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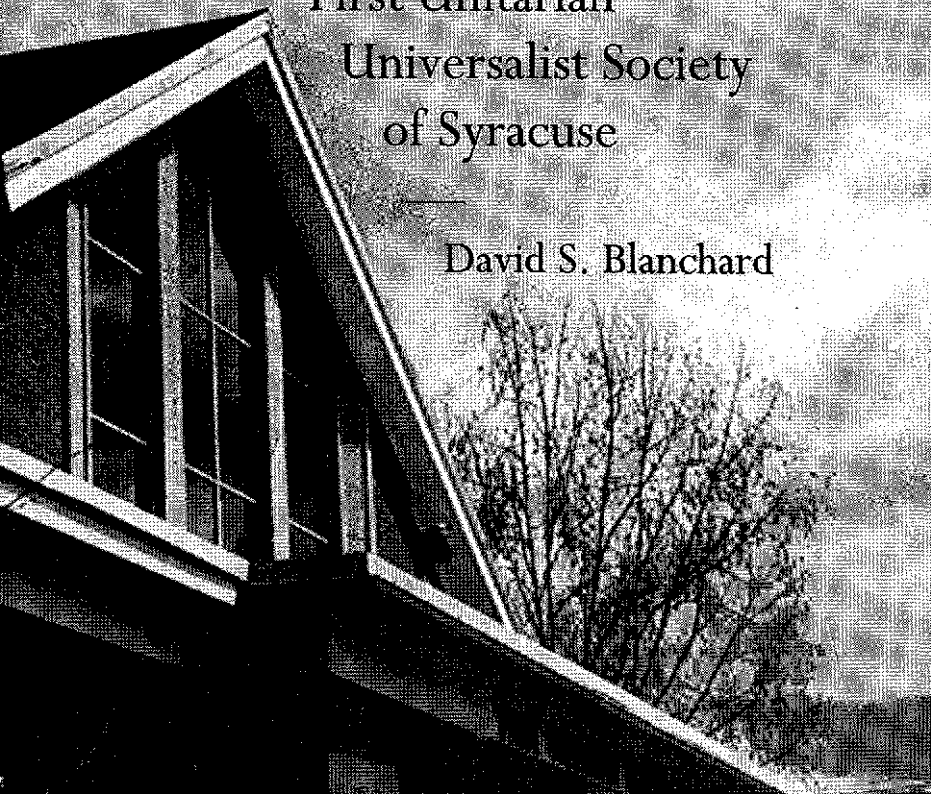
A History of the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse

David S. Blanchard

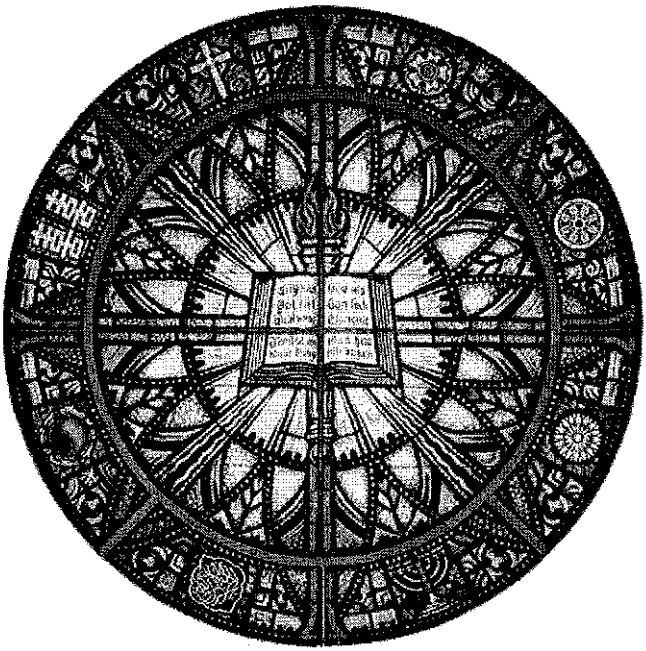


One Hundred Forty Fruitful Years

A History of
The First Unitarian Universalist Society
of Syracuse

by David S. Blanchard
Minister, First Unitarian Universalist Society of
Syracuse

December 2001



The Chancel Window

To the members and friends
of this congregation –
past, present, and future.

PREFACE

In the summer of 1929, the Reverend Frederick W. Betts wrote a book called "Forty Fruitful Years". It was a collection of his writings: sermons, lectures, and prayers that had been produced in the latter part of his extraordinarily lengthy service to what was then called the First Universalist Society of Syracuse. Dr. Betts would live only another three years after his book was published, bringing his tenure in this church to forty-two years. His ministry, being the longest, was indeed a "fruitful" time in the life of the congregation as the story will later tell, yet there are other chapters, other eras, other contributions that are worthy of our attention and gratitude. For over 140 years now, this congregation has brought the liberal gospel to this city and neighboring communities. Some years have been more 'fruitful' than others. Some years could be described as nothing more than barren. I stopped counting the number of church bulletins and newsletters that pleaded for more money. But I still feel comfortable calling the history of this place, "fruitful", if only for the fact that we are still here. Of the one hundred sixty-three Universalist congregations in New York State in 1889, seventeen remain today as functioning religious congregations. We have not followed the biblical admonition and multiplied, but as I trust this document will demonstrate, we have been "fruitful" and faithful to the hopes of our spiritual ancestors who sought to bring to all a message of hope and not of hell.

You might note that I have titled this volume, "A" history, and not "The" history of this congregation. What is contained here no doubt incorporates not only the limitations of the historical record, but also my own biases. Someone else would have written the story somewhat differently. I accept responsibility for my omissions, for my decision at times to ignore something, and to forgive shortcomings. Someday, I hope some future historian of this congregation will extend to my ministry the same courtesy.

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I am grateful to the congregation for the sabbatical leave this year, during which I have researched and written this history. For decades, the late Raymond Davies served as Church Historian – preserving much of what we have in our archives. Jean Jansson created wonderful scrapbooks of church events through the 1930s and 1940s. Alice McBride is a living font of memories as a life-long member of our congregation for over 87 years now. Special thanks to Janet Mallan and Harold Burkart for their extensive work to catalogue and preserve the historical documents of this congregation. It has made my work possible.

In addition to the archives of this congregation, I benefitted greatly from use of the collections of the Onondaga Historical Association. It was there that a huge gap in our congregational story was filled when I discovered a photograph (reproduced herein) of our second church building at the corner of West Genesee and Franklin Streets.

I owe a debt of gratitude as well to the Board of the New York State Convention of Universalists, whose generous grant has made the publication of this document possible.

I am grateful to Rebecca Karpoff, Mark Braiman, H. Daniel Smith and Coy Ludwig for their editorial contributions, corrections, and comments. It is a better book because of them. Thanks also to Linda D'Aloisio for creating the map of downtown Syracuse in the late nineteenth century, showing the locations of our three previous church buildings.

And finally, my thanks to Billy Buchanan for his steadfast love and for his support of my ministry to this congregation.

David S. Blanchard,
June 2001

I
THE LARGER HOPE

Before the story of Universalism in Syracuse can be told, the theological and historical development of the larger movement of this liberal faith demands a brief treatment. By some measures, Universalism came late to Syracuse. It had been a powerful force in the rural New England States throughout the early 19th century and had even taken root in remote parts of New York by the 1820s, when the New York State Convention of Universalists was first organized. Universalist congregations were well established in places like Auburn, Buffalo, and Utica in the 1830s. A Unitarian Society was established in Syracuse in 1838. Efforts were made to begin a Universalist congregation in the Syracuse area in that era, but documents do not survive that would tell us more about their successes or struggles.

Our theological roots can be traced back to some of the earliest conflicts in the Christian Church over salvation. In theological discourse, Universalism refers to a belief in universal salvation: the notion that all are saved from the eternal punishments of Hell. It is based upon the presumption of a loving God that would not doom God's own creation to such a cruel and harsh sentence for eternity. The early church labeled the belief in Universalism a heresy, burning many of its adherents at the stake, but never vanquishing the idea. It reemerged in England in the 18th century and came to the shores of this country in the heart and soul of John Murray.

John Murray (1741-1815) left England in 1770 after a period of personal turmoil during which his wife and son had died and he had been in debtors' prison. He had preached the message of universal salvation in England, but vowed to start life anew in America, hoping for a new beginning. In a development that gives even the most strident atheist doubts, his ship ran aground at Cranberry Inlet, New Jersey. Murray rowed to shore, only to be met by Thomas Potter, who had reportedly been waiting for God to send him a preacher with a distinctive message. In fact, Potter had already built a small chapel in anticipation of the preacher's arrival. Murray recanted on his own promise to abandon the religious life, and began preaching. The rest, as they say, is history. In 1774, he founded what would be the first Universalist Church in America in Gloucester, Massachusetts. He was a traveling evangelist for this new faith, and through his efforts, spread this revolutionary faith throughout New England.

From the vantage point of contemporary Unitarian Universalism, the early Universalists sound quite orthodox. Their sermons were biblically based. Jesus was the central figure of their faith. Some found biblical cause for belief in the Trinity. God was a loving Father figure. What we cannot fully know is the profound implications their theological message had upon people who had long feared a judging God in light of their own supposedly depraved human nature. The prevailing Calvinist theology of puritan America was thought by most to be not only sound theology but an essential social control. Without the threat of hell, many believed that no one would have incentive to behave. Early Universalists were often barred from serving on juries and from teaching school, so warped were their morals thought to be. At the beginning of the 21st century, in a secular age, we can't imagine the extent to which Universalism was a light in the darkness, a hope for the hopeless. Mainstream Protestant ministers were known to call Universalist ministers "Fire Escape Preachers" for their popular theological escape route from Hell. It became so popular, that by the late 1850s, Universalism was the fifth largest denomination in New York State. It was during this time that Universalism took root in Syracuse.

II
FALSE STARTS

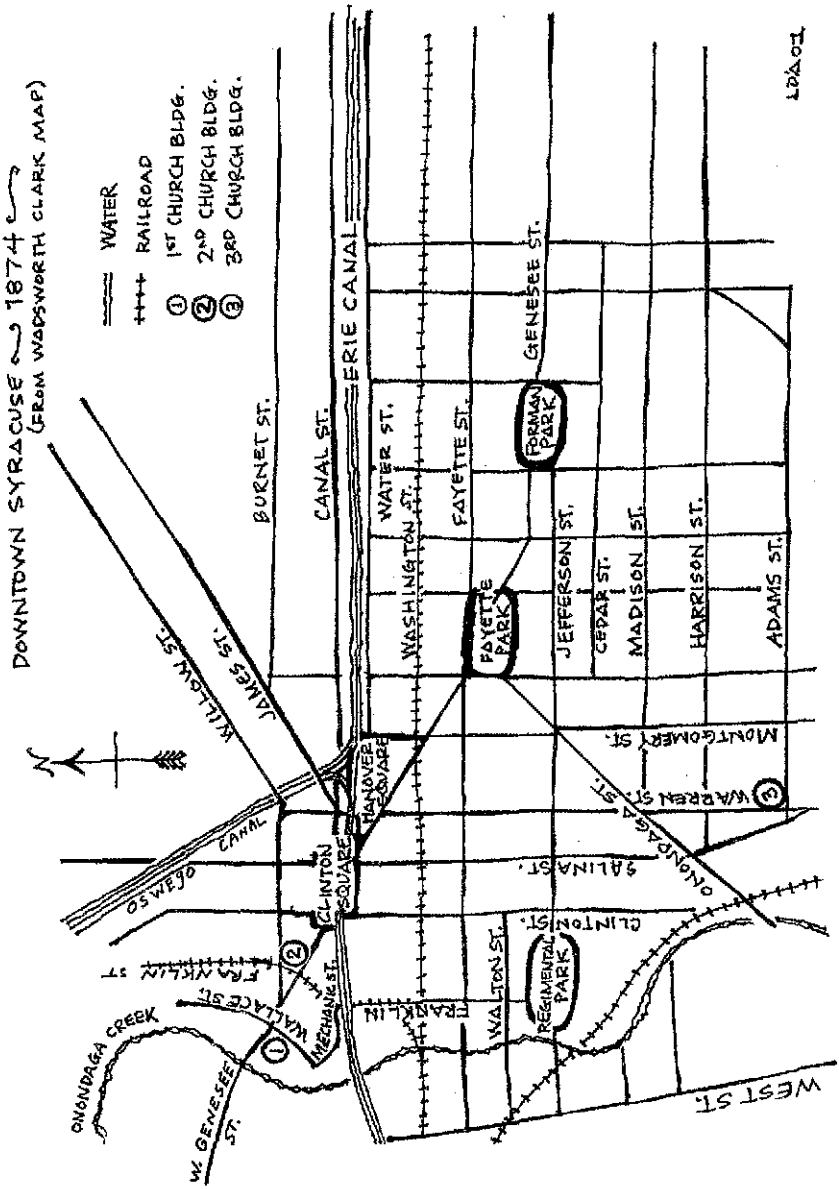
Always a populist faith, Universalism found its way into the rural hamlets and towns via circuit riding missionaries with little formal education and even less theological training. But they had the spirit behind them. In 1824, the Black River Association of Universalists reported that in New York there were forty-five preachers and fifty Universalist societies. It is likely that one of those religious societies was in this community that had yet to be called Syracuse.

Prior to the opening of the Erie Canal in 1825, the City of Syracuse was just another wide (and swampy) spot in the road. Population centers were scattered around the county serving an agricultural economy. Though it may seem odd to us today, the fact that the first Universalist society was organized in Marcellus made sense. It was on the Seneca Turnpike that ran across the State, just about half way between Syracuse and Auburn. It was there on June 20, 1817 that twenty-one persons who described themselves as The First Universalist Society of Onondaga arranged for "Elder Root of Marcellus to preach in the school house near Azarish Hall's, one fourth of the Sundays in the year ensuing." The location of the school house is believed to have been near Howlett Hill Road. The duration of that first society is not known.

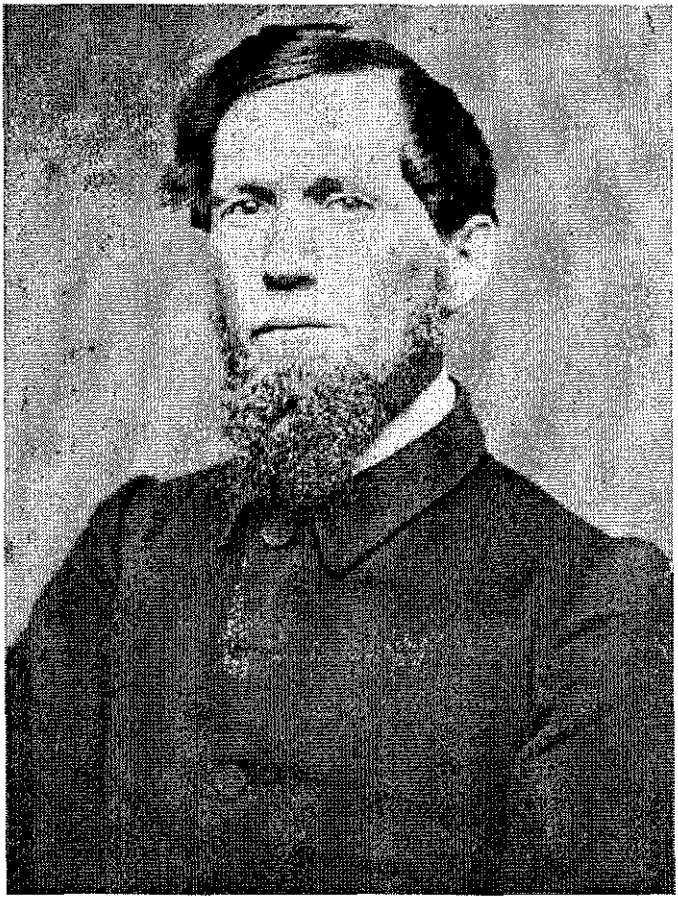
Among the documents most useful for this early period is a handwritten sheaf of papers scrawled with notes. They were written by someone who had been in attendance at the first service of this present Society in 1859 and are likely the reflections of founding member, Nelson Ritter. In these undated reflections, it is noted that Universalism was preached by Stephen R.S. Smith at Salina (presently the northside of Syracuse) as early as 1822. Other prominent circuit riders followed Smith throughout that decade. Our first historian goes on to say:

> "The earliest printed notice I have come across is as follows:
>
> Walter Bullard will preach at Salina the 29 Sunday in September 1830 and at Geddes in the evening at early candlelighting.
>
> People of this hustling generation may not be aware of the fact that very few families owned timepieces, and that a 'moon mark' was an absolute necessity in every family – a church bell to tell the congregation when to go to meeting, and early candle lighting was the time for evening services. All these are now obsolete except the Church Bell which now remains of little use except as a nuisance."

The Village of Syracuse, incorporated in 1825, began to grow as the Erie Canal transformed the settlement into one of commerce, trade, and manufacturing. Along with the westward flow of people and goods came the ideals and teachings of Universalism. Universalist societies were established at Geddes, Liverpool, and Salina. Around 1840 the society in Salina moved to Syracuse, locating in Temperance Hall in the Granger Block downtown. On March 13, 1843, the First Universalist Society of the Village of Syracuse was organized. The Rev. Thomas Beede was settled as their pastor. Like the Society established in 1817, there is no record of when this congregation disbanded. A cause for its failure was division over the issue of slavery. There was a pro-slavery group among the Universalists. An early history remarks, "History was against them, but their convictions were real." Universalists with abolitionist sentiments found the Unitarian Church, under the leadership of Samuel May, more agreeable to their views on this moral issue. From the mid-1840s until 1859, Universalism, expanding rapidly throughout the region, had no institutional presence in Syracuse itself.



Map of Downtown Syracuse,
from Wadsworth Clark Map (1874)



Aaron A. Thayer, first minister of the congregation, 1860-1866

III

THE FORMATIVE YEARS OF THIS CONGREGATION

Perhaps three times is a charm, since something finally took root in the third attempt to establish a Universalist Society in Syracuse. The Village of Syracuse had become a city. The canal was still used, but the railroads were taking over. The slavery issue was more clearly defined. The population of the city had swelled. Early in September 1859, notices must have gone in the newspaper and posters printed that a Universalist preacher was coming to town. On September 11, 1859 Aaron A. Thayer began the first of two courses of Sunday evening lectures in Syracuse. The programs took place in Wieting Opera Hall. Immediately a group sought to retain the services of the Rev. Thayer and the next day secured housing for him to remain. The first lectures were on "Eminent Christian Men" and the second series on "The Elements of American Theology and Church Polity." The popularity of such lectures is easier to understand in the context of that period of history, during which lectures, sermons, and "orations" were a form of social and cultural entertainment. It was still a largely oral culture. It is likely the founding fathers and mothers of our church would consider our present services shockingly brief. In any case, Mr. Thayer remained.

For a period of time the services of the new group were held in Wieting Hall. They paid a rental fee of $8 per week, allowing a morning and evening service each Sunday. For festivals and other special needs it was usually free. Music was supplied by Charley Sutherland's band. Two of the first organizations established were a Sunday School and a Women's Society. During the Civil War the women made stockings and other garments for soldiers in the Union army. The Society was prepared to seek incorporation within months of their first meeting, holding a meeting of the congregation April 2, 1860 at 2:00 p.m. to elect officers and adopt bylaws. The papers were filed with the County two days later. Two months later this new congregation was admitted to the Cayuga Association of the State Convention of Universalists at a meeting in Cortland. Their original covenant as a congregation appears as Appendix I.

Aaron Thayer was a native of Vermont, and was educated at Harvard. Early in his time in Syracuse, he preached a funeral sermon that brought him great attention and acclaim, establishing his reputation in the city. He was called upon to conduct a funeral service for Peter Tinker and his two daughters, aged 6 and 8. Mr. Tinker had poisoned himself and his children because of the infidelity of

his wife. Some two to three thousand people attended the funeral which was held at the Medical College. The three caskets were placed on the sidewalk outside for people to view. It is a curious tale that several early historians recorded as an important event in the early stages of the church. What became of Mrs. Tinker was never noted.

One historian who remembered Thayer's visits to her childhood home, recalled a man with a quick step and few words. Betty Clark Underhill recalled, "It was a delight to see him walk in the house with his quick tread and hear him say, "Sister Clark, is my plate on the table?" Always a busy man, his calls were brief. One of his sayings well adhered to was that "short calls make long friends." Mr. Thayer served the congregation until 1866.

A newspaper clipping from the Syracuse Daily Standard (December 17, 1859), headed "Rev. A. A. Thayer Surprised", provides a rare glimpse into a moment in history which, though a humorous anecdote, allows us to get a fuller sense of the people who first gathered this congregation. It reads:

> "The parishioners of Rev. Mr. Thayer, met last evening at the residence of David Wilcox, Esq., on Willow Street, and surprised their pastor by presenting him a purse of $150 in cash and sundries, as a token of their esteem. The presentation was made through L.Y. Avery, Esq., of Salina, in a brief address characteristic of his good humor and social mirth. On returning to their home, Mr. Thayer and his lady also found that some daring man had clandestingly (sic) entered their dwelling during the evening and filled it with vegetables, groceries and provisions, sufficient to frighten away all hard times for the entire winter. His friends from the First Ward, committed even greater depredations in a quiet way, not long since; for in addition to presenting their pastor with a snug roll of bank notes and family stores, they molested his outbuildings and crowded their pastor's barn with substance for his favorite horse. This is quite like the Universalists for they are a generous and large-hearted people. Mr. T. has now gathered around him a strong band of noble friends, comprising many of the influential citizens of Onondaga County. The success of his enterprise in building up a large and popular congregation in our city, may be relied on with the utmost confidence. Between two and three hundred families are already identified with the movement."

A major accomplishment of that first ministry was the construction of a "meeting house." Mr. Thayer is given much credit in the early histories as being

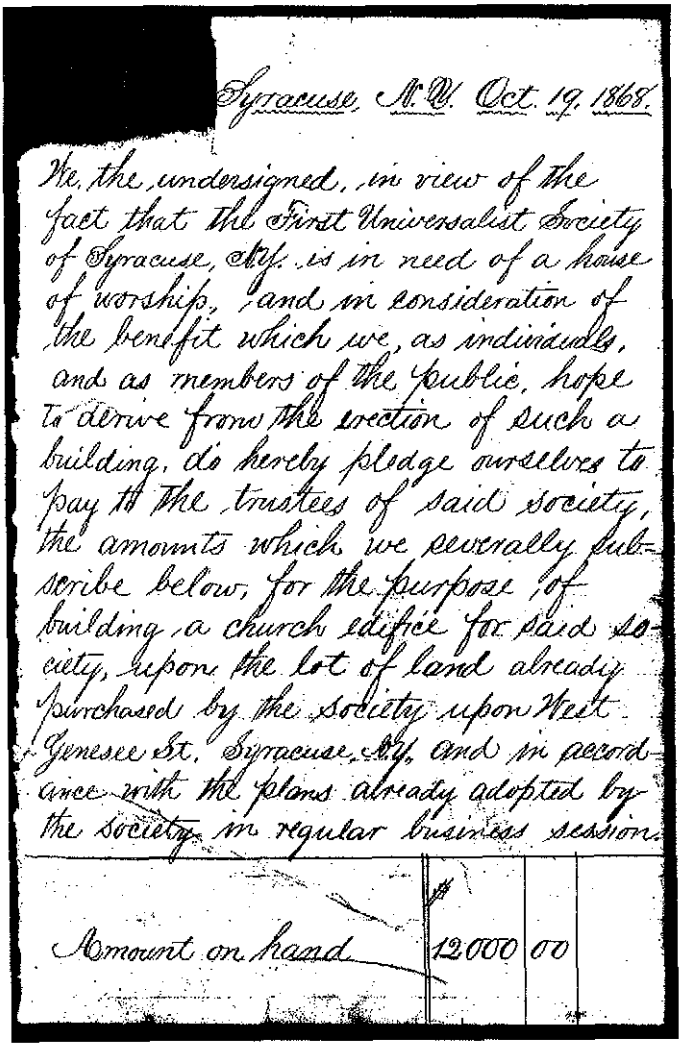
the "controlling spirit all this time, he collected the money, perfected the titles, let the contracts, and paid the bills." The new church and parsonage were located north of the canal on the northwest corner of West Genesee and Wallace Street. A cornerstone was laid in August of 1862, and the wood frame building dedicated at a special service at 10:30 a.m., Thursday, August 20, 1863. This event was scheduled mid-week, no doubt to allow clergy from the region time to travel to Syracuse and then home again for their own Sunday commitments in the churches they served.

The selection of the building site was not without controversy. The unsigned history (likely Nelson Ritter, a charter member of the Society) remarked that "a very grave mistake was made in the location of the first church." It seems that a lot at the southwest corner of Salina and Jefferson St., long used as a stone yard, was offered for sale for $15,000. But the majority of the congregation lived north of the canal and refused to cross it to go to church. Forty years later, they would build their third church two blocks from that most desirable site, and Dey Brothers Department Store would be well established on the corner they turned down. Due to the state of downtown Syracuse at the start of the new millennium, the lot is probably available again.

No photographs exist of the original church building and parsonage. It stood for only five years before it was sold in 1866 to the City for $16,000 so that they could build a High School. It was described in this way: "The church faced W. Genesee St. It had a fine auditorium with Sunday School rooms in the basement, three in number, designed for class rooms or for social work as required. Entrance to the Sunday School was beneath the church entrance as the lot sloped to the creek. The parsonage was at the rear of the church facing Wallace St., and was a good roomy well arranged house."

It was in their new church that the Universalists held their first Christmas Eve celebration. According to newspaper accounts, the service took place at "6 ½ o'clock". They went on to describe the scene: "The church will be appropriately decorated for the occasion, and a Christmas Tree provided for the children of the Sunday School. All who feel a desire to participate in celebrating that memorable event, the birth and nativity of Jesus, the spiritual savior of the world, are cordially invited to attend." (12/24/1863)

The period from 1866, when Thayer left for a new congregation, to 1889 was fraught with difficulties for this congregation. They were frequently without a minister, and when they had one he never lasted long. They were suddenly without a church building. There was a split in the congregation and a second Universalist congregation was formed. Yet in spite of the challenges to be



Syracuse N.Y. Oct. 19. 1868.

We, the undersigned, in view of the fact that the First Universalist Society of Syracuse, N.Y. is in need of a house of worship, and in consideration of the benefit which we, as individuals, and as members of the public, hope to derive from the erection of such a building, do hereby pledge ourselves to pay to the trustees of said society, the amounts which we severally subscribe below, for the purpose of building a church edifice for said society, upon the lot of land already purchased by the society upon West Genesee St. Syracuse, N.Y. and in accordance with the plans already adopted by the society in regular business session.

Amount on hand	12000	00

Pledge of Members to raise funds to build a new church at West Genesee and Franklin Street.

recounted, the congregation stubbornly survived. The details of the conflicts of that era are sparse, as the primary sources of information of that period are handwritten minutes of Trustee Meetings, written in polite and formal prose. In firing a minister, they record "that during the time of his communion with the society the Rev. Charles Tomlinson has not in any degree been found wanting either in desire of effect to advance its interests and to increase its strength and usefulness. Resolved: That in parting with him under the necessities of the case we acknowledge our obligations to him as our earnest and faithful pastor, and as the devoted upholder of the fundamental principles of true religion." It almost sounds like they were recommending him, not firing him. Such are the documents of this era.

Charles V. Tomlinson, minister 1866-1867

It was the aforementioned Charles W. Tomlinson who followed Aaron Thayer as the second minister of the Society in 1866 at an annual salary of $2,000. It was during his one-year tenure that the church was sold to the Board of Education. Tomlinson departed during some unrecorded conflict in 1867. There was one year of supply preaching that followed. During this period without a settled minister the congregation met in the Court House for services. In October 1868, the Rev. Edwin C. Sweetser became the minister, and plans developed for the construction of a new church at the corner of West Genesee and Franklin Street. Before the project was completed Mr. Sweetser was called to serve the Bleeker Street Universalist Church in New York City, and in the summer of 1869 departed Syracuse. A large brick structure in the Romanesque style was completed in 1870 at a cost of $28,000. The architect was noted Syracuse architect Horatio Nelson White, whose mark on the Syracuse streetscape remains in such landmarks as the Gridley Building, Syracuse University's Hall of Languages, and the Syracuse City Hall. The seating capacity was 450. The dedication of the church on October 20, 1870, coincided with the installation of their next minister, George P. Hibbard.

Mr. Hibbard was hired by the Trustees early in 1870, but submitted a resignation in September before he was even installed. On February 12, 1871, the trustees requested that Mr. Hibbard withdraw his resignation. By March 30, 1871, something had changed, and the Trustees resolved that "the Clerk of the First Universalist Church of Syracuse be instructed to notify the Rev. Geo. P.

First Universalist Society, corner of West Genesee and Franklin Street. This was the second location of the congregation, one block from Clinton Square.

Hibbard that his services as Pastor will not be required after April 30th 1871 and that we hereby decline to renew any engagement with him." Something dramatic must have occurred by the time April 30th had come and gone, for on May 4, 1871 the Trustees were meeting again about Mr. Hibbard. They went so far as to make a series of motions that closed the church and forbade the Rev. Hibbard from officiating any longer in that place. They charged one of the Trustees to go to Mr. Hibbard and "demand the keys and close the church against the Rev. Geo. P. Hibbard."

The story, written between the lines, is one of conflict over Mr. Hibbard's efforts to change the nature of the services of the church "after the Episcopalian Tradition." Universalism of that day varied greatly, as does Unitarian Universalism in this era. Mr. Hibbard was apparently aligned with more orthodox Christian teachings, and this seriously divided the congregation. One indication of Mr. Hibbard's perspective can be discerned in the name of the society established after he was fired from his position with First Universalist. His followers created another Universalist Society in Syracuse, "St. Peter's Church, Universalist". They adopted as their theological foundation the Winchester Confession, adopted in 1803 by a Universalist General Convention (see Appendix II). This second Universalist society lasted only four years.

Again, the daily newspapers of the time provide useful details in reconstructing the events of the time without the careful gloss cast over most discussions recorded in formal Board minutes. In May and June of 1871, significant insights emerged in the press. Initially, a two sentence article appeared as follows: "NOTICE: The First Universalist Church of Syracuse is closed, by order of the Board of Trustees. In consequence thereof, there will be no services until further notice." (May 5, 1871)

A week later, the plot thickened. The newspaper described the chief ground of complaint was that "Mr. Hibbard has introduced forms of worship not belonging to that denomination, and that he caused a chancel to be constructed against the known wishes of many of his congregation." The severity of the conflict was noted in reporting that the church doors had been locked at the hour of the services. The writer noted, "we have made inquiries in the hope of ascertaining all the facts leading to the unhappy difficulty, but there seems an inclination, which is very proper, to keep the facts out of the newspaper." (May 13, 1871)

A dramatic conclusion to the controversy came at a service on Saturday, May 27, 1871. During the month of May, the Society had been closed, and Mr. Hibbard and his supporters had been holding services in the Hall of the

Conservatory of Music. The Society's Trustees invited the Rev. Dr. Fisher of the Theological Seminary at Canton, NY (St. Lawrence University) to preach. Upon arrival in Syracuse, Dr. Fisher was met by a committee of the friends of Mr. Hibbard, asking him to decline the Trustees invitation on the grounds that it would cause a widening of the breach. Dr. Fisher ignored that request, and the service remained scheduled. Here I will allow the anonymous newspaper reporter to describe the showdown:

"Yesterday morning the church was opened by the Trustees. As the friends of Mr. Hibbard had also announced services at the same time and place, the church was well filled. The Rev. Dr. Fisher and Rev. Mr. Hibbard entered at the appointed time and took seats in front of the pulpit.

Dr. Fisher beheld the exact situation of affairs, and poured oil upon the trouble (sic) waters, by suggesting that instead of attempting to hold services, a meeting of the Trustees, Mr. Hibbard, and himself, be called at once. The proposition met general approval, and the ministers and Trustees retired for consultation, leaving the congregation alone.

After an absence of about thirty minutes, the ministers and Trustees returned, when Dr. Fisher read an agreement which had been partially made the previous evening, and which had been fully endorsed at the meeting just held, as follows:-

A memorandum of an agreement made upon the 27th day of May, 1871, in the city of Syracuse, by the parties whose names are hereunto subscribed for the purpose of terminating the difficulties in the First Universalist Society, in Syracuse:-

We, the undersigned, agree and promise to carry out in good faith, the following points:-

1st There shall be no preaching in the Universalist Church by any person tomorrow, May 28th.

2nd Rev. Geo. Hibbard agrees to withdraw wholly and finally from all connection with the Society, and all preaching or pastors work in Syracuse, so that his name or influence shall not, by his consent, be used to perpetuate the present troubles, it being understood that this withdrawal is his free and voluntary act for the promotion of peace in the parish.

3rd Steps shall be immediately taken by the Trustees and Clerk of the Society to ascertain who are the legal voters in the affairs of the Society. . . . and that in the future all questions upon which divisions may arise in the Society, shall be submitted to such legal voters, at a meeting or meetings legally called for that purpose, and that their decision shall be final in the case.

(Signed)

Geo. P. Hibbard,	Guy Clark,
S. Jaqueth,	Simeon Rouse,
Ralph D. Marvin,	Henry Russell,
David Wilcox,	H.P. Hall

Dr. Fisher took occasion to briefly address the congregation, admonishing all of the dangers of prolonged controversy, and advising an amicable settlement of all difficulties. He spoke briefly, but kindly, of Mr. Hibbard. He counseled the society to forget the past, and strive for perfect unity in the future, even though it were necessary to make concessions.

When the congregation were (sic) asked to endorse the terms and conditions of the agreement, many responded. Mr. Hibbard followed with a few remarks, giving his reasons for resigning. He said the welfare of the church was uppermost in his heart, and he was fully convinced that its good demanded his retirement. He spoke feelingly of the friendships he had formed, and with a heart full of gratitude to the Society for the many acts of kindness shown him, he took his leave. The congregation rose, Dr. Fisher offered prayer and pronounced the benediction, and the services were closed. (May 29,1871)

Before the year was out, the Society had secured the services of the Rev. John G. Bartholomew of Auburn New York. The salary in 1871 was $3,500 a year. Following a disruptive time, his ministry was remembered fondly. He was an eloquent preacher with a commanding presence. His obituary in the "Universalist Register" noted that "from his first entrance into the ministry his pulpit labors attracted attention by his happy elocution, his magnetic personal influence and his dramatic delivery." Under his leadership the church was crowded. However, he was in poor health, and one year after he arrived, he resigned. He died at the age of 40 in 1874.

At the start of 1874, the Society had called yet another pastor, the Rev. George B. Stocking. The minutes of Board meetings during this entire period of

our history are filled with concerns over the financial state of the parish. Over and over they were deliberating on how they were going to pay the minister his monthly salary. During this specific span of years, the congregation was no doubt depleted by the split which brought the second society into being. At this time, most funds were raised by "pew rental", a system in which members of the church paid an annual fee for their particular numbered seat in the sanctuary. Based on modern seating habits, I am not certain if the expensive desired seats were in the back, but in any case each member had his or her place. When they hired Brother Selden Curtis, a member of the church, to be the janitor, his compensation was "one hundred dollars per year, and his seat that he had before, being no. 34." (February 2, 1874)

In January of 1877, after years of financial uncertainty and other unrecorded conflict, Mr. Stocking tendered his resignation. In an effort to persuade him to continue, the choir (a vocal quartet) resigned, and some offered to sing without pay for a time. One member offered to be janitor for $40 a year "and if not done satisfactorily would not receive anything." The financial crisis brought great conflict, and in March of 1877, a motion was made by the congregation that all of the Board hand in their resignations. It passed, and the congregation passed an unusual motion, "That all matters of unpleasantness now existing between Bro. Hall and Bro. Stocking be buried forever and never to be mentioned in the Board of Trustees." It was then noted that "a general good feeling prevailed."

George B. Stocking, minister 1874-1877

Yet, all was not well, and in July George Stocking submitted another resignation. The letter describes his wife's ill health, and a physician's advice that her condition "demands a change of climatic influence." He goes on to hint at the difficulties he encountered in saying "with few exceptions my labors with this church have been exceedingly pleasant and profitable to me." The Clerk of the Church responded: "with mingled feelings of surprise and regret I read your letter. This will fall on your congregation like a clap of thunder out of a clear sky."

They turned next for ministerial leadership to Richmond Fisk, a Universalist minister who had come to Syracuse from Grand Rapids, Michigan. At one point, the Board received letters "exonerating Br. Fisk from all blame" for something that happened in his former parish. In any case, he served the congregation for

the comparatively lengthy period of eight years. Initially he was hired at a rate of $15 per Sunday to preach to the Society. Eventually he was paid $800 a year, a notable drop from the salaries of earlier pastors, in part reflecting the economic struggle of that time.

Richmond Fisk, minister 1877-1884

As noted earlier, during the tenure of Aaron Thayer, it was an occasional custom of the 19th century to hold "Donation" parties or visits to supplement the meager income of ministers. The following episode describes the unexpected aftermath of one such "Donation Visit" paid to the Rev. Fisk, January 24, 1879. The colorful details of this local newspaper account help us to imagine life in Syracuse in the last quarter of the 19th century. The headline read, "DR. FISK'S MIDNIGHT CHASE":

> "Last evening the congregation of the Universalist Church, in West Genesee street, paid their pastor, Rev. Richmond Fisk, D.D., a donation visit at the church. The occasion was not only made a medium of social intercourse, but so many gentle reminders of esteem and love were left with Dr. Fisk, that the event will likely be one always associated with pleasant memories, albeit a single unfortunate circumstance intervened. After the departure of the visitors, or a greater part of them, a carriage was called by Rev. Dr. Fisk, into which he loaded the bounteous gifts of his friends, for the conveyance to his home on McBride Street. Among the other donations was cash to the amount of nearly $200 which was deposited in a small box. This was placed inside the carriage with the other gifts. Upon arrival at Dr. Fisk's residence, the cargo was discharged, but by a strange oversight, the box containing the money was left untouched. Soon after the hack was driven away, Dr. Fish (sic) discovered his loss, and at once notified the police, who sought to find the hack, which it was learned, was owned by Weston and driven by John Carr. Roundsman Walsh was detailed to recover the lost

> treasure, if possible, and at about midnight succeeded in his undertaking. It was first learned that Carr had taken up a party of men, and once on the trail, the search was brought up in front of a South Clinton street house of ill-fame, where the carriage was found waiting. On searching inside of the hack the precious box was found as it had been left, unmolested, by the previous occupants. Dr. Fisk was, of course, very much overjoyed at the recovery of his little bonanza." (January 25, 1879, Syracuse Courier)

In addition to the perpetual efforts to pay salaries and repair the building, it was in the early 1880s that the Syracuse and Northern Railroad Company made plans to place the railroad track immediately to the west of the church. The Society filed suit, and eventually settled for $3,000 to compensate for damage and disruption from the passing of trains.

Mr. Fisk was the first Universalist minister to be invited to join the Minister's Association of Syracuse, and he helped to establish a Labor Bureau to assist with the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children. His efforts at community outreach were assisted by the "Yellow Ribbon Society" of the church, a group composed of "the old maids of the church." They raised money and did charitable work for the poor.

During the next five years, three pastors served the church, Costello Weston (1884-1885), Jesse C.F. Grumbine (1885-1888), and A.U. Hutchins (1888-1889). The most notable feature of those years was the Society's position regarding the activities of Mr. Grumbine. The Trustees met to take up the issues that "the Moderator stated that there had been complaints made to him that the pastor was attending the meetings of the Labor Party. On Motion a committee was appointed to see the Rev. Mr. Grumbine and to report one week from today." (October 9, 1887) The committee returned from their meeting and reported that Mr. Grumbine agreed not to take any "practical part" in the Labor Party in the future. Yet it was only a month later that the Board was again discussing the issue of Mr. Grumbine's activities. The Clerk of the Trustees wrote this on December 4, 1887: "The president reported that some members were not satisfied with the Rev. Mr. Grumbine in his taking part in politics, and in his editing a paper called 'Justice.' The president stated that people in his place of business and on the street had spoken to him in regard to the matter, after discussion the following resolution was offered. Resolved that the sense of the board of trustees of the first Universalist Church is that in view of the feelings that exist between the Rev. J.C.F. Grumbine and the board that he be asked to tender his resignation as pastor of this church. Motion carried." No doubt there were a range of issues underlying this action, yet it stands in marked

conflict with the free church tradition in which the beliefs and convictions of all, clergy and laity, are protected. It reveals that not all of our past is worthy of our honor, but that it is essential to remember such events as evidence of the evolution of our basic religious principles over time.

Frederick W. Betts, minister 1889-1932

IV
THE BETTS ERA (1889-1932)

By all accounts, there was little to recommend First Universalist as a hopeful ministry in 1889. In thirty years there had been nine ministers, a serious schism, and many years of supply preaching. The congregation was fragmented. There were only sixty members. They had remained in serious debt since 1871 when the building was built. The first waves of immigrants from Europe had begun to change the make-up of neighborhoods around the church. A railroad next to the church disrupted services. Saloons were popping up in the neighborhood. The city was expanding into areas south of the canal. The church was in ill repair. Clearly, though, this was a church with remarkable fortitude.

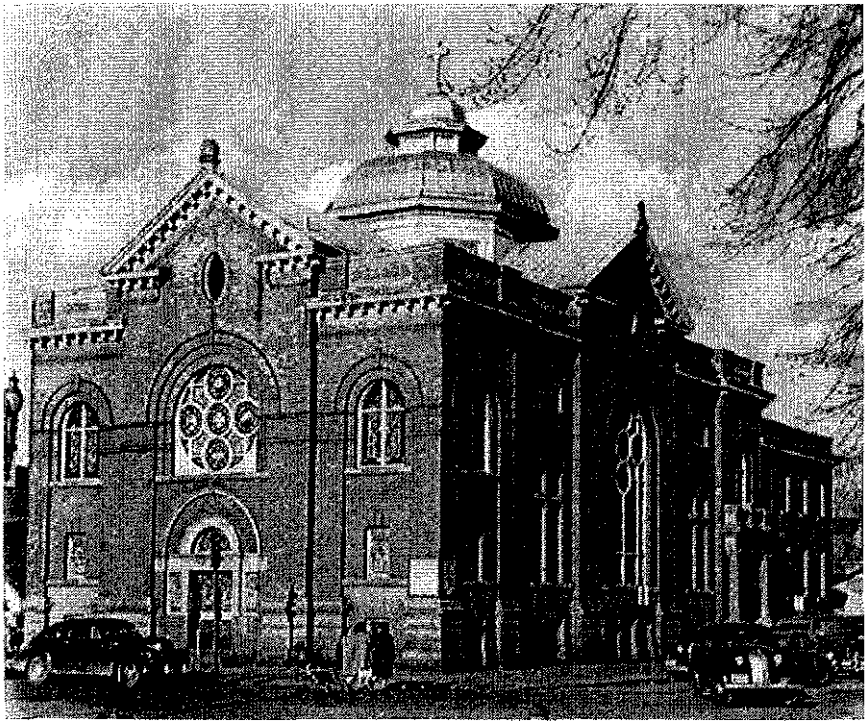
Somehow, they persuaded Frederick W. Betts to leave his parish in Palmer, Massachusetts, and to take up the ministry in Syracuse November 1, 1889. Betts had been born in Illinois on March 6, 1858, but soon after moved with his family to Onondaga Hill, outside Syracuse. When he was seven, he watched President Lincoln's coffin pass through Syracuse on its way to Springfield, Illinois. His family was "spring poor," carpentry work for his father being scarce in the winter. He was told by his mother that the first toy things he asked to play with were a hammer and saw. With little formal education, he became a carpenter. At 14 he was hired out as a "month hand", assisting another carpenter for $5 a month. He met his wife, Mary Browning, when called to her family home to hang shutters.

His religious upbringing had been in the Calvinist tradition, and in spite of attending many revivals, he failed to "experience" religion, his soul never being converted as the revival preachers promised. He wrote of waking in the night in fear that he would go to Hell. At the age of 26, married and with a child, he went through a transformation that is best described in his words: "Mysterious psychical waves shook me through and through. I could not eat. I could not sleep. I could not work. I became broken in courage and nerve. I would leave my work and crawl away and cry. I would get out of my bed at midnight and walk the room or the street. That period is a nightmare to me now. The sorrow of the world was on me. The old dream came back – the dream of my youth – that I was to be a preacher of the Gospel. My friends discouraged it. Those who loved me thought me beside myself. But there is no help for God's fool." He enrolled at St. Lawrence Theological School in Canton, New York, and was ordained in Portsmouth, New Hampshire in 1886.

Betts was 31 years old when he arrived. Early photographs show a handsome young man with a dapper mustache and the sort of smile that rarely appears in photographs of that era. By that smile he can be recognized in the photographs taken even as his life came to a close. Much of what was written about his ministry here is testimony to his successes at leading the congregation through four decades, the building of a new church, the growth of the congregation in size, in spirit, and in service. It is interesting to read Betts' reflections on how that astounding ministry began. In "Why I Did Not Leave The Ministry" he recalled, "It was hard times at first. They almost broke my heart a dozen times. I had yet to learn that when one makes great sacrifices he must not expect people to understand. They were cold, penurious, without faith in me or in my work. How I tried to win that people and get a hearing in that city. . . . About the only external reward I got for a long time was the warning of friends and the severe criticism of the community. My church trustees took me aside and scolded me. They told me that if I went on I would kill what was left of the society." By the end of his ministry, there were few who would not have declared that it was Fred Betts that saved the church.

There were practical matters to be resolved upon his arrival, and one by one, he set out to address them. During the early years of his ministry, the church did away with pew rental and instituted an "envelope" system, not unlike the system that we use today. It was a radical innovation for that time, but it served to increase income. The church debt, a chronic problem, was eliminated through the efforts of three women of the church appointed by Dr. Betts; Mrs. Mary Marvin, Mrs. Fannie Parker, and Mrs. Hettie Underhill, who went about canvassing "every known Universalist in Syracuse." The women raised over $3,000, not only ending the debt, but simultaneously awakening a greater interest in the church. This allowed them to improve the church facility in which walls were marred and discolored, the carpets ragged, and the pew cushions faded and worn. Mrs. B. Austin Avery, a woman of great wealth, gave $1,000 for new pew cushions, an astounding amount when you consider that the pastor's annual salary at that time was $1,800. The church basement was excavated, allowing a kitchen and dining room for 100 to be constructed. The congregation was, by all reports, financially solvent and contented with their pastor.

As the city of Syracuse grew and changed, the church felt that its location north of the canal was no longer suitable. The neighborhood around the church had become settled by Catholic Italian immigrants who demonstrated no interest in the Universalist faith. According to Betts, "between 1870 and 1890 the whole population around the church changed. North Franklin St. became the center of



First Universalist Society, corner of Adams and South Warren Street. This was the third location of the congregation, and was occupied from 1906-1960.

an Italian settlement which moved north from the Erie Canal. There is a ribbon now, perhaps two blocks wide, which centers on North Franklin Street, where for a half mile or more the Italians have made their home, purchased much property and settled down permanently." There were other factors involved in the move, but the most prominent cause was the discomfort church members had with the ethnic and religious changes in the neighborhood. On February 13, 1898 the congregation held a meeting at which they decided to build a new church at a different location in the city.

The story of the genesis of that new church is worth telling. Mentioned earlier was Mrs. Mary A. Avery, benefactress of the new pew cushions. Early in his ministry, Mrs. Avery told Dr. Betts, "You have the brains and I have the money. I think together we can make the thing go." On May 19, 1898 the following transaction took place.

Syracuse, N.Y. January 12, 1899.

This certifies that on the 19th day of May 1898, I transferred to

Frederick W. Betts, without reserve or condition, the sum of Three Thousand Dollars ($3,000) and interest, the same being the money I then had on deposit in the Onondaga County Savings Bank, and this money and its earnings is herein declared to be the sole and absolute property of said Frederick W. Betts, to be used by him for such purpose or purposes as he may choose.

Mary A. Avery

In 1899, the property at the corner of Warren and Adams Street was offered for sale for $5,000. This site, at that time at a distant edge of the city, was selected by the Building Committee as the location for their new church. One of the pillars of the church since the days of its founding, a Mrs. Emmons, was recorded to have remarked, "Buying property away off there when we've always been a downtown church is the first fool thing Mr. Betts has done." Dr. Betts placed a statement, along with the document from Mrs. Avery, in the cornerstone of the new church when it was laid August 16, 1905.

> It was understood between Mrs. Avery and myself that if a new church was built I should use this $3,000 for that purpose, otherwise the money was to be mine. When the Stevens estate put the old home lot on which this church stands on the market, I went to the church trustees, explained this slip, they together raised $2,000 and I handed over the sum as above. This $5,000 was the first money paid out. . . . Mrs. Avery died in 1900. . . . The best friend I ever had, or ever expect to have, was Mary A. Avery.

The church was built on that site with the support of many. Mrs. Daniel Gridley was the largest donor with a $10,000 gift. George B. Clark was the Chairman of the Trustees who oversaw the transition. Dr. Betts in the same note said, "Mrs. Avery made this new church possible. Mrs. Gridley is the largest contributor. George B. Clark is the father of us all."

Archimedes Russell was chosen as the architect. The style of construction was Byzantine. The building was made of yellow brick, with its primary entrance on Adams Street across from Central High School. The structure was 115 feet long and 66 feet wide, with a seating capacity of 500. There was a center dome, actually two glass domes, one above the other. The sanctuary was lit with electric lights around the base of the lower dome. A cross stood atop the outer dome. The interior of the sanctuary was furnished with golden oak woodwork, pews, and pulpit furniture. There was also a large painting of Christ as the Shepherd of His Sheep, and a series of memorial stained glass windows. The church also included two parlors, a large hall used for classes and dances, a large

dining room, kitchen, and many Sunday School rooms.

The old church north of the canal housed its last service on December 30, 1906. It was sold to an Italian Methodist congregation for $16,000. The following Sunday, the congregation dedicated their new church. The Order of Service for that event can be found in Appendix IV.

Three years after the church opened, the congregation celebrated the 20 years of service of their pastor, Dr. Betts. At that time there were 400 members. He gave a sermon called "Twenty Years in Syracuse", which gives us valuable insights into the man, the ministry, and the congregation. He said, "Ministers and people are like folks who wed. They must learn to live together. Happy are they who learn to live together in peace and joy. Those families are also happiest who begin with little, begin even very poor and go on together increasing in prosperity, adding comfort to comfort and pleasure to pleasure and joy to joy. We certainly began very poor. . . . Sometimes the churches are criticized as social clubs, full of cliques. This criticism does not apply to us here. The rich and the poor, the wise and the foolish may find here absolute equality of spiritual freedom. . . . And now after twenty years together, let me say that I am glad we began so poor in circumstances. I am glad we have had to work so hard. I am

Interior of Sanctuary at Adams and Warren

glad that every beautiful thing in our new home is consecrated with memories of the living and the dead, who have toiled together so faithfully. I would not like to try it over now, but I am glad it happened so, glad for the devotion and sacrifices necessary. It has been all a rich and sacred experience. . . . Shall we continue together? Are there other years of growth and prosperity, of peace and joy ahead of us? We do not know. We must leave that with God while we go on together toward the future in the old spirit of our mutual love."

Dr. Betts was evidently effective in almost every area of church leadership. There continued to be financial difficulties. The building needed frequent repair. Conflicts came and went. But through it all, he was remembered as a devoted pastor, an effective preacher, and a well respected civic leader. To honor his work on the Library Board, a branch on South Salina Street was named. He served also as Chairman of the Red Cross and Associated Charities. In 1928, he was awarded a silver loving cup as "The Most Useful Syracusan" in a civic referendum of church goers. Active in the larger work of the Universalist Church as well, he served for many years as the President of the New York State Convention of Universalists, as a trustee of the Theological School of St. Lawrence, and as a member of the St. Lawrence University Board of Trustees.

However, the most distinctive characteristics of his ministry were his efforts to advocate for oppressed, disadvantaged, and misused populations of the community. In many ways he was a social radical. One of his significant efforts was to address the problem of prostitution. His approach was not to lay the blame on the women, but to consider the economic system that placed them in such a debasing situation. He saw the connections between education and opportunity. He questioned first those who profited from the houses of prostitution and the men who frequented them. He did not blame the women who were victims of all who benefitted from "vice." He lamented that "perhaps the deepest tragedy of modern life (is) that the church and social radicalism were so far apart. The most powerful institution on earth today is the church. Yet many look upon it as a refuge for namby-pamby, milk-and-water men to occupy its pulpits. . . . But the church has a good side and a strong trend for betterment." His social radicalism reached also to his economic views. He said in 1909, "I believe the present wage and economic system will last no more than preceding systems have lasted. I believe that, under organic law, an empty stomach will have as many rights as a full pocketbook. I prophesy that the elemental right to labor, which is the right to live, will not then be denied any man."

The church had clearly come a long way from the era when they dismissed a minister for his alliance with the Labor Party.

Frederick and Mary Browning Betts, 1920s

One of the traditions of the Betts era was a church wide celebration of his birthday on the Wednesday closest to March 6th of each year. For his 68th birthday in 1926, a banquet attended by 400 members and friends took place.

At the banquet, H. W. Smith presented Dr. Betts with a hand-crank and an order for a completely equipped master six Buick sedan with his initials on the door and a license for driving. The car was a gift from a grateful and loving congregation. In accepting his gift, Dr. Betts said this:

"I came here thirty-seven years ago because you needed me, wanted me, and were willing to work with me for a democratic, high-minded, wholesome family, where I could work as one of you, heart to heart, life to life. Your gift will enable me to share a bit more in the things that need to be done."

Late in his life he looked back over his accomplishments, and wrote, "I have had a glorious life. I have lived to the limit. I have filled the days and weeks and years with plans and purposes and activities that have brought me satisfaction . . . I have lived in the world with humanity, with a smile, and I am setting this down here because I want to tell others that there is such a thing as having a glorious time in the world, doing a lot of things that you like to do and getting a lot of joy out of life in spite of handicaps which must be overcome, and inward shrinkings, which left to run riot, will utterly destroy one's usefulness." His life ended on March 4, 1932, two days prior to his seventy-fourth birthday. His health had been in decline for several months due to heart disease. His body lay in state in the church he had served for 42 years. A great late winter storm hit the city that day, but it did not prevent crowds of mourners from attending and paying their respects. Burial took place at the Oakwood Cemetery. He was survived by his wife Mary Browning Betts, a son, C. Fred Betts, and a grandson Browning Betts, the son of Welcome A. Betts, deceased son of the Betts. Within two weeks of his death, the congregation voted to name the building, Betts Memorial Universalist Church. For many years a group from the church went to Oakwood Cemetery on the anniversary of his death to place a wreath on his grave.

It was written in the newspaper that "his life ebbed out as calmly and serenely as a summer sun sinks in the West at the close of the day." This image befits Dr. Betts' reflections of his own boyhood hopes for his life. He wrote of looking down over Syracuse from Onondaga Hill at dusk with his friends:

> "Those were the days of gas. When summer twilight came and darkness ended our play, we boys would lie upon the grass together and watch the city of night as it was slowly born. We could not see

the lamplighters on their way, but we could mark their paths as they lengthened behind them along the city streets. While the mellow tints of the yellow lights increased until they filled the valley with a soft radiance so dim, so mysterious that it hid, yet hinted, at all the life below us. We boys talked, as boys have always talked since boys were here upon the earth, about life, the world, and our future."

Ellsworth C. Reamon, minister 1932-1970

V
THE REAMON ERA (1932-1970)

In today's world of ministerial leadership for congregations, after a ministry of great duration, it is typical for an interim pastor to be settled before a new permanent minister is called. Two-year interims are not uncommon after twenty year ministries. This permits the congregation to get prepared for a different style of ministry and to acclimate to the inevitable changes that are required, even after a successful ministry. But this was not the case in 1932, and the congregation went about the business of settling a new minister within a few months of Dr. Betts' death. The Board appointed a selection committee, and they invited three preachers to address the congregation, then sought the counsel of the congregation in making a choice. It appears their decision was not difficult, as the majority cast ballots for Ellsworth Reamon, then the minister of the Universalist Church in East Lansing, Michigan. Reamon was not a stranger to the area. He was born in 1895 in Ft. Plain, New York, moving with his family to Watertown as a young boy. A graduate of St. Lawrence University, he earned four Varsity letters in football and baseball. In addition, he was the captain of the Debating Team. On June 11th, 1932 the Board offered the position to Dr. Reamon at a salary of $3,000 a year. Within weeks, Dr. Reamon and his wife Hope, and daughter Carolyn Hope moved to begin what would be another lengthy and constructive chapter in the church's history.

Similar to the experience of Dr. Betts, and despite what was remembered at the end, things were not so easy in the early years of this ministry. Following a man like Dr. Betts would be a daunting task under any circumstances. Add to that that the church had been named for Betts, his widow and son remained in the congregation, the constant comparisons made by parishioners with a memory of someone that time had made faultless, and the Depression, and you have a substantial challenge. Dr. Reamon remarked at the time of his retirement, "Following Dr. Betts was one of my most difficult assignments. Dr. Betts had been a dominant person in the entire community; to come into a city a stranger, pick up where he left off, facing the inevitable resistance to change, at times seemed almost too much of an ordeal." Hope Reamon wrote to me early in my ministry here and told me of their early years in Syracuse, and credited Mrs. Betts with getting them through the transition years in Syracuse. She was loyal to the Reamons, and in her quiet ways, made their path easier with those who wished Reamon to be another Betts.

For the first several years of this new ministry, in the country and in the church there were great financial challenges. Board meetings were taken up with the business of raising money, borrowing money, cutting expenses, and consolidating salaries. In November 1933, Mr. Reamon presented the idea of a Christmas Tree in Church, the Sunday before Christmas, to be trimmed with greenbacks given for such purposes during that December. Such an offering was required to raise the $300 necessary to cover the overdue coal bill. The impact of the Depression can be read between the lines of the church records of that period. It is not a sense of fear, but of sacrifice and uncertainty about what was happening in their lives. But at the same time, church life continued. Services were held. Religious Education kept the young people occupied and happy. The women's groups raised money, visited the sick, served meals, and carried out philanthropic activities.

A notable development that came about as the Depression was lifting was the institution of a church newsletter. H.W. Smith, manufacturer of typewriters, later Smith-Corona, offered to finance the printing and mailing of a monthly newsletter. The first issue, written by the minister, was mailed in September 1936 under the banner "The Universalist News." Noted in that first issue this item, "Congratulations to Miss Alice MacBride upon her graduation from the Cornell School of Religious Education." (We know her now, having been Mrs. Ralph Waring and after Mr. Waring's death, as Mrs. Herbert McBride, or Alice McBride.) In November of that year one of the women's groups, King's Daughters, sponsored a lecture by Amelia Earhart. (Alice McBride was chosen as the young woman from the congregation that would introduce Miss Earhart to the audience.) The inception of the newsletters was an important development for communication within the congregation, taking it a step away from the interpersonal, oral transmission of information. It also will provide historians of the future a rich resource for research on the social history of the middle class America in 20th century.

Reading the newsletters reminds us that the issues that challenge the strength of all churches are nothing new. In almost every other newsletter in the course of his ministry, Mr. Reamon expresses his concern and frustration over the infrequent attendance of his flock. In December of 1939 he asks, "Is it nothing to you that your church succeeds or fails? Have you taken time to consider that your absence from church and your failure to support our work may discourage the minister and his faithful helpers, and reduce their efficiency? Less than 30% of our people attend morning worship; less than 50% of our families contribute regularly. Is this a fair sharing of responsibility? Your minister and his wife work day and night for the church we all love. They have refused more than one offer

to improve their income elsewhere. The reason is that they love the people of this parish. Is it nothing to you?" Similar expression of concern and angst appear over the next three decades.

A parsonage was purchased in April, 1946 for the Reamon family, which now included a second daughter, Judith. The parsonage was located at 743 Allen Street, just down the block from the residence of the present minister of the congregation. Once again, H.W. Smith stepped forth to foster the generosity of the congregation. He made an initial gift of $2000, which was then matched by the rest of the congregation. The parsonage was the home of the Reamon family until his retirement in 1970, at which time the parsonage was sold (for $14,000) and the congregation used that income to support Dr. and Mrs. Reamon's housing expenses in retirement.

The social life of the church appears to have been varied and entertaining during the middle years of the century. There were several women's groups, organized into "Circles" of the Mary R. Browning Betts Chapter of the King's Daughters. In 1951, the women reorganized under the name, "The Association of Universalist Women." The men of that era also gathered in the "Betts Men's Club" for social and philanthropic work. There were countless church suppers, socials, bazaars, plays, and dances. In March of 1942, the brainchild of the Rev. Fred Leining, the church organized its first "Maple Sugar Supper", a tradition that continued into the

Children's Day, 1943.
Carol Fryer Davenport, back row, second from right.
George Tennant, front row, third from right.

early 1980s. The newsletter announced: "Yes, sir, right in the midst of the sugar shortage, a 'Sugar Supper'. Sponsored by the Betts Men's Club . . . it will feature fresh maple syrup on snow. The sweetest story every told. You will be served sugar-cured ham, home-made baked beans, real doughnuts, pickles to sharpen your appetite, pie, coffee, etc. The price of the meal will be 60 cents per plate." They made $80, and considered it a "great success."

Dr. Reamon later recorded this memory of the early Maple Sugar Suppers: "During the early days, the date of the Maple Sugar Supper was always determined by the availability of snow. Fred Leining and I were usually members of the miserable 'Snow-Search Committee'! We would go all over the county and beyond, looking for canyons filled with deep snow. The west side of Skaneateles Lake was our most dependable source. We would dig down, looking for clean snow, only to come upon a layer of dust. More digging – more dust, until we would finally gather a large enough supply of clean snow. Then the problem was to climb out of the canyon with all those heavy cans. When I first suggested to Fred that we try crushed or shaved ice, he was horrified: "Who ever heard of sugaring off over ice?" We finally tried it, and it worked beautifully – more sanitary and much easier on the men. And we could set the date of the supper when we wanted it." All to make $80!

A group from The King's Daughters, a women's group of the church, mid-1940s.

Back row: Kittye Birks, Ruth Williams, Vi Case, Beatrice Palmer, Hope Reamon. Front row: Grace Schwartz, Ruth Wallace, Pauline Bucklin, Edith McNeal.

On social issues, the church tended toward conservative social and moral positions. On occasion they expressed a clear position on public and legislative issues. In 1933, the Trustees voted in support of censorship of "Zangara", a movie scheduled to be shown in Syracuse. The mayor of the city had ordered that the movie not be shown in any Syracuse theater, and this was endorsed by the Trustees of this Society. In the early 1950s, the Trustees voted to endorse a piece of state legislation that related to para-mutual betting on harness racing, requiring the consent of local legislatures in licensing such races. Later in the '50s, when asked by the Director of Ministry of the Universalist Church of America if this church would "call a qualified minister . . . regardless of color or sex," the trustees held a discussion, and directed the minister to reply. The response was thoughtful for its time, but telling of the biases that prevailed. Dr. Reamon wrote, "We believe that worthy young people, irrespective of color or sex, should be encouraged to prepare for ministerial service in our denomination but with a clear understanding of the realities involved . . . the average "white" congregation is unlikely to call a "colored" minister . . . the average congregation still prefers a man as its minister. . . . We must be frank to say that, if our pulpit were open, a "colored" minister would hardly be considered as a candidate." (January 20, 1955)

Judy, Hope, Ellsworth, and Carolyn Reamon, early 1950s.

In the 1960s, the church struggled with racial issues, and made efforts to create understanding through study, service, and fellowship with an inner-city church. They studied the Kerner Report, assisted individuals in finding suitable housing, and hosted social gatherings with a largely black church. The Society seemed to have favored a slow and gradual integrationist method for social change, and the newsletter included criticism of efforts within the nation and within the denomination for black empowerment in addressing their problems. At no time in its history has this Society experienced any measure of racial diversity. This has been an endemic problem throughout both Unitarian and Universalist churches since our beginning.

25th Anniversary Celebration of the Reamon ministry, May 22, 1957

Religious Education was always a significant part of the congregation, and during the Reamon years, it took on a higher profile. For the first 90 years of the church, the Sunday School was run by a volunteer, the "Superintendent of the Sunday School." There were graded lessons of basic Christian education, special pageants, and social events, all coordinated by the "Superintendent." In 1953, at the Annual Meeting, a new standing committee was established for Religious Education. At that time, the need for a professional Religious Education Director was acknowledged to guide the program. Later that year, at an annual salary of $3,000, Lucille Smith was hired as the first Director of Religious Education. Since the beginning, the position of DRE has been held for fairly short periods of time by any one individual. The longest tenure was that of an "Interim DRE", Hope Reamon, from 1960 to 1970. Not unlike today, volunteers were always in short supply.

The Reamon years span a time of significant theological transition within Universalism, as well as the lengthy deliberations that led to a merger of the Universalist Church of America and the American Unitarian Association. The predominant theological focus of the early 20th century was given expression in the Avowal of Faith (1935):

"The bond of fellowship in this church shall be a common purpose to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it and to co-operate in establishing the kingdom for which he lived and died.

To that end we avow our faith in God as Eternal and All-Conquering Love, in the spiritual leadership of Jesus, in the supreme worth of every human personality, in the authority of truth known or to be known, and in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the kingdom of God."

These words were printed in the front of the hymnals that were used in this church, and are a fair representation of the theological perspective of minister and congregation. During the late '30s and the '40s, Universalist theology was affected by the rise of humanism and by a deepening respect for the universal religious impulse that has been given expression in all the great world religions. A symbol of the new theology was the off-center cross within a large circle, representing the continuing value of Christianity but removing it from the center of theological inquiry. The "new Universalism" recognized the spiritual and ethical oneness of all religiously concerned persons of all cultures and rejected the notion that "Christianity was the only hope of the world." (In 1955 this congregation's Board voted unanimously against such an exclusive resolution proposed by the New York State Convention of Universalists.) The theistic construction of the universe with God at the controls was challenged by the faith in human action and self-determination. That new brand of Universalism didn't make inroads in Syracuse. Until 1971, the Lord's Prayer was an established element of every worship service. Dr. Reamon's theological framework was not unlike that of his predecessor and could be best characterized as liberal Christian. This meant a fair bit of leeway in interpreting the scriptures, the nature of Jesus, and the revelations of historic Christianity. In the 1930s, most Universalist (and Unitarian) churches would have been characterized in that way. By 1970, however, such churches, our own included, were in the distinct minority within our denomination.

Discussions of a merger between the Universalists and the Unitarians had been discussed off and on since the 1920s. Some departments of the two denominations worked in cooperation, namely in the areas of education and service. In 1953, congregations of both denominations were asked to consider a "federal union between the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America."

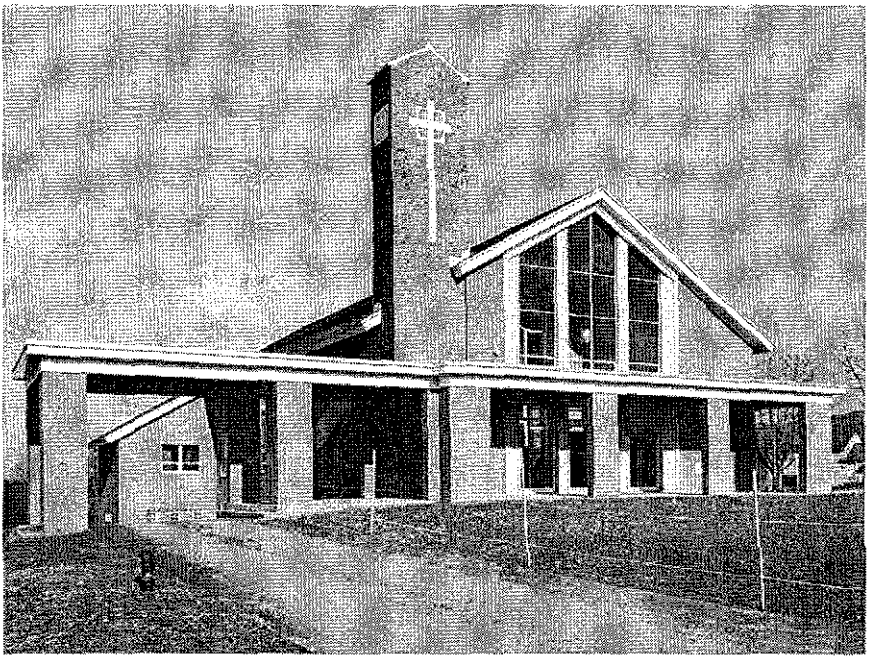
The 1953 motion failed to receive the required 75% approval, and was thus defeated. (Approval was approximately 60%.) However, on a national level the union was accepted, and preparations continued toward a complete merger of the two denominations. This church remained opposed to any further steps toward union.

Dr. Reamon was an outspoken opponent of such a merger, wishing to preserve the autonomy and identity of Universalism. In voicing his opposition to the merger, Dr. Reamon articulated the following reasons in an article that appeared in the Syracuse Post-Standard on November 9, 1959:

> "I was opposed primarily because I favored a plan with a broader base, a more inclusive plan, a federation of liberal churches wherein the resources of member bodies could be kept intact.
>
> "I opposed the plan as a protest against the pressure of the brass. For this was not a grass-roots movement, it was not democratic.
>
> "I am opposed because I firmly believe that it will result in an overemphasis on science and reason as the 'Alpha and Omega' of religion. This attitude will be filtered down from the top and will find increasing expression through our educational material . . . it is happening already. Understand, I am not opposed to a union of science and religion, I favor it. Religion should make sense . . . but it must do more than that if it is to satisfy human need. When reason alone becomes God, the people in the pews are apt to suffer from frost-bite."

By 1959, the details of a consolidation had been worked out and were presented to a national assembly of the two denominations that was convened in Syracuse. Earlier that year, this church considered the question for a final time and voted overwhelmingly against a merger with the Unitarians, with 9 in favor and 65 opposed. In the end, the merger was approved by wide margins of both the Universalist and Unitarian congregations, with 555 congregations in favor, and 54 opposed. In May of 1961, the Unitarian Universalist Association was formed, and though the local churches retained their old historical denominational names, they were part of a new denomination. Of the meeting in Boston in which the consolidation was to be accomplished, Dr. Reamon wrote in the newsletter, "to be perfectly frank, your minister confesses to a singular lack of enthusiasm as he anticipates the sessions in Boston."

At the same time as the new denominational identity was being formed, this church was experiencing changes of its own. The church building showed signs of age. The downtown neighborhood was "deteriorating" as whites left the city for the suburbs, and African Americans moved into south side neighborhoods and the nearby public housing. There was no parking. The sanctuary was too large for the congregation, and many pews were empty on Sunday mornings. In the mid-'50s a "Fact Finding Committee" went about the work of finding a new site for the church. The first proposed location was at the corner of East Colvin and Nottingham Road, but the neighbors did not want all the traffic that a church would create in their neighborhood. Today it is the site of the bustling Peters Grocery Plaza. They went a bit further down the road, and located a parcel of land at the corner of Waring and Nottingham Roads. Through the generosity of Lyman



First Universalist, corner of Nottingham and Waring Roads.

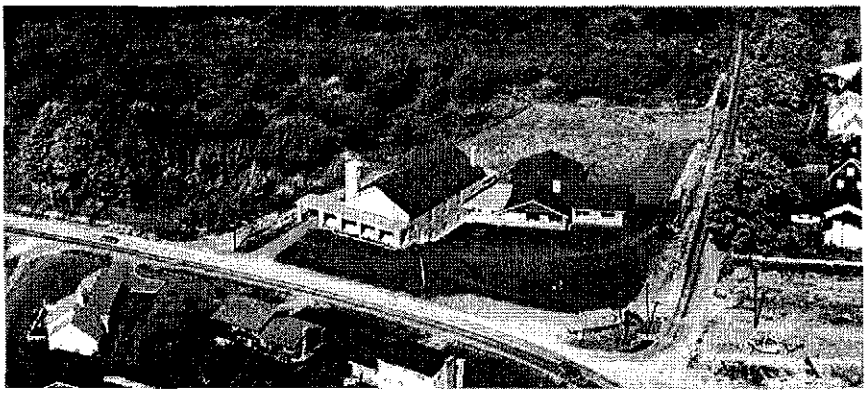
and Nancy Spire the land was purchased and given to the church.

The planning and fundraising for the new church occupied the attention of the parish for several years. Considerable opposition to leaving the old church was expressed, and needed to be overcome. On September 20, 1959 ground was broken for the new church. The cornerstone was laid on Easter Sunday, April 17, 1960, a day with the temperature noted at 86 degrees! The last service was held in the downtown location on June 26, 1960, with 294 people in attendance to say goodbye to a beloved place in their lives. On September 11, 1960, with the church not quite finished and the parking lot a field of mud, the first service was celebrated in the present facility. During that first service, Dr. Reamon preached a sermon titled, "The Tragedy of a Closed Mind." In it he stated his vision of the purpose of our congregation, "Now we here have dared to build a new church in a new community because we are convinced that we have a needed message and faith to share. We believe that we have an important emphasis to make within the Christian fold. And that emphasis involves the prophetic insights of Jesus." On September 24, 1960, by a vote of the congregation, the name of the Church was changed from Betts Memorial Universalist Church back to First Universalist again. Dedication of the church took place November 13, 1960 in the presence of an overflow congregation. The downtown church was sold and demolished early the next year.

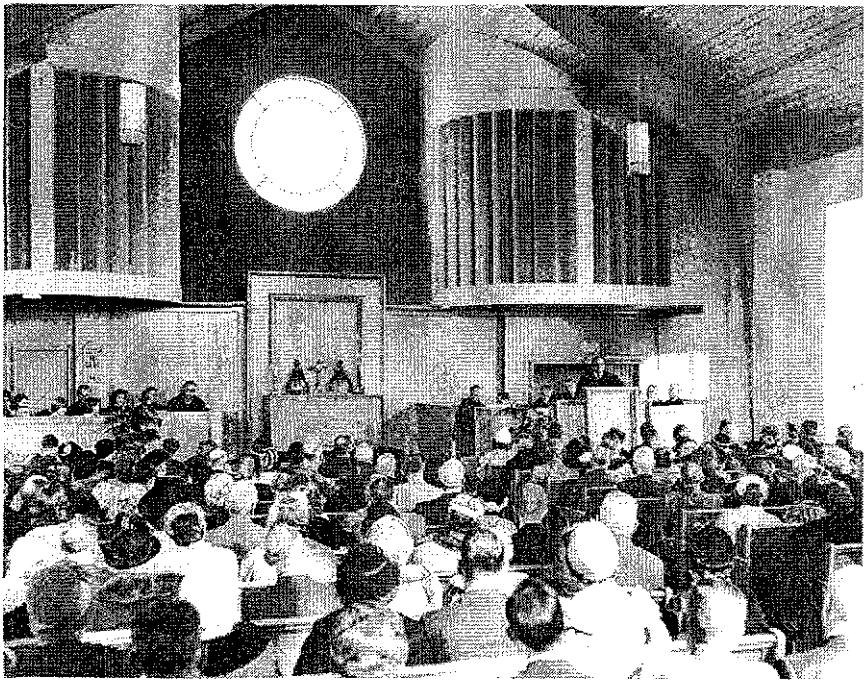
When the church was built, it was something of an outpost on its corner. The neighborhoods surrounding it had yet to be completed, and the school across the road was a few years away from being built. In the early years of the 1960s the church enjoyed the "boom" that most suburban churches of all denominations experienced in that period. The average attendance for the first full year (1961) of occupancy at Waring Road was 200, with twenty-nine new members being added to the rolls. By 1970, the average attendance had dropped to 154, with only twelve new members. This trend was as widely shared as that of the growth early in the decade. Factors of the times included "Death of God" theology, the divisions of the civil rights struggle and Vietnam, and the challenges that came to every institution viewed as holding authority in the country. Within the church there were the factors of a theological perspective that was at the margins of mainstream Unitarian Universalist thought and the inevitable strains of a lengthy ministry that had grown weary.

In his report to the congregation in 1968, Dr. Reamon – then in his early seventies – wrote this: "I think my chief concern at this moment involves what I would call an increasing apathy among many of our people. It is increasingly difficult to persuade people to accept responsibility within the church . . . I suppose there are several reasons for this apathy or indifference. And I may be one of them. A long pastorate is never an unmixed blessing. People grow tired of the same face and the same voice. There may be other reasons. But whatever it is, it makes the running of a Church difficult and sometimes discouraging."

An initiative that took place within the church in the '60s was with the people of the Gospel Temple of God in Christ. There was a period of exchanges between this congregation and that one, a predominantly African American congregation. The church also engaged in works of charity to supply "a poor colored woman" with some furnishings for her house and clothing "for her 10 or 11 children." In relation to the denominational struggle over the issues of race, under Dr. Reamon's leadership the church maintained a conservative path and cautious



Aerial photograph of present location, 1961



Dedication Service of present church building, November 13, 1960. Note yet to be installed Chancel Window and original organ pipe housings.

position.

After Martin Luther King's historic "I Have A Dream" speech made at the "Freedom March" on Washington, August 28, 1963, Dr. Reamon wrote in the newsletter of the 300 UU ministers who participated, "We honor those who took part in this dramatic demonstration . . . but honesty forces us to admit that, even if it had been possible, we would not have participated. It is our firm conviction that there are better and more effective ways of achieving the same worthy goal." Later in the '60s, when strife divided the UUA in coming to grips with the degree of autonomy that minorities would have in determining how racism would be addressed, our congregation favored the integrationist path which prevailed but chose not to support those efforts in any financial way. As it was to most white, middle-class Americans, the issue of race was troubling and conflicting for this church. There was a strong appeal to "brotherhood", but little acknowledgment of the place of justice.

An important legacy of the 1960s was the purchase and installation of the Holtkamp organ which we continue to enjoy today. The role of music in our services from the beginning has been a high priority. In the congregation's early

days it was the custodian's job to be present on Sunday mornings to pump the bellows that gave the organ its sound. The instrument that had been initially installed in the Waring Road church had previously been in service in the downtown church. However, it never successfully made the transition to this church. Extensive repairs were futile. The choir and organist had to make do with an instrument that was long past its prime.

Having just completed a massive building project, the Board was reluctant to undertake another financial campaign for a new organ. In June of 1963, Lyman and Nancy Spire made another generous offer to the congregation. They would contribute half the cost of a new organ, if the congregation would raise the other portion. The challenge was taken up and the gift gratefully accepted. When the organ was finally installed in 1966, the cost was $35,000. Today it would approach $300,000 to replace. The organ was dedicated on September 25, 1966. Donald Sutherland was the Organist and Choirmaster at that time, and is still remembered for his musical contributions to this congregation.

Another addition to the facility in the '60s was the Chancel Window. Early photographs of the church show an empty circle over the chancel. The window was made by the Keck Stained Glass Company in Syracuse, after a design created by Ellsworth Reamon and Mr. Keck. Dedicated on Easter Sunday, April 2, 1961, it was the gift of Chester Crowell and his son, Chester Crowell, Jr., in memory of Marion L. Crowell. The window, with its bright jewel tones incorporates symbols of seven of the world's great faiths: Christianity, Judaism, Buddhism,

Tree Planting Ceremony, 1969.
The present minister, at age 11, is holding the "LOVE" banner!

Hinduism, Islam, Taoism, and Confucianism. Those varied symbols radiate from an image in the center of an open book illuminated by a great flame. The script in the book is symbolic of the sacred writings of these faiths, and the light behind it symbolizes the ongoing search for truth that illuminates both the past and the future. This window is more than an object of beauty: it has become a living symbol of our religious identity at First Unitarian Universalist.

In his Annual Report to the congregation at the Annual Meeting, January 21, 1970, Ellsworth Reamon announced his retirement for later that year. He and Hope had served the church since the summer of 1932 with endless devotion and endurance. Not to be overlooked were their contributions to the greater Syracuse community and to the cause of Universalism. Ellsworth had been the president of the Universalist Church of America, President of the Onondaga Public Library Board, a member of the Executive Committee of the local Red Cross chapter, President of the Trustees of the Theological School at St. Lawrence, among many other efforts. Hope Reamon, in addition to her unwavering support of her husband's ministry and her own leadership of the Religious Education programs of the church for many years, was a leader within many organizations in Syracuse, including the YWCA, the Red Cross, Zonta, and the State Association of Universalist Women. The Reamons represented another era of ministry ("two for the price of one") that would not be seen again within our congregations.

On October 4, 1970, Ellsworth Reamon gave his last sermon before "retiring" to Florida where he became pastor to the congregation in Tarpon Springs. Ironically, his last sermon was titled, "The Foolishness of Preaching." He was given a standing ovation by the overflow congregation at its conclusion. The church held an Appreciation Banquet with 450 in attendance to hear the tributes from church and community. Upon retirement from First Universalist, he was honored with the designation of Minister Emeritus. The Reamons enjoyed many years of good health in "retirement", first in Florida where Dr. Reamon served the congregation in Tarpon Springs, and then in Brattleboro, Vermont. Ellsworth Reamon died at the age of 88, on November 9, 1983. Hope Reamon survived him for nearly 12 years. Of his wife, Ellsworth wrote, "She has been the most wonderful helpmate, a bastion of strength and courage, and the most cherished life companion any man could have." They are buried beside each other in Oakwood Cemetery in Syracuse.

Charles A. Howe, minister 1970-1983

VI
THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ERA (1970 - THE PRESENT)

Having known but two ministers over the course of eighty-one years (1889-1970), the congregation and its new minister would face great challenges as the 1970s began. The congregation had never fully accepted the merger of the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church of America, accomplished ten years earlier. At the dawn of the feminist movement, our congregation's experience of leadership had been that of benevolent patriarchs. (Even among lay leadership, a woman had not yet served as Board President.) At the height of the Vietnam War, with the American flag hanging over the pulpit, the composition of the membership of First Universalist had become more politically conservative than it had been, as alienated families from the more politically liberal May Memorial Unitarian Society migrated to our congregation. My own family was among that migrating group. Add to those particular factors, the general, generational distrust of traditional cultural/social institutions of that time, and one has a general understanding of the conditions at the beginning of the post-Reamon era.

It was to this congregation that the Rev. Dr. Charles A. Howe was called in 1970. Dr. Howe had been a professor of Chemistry at Clarkson University prior to entering the Unitarian Universalist ministry in the mid-'60s. It was while at Clarkson that he became introduced to Universalism at the church in Canton, New York. Dr. Howe moved to Syracuse from a ministry in Texas with his wife Ann, a professor of Education at Syracuse University, and his children; Judith, Marjorie, and David.

The transition of leadership went better than some might have expected. Dr. Howe recalls the first thing that Dr. Reamon said to him upon his arrival: "I know the question which must be uppermost on your mind, and the answer is that I'll be leaving town not later than this coming January." True to his word, Ellsworth and Hope Reamon moved to Tarpon Springs, Florida at the beginning of 1971. Dr. Howe remembers the generous support he received from Dr. Reamon in interpreting the congregation's history and needs during those initial months. For several years, Dr. Reamon contributed supportive and encouraging articles to the Syracuse newsletter from Florida, and until the end of his life, returned each June as Minister Emeritus, to preach to his former congregation.

After a year's service to the congregation, in his 1971 annual report, Dr. Howe wrote of his impressions of the strengths and challenges present in First Universalist. He wrote: "Our church's greatest need, as I see it, are to attract new members while retaining the old, and to increase its influence on the larger Syracuse community and on our denomination. Its greatest strength, as I see it, are its religious education program and its large number of committed, hardworking churchmen and churchwomen. Its greatest challenge, as I see it, is to maintain and enhance its spirit of community and 'unity in diversity' during these times of rapid, deep-seated change." Over the course of his thirteen years of service, these strengths and challenges shaped his ministry and the life of the congregation.

It seems logical to use the agenda set out in Dr. Howe's annual report of 1971 as a context for interpreting this period in the congregation's history. By no means does it incorporate the entire scope of the congregation's ministry during this period, but it allows the most shaping and transforming trends to be grasped and traced through the years.

The first drastic sign of change came about at the beginning of 1971, when Dorothy Wright became the first woman to serve as President of the Board. At that time, the President was chosen by the Board members from among its members. Without question, women had always provided invaluable leadership to the congregation, but apart from within the women's organizations, never in a formal, lay-leadership capacity. In the course of the next three decades, eight of the seventeen presidents would be women (see Appendix V).

A Thanksgiving Service, late 1970s.
Glen Mietz, unknown, Charles Howe.

During the Howe ministry the concern over membership growth and retention occupied the efforts of many. It was an uphill struggle. Review of church newsletters through the '70s revealed a steady decline in membership due to retirements, illness, and death. Most monthly newsletters reported the memorial services for anywhere from one to four elderly members. In the early '70s, efforts at new member recruitment were successful. In 1974, there were 24 new members. However, in spite of great efforts by many, the presence of new members declined after 1974. In 1982, there were only five new members added. The overall effect of these two forces, led to a decline in overall membership, and a growing sense of frustration and discouragement. At the time Dr. Howe's ministry began, the average attendance on a Sunday morning was 135. By the early 1980s, that number had become 110.

The need to become a congregation of greater influence on the local community and within the larger denomination yielded tangible results. A number of programs brought our congregation into closer relationship with the UUA. During the 1970s, a joint committee of First Universalist and May Memorial was formed to sponsor adult education programs, social events, and pulpit exchanges. It was also during the '70s that a ministerial internship was established by the two Syracuse congregations and Hendricks Chapel of Syracuse University. This internship was the training group for many interns until the program ended in 1991. Participation in District and denominational meetings was also encouraged with notable participation. While still proud of their Universalist heritage, there was a gradual shift in congregational identity toward the broader UU movement. As Dr. Howe noted in correspondence to me, "a significant influx of people who had left May Memorial to join our church (like your own family) were living proof that 'Unitarians' could be OK after all."

A number of programs were incorporated into the life of the congregation during the '70s that related to service to the outside world. An ecology committee provided educational programs and coordinated a massive recycling program with great success. The Social Concerns Committee faithfully brought issues of justice to the attention of the congregation. Dr. Howe preached on significant social issues and was himself active in the community in both abortion rights and efforts to combat the death penalty. But the program that endured the longest was the "Recreation Generation" -- a weekly program designed to address the social and recreational needs of senior citizens. It is a program that continues to thrive.

Spearheaded by Genelle Altman after Dr. Howe had preached a sermon on the needs of the elderly, the first meeting was held in January 1973, under the sponsorship of the Association of Universalist Women and the Town of

DeWitt's Parks and Recreation Department. Dr. Howe remembers that first meeting this way: "I drove out to church on the Monday afternoon it was scheduled to have its first meeting, more out of a sense of duty than any expectation, only to find no place to park." So popular, there was a waiting list and a minimum age of 55 had to be strictly enforced. The following conversation was reportedly overheard: "She's certainly not eligible, no matter what she says!" "You're right. She's nowhere near being 55!" This all volunteer program of instructors, administrators, and hosts continues to draw a full house on Monday afternoons, and has grown to incorporate the serving of a meal to those who wish to share lunch.

From my perspective, the greatest challenges and most painful episodes faced during the 1970s and 1980s were centered around matters of religious identity and worship practices within the congregation. Without question they were necessary as a part of an evolving congregation, and in all likelihood could not have been navigated with any less discomfort.

The fact is that even Universalism was far from monolithic in its theological positions during the first half of the twentieth century. One could argue that it incorporated a wider theological spectrum than did Unitarianism during the same period. Universalism embraced (though not always easily) the liberal Christianity of its 19th century roots, the humanism of those like Kenneth Patton and Clinton Lee Scott, and the growing influence and celebration of the great world religions. The impact of the two extended ministries of Dr. Betts and Dr. Reamon kept this particular Universalist congregation largely isolated from those influences, and squarely rooted in a version of Christian Universalism. This took the form of regular communion services, weekly recitation of the Lord's Prayer and the Washington Avowal of Faith (see Appendix VI), and the dominant image of the cross within the sanctuary. Within the larger UU movement this congregation in 1970 was at the most traditional conservative margins of our movement. There were no more 'Dr. Reamons' out there within the ranks of our clergy to perpetuate those traditions in quite the same way, and fewer and fewer UU lay people felt that those traditions met their spiritual needs.

Yet, at the same time, most of the people remaining in the pews at the start of Dr. Howe's ministry were perfectly satisfied with who they were, and how things had always been done. The inherent tension between the congregation's honorable past and a viable future was the subtext to these transitional decades.

Changes within the Sunday Service were made gradually. In 1974, the hymnal, Hymns of the Spirit, in use since 1937, was replaced with the hymnal

widely used by Unitarian Universalist congregations since 1964, Hymns for the Celebration of Life. Communion services were administered separately from the regular Sunday Service. The order of service became more varied and flexible, including the gradual elimination of the Lord's Prayer as a standard element of the service. Intergenerational services became more frequent. The Choir, once comprised of paid singers, became largely volunteer. Regular "coffee hours" were instituted and sermon discussion were common. Many of these changes were painful to some long-term members. The very same developments were warmly embraced by newer members as a necessary reflection of an inclusive UU identity that could incorporate Christian traditions and beliefs, but that would not be constrained by them.

On September 23, 1982, in a sermon titled, "The Future Enters Into Us", Dr. Howe announced to the congregation that he would be ending his ministry at First Universalist at the end of that church season. In the newsletter column he wrote following that Sunday, he wrote: "Last Sunday's sermon, in which I announced that this church year would be my last as minister of this church, was the most difficult one I've ever had to preach. For those of you who weren't there, my reason for this decision, made last April, is simply this – that neither the church nor I am growing and we both need a change."

He went on to comment on a pending congregational goals setting process, set to begin that fall: "The success of this undertaking means a lot to me because it can ultimately mean a lot to this church. I pledge myself to give my best effort in all aspects of my ministry in the year ahead, just as I have tried to do for the last 12 years."

What follows are the goals set out by the congregation in the fall of 1982.

- The enrichment of our religious life through clarifying, affirming, and promoting our identity and our philosophy and spiritual concerns.
- A religious education program for our children that enables then to draw fully on their Judeo-Christian and Unitarian Universalist heritage, and insights from other sources, in choosing their ultimate religious path.
- Building and extending a community of friendly mutual support within the church.
- Reaching out to serve the larger community.

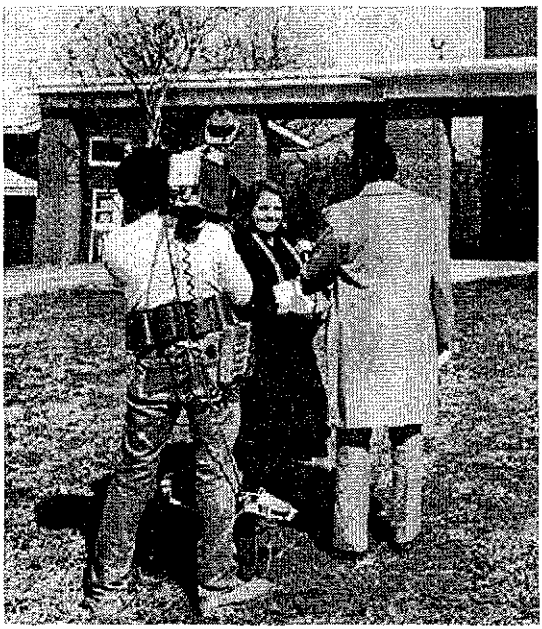
Future statements of purpose and mission would resonate closely with these sentiments and those being generated throughout the Unitarian Universalist Association as well (see Appendices VIII & IX).

In the final year of his ministry, Dr. Howe and lay leaders prepared for the transition to a new ministry. A search committee was formed, yet was unsuccessful in finding a suitable (and willing) candidate to serve the congregation upon the departure of Dr. Howe. The last Maple Sugar Supper was held that year, ending a forty year tradition, done in, no doubt by a shrinking pool of volunteers for such a massive effort, and an increasingly health conscious public. The final months of his tenure were marked by the controversy surrounding the Board's dismissal of the Director of Religious Education. Though issues of performance were at the root of their decision, the Board's process in making and communicating their decision aggravated the conflict. History repeated itself from an earlier conflict, when the locks on the church were changed in concert with the dismissal.

In the spring of 1983, Ann Howe was extended an offer to teach at North Carolina State University in Raleigh. Dr. Howe accepted an Interim Ministry at the Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Universalist Church in Charlottesville, Virginia. His last sermon at First Universalist was aptly titled, "An Unfinished Ministry," as he understood that what he had begun, others would have to continue. An

Charles and Ann Howe at their farewell celebration, June 1983.

appreciation banquet for Charles and Ann Howe was held in June 1983, and was the occasion for the expression of the gratitude, affection, and esteem held between the congregation and the Howe's. I can report this much as a fact, for I was in attendance that evening myself. I was about to move to Cambridge to begin my studies for the Unitarian Universalist ministry, having no idea at the time, that one day I would be one to take up that "unfinished" ministry of this congregation. The inability of the Search Committee to settle a permanent minister required the calling of an interim ministry for the 1983-1984 church year. They hired a recent graduate of Colgate-Rochester Divinity School, the Rev. Katherine W. Russell (now Winthrop), to serve the congregation as the permanent ministerial search continued. Though Universalists had been the first American denomination to ordain women in 1863, Ms. Russell was the first, and to date, only woman minister of First Universalist. Her ministry, though brief, played an important role in the life of the congregation. As a new minister, her vision and enthusiasm were expansive. As she once remarked to me, there was at first great skepticism regarding her ability to minister to the congregation, mostly from older women in the congregation, but by the end of the year former antagonists would celebrate the ministry she offered. She also mentioned to me that what was most objectionable to some women was having the minister in <u>their</u> restroom!

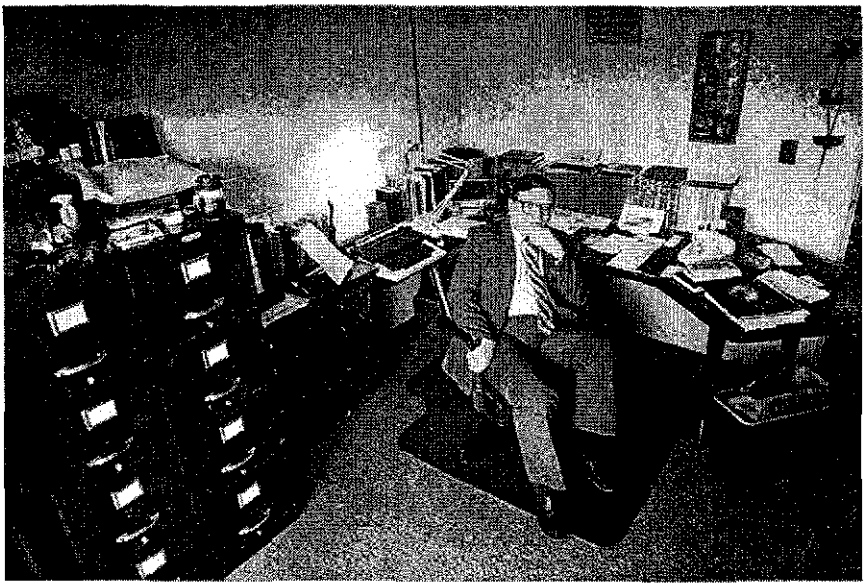


Katherine "Kitsy" (Russell) Winthrop, Interim Minister 1983-1984

At her first Board meeting, Ms. Russell requested that the Board begin efforts to degenderize the language in the Church constitution, asking that the language be inclusive, not exclusive of women. (This would finally be accomplished in 1989.) Two months later, in November, she broadened the Board discussion of gender inclusive language to the hymns and readings used in worship. In May 1984, an offer was made by an anonymous donor to provide the church with 150 copies of a slender

collection of gender inclusive hymns to supplement the 1964 hymnals. The Music Committee, loyal to tradition, declined the offer. The Board chose to accept them, and they took their place beside the 1964 hymnals that only a decade before, in 1974, had themselves been viewed as something of a radical innovation.

In one of her last Board reports, Ms. Russell offered the following assessment of First Universalist: " A loyal and committed congregation in excellent fiscal shape. Many strengths, with an older segment of the congregation which is a great asset. Potential for expanding the Recreation Generation ministry. 'Growing edges' are a need to develop a good youth program and a need to develop in the area of social responsibility." Ms. Russell went on from Syracuse to serve the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Springfield, Vermont, where she enjoyed a lengthy ministry.



David E. Bumbaugh, minister 1984-1988

Early in 1984, the Search Committee presented their candidate to become the next permanent settled minister, the Rev. David E. Bumbaugh. They reported to the congregation that they had reviewed forty resumes, studied twenty packets of sermons and general information, held six in-depth interviews, and had arrived at Mr. Bumbaugh as their unanimous choice. Mr. Bumbaugh had served a number of UU congregations in the prior two decades, most recently in Alexandria, Virginia. His wife, Beverly, was also a UU minister, recently

ordained. At a congregational meeting March 18, 1984, by a vote of 90-2, David Bumbaugh was called as the minister of First Universalist.

Mr. Bumbaugh reflected in correspondence with me about his earliest recollections of First Universalist going back to 1950 when he came to Syracuse for the biennial assembly of the Universalist Church of America, which met at our former location downtown, then still known as Betts Memorial. He recalled it as a Universalist Christian congregation, and in 1984 initially felt it was an "unlikely" match for a ministerial settlement for him. After exchanging packets, he believed there might be a ministry here after all. He observed, "that this was a congregation no longer fully comfortable with its historic identity . . . I became convinced that there was a viable ministry possible for me in Syracuse. . . . When I told a friend of my decision (to go to Syracuse) he smiled, congratulated me and said mysteriously, 'Of course, you won't be in Syracuse very long.' I replied that I did not choose to make short-term commitments, that I could see myself in Syracuse for a very long time. He was a better prophet than I. I was not in Syracuse very long before I realized that I was embarked on a long-term interim ministry."

During the first year of his ministry, thirty new members joined the congregation, yet attendance was static at around 100. (By the end of his ministry, Sunday attendance averaged 84.) This decline occurred despite the presence of new members and his reputation for giving brilliant and provocative sermons. In many ways, the silent dissatisfactions felt by long term members were aroused, in part, by the theological perspectives of Mr. Bumbaugh, and also by his own resolve to recast the image and self-identity of the congregation. It was Mr. Bumbaugh's view that the church's self image had been shaped by a "not-May Memorial" dynamic. He reflected, "I decided that if the church were to survive in the long run, the grip of the old-timers would have to be eased, the church would have to redefine itself and reshape its image in the community."

It is important to note that during the ministry of Mr. Bumbaugh that a number of initiatives were begun which would only be executed after he had left the ministry of the Society. Among them were the building renovations to deal with the issues of limited accessibility and the aesthetics of the sanctuary and fellowship hall, and the incorporation of the word "Unitarian" in our legal congregational name.

It was also during this time period that the church bought its first computer. In September 1986, the Board approved a purchase of a computer after having heard a report from a Board member who had attended a workshop at General Assembly. He reported to the Board that "the use of computers by churches was becoming widespread." And so, for $3,400, the first of many computers entered

the office. The typewriter given us in 1936 by H.W. Smith could finally be retired.

Working against a longer-term duration of Mr. Bumbaugh's ministry were a number of factors. In part, it was affected by his theological perspectives which resisted the use of traditional religious language, the use of public prayer, and biblical references. Some viewed him as inflexible on those points, and of course, to him it was a matter of personal integrity and spiritual authenticity. This provided fodder for an almost impossible conflict between Mr. Bumbaugh and his critics. And so whether it was a question of idolatry raised by the presence of American flags in the sanctuary, the shape and context of communion, or the appropriateness of an Easter Sermon on evolution, dissension stayed close to the surface in parish life.

A second significant factor in creating this "long-term interim ministry" was the reality of the Bumbaughs sharing a "two-parson" marriage. Beverly Bumbaugh's hopes to become settled in a part-time ministry in central New York never materialized, and she accepted interim and part-time ministries which necessitated a disruption of their household which neither of them desired to continue. The Syracuse congregation was never receptive to the concept of a shared ministry by the Reverends Bumbaugh.

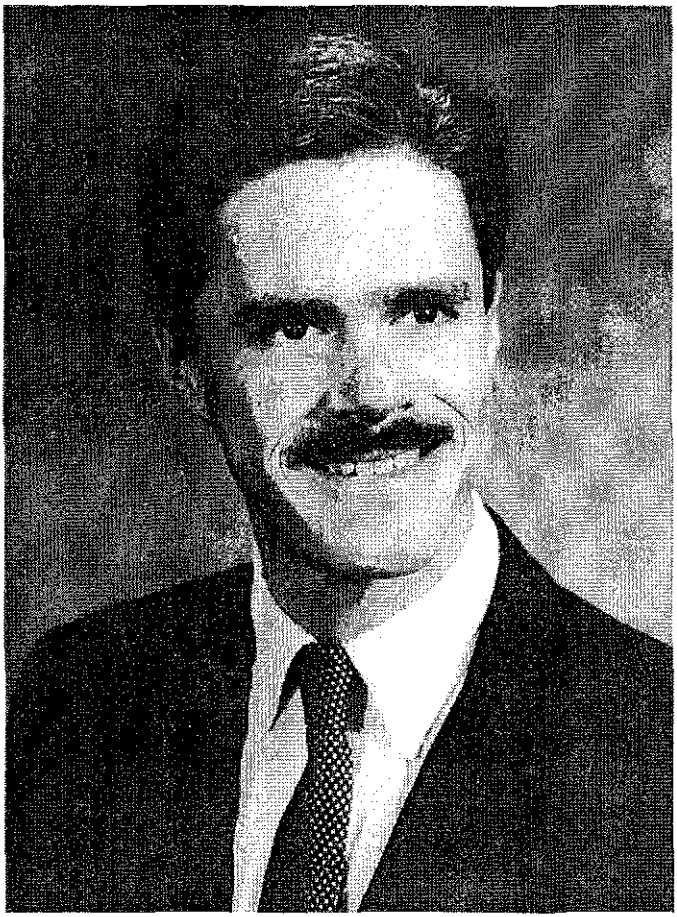
In the spring of 1988, David Bumbaugh announced his resignation and his intention to serve the UU congregation in Summit, New Jersey, a congregation which would eventually call Beverly Bumbaugh to serve as co-minister with her husband. The president of the congregation reported in the newsletter that Mr. Bumbaugh's decision to resign was "one designed to further his personal career and family life. It is not a resignation that is a result of the recent controversy in the congregation concerning the manner in which David has ministered to us." In personal correspondence Mr. Bumbaugh recalled,

> "Most of the time, I enjoyed the support and affection of most of the congregation. There were occasions of rich fellowship and there was an underlying mutual respect and affection which made a period of change and upheaval something other than an on-going battle. . . . In many ways, the four years in Syracuse were among the most satisfying and rewarding of my entire ministry, and I think of those days and the people of that congregation with deep gratitude. Teaching 'Arts of Ministry' for students at Meadville-Lombard Theological School, as I now do, I realize that the years in Syracuse helped to focus and structure my understanding of what the church is, what ministry in the liberal church is all about. I am eternally grateful to the men and women of the Syracuse congregation for the many gifts they bestowed upon me during our four years together."

The 1988-1989 church year was probably one of the lowest points in the recent history of the congregation. The group disaffected by the Bumbaugh ministry may have felt relieved, but the active leadership that had supported Mr. Bumbaugh felt discouraged. The church was served throughout the year by the Rev. Ronald A. Marcy, as interim minister. Attendance on Sunday mornings took a precipitous decline. A core of loyal and dedicated lay leaders stood by the church through these uncertain times; singing in the choir, teaching Sunday School, welcoming visitors, visiting the sick, raising money, and of course, searching for their next minister.

In writing this manuscript, I find I have come to the most complex challenge in attempting to be the historian of my own ministry. It has been much easier to find meaning in the mostly forgotten past than to discern meaning from a period in time in which I am so closely associated. Someone else, in the years to come, will have to be relied upon to provide a more objective analysis of this most recent period. It was much easier to glean the story of our congregation from brittle books of handwritten meeting minutes from the 19th century and from sepia toned photographs than it has been to review contemporary documents, many of which, are my own writings. I will shift to the first person as the most natural way to tell the next part of our story.

I was called to the ministry of First Universalist on April 9, 1989, by a vote of 104 in the affirmative and one abstention. After graduating from Harvard Divinity School, I had served the UU congregation in Lexington, Kentucky for three years prior to my call to the Syracuse pulpit. As has been alluded to earlier, I was not unfamiliar with First Universalist. My family had been members here since 1969, having been members of May Memorial since 1958. At the time of my call to Syracuse, I was married to Sheila Toohey Blanchard, and had one daughter (Julia), with another child due in the fall. (Emily was born October 5, 1989.) It had been 100 years, since the arrival of Frederick Betts, that the congregation had so young a minister. At 31, I was sufficiently idealistic to be undeterred by the demoralized and dissipated state of the congregation. That said, it was obvious that there remained a profoundly committed core of loyal, hardworking members willing to trust me to work with them on the challenges no one could ignore or deny: an aging congregation, a shrinking membership base, a stalled building renovation program, a Youth Religious Education program without leadership, an unsettled sense of identity as Unitarian Universalists, an ambiguous sense of the prophetic role of the church, and the residual antagonism between factions created during the prior ministry. Some felt that my ministry was, at best, a last-ditch effort to keep the church from closing. Others held more hope, and I worked hard to keep listening to them.



David S. Blanchard, minister, 1989 to present

Within the first year, the Long Range Planning process was made active again, and the rationale for the building renovations were reintroduced. The building, typical of so much institutional design and construction from the early 1960s was constructed with little consideration of physical accessibility and even less concern for energy efficiency. It bristled with barriers to complete accessibility. The facility, though highly functional in many ways, had an almost commercial feel, with cinder-block walls and metal framed windows. The carpet in the sanctuary had been previously installed in the former church building downtown, and had been torn up and patched together in the present building. (The indestructible stoves in our kitchen are other relics from the former church.)

A significant early development during my ministry was the arrival of the

Kynda Montessori School to our facilities. What began as a temporary rental precipitated by their need to vacate the space they had occupied at the Tecumseh Elementary School across the street, turned into a long term rental agreement. The owners of the school underwrote an extensive renovation ($20,000) to the Education Wing to make it more functional for their needs. The added income from this source permitted the congregation to expand the scope of the Director of Religious Education from a part-time to a full-time position in 1991.

The process moved slowly and carefully due to the need to build support for such a large expenditure ($370,000) and to restore confidence in the viability of the church. In the fall of 1991, the congregation approved the concepts incorporated in the renovation program, and a Capital Fundraising Campaign was initiated. Some of our more senior members remained opposed, in part no doubt because of what they perceived of as criticism of the church that they had sacrificed for and built in 1960. A sad irony was to see one of the stalwart opponents to the renovation plan sitting alone in the lower Fellowship Hall, after his wife had climbed the stairs to the Sanctuary. He listened to the service through a hearing aid device, because his legs could no longer carry him up the stairs.

The Ad-hoc Remodeling Committee was chaired by James D'Aloisio through its approval and implementation. The building work was completed over the summer of 1992, with a capacity congregation present for the Service of Re-Dedication on September 20, 1992. A series of concerts was planned throughout that year to celebrate the renovated space. Those initial concerts set the stage for an annual series ever since. The final phase of the project – the landscaping, terrace, and handicapped parking lot – was completed a year later, after neighborhood objections to the concept of a parking area at the front of the church were addressed. Average Sunday attendance rose by 30% after the renovations were complete. It felt as though a corner had been turned.

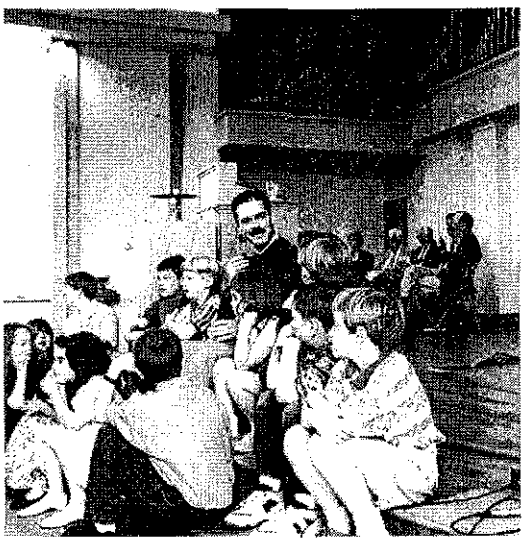
The following year ('92-'93) was a challenging and painful one for all of us in the congregation. In December 1992, the Director of Religious Education was dismissed by the board due to conflicts with me and other church leaders. As with the episode of the Board's dismissal of the RE Director in 1983, the personnel processes were found lacking by some. In 1991, the Director of Religious Education had been made a full time position for the first time, and this was a difficult set back to the progress that had been made in that area.

During the summer of 1993, I separated from my family in the process of coming out as a gay man. I wrote a letter to all of our members and friends to inform them of this development, and the Board promptly met to discuss their response. I am sure feelings ranged widely, but the Board was clear and direct

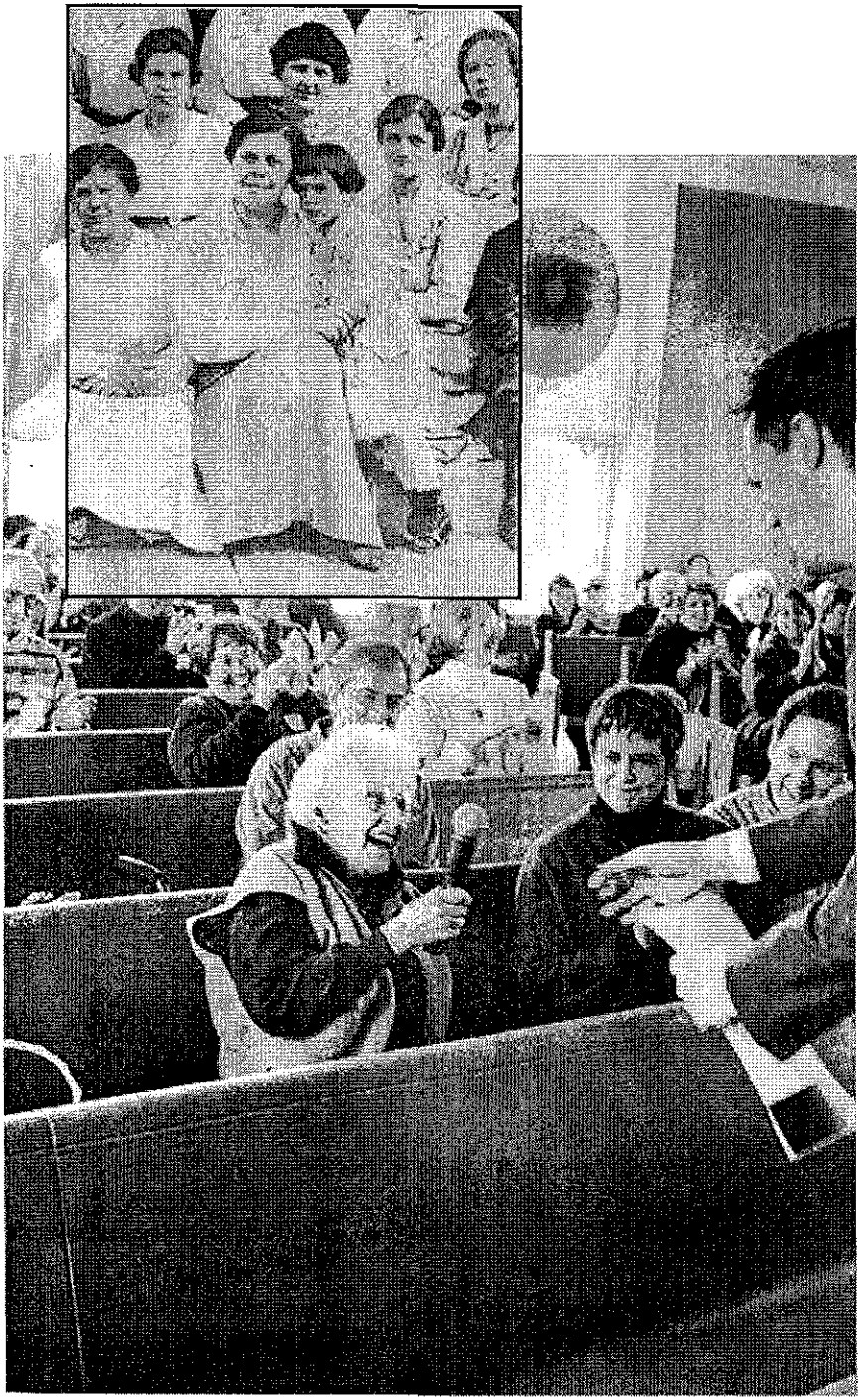
in their support of my continued ministry at First Universalist. The first Sunday we reconvened in September found the sanctuary filled with supportive and affirming members and friends. As time would reveal, the concept of my sexuality was easier for some to accept than the reality of my being gay – my very presence before them giving witness to that reality through what I said, who I showed affection toward, and even to some, how I appeared. Much of this discomfort would later find expression as the congregation dealt with the "Welcoming Congregation" program and proposals.

As earlier chapters have detailed, this congregation had a long history of ambiguity when it came to identifying with our larger Unitarian Universalist movement. One of our senior members never referred to 'Unitarians' without the preface, 'damned'! And so it surprised few when a proposal to the congregation in 1991 to change the name of the Society to become the "First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse" failed to receive the required 2/3 approval. (It was affirmed by a clear majority, but fell three votes short of the required 2/3 approval.) Three years later, it was reintroduced and approved by the necessary majority at the May 1994 Annual Meeting.

A humorous aside that reveals the always human side of institutional life has to do with the implementation of that decision. In 1991, after the congregation rejected the formal name change, the Board authorized the placement of signage indicating our Unitarian Universalist affiliation on the front of the building. In 1994, the Board called upon the Building and Grounds Committee to replace the now outdated lettering on the front of the building, over the portico, with the newly minted congregational name. The Chair of the Buildings and Grounds Committee, a second generation member of the church, long opposed to the name change, just happened not to have enough money in his budget to accomplish this task in 1994. Or in 1995. Or in 1996. During the summer of 1997, with a new Buildings and Grounds Chair, the front of the building caught up with the identity celebrated within the building.



"Focus on Youth, 1994



Alice McBride's 85th Birthday Sunday, January 1999.
Inset: Alice McBride with Bertha Hinds, 1918.

In the summer of 1995, the Music Committee was charged with hiring a new Music Director. Several applications were received by the posted deadline, and the search committee thought they had a complete pool of candidates. On the deadline day, a young woman came to the office to express her interest in the position, and inquired if the church would be open to a husband and wife team sharing the position. She happened to mention that she was a fourth generation UU. They had just moved to town and heard about the position, and would need a day or two to get their application completed. The couple was Rebecca and Fred Karpoff, and we made an exception to the deadline for them. (One of the best decisions to bend the rules I can recall.) They accepted our offer of employment, and started immediately. During their tenure, they have raised the musical standards with their great skills as musicians and educators. They have sought to increase the varieties of music performed, and to incorporate musical compositions reflective of Unitarian Universalism. While with us, they have welcomed two daughters into their lives, Elena and Luella.

Though Charles Howe had taken two short leaves during his ministry, between January and May 1996, the congregation prepared itself for my first sabbatical leave. During that time I spent one month in East Africa, the highlight being the climbing of Mt. Kilimanjaro – the tallest mountain of that continent. It was during that sabbatical that I completed a collection of essays that was published by the UUA, A Temporary State of Grace.

The tensions surrounding the prophetic role of the church have been tangible through much of the recent history of the congregation. In the mid '70s, the Society's constitution was amended to include a provision requiring that the Society could take no official position on a public issue without the unanimous assent of all members present at a meeting called to take up a given issue. The effect of this was to discourage the congregation from utilizing its collective influence and power to challenge social inequities and issues of justice. The congregation had long been committed to humanitarian service projects and good works efforts – near and far – but avoided the use of collective public witness for social justice.

The first real test of that long held precedent came when the congregation – at Board initiative in January 1995 – engaged in the "Welcoming Congregation" educational/social justice program developed by the UUA to assist congregations in addressing the inherent bias and oppression long perpetuated against gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender people in the name of religion. Though this issue was concerned with establishing an internal church policy, and not taking a position on a public issue, a small but vocal minority opposed the Society's self-designation as a congregation intentionally welcoming to gay,

lesbian, bisexual, and transgender persons. The opposition was based on the grounds that, a) it was somehow coercive of their individual freedom of belief, b) that we were already welcoming to anyone who wanted to associate with the church, c) that no one group deserved such "special" treatment, and d) this could lead to us becoming a church overrun with gay people. The volume of the dissension, not dissimilar to what had disrupted the Bumbaugh ministry, led church leadership to proceed with great caution and careful deliberation. In March 1998, at a special Congregational Meeting a resolution designating First Unitarian Universalist as a Welcoming Congregation of the UUA was presented to the membership (see Appendix VII). It was approved by a vote of 115 in favor and eight opposed. In spite of the controversy, or maybe because of it, we welcomed the largest group of new members (50) during this year. Of the fifty, only a handful were gay or lesbian.

In August 1998, Sheila Schuh became the Director of Religious Education. She spent her first year among us listening to and learning to the needs of the children and parents of the congregation, and with the support of lay leaders on the Youth Religious Education Committee and staff members, set about sharing her vision for our program, and the spiritual lives of our children. During the three years she has led our program she has supported the development of a "Coming of Age" program for teens, encouraged service and social action among the children and youth with the program "Louder Than Words", reconfigured the Sunday morning schedule, worked to establish the relationship with St. Lucy's as a community for our congregational outreach, and integrated reflective/worship time with the children each Sunday (Youth Community Time). Her commitment to nurturing the Unitarian Universalist identity of our children is a passion that has transformed the program in a short time. When she began her work, she and her husband Dave had a two month old daughter Ava, and has since had a second daughter, Noelle.

The questions of institutional identity and purpose seem to be a consistent source of interest and concern throughout the decades. Though this might appear to some as a sign of indecision, in our free-church tradition, it might more accurately be understood as another sign of life (see Appendices VII & IX). In many ways it is a necessary dimension of any evolving faith tradition. Only if our religious thinking and spiritual purpose were static could our sense of identity be immune from periodic revision and redefinition. It seems to require a regular re-commitment by the congregation to incorporate newer members into shaping the shared vision of the congregation. The most recent expression of this congregational vision was developed over the course of the '97-'98 church year. It takes the form of the Mission Statement that follows:

Building Community With Compassion, Service, Diversity, and Spirit

- We express compassion through caring, love and support for others.
- We serve by promoting our principles and purposes through leadership, giving and action.
- We are inspired by diversity to accept, respect and celebrate differences and interdependence.
- We grow in spirit though our religions experiences, inquiry, education, reflection, and transformation.

As this history goes to press, a "Futures" planning committee is beginning its work to develop a long-term plan for the programming, budgeting, and staff needs that will meet the Society's needs in the coming years. I have no doubt that our mission statement will evolve and change again before the cycle of their planning is complete. We are always ready to be blessed by new visions and new voices among us.

David Blanchard and Billy Buchanan, August 2000

In 1999, again at the initiative of the Board, a recommendation was brought to the congregation to amend the by-laws to permit the Society to make a public statement on an issue of social concern, after due consideration and study, with a two-thirds vote in favor of the proposed action required for adoption. By the two-thirds vote required to alter the by-laws, the amendment passed. As Charles Howe so aptly wrote in the church newsletter in 1983, "I'm convinced that the whole question of whether or not a church, as a church, should be involved in social concerns (and if so, how) is a perennial one with which we are fated to wrestle again and again without ever completely resolving. I'm willing to accept this, and I hope you are, too. It's the kind of challenge that keeps us alive and lively."

Late in the '98-'99 church year, the Society was asked by AIDS Community Resources to rent the Fellowship Hall to their organization for the purpose of operating a monthly bingo game. This monthly event was designed to serve as a fundraiser and educational program to reach segments of the population at greater risk for AIDS/HIV transmission – mostly younger gay men who had not lived through the early stages of the AIDS epidemic. Shortly after the Board of Trustees unanimously approved the request, a petition was circulated by a Board Member to call a congregational meeting to overturn the Board decision on the grounds that we should not allow gambling within our facility. This was a highly conflictual issue as people quickly became polarized in their positions. At the called meeting, by a narrow majority, the invitation was rescinded, and a policy was passed forbidding gambling on church property. A measure of the strength of feelings engendered can be noted in the fact that several members who opposed the Board's decision, and who prevailed in the democratic process, nevertheless subsequently withdrew their support from the church.

A constructive outgrowth of that painful episode (and others of a less public nature) was the development of a congregational covenant that describes the ideals we bring to our relationships in religious community, and offers guidance in being in relationship with those with whom we differ (see Appendix X). The Congregational Covenant was adopted in 2000.

This part of our story ends, with the congregation having thrived during my second sabbatical, which I have devoted to the research and writing of these pages. Together we will work together to shape and guide the story that has yet to be told; guided by both our "fruitful" past and our fertile vision for the future of our liberal faith in this community.

Julia, David, Emily Blanchard, June 2001

POSTSCRIPT

Having read the minutes from almost 1,500 Board meetings, digested 1,200 editions of the newsletter, poured over ancient newspaper clippings at the Historical Association, and closely perused the archives of our own church, I quickly came to realize that there would have to be some serious omissions from what I could chronicle in this history. There is no way to summon the range of feelings felt here when people gathered to celebrate a marriage, to rejoice in the birth of children, or to mourn the death of one they loved. I know I have written little about the religious education programs that nurtured our children, the music programs that enhanced weekly services, the devoted women's and men's groups that were so important in our past, the variety of social events that shaped the close fellowship and friendships of so many, the fundraising efforts which have always been required, or the countless devoted staff members who have worked on behalf of the congregation. Their stories, equally as important as those of the ministers, are harder to tell, since their stories never found their way into the formal documents preserved for legal purposes.

Having done this research, and now this writing, I feel especially honored to have served this congregation for the past twelve years. In reflection on all this deep history, I have grown in respect and reverence for this place and its people back through the decades, and am hopeful for its future. I am profoundly grateful for the opportunity I have had to contribute to the "unfinished ministry" of this place, and to grow and learn as a human being from such generous teachers.

Changes have not always been easy. Some of them have been deeply painful and, at least in the short term, disruptive. But from a historical perspective, you can see how necessary each – in their own time – has been in preparing us to meet the future. No doubt that same process is carrying us forward, even now, in ways some historian will help others interpret after we have all joined the company of the likes of those "generous and large-hearted people" who have gone before us: Aaron Thayer, Mary Avery, Nelson Ritter, Daniel Gridley, Frederick Betts, Katherine MacBride, H.W. Smith, Bertha Button, Seward Bucklin, Ellsworth Reamon, Betty Schmidt, Donald Neily, Ed Irish, Ruth Wallace, and so many others whose legacy on this earth endures, in part, with us in the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse.

Appendix I

PROFESSION AND COVENANT OF FIRST UNIVERSALIST (1864)

Profession

The persons whose names are hereunto attached do solemnly Profess and Covenant with each other and in the sight of God our Heavenly Father as follows; We believe and profess that the New Testament contains the highest system of Religion and the purest morality known to mankind.

Covenant

We covenant and agree before men and in the sight of God, that so far as in us lies, we will practice the religion which was taught by Jesus Christ and his Apostles; and we will endeavor to discharge faithfully all those duties which to our minds are clearly implied in the command to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves; being fully determined to do unto others all things whatsoever we would that they should do unto us; (and) we sincerely dedicate ourselves to God as servants; to Jesus Christ as disciples, and to each other as brethren and sisters in the faith of the Gospel, promising an earnest and continued effort to fulfill our duties to the Merciful Father in and to all His children on the earth and especially to those of the household of Faith.

Appendix II

WINCHESTER PROFESSION

Art. I We believe that the Holy Scriptures of the Old and New Testament contain a revelation of the character of God, and of the duty, interest and final destination of mankind.

Art. II We believe that there is one God, whose nature is love, revealed in one Lord Jesus Christ, by one Holy Spirit of Grace, who will finally restore the whole family of mankind to holiness and happiness.

Art. III We believe that holiness and true happiness are inseparably connected, and that believers ought to be careful to maintain order and practice good works, for these things are good and profitable unto men.

(Neither this nor any form of words
shall be imposed as a creedal test.)

Covenant

Cherishing these truths, we covenant and promise that we will, by study of the Scriptures, by prayer, and other available helps to Christian culture, earnestly endeavor to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Savior JESUS CHRIST, walking with the Church in love and helpfulness.

Appendix III

THE BOSTON DECLARATION, 1899

The Universalist Church does not believe that any unchanging form of words can contain the whole truth of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Therefore, it has no stated Creed, but does affirm as the Substance of Christian Faith, the following principles:

1. The Universal Fatherhood of God.
2. The Spiritual Authority and Leadership of His Son Jesus Christ.
3. The Trustworthiness of the Bible as Containing a Revelation from God.
4. The Certainty of Just Retribution for Sin.
5. The Final Harmony of All Souls with God.

(Liberty Clause)

Appendix IV

SERVICE OF DEDICATION, JANUARY 6, 1907

Organ Prelude
The Lord's Prayer, by Minister and people
Response by Choir
Responsive Reading
Anthem "Praise the Lord"
Prayer
Response by the choir
Contralto solo "But the Lord is Mindful of His Own" – Mendelssohn
Mrs. Ella M. Button
Sermon by Rev. J.M. Atwood
Hymn
Offering
Anthem "Seek Ye The Lord"
Transfer of the keys
Dedication (all standing)
Anthem "Beloved, Let Us Love"
Prayer of Dedication
Hymn
Benediction

Mr. Atwood of Rochester, ex-president of St. Lawrence University, took for his subject, "For we are fellow workers with God." He said in part, "We want every man and woman to learn that it is not what we are able to do for ourselves, but what we are able to do for the world in which we are partners with every person that counts. There are so many people living in so small a circle that when they venture out it is simply predatory."

Appendix V

CONGREGATIONAL PRESIDENTS 1971-2001

1971-1972	Dorothy Wright
1973	Helen Wingate
1974-1975	Clifford Mellor
1976-1977	Janet Goss (now Mallan)
1978-1979	Lee Murray
1980-1981	Ray Homan
1982-1983	William Bishop
1984-1985	Kendrick Sears
1986-1987	Mitzi Wolf
1988-1989	David Kinnear
1990-1991*	Stephan Nix
1991-1993	H. Brainard Fancher
1993-1994	Gracia Sears
1994-1996	James D'Aloisio
1996-1997	Marjorie Mellor
1997-1999	Barbara Griffin
1999-2001	Theodore Limpert
2001-	Mindy Holgate

*The Fiscal Year changed from the calendar year to 7/1 to 6/30 in 1991, changing the time frame of the terms of church officers.

Appendix VI

Washington Avowal of Faith (1935)

We are united by a common purpose to do the will of God as Jesus revealed it and to cooperate in establishing the Kingdom for which He lived and died.

To that end, we avow our faith in:

God as Eternal and All-conquering Love,

The spiritual leadership of Jesus,

The supreme worth of every human personality,

The authority of truth known or to be known,

And in the power of men of goodwill and sacrificial spirit to overcome all evil and progressively establish the Kingdom of God.

(Neither this nor any other statement
shall be imposed as a creedal test.)

Appendix VII

WELCOMING CONGREGATION RESOLUTION

Be it resolved that the First Unitarian Universalist Society of Syracuse shall henceforth be known as a Welcoming Congregation. We celebrate and support the lives, relationships, religious quests, and the individual and group contributions of lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender people, and their families and friends. We affirm and promote the full participation of all people at every level of our congregation and community. We pledge our Society's commitment to do its part to heal centuries of religious and societal based oppression and prejudice, making our church a sanctuary of spiritual growth and welcome for all.

Adopted March 8, 1998

Appendix VIII

ARTICLE II
PURPOSE OF THE SOCIETY

Principles

This Society shall provide a spiritual Center for its members, offering religious experience rooted in the Judeo-Christian tradition, while recognizing the world's many sources of religious truth, values, and wisdom. This Society affirms individual freedom of belief, the inherent dignity and worth of every person, and justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Its members shall unite in fellowship, strengthening one another in seeking truth and ultimate values, and accepting responsibility for the interdependent web of which we are a part.

Adopted 1991

Appendix IX

THE PRINCIPLES OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST ASSOCIATION

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 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.

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 that 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 neighbor 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-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision.

As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

Adopted 1985, adapted 1999

Appendix X

CONGREGATIONAL COVENANT

In keeping with the Purposes and Principles of our Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations and the Mission Statement of this congregation: Building Community with Compassion, Service, Diversity and Spirit,

We choose, as participants in this religious community, in what we do and say to:

- Support the overall good of the congregation,
- Honor the ongoing nature of relationships in this community, and
- Encourage spiritual growth.

We recognize that conflict may occur, therefore, in a spirit of good will, and with good humor when possible, we agree to:

- Be responsible for ourselves and our own feelings.
- Do our part, not leaving the work to others,
- Treat each other respectfully,
- "Share our truth" while keeping in mind that language matters,
- Address conflict and disagreement with open communication and respectful listening,
- Complain constructively, and
- Endeavor to be a part of the solution.

Adopted June 4, 2000