some period of tenure on the Board—a short time after showing up to a few of the Sunday services, you would be approached and asked if you would like to take a hand in the steering of the Fellowship—either on the Board or via a committee.

In the latter arena as well, the work is often demanding—and sometimes solitary. For some time, the Aesthetics Committee consisted of one person: Kathie Keefe. Lynda MacLeod has now joined her, so the work is shared between them.

There are long-term committees, like the Membership Committee, the Program Committee and the Religious Education Committees. And then, there are the shorter-term committees, formed for a specific purpose. These have included the Building



1994 Board of Trustees

Search Committee and the Welcoming Congregation Committee.

Another staple of our weekly routine is the PODs. The origins of the name are obscure. Some speculate it is derived from the acronym “People on Duty.” Others say that it comes from the idea of whale pods, evoking the notion of a group, working together . A third story is that it comes from the name used by another congregation, and we adopted it.

Regardless, we have the PODs to thank for our weekly coffee and cookies, for the friendly greetings at the door and for the distribution and collection of our hymnals every week. And we have the POD coordinator to thank for the presence of the PODs—a job that has recently been transferred from Irena Baltaduonis over to Else Barg.

It’s quite a task, coordinating everyone’s schedules to ensure that there are coffee and greetings week after week—and the efforts are much appreciated by all who come to the Sunday services.

In all, without the Board and the committees, congregational life would grind to a halt! Instead, we have a bustling, well-run community and are able to enjoy a wonderfully diverse assortment of events, activities and goings-on. Hooray for our volunteers, both past and present!



## Raiders of the Lost Archives

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By Theo Raynham

*As I have had reason to discover during my recent "raids" of the archives, they house one of the truly priceless treasures of our congregation: the documents of our history. Yet, though some pains were taken in years past to collect orders of service, newsletters and records of meetings, very little is known about the people who snipped those early clippings and assembled the old newsletters. What we do know is that they fell into Maureen Kinahan's hands in the early 1990s. She undertook the initial task of sorting through the boxes and categorising them. From there, Theo Raynham took over the job of cataloguing them in more detail in the new millenium. What follows is Theo's account of his experiences with the*

It must have been about the year 2000 that I was asked to join the Board of Trustees. I protested that since I was not a signed-up member of the Congregation I was ineligible for this honour. The membership book was speedily produced and on a fresh new page I was quickly made eligible.

I can't recall any great contributions that I made to the work of the Board and the progress of the Fellowship, but at one of the Board meetings the president inquired whether anyone would care to take over the archives. In order to break the silence which followed, I innocently held up my hand and found myself elected. Maureen Kinahan had recently resigned from the post, leaving cardboard boxes numbered 1 to 10 and filled with the history of WCUF. She also left a general index of what might be found in each box. There were a few treasures, many routine records and some less-than-memorable junk. I have no idea as to how she had found and assembled all of these records, newsletters, orders of service, and a few interesting collections of programmes, diversions, even paper hats used at the frequent joyous celebrations that the WCUF had held.

Teresa Zvonar came to my aid. She suggested that the whole thing might be more accessible if the folders and papers were re-sorted and filed in regular document boxes. And so came more

uniform boxes tagged 01-1 to 01-10. The prefix 01 was adopted to indicate the year, 2001, in which I re-sorted all the records that Maureen had left. I took the opportunity to throw out some of the duplicated and uninteresting stuff, though I did not achieve the wholesale house-cleaning recommended by the book about archives. It remains to the present archivist or his heirs and successors to make a really clean sweep so as to retain the essentials and items of lasting interest while holding the overall collection within manageable size.

As I went through the boxes and re-sorted the papers, I found the history of WCUF and FUCW to be very interesting, connecting names, familiar and unfamiliar, to events and developments through the years. There are also some interesting albums of photographs.

It also appeared that at some time a mad woman had arisen in the Maritimes and had gone across Canada decreeing that every UU group should send the essential parts of its archives to be microfilmed. In order to comply with this instruction, some of the early records that had been neatly assembled were torn apart and, although the pages were returned, they have never been re-assembled and bound in their original order.

I hope that the FUCW will continue to preserve the records of its life and history, although in recent years the committee chairs and the organizers of special events have been reluctant to submit summaries of their activities. Consequently many interesting details of such activities and the names of people who participated are not recorded in the history of FUCW.

Now, as more and more of the Congregation's business is conducted by e-mail and Internet, and when photographs are submitted on compact discs, we should perhaps consider the appointment of a digital archivist.

I continued to collect and file items of interest until 2005. Jack Horman has now taken over the position of archivist. I hope that he too will find the job interesting and that in the Sydney Street building he will be given more adequate space for his work. Archives are important!



## In Memoriam

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Just a few of the many, wonderful people who have been a part of our congregation through the years. Thank you so much, for all you have done, and, even more, for all you have been, to so many of us.

Don Bastedo  
 Vivian Batke  
 Harvey Burkholder  
 Doris Burkholder

Phil deGruchy

Marge Eby

Mrs. Hall  
 Nick Harder  
 Mabel Hedley  
 Kae House  
 Jack Howard  
 Mary Howard

Irving Ilmer  
 Bob Irving

Sylvia Knight

Dorothy Looker

Jack Macredie  
 Keith McLeod  
 Nellie McLeod  
 Jack Mills

Nabil Naguib

Carl Ott  
 Ann Ott

Ed Ratcliffe  
 Irmgard Raynham

Dorle Sauder-Bongart  
 Frankie Stocco

Major Robert Wesley Taylor  
 Sabry Tewfik  
 Elinore Torrie

John Walter  
 Olga Walter  
 Pauline Watt  
 Elsie Whitton



# Again, an Exodus

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By Peggy Hagen

Soon we will break camp and move on as we have done many times before. We are in migration. And what are we following: the Pole star, the pillar of Fire, Moses, the ancestors, tradition? Not likely! Our lure is Wholeness. It's a domain of the Spirit, and doesn't depend on place at all. We are in Process, separately and as a tribe, and we need to trust our Becoming. Though we can go far on solitary migration to individuation, we can't learn the relating skills that knit us into tribal Wholeness by ourselves.

So that we won't waste valuable energy in backwards-looking nostalgia, we will separate what should come on migration with us from what should be left behind. We are between hanging on and letting go, between what to keep to give us continuity and what to release. Let us take our enquiring and open minds, our quest for more consciousness and our acceptance of differences. Let's pack our art objects: the Banner of the Sacred Flame, our Chalice, the Memorial Plaques, the Quilt and Banners, our framed Principles, the glass Window, and our Songs. Let's take quiet memories of our tribe in meditation, noisy memories of pot-luck meals, dancing memories of Maypole weaving, thumping memories of drumming sessions, ritual memories of weddings and funerals, and musical memories of Bach, Gershwin, and jazz.

We are a Zen people, finding our way by beginning to walk. So we will need all our capabilities and instincts—a balance between reason and the imaginal, between experience and risk, between intellect and emotion, between the visionary and the practical, and between scholarship and imagination. That's why we need a tribe and why we celebrate our diversities. At a mystical level we are continuous with everyone and everything, and always have been. We will always have one another—individuals in community.

So let's bless this present shelter, Unitarian House on Dunbar Road, its usefulness and sturdiness, knowing it will refill with other lives in Process. Let's appreciate all the work by many people who have made this our welcoming and pleasant home for so many years. We are grateful and thank you.





## In Conclusion...

From a 1979 article by Bob Whitton:

What's ahead?

I haven't the faintest idea.

I just hope that if I'm still alive 23 years from now—and statistically speaking there is a very very good chance I won't be—but if I am, I just hope there's still some kind of a Unitarian group here, and that I still have the strength to get up on Sunday mornings and get to see what's happening.