

Brief History of the UU Church of Charlotte

1947 - 1957

In 1947, Ruth Teeter wanted an inclusive, non-dogmatic church for her family. She invited and assembled 25 families who had written open-minded letters to the editor in the local newspaper. The Unitarian Church of Charlotte was born. This small group petitioned UUA in Boston for help. On November 16, 1947, the Unitarian Church of Charlotte was formally established with 82 members.

Rev. John H. Morgan became the first minister in January 1948. Meetings were held in temporary quarters until 1951. Rev. Morgan left for another church in May 1951. Construction of a permanent building on East Blvd. began. In November, the building was dedicated and Rev. Edward Cahill was installed as the congregation's second minister. In January 1957 Rev. Cahill moved on, and in late spring the church called Dr. Sidney Freeman to be the new minister. Membership climbed to 150.

1957 - 1989

Because of membership growth there was an increased need for space, especially for religious education. The congregation decided in 1962 to finance a larger building on Sharon Amity Rd. On January 31, 1965, the 230-member congregation dedicated its new two-story home, with the flaming chalice as its symbol.

Also during the 1960's, Dr. Freeman and the congregation were actively involved in the civil rights movement. In 1966, the church established the Open Door School, the first integrated day care and kindergarten in the area.

Crowded conditions in RE pushed the church to the next phase of the building program, which was the construction in 1968 of a one-story wing. In 1969, the church received a fine organ, the gift of an anonymous donor. In 1972, with membership near 400, a second floor was added to the RE wing. Membership leveled out at around 450 for most of the 1970's. Starting about 1980, membership again grew rapidly. The congregation voted to construct the present sanctuary/office/library addition and approved borrowing \$190,000 from the Vetch Foundation and the UUA. The addition was completed and dedicated in 1984.

In early 1986, planning began for a second church in northeast Charlotte. Nearly two years later, in December 1987, a "birthing service" was held at the UUCC for the new Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church.

In January 1989, Dr. Sidney Freeman conducted his last service and retired as minister emeritus. Membership was about 630; approximately 500 were voting members.

1989 - 1997

Rev. John Gilbert served as interim minister from February 1989 to June 1990. Rev. Dr. Douglas Reisner began his service as minister in September 1990. In May 1993, the congregation voted to change the name to Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte. Also in 1993, the church began to turn the corner financially. Fiscal year 1992-1993 ended in the black, a mortgage-reduction fund drive was begun, and the mortgage and outstanding loans were refinanced.

In May 1996, the Board of Trustees created a Long Range Planning Committee and initiated a multi-year planning process. Fiscal 1996-1997 ended on a positive note. With significant increases in pledging, the more than 600 active members of the congregation faced the most optimistic prospects in years.

1998 - 1999

The beautiful Memorial Garden was dedicated and has become a popular place to reflect. We held a special Chalice Lighter service in April 1998, with 109 Chalice Lighters from our congregation. Over 250 people volunteered with the RE program in 1998, with RE enrollment of 275 children and youth.

1999 was a year of transition to two services and two RE sessions. Major repairs to the building were made. The person-to-person pledge drive was a success with 577 members raising \$300,000. Funds were authorized for an intern minister. A computer network was set up in the staff member's offices.

1999 - 2004

In September 2001, the Rev. Dr. Reisner retired as minister and it was decided that we would return to one service and one RE program until a new permanent minister was called. In 2002, the Board of Trustees approved calling an interim minister and chose a committee to search for someone to help us during our transition. The Rev. Dr. Janet E. Newman served our congregation as our interim minister from August 2002 to July 2003. Also during that time, a Ministerial Search Committee was chosen to look for our new permanent minister. On April 6, 2003, our congregation voted to call the Rev. James "Jay" C. Leach. The Rev. Leach accepted our call and began his service as minister in August 2003. His first service on September 7, 2003 also marked the return to two services and two RE sessions.