

First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit

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December 19, 2009

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First Unitarian
Universalist Church
Organizational Chart
2009 – 2010

Officers

President

Marilyn Mitchell

Vice President

Bill McKnight

Immediate Past

President

Alicia Biggers

Board Secretary

Alma King

Staff

Minister

Rev. Drew Johnston

Minister Emeritus

Rev. Larry Hutchison

Assistant Minister

Rev. Lynda Smith

Music Director

Todd Ballou

Cantor

Gwen Foss

Office Admin

Jenn Hurtt

Building & Grounds

Joe Brimmer

Leonard Swint

(Sunday)

Trustees

Dessa Cosma

Dan Rebb

Newsletter Editor

Ryan King

DREW'S VIEWS

If the church were a person, and wanted to write one of those end-of-year letters like some people do, it would look a bit like this:

Dear Friends and Family,

It is that time of year again to share with you our adventures in this journey we call life. 2009 has been another year of magic and wonder... Early in the year we spent time with a valuation process in which we discovered that we experience things as going quite well at church. Some of us do have a hard time adjusting to things going well, so it was great to learn that we are feeling good about the direction we are headed!

At the first of the year we also began an entirely new way of determining our pledges of support for the church. Not everyone understands this process yet, but it is working pretty well. Instead of having one big annual canvass event, we spread it throughout the year and canvass a few pledgers every month. By late spring we had a new tenant, as Sugar Law moved into several of the rooms on the second floor. In addition to having new tenants, we now have improved rooms and a highly efficient heating and cooling system on that floor!

In May we enjoyed a long awaited concert as our music director, Todd Ballou, and our office administrator Linda Kernohan performed on our fine old Skinner organ. About the same time we rolled out a draft of a Comprehensive Plan the likes of which we have not had in decades! Much like the new canvass process, this plan looks unfamiliar to many folks, but we are beginning to understand that new things stand a better chance of working than things that are already proven not to work. We're learning!

We had several months this year when roles shifted for people at the heart of doing the work of the church. Linda Kernohan, although a musician by profession, had been a fine administrator but moved to Boston. While seeking her successor we ended up hiring Jenn Hurtt to do the office part of the job, and Katie McIntosh to take on special events and publicity.

Reverend Lynda Smith got a new title of Pastoral Assistant Minister and really stayed busy, especially after Athena Kolbe moved on to work elsewhere and Reverend Lynda picked up her duties with the young folks. Now that Lynda is leaving to be with her mom, Katie is shifting her work to cover the young folks with the help of Maya Thottakath.

If you haven't gotten lost in all that shuffling yet, that's okay, there's more! The Board has also shuffled some and has Marilyn Mitchell back at the helm as President after an undisclosed number of years since she last served as Moderator. During these changes, we discovered some things needed fixing and we will soon have an entirely standard and up-to-date accounting system set up and managed by people specifically trained in using it.

That is a significant change for the new year and the future. It looks like we will have all the out of balance money matters back in balance by then, too!

There is some major activity with the settled Ministerial Search Committee! Although delayed somewhat in getting started, they worked hard and fast to get the Congregational Record posted (so prospects can see that we are looking). Our record has been visible for less than a week and there are already several ministers indicating an interest in serving here! Some of us will remember that a primary goal of the work we began three years ago was to make ours a congregation where skilled ministers would be eager to serve. We seem to be succeeding!

The summary of this year is simple - optimism has, once again, prevailed! May the holidays favor your good spirit and may you find kindness in your heart every time you look -

Happy New Year - See you in church.

Rev. Drew Johnston

Lynda's Lyrics

This is my last newsletter column. I'm leaving First UU to have more time with my mother.

My relationship with this church changed when I was ordained as a minister here in 2006. But my partner, Stuart, and I joined this church in 1977. Our three children were dedicated in the sanctuary. One daughter's wedding was here. One daughter's memorial service was here. Our son's three children and his wife came to my service of Ordination here. Besides milestones, I have so many memories of laughter and singing, all kinds of discussions, many small kindnesses, lots of hugs, and some tears of sorrow and joy. Having no relatives in Michigan made church our extended family. Now my family calls me--my mother in Arkansas--my grandchildren in Ohio. Here's an excerpt of a poem by Richard S. Gilbert, that sums up my jumble of feelings about this transition:

"Catch your breath; relax your body; loosen your grip on life.

Consider that our lives are always unfinished business....Do not let the incompleteness weigh on your spirit; do not despair that imperfection marks your everyday; do not fear that we are still in the making.

Let us instead be grateful that the world is still to be created; let us give thanks that we can be more than we are; let us celebrate the power of the incomplete; for life is always unfinished business."

You have my deep gratitude, my best wishes, my prayers, and my hope for the church to thrive with truth, kindness, courage, and love. May you be well. And thank you for the beautiful flaming chalice and candles you gave me last Sunday!

Love,
Rev. Lynda Smith

Presidential Ponderings

In November, after church and coffee hour, Drew gave a very interesting presentation on Universalism. The film he showed was produced by the Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma (proving that Oklahoma is not totally unredeemable!). I was bride's maid to my best friend in that church back in the 60s, and she was the one who introduced me to Unitarian-Universalism, which has been such an important part of my life. (I almost said a "God-send" but caught myself).

Drew spoke of Universalism as "good news" for those who had been wounded by religion. What an apt phrase. I am one who was "wounded by religion" and yet when I think back on my not-so-Disney childhood, I realize that various church youth groups were bright spots in that period of my life. I "lost" my faith when a Presbyterian minister in the high school youth group assured me that I didn't have to believe that Jesus was the son of God. He relieved me of quite a burden I had been carrying, what with Hell-fire-damnation and all that I was exposed to. I also delighted in singing in the Disciples of Christ church choir and the Nazarene youth group. And I still think fondly of MYF (Methodist Youth Fellowship) and the monthly chicken noodle dinners other teens and I served to people who came from all over to eat our wonderful food and purchase the handmade quilts from the women's society.

This is why I came back to a church – this church – in my thirties. I missed the community of church. I also came to this church because I believe we have a mission to reach those who have been "wounded by religion" and show them that they can find peace, fellowship and community with other like-minded people who believe in the responsible search for truth in the universe. I fervently believe in the message of "liberal" religion and I want to be evangelical on this point. Finding Unitarian-Universalism has been so important in my life that I want to share it.

Finally, I commend the most recent issue of UU World to you entitled "The Religious Left". That article is an eye-opener, but I also urge you to read "Breath Is Life, a Christian Rationale for Abortion", "A Poet's Grief" and "Ghosts of Unitarian Christmas" on p. 22.

Finally, finally, I commend Gwen Foss for her excellent scholarship proving me wrong in my pronouncement last month that our church was the first Unitarian-Universalist church in the U.S. The Oak Park, IL church was earlier and there were other youth groups and such where Unitarians and Universalists "cohabited". I'll assert that we were the first in Michigan and one of the firsts nation-wide, but otherwise what I erroneously propounded to you last month was, I'm afraid, another "urban myth". However, I stick by the hyphen.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS, EVERYONE!!

Marilyn Mitchell

2009 Ministerial Search Committee Update

I call our 2009 Search Committee, the Most Excellent Search Committee, as these members have come together quickly, thoughtful and with your voice in mind as we complete the process to call a settled minister here at First Church. Now, I must call our congregation, "Awesome", (to coin a Board members phrase) as you responded quickly, thoughtfully, and honestly to our search survey.

Over the past 18 months, there have been opportunities presented to ensure your voice was and is heard with great results presented in our draft plan, congregational activities (think assets mapping, how-we-lead) and the summary of Rev. Johnston's appreciative inquiries. The survey results just "top" off what the search

committee needs to understand about the congregation as we continue our work on the ministerial packet to seek the best and brightest for our future Church.

We, the Search Committee, are excited to work with the Social Justice Committee to bring "Beyond Categorical Thinking" to you on Saturday, January 23, 2010. More details around timing and location will be coming in the next newsletter. This training is another step to ensuring a successful settlement for both our congregation and the minister.

We are now working our way through the requirements of the search process with support of the Board of Trustees for an agreement with compensation; ministerial packet and we expect soon, a successful posting of our Congregational Record (think of this as our "want ad") for other ministers to see and respond.

If you have any questions, please feel free to contact any of the members: Al Acker, Carole Hosey, Sharon Mills, Ian McGill, Ruth Seifert, Mary Lou Malone and myself, Alicia Biggers.

Alicia Biggers, Chair

Late Breaking News—Women's Alliance will now be known as the Alliance!

The members of the Women's Alliance voted at their December meeting to officially change their name to the **Alliance**. This is one of several steps the Alliance is taking as its members work on the goals they formed in the fall to transition to the future.

On January 20, 2010 our meeting's guest speaker will be Tova Purlmutter. She is the executive director of the Sugar Law firm. Sugar Law rents space on the second floor of the church house for their offices. We will learn about the firm's history and the important work they are doing for workers' rights.

Alma King

Christmas Eve Service and Holiday Vespers

There will be no vespers/church night on December 23 and December 30. We'll get back together again on Wednesday, January 6. Todd Ballou will be continuing his musical adventure series that evening with a discussion of the role of the choir in the church.

The Christmas Eve service, led by Reverends Drew and Lynda, will begin at 6:30. The period before the service in the sanctuary, from 6:00 - 6:30, will be for peaceful relaxation.

Dan Secrest

Holiday joy brought to boys and girls!

The next time you see Andee Seeger at Church, let her know you appreciate her generous donation to Vista Nuevas Head Start in southwest Detroit in the name of the Church. Many of you know that Andee had quite the collection of stuffed animals from small to tall with her donation bringing joy to little ones ages 3 to 5 years old. Each child received an animal of their very own! Andee Seeger is a great example of our living our mission to radiate kindness and love courageously! Thank you Andee!

Alicia Biggers, on behalf of the Board of Trustees

Saturday Night Out

1stUU is starting a new group centered on attending outside entertainment, and perhaps followed by group sharing. The events would be open to all adults and not restricted to singles, couples, or almost any type of relationship status. The group would attend at least one event, not necessarily theatre, during the month on any day of the week. It could provide us, the church, both a vehicle for outside of church activity and community. It also would be a fun way to introduce people to the church. Would you join us? If you are interested in helping to plan events please contact Arthur Gabhart or Sally Borden.

Art Gabhart



OUR MUSICAL ADVENTURES CONTINUE ON WEDNESDAY, JANUARY 6, 7-9pm

Todd Ballou, 1st UU Music Director

Church Night is the place to be! MUSICAL ADVENTURES is a series of discussions, lessons, and demonstrations facilitated by Todd Ballou for musicians in our community to build musical skills, network, become involved, and share musical ideas for the benefit of our Sunday morning experience at 1st UU church. Topics will be driven by participants so bring your favorite musical inspiration on CD, or even perform it for us; bring a musical question you'd like discussed, or bring your most musical friend. Topics will include reading music, learning about rhythms, exploring our hymnal, finding your singing voice, sharing your musical inspirations, planning musical experiments, discovering the organ, choir repertoire, providing feedback, and instrumental music.

Mark your calendar for these upcoming topics:

Jan 6- Herding Cats & other choir topics

Feb 3- Instrumental service music- Piano, Organ & Beyond ...yond...yond..yond

Mar 3- 2nd chance: Reading music 101: pitches & rhythms

Apr 7- Reading music 201- The "Key" to listening

May 5- The Musical Psychic- the magic & mystery of selecting music for next Sunday

June 2- If we don't have anything better to talk about, we'll have an Organ Tour!

Todd Ballou

Here We Come A-Wassailing...

Come one, come all to help toast good-health and good-will to 1st church goers for this holiday season and New Year to come. Sure to be a fun-filled and festive affair on December 20th during coffee hour potluck Sunday complete with mulled cider, winter holiday sing-along led by Todd Ballou, and special Wassail cake. Come with us as we go wassailing as we honor all religions that share this festive season. Special thanks to Kathleen and Robert Johnson for organizing this most special celebration. Plan to be there, bring a dish, and share this festive time with one another!

Kathleen Johnson

Social Justice Update

This is just a note to let the congregation know we have postponed the Cool Congregations program until fall 2010. Meanwhile, we are pleased to announce we will be assisting the Search Committee with the "Beyond Categorical Thinking" training scheduled for January 23, 2010. Every member is invited to attend this training (and yes, it is a Saturday).

We want to remind you to pledge your support of the UU Service Committee too: <http://www.uusc.org/> and make sure you support through First Church too.

Lee Gaddies, Chair

"About Us"

This is part of an ongoing series of profiles of members of 1st UU Church of Detroit.

Dan Rebb is a relatively new member of our church, as he joined on the Winter Solstice, 2008. He grew up in Livonia and spent the first 9 years of his education in a Lutheran grade school and then attended Livonia Franklin High School.

Dan graduated from U of M--Dearborn where he majored in Economics and German and minored in euchre. "I'm a product of the 80's; I love music and movies." He is very interested in Fine Arts Photography and has his own darkroom where he develops black and white film.

His father passed in 1996. Dan's mother still lives in the house that he grew up in. His sister, Laura, and her husband, Josh, live in Dundee and brother, Dave, is in Canton with his wife, Joanna, and their son, Andrew. Dan has two feline children, Felix, (a yellow tiger) and Oscar, (a gray tiger). "They own the house and give me the privilege of paying the mortgage."

"A friend who is a Zen Buddhist and knew Lynda Smith referred me to First Church, saying that I was a Unitarian and didn't realize it. I was drawn to First Church because of the friendliness of the people there." "I am a Reiki practitioner and will be glad to explain it to anyone who is interested."

Dan works for an auto parts supplier in their corporate office in the IT department as an EDI coordinator.

Dan is on the church board and on the membership committee. He is currently working on a project to fill in data base information about our members. "You may be hearing from me soon. Gathering all this information will enable us to know each other better. Members of the congregation are a well rounded group of people from diverse spiritual traditions which I enjoy being with."

Mary Neale

Contact Information for Bessie Mercer

Bessie Mercer, a long time member of the church is currently in the last stages of cancer. She would love to hear from members of the church during this Holiday Season! Her address is 626 Peninsula Court, Ann Arbor, MI 48105 and her phone number is (734) 769-0466. Cards and phone are welcome!

Jen Hurtt

Research Project Invitation from Michigan Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Network Steering Committee

Participate in a research project on Grandparents and Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Queer Grandchildren. This study is seeking grandparent-grandchild pairs, where the grandparent knows about the sexual orientation of the grandchild, and the grandchild identifies as gay, lesbian, bisexual or queer. If both parties may be willing to talk to me about this, please contact me for more information about this research project. Grandchildren must be at least 18 years old.

Interviews are confidential, last between 1-2 hours, and take place at a location most convenient to the participant. Both grandparent and grandchild participants will be compensated \$20 for their time. This project is approved by UM IRB (HUM00031673).

For more information, please contact: Kristin Scherrer, doctoral student in sociology and social work at the University of Michigan. Email: scherrek@umich.edu or phone (734) 272-1888.

Martin Luther King Day Community Service

Again this year, 1st UU members will be celebrating the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday with a *day on* rather than a *day off*. Details to follow about our activities. If you already know you're interested in helping out, please notify Dessa (dessacosma@gmail.com; 231-631-4469)

Dessa Cosma

NEXT NEWSLETTER DEADLINE

The deadline for all newsletter submissions, both printed and electronically submitted material, is Wednesday, Jan. 27th, 2010. Please send articles to the Newsletter Editor at newslettereditor@1stuu.org. Your feedback is welcomed and appreciated in the spirit of liberating truth, radiating kindness and loving courageously.