

FROM A CULTURE OF CONFLICT TO A RENEWAL OF COVENANT:
A HISTORY OF THE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST SOCIETY OF SACRAMENTO

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Abstract

From a Culture of Conflict to a Renewal of Covenant: A History of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

In the 1980s and 1990s, an established, mid-sized church, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS), weathered endemic mistrust and conflict among members and leaders, with turf wars and assertions of individual freedom at the expense of congregational wellbeing. There was sparse evidence of the values of a religious community. The concept of covenant is key to the Unitarian Universalist heritage. However, there is little evidence that UUSS leaders and other members had a written covenant or invoked, spoke about, or adhered to a covenantal understanding of themselves as a community.

Over this period, however, key lay leaders and clergy did begin to speak frankly and act with courage for the health of the congregation. During painful controversies, they promoted listening across differences, clarified and upheld behavioral standards, and eventually led members to adopt a covenant, promising one another mutual support. This thesis uses congregational archives and interviews to trace this journey from a culture of conflict toward a renewal of the practice of covenant. One chapter summarizes the emergence of new Unitarian Universalist congregations in the Sacramento region since the 1950s. Some of these were seen as a “church split,” whereas others were intentional efforts to extend the faith. Another chapter gives the history of this congregation’s Women’s Alliance, founded in 1911. Reflecting the predominant role of women in

American religion, the Alliance has evolved alongside larger social trends and recently has adapted itself toward a sustainable structure.

This thesis also explores the shifting patterns of religious participation in the United States, mainly growth in the proportion of “religiously unaffiliated” persons or “spiritual independents.” Opportunities beckon for ministry to this demographic; however, younger adults or other seekers will not be drawn to join congregational cultures of mistrust, conflict, or time-consuming bureaucratic procedures.

The congregation’s eventual return to its heritage of covenant and the affirmation of mutual dependence took place in the same era that its denomination was adopting the religious principle of “a web of interdependence of all existence.” In recent years, the congregation’s fidelity to shared values and mutual dependence and a clear sense of mission have brought about new signs of progress and vitality.

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List of Abbreviations

CCMC	Communication and Conflict Management Committee (of UUSS)
DRE	Director of Religious Education
LGBT	Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender
PCD	Pacific Central District of the Unitarian Universalist Association
RE	Religious Education (curricula, staff, or programs for children and youth)
UU	Unitarian Universalist (as an adjective or as a noun)
UUA	Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations
UUCC	Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Sacramento
UUSS	Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, also referred to here as the UU Society of Sacramento, the Society, and the church. Earlier names were First Unitarian Church and First Unitarian Society of Sacramento.

Introduction

Summary, Purpose, Methods, My Role, and an Overview

1. Summary of this Thesis

In the 1980s and 1990s, the main period of the scope of this thesis, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS)¹ could boast of an adult membership of more than 500; it enjoyed several years of growth in membership and children in Religious Education. As in the current day, the congregation had many activity groups and committees, and a variety of regular discussions and other programs. Members of the Society helped the needy and suffering, and they organized, wrote letters, and protested for social justice, equal rights, and world peace. For the first time since its founding in the late nineteenth century, this era was when UUSS began appointing female-identified clergy, though most of them were in hired, part-time roles rather than in a full-time called ministry.

The Women's Alliance, a church group with its own budget, bylaws, and elected leaders, had been in continuous operation since 1911 and was going strong in the 1980s. It provided its members a monthly occasion to learn about local, national, and international issues, and a place to speak out about them. The Alliance threw parties and banquets, presented music and art shows, and gave money to the church and other organizations. In the late 1990s and early 2000s, its formal structure of committees, elected offices, and business meetings became stressful to sustain, as Alliance members were fewer in number and many were getting frail. Leaders engaged the support of a

¹ UUSS is also referred to as the Society, the congregation, and the church. See the List of Abbreviations.

facilitator from the congregation and the Alliance members voted to adopt a less formal and leaner governance structure, keeping the group's essential focus on fellowship among its members.

In cooperation with the Unitarian Universalist Association and local leaders in the denomination's Pacific Central District (PCD), a group of members from UUSS launched a new congregation in South Sacramento in 1989. They ruffled some feathers at UUSS by challenging the UU franchise in Sacramento County, but they wanted to extend the reach of liberal religion and to be more inclusive of children and families. UUSS contributed a small subsidy for a few years to help the new church pay for a full-time minister. Of the three new congregation starts in the Sacramento and Sierra Nevada region from the 1980s and 1990s (as well as some from the 1950s and 1960s), the UU Community Church (UUCC) of Sacramento was the one with which UUSS members had the most significant connection. UUCC was an active congregation with full-time ministry for twenty-five years, but its members voted to suspend operations in 2014.

Unfortunately, the 1980s and 1990s at UUSS were a time of mistrust and conflict among members and between members and their clergy, staff, or elected lay leaders. Committee and Board leadership operated in the mode of managerial control, permission-granting (and permission-withholding), and bureaucratic procedures. Various UUSS members guarded their own turf with the blunt end of typed memoranda. An adversarial culture is reflected in the church's reports, meeting minutes and correspondence, but it also was the diagnosis of clergy who came to serve as intentional interim ministers (short-term consultants between settled ministries). In fact, such dire observations and recommendations made by the interim minister in 1989 and 1990 mirrored those of

Sacramento's interim ministers five years earlier and fifteen years before that! With low trust in their at-large church leadership, many people were loyal first to their own group or program area or to strong personalities who led some of those groups. Too often, volunteer leadership contributed to and suffered within an atmosphere of duty, pressure, second-guessing, and scolding.

Reflecting attitudes of caution and scarcity about money, Society communications about pledging and giving to the church and about finances in general often used the word *pessimistic*, occasionally the word *optimistic*, but rarely the words *generous*, *generosity* or *gratitude*, let alone *blessings*. This burdensome tone existed in a congregation of people who were not poor. The congregation has drawn largely from the middle class and upper-middle class, with higher average levels of income than the national average. The congregation's social-class profile is representative of Unitarian Universalist churches nationwide, with higher levels of income and educational advancement than the national average, and near the top in all religions denominations in the country.

In the late 1980s the Society had one short-lived settled ministry; its legacy is ambiguous. The recollections and written record of that era show an ambivalent relationship between members and the minister. Then an interim minister (the Society's first full-time female clergy person) worked hard to bring a sense of celebration, joy, and love to community life, as she cited and lamented the signs of mistrust and rancor. She led multiple workshops on communicating and negotiating about disagreements in community. In 1990 a ministerial search ended in failure when the announced candidate

withdrew his name before the candidating week; this led to a second and lively interim ministry (by the Society's first openly gay and partnered minister).

After this, an accomplished and ambitious minister was called by the congregation, and he moved across the country with his wife (in treatment for cancer) and their teenage children. In a few years, the marriage ended in divorce and in a few more years he married a parishioner. In every year at UUSS he reported on a very active schedule of pastoral visits, teaching, preaching, denominational involvement, and interfaith work. Along with steady growth in membership, his tenure included the part-time service of two female colleagues, one for young-adult outreach and social-advocacy organizing and the next one for pastoral care, teaching, and some preaching. Both positions were temporary--the former by plan and the latter by necessity. The senior minister's tenure ended in a negotiated resignation. After he was accused by a member and her teenage daughter of an angry verbal assault on them, he was urged to resign by the Director of Religious Education. She had witnessed the exchange and resigned her own position in protest of what she and several others said was his pattern of angry criticism and defensiveness. The UUSS Communications and Conflict Management Committee held a series of Healing Circles to enable members to be heard. The UUSS Board of Trustees made it possible for those who admired him and those who felt hurt by him to hear one another. Amid those open differences of opinion and perspective, the Board reached an agreement for the minister to resign with a severance payment and to preach at a farewell worship service.

This minister departed after a Board-appointed administrative leave and a planned sabbatical, leaving his pastoral minister as the only clergyperson for one and a half years.

Then she resigned, saying she recognized that she needed a full-time salary and the church could not afford that as well as a full-time interim ministry, which the UUSS Board had committed to. For the next year, a married couple shared one position as co-ministers, explicitly leading work on the denomination's recommended "five developmental tasks of interim ministry." Near the end of that year, members of the Society took part in a series of workshops and presentations to develop a shared covenant for their life together as a religious community. The members adopted the covenant in June and welcomed a newly called minister in late August. Under his leadership, they would also write and adopt a mission statement and a statement of shared values. Though not covered in this dissertation, his ministry continued for thirteen years, ending with voluntary resignation and retirement, with congregational standing ovations at his farewell party and final service.

Not surprisingly, if not thoroughly accurate or fair, the Society had gained a reputation for conflict and meanness in the Unitarian Universalist Association's Pacific Central District (PCD) and among some offices at the denominational headquarters in Boston. I learned of that reputation from colleagues after arriving as a minister at another congregation in the PCD in 1997.

That is not the case now. The appraisal of the most recent long-term senior minister and my own observations since I arrived to serve the Society in 2008 are that it is a congregation of shared commitment, openness to differences of opinion, spiritual variety and curiosity, gratitude, and affection among the members. As a community, UUSS has taken on significant challenges and accomplished them with fortitude and a spirit of confidence and celebration. There is little evidence in recent years that would

match the archival records or confirm the diagnoses from interim clergy in the 1980s and 1990s of a culture of mistrust, adversarial interactions, scarcity, turf-guarding, and scolding.

Instead, there are now—most of the time—words of optimism about facing challenges, expressions of generosity and gratitude among members, a warm welcome to Sunday visitors, and enthusiasm for new volunteers as they try out new forms of serving and leading. What did it take for the members of this established congregation to bring UUSS through times of conflict and controversy among themselves and to be prepared for a long-term settled ministry of mutual affection and shared achievements? This is the guiding question of my reading of the congregation's archival record and my interviews with a number of current lay leaders who were present during many of the events I describe.

As is described in the following chapters, often the congregation's points of crisis turned out to be occasions for the congregation to learn about itself and to change. During and after church-wide controversies, some UUSS lay leaders and clergy began to speak frankly and act with courage for the benefit of the congregation at large. They showed that stewardship of the community as a whole must not be subverted by individual agendas, ax-grinding, antagonistic behaviors, or factionalism. A growing sense of the members' commitment to the wellbeing of the community would not let rhetorical appeals to the freedom of speech continue to be a cover for the license of a few to harass, berate, or intimidate others.

Times of trouble and transition led to decisions and innovations for the members to listen to one another, to speak of hard feelings as well as hopes, to hold one another

more accountable in facing conflicts openly, and to learn how to work through and live with their disagreements. Leaders explained the dynamics of conflict and invited members to try out new skills for communication and negotiation.

In the 1980s, the congregation updated its Bond of Union (adopted back in 1913), taking a step toward reviving the tradition of covenant from our Unitarian Universalist heritage. Then members engaged in discussions about a shared vision and articulated their priorities in a vision statement. In the year that followed the controversy around a ministry and its termination, interim clergy helped the Society appraise its strengths and look more closely at the habits that undermined its performance. Over a series of workshops, worship services, and conversations, members and staff came together to articulate a covenant for their shared life in community. Congregation members then voted to adopt that covenant. As a departing interim co-minister told them, the *process* of coming to that statement was a crucial part of it, for in their conversations they learned why they were, in fact, joined together as one congregation, and not merely as an association of interests. The USS Covenant continues to be a touchstone, a chance for new members to make—and seasoned ones to remember—the promises and pledges of people in a freely chosen community.

2. The Sweep of American Religious History and a Congregation in Close-up

In the fall term of 2015, I took a course at Pacific School of Religion on “American Religious History through the GTU Archives.” My doctoral colleagues and I examined a variety of archival collections at the Graduate Theological Union’s Library. In every such exercise, our professor asked us to consider how the materials “complicate”

our impressions of the standard narratives of American religious history. Also for this course I reviewed a substantial, thorough, and well-written narrative survey of American religious history, *Religion in American Life*.² It narrates the origins of diverse and significant movements of thought and belief in the United States. It charts the spread of those beliefs (and many of the believers' own migrations) into and around this country. The book describes the interactions of American religious people and institutions with social, political, and cultural history, and their impacts on one another.

Such a book's sweep may be grand, but it cannot explain every era of every movement or give more than a few close-up looks or micro-history sidebars. A notable gap in that survey of American religious history is the lack of any of the complexity, achievements, or struggles within the life of a local congregation. The handbook *Studying Congregations* asserts that in the United States, "congregations are at the heart of individual and collective religious history."³ This thesis looks at selected time periods and themes from the life of one congregation, one of "the gathered communities that have formed the bedrock of American religion."⁴

Local churches and other religious societies, especially those with explicit congregational governance, are more than sources of religious proclamation or devotion, more than sources of engagement in social services or political struggles. They are also membership organizations. Most of the religious adherents of a congregation are

² Jon Butler, Grant Wacker, and Randall Herbert Balmer, *Religion in American Life: A Short History* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, ©2003).

³ Nancy Tatom Ammerman, ed., *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, ©1998), 7.

⁴ *Ibid.*

consumers: receivers of what the church does and provides. At the same time, however, many of the same people are the responsible producers--the leaders and givers of what the church does and provides.

Using the discipline of congregational studies, I have attempted to make my observations through the frames of congregational culture and process, seeking to show what Ammerman calls “the underlying flow of and dynamics of a congregation that knit together its common life and shape its morale and climate, [and asking] how leadership is exercised and shared, how decisions are made, how communication occurs, and how conflicts are managed.”⁵

3. Introduction to the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Currently UUSS has approximately 400 adult members and seventy-five “friends” (those who pledge financial support to it but who choose not to be able to vote or be elected to church leadership). About 250 adults, youth, and children are present on Sunday mornings in 2017. The primary period of study for this thesis is the 1980s and 1990s, when adult membership reached nearly 550. In addition, I include a historical study of the UUSS program or sub-organization known as the Women’s Alliance, which was founded by women of this church over a century ago and which continues with monthly meetings to this day. Chapter One includes an overview of the Society’s history in various locations in or near Sacramento.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 15-16.

4. Intentions and Methods: What This Thesis Does Not Attempt to Be

This thesis is a study of certain aspects of the history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento. The period under study is primarily the 1980s and 1990s, though there is a longer time frame for the chapter about the Women's Alliance in the congregation, and it covers the emergence of four Unitarian Universalist fellowships in the area in the 1950s and 1960s. However, this is not a comprehensive chronology of events in the congregation's life during the period under study. For background and to fill in some blanks regarding particular events or persons, I make some references to a very engaging official church history, written and edited by members of the congregation: *In Good Times and in Bad: The Story of Sacramento's Unitarians 1868-1984*. (It is an edited "compilation of two authorized histories of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento.") While the years covered by most of this thesis come after the time frame of the authorized history, I am not attempting here to provide a sequel to that work.

This thesis focuses on the culture and systems of this congregation as reflected in archival meeting minutes, reports, correspondence, and newsletter articles from the 1980s and 1990s. It also makes use of interviews I conducted with several lay leaders and other members in 2014 and 2016 as they recalled their experience of earlier events; I received written consent from each of the interviewees to interview and quote them. I left particular statements anonymous, at their request. I make use of some tools of analysis and interpretation to which I have been introduced in coursework at the Pacific School of Religion, and offer my conclusions on setbacks and achievements in the congregation's

recent history. It will be obvious to readers that the present work leaves other themes and topics to be studied and several other detailed chronologies to be assembled.

For example, my study looks at the ministries of several clergypersons who served the Society in the 1980s and 1990s, but does not attempt to analyze, catalogue, or summarize the sermons or correspondence they wrote for the Society or curricula they created. In any case the church archives do not have a complete collection of the body of sermons for any one of them. I refer to but do not illustrate in depth the shifting currents of theological opinions and styles of worship at UUSS, but this is not a theological or liturgical study. I mention some financial and membership statistics and some financial trends and events. However, a separate work could be written about the ways congregation members pledged, gave, raised, spent, and accounted for the Society's financial resources, how the congregation engaged with financial challenges, and how its handling of money changed over time. In some instances, I refer to the activities of the congregation's Religious Education programs and staff members, particularly at turning points or trouble spots. Yet a sustained study of Religious Education at the Unitarian Universalist Society would be worthwhile and surely enlightening. I cite some archived denominational reports and letters between the congregation and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in Boston or the regional body of the Pacific Central District (PCD). A history of the relationships of this and other West Coast congregations with the PCD and the UUA would be fascinating and lengthy.

5. Role of the Author: An Insider Looking in and Looking Back

I must discuss my closeness to the subject of this dissertation. I began serving UUSS as a one-year contracted Family Minister in 2008, and the contract continued for two more years. In April 2012 the congregation voted to call me as Associate Minister. In July 2013 the UUSS Board of Trustees named me as Acting Senior minister, and in January 2014 I was called by congregational vote to be the Senior Minister. A called ministry operates by a Letter of Agreement with an open term of service. It is as much a covenant of mutual expectations and promises—and a reminder of the importance of good will—as it is an employment contract.

Given my embedded, accountable, and ongoing relationship with UUSS, I have chosen to highlight the events of the congregation which largely took place before I arrived, though in studying the Women's Alliance I did provide my recent observations of that congregational group.

I have studied the ministries of UUSS clergypersons whose terms of service had ended before I arrived to serve the congregation, though I have known a few of them. The scope of this dissertation does not include the most recently completed settled ministry of the congregation, that of the Rev. Douglas Kraft. His ministry of thirteen years was one of the longest ministerial tenures since the congregation was founded, and has been remembered by my interview subjects as well as others in the congregation as a time of healing and renewal for the church. His tenure overlaps my own, as he recruited me to apply for and accept a position at the Society in 2008, and we served together until his retirement five years later. I attempt to show how the efforts of UUSS leaders and the

urgings of interim ministers toward covenantal interactions in the congregation made the congregation well poised for his healing ministry.

In *Refiguring History*, Keith Jenkins notes that any historian is “always part of the past” that she or he paints or narrates.⁶ Historians notice particular aspects of the historical record and make selections of what to use or leave out in constructing a narrative. It is worth noting that as a historian I am not only “part of the past” which I am constructing, I am a significant part of the *present* of this institution. In other words, as a writer of this history I am an insider, which gives me a rich sense of context but also gives me a particular lens, with a bias based in fondness and affection for (and occasional stress over ministry with) the people, culture and habits of the congregation.

I recognize, as Arthur Danto is credited with observing, that an accurate description of a past event or era “cannot be determined at that [past] time.”⁷ I have the benefit of hindsight, and of knowing how the story would unfold, and how it did unfold. Most of the people in my narrative and in the UUSS archives did not know how the story would unfold; they were not living with a coherent sense of the meaning of their actions or their aspirations. With the benefit of hindsight, I do strive to treat with compassion the frustrations of the congregants and clergy of the era covered in this paper. At the same time, when I see early evidence of habits or traits that have challenged the congregation or its ministers in the recent past, it can be disheartening. Congregational historian Margaret Bendroth has written that we can study our own congregational predecessors as

⁶ Keith Jenkins, *Refiguring History: New Thoughts On an Old Discipline* (London: Routledge, 2003), 36-42.

⁷ Cited by Paul Roth, “The Pasts,” *History and Theory* 51, no. 3 (October 2012): 313-339.

we might encounter another culture--with respect, without letting our hindsight tempt us into seeing them as less enlightened than we are. They are “available to us,” she says, not necessarily as role models but as spiritual companions. As they once did, we now seek to “run the race” as faithful members, lay leaders and clergy ourselves.⁸ They did not have the hindsight we possess on their life together as congregation, their challenges and possibilities, or the larger context of their work. Likewise, we cannot know what conclusions future observers will make about how we are living and leading as a religious congregation in these times. As we draw lessons from past eras, may we show creativity, courage, and faith in the present one.

6. Overview of the Chapters of this Dissertation

The Introduction (above) summarizes the stories detailed in the chapters of this dissertation. It describes the purpose and scope of my study and notes that this is not a traditional chronology of a congregation’s life or a substitute for an “authorized history.” I introduce the congregation and reflect on my role as an inside observer of its life, which I have served as a minister since 2008. I reflect on the use of congregational and denominational archives and on the use of interviews with several members.

Chapter One is an overview of the history of Unitarian Universalism in the United States and of the development of Unitarian and Universalist congregations on the West Coast in the 1800s. (Appendix III is a table of originally Unitarian and originally

⁸ Margaret Bendroth, “The Weight of Congregational History,” Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society website (undated essay, accessed October 17, 2015). <http://uuhhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CHBendrothEssay.pdf>

Universalist congregations founded in California in the 1800s.) This chapter summarizes the history of UUSS.

Chapter Two goes back to 1911, to the founding of the Sacramento chapter of the Unitarian Women's Alliance, and covers the dynamics and changes in the life and role of the Alliance as an organization in the congregation. I show how its leaders in 2005 met the challenge of diminishing numbers and volunteer energy by choosing to adapt to a new, sustainable model of operating. I highlight the Alliance as an example of Ann Braude's thesis that women (in spite of their often-circumscribed range of authority) have always been the predominant source of membership, energy, and resources in American religious movements and institutions. Given that this chapter covers a longer span of time than most of this thesis, the chapter comes early in this work.

Chapter Three looks at the congregation's organizational culture, especially as a reflection of economic and social class in the 1980s and 1990s in the Sacramento area and in light of its roots in the Unitarian tradition and (to a lesser extent) Universalist tradition.

Chapter Four features a chart showing traces the tenures of the settled, interim, and contracted ministers of the Society from 1983 to 2000, then recounts the sequence of ministries from 1983 to 1991, with their successes, stresses, and challenges.

Chapter Five reviews the ministries from 1991 to 2000, looking in particular depth at the arrival, progress, and painful termination of the Society's longest serving minister of the period under study. This period includes new experiments in specialized, part-time ministries by female clergy as well as the interim service of a married couple of ministers who shared one position and who led UUSS in adopting a formal covenant.

Chapter Six documents how a number of interim ministers (short-term consultant ministers) brought fresh insights and urgency to the congregation about its dynamics and habits, encouraged experimentation and dialogue, and promoted the articulation of shared visions and a shared covenant for moving forward in their life together as a community. It highlights the need for pursuing a trust orientation above a task orientation in congregational relationships, and the value of a covenant of mutual support.

Broadening the concept of a covenantal understanding of religious institutions, Chapter Seven looks at the greater or lesser roles that members of this congregation played in the founding of new Unitarian Universalist congregations from the 1950s to the 1990s in its Central Valley area, including the foothills of the Sierra Nevada mountains and Reno, Nevada. The chapter shows the ways that some of these developments related to life in UUSS.

Chapter Eight shows the steps taken by lay leaders and clergy to face conflicts openly and to learn the skills to manage their disagreements and their work to articulate a statement of a shared vision and later a statement of covenant, by which members, lay leaders, and clergy can hold themselves accountable and work together fruitfully.

Chapter Nine describes major shifts in the religious landscape of the United States in the past few decades, including the trends of decline in religious affiliation and attendance. It draws on recent reports and analyses of surveys about religious participation. Citing the arguments of contemporary ministers and scholars and noting my own observations, I discuss the opportunities for ministry that this or another congregation might pursue in this changing landscape to serve people, particularly the growing share of Americans who are “religiously unaffiliated,” “spiritual independents,”

or “seekers.” However, the resumption of the contentious and mistrustful climate of earlier decades would alienate most of those spiritual seekers who might come to the congregation hoping to find a religious home. Likewise, such a setback would also be disheartening to long-term members and the ministers who love and serve the congregation.

In the Conclusion I assert that, even in this time of shifting patterns of religious participation, the Unitarian Universalist Society can move ahead with hope. It can be sustained by ensuring that its mission is always clear and compelling and by letting that mission guide its choices and planning. Though this thesis focuses mainly on UUSS in the 1980s and 1990s, I provide an epilogue to recount its achievements during the tenure of the minister from 2000 to 2013 and to summarize aspects of the congregation’s vitality at present. Having achieved (or perhaps revived) a covenantal understanding of congregational identity, the Society has in recent years enhanced and expanded its facilities and reached out in greater hospitality, service, generosity, and advocacy. These traits and practices will help current and future leaders of the congregation face challenges and adapt to them in ways that are congruent with its deepest values as a liberal religious community.

Chapter One

Context: Unitarian Universalist History in the United States, California, and Sacramento

1. Overview of Unitarian Universalism in the United States

The Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations (UUA) is the result of a 1961 consolidation or merger between the American Unitarian Association and the Universalist Church in America. Both denominations emerged on the theological left wing of the Protestant population in New England in the late 1700s and early 1800s.

Both of our denominational movements arose in reaction to a dominant Calvinist orthodoxy. (In contrast, Universalism in the Philippines, started in the 1950s by a former Pentecostal Filipino, has always existed in a land where more than eighty percent of the population is Roman Catholic.) Unitarianism in the United States originated in Boston among ministers of Congregational churches who identified themselves as liberal Christians. We tie their overt expression of Unitarianism as a separate religious orientation to a sermon given by William Ellery Channing in 1819 entitled “Unitarian Christianity.” The Unitarians emphasized the use of reason in interpreting the Scriptures, and argued for the humanity (rather than divinity) of Jesus and the inherent dignity of all people, rather than inherent depravity.

Universalists also originated in New England, but in a variety of Protestant churches, not only Congregational ones. Universalists argued against the doctrines of substitutionary atonement, salvation by election, and the idea of eternal damnation. They

proclaimed that all souls would be brought into harmony with God, who is a loving parent rather than a harsh judge. Unitarian clergy and parishioners typically were educated and elite members of their communities. Early Universalist clergy were often self-taught and were apprenticed by their senior colleagues in ministry rather than trained in a divinity school. Their churches were often rural, and their preachers more given to “circuit-riding” and evangelism for their gospel of universal salvation.

Today, Unitarian Universalist congregations in North America are made up mostly of people who have been to college and hold professional jobs. We are mostly a white, middle-class population. Our median church size is less than 100 individual adult members, but with some ranging above 1,000 members. Most churches have paid staff, at least a minister, who holds an M.Div. In general, UU church members are socially liberal, especially on gender and sexual orientation issues, and our members predominantly are progressive in politics.

2. Unitarianism and Universalism from New England to the Pacific Coast

The first Unitarian or Universalist church on the Pacific Coast was the Unitarian congregation established in San Francisco in 1850 and served by the legendary Thomas Starr King in 1860.⁹ In his 1957 book *Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast*, the Rev. Arnold Crompton wrote that Unitarian ministers and lay leaders came west following the California Gold Rush and the completion of the transcontinental railroad. Crompton attributed the growth of Unitarianism to five factors:

First, “transplanted” New England Unitarians wanted a church like those back home.... Second, the tightening of the lines of orthodoxy [in the

⁹ “Thomas Starr King,” Architect of the Capitol website, accessed December 11, 2011. http://www.aoc.gov/cc/art/nsh/king_t.cfm

larger society] gave rise to conscience problems among liberal Christians which led them to seek their own company.... Third, direct missionary activity... established churches or planted seeds of future churches. Fourth, the great ministers... by their preaching, their leadership, and their lives attracted people to their churches and denomination. The fifth factor was the changing intellectual climate [especially scientific challenges to traditional theology].¹⁰

While conclusive evidence is lacking about the Universalists' westward migration, it seems fair to assume that the promise of economic success and the transcontinental railroad brought them here as well. Appendix III shows the dates when most Unitarian or Universalist congregations were established on the Pacific Coast in the nineteenth century. While the dates are similar between the two denominations, it is notable that many of the Universalist churches did not survive to the present day. One that did, in Pasadena, was blessed by a large endowment from Amos Throop, who also founded the California Institute of Technology. Another is in Santa Paula. Both have small memberships now. The congregation which is the subject of this dissertation was founded as the First Unitarian Church of Sacramento in 1868 and incorporated as the First Unitarian Society in 1892.

In the rest of the United States, as well as in the West, the number of Universalist churches and members declined in the twentieth century. The standard history of the movement reports that the American Almanac for 1832 listed Universalism as the sixth largest denomination.¹¹ However, in a sermon given in 1995 and revised later on his website, David Lawyer cited census and other data to estimate that 49,000 to 64,000

¹⁰ Arnold Crompton, *Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast: The First Fifty Years* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 3.

¹¹ Russell E. Miller, *The Larger Hope*, vol. 1 (Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association, 1979), 162. Volume I covers American Universalism from 1770 to 1870. Cited in Lawyer. See note 14.

Universalist church members existed between 1890 and 1906.¹² Lawyer argued that, contrary to many claims, Universalism was in decline before the twentieth century and may never have grown as much as its early leaders announced.¹³

The Unitarians as a denomination had a stronger missionary activity on the West Coast, fueled by the Rev. Jenkin Lloyd Jones,¹⁴ a Unitarian leader from the Midwest. The Rev. Charles Wendte, who served local churches around the region and was a leader of the Pacific Coast Unitarian Conference, led the planting of many Unitarian churches in the West. For a congregationally based tradition, missionary work entailed pulling together enough local people with liberal Christian beliefs (or better, some with Unitarian backgrounds from elsewhere) and gathering them into a congregation. This work included advertising, publications, and lectures, working on local causes and civic projects, holding worship, and dedicating a church building as soon as affordable.

In 1892, the Unitarian churches in Los Angeles, National City, Ontario, Pomona, Santa Ana, Redlands, San Bernardino, San Diego, and Sierra Madre attended a conference to organize the Southern California Liberal Conference “as a subdivision of the [Pacific] Coast Conference.”¹⁵ This reflects a missionary optimism. Yet few of these churches may have been strong ones, and half of those towns no longer have a UU church. Just a few years earlier, in 1886, Unitarian leader Charles Wendte (heavily

¹² David S. Lawyer, “West Coast Universalism,” sermon delivered in Pasadena, Calif., July 16, 1995. http://www.lafn.org/~dave/uu/universalism/west_coast_universalism.txt

¹³ See Edwin Gaustad and Philip L. Barlow, *New Historical Atlas of Religion in America* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

¹⁴ A Welsh immigrant, Jones was a theologically radical Unitarian (i.e., not identifying as Christian and opposed to official statements of the movement as a Christian one). See the online Dictionary of Unitarian Universalist Biography, accessed December 21, 2016: <http://uudb.org/articles/jenkinlloydjones.html>

¹⁵ Crompton, *op. cit.*, 144.

involved in church-planting efforts for the faith) listed only four “stable Unitarian churches on the Pacific Coast”: San Francisco, Portland, Santa Barbara, San Diego.¹⁶ It is notable he did not include the Sacramento church. It may have been in decline or have ceased operations altogether since its founding in 1868, but the church would appear again in 1892 and be incorporated and chartered as First Unitarian Society.

Though based in Boston like the Unitarians, the Universalist Church in America and its state conferences were a much less centrally organized body, and membership statistics are unclear. While the Universalists’ original evangelistic activity on the other side of the continent was impressive, it is unclear to me whether this gospel zeal is what led to their founding of West Coast congregations.

Chapter Seven summarizes a number of Unitarian or Unitarian Universalist church-planting efforts undertaken in Sacramento and nearby counties in the 1950s, 1960s, 1980s, and 1990s, and describes the greater or lesser part played by the Society in those extension efforts.

3. Overview of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

The congregation was founded in 1868 as the First Unitarian Church of Sacramento, and it espoused liberal Christianity. The authorized history of this church suggests it may have ceased operations during a U.S. financial panic in the late 1870s. Indeed, in 1892 it was incorporated as if for the first time. However, as Dr. Randi Walker has pointed out, many congregations were established years before they formally incorporated, so the years before incorporation were arguably not years of dormancy. In

¹⁶ Crompton, *op. cit.*, 91.

any case, the congregation rented worship space for services for many years before obtaining its own land and erecting a building in 1915 (at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street, in the Midtown area of Sacramento).

In 1956 the congregation bought five and a half acres of ranchland five miles east of the Midtown site in unincorporated Sacramento County. In 1960 it completed and dedicated a major building on that site; a few years later it constructed a second building, which is actually three buildings connected by breezeways. These consisted of classrooms, which served also as meeting rooms, and a few offices. In 2012 the congregation held a capital fundraising campaign. Using donations received in that campaign, plus bequeathed assets and a commercial bank loan, it completed a major expansion and renovation of the main building and held a dedication ceremony in 2015. This main building houses the sanctuary, kitchens, business office, and meeting rooms, and includes a theater stage and gallery wall space.

It is likely that there would be a diversity of theological beliefs and spiritual orientations in a non-creedal congregation. This is especially true in most UU congregations today. Historically the UU tradition has asserted freedom of belief and argued for the use of persuasion rather than coercion in matters of religious opinion. However, in any UU congregation's history, there may have been a primary or dominant religious orientation at various points in time. The Society's dominant theological outlook (or religious vocabulary, if you will) has shifted over the decades from liberal Christian at its founding to non-theistic Humanist starting in the 1930s, to the current mix of theological identities. The current form of religious diversity began in the larger UU movement in the 1970s, with feminist spiritual perspectives and critiques of male-

dominated UU governance structures and liturgies. Since the 1980s and 1990s, a greater openness to non-mainstream spiritual practices by clergy and lay members has led to the current variety which can be found in the Unitarian Universalist Society and many other UU congregations. This variety includes Buddhist study and meditation practices; Neo-Pagan and other Earth-based rituals and seasonal observances; observances by Jewish UUs of the High Holy Days, Passover, and Hanukkah; and non-Trinitarian observances of the major Christian celebrations of Advent, Christmas, and Easter. Though the label is rarely claimed by them, quite a number of USS members could be called religious naturalists, finding nature as a primary source of inspiration and consolation without a theistic belief. Engagement in social issues, charitable giving, and volunteer service in the local region are of importance to many members and to the congregation as a whole.

It is possible, however, that an avowed openness to multiple theological practices could allow the secular culture to dominate a congregation's life, undermining the tradition's covenantal theology, which implies mutual dependence and shared commitment. In the United States, socio-economic class is often a dominant but unacknowledged influence on our relationships with one another, particularly in religious communities. Chapter Three looks at social class as a strong element of the congregational culture of the Unitarian Universalist Society.

Chapter Two

Women in American Religion, the Ministry, and the USS Alliance

1. Introduction

This chapter explores the presence and role of many lay women in the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (USS) through their involvement in the Women's Alliance. Of the numerous sub-organizations or programs in the congregation's history, the Alliance boasts the longest continuous presence. In some years, the organizational culture and leadership in the Alliance had traits similar to those of the Society as a whole, including some points of stress or difficulty and a high devotion to organizational structures and procedures. However, neither the Alliance archives nor my interview subjects revealed the degree of mistrust or antagonism in the Alliance as existed in the congregational system at large in the 1980s and 1990s. In the early 2000s, as the Society as a whole began its crucial shift from a period of conflict into a new focus on covenant, the Alliance members faced their own organizational challenges. By listening and thinking together, Alliance members were able to modify their expectations and adapt their structures and processes. It continues as a regular program today.

2. Women's Majority Presence in American Religious History

Though women originally did not have equal authority in governing this congregation at its founding and no women clergy ever served USS before 1989, the history of the Alliance at USS is a vivid example of the significant presence and power which women have had in this congregation's history and in general in the history of

American religion. I now turn to the presence of women in the larger context of American religion.

Historian Ann Braude has written that ever since the colonial era in America, women have always constituted the majority of religious participants, and at no point have men been in that majority. American religious communities have depended on women's presence, energy, and resources. Except for a few marginal American religious groups which have stood apart from the larger culture, women have been an enduring majority. Even in male-dominated religious organizations or communities—nearly all of which were led by men until the late twentieth century—women's presence has predominated.

Braude writes, "Indeed, numerical dominance of women in all but a few religious groups constitutes one of the most consistent features of American religion," yet she notes that prominent historical narratives have not taken account of this.¹⁷ While many historians and a lot more religious leaders in America (primarily male ones) have alleged and worried about a decline in men's participation, Braude says the story to be told is not of the decline of men's numerical presence, but the enduring majority of women. Even when men's participation has grown in number and in proportion to that of women, that has not changed the women's majority, only temporarily reduced the proportion of it.¹⁸

This is true across denominations of Protestant faiths—North and South; white, black or otherwise—and in Roman Catholicism, where there are more women in

¹⁷ Ann Braude, "Women's History *Is* American Religious History," in Thomas R. Tweed, *Retelling U.S. Religious History* (Berkeley, 1997: University of California Press), 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 88.

religious orders than priests or brothers, not to mention more faithful lay women than men in church.¹⁹ As Braude notes, it is paradoxical that women have propelled religious organizations and movements that have excluded them from the clergy and lay leadership; they have sustained movements where the hierarchy or the community at large has suppressed their voice in matters of doctrine or decision making. Women have provided the majority of “audiences for preaching, participants for rituals, the material and financial support for religious buildings, and, perhaps most important, [they have inculcated] faith in their children.” Braude says, “There would be no [mostly male] clergy, no seminaries to train them... no hierarchies to ordain them,” unless women supported all of those necessary institutions.²⁰

Although I have not counted the numbers, this has been my impression in this and earlier Unitarian Universalist congregations where I have served as a minister or have been a member. Female-identified adults have made up the majority of worshippers, volunteers, and elected officers. Of course, I could name many men who have been devoted, involved, and appreciated members, and the absence of any of them would have been a great loss to the church. Yet in my congregations, including the Unitarian Universalist Society, Braude’s thesis holds. Since my arrival in 2008, more than half of the elected Trustees have been women. The last man to serve as President of the Board was Richard Howard, whose term ended in 2000. As Braude notes, such facts are not a cause for concern. They do not reflect a trend, merely the steady state of women’s majority participation in American religious communities.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 89.

3. Clergy Women in Unitarian Universalism and at UUSS

While women have had a majority presence and predominant role in American religious organizations since colonial times, they have rarely had official authority in religion until the late twentieth century. Of course, the most visible and powerful position in most religions is that of ordained clergy. The Unitarian and Universalist faith traditions (precursors of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the result of a merger in 1961) have moved faster than other American denominations with regard to the ordination of women. They have been early in applying a feminist critique to the church as well as to the larger society.²¹ However, women clergy did not begin to grow as a share of all Unitarian Universalist parish-based ministers until the 1970s, when many other denominations had recently begun ordaining women.²² Many of the prolific and widely published apostles of Religious Humanism in Unitarian and then Unitarian Universalist congregations were white men. The Humanist-identified settled ministers at UUSS from 1946 to at least 1983 were all white men.²³

The following table is a list of the women clergy who have served UUSS, and their roles and terms, with a narrative explanation below.

²¹ See, for example, Margaret Fuller's 1845 book *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* (New York, 1971: W. W. Norton), first published as a series in *The Dial*, a Transcendentalist journal, in 1843. In 1977, the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) adopted a Business Resolution entitled "Woman and Religion," which required the UUA administration (and urged congregations) to conduct audits for sexism in institutional culture and processes as well as in language for worship, music, and publications. It also called on the administration of the UUA to make annual progress reports. See <http://www.uua.org/statements/women-and-religion>.

²² See Helen Lutton Cohen, "Leaping from Their Spheres: The Impact of Women in Ministry on Unitarian Universalism," *UUMA Selected Essays* (Boston, 1998: Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association).

²³ I am not sure if all clergy since 1983 have taken the label of Humanist. Though the Rev. Theodore Webb (who served UUSS from 1971 to 1983) had grown up in a Universalist family and attended a Universalist theological seminary, he told me he identified as a Humanist when I met him in 2008.

Table 2.1 Ordained Women Ministers Serving the UU Society of Sacramento

<u>Name</u>	<u>Title</u>	<u>Time</u>	<u>Term of Service</u>
Eileen Karpeles	Interim Minister	Full	January 1989-July 1990
Richelle Russell	Chaplain for Young Adults	½	October 1992-July 1994
Shirley Ranck	Pastoral Minister	½	October 1997-June 1998
”	Associate Minister	¾	July 1998-June 1999
Sydney Wilde	Interim Co-Minister	½	August 1999-June 2000 (shared full-time position with her husband)
Lyn Cox	Acting Director, RE	Full	August 2003-June 2004
”	Assistant Minister	Full	July 2004-July 2006
Constance Grant	Minister of Education	Full	August 2006-July 2008
Lucy Bunch	Assistant Minister	½	August 2013-June 2014
”	Assistant Minister	¾	July 2014-June 2015
”	Assistant Minister	Full	July 2015-present

The first woman to serve in the primary or sole ministerial position at the congregation was the Rev. Eileen Karpeles; she was hired as the Accredited Interim Minister for one and a half years. The Rev. Richelle Russell was hired as the Chaplain to Young Adults for two years. UUSS received grant funds from the denomination for part of the cost of the young adult ministry, and her half-time position also included ministry with a child advocacy campaign connected with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, from which she secured more grant funding.

The Rev. Dr. Shirley Ranck was called by congregational vote at the end of a three-day candidating weekend. She served as the half-time Pastoral Minister in 1997; then as of July of 1998 she was appointed Associate Minister (in a three-quarters time position) after the Rev. Dr. John Young’s sabbatical and negotiated resignation. She resigned for a full-time interim ministry out of state in 1999.²⁴ Other female-identified

²⁴ As noted earlier, Ranck was presented as the candidate for part-time Pastoral Minister after a three-day weekend of meetings and preaching on Sunday, and the congregation voted to call her.

clergy at UUSS: Rev. Lyn Cox (Acting Director of Religious Education for one year, then Assistant Minister for Religious Education for 2004-2006), Rev. Constance Grant (Minister for Education, 2006-2008), and Rev. Lucy Bunch (Assistant Minister, 2013-present).²⁵ To date, Karpeles was the only woman to be appointed as the sole or senior minister. Only Ranck was in a called position, but of limited hours and authority, and under the auspices of John Young. The controversy over his ministry and his administrative leave for a month, followed by a sabbatical and then his departure, demanded extra fortitude from Ranck and no doubt meant uncompensated additional time, as she was the only minister available for nearly one and a half years.

The ordination of women to the ministry and their actual presence in this and many other congregations as ministers is a significant achievement. Their perspectives and voices have made a difference in many ways. One is simply the example that women can be preachers, pastors, wedding officiants, and ordained congregational leaders. Many young and middle-aged women ministers have recalled from their childhoods that seeing a woman in ministry was the first time they realized women could be clergy.

Yet, as Braude notes, women's presence has been predominant in religious institutions long before women could be ordained (or even be elected leaders in some congregations). Had the relative population of women in congregations been the determining factor for having women in the ordained ministry, women's ordination and ministerial settlement would have been achieved much earlier and more widely in Unitarian Universalist congregations, among other faith traditions.

²⁵ As indicated in the table category of "Term," the "church year" at UUSS has coincided with the fiscal year, from July through June. For decades, church leaders have spoken informally of the church year as starting in September, when program activity and attendance both increase heavily after the summer.

4. Role Models and Mentoring

One of the most important aspects of the majority presence of women in religious institutions must be that of mentoring and finding role models in one another. A Roman Catholic in childhood, JoAnn Anglin came to the UUSS in her thirties, in 1976. After she became a member in 1978, she became increasingly involved in lay leadership. She recalled: “As a single woman in an age of growing feminist awareness, the role models--the older women--were really important to me. How vital they were, how participatory, in the church and larger community. At their memorial services, I thought about how good it was to have had them as role models.”²⁶ Anglin has been active in various programs and volunteer jobs in the congregation, though not as a member of the Women’s Alliance, largely because she was working on weekdays when it met. In any case, her recognition of the role of women as role models can be expanded to point out that in a gender-specific group within any kind of religious institution, women also have more opportunities to lead. As will be shown below, the Women’s Alliance at UUSS has provided many opportunities for women to be role models and mentors for one another, in addition to the many specific activities of the group.

Braude’s thesis that women have always had a predominant presence and role in American religion is reflected in a primary fact about the Women’s Alliance at UUSS. Of all of the sub-organizations or programs in the congregation, it has had the longest continuous existence, having started in 1911. What follows is a summary of the origins of the Alliance and a study of some of its transitions over most of its years.

²⁶ JoAnn Anglin, interview with author, December 6, 2016. Quoted with permission.

5. The Alliance: “An Outlet for My Energy”

Anna Andrews, a longtime member of UUSS, told me: “I got involved [in the Women’s Alliance] as soon as I got here in 1962.”²⁷ She was the Alliance president one year, but she more often organized programs and volunteer projects. She recalled leading a textile arts show for the Alliance’s spring luncheon in 2002, calling it “one of the highest points in my life.”²⁸ From that show she recalled church and Alliance members’ handmade rugs, basketry, a wedding dress, “and the *quilts!*” she exclaimed. Over the years, she has organized many UUSS events, led volunteers in church pledge drives, served on the UUSS board, and founded a committee to choose artists for quarterly exhibits on the walls of the Main Hall’s Auditorium (i.e., sanctuary). In the 1970s she served five years as Director of Religious Education at UUSS.

Her former husband preferred solitary pursuits, “fishing or hunting or drinking,” she said, and “I had to have an outlet for my energy.”²⁹ Indeed, the Alliance has been an outlet for energy and a source of energy in this congregation for more than a century. And it has done so much more. The creative leadership of women at this congregation predated the founding of the Alliance in 1911, but this liberal religious women’s organization has been an enduring source of education, creativity, entertainment, and philanthropy.

Especially for educated religiously liberal women of middle and upper-middle classes and of European American ancestry, the Alliance has been a place of longtime

²⁷Anna Andrews, interview with author, November 5, 2014. Quoted with permission.

²⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁹ *Ibid.*

friendships and mentoring relationships. It has provided hospitality to its members and hosted many events for the congregation as a whole and for larger bodies in this liberal religious movement. The Alliance has been a fundraising machine for the church and a leadership incubator for many women. It has been a power base for them in their church and the larger community.

In response to changing demographics in church and society, the Alliance since 2005 has relied less on an explicit governance and committee structure. It has nurtured consensus among leaders in place of using parliamentary procedure, and it no longer organizes fundraising events. Longtime members are proud of its heritage and wistful about the loss of departed leaders and friends. However, it appears to have arrived at a sustainable model, with few complaints reported to or heard by me.

6. Framework of Eras of USS History

The story of the Alliance's development is a story of adaptation to circumstances in the larger congregation and local context. Hence it is useful to summarize the various locations where the congregation has met over time, and how the Alliance functioned in those times and places.

The years 1867-1915: The congregation held worship in the city in various theaters, music halls, and fraternal lodges (like the "castle" of the Knights of Pythia) until 1915. Hence, from its formation in 1911, the Women's Alliance's meetings were held in women's homes, and fundraising cake sales were held in commercial stores. It is worth noting that the church was founded in 1868 as the First Unitarian Church, and it was legally incorporated in 1892 as the First Unitarian Society. Church historian Rodney

Cobb wrote that the church had closed after a national financial panic in 1873, with no records of church activity for fourteen years. Local newspapers carried notices of a Sacramento meeting led by Unitarian ministers from Oakland and San Francisco to establish a church “representing the liberal Christian faith” in Sacramento, in January 1887 and a sermon for the Society’s “first service” in October 1889 by its new minister.³⁰ Given that Cobb reported “intimations that [the dormancy of the congregation] was the result of an internecine battle,”³¹ it is possible that the nomadic church had continued at some level of operation from 1873 to 1887, and that it was a faction of the church that took over control of it and then legally incorporated it in 1892, with a formal charter.

The years 1915-1960: The congregation met in a cedar-shake building, a house-like meeting place it constructed at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street (at the corner with N Street) in Midtown Sacramento. Alliance meetings took place in members’ homes and in the church, often in its Fireside Room.

The years 1960 to the present: The congregation has owned and met continuously at a modern, hexagonal meeting hall with additional educational buildings on a five-acre campus at 2425 Sierra Boulevard, just east of the city limits. Since then the Alliance has met at the church, originally in the Main Hall’s auditorium (sanctuary/all purpose room), but for over a decade it has met primarily in a classroom with a capacity of fifty people seated in rows, fewer at tables for a meal. When the congregation vacated its Main Hall for its renovation and expansion from August 2014 to September 2015, the Alliance

³⁰ Rodney Cobb and Irma West, *In Good Times and Bad: The Story of Sacramento's Unitarians 1868-1984* (Sacramento, 2008: Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento), 17-19. Cobb wrote the first five chapters and West wrote the concluding ones of the chronologically organized history.

³¹ *Ibid.*

meetings continued in the same classroom in the education building. In late 2016 it began meeting in the large and bright Welcome Hall of the Society's newly renovated and expanded main building.

7. Women's Early Organizing and Founding of the Sacramento Alliance

Though the Alliance did not start until after the congregation had begun, the place of women in the founding and early years of the church is worth noting. The Rev. Henry W. Brown arrived from the East Coast and gave an evening sermon for liberal Christians in the Metropolitan Theater in December 1867. Three months later, on March 29, a group signed an "article of agreement" to "associate ourselves in a body corporate, to be known as the First Unitarian Church of Sacramento." The purpose of the church was "the worship of God and the service of Men." With seventeen families, the newly gathered congregation established bylaws. The bylaws allowed that of the seven trustees of the church, three of them could be women.³² Neither the authorized UUSS history nor archival records show when such a gender limit was removed. Chapter One discusses the congregation's founding and explores whether it was dissolved and succeeded by a new Unitarian Society in the late 1890s or if the church was only reinvigorated, renamed, newly chartered, and legally incorporated.

The following notice appeared in a Sacramento newspaper article about the congregation in 1889: "The ladies of the Unitarian Society [have] opened a Bazaar of Days, a booth for each day, and many holiday goods will be displayed. There will be a program of exercises in the evening." The UUSS history says: "Admission to the Bazaar

³² Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 14.

was 25 cents for adults and 10 cents for the children.”³³ Also, the California History Room of the State Library holds a book from 1890 subtitled “a collection of choice recipes tried and approved by the Ladies of the Unitarian Society,” and entitled *Cookery in the Golden State*, with First Unitarian Church listed as author and Woodson Brothers of Sacramento as the publisher.³⁴ From these two projects, it appears women did organize themselves early in the church’s history, but no records mention a formal group before 1911.

On March 16, 1911, the Women’s Alliance of this congregation met for the first time at the home of Mrs. C.R. Ross. Four women attended, and they elected four officers, presumably from among themselves. It continued meeting every week on Monday afternoons, with attendance of six to twelve. (In recent decades it has met monthly on Thursday mornings.)

Mrs. Ross did not host all of the first year’s meetings, but she hosted more frequently than any other member. At their first meetings, they enjoyed refreshments and established dues of ten cents per meeting and an initiation fee of fifty cents for charter members through the end of May. They adopted a constitution at their sixth meeting and appointed standing committees: Entertainment, Work, and Flower. They had a card party and planned another party “to help members of the church to get acquainted.” Fundraising cake sales took place at stores in town but not in the hot summer months.

³³ Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 17.

³⁴ California State Library Catalog (accessed December 1, 2014).
http://catalog.library.ca.gov/F/YQ35TEBAMJARVP4RAR72QBLTQDVF2BPS7GDCQ3G6C4C84VG7J5-43584?func=full-set-set&set_number=008583&set_entry=000001&format=999

The Rev. Franklin Baker, the minister in 1911, met with them to talk about the need for a new and stable rental venue for the church. Together they inspected a Baptist church as a possible site. High rents and the owner's refusal to do repairs led the women to look elsewhere.

The new Alliance made aprons and kids' rompers to sell to benefit the church. They voted to borrow fifteen dollars to cover any church deficit and assume liability for repayment.³⁵ It is not clear if that is an amount per person or one loan of fifteen dollars; inflation-adjusted, it would be \$355 in 2017. In November of 1912 an Alliance committee reported on their investigation of the options for replacing the church's piano.³⁶ The Alliance joined the Women's Council, presumably the same local body to which Alliance reports of the 1940s would refer.

In those early months, the focus of the Alliance's efforts was on the church, and it was not yet engaged with public and cultural issues. The women did engage, however, with the larger Unitarian movement, hearing by letter from "the Alliance of the Indianapolis Church" about fundraising needs and the struggles of establishing a new church.

As recalled many years later, they hosted a Sunday afternoon reception for Earl Morse Wilbur, head of the Unitarian seminary in Berkeley, which had been founded in 1904. Thirty attended.³⁷ It is notable that in 1997, Unitarian Universalist Society President Carrie Cornwell asked the Alliance to provide a "hostess" to greet the Rev. Dr.

³⁵*The Sacramento Unitarian*, December 1949, 72, USS Archives.

³⁶*Ibid.*, 108.

³⁷*The Sacramento Unitarian*, January 1950, 5, USS Archives.

Rebecca Parker, the head of the same seminary, when she would arrive to preach on February 1, 1998, and to take her to lunch after church. The Alliance board took this request to a meeting of the membership, but ultimately it was an Alliance board member, Dorothy Englestad, who hosted Parker.³⁸

In late 1912 the group voted to send the Unitarian Women's Alliance in Andover, New Hampshire, an unspecified "something to sell at their fair."³⁹ Its own Christmas fair was held in a vacant Sacramento store with lent chairs and lumber, and donations for sale from ten other Alliance branches on the West Coast.⁴⁰

They set dues at one dollar per year, a change from ten cents per meeting, and made an Alliance pledge to the church of \$150 a year, paid monthly.⁴¹ Yearly pledging to church operations took place as late as fiscal year 2004-2005, and the highest amount in the later years of pledging was \$2,700.

A year and two months after the Alliance's first meeting, its nominating committee put forth four candidates for its four officers, none of whom was an incumbent in any office. Their first weekly meeting of each month would be a business meeting, and the following weeks' meetings would be "devoted to work." By this time, they had raised \$300 for the church, not counting their providing flowers for worship or food for the Sunday school. Evidence of what would be a long relationship between UUSS and Congregation B'nai Israel is a thank you letter to the Alliance for its gift of an altar

³⁸ Alliance meeting minutes, February 5, 1998, UUSS Archives.

³⁹ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, December 1950, 109, UUSS Archives.

⁴⁰ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, January 1951, 6, UUSS Archives.

⁴¹ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, January 1950, 5, UUSS Archives.

curtain to the synagogue.⁴² In subsequent years, but not recently, the church had Thanksgiving worship services with the synagogue. Nearly eighty-six years later, in May 1998, the Alliance welcomed its new rabbi, Mona Alfi, as their guest speaker.

There are signs of organizational growing pains. Minutes from June 19, 1911, state: “Consternation over the amount of the advertising bill seemed to take the place of the business meeting.”⁴³ The woman elected as treasurer in March 1911 resigned a few months later, and the vice president elected in May 1912 resigned in November. In May 1911, the group approved a “fine” of five cents for those arriving later than 2:30 p.m.⁴⁴ In September 1912 the group reversed an (undocumented) earlier decision to charge members “an absence fee.”⁴⁵

The authorized history of the congregation states that the church had forty-seven members in 1922, but its Alliance had 241 subscribing members in 1923, “and fundraising activities brought in \$868.00 that year.” The Women’s Alliance “played a unique role in Sacramento, presenting a program of literary, artistic, and aesthetic merit, opened to the public [for a] \$1.00 yearly membership.”⁴⁶ The Alliance’s membership growth, from no more than twenty attending in 1911 to 241 subscribers in 1923, is striking. This number, if accurate, may indicate that the Alliance did grow into a local force. If so, that seems not to have lasted. Rodney Cobb has written:

⁴² *The Sacramento Unitarian*, October 1950, 80, UUSS Archives.

⁴³ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, February 1950, 20, UUSS Archives.

⁴⁴ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, January 1950, 5, UUSS Archives.

⁴⁵ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, November 1950, 96, UUSS Archives.

⁴⁶ Alliance of the Unitarian Universalist Society, *Honoring Our Past and Building Our Future*, ca. 1997, 3, UUSS Archives. The date of production is not evident on this document.

In 1934, the only recorded functioning program [of the congregation] were the Women's Alliance's two meetings per month and a women's devotional group which met weekly in homes for prayer, hymns, and readings of short published sermons. There were some informal meetings... at the N Street church.⁴⁷

The authorized history's chronological list of all UUSS clergy shows a corresponding ministerial gap for that year of 1934-1935. There was a minister from 1931 to 1933, a part-time minister in 1936, and another part-time minister from 1936 to 1945.⁴⁸ I have not located Alliance archives for the 1930s. Given that the church owned the building at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street both before and after the Great Depression and Second World War, it seems possible that worship continued, if not on a regular schedule, or without much publicity or assiduous record keeping.

Following the Second World War, the Alliance was deeply involved in a variety of activities to serve the local community, provide relief overseas, learn about foreign policy and local concerns, and make its voice heard in local issues and state politics. Book discussions led by group members and visits by guest speakers filled many programs. Yet this did not offset their service to the church or their exploration of arts and crafts. For example, at the meeting of June 10, 1954, they enjoyed a luncheon, planned for an upcoming bazaar, and decided to reserve a booth at the next year's county fair. They also appointed a committee to find rides for members to meetings, learned how

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁴⁸ Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 4.

to craft covers for the group's membership directory, and discussed proposals for revisions to the United Nations Charter.⁴⁹

Starting in 1946, every month's *Sacramento Unitarian* newsletter reported on Alliance meetings and announced upcoming ones. Many meetings took place in the church, but more than half were hosted in homes of Alliance members, usually at 2:00 p.m., sometimes earlier when lunch was planned. In the early 1950s, members signed up to serve refreshments to military service members at the local USO center every fifth Tuesday night, and they hosted card parties for local elders. Teams of four to six ladies from the Alliance would take turns hosting the coffee hour after Sunday services in the postwar decade; the newsletter listed them by name in the late 1940s.⁵⁰

In later years, the Alliance members catered lunches, hosted church dinners, and served refreshments at the congregation's January Annual Meeting. They charged for every event. The group used its accumulated assets to select equipment or furnishings it wished to underwrite for the church.

At least as early as 1954, the Alliance was called upon by the church and its ministers for volunteer service. In March of that year, Maud Turner "consented to be the hospitality chairman, helping Mr. [Theodore] Abell to welcome guests and new members the remaining Sundays in March." At its April 8 meeting, five volunteers said yes to an

⁴⁹ Alliance meeting minutes, June 10, 1964, Record (Minutes of Board and General Meetings), 1953-1965. UUSS Archives.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, various dates.

announced request to provide punch at a wedding at the church on April 17, which was only nine days later.⁵¹ Presumably wedding receptions were less elaborate back then.

8. Engagement with Church and World

As the congregation attracted more visitors and members, ministers Theodore Abell (who served 1945-1960) and Ford Lewis (1960-1970) asked for help from Alliance women. Lewis asked them to host get-acquainted sessions for him and newcomers every week. After discussions at their Alliance meetings, they offered to do this only once a month. In 1965, they provided a luncheon for Lewis to host other Sacramento clergy so they could hear about his experiences at the Civil Rights march from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. The Alliance also provided food when he hosted area Unitarian Universalist ministerial colleagues. Of course, they charged for this lunch as for most other services, and enlarged their treasury for future philanthropy and program purposes.

Every newsletter I reviewed from 1946 to 1953 bears an article about programs and activities of the church's chapter of the Fellowship for Social Justice, a larger Unitarian denominational body. Hence, the Alliance was not the only source of congregational programs to explore politics, local social conditions, and foreign policy; but such issues were frequent program topics for the Alliance. Its general business meetings involved deliberations on how much to contribute to external agencies, from the Unitarian Service Committee to help refugees and starving survivors in Europe after the Second World War, to later support of local agencies that serve homeless persons, plus Planned Parenthood and the local chapter of the United Nations Association.

⁵¹ Alliance meeting minutes, April 8, 1954, Record (Minutes of Board and General Meetings), UUSS Archives.

Due in part to the Alliance's tradition of keeping meeting minutes in detail, its beneficence sometimes bordered on the patronizing. On November 13, 1952, with twelve attending, the group voted to continue supporting a named family (presumably of the church) at ten dollars a month.⁵² At least five of its meetings in 1960 and 1961 included discussion, by name, of an elderly and "handicapped couple" in the church who needed help. The Alliance helped to pay three months' rent and agreed to "hold a canned goods shower for them." Phyllis Gardiner offered eight dollars for a "starter fund" for them; the minutes indicate mention of the idea of a committee to establish policies for providing such help, but no formal action. In December, the couple "needed clothing for Christmas"; the results of this appeal were reported at the January meeting, and then a thank you letter from the couple was read aloud at the meeting in February.⁵³

9. Women's Changing Lives and Nighttime Meetings

Of course, the women were living out one of the major social issues: the unequal and shifting roles of women in American society, the challenge of economic security and tradeoffs necessary to join the workforce, and the balance among supporting your family, serving the community, pursuing your own development, expressing your personal passions.

Andrews cited "the women going back to work" as a turning point in the history of the Alliance.⁵⁴ She told me in a 2014 interview that her divorce had become final in

⁵² *The Sacramento Unitarian*, December 1952, 163, UUSS Archives.

⁵³ Alliance meeting minutes, various months in 1960 and 1961, Record (Minutes of Board and General Meetings), UUSS Archives.

⁵⁴ Andrews, *op. cit.*

1976, and full-time work followed. She had worked earlier as the part-time Director of Religious Education for UUSS, but the wage was not sufficient for a single mother. In 1979 she began working at the Capitol, which kept her from attending the Alliance's monthly Thursday morning meetings. Andrews recalled, "They decided to have an evening Alliance meeting to accommodate the working members. That didn't last too long."⁵⁵ It seems, instead, that women attempted to establish an Evening Alliance more than once, with unclear success.

An Evening Alliance was launched in 1949, but there were few reports from it or references to it afterwards. Along with Jean Abell, wife of the minister who served from 1945 to 1960, twelve women met at 7:45 p.m. on April 21, 1949, and agreed that they would "help as much as possible on all Alliance projects, [but] ... they are all working, mothers of young children, or both." Their group would work "under the afternoon Alliance" with only an evening position of program coordinator to be created.⁵⁶

Not long after, however, on November 1, 1949, they made the reverse decision: to "organize the Evening Alliance as a separate organization." Mrs. Abell was part of its nominating committee. It sponsored a church dinner on April 20, 1950, with the Rev. Harry Meserve of the First Unitarian Church of San Francisco as the speaker and eighty-five people paying one dollar each and fifty cents per child.⁵⁷

With eight to ten women attending this Evening Alliance group, it met until July 1950, but there are few records of later meetings. It seems to have been accorded a

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

⁵⁶ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, May 1948, 34, UUSS Archives.

⁵⁷ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, May 1950, 35. UUSS Archives.

second-class identity. Back in 1946, most (daytime) Alliance notices in *The Sacramento Unitarian* newsletter encouraged “every woman of the congregation to attend,” but notices for the Evening Alliance said it was “for all women who cannot attend the Women’s Alliance.”⁵⁸ Though I did not locate a record of meetings, there were sixteen Evening Alliance members in 1951.⁵⁹

When the Evening Alliance ceased appearing in the newsletter, another evening group, known as Freelancers, did appear. A 1952 Freelancers article said, “All women who can’t attend Alliance [are] invited,” which is comparable to the second-best invitations that had been made to the Evening Alliance. Yet the Freelancers boasted from twenty-six to twenty-eight women attending its night meetings on May 12, June 9, and October 13 of 1952, and June 8, 1953. This represents one-and-a-half times the attendance of the earlier Evening Alliance meetings.⁶⁰

Some Freelancers activities included a book review, support of the Sunday School, fundraising activities, and a planned program theme of “Our Relationships with Other People in Terms of Unitarianism.” The Freelancers committees were named Sunshine, Hospitality, and Publicity. Freelancers’ activities and lists of attendees indicate interest in the Sunday School of the congregation. A Freelancers card party in 1952 brought 109 people and raised \$112 for the Julia Bray Memorial Fund for church school

⁵⁸ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, February and June 1950, USS Archives.

⁵⁹ Alliance of the Unitarian Universalist Society, *Honoring Our Past and Building Our Future*, ca. 1997, USS Archives.

⁶⁰ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, issues May to November 1952 and June and July 1953, USS Archives.

facilities. Fundraising for the Bray Fund later that year would take the form of a raffle at a June 29 picnic: “Mr. [Wayne] Thiebaud is donating a painting.”⁶¹

The Evening Alliance reappeared in 1953--as if for the first time. The *Sacramento Unitarian* said, “In this their initial year of existence” they would meet “every fourth Tuesday,” and would consider “Unitarian Extension work” for the year, starting with a discussion of Earl Morse Wilbur’s *Our Unitarian Heritage*.⁶² Minutes of the (daytime) Alliance from June 10, 1954, show a plan “to cooperate with the Evening Alliance on a bazaar and dinner in the fall” to raise money for the building fund. Yet on September 16 of that year, “It was announced that those who belong to both Day and Evening Alliances should decide which branch they wished to affiliate with as regular members,” and by which one they would be listed as associate members. Rather than a sign of guarding turf between the two groups, this could perhaps be a record-keeping matter. If the national body kept a list of members of every branch and charged dues accordingly, Sacramento women would want to avoid paying twice for any member.

Four years later, March 17, 1960, thirty-six women attended an 8:00 p.m. “joint meeting of the Day and Evening Alliance groups.” In May of 1965 Phyllis Gardiner “made a report on the May 20th Evening Alliance Meeting,” but the minutes have no details of her report, and no archives exist from any evening session of the Alliance.⁶³

Later Alliance records do not show there was an ongoing women’s group at night. There are no Freelancers or Evening Alliance archives at the church now. It appears that

⁶¹ *The Sacramento Unitarian*, June and October 1952 and June 1953, USS Archives.

⁶² *The Sacramento Unitarian*, September 1953, 12, USS Archives.

⁶³ Alliance meeting minutes, March 1960 and May, 1965, Record (Minutes of Board and General Meetings), USS Archives.

the daytime organization has had regular monthly meetings of Alliance membership once per month from the 1950s until the present, judging from archives and interviews of longtime members whose history covers the years for which no minutes exist (1966-1995).

Bobby Stewart had been part of the Alliance since 1963, serving in early years as president and secretary, and she was serving when I interviewed her in 2014 on the ad hoc team that now runs a more informal and modest Alliance operation. (She moved to the East Coast in 2016.) She recalled her first experience with the Alliance as a young woman in the 1960s: “I remember the welcoming of the older women to the young women. Most of us were newly married, and many had moved away from home. Here was this old crop of ... women the same age as our mothers who were interested in us, and had time for us. It had a big impression on me.”⁶⁴

She recalled some occasions when the Alliance “hired a babysitter for our meetings,” which helped her after her second child was born in 1964. However, neither the Alliance minutes nor newsletter publicity available from the past sixty years mentions regular childcare as a service or as a regular discussion topic. Moreover, in response to my question about the Alliance’s relationships (as an organization) with adults and with children in the congregation, the late Thelma White said: “There wasn’t any relationship with children in the church.” (She would likely had known if so, as she enjoyed children and had organized all-ages holiday parties for the church.) No other person interviewed

⁶⁴ Roberta Stewart, interview with author, November 7, 2014. Quoted with permission.

was able to describe an activity in which the Alliance interacted with children in the congregation.⁶⁵

Stewart said she had not worked outside the home before her divorce in 1973: “I was a housewife, which is a lovely thing to be. I don’t think we appreciated how neat that was.... Pick up the kids, take them places... [do] volunteer work.” After a divorce, she needed to work. For a year or two, she said, “I would take time off work” to attend an Alliance meeting. She said she was aware of evening meetings but did not think that they had taken place every month.

As the proportion of U.S. women working outside the home has grown over time,⁶⁶ the Alliance’s daytime group has endured. Neither an Evening Alliance nor a Freelancers group left much of a track record, however. From its first meetings in 1911 to the present, I suspect, the Alliance has been constituted mostly by women who could afford not to work outside the home, and those able to retire while still in good health.

Several interviewees in 1993 (recorded for the Alliance) and in 2014 (with me) have told of their on-and-off participation due to child rearing or work obligations. While this is normal in church life, there is no evidence that the Alliance made a sustained effort, or at least a successful one, to support women in the church as their lives changed with the times. In the past several decades, its philanthropy has largely been directed outside the church, and its notable fellowship and caring have benefitted women who could participate regularly. Perhaps the majority’s enjoyment of and comfort with

⁶⁵ Thelma White, interview with author, November 10, 2014. Quoted with permission.

⁶⁶ The National Bureau of Economic Research says: “In 1947, 31.5 percent of women and 86.8 percent of men were in the labor force. By 1999, women's labor force participation had roughly doubled to 60 percent, while men's had fallen moderately to 74.7 percent.” “Changing Work Behavior of Married Women,” National Bureau of Economic Research Digest website, accessed December 16, 2016. <http://www.nber.org/digest/nov05/w11230.html>

other members who were mostly not child rearing and not working outside the home kept leadership from considering how they might adapt or make a special effort for women who would not fit the daytime schedule. At present, attendance numbers compare to those of some earlier eras (between ten and twenty per monthly program) but only a few of the recent participants are younger than eighty.

10. Denominational Connections and Activity over Time

A National Alliance of Unitarian Women was established in Boston, and a constitution written in 1890. It was a centralized body which local liberal religious women's groups around the country could join and which would help new Alliance branches to form and flourish.⁶⁷ As I noted earlier, the Sacramento Alliance communicated with branches in other cities and states in its early years. After the Second World War, it was sending its members to the fall Associate Alliance conferences in San Francisco (1950), Stockton (1947), and other places, often paying part of their costs to attend. It hosted a conference in Sacramento on October 24, 1946. On January 14, 1960, two Sacramento members reported on their attendance at a National Conference held at Michigan State University, presumably in the prior summer or fall.⁶⁸

In 1960, counting a membership of thirty-two, the Alliance paid sixteen dollars in dues to the denominational "General Alliance" in Boston, and \$3.20 to the regional

⁶⁷ Emily Fifield, *History of the Alliance* (Rumford (now Concord), N.H, 1915: Rumford Press), 41-54.

⁶⁸ Alliance minutes, January 4, 1960, Record (Minutes of Board and General Meetings) 1953-1965, UUSS Archives.

Associate Alliance; it contributed twenty-five dollars to Starr King School for the Ministry, a recipient of Alliance support for several years.⁶⁹

In 1963 the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation (UUWF) was established, according to its website, as the result of a "consolidation of the Association of Universalist Women [founded in 1869 and 'believed to be the first organization of lay church women in the United States'] and the Alliance of Unitarian Women (1890)."⁷⁰ According to the 1997 booklet at UUSS subtitled *The Alliance Story*, the Sacramento Alliance severed its contributing affiliation with the Women's Federation in 1982.⁷¹ That late date may be in error, as Alliance minutes from 1998 show members discussing disaffiliation, noting dues were "dropped six years ago [hence 1992] because of the expense. Individuals can always join on their own," one member is quoted as saying.⁷² In an Alliance interview in 1993, Marjorie Ryall said: "I recall many discussions about dropping our affiliation with the Women's Federation, as they asked for \$5 per person dues and our local dues were just \$7. Many were disappointed but we decided we needed to do more things locally. It was then we started supporting Maryhouse [serving homeless women and children]."⁷³

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation, "Who We Are," website accessed December 2, 2014. <http://www.uuwf.org/who-we-are/>

⁷¹ Alliance of the Unitarian Universalist Society, *Honoring Our Past and Building Our Future*, ca. 1997, 4, UUSS Archives.

⁷² Alliance meeting minutes, February 12, 1998, UUSS Archives.

⁷³ Marjorie Ryall, interview with Evelyn Watters, interview transcript from August 27, 1993, included in archives of the Alliance, UUSS Archives.

Andrews told me that she had withdrawn from the Alliance at UUSS for five to eight years after it ceased paying dues to the Women's Federation. Though "it's conceivable they didn't even know I quit," she said, "I did say something to some people." She recalled when a treasurer "just wouldn't let go of a penny," in contrast to her own view of Alliance money: "I thought it was to be used."⁷⁴

11. Spirituality and the Alliance: Works versus Faith

Growing up in a mainline Protestant church in the 1960s and 1970s, I heard about prayer and devotions as part of women's groups in our church and I heard grace at any shared meal at church (though not at most meals in our home). Alliance records at UUSS do not indicate that any equivalent practices have been a regular part of Alliance culture, and I observe their absence now when I visit Alliance meetings and stay for lunch. However, there are signs of occasional spiritual practices for Alliance gatherings, locally and beyond.

At the Associate [regional] Alliance conference in San Francisco on April 28, 1949, a Starr King seminarian gave devotionals at the meeting. Also, the crowd heard an address by Mrs. Elizabeth MacDonald of Pacific School of Religion. On June 4, 1998, the Sacramento Alliance board changed the name of its Sunshine Committee to the Caring and Inspiration Committee; it voted that Alliance meetings would "include an inspirational message or moment of meditation by members."⁷⁵ Jean Hellmuth, a longtime Unitarian Universalist and social activist (along with her late husband) in

⁷⁴ Andrews, *op cit.*

⁷⁵ Alliance meeting minutes of June 4, 1998, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

several cities where they lived before retirement in Sacramento, offered a Moment of Inspiration in 1999, but the content or nature of it is not recorded.⁷⁶ In 2002, Pat Moore-Howard read “Aging Has True Value” from a newspaper column as her offering for the Moment of Inspiration. Nonetheless, recent records and practice show few invitations to spiritual practice as a group or in individual lives.⁷⁷

It may be generational more than denominational in character, but I attribute this non-devotional culture in the Alliance and other longstanding UUSS groups to the secularizing influence of religious Humanism, which has been the dominant theology at UUSS since at least Abell’s ministry (1945-1960). On behalf of the Alliance, one might argue that spoken poetry, book reviews, other intellectual discussions, arts and crafts, and live music do seem to have been great sources of spiritual refreshment, even if not acknowledged as such. Unlike spoken prayer, live music has been offered at many Alliance meetings, whether it is piano music being played while folks arrive and greet one another, or several musical numbers as the featured monthly program, or (in earlier decades) a duet offering a full program at a fundraising luncheon.

Note how, in the personal testimonies that follow, people are appreciated for their talents, personalities, and creativity, with no mention of them as exemplars of a liberal faith or spirituality: in traditional terms, “works” over “faith,” though perhaps the nineteenth century Unitarian emphasis on one’s character is more salient than effort or works per se.

⁷⁶ Alliance meeting minutes of February 11, 1999, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

⁷⁷ Alliance meeting minutes of 2002, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

12. Some Names, Profiles and Personal Stories

Several Alliance women have records of commitment both to the Alliance organization and to the congregation as a whole. Here are a few glimpses. The late Edna Mills recalled her first Alliance meetings in members' homes back when the church was at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street. Looking back, she said:

It was a small, very friendly group. We had small bazaars. I went to work when my daughter was in junior high school, so I didn't attend for a while, but I kept up my dues and helped when I could. When I retired, I resumed coming.... One year I typed the roster and was on the Membership Committee for several years. Now I'm a telephone caller.... I get to talk to nice people every month.⁷⁸

The late Helen Bradfield's family moved to Sacramento in 1948, when her husband was appointed to "the original faculty" of the "new state college," now California State University, Sacramento. She joined the Alliance, but recalled it as a group of women older than she was. Interviewed by Evelyn Watters, she said: "When the five children were young, most of my activities involved children. I worked in the church and especially the church school. For six years, I was the Director of Religious Education. All of this became an important part of our family life."⁷⁹ Later she pursued overseas travel, taking three of the children to Europe. She made multiple trips to China, even organizing three of them, and taking along Alliance friends.

The late Phyllis Gardiner's involvement shines through many meeting minutes, member interviews, and *The Alliance Story* from 1997. She joined UUSS in 1926 (when she was twenty-three), having moved to Sacramento at age five when her father was

⁷⁸ Edna Mills, transcription of interview by Evelyn Watters, November 29, 1993, UUSS Archives.

⁷⁹ Helen Bradfield, transcription of interview by Evelyn Watters, *circa* 1993 (no date), UUSS Archives.

elected State Superintendent of Public Instruction. (She wrote *The Hyatt Legacy*, a book about her father and his family; she also spoke about her book at an Alliance meeting.)

She served on the Alliance board, on and off, for several years, with 1961 her last year as an elected officer (president). Several women interviewed by Evelyn Watters in the 1990s recalled that Gardiner, a widow, took her dog (a black Labrador) to church and was opposed to having alcohol served at church events. (However, by 2003 Alliance spring luncheons featured one or two Alliance husbands staffing a “no-host” bar and making mimosas before noon.)

Several women have cited the Alliance bridge group as their entryway into the organization, and credited Gardiner with organizing it. In my interview, Bobby Stewart said: “She tried to teach me bridge, so I could fit in.... [But] I couldn’t grasp it.”⁸⁰ Stewart called her a “great friend,” “friendly and welcoming,” though also with a “prickly” personality.

The Society’s authorized history says Gardiner became indignant that privileged classes in the region had access to birth control and information about it, but poor women did not. With the support of the Rev. Ford Lewis and a church member, local physician James Affleck, Gardiner hosted organizing meetings at UUSS (with permission of the Board of Trustees) to found a Sacramento chapter of Planned Parenthood. She was chair of the Steering Committee and Watters was secretary; Lewis chaired the Advisory Committee. Alliance minutes note that after her death in 1983, a room at the local Planned Parenthood office was named after Phyllis Gardiner.⁸¹

⁸⁰ Stewart, *op. cit.*

⁸¹ Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 103.

Genevieve and Rodney Cobb came to Sacramento in 1953 and joined the Society in 1956. She recalled this about the church: “We were bombarded with things to do and literature and all these initials that you don’t know what they mean. The Women’s Alliance was one of them and they had a night meeting, so I went.” The group offered a class on Contract Bridge, and she took it. She said: “I will never forget when Phyllis said: ‘Now I think you can join the Alliance Bridge Group.’... I have been playing with them ever since.”⁸² The couple retired in 1969, and Genevieve’s Alliance work increased. Interviewed in 1993, she said, “At first I helped with some of the lunches. Then I became telephone chairman. I have been membership chairman and...secretary.... worked with the Craft group and on the church Bazaar. Right now I chair the Budget and Finance Committee [of the Alliance].”⁸³

Women have credited the Alliance with providing an experience of joy in leadership roles as well as being a source of learning. In the early 1990s, Julia Diggs said:

It was my educator in being able to meet people and ... [to] take on jobs and responsibility. I had not done anything in groups. This was a learning situation. Believe me, it took an awful lot of courage to agree to be president. Here I was with 100 members and I was their leader! I wondered if I could meet all the responsibilities. But I had come up through the ranks and I learned about the people and what they could do. [She also said:] We decided the year I was president to redecorate the library. The [church] Board wanted it redecorated as a meeting place. There was, unfortunately, some disagreement, but we weathered that and got the library furnished.⁸⁴

⁸² Genevieve Cobb, transcription of interview by Evelyn Watters, 1993 (no month noted), UUSS Archives.

⁸³ *Ibid.*

⁸⁴ Julia Diggs, transcription of interview by Evelyn Watters, *circa* 1993 (no date), UUSS Archives.

It is worth noting that her husband, the late Charles Diggs, will be mentioned unfavorably in later chapters by more than one lay leader I interviewed. One recalled that he arrogantly dismissed the perspectives and spoken opinions of fellow congregants who had not been UUSS members for many decades, as he had. Another remembered him as hostile to support of the UUSS Religious Education program, asserting that it should be handled by female volunteers, not paid staff. (Yet UUSS archives do show several men in volunteer leadership of Religious Education in the last half of the twentieth century.)

Julia Bray, a church member since 1913, died in 1949, and six days later the church Board established a Julia Bray Memorial Fund for religious education needs, especially the “physical plant.”⁸⁵ Anna Andrews told me in 2014 that the Religious Education building is properly called the Bray Building in Julia’s memory, but the only personal name commonly used is given to the largest classroom in that building. The room bears the name of Sophia Lyon Fahs, a twentieth century denominational leader in Religious Education.⁸⁶

The late Ruth Rice Horn is pictured in three strands of pearls in the 1997 UUSS booklet, *The Alliance Story*. She served as Alliance president in 1967-1968, but in her earlier role as President of the UUSS Board of Trustees, she was considered a “prime instigator in the purchase of the [Sierra Boulevard] land, and presided over the 1956 ground reaking ceremonies at the site.” Her husband, also a UUSS member, was a physician, and Ruth was active in the Women’s Auxiliary of the county Medical

⁸⁵ Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 66.

⁸⁶ Andrews, *op. cit.*

Association and a founder of the first Women's Association for a public television station in the country.⁸⁷

Irma West, M.D., had joined a Unitarian Universalist church in Berkeley, and she joined UUSS after a transfer to Sacramento in 1973. (She later wrote the 1971-1984 section of the congregation's authorized history.) The Alliance was one of many groups and activities in which she invested her time after retirement. "I found a very compatible group of women who were very supportive and friendly." She called the Alliance "intellectually alive" and found "all of the subjects ... addressed in the meetings... very interesting."⁸⁸

Marlene Parkinson passed away in 2016. We met for an interview in 2014, when she was eighty. She was the Alliance's secretary for many years, as well as president. She said that in the 1960s her mother took care of her children for her, enabling her to participate. Though I have not read of this in the archives, she recalled the Alliance arranged for a person to provide child care in a cottage on church grounds during Alliance meetings. She said the Alliance had provided a reception after her mother's memorial service at the church. In earlier years, she said, "we were pressured to ... do memorial service receptions." Minutes of several Alliance meetings show ongoing efforts (and frustration) at clarifying that the Alliance would host such events *only* for the family of Alliance members, or for an Alliance member herself, and not for the general congregation.

⁸⁷ Alliance, *Honoring Our Past and Building Our Future*, ca. 1997, 9, UUSS Archives.

⁸⁸ Irma West, transcribed interview with Evelyn Watters, *circa* 1993 (no date), UUSS Archives.

Marlene Parkinson told me that Ruth Horn had inspired her in the 1990s “to compile a book of favorite recipes of Alliance members and friends.” She told me she had enjoyed playing piano for many Alliance meetings over two decades (as well as church parties and at USS Theater One intermissions). She remembered: “At the very first, most of the women wore hats. Later on, no hats...[and] fewer dresses.” Among the high points for Parkinson was hearing “poetry about the feminist movement” written by Alliance member Corinne Geeting, who co-hosted a local radio show with her husband.⁸⁹

In a 1994 interview for the Alliance, Joyce Chadd said: “I started attending the Women’s Alliance in 1973, and I’ve attended it ever since.... I’ve met a lot of wonderful people, enjoyed helping fix many meals.... Last year I was Membership Chairman.” For several years, she also served on the congregation’s Property Management and Finance committees as well as being elected to the Endowment Trust.⁹⁰

The late Thelma White joined the church in 1972. On retirement from a county job in 1995, she said, “the first thing on my agenda was to join Women’s Alliance.” In that same year, she was recruited by Marguerite Webb and Genevieve Cobb to be the membership chair. Later she served as vice president for two years and president for three. Like other interviewees, she recalled the Alliance paying for equipment and improvements for the church. This included the refinishing of the stage floor. It was a necessity, she said: “We were going to have a ballet dancer perform!”⁹¹ In addition to making a yearly pledge payment to USS out of Alliance dues and fundraising

⁸⁹ Marlene Parkinson, interview with author, November 10, 2014. Quoted with permission.

⁹⁰ Joyce Chadd, transcribed interview with Evelyn Watters, July 20, 1994, USS Archives.

⁹¹ Thelma White, *op. cit.*

luncheons, she noted other sources of support: “The women also made crocheted items... gift cards made of wildflowers they had collected throughout the year, handmade Christmas tree decorations—anything they could sell.” These included Virginia Dunstan’s handmade books and note cards bearing color photos of the sanctuary’s banners of different religious and cultural traditions. White had a stroke in 2007 and had recently begun attending regularly again when I interviewed her in 2014. She was happy to tell me she had been invited to play the piano as people would gather for an upcoming Alliance program. She passed away in 2016.

13. Ministers, Minister’s Wives, and the Alliance

Several minister’s wives were active in the Alliance or other aspects of the church. Mrs. Franklin Baker (whose first name is not listed) hosted a meeting of eighteen women in September 1912 and was made an alternate representative on the Women’s Council in May 1911.⁹² In the 1950s, Jean (Mrs. Theodore) Abell attended and even hosted several Alliance meetings (day and evening), often with her baby son in the house, and she served on some Alliance committees. Barbara (Mrs. Ford) Lewis put her theater experience to use as a founder of Theater One at the church in the early 1960s. After Ford Lewis’s death in 1989, Barbara sent a letter to the UUSS Board and the Alliance asserting that her late husband had wanted the Alliance (not the UUSS Board) to have sole discretion over how funds given in his memory would be used to enhance the church’s music life. Section 15 (below) explains that the disposition of these funds was a matter of controversy between the church Board and the Alliance for a few months.

⁹² “Alliance in History,” *Sacramento Unitarian*, January 1950, 5, UUSS Archives.

The 1987 Alliance bylaws show membership having been made open to women and to men. Cobb and West's history says, "Men were invited to join, and Rev. [Theodore] Webb was the first [to do so]."⁹³ This would have taken place before he resigned from his ministry at UUSS in 1983. His late wife, Marguerite Webb, was active in the Alliance during his ministry and later when they retired back in Sacramento after four interim ministries out of state. Several of my 2014 interviewees observed that some members' husbands attended the Alliance with their wives, especially if the men had driven them to the church, but there was not an influx of men coming on their own. Reflecting on the decision to invite men to attend the Alliance, Bobby Stewart said, "It must have been a big deal when they decided to do that, but it didn't make any difference."⁹⁴

Madhavi Young was undergoing breast cancer treatment when her husband John was the ministerial candidate for the congregation in April 1991, and she continued treatments into the fall after they arrived in Sacramento. Mrs. Young was interviewed by Watters in 1993. Sometime later the Youngs' marriage ended in divorce; it is not clear if Madhavi left the congregation, but I did not read evidence of her presence in the Alliance after the 1993 interview. Rev. Young's next wife had joined the congregation after he had begun his ministry at UUSS.⁹⁵ They married in the church in October 1997. In their honor, the Alliance voted to give \$100 "to the Pastoral Ministry Fund." Alliance minutes note that Alliance members would *not* be needed to host the reception, "as it is to be

⁹³ Cobb and West, *op. cit.*, 17.

⁹⁴ Stewart, *op. cit.*

⁹⁵ For more on the issue of clergy in romantic relationships, see Chapter Five, note 253.

catered.” During the Rev. Douglas Kraft’s ministry from 2000 to 2013, Erika Kraft (his wife, a musician and arts administrator) was working full time, but Alliance minutes show she attended a few times. Soon after starting his ministry at UUSS, Kraft was recruited by Alliance leader Fran Oyafuso to lead the Alliance’s first program of the fall.⁹⁶

As noted in Chapter Four, the Rev. Dr. Shirley Ranck arrived as Pastoral Minister in 1997. She remains known in the denomination for her books and adult education curricula in Neo-Pagan and Feminist spirituality. A year later, the Alliance voted to grant \$200 for the reception at an “installation ceremony” for Ranck as Associate Minister (her new role) and for Kate Throop, a church member who had been hired as Director of Religious Education. Typically installations take place only for ministers and usually for those in clearly settled, full-time positions. It is notable that the two were celebrated together, whereas most UU clergy are installed individually.⁹⁷ I can imagine Ranck wanted intentionally to highlight the profile of staff leadership for Religious Education as well as to reflect equality and collegiality with her female staff colleague, given the absence of John Young by that time.⁹⁸ Ranck voluntarily resigned from the congregation in the summer of 1999. She noted that UUSS could not afford to keep her three-quarter-time position as well as the full-time interim position (to be filled by a co-minister couple) and she was not able financially to resume only a half-time position. She

⁹⁶ Alliance board minutes, September 7, 2000. Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

⁹⁷ Alliance board minutes, October 8, 1998, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

said, “I really need full-time work to support my expensive habits! And you need to live within your means as a congregation without feeling guilty” [emphasis hers].⁹⁹

14. Money: Creativity, Generosity, Autonomy, and Power

The Alliance’s annual “Membership [Directory] and Activity Schedule” list the programs for the fiscal year and the budget adopted before the year began. (The archives hold copies from 1990-1991 to 2004-2005.) It does not show a report of actual income and expenses, but monthly Alliance minutes sometimes include a treasurer’s report. At the least, the minutes list bank balances. In 1990-1991 Alliance dues were fifteen dollars a person, and they rose to twenty dollars in 2002-2003. The group made an annual pledge to the Society of \$1,800, rising to \$2,700 in the year 2000-2001, and dropping to \$1,800 in 2004-2005, the last year of approving budgets and electing officers. In the same period, the tally of individual \$100 donations to local charities and UU organizations totaled from \$500 to \$700, often with \$200 going to Planned Parenthood “in honor of Phyllis Gardiner.”¹⁰⁰

All the women whom I asked about the purpose of the Alliance gave a variation on this answer: fellowship for the group and support of the church. They mentioned the Alliance’s past practice of underwriting the purchase of items for the church--an electronic organ for \$12,500, new curtains for the stage in the Main Hall (the Auditorium or sanctuary) for over \$3,000, refinishing and reupholstering of chairs in the library (also a meeting room), new kitchen cabinets, and a commercial freezer. Funds came from

⁹⁹ Shirley Ranck, “Shirley’s Cauldron,” *Unigram*, June 1999, 2, “Unigrams 1999,” UUSS Archives.

¹⁰⁰ “Membership and Activity Schedule,” Alliance 1990-2005, “Alliance” archives, UUSS Archives.

memorial donations and from event activities, such as having a booth at UUSS holiday bazaars and hosting a spring fundraising luncheon every year through 2005. Thelma White recalled a textile art show fundraiser: “We invited everybody to bring their textiles.... The whole church. The only criteria, they had to buy a ticket [for twenty dollars].” She said the luncheon “was truly fun, and it gave everybody in the church an opportunity to participate.”¹⁰¹

At least one of my interviewees repeated an understanding shared by many, which is also given in Cobb and West’s history. This anonymous interviewee told me that the Alliance “used to be what kept the church going [financially]” in hard economic times. Regarding its “basic relationship with the church,” she said, “it always had to do with money.”¹⁰² She said: “In the process of all this [fundraising activity] you got to be acquainted with the people with whom you worked.” Regarding purchases for the church, she said, “I think we pushed for things sometimes. People would look around and they’d decide this would be a good project—a drinking fountain, for example.”¹⁰³ A few years after the Alliance ended fundraising activities and stopped assessing dues, several of its women worked with women not in the Alliance to raise funds to buy a new commercial oven and range in the kitchen; it was dedicated in honor of White’s organizing legacy on behalf of the UUSS kitchen and other church facilities.

Over the years, given how much the Alliance has contributed for operations, equipment, and furnishings, money has been a sign of the group’s connection to--and a

¹⁰¹ White, *op. cit.*

¹⁰² Anonymous, interview with author, November 2014. Quoted on condition of anonymity.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

source of power in--the congregation. Yet money is also an aspect of the group's relative autonomy from the church. Stewart pointed out that other UUSS activity groups have had to submit annual budget requests to the UUSS Board or UUSS Program Council, but the Alliance has funded its own way without church oversight.¹⁰⁴ These days, a suggested three-dollar donation is collected at the door at each meeting to cover supplies and food; at the end of a year the Alliance's three-person coordinating team spends it on an aspect of the church they feel would be helpful and appropriate for Alliance funds.¹⁰⁵

15. Stress and Strain

The Alliance's dual status as a part of the Society and as a group with autonomous decision-making powers has brought controversy with Society leaders and disagreement in its own meetings. Records from 1999 show an extended disagreement about control of donations in memory of Ford Lewis, who had died in the fall of 1998; the conversation appeared in the minutes of several meetings. The Ford Lewis Fund was held by the church for "enrichment of music in the church." Though the music staff and church facilities were under the UUSS Board's purview, the Alliance board highlighted a letter which Lewis's widow had sent both to the church President and to Alliance leader Dorothy Englestad. It said contributions should be "exclusively in the hands of the Alliance to dispense with as you see fit. No other committee should be involved."¹⁰⁶

¹⁰⁴ Stewart, *op. cit.*

¹⁰⁵ Aggie Vawter, interview with author, November 8, 2014. Quoted with permission.

¹⁰⁶ Alliance meeting minutes, February 11, 1999, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, UUSS Archives.

Discussion about a legacy to remember departed member Julia (“Julie”) Diggs began in 1998 when “her husband gave the Alliance \$500.00 (no strings attached) for some kind of memorial. The Alliance proposal for an arbor in the memorial garden may not be approved for a very long time, for a variety of reasons,” the minutes reflect. Hence the Alliance president solicited alternate ideas from the women, from kitchen equipment to a new drinking fountain or a stained-glass window.¹⁰⁷ Discussion continued, with new suggestions, at the following meetings: April 2, May 14, and June 11. Englestad then announced that a wheelchair-accessible drinking fountain had been installed in Julia’s memory; she asked the Alliance board secretary to inform Charles Diggs.

In the 1990s the Alliance board met one week in advance of each monthly Alliance membership meeting. The long practice of reading board meeting minutes aloud to the membership was disputed and noted in minutes as a “longstanding issue.” The board decided finally on December 4, 1997, that it would no longer read the minutes aloud, but would have copies available for members who wished to read them. This decision was announced, but not voted on, at the next meeting.¹⁰⁸ A decade later, the decision was whether to read aloud even the minutes of the *membership* meetings of the Alliance. Virginia Dunstan told me of her dismay at the time this took up when she joined the Alliance in 2003.¹⁰⁹ The group dispensed with the need for meeting minutes

¹⁰⁷ Alliance meeting minutes, March 12, 1998, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, USS Archives.

¹⁰⁸ Alliance board and general meeting minutes, December 4 and 11, 1997, Alliance Minutes 1996-2003, USS Archives.

¹⁰⁹ Virginia Dunstan, interview with author, November 13, 2014. Quoted with permission.

altogether in the 2005 Alliance reorganization, when it eliminated elected offices. This is described below.

For decades, the Alliance had a large committee structure, and a large board representing those committees. Then, it seems there was a shortage of newer members to mentor into leadership, or any willing recruits. A roster of Alliance officers from 1961 to 1996 shows a variety of names, but several women would leave one position and later return as another officer or committee chair. Janet Flyr was president and vice president for ten years combined; Margaret Funai was secretary for eight. The record for longevity was earned by two treasurers: Rose Sachs, who served thirteen years, and Bobby Kramer, who served seventeen.¹¹⁰ My interpretation is that the tradition of meticulous, ordered meetings and perhaps battles over turf took some of the joy out of participation; however, the leaders assumed it was their duty to carry on with the structures and practices they had inherited, and in which the Alliance had once thrived, even as veteran leaders would need to re-enlist for old or new jobs. Now, leadership scarcity and stress were taking a greater toll.

It is worth noting that larger social changes may have affected the pool of potential Alliance members. As noted in Section 2 of this chapter, Ann Braude has asserted that women have always been a majority of participants in any religious institution in the United States. This has not changed at the UU Society, and women today represent a larger portion of members, attendees and volunteer leaders than do men, youth, or children. However, as cited earlier, the proportion of U.S. American women working outside the home has grown over the past several decades. As noted by

¹¹⁰*Honoring Our Past and Building Our Future*, ca. 1997, Alliance Archives, USSS Archives.

several interviewees in the 1990s and in 2014, many women did not join the Alliance until they had retired. Hence, the average age of Alliance members rose, as working-age women who joined USS would be unlikely to attend its weekday morning programs or put their volunteer time into the Alliance than they would into other parts of church life.

16. Turning Point: Group Deliberation and a Change in Structure

The Alliance organization's long-standing reliance on a large volunteer corps with plenty of time to serve became unsustainable by the early 2000s. Many members had passed away, several others faced frail health, and fewer people stepped forward to fill roles. Virginia Dunstan joined the Alliance in 2003 and a year later was its membership chair; a year after that she was president. Having retired and moved here from a smaller UU church in the Bay Area, she had expected an Alliance in a larger congregation to be larger, but it seemed small to her, and most members were older than she was. A planning meeting on July 8, 2004, addressed challenges of an "aging membership" and "low attendance." Notes show that a June survey, which had fifteen respondents, showed "greatest interest in field trips." They considered holding a Saturday meeting in December, making three Saturday meetings for the year so that attending might be more feasible for some. "However, [a note says, it] did not make a difference for June meeting – very small attendance."¹¹¹ The next year, 2004-2005, the group did have a full program lineup: poetry, chamber music, a speaker on Iranian women, a speaker on mental health, and field trips to the winery of a member's family and to a household Japanese garden.

¹¹¹ Agenda for Planning Meeting, July 8, 2004, Alliance Archives, USS Archives.

The Gala Brunch fundraiser had a one-act play, catered buffet, colorful paper hats, a raffle, and silent auction, with over seventy-five people in attendance.¹¹²

However, leadership vacancies persisted and grew in number. The president was in the unusual spot of leading the organization *and* chairing the spring fundraising luncheon, an event for which printed programs showed dozens of helpers in prior years. Dunstan said, “As I was finishing my term in 2005, we could not find a new president. I was going on the church Board and couldn’t continue.” Dunstan asked members to “look closely at what can be done to preserve the important aspects of the group but make realistic changes to ensure the continuance of the group.”¹¹³

The Alliance board recruited Carol Houseman, a consultant and UUSS member not in the Alliance, to facilitate a meeting on Tuesday morning, May 24, 2005. The Rev. Douglas Kraft provided a centering meditation at the start. Carol has told me, “I remember a very engaged group, where I had expected some weary warriors. They wanted to keep the group alive and were very willing to make some changes to do so.”¹¹⁴ The twenty attendees unanimously voted to recommend to the members a suspension of the existing structure and the goal of “revitalization.” They formed a Revitalization Committee of seven women, with Kate Throop as “chairperson,” a noted change from “chairman” in earlier years’ meeting minutes. (Throop had served in two professional staff roles for UUSS but by this time had retired and resumed volunteer roles at UUSS.)

¹¹² Virginia Dunstan, “Alliance,” April 6, 2005, UUSS Annual Report 2004-2005, UUSS Archives.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴ Carol Houseman, e-mail correspondence with author, November 28, 2014. Quoted with permission.

There was one more business meeting to ratify the changes by vote, and the members did so. Dunstan said, “The decision was made to first call it the Alliance [i.e., without ‘Women’s’], have an open format, not have a board. There was a threesome who took it over in its new format.”¹¹⁵ Aggie Vawter has been part of that threesome, or coordinating team. She said: “We decided to bring your own lunch and occasionally have a catered lunch.” As a retired couple, Vawter and her husband came to UUSS in 2001. She started in the Alliance in 2004, near the end of the group’s time under the former model. She recalled that her friend and lay leader Fran Oyafuso was “determined that we would keep [it] going.... She and I for quite a few years would get the coffee going and recruit the speakers and try to get people to bring [snacks].”¹¹⁶

To this day, an informal team of leaders divides up several tasks: arranging for a presenter on a topic of interest, publicizing events, decorating the tables, setting up for coffee and snacks, and occasionally buying easy-to-serve food for a buffet lunch. At a table near the door, a volunteer invites everyone arriving to sign in and use a nametag; a sign invites a three-dollar donation. The late Frances Yankauer said a smaller operating structure of the Alliance had been a good change. Noting in particular that minutes are no longer read aloud at each meeting, she said many of the former customs “took a lot of time.” She said:” “I don’t think we needed to do all those things.... You don’t need to burden people.”¹¹⁷ A UUSS member since 2001, Yankauer recalled fondly when “JoAnn Anglin brought the poems of some of the prisoners she worked with [at Folsom State

¹¹⁵ Virginia Dunstan, interview with author, November 13, 2014. Quoted with permission.

¹¹⁶ Aggie Vawter, *op. cit.*

¹¹⁷ Frances Yankauer, interview with author, November 6, 2014. Quoted with permission.

Prison] They were very good.” She recalled learning about the Hmong community’s textile art from Pat Moore-Howard, and going on a group outing to “the home of a woman who has an absolutely magnificent Japanese garden.” She said: “The Alliance was not only a social time but a chance to learn about something we didn’t know about. And it still is.” Frances Yankauer passed away in 2016.¹¹⁸

17. The Current Scene

Though the Alliance’s operating structure is simpler and smaller now, many of its recent program topics are quite similar to those of earlier eras. Recent attendance at monthly daytime meetings has been variable and modest, with one or more men coming along with their wives. There are newsletter invitations, Sunday bulletin announcements and e-mail reminders to the Alliance e-mail list, but not an organized outreach campaign. Archival records give the impression from earlier eras of laboriously ordered business meetings (along with ambitious programming), but the current atmosphere seems to me to be one of warm friendship and exchange among those who are familiar with one another; most of my 2014 interviewees confirmed this feeling. There are occasional visitors, often drawn by the topic or by the speaker, and more often accompanying a guest speaker. Other than using nametags at the meetings (penned in calligraphy by a member as you enter and register), there appears to be no regular practice to help newcomers become known or for them to connect with longtime members. As a small group, it seems to count on informal self-introductions rather than having all introduce themselves as the program starts. The mood seems to be warm, informal, and subdued.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

The Alliance currently holds programs at 10:45 a.m., the second Thursday of the month, September through May. At its meeting on December 11, 2014, on a morning when predicted high winds and rain had begun, approximately twenty people showed up to hear the female Assistant Minister speak on the historical connection of Unitarians and Christmas traditions, and to share a prepared lunch together; that is above recent average attendance.¹¹⁹ The Alliance's informal leadership group is trusted to choose programs, handle the monthly donations, and decide how and whether to disburse net income at the end of a program year to benefit the congregation at large.

Conclusion: Adapting to New Times

Some of my interviewees speculated in 2014 that the group may not have enough personnel to continue much longer, but they spoke with a tone of wistfulness instead of desperation or the prescriptive urgency that is common to organizations in times of decline or other challenges. Most interviewees talked with pride about what they have done in the group and what it has accomplished for itself, its members, and UUSS.

As described in the Conclusion to this thesis, this is an era of declining religious participation in the United States, with shifting interests and increased demands on schedules of women, men, children in school, and families. The resulting stress on religious communities and their traditional membership groups has often been met with alarm or denial, rather than adaptation to new circumstances. The Alliance's current, simpler model of operation is a sign of such adaptability. It has been sustainable for over a decade. The transition to this model reflects resourcefulness, collaboration, and vision

¹¹⁹ Attendance by the author, December 11, 2014.

in the midst of social change. These traits mark the past century of the Women's Alliance history in this congregation. Moreover, the adaptations made in 2005 reflect the general congregation's work in the late 1990s to reflect on a sense of common purpose and to articulate that a vision statement and covenant, and of work of the early 2000s, in which the Society adopted a mission statement and a statement of shared values as a congregation. Chapter Eight charts the Unitarian Universalist Society's path through two conflicts toward the UUSS Vision statement in 1995 and the UUSS Covenant in 2000.

Chapter Three

Looking at Culture and Class in the Congregation, and Looking Forward

1. A Congregation Has a Culture

Nancy Ammerman, a sociologist of religion, has pointed out that every congregation is a “unique gathering of people with a cultural identity all its own.”¹²⁰ Even congregations that are in the same denomination or theological tradition have distinct cultures among themselves. For example, every congregation’s culture is shaped by its local economy and climate. It is distinctive by nature of its own history and the stories that members and clergy remember and repeat about their community. “Culture includes rituals and symbols important to the congregation and its worldview,” Ammerman says. It is “shaped by [its] theological tradition... [but also by] the secular culture in which it is located.”¹²¹

2. What Is Class?

To the above aspects of identity, one could add that a congregation’s culture is shaped by the social class or mix of classes that it includes. What is class? To what does this term refer in the modern United States of America, and how does it show up in our congregations? This is the topic of the recent doctor of ministry dissertation by the Rev. Dr. Andy Burnette, a colleague of mine. Citing the work of social scientists Christian Smith and Robert Faris, among others, he summarizes the following elements of social

¹²⁰ Nancy T. Ammerman, “Culture and Identity in the Congregation,” in *Studying Congregations: A New Handbook* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998), 78.

¹²¹ *Ibid.*

class: years of education and degrees held, income level, occupational prestige, and social habitus. Social habitus, he says, is “something like a natural habitat in which the members of each social class most naturally move.” He writes, “Social habitus.... encompasses relationships and the ways they are lived out, entertainment preferences including favorite sports, music, movies, and more. It certainly also includes worship services.”¹²²

3. Class Distribution in American Religion

Burnette cites legendary scholars of religion from the past century who have identified the persistence, over decades or centuries, of social-class distributions within many denominations, including Unitarian Universalism. For example, using Smith and Faris’s analysis of General Social Survey data points from the early 1980s to approximately the year 2000, he notes that the rankings of education level and “degrees held” have remained stable. More than sixty-one percent of Unitarian Universalists held college degrees, the top in the sample. Burnette writes:

Unitarians are first in college degrees held, followed by Jews and then liberal Protestant groups. Near the bottom for both decades [of the survey] are ... Pentecostals, Seventh Day Adventists, and Jehovah’s Witnesses. Black Baptist groups are near the middle.... Where Unitarians reported an average of more than a college degree [16.39 years of education in year 2000], Pentecostals averaged less than a high school diploma [11.81 years of education].¹²³

In summarizing income data, Burnette notes that “just before 2000,” the average Unitarian Universalist household had an annual income of \$46,158, a

¹²² Andy Burnette, “Unitarian Universalism and the Working Class: Widening the Welcome” (DMin diss., Pacific School of Religion, 2016), 45.

¹²³ *Ibid.*, 42.

rank second only to Jews, and an amount twice the average income of Pentecostals.¹²⁴ He points out that income levels have long been tied to educational achievement, and notes that occupational prestige typically correlates highly with those two traits as well.¹²⁵

Another factor often tied to income and education is social habitus. Again, as Burnette explains, this term refers to the mix of available choices, preferences, daily experiences, and assumptions about the benefits and challenges of living in this country or in one's regional area. For example, having the privilege of a paid vacation from work varies by financial situation, as may one's choice of how to spend that vacation, but such a choice might be shaped also by upbringing and current social relations. Reflecting on the question of class in the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS) in the period under study for this dissertation, JoAnn Anglin recalled a conversation at a backyard party at the house of a couple from the church: "All of the people there were talking about the best restaurant to go to in Maui." Anglin said, "I think travel is really an indicator of class. Our people are very well traveled."¹²⁶

As with many areas of personal taste and experience, the social habitus of our experiences of travel may be widely shared in a congregation, but this can cause those in the social minority to doubt whether they belong there. I remember

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵ Of course, I can think of exceptions to this point—such as adjunct college professors and ministers with low incomes and high debt burdens, or administrators or teachers working in underappreciated and uninspiring jobs to which they hang on for a guaranteed pension—but the general trend is that members of some denominations have more educational degrees, job prestige and income, and those in other denominations have fewer of these attributes.

¹²⁶ JoAnn Anglin, interview with author, December 6, 2016. Quoted with permission.

a conversation I had with a former younger member who had not traveled abroad and could not foresee being able to do it very soon. At a committee retreat's luncheon, the person felt quite alone while listening to a group of members telling about ocean cruises they had enjoyed.

4. Reinforcing Culture and Class in the Unitarian Universalist Society

Nancy Ammerman writes, "A congregation's culture... is something that a group of people has created, not a fixed ... category." She goes on to say that a culture "is who we are and all the ways in which we reinforce and recreate who we are." The above example of assumptions about access to (or preferences about) vacation travel shows that the ways in which a congregation "reinforce[s] and recreate[s] who we are" can be nuanced, unintentional, and even invisible to those of us reinforcing that culture. But such nuanced ways would be quite visible to the working-class, poor person or non-degreed person who might interpret such a conversation to mean "who we are" does not include them. In an interview about the 1980s and 1990s, Judy Bell speculated that the Society may not have had a welcoming tone to many church visitors from the working class: "Unconsciously people can pick up [on class differences] by our behaviors, the topics we bring up, the questions we ask, and we are not even aware how we are labeling them--and ourselves."¹²⁷

When I asked Bell and Anglin, two longtime lay leaders of UUSS, to describe the congregation in terms of socio-economic class, they made similar statements. Bell said

¹²⁷ Judy Bell, interview with author, December 3, 2016. Quoted with permission.

the congregation has been (both in the decades under study and currently) middle class, adding, “though I know some people who don’t have as much” and others with accumulated wealth. Occupationally, she said, the congregation has been “white collar--a lot of State workers, educators, a lot of teachers ... and a lot of health care people over the years.” When I asked her what kind of State employees, she said “The ones that sit at desks and the people who manage departments [in State agencies], or are retired from it.” Bell added, “Not a lot of the people cleaning the State office buildings.” In a separate interview, Anglin said this in response to a similar question: “Mostly people in the professions, people that are involved with policy, not so much the truck drivers and warehouse workers.” She said the congregation has skewed toward the upper-middle class over time, [though now] ...we’re a little less academic than we used to be.”¹²⁸

In 1989, the Settled Minister Search Committee of the Unitarian Universalist Society reported the results of a congregational survey conducted at UUSS. Containing thirty questions, it was mailed to 523 members and pledging friends of the congregation; 262 responses came in. The results show the predominance of upper- or upper-middle-class persons. Of the 262 respondents, 151 were over age sixty. Ninety-one had a college degree and another 122 had achieved a graduate degree as well. Very few had *not* been to college; only ten worked in “skilled labor or trades.” Sixty-eight people reported incomes of at least \$40,000 per year (fifty percent higher than the national household average). In the summary of survey results, the committee or its writer made sure to point out this item: though the congregational survey was anonymous, more than

¹²⁸ Anglin, *op. cit.*

fifty people declined to write down their annual income.¹²⁹ Bell said to me, “If we have wealthy [people] in the congregation, they must hide it.” That may be the case. I believe that one sign of a class discrepancy in a country that officially eschews a class structure is an ambivalence to talking about one’s relative economic advantage or other forms of privilege.

Whatever ambivalence there may have been to admit to one’s income, even privately, there was an explicit display of social class membership among church members in the 1980s and 1990s. There were also examples of the assumption of homogeneity in the cultural or socioeconomic fabric of the congregation. The Society had a practice of publicizing the occupations of congregants. For example, a 1980 listing in the *Unigram* newsletter of recent new members provided these occupations after the names: Sacramento State University student, correctional counselor, retired physician, homemaker (two of them), retired librarian, social worker (two of them), salesman, attorney, teacher, “program tech,” history clerk, and deputy probation officer.¹³⁰ Likewise, into at least the late 1980s, the printed church directory would list the occupations beside the names and contact information of members and friends. On two Sundays in 1990, a printed introduction of new members was inserted in the Order of Service (March 25 and August 27, 1990). In these cases, an occupation was mentioned along with other biographical information in an introductory paragraph. Perhaps for such a paragraph a new member could choose whether to provide occupation information or not, whereas for a listing in a directory it would stand out if it were left off.

¹²⁹ “Summary of USS Congregational Survey,” March 1, 1989, “Board of Trustees January 1989-June 1989,” USS Archives.

¹³⁰ “New Members,” *Unigram*, September 27, 1988, “Unigrams 1988,” USS Archives.

As Anglin has observed, many members of the congregation have been—and many still are—well traveled in a variety of countries, for purposes of international employment, college or graduate studies, works of mercy and service, and especially tourism. The “social habitus” of many Unitarian Universalists is one of cross-cultural interest and a longing for peace, human rights, and relief from disease and hunger around the globe. In some couples in the church, one of the partners has grown up outside the United States. However, I believe the dominant assumption and expression of culture of the congregation has been white and Euro-American as well as middle class.

A note from the era under consideration reflects both an inter-cultural interest and a monocultural assumption (i.e., that everyone in UUSS is of the same national origin and culture). The *Unigram* newsletter listed the Sunday service for November 6, 1988, as celebrating and explaining the cloth banners hanging high around the hexagonal Auditorium (i.e., sanctuary) walls. Apparently it was a lay-led service, but no leader is named. Installed in 1983, the handmade banners represent a diversity of religious and cultural traditions. The article said, “Join in a celebration of universal belief. Add to the color...by wearing a costume native to another culture.”¹³¹ One might ask: would an immigrant from Germany, Japan, India, or Mexico wear garb of their homeland, or dress in slacks and a sweater or a pantsuit, as many North American Unitarian Universalists might wear to church? The phrase “celebration of universal belief” indicates to me that the organizers believed that their global good intentions made cultural or geographic particularities irrelevant, though at the same time the visual differences could be celebrated. Use of the words “universal belief” in the singular might imply a dominant

¹³¹ Sunday service listing, *Unigram*, November 1, 1988, “Unigrams 1988,” UUSS Archives.

belief. Perhaps this wording for that event reflected a hope for harmony and inclusiveness. However, contemporary workshops on racial and ethnic diversity in organizations show that authentic inclusiveness and harmony do not always coexist.

Another example of how a congregation might “reinforce and recreate who we are” comes from the Society’s long-standing interest in public issues, especially issues of interest to progressives. Starting in the mid-1980s, the congregation’s Forum Committee organized and hosted hour-long Sunday presentations on contemporary social and political issues by local journalists, activists, advocates, and academics. It was founded by the Rev. Theodore Webb (the UUSS minister from 1971 to 1983) and several university professors in the congregation. Every year for nearly a decade, from September through May, a Forum took place in the Auditorium at 9:30 a.m., with the service following at 11:00 a.m. Many interested visitors who were not church members reportedly came to the Forum, and at least half of the Forum presenters were not members. Moreover, as lay leaders have told me, some UUSS members often attended the Forum discussion without staying for the service. Ginny Johnson said, “I realized that for some people, going to the Forum was going to church!” As I cited above from Burnett’s writing on social class, one could say that discussions of public issues were part of the social habitus of many congregants in Sacramento.

One Sunday morning in the 1990s, the Forum speaker would be Ann DuBay from the California Abortion Rights Action League. The *Unigram* article said: “[H]er subject is highly controversial. Because she will speak before a more sophisticated audience, her presentation at UUSS will include... some of the more difficult questions involved in the

abortion rights issue.”¹³² The presumption of an audience already conversant with the issue of abortion rights no doubt was accurate for many in the congregation, especially those who attended the Forum’s regular discussions. Moreover, it is not a bad idea to warn people that the speaker’s approach may be controversial, strong, or even graphic. Yet the wording “a more sophisticated audience” might put up an invisible barrier to those who were curious about the topic but not yet engaged with it. They might conclude they did not qualify as part of the Forum audience. In Ammerman’s phrasing, “we recreate and reinforce who we are” through language that reflects the social habitus of dominant or prominent members of a congregation.

As noted above, the congregation largely has comprised people employed in one job at a time, or comfortably retired from a career (versus a string of low-paying jobs), or able to be a homemaker. The predominance of middle- and upper-middle-class members notwithstanding, in recent decades there has been an informal, non-luxury atmosphere in this Unitarian Universalist congregation. Perhaps this is a reflection of the context of the West Coast, and particularly of California’s Central Valley. Most congregation members are not highly formal in dress, manner, or terms of interpersonal address. Most of the cars they drive to church are typical of frugal middle-class consumers. Here is an interesting story from an earlier decade from Dick Tarble, now in his late 90s. He said, “Every year the men’s group [at UUSS] would have a potluck supper with men from B’nai Israel [a Reform Jewish congregation].” They took turns hosting one another. Tarble said, “When we went to their place, they used ceramic plates and cloth napkins.” Yet when the Unitarians were hosting, “What we did was like a picnic,” serving on paper plates with

¹³² “Forum Programs,” *Unigram*, March 1990, “Unigrams 1990,” UUSS Archives.

plastic cutlery. He said this disparity of hospitality “brought [the exchanges] to a halt.” He added: “I really don’t blame them.” It would be interesting to find out any other dimensions to the ending of a long-standing and multi-faceted relationship between B’nai Israel and UUSS. In any case, this story about some UUSS men may reflect the presence of a “do it yourself” culture, that is, a preference for volunteer labor in lieu of hiring service workers for many tasks. In more recent years I have observed signs of this culture with regard to church facilities and grounds, meals, kitchen cleanup, and social events.¹³³ On the other hand, since it was the men’s group hosting, it could be they were used to depending on wives or mothers to prepare for guests and serve them.

5. Religious Community: The Result of Striving, or a Gift to Share?

As described in Chapter Six, “From Task-orientation to Trust-orientation,” a number of clergy who served the Society as interim ministers in the 1980s and 1990s pointed out and lamented a strong managerial culture among those in lay leadership. As noted in that chapter, meeting minutes and committee reports reflected close attention to process and authority, including disagreements over which person or church body had authority over a particular decision, committee, event, or staff position. There was not much attention given to a shared mission as a religious body or to an explicit ethic of community-making. There is ample evidence, however, that attention was given to lines of authority, as is normal for managers working in large bureaucracies or in organizations where mutual trust is low. In such cases, it seems that the church culture was absorbing the habits and values of the secular culture around it. The middle-class culture in the

¹³³ Dick Tarble and Georgene Tarble, interview with author, November 28, 2016. Quoted with permission.

Sacramento area has been dominated by the bureaucracies of a large public university and the seat of government for the largest state in the nation. Having arrived to serve this congregation in 2008, I have felt resonances of such a managerial tone, in which permission-granting and performance-critiquing sometimes take precedence over a sense of mission or a sense of trust and partnership regarding church projects, programs and events.

Yet following twentieth-century theologian H. Richard Niebuhr, we could trace such habits to the roots of Unitarianism in Calvinist Christianity, which was the theological strain dominant in New England Congregational churches. Later in this chapter I will address more of his work *The Social Sources of American Denominationalism*. But for now, it is worth noting one point from Niebuhr, and from his references to the work of Max Weber. That is, one aspect of Calvinism in Europe and New England was the impetus on striving in the ways of God and striving for earthly success, as success would show a Christian's status as one of God's elect few, hence predestined for salvation.¹³⁴ This may seem like a stretch to Unitarian Universalist congregants who may never have been Calvinists and who probably eschew ideas of predestination, original sin, and perhaps even the existence of a transcendent God. Yet if a congregation's culture is shaped in part by its religious tradition, and if the Unitarian tradition counts Puritan Calvinism—and the church cultures of the Puritans—as part of our heritage, then it is worth listening for hints of it in our day.

In the archives of the Unitarian Universalist Society, I discerned a recurrent theme of duty in church life. I noticed a pattern of looking for signs of organizational success

¹³⁴ H. Richard Niebuhr, *The Social Sources of American Denominationalism* (New York: Living Age Books, 1960), 102.

and progress—and celebrating them. This is reflected in Board meeting minutes and reports of some church presidents and ministers. I suggest these habits may have their roots in Congregationalist and Calvinist cultures. To be sure, the haggling over lines of authority and the power struggles over the granting of permission for one action or another could reflect the secular culture of a city with a large government bureaucracy. However, it is also likely that contemporary secular and religious cultures have roots in those early-American themes of striving for success and duty to the larger body to which one belongs.

A striking example of those managerial habits taking place in UUSS in 1998 comes from a formal three-page memo from the UUSS Treasurer, addressed to “Chair, Dance Committee,” who was Bob Clifton. The Second Friday Dances at the Society were “supposed to be” fundraisers, yet the program had a net loss in the prior fiscal year, wrote the Treasurer, John R. Williams. He said, “I have asked the Finance Committee to analyze the last two years in order to help assure an operating profit for this fiscal year.... Your assistance and cooperation will be invaluable and greatly appreciated.” The memo also asks for a Dance Committee charter to be provided, reminds chair Bob Clifton that he needs to make a pledge to remain a UUSS member and hence to chair a committee, and reminds him to encourage people to make donations for alcoholic beverages at the dances. The memo has the ring of an auditor’s report and not of an outreach by one member of a mission-based congregation to another member.¹³⁵ Six months later, after giving a report of “continuing loss” in the congregation’s overall finances, John Williams

¹³⁵ John R. Williams, memo to Bob Clifton, September 18, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 18997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

announced his resignation from his role--and from the congregation.¹³⁶ There is no evidence in the Board archives of a reply to his memo to Clifton. I am not sure why he left the church, though one of my interviewees has suggested it could have been for medical reasons.

I thought of this memorandum--and other examples of the task-oriented, supervisory culture of the Unitarian Universalist Society in the 1980s and 1990s, when I read the following critique of the effect of middle-class culture on religious life. Niebuhr said: "The values of religion are regarded less as a divine, free gift than as the [result] of striving... the content of the faith is a *task* rather than a promise."¹³⁷ It is notable that "promise" is a definition or constituent element of "covenant," and both Calvinist Congregationalism and Unitarianism have been defined by the practice of covenant-making and covenant-keeping, in contrast to the basis on creeds in the Catholic and liturgical Protestant traditions. How might a congregation begin to think again of its goals and its calling as a free gift? How might it act as a congregation united by shared promises and aspirations rather than by tasks or duties?

6. Economic Solidarity: Is "Middle Class" Misleading?

Given my examples of how the congregation has "recreate[d] and reinforce[d] who we are," it is worth turning to a book about religion and social class from 1988, a year during the period of my study of this congregation. *Risking Liberation: Middle Class Powerlessness and Social Heroism* argues that "the label of *middle class* is

¹³⁶ Board meeting minutes, March 28, 1998, "Board of Trustees Jan. 1998-June 1998," UUSS Archives.

¹³⁷ Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, 83, emphasis mine.

inaccurate and misleading.” Though accepted by many U. S. Americans as a self-categorizing term, in fact it promotes a “narrow focus on certain occupations which, on their own, do not constitute a class.” Authors Paul King, Kent Maynard, and David Woodyard (respectively an economist, sociologist/anthropologist, and theologian) argue that people in “the middle-income range” have mistakenly thought about themselves as a class distinct from the working class and the poor, rather than as a “middle fraction, layer or sector ... of a much wider laboring class.”

The result of seeing oneself as a separate class is that middle-income working Americans “often do not see the extent to which they share interests with the poor or those in the working class.”¹³⁸ When middle-income Americans think they have more in common with wealthy people, the authors explain, many of them will feel their conscience pricked or weighted down by knowledge of those worse off than they are, even if those of the “worse off” and they of the “middle class” are in the same boat. In other words, “middle class” people are distracted by thinking altruistically about helping those in worse conditions (the working poor or the unemployed and poor) instead of thinking critically about an economic system which makes all of them vulnerable to economic loss and hardship.

As these three authors interpreted the U.S. American political and economic system in their time, it was a system being reshaped increasingly for the benefit of those at the top levels of income and wealth, leaving others in precarious conditions and with little economic autonomy. In the American mythos of individualism, the heroic entrepreneur or ever-advancing hard worker can rely only on yourself. That is, your

¹³⁸Paul G. King, Kent Maynard, and David O. Woodyard, *Risking Liberation: Middle Class Powerlessness and Social Heroism* (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox Press, ©1988),4.

economic security and success rest on the choices and efforts made by you, the individual. Acceptance of this cultural story has made the experience of economic insecurity or the sense of a lack of autonomy even more isolating. In place of the myth of the striving and suffering lonely hero, the authors call for a “social heroism.” In their vision of solidarity, all working people from the “middle fraction” would recognize their bondage to and vulnerability in current economic arrangements. If they were to see their common lot, and see their fortunes tied with those of people from nearby layers of the nation’s economic strata, Americans in the “middle fraction” could join together to demand and make political change that would benefit everyone who works for a living.

This critique has persisted since 1988, as the gap of inequality in wealth and income has grown. In 2016, for example, the populist economic rhetoric of insurgent presidential candidates in both major parties drew enormous crowds and followings. One candidate arguably manipulated the fear and pain about accelerating economic disparities into anger, and rode that anger into a party nomination and a national victory. However, while capitalizing on economic pain and vulnerability, President Donald Trump also stoked resentments based on race, religion, national origin, and immigration. Moreover, he did not articulate a comprehensive platform for economic reforms to benefit a broad sector of society. It seems that, with regard to health insurance, public education, financial and environmental regulation, and tax policies, his words and his cabinet nominations do not hold much promise for the general uplift of the sectors of people who must work to survive (by whatever categories they are named), not to mention for the destitute among us.

7. Looking Again at Class Interactions in the Unitarian Universalist Society

In light of the above-cited authors' case for inter-class solidarity and their vision of middle-class liberation as a component of general economic fairness, two related features of the Sacramento congregation are worth noting. One is that their social habitus may have inclined the members toward the economic levels above their own rather than those below them. The other note is that discomfiting social-class interactions in the congregation could be a self-reinforcing dynamic. That is, occasions of insensitive actions or condescending words about differences in occupation, money, or social habitus in church encounters could alienate any interested congregants who come from a lower income level. The resulting alienation of the lower-income persons could perpetuate our members' lack of awareness, without which a sense of solidarity across income sectors is less likely to develop.

I noted above that a congregation's culture is shaped by the social class or mix of classes that it includes. Below I cite evidence that the culture of a congregation can also reinforce the class mix in the congregation, and can make it hard for the church to embody a broadly inclusive community as a reflection of its stated ideals.

As indicated earlier in this chapter by the results of a Search Committee survey as well as the impressions of lay leaders I have interviewed, the congregation has included numbers of well-paid medical, legal, engineering, and other professionals above the local population's average numbers of them. Moreover, located in California's capital city and near large universities, the congregation has counted among its members a big variety of securely employed (and securely retired) professional and managerial workers for State and local governments. Hence, it is to be expected that many in the congregation (but not

all) would feel like stable, prosperous, and economically autonomous members of the local community.

Many Unitarian Universalists might understandably have assumed they had more in common with people in income sectors above them than those in lower sectors. This would be especially true with regard to the class marker of social habitus. For example, they may have been confident, in most years, of the ability to take vacations and enjoy local amenities of culture and cuisine. They may often have been proud of their children's academic success. Even if many congregation members felt frustrated or powerless in their occupations or vulnerable in the larger economic system, the advantage of middle or upper-middle incomes--and of sharing in the social habitus dominant in the congregation--could work against showing a sufficient welcome to working class members or visitors. In the congregation, the white majority's belonging to a social habitus common to the upper-middle class could alienate some middle-income persons who are not white and whose social habitus is out of the Unitarian Universalist mainstream. This would inhibit the majority of the congregation from learning of insights about shared economic destiny that might come from sharing in religious community. It would perpetuate a sense of economic individualism, and exacerbate the frustration and isolation that middle-income workers might experience.

On the other hand, gaining awareness of the plight of people in conditions worse than your own has long been a priority in the Unitarian Universalist Society, as shown by many Sunday sermon and Forum lecture topics, by donations given away, and by advocacy made by the Women's Alliance and Social Responsibility Committee, among other groups in the church's history. Indeed, leaders in the congregation have continued

to develop new opportunities for its members and friends to show mercy and be of help, and congregants have responded in many cases. The giving of one's service, resources, and presence to ease or prevent the suffering of others is a value and a legacy of this congregation's identity as (first) a liberal Christian church and (later) a Humanist and (now) a theologically diverse congregation. Whether middle- or upper-middle class members of the congregation have identified themselves as having common cause with poor and working class people or with wealthy ones, it matters that they have shared their bounty with others. They have offered their presence and care, and they have raised their voices in calling for justice and fairness.

It is important to point out that the explicit values of the Unitarian Universalist movement appeal not only to persons with above-average incomes or education levels. Burnette recently has documented the personal stories of ten committed, involved Unitarian Universalists who are not of the middle class or upper-middle class. While most of them described personal encounters or congregational dynamics which have challenged their comfort or sense of belonging in the faith, they testified also to affection for their fellow church members, preference for the idea of belonging to a church by way of shared promises (i.e., a covenant) rather than by professing a common creed, and their devotion to the values reflected in the statement of the seven Unitarian Universalist Principles.¹³⁹

¹³⁹Burnette, *op. cit.*, 65-110.

8. Look Abroad: See Beyond the Class-based Appeal of Unitarian Universalism

Another example of the wider appeal of Unitarian Universalist Principles, values, and practices can be found across the Pacific Ocean, in the Republic of the Philippines. In the middle 1950s an itinerant Filipino Pentecostal evangelist on the small island of Negros encountered the Universalist faith in an American newspaper that he ran across. Intrigued by a reference to Universalism, the Rev. Toribio Quimada attempted contact for several years with the Universalist Church of America. Once he was in communication with the U.S denomination, he requested and received curricular and other materials. After founding the Universalist Church of the Philippines (headquartered in Dumaguete City, on Negros Island), Quimada pursued admission to the denomination. Admission to the North American denomination was achieved in 1988, by which time the Universalist Church in America had merged with the American Unitarian Association. Though he was assassinated in that same year, his daughter and other relatives and colleagues have stayed in the church he founded and kept alive its relationships with Unitarian Universalists in North America and on other continents.

To this day approximately thirty congregations in the Philippines hold weekly worship services and serve as community centers for their villages. Most of their Unitarian Universalist clergy are not seminary trained or compensated for their ministry. Nearly all their church members are poor; most of the homes in their villages have dirt floors. Many of the cinderblock village churches in the mountains or on the coast are exposed to the elements, with a thatch or corrugated metal roof but no doors or covered windows. The tropical island climate makes this design practical as well as less expensive

than a church many Americans would expect to see. Around the inside walls of several of the Negros Island UU churches I visited in 2011 were eight signs listing the Unitarian Universalist Principles, with one more principle added by the Filipinos to the original seven. It reads, “There is God.”

Rev. Quimada was drawn in to American Universalism when he read of its doctrine of universal salvation. He felt inspired to preach a message of God’s love and unconditional acceptance of all human beings. Of course, this message had also been the proclamation of the founding preachers of Universalism in New England in the decades following American Independence. Burnette cites the work of Unitarian Universalist minister and historian Mark Harris in recounting that Universalism originated among more rural, working class people, and not formally educated ones.¹⁴⁰ He notes that the message that human beings are equal in God’s eyes was translated into a sense of equality in the church community and beyond it into society.¹⁴¹ It seems likely that this American faith, which eschewed many kinds of human categorization in favor of all-embracing love, appealed to a poor pastor in the Philippines, as did the absence of requiring adherence to a doctrine in order to be loved.

9. The Social Sources of American Denominations—Including this One

In his legendary book from 1929, *The Social Sources of American Denominationalism*, theologian H. Richard Niebuhr described the geographic and social pathways that persons in various American socio-economic classes followed as they

¹⁴⁰*Ibid.*, 38.

¹⁴¹*Ibid.*, 57.

founded or were drawn to particular Protestant denominations. As a Christian of German immigrant background, Niebuhr lamented this fact as a failure of Christendom to recognize a universal Kingdom of God or to practice divine love in human relations. Niebuhr saw the division of Christendom into denominations as a triumph of economic forces and racial and national identities over the power of the Gospel. It is nothing but “the accommodation of Christianity to the caste-system of human society.” Denominationalism is “contrary... to the ideals of [Jesus] and the spirit of the community he founded,”¹⁴² Niebuhr said. It “seats the rich and poor *apart* at the table of the Lord.”¹⁴³

By applying Niebuhr’s critique to help explain the origins of the two denominations that eventually consolidated to form the Unitarian Universalist Association, we can see the resilience of class distinctions. Rather than focusing on theological origins for the American Unitarian movement, Niebuhr traces its socio-economic origins. In the early 1800s, liberal ministers broke away from the orthodox Calvinism of Congregational churches in Massachusetts. Their organizing efforts put Unitarian theology into institutional form. Thus, a separate denomination of Unitarianism grew out of the root of an established, educated, and relatively wealthy Anglo-Saxon American churchgoing population. As Protestants migrated west, proto-denominations (such as the Baptists) and missionary denominations (such as the Methodists) formed on the frontier and grew. The long-established Congregationalists did found churches in new areas in the West, Niebuhr said, but they lost many working class and poorer Americans to those two denominations. They lost many of their better-off members as

¹⁴²Niebuhr, *op. cit.*, 9.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 6.

well. As Niebuhr has put it, much of “the metropolitan aristocracy of wealth and intellect” of this nation “found their home . . . with the Episcopalians and Unitarians.”¹⁴⁴

The rich and the poor not only sat apart at the table of the Lord, they were at separate tables in separately furnished homes. Moreover, these homes were handed down from generation to generation within their class-based communities. As Burnett recounts, the Unitarian congregations of the nineteenth century largely consisted of merchants, factory owners, politicians, seminary-trained clergy, and other formally educated people. Burnett draws on many examples to show that leading early Unitarians accepted class hierarchies, prospered from the privilege gained from those hierarchies, and sometimes made efforts to reinforce them.¹⁴⁵

Niebuhr did not address the Universalists’ origins. I speculate that this omission reflects the state of decline of the influence and relative size of Universalists among Protestant faiths by 1929, when Niebuhr was writing. As I note above and as described in many written histories, the Universalists argued for universal salvation in the afterlife and longed for a united humanity in the present world. Their God drew no boundaries and chose no favorites among the children of God. The Universalists were less wealthy than the Unitarians, as Burnette has explained, citing the works of Richard E. Sykes and Mark Harris.¹⁴⁶ By the time of the consolidation of the Universalists and the Unitarians, in 1961, the former had declined further and the Unitarians were the stronger denomination, with authority centralized in Boston (though congregations were officially autonomous).

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 152.

¹⁴⁵ Burnette, *op. cit.*, 10.

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 48-50.

The Universalists also had a Boston headquarters, but were more decentralized, with a loosely organized state-convention structure. The street address of the newly formed denomination's headquarters was the same as the address of the old American Unitarian Association, 25 Beacon Street. Furthermore, the congregation under study in this dissertation was established as the First *Unitarian* Church of Sacramento, and named First *Unitarian* Society in 1892. Its addition of the word *Universalist* to its name in the late 1970s was an expression of belonging to the consolidated denomination, but likely not the sign of an equal sharing of cultural and class origins; as Niebuhr has shown, such distinctions are persistent over time.

10. A Theology of Class, not of Covenant?

Our Unitarian forbears emphasized individual growth and freedom of conscience; the Universalists proclaimed God's boundless love to everyone, making us all spiritual equals and hence actual equals. Niebuhr traced the class distinctions among denominations to their social origins. Burnette has suggested the dominance of middle- and upper-middle-class cultures and people in our movement reflects the relative strength of the richer, more educated Unitarian congregations versus the less educated and less wealthy Universalist ones. To this I offer another factor—the possibility that our theological culture is no longer based in covenant but in class.

To the extent that a congregation or a denomination is not rooted strongly enough in common practices or terms to reinforce its identity as a *religious* body, competing forms of group identity and belonging will gain traction. Class identity is a strong (though nuanced) form of group identity. As noted in my examples and those from

Burnette, we can “recreate and reinforce” this identity without being aware of it. As Burnette cited, class identity has many factors: social habitus, job prestige, education level, and income.

Since the early twentieth century, non-theistic Humanism has remained a common denominator for many Unitarian Universalists, including many in Sacramento. Though it is not alone as a philosophical or faith tradition in doing so, Humanism affirms the worth of every person no matter their category. It calls for society to help all people to thrive and pursue their full potential. Indeed, many early Humanists and freethinkers were socialists, eschewing the class structure. Yet in this denomination, the culture of religious Humanism has been a culture of intellectualism, prioritizing reason, argument, free choice, and tolerance of different beliefs. It also prizes education and educational accomplishments. As noted, a higher education level correlates more often with higher incomes than with low. Perhaps our common denominator of Humanism dominates and thereby reinforces a class identity. While many parishioners and clergy (like me) testify to and strive to embody and extend Humanist values, I am not sure those values alone are sufficient to reinforce a congregation’s *religious* identity.

Like many UU congregations, UUSS has an avowed embrace of theological diversity. This is a reflection of our traditional openness to heresy and our affirmation that religious revelation is not sealed but continuous.¹⁴⁷ We find a variety of religious and secular metaphors to be helpful to us and evocative in worship. We quote many scriptures and secular texts as they suit a given message. A church member can choose from a diversity of personal practices, or none at all, yet still be active in the

¹⁴⁷ See James Luther Adams, *On Being Human Religiously: Selected Essays in Religion and Society*, Max Stackhouse, ed. (Boston, 1976: Beacon Press), 12-20.

congregation. As our theological diversity has grown, has our identity as a unified religious body faded? Some of our clergy have made this claim as they argue for a “center” to our diverse faith. And of course, that has been a critique of Unitarian Universalism by people in other traditions, including those in denominations where members have fallen out of personal or communal spiritual practice, even practices expected by their tradition and urged by their leaders, yet they stay in their community.

Fortunately, to replace a class theology with a renewed religious identity, we need not reject Humanist values or withdraw our embrace from the spiritual variety we have among us. Of course, we could not do so even if a compelling dissertation were to argue for that. We have a resource for a deeper identity as a religious community verses a community of class or culture. This is the tradition of covenant. I argue in later chapters that the Unitarian Universalist Society went through unnecessary hardships in part out of a lack of attention to covenant.

For example, Chapter Six cites interim ministers at UUSS in 1970 and in middle and late 1980s who diagnosed and lamented a lack of a covenantal understanding or practice in UUSS. It was not very much a body of people religiously committed to one another. To be sure, the congregation’s historic Bond of Union includes “mutual helpfulness” as a purpose for gathering (See Appendix I). Yet the culture described by those interim clergy did not reflect UUSS members’ mutual commitment to, trust in, or love for one another. In times of trouble, the assertion of *rights* and *duties* took prominence over terms like *trust* or *faith in one another*. Chapters Four and Five cover some periods of success and progress during several ministries. Yet in various reports and correspondence, the achievements were praised as a reflection of good work and the

inherent greatness of the institution. It seems that the celebratory pronouncements drowned out the whispers of gratitude and humility in the face of shared blessings and shared hardships in the community.

It is important to notice how part of our theological heritage reinforces the myths of individualism. Individualism can inhibit mutuality. As noted above, the individualism of academic achievement and the individualism of economic advancement are part of class distinctions in this country. And what economic or academic individualism have in common with spiritual individualism in a liberal church is...individualism. The language of rights and duties comes from a Western secular and political heritage of which U.S. Americans should, of course, be proud. The religious tradition of covenant, on the other hand, speaks of gifts, mutual expectations, forgiveness, and shared sacrifice. Covenants imply solidarity—not uniformity but shared goals and common destiny.

In the same years that the Unitarian Universalist Society struggled with rancor and mistrust, the denomination was hammering out new language, the power of which could be helpful in managing conflicts and keeping covenants. In the middle 1980s, delegates to the General Assembly of the Unitarian Universalist Association revised and expanded the statement of Unitarian Universalist Principles. These are the values our Association of Congregations promises to “affirm and promote.” The most recent is the Seventh Principle: “the interdependent web of existence of which we are a part.”¹⁴⁸ The metaphor of the web is used often to refer to the natural environment, to humanity, and to the whole cosmos. Yet less often do we bring it down to the microcosmic level: the interdependence of people together in a chosen community. This is mutual dependence.

¹⁴⁸ Unitarian Universalist Association, “Our Unitarian Universalist Principles,” (webpage accessed December 31, 2016). <http://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>

This is our heritage of covenant. Its embrace has been expanded by the Seventh Principle, so we are now called to live in right relationship with other beings and with the whole planet. Yet the center or starting place needs to be in our congregations. We start our work in the world by bowing in humility to the beauty, randomness, and mystery of life, and by bowing to one another in trust and love. Our theological inheritance has not vanished, but we may have left it lying around somewhere while hard at work trying to get things right.

11. Looking Forward

I have included this exploration of class in American religion and in Unitarian Universalism early in my thesis because the lens of class and culture is useful for understanding various aspects and developments in the history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, which appear in the later chapters. To show these distinctions of class is neither to take pride in them nor to wallow in shame about them.

We dare not condemn the people on any side of these distinctions; nor do we need to accept such phenomena as inevitable trends for the future of the congregation or the denomination to which it belongs. Indeed, it is Burnett's thesis that we can set ourselves toward "widening the welcome" for working class people who are religious liberals. The findings of his dissertation are sobering and his testimony poignant. His multi-faceted recommendations are hopeful and his conclusions inspiring. Widening the welcome, he concludes, will call for the practice of humility by those of the dominant culture and class and a congruent loosening of the Unitarian hold on "rugged intellectual individualism."¹⁴⁹

¹⁴⁹ Burnette, *op. cit.*,134-136.

Having a broader embrace will depend on the continued resilience of those congregants who have been outside the Unitarian Universalist mainstream. From all of our liberal religious stakeholders, it will require the courage to keep forming ourselves and shaping our congregations into people and places that are more flexible about our future as religious communities. As will be shown in later chapters, achieving a broader embrace of newcomers and a more loving embrace of current members has taken hard work. Lay leaders began prioritizing the congregation's well-being and common purpose over the impulses of individualism, and the congregation has responded with heart. This work has continued, and it must, by crafting common goals and reminding one another that we are a people who have chosen freely to be bound by covenant. We must strive to inhibit class membership from being our default sense of group identity and belonging. Thus can we be faithful to our bravely open-minded and open-hearted heritage.

Chapter Four

Successes and Stresses in Ministerial Relationships from 1983 to 1991

1. Introduction

This chapter and the following one describe the tenures of the professional ministers who served the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS) from 1983 until 2000, a period of significant transitions and trouble spots. This chapter begins with a few notes about the conclusion of the service of the Rev. Theodore Webb and ends with the congregation poised to welcome the Rev. Dr. John Young. Chapter Five will look at the progress and painful ending of Young's ministry and recount the part-time specialized ministries provided by two women during Young's tenure. Chapter Six will review the guidance offered by four interim ministers; they urged the congregation to take steps toward clearer institutional boundaries, better communication, and mutual trust. This table summarizes the ministries at UUSS from 1983 to 2000.

Table 4.1: Ordained Ministers Serving the UU Society of Sacramento, 1971-2013

<u>Name(s)</u>	<u>Title/Role</u>	<u>Position Size</u>	<u>Term of Service</u>
Theodore Webb	Minister	Full-time	1971-1983
Aron Gilmartin	Interim Minister	Full-time	1984-1985
Don Beaudreault	Minister	Full-time	1985-1989
Eileen Karpeles	Interim Minister	Full-time	1989-1990
Douglas M. Strong	Interim Minister	Full-time	1990-1991
John Young	Minister	Full-time	1991-1998
Richelle Russell	Chaplain to Young Adults	Half-time	1992-1994
Shirley Ranck	Pastoral Minister	Half-time	1997-1998
“	Associate Minister	Three-fourths time	1998-1999
Sydney Wilde	Interim Co-Minister	Half-time/shared	1999-2000
Dennis Daniel	Interim Co-Minister	Half-time/shared	1999-2000
Douglas Kraft	Lead Minister	Full-time	2000-2013

2. The Conclusion of a Loved and Loving Ministry

The late Rev. Theodore Webb served as the sole ordained minister at UUSS from 1971 to 1983. Webb is remembered fondly by those to whom he ministered, and one of his daughters has been active in the congregation for nearly three decades. It has been my observation that he was admired and loved also by those whom he met and befriended at UUSS after he completed a series of interim ministries in four other cities and retired back in Sacramento with his wife, Marguerite.

Webb resigned voluntarily and left in late November of 1983. According to the authorized UUSS history printed in the 1980s, his announcement surprised the congregation.¹⁵⁰ Yet two years before resigning his ministry, Webb's *Unigram* newsletter columns revealed his disappointments and exhaustion--as well as his feeling of satisfaction at several accomplishments of his ministry with UUSS. The accomplishments included having shared his authority with laypersons in programs at UUSS, especially in creating a diverse and sometimes dramatic offering of Sunday religious services.

He noted insufficient financial giving as an area of disappointment. He said, "Less than adequate pledging (with exceptions, of course) has meant that my ministry has been hampered by my having to carry on without a full-time assistant. I have not mentioned this felt need until this tenth year."¹⁵¹ Perhaps the minister's reluctance to bring up his

¹⁵⁰ Rodney Cobb and Irma West, *In Both Good Times and Bad* (Sacramento: Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, 2008).

¹⁵¹ Theodore Webb, "The Minister's 'pinion,'" *Unigram*, June 29, 1981, "Unigrams 1981," UUSS Archives.

need for a full-time assistant shows that he did not wish to risk more controversy by challenging the congregation, especially if he had experienced the church culture as oppositional to calls for more generous giving. Perhaps also, as a person of noted modesty from a poor family background, Webb was less comfortable being a fundraising leader or bringing up monetary needs, which the next interim minister would highlight as hindering church progress. However, it seems likely that he had been worn down by some degree of antagonism as well as overwork.

Lay leader JoAnn Anglin shed light on at least one challenge for Webb in addition to the work load. She told me there had been a small, abortive campaign in the church to press him to resign. At least one instigator was a staff custodian who was renting a cottage on the church premises as his cottage. He was involved in the church beyond his job description. She said he liked to “go around to all of the committee meetings.”¹⁵² Dick Tarble spoke of the same person as having inappropriate boundaries as a staff person. Indeed, several longtime members have told me that the man had initiated, conducted, and bragged about sexual relations with several women in the congregation. Anglin recalled that UUSS leaders gave no traction to that small campaign to push Webb out. The custodian was fired, but not until after Webb had left. UUSS Board archives include a letter from the Board asserting a loss of “trust and confidence” in the custodian and asking for his prompt resignation, and this is dated nearly two years after Webb’s retirement, and even after the interim ministry of Aron Gilmartin had ended.¹⁵³ Hence, whatever aggravation this person may have caused Webb, it was Webb who left first.

¹⁵² JoAnn Anglin, interview with author, December 6, 2016. Quoted with permission.

¹⁵³ Dorothy Englestad, Board President, letter to staff member, June 25, 1985, “Minutes Board of Directors July 1, 1984-June 30, 1985,” UUSS Archives. Rev. Don Beaudreault had been called on March 1, 1985.

No doubt wanting to ensure a gracious parting, in his final months of service it appears that Webb did not refer to any stressful episodes or mention areas of conflict which the congregation might address in the future. It seems that his reputation for good humor, creativity, and gracious behavior as the minister led him to represent primarily the pleasant aspects of the culture of the congregation. As addressed in Chapter Six, interim ministers who served before and after Webb's ministry identified signs of mistrust and animosity among the congregation members and between members and staff. It is hard to imagine that Webb's tenure of ministry at UUSS had been spared much of those very stressful dynamics.

At a Congregational Meeting on August 25, 1983, an area minister who was serving as a Ministerial Settlement Representative for the denomination came to explain the process for calling a new minister. UUSS members present there voted to accept Webb's resignation "with deep regret," and to authorize the hiring of and compensation for an interim minister.¹⁵⁴ Nominations (with resumes) of members for a settled minister search committee would be due by November 4. The congregation would elect five members for a committee on November 20 (with the Board then appointing two of the seven members).¹⁵⁵ For several decades this has been the recommended and conventional practice among Unitarian Universalist congregations for transitions after the conclusion of a settled ministry, especially when there are no other ordained clergy already serving at the church.

¹⁵⁴ Congregational Meeting minutes, August 25, 1983, UUSS Archives.

¹⁵⁵ Board minutes, September 25, 1983, UUSS Archives.

3. Interim Ministry by the Rev. Aron Gilmartin, 1983-1984

The UUSS Board of Trustees (UUSS Board) appointed the Rev. Aron Gilmartin to serve as the Interim Minister (under the agreement that the church would not consider him for the settled position and he would not seek it, as was denominational culture and practice). At age 73, he had been serving in ministry for nearly fifty years and was in retirement with his wife, Eve. (He had been the first minister for the congregation in Walnut Creek, having served fifteen years there until 1975.) He started at UUSS in early December, but he had made a prior commitment to serve the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Reno for six weeks, so he was away from January 1 to February 16. The Reno work had been arranged through the Minister-on-Loan Program of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), which assisted small or lay-led congregations to make use of professional clergy on a short-term basis. Gilmartin returned to Sacramento February 16, served through June, and returned August 16 to serve until February 1985.¹⁵⁶ He was away in Reno when his greetings and initial observations appeared in the UUSS Annual Report, dated January 22, 1984. Though enthusiastic about the gifts and the potential of the Sacramento congregation, he said it had challenges to work through, especially those of building relationships of trust and commitment. Also, he wrote, "I get the feeling that DEFICIT casts a continuing shadow, which eats away at creativity and enthusiasm."¹⁵⁷ Gilmartin continued to identify challenges in the congregation's processes, noting habits of mistrust and antagonism among members and

¹⁵⁶ Dorothy Englestad, President's Report to the Congregation, Annual Report [for 1983-84], January 22, 1984, "Annual Reports 1972-1987," UUSS Archives.

¹⁵⁷ Aron Gilmartin, Report of the Interim Minister to the Congregation, Annual Report [for 1983-84], January 22, 1984, "Annual Reports 1972-1987," UUSS Archives.

with staff members. Chapter Six goes into depth on the work of Gilmartin and other interim clergy at the Society.

4. A Short Settlement: Rev. W. Donald Beaudreault, 1985-89

The Settled Minister Search Committee was elected in early 1984, and within a year it was happy to announce the selection of the Rev. William “Don” Beaudreault as the settled minister candidate. After eleven days as a candidate at UUSS and two Sundays of preaching and leading worship, Rev. Beaudreault was called by a vote of 188 in favor to seven in opposition, a ratio of ninety-six percent. In the Annual Report of January 20, 1985, Search Committee chair Dick Tarble noted that fifty-six percent of congregants had completed the committee’s confidential survey, and from this he reported an average age of sixty-one years. He said: “Recognizing that we have become an elderly congregation..., we set as our goal someone who would be attractive to younger people and still serve the Society’s older segment.”¹⁵⁸ Fortuitously, the young minister (in his late 30s) had a wife and children. In the same UUSS Annual Report, however, Treasurer Bill Lambert stated his disappointment at the “longstanding problems” in church finances, including a “continuing practice of deficit budgeting” (which had meant recurring withdrawals from the financial reserves of the church), and the “inability, year after year, for our Society members to even come close... [to their

¹⁵⁸ Dick Tarble, Search Committee’s Report to the Congregation, Annual Report 1984-85, January 20, 1985, “Annual Reports 1972-1987,” UUSS Archives.

pledge drive, or canvass, goals], even though [they have been] reasonable and necessary [goals].”¹⁵⁹

Rev. Beaudreault’s tenure as a called minister at USS was brief (about four years) relative to the three settled ministers who had preceded him and the two who followed him (ranging from six and a half to fourteen years). However, Beaudreault was remembered as a strong and enjoyable pianist, accomplished in jazz and other genres, and for his “energy and upbeat manner.”¹⁶⁰ Most of his archived sermons at USS are from 1985, including “The Way We Deal with Dying” (a series of two), “God as Woman,” “The Shrinking of America” (psychological and self-realization trends), and the experience of “worship” in--and beyond--the typical setting of church. Near the occasion of his fortieth birthday, in 1986, he preached, “Midlife: The Second Spring.” Some of his sermons were serialized or excerpted for the monthly *Morality Exchange*, a newsletter of articles written by members and edited mainly by James Bradfield; it was inserted with the *Unigram* newsletter. These articles include a sermon series by Beaudreault on the Beatitudes of Jesus in the New Testament and another on “freedom and commitment.”

Lulu, Beaudreault’s wife at the time and the mother of their two small children, was from the Philippines. He had served as a Peace Corps volunteer in the Mindanao region of the Philippines. For the UU Service Committee Sunday on November 13, 1988, his sermon was “Philippines Update,” and it would cover the election of Corazon

¹⁵⁹ Bill Lambert, Treasurer’s Report to the Congregation, Annual Report 1984-85, January 20, 1985, USS Archives. Another point of his pessimism was the “slowness of the growth of our Endowment [Fund].”

¹⁶⁰ “The Memory Board from Heritage Sunday,” March 30, 2008, “Bios-Ministers” file, USS Archives.

Aquino as President.¹⁶¹ While I have not located the sermon text, the announcement for it neglects to mention the presence of the UU Church of the Philippines (made up of 29 village congregations on the Visayan island of Negros), though earlier in 1988 the church was admitted as a member of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) at the annual General Assembly, and its founding minister had been killed by paramilitary forces in May of 1988.

Rev. Beaudreault was the mentor and supervisor for the internship of ministerial candidate Jaco tenHove (January to June 1988), who went on to serve in several parish ministries, most of the time as a co-minister with his wife, Barbara Wells tenHove. During that internship, UUSS was the host congregation for a five-day training on the study of congregational dynamics and community engagement. Called the Institute for Congregational Analysis, it was led by staff of the denomination's Department of Extension with clergy and volunteers from four western districts of the denomination. On or near the final day, the "Morning Worship," held on Monday, January 28, 1988, was led by the Rev. Leon Hopper and two lay leaders, all from the Seattle area, in the Pacific Northwest District of the denomination.¹⁶² Though seminar trainees and leaders came from several congregations in the West, UUSS served as the model for the in-depth study.¹⁶³

¹⁶¹ In Beaudreault's November 13 *Unigram* column, he noted the coup attempts against Corazon Aquino; he concluded: "Is the Philippines our Next Vietnam? God forbid!"

¹⁶² "Morning Worship" order of service, January 25, 1988, "Orders of Service 1988" file, UUSS Archives; the document is a gift from the files of William Hamilton-Holway.

¹⁶³ William Hamilton-Holway, personal conversations with author, 2016. Unfortunately, a record of the study itself has not been located in UUSS Archives or the UUA Congregational Archives held at Meadville Lombard Theological School.

Annette Emery joined UUSS in 1986, after moving to Sacramento from Santa Cruz County, where she had been active in the local UU congregation. She had this recollection of Beaudreault: “He was so formal when he was preaching”; his sermons were “intellectual,” and did not reach her spiritually. “He just did not seem to connect well with people,” she said. Noting that some years later he came out of the closet as a gay man, she said, “Maybe he put a wall up between himself and others.” On the other hand, she said, when he played the piano at a service, he seemed to “let his hair” down and she, among others, felt a strong connection.¹⁶⁴

Like three other people I have interviewed, Emery recalled that Beaudreault’s wife and two children attended a Catholic church: “I saw them maybe twice.” She imagined this could have been difficult for him as a UU minister, and “people were talking about why he didn’t have his wife or children” at UUSS. Another member suggested that many were disappointed that the church had thought it was getting a minister and a young family but instead had only the minister most of the time. To be sure, ministerial candidates and congregations project many hopes onto one another when engaging in the courtship of a search process. It is worth noting that the denomination’s online form for search committees to submit (and ministerial applicants to read) about their congregation now asks the search committee this question: “What expectations, however silent, may there be about the minister’s family and personal life?”¹⁶⁵

On September 12, 1988, Beaudreault sent a brief resignation letter to the congregation: “I have accepted the call of the [church] in Rancho Palos Verdes...where I

¹⁶⁴ Annette Emery, interview with author, November 29, 2016. Quoted with permission.

¹⁶⁵ Unitarian Universalist Association, Ministerial Settlement System, “Congregational Record,” website accessed January 1, 2017, password protected.

did my ministerial internship and where I was ordained... almost a decade ago.”¹⁶⁶ This was Pacific Unitarian Church. Though it had a smaller membership than UUSS, this church featured a dramatic location overlooking a canyon and the ocean. In 1987 its long-term minister (and no doubt Beaudreault’s internship supervisor and mentor) had retired after twenty-four years, and his wife passed away shortly thereafter. Beaudreault was called there following an interim minister’s service of one and a half years at that church. Beaudreault served at Pacific Unitarian Church from January 1989 until he resigned in summer of 1993.¹⁶⁷ One of my interviewees at UUSS said, “I thought that he was only using us as a stepping stone to get back to Rancho Palos Verdes,” but after learning that he later came out of the closet, this member imagined he had been living with multiple sources of stress during his ministry at UUSS.¹⁶⁸

Dick Tarble had been the chair of the Search Committee that presented Rev. Beaudreault to the congregation in 1984, and he told me they have remained friends, lately keeping in contact via Facebook. I asked Dick and Georgene Tarble if they were aware of significant reasons for dissatisfaction in the relationship. Dick said: “Some people were not all that satisfied with his sermons.” With amusement and no sign of harshness, Georgene recalled that he had “used a sermon which he’d done before,” but when he came to an anachronistic date or seasonal reference in the text, “it caught him up.” She said, “The sermon was rehashed, but without enough hash.”¹⁶⁹ Noting that

¹⁶⁶ Don Beaudreault, letter to UUSS Congregation, September 12, 1988, UUSS Archives.

¹⁶⁷ “Pacific Unitarian Church,” Wikipedia, accessed November 26, 2016, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacific_Unitarian_Church. The church’s website does not include a history but the Wikipedia list of ministries appears to be complete and limited to facts which readers could verify.

¹⁶⁸ Anonymous, interview with author, November 2016.

¹⁶⁹ Dick Tarble and Georgene Tarble, interview with author, November 28, 2016. Quoted with permission.

Beaudreault's wife and children had attended a Roman Catholic church, Dick said that the minister's wife had participated in some activities at UUSS, but she "just wasn't a full-fledged member," and some at UUSS were disparaging or gossipy about that. Dick said: "This is where I fault [our] congregation."¹⁷⁰ Indeed, it is notable that his wife at the time was a Filipina native, and this congregation has always reflected the dominant culture—white and middle class. Perhaps she felt more at home elsewhere, and if she detected a judgmental tone at UUSS, she would no doubt feel even less comfortable being at the church where her husband served. (Chapter Three looks at social class in the congregation.)

Beaudreault's 1988 resignation letter to the Sacramento congregation did not mention any problems or challenges in his relationship with the church. Nor did it celebrate any shared accomplishments. He closed it thus: "I wish each one of you the best."¹⁷¹ The topic of his sermon for September 13 was listed as transitions, life changes, and Jungian psychology. In his column in the newsletter later that month, Beaudreault encouraged participation in focus groups of the UUSS Long Range Planning Committee, and he appealed for donations to two liberal religious international relief projects. He did not mention his resignation.

There is often archival evidence of strains in the ministerial relationship when a UUSS minister had only a brief tenure or a troubling departure. However, according to Beaudreault's interim minister successor, many members may not have known of any tensions. After nine months of interim service at the Society, Rev. Eileen Karpeles wrote

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁷¹ Don Beaudreault, letter to UUSS congregation, September 12, 1988, UUSS Archives.

this: “My experience has been that the vast majority here are unaware of Don’s dissatisfaction with them—or theirs with him.”¹⁷² While it seems paradoxical to say most members were unaware of their dissatisfaction with their minister, my interpretation of her statement is that most of them were not aware that there was a significant level of dissatisfaction among particular members, perhaps members of the Board of Trustees or other leaders. In his Annual Report in June 1987, nearly a year and a half before he would resign, Beaudreault expressed “great appreciation and love for ‘you and UU.’” He also said: “We need to be about structuring ourselves...to perform the nurturing and caring aspects of a loving” but varied group of people, and urging a “concerted, communal effort so that [social justice] evils might be addressed and changed.” He wrote, “I believe that we can have a broader effect if more of us supported our church with more time, energy, and financial resource, [yet] we cannot at present....”¹⁷³

It is worth noting that neither his newsletter columns nor his reports to the Board of Trustees appear to engage with or even bring up a congregational culture of mistrust and hostility which had been a subject of great urgency by the interim minister who preceded him (Gilmartin) and would be for the one who would follow him (Karpeles). However, while serving UUSS Beaudreault had articulated his ambitions for the congregation, and he pointed to its accomplishments and potential with enthusiasm. It could be that he was hoping any conflict-based problems would fade away with time; perhaps the idea of confronting them openly seemed like a distraction from his primary interests and goals as a minister. In more recent decades, parish clergy have made use of

¹⁷² Eileen Karpeles, “Evaluation of Congregation by Minister,” September 18, 1989, UUSS Archives.

¹⁷³ Donald Beaudreault, “Minister’s Annual Report,” Annual Report, July 1986-June 1987, UUSS Archives.

collegial coaches and personal consultants to help them navigate cultures of mistrust and to maintain their sense of personal boundaries and self-care in the midst of challenges to the authority of their position.

In months following notice of his resignation, Beaudreault did not mention his impending departure in his sermon descriptions or columns in the *Unigram* newsletter. In the weeks following his resignation letter, his sermon topics were T. S. Eliot's centennial, understanding Buddhism (in two parts), Eleanor Roosevelt and the United Nations (given with Barbara Lewis, wife of an emeritus minister), the Philippines, "Class/Caste in U.S. Society," "Perspectives on Peace," and the Goddess Fortuna (on New Year's Day 1989). In October 1988 an article he titled a "love letter" to Olympic athlete Florence Griffith Joyner appeared in the *Morality Exchange* newsletter insert.¹⁷⁴ Perhaps Beaudreault did not attend publicly to the traditions of ministerial leave-taking because he could find little to appreciate at UUSS. On the other hand, perhaps he was distracted by anticipation of his new settlement in January in Southern California.

In any case, UUSS lay leaders apparently moved on as well. The Board called a Congregational Meeting after church on November 6 to have members authorize the Board to hire an interim minister (rather than "rely on our own lay leadership"). Another meeting followed on the night of November 17 to hear about the settled minister search process from an area minister serving as the Ministerial Settlement Representative of the denomination.¹⁷⁵ At that meeting the congregation authorized both the hiring of an

¹⁷⁴ Don Beaudreault, "A Love Letter," *Morality Exchange*, October 1988, UUSS Archives.

¹⁷⁵ John Berke, UUSS President, *Unigram*, October 25, 1988, "Unigrams 1988," UUSS Archives.

interim minister and the establishment of a Settled Minister Search Committee (five members to be elected, two to be appointed by the Board).¹⁷⁶

Beaudreault and family departed after an evening reception on January 6, 1989, but Accredited Interim Minister Eileen B. Karpeles had arrived and received a welcome reception on Friday evening, December 30; she had come to find an apartment that weekend.¹⁷⁷ Typically interim ministers are appointed and hired by a congregation's board or by a committee to which the board would delegate that role, and interim clergy are not called by a congregation the way settled ministers are. Hence it seems unusual in this case that there was a Congregational Meeting "to affirm her selection" after the service on Sunday, January 1--a service which Beaudreault led.¹⁷⁸ Perhaps the Board of Trustees did not wish to risk being second-guessed about its authority to hire an interim minister or it wanted to generate buy-in to her ministry.

5. The Good of the Whole Community: Rev. Eileen Karpeles, 1989-90

The first female-identified minister employed by the Society, Karpeles served as Interim Minister until the summer of 1990. Introducing her in the newsletter, lay leaders quoted Karpeles: "If the glue that holds any group together is this common value structure, it behooves us to pay attention to how we handle differences."¹⁷⁹ Much of her

¹⁷⁶ "The Search Begins," *Unigram*, November 11, 1988, "Unigrams 1988," UUSS Archives.

¹⁷⁷ "Farewell to Don and Family" and "Welcome to Eileen," *Unigram*, December 27, 1988, "Unigrams 1988," UUSS Archives.

¹⁷⁸ *Unigram*, December 20, 1988 (no title to the article), "Unigrams 1988," UUSS Archives.

¹⁷⁹ "Biography of Rev. Eileen Karpeles," *Unigram*, December 13, 1988, "Unigrams 1988," UUSS Archives.

ministry at UUSS would be devoted to how people handled and resolved their differences in church.

In February of 1990, Karpeles and the congregation expected there would be a settled minister candidate in a few months, and a new minister by fall, so she directed their attention to ensuring a successful ministerial relationship in the future. To describe her upcoming February 18 sermon on “Group Dynamics,” she wrote this: “The way in which [a minister’s] arrival is greeted does much to determine the success or failure of that ministry for many years to come.” She added, “The interaction among congregants (and staff members) affects a society’s ability to work toward implementing its goals and purposes.”¹⁸⁰ In her evaluation after nine months at UUSS, she wrote: “I am haunted by the LONG record of ministerial terminations at UUSS, and worry I’ll do... a disservice if I don’t increase congregational awareness. But no one else seems to feel it’s important.”¹⁸¹

In the March 1, 1990, *Unigram*, Karpeles wrote about the importance of taking the Pledge Kickoff Dinner seriously: “The whole ploy—‘If you don’t do it my way I’ll pick up my marbles and go home!’—always amazes me when it comes from those as sophisticated about democratic process as UUs tend to be.”¹⁸² As noted in Chapter Eight, the emphasis on the wishes or agendas of individuals as more important than a shared

¹⁸⁰ Eileen Karpeles, “Notes from a Journeywoman,” *Unigram*, February 8, 1990, “Unigrams 1990,” UUSS Archives.

¹⁸¹ Karpeles, “Evaluation of Congregation by Minister, September 18, 1989,” “Unigrams 1990,” UUSS Archives.

¹⁸² Karpeles, “Notes from a Journeywoman,” *Unigram*, March 1, 1990, “Unigrams 1990,” UUSS Archives.

purpose and congregational well-being was central to some of the congregation's painful controversies.

In September of 1989, nine months or half way through her ministry, Karpeles completed an evaluation of the interim ministry, reflecting on herself and the congregation. She stated, "I have been much too prone to initiate corrective action on my own, rather than waiting for the Board to become aware of needs and decide how to deal with them."¹⁸³ This concern is also reflected in several of her Board reports, which urge members to step forward in leadership and work on ideas for improving church life.

The evaluation asked about the relative priorities of minister and congregation regarding "improving [their] skills in dealing with conflict." Karpeles responded, "Less importance [was] put on this by leadership than by individuals in non-leadership positions." (This observation may indicate the isolation of lay officials from other members regarding the pulse of UUSS life.) For Karpeles, this goal was a "high priority." She had given a two-part conflict-management workshop for the Society on six separate occasions and had written newsletter columns about organizational health.¹⁸⁴

In June of 1990 Karpeles reflected on the changes undertaken and challenges remaining for UUSS in her four-page final report as the Accredited Interim Minister. She said her initial impression (eighteen months earlier) had been one of "a strong congregation [with] very poor skills in coping with the wide diversity of values.... [and] a low level of trust in one another, [and] non-productive ways of dealing with the disagreements which our diversity always generates." Rather than a widespread

¹⁸³ Karpeles, "Evaluation of Congregation by Minister," September 18, 1989, UUSS Archives.

¹⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

commitment to the congregation as a whole, she said, she had observed that members' "loyalty, in many cases, was to a small subgroup.... [with] strong distrust of congregants who were outside one's 'tribe.'" Language of "we" and "they" was common in the Society, she said.

Over their year and a half together, she had seen "a real turnaround." For example, in recent Congregational Meetings, "people [had] been very responsive to one another." She applauded "the good will with which extra money was generated to increase the salary of the next minister."¹⁸⁵ She made recommendations in nine areas of church life, including making use of the "preventive medicine" offered by the Conflict Management Team at USS, such as training sessions, process observers, and "interrupting deliberations, in any setting, when tempers start to rise."¹⁸⁶

In addition to her efforts to promote community-building social activities, Karpeles made a point of making herself easily available to greet worshipers after a service. Starting at least by April 8, 1990, and lasting as late as August 27, a standing announcement in the Order of Service read, "The minister will be standing [in the center aisle in the rear] for those who would like to greet her."¹⁸⁷ This is remarkable to me, who cannot recall attending a Protestant or UU church service (or leading a service) after which the minister or speaker was not present for a receiving line. Perhaps she had already been following this practice but knew some clergy did not follow it; she may have wanted to set an example that clergy should be available to receive as many people

¹⁸⁵ Eileen Karpeles, "Final Report" of interim ministry, June 1990, USS Archives.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁷ Orders of Service; April 8, 29; August 13, 20, 27, "Orders of Service 1990" file, USS Archives.

as possible. On the other hand, perhaps Karpeles wanted to make a point that her attention after a service should not be taken up by only a few lay leaders or any kind of church business.

Annette Emery had joined UUSS in 1986. She has recalled that in that era there was “a very divided board. Money was tight.” Noting that there was a need in 1990 to fund the ministerial Search Committee, she recalled hostility by some lay leaders to paying for a religious education (RE) professional. However, she said, “Eileen made it really clear that we were going to support RE.”¹⁸⁸

In the spring of 1990, the Settled Minister Search Committee told the congregation the disappointing news that its preferred and invited candidate had decided not to come to Sacramento to meet the congregation. Since Karpeles was already anticipating her departure in the summer, the Board appointed a team to select a new interim minister. It selected the Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong, another Accredited Interim Minister (“accredited” signals having additional training and a commitment to transitional ministries).

6. An Assembled Picture of the UU Society in 1990

The Settled Minister Search Committee assembled a three-ring binder (“search packet”) to introduce itself to prospective candidates. This included copies of the newsletter, annual report, guides to activities and committees, program listings, budgets, and a summary of the congregational survey completed in anticipation of the ministerial

¹⁸⁸ Emery, *op. cit.*

search. Compiled in the fall of 1990, the packet included the following statistics for UUSS shown in the following table:

Table 4.2 Statistics about the UU Society from the 1990 Ministerial Search Packet

Members	460	Average Service Attendance	248
Average Religious Education Attendance (children and youth)			43
Annual Operating Budget	\$247, 313		
Amount Pledged	\$162,276	Pledge Units	353
Average Pledge	\$460		

The survey had been conducted in January 1989. Compared to the internal summary of the survey provided to the congregation, the search packet’s summary (i.e., what prospective applicants would see) left out the point that, in spite of anonymity, fifty of the respondents had refused to answer a question about their annual gross income. The summary in the packet also provided less information on responses to what some have called “the Affirmative Action question.” It noted that the church was prepared to welcome a candidate of desired gifts and skills, regardless of personal identity (gender, ethnicity, sexual orientation). This may have been largely true, but Ginny Johnson told me that the survey had revealed a minority portion of the respondents in the congregation would be “uncomfortable” with having a minister who was lesbian or gay. She said, “I hadn’t even thought about that as something to be concerned about.”¹⁸⁹ A person who had served on the Search Committee that conducted the survey has told me that at least one committee member spoke with hostility about the idea of considering a gay or lesbian

¹⁸⁹ Ginny Johnson, interview with author, November 11, 2016. Quoted with permission.

applicant for the settled ministry position.¹⁹⁰ However, the Accredited Interim Minister who had just arrived in August of 1990 (when the Search Committee was still operating) was openly gay.

The updated version of the search packet included a letter from that new Accredited Interim Minister, the Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong. He wrote, “The people of this congregation... are diverse... committed and... excited about our movement.” Calling UUSS a “large church,” he said, “Ministry here is more than a pastoral presence.” They “expect more ministerial presence in administration, in committee organization, in supervision.” In addition to wanting pastoral care and strong sermons, the congregation hoped the minister would “be part of [the] leadership team and bring a ministerial presence to the entire operation of the church.”¹⁹¹

Under “Our Visions,” the packet said in the long range, the Society aspired to...

- develop a mission and covenant statement;
- establish a Church Council as a one-year pilot project;
- start a new congregation to serve the greater Sacramento area;
- redesign the buildings;
- hire a full-time music director;
- expand Religious Education; and
- reduce dependence on fundraisers, down from twenty-seven percent to twenty percent of the congregation’s budget.

7. The Candidate Who Didn’t Come

An insert in the Order of Service for Sunday May 6, 1990, announced: “June 3 through 10 will be our candidating week with the Rev. Arthur Wilmot, accompanied by his wife, Heather. The Search Committee welcomes your ideas for events, special

¹⁹⁰ Anonymous, interview with author, November 2016.

¹⁹¹ Douglas Morgan Strong, letter, October 1990, Search Packet, UUSS Archives.

meetings, particular people they should meet or other opportunities [to get acquainted].” The blank form included lines for suggestions and one for a signature.¹⁹² Arthur Wilmot (1937-2014) had been serving at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Corvallis, Oregon, since 1981. According to his obituary, he also had served in Corvallis earlier as a “one-year minister” in 1979. After seminary graduation from Tufts University in 1962, he served the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Chico, about ninety miles north of Sacramento. Among his other ministries, he had worked as an addictions counselor before resuming parish work. His obituary notes that he retired in 1996 and later was named *minister emeritus* by the Corvallis congregation; hence he continued serving there at least five more years after he withdrew his candidacy from Sacramento.¹⁹³ I have not located specific information about why he did not go to Sacramento as its candidate in June of 1990. It is conceivable that he withdrew because of the Sacramento congregation’s reputation for antagonism and hostile interactions among its members. For example, at the time of another ministerial search, nearly a decade later, USS Board President Rich Howard told the congregation, “Three ministerial applicants have removed their names from this year’s search process because of our reputation for conflict or perceived inability to move forward.”¹⁹⁴

However, unless the Search Committee members had misunderstood that Rev. Wilmot was not yet prepared to be their candidate, it is unlikely that he would have

¹⁹² Order of Service, May 6, 1990, “Orders of Service 1990,” USS Archives.

¹⁹³ “Rev. Arthur Dean Wilmot,” *Peninsula Daily News*, September 6, 2013 (accessed November 28, 2016). <http://www.legacy.com/obituaries/peninsuladailynews/obituary.aspx?pid=166813826>. See also Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association, “In Memory of the Rev. Arthur D. Wilmot,” (accessed November 28, 2016): <http://www.uuma.org/blogpost/569858/183165/In-Memory-of---Arthur-D-Wilmot-1937-2013>

¹⁹⁴ Rich Howard, “President’s Letter,” *Unigram*, April 2000, “Unigrams 2000,” USS Archives.

allowed them to announce him as such if he still had reservations about the congregation. One glimpse comes from the words of Douglas Morgan Strong. Looking back on why he had been appointed by UUSS as its Accredited Interim Minister in the wake of this event, Strong wrote that “eleventh-hour negotiations with the candidate your Search Committee had selected came to a stalemate and there was no candidate.” With good humor, Strong wrote this many months later: “When I arrived last August, I was literally the last person you wanted.” However, he said, “I knew it was nothing personal.”¹⁹⁵

8. A Creative Challenger: Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong, 1990-1991

Current lay leaders at UUSS have recalled that Strong and his male partner rented a large, historic home in Midtown Sacramento. The couple hosted several church activities, including staff parties, UUSS gay/lesbian discussions and potlucks, and a 1991 New Year’s Day open house for members and their children. Strong reported 275 guests over the four hours of that party on January 1.¹⁹⁶

Among other aspects of his ministry at UUSS, Strong worked with Church Administrator Patti Lawrence on the Volunteer Development Committee. Lay leaders also recall his involvement with computer and administrative systems at the church and the devotion of his talents to aesthetic matters at the church. In particular, he is remembered for regularly changing the physical environment for worship. For a congregation used to a regular worship setting in the Auditorium (sanctuary), Strong brought various thematic decorations--and frequent rearrangement of the chairs. Ginny

¹⁹⁵ Douglas Morgan Strong, Minister’s Report, Annual Report 1990-91, UUSS Archives.

¹⁹⁶ “Board Highlights,” *Unigram*, January 4, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

Johnson said, “He was wonderful with the way the church was set up. He had it different every time.” The church used sturdy metal and fabric folding chairs, so rearrangements were manageable, but Johnson said she imagined the facility staff found it burdensome.¹⁹⁷ In the newsletter, Strong noted that the Lounge (foyer) was too crowded during coffee hour. He made a request for Sunday worshipers in the last three rows to fold their chairs after the service and carry them to the storage room where others would store them on racks.¹⁹⁸ Later *Unigrams* show this request was published during the rest of his ministry at UUSS.

During Strong’s ministry, Iraq invaded Kuwait and the United States went to war in Iraq. He addressed the war in a number of ways. He wrote, “This week we entered the war and remembered Martin Luther King.” He lamented “the violence of protestors and rioting” and noted “the need to call our leaders to task.”¹⁹⁹ He also informed the church how an eighteen-year-old could register with the Selective Service as a Conscientious Objector (CO) in case a draft would be reinstated. He said young men should make sure to file a copy of the CO form with him and send one to denominational headquarters.²⁰⁰

He wrote that many, like him, were “feeling powerless and conflicted about the war.... Yet we all have family members now serving in Saudi Arabia.” He announced a special evening service in a UUSS classroom on Tuesday, February 12, 1991. He said it

¹⁹⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.*

¹⁹⁸ Douglas Morgan Strong, “The Hordes, the Crowds,” *Unigram*, January 17, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

¹⁹⁹Strong, “A Strong Opinion,” *Unigram*, January 17, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰⁰Strong, “Conscientious Objection and the Gulf War,” *Unigram*, January 24, 1991, UUSS Archives.

would be “a circle of healing” and “a forum to share feelings, without judgment.”²⁰¹ Perhaps he was disappointed in his hopes for a genuine exchange. That is, in a subsequent newsletter article, Strong made a plea “that we don’t fall in to the trap of believing everyone here thinks alike.... Those who support the war are just as valuable Unitarian Universalists as those who object to the war. When we don’t hear these expressions, we must ask whether we have created an atmosphere in which diversity is not permitted.”²⁰²

As had the interim ministers before him, Strong highlighted the harsh dynamics and tone of interactions in the Society. He emphasized the need for more direct and gracious communication, and for kindness. For example, in December 1990, Strong wrote, “Thank you is a rare gift we can offer one another. It speaks of appreciation [and] affirms we are cared for.”²⁰³ Strong printed an apology for having misspoken unkindly in a meeting about the now deceased Beth Bennett’s suggestion that members bring their own tableware to monthly church dinners. He apologized to her by name and explained what he had meant to say instead. He regretted the “discomfort” his comments may have caused anyone. He said, “I hope you will forgive me.”²⁰⁴

In a newsletter column Strong wrote about the “abuse” some worshipers made of the candle-lighting or “Sharings” time in the service by making political and church

²⁰¹ Strong, “A Special Circle of Healing Service,” *Unigram*, January 31, 1991, UUSS Archives.

²⁰² Strong, “A Message from Our Minister,” *Unigram*, February 22, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰³ Strong, “A Strong Opinion,” *Unigram*, December 1990, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰⁴ Strong, “I Want to Set Things Straight,” *Unigram*, January 31, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

announcements. Noting he had heard complaints about it, he said, “Some suggested a Conflict Management Team for Sharings!” Hesitant to “make rules,” he said, “please consider this: If in doubt, don’t!”²⁰⁵

Often interim ministers launch experiments in areas of theology, education, community building, or social action, especially if a congregation has no recent experience in a particular area. For example, Strong and his partner hosted gay/lesbian discussion groups and potlucks, and he publicized the annual convocation of UUs for Lesbian and Gay Concerns (later named Interweave). At the church he hosted a few sessions for exploring Unitarian Universalist Christianity, hoping to see if a regular group might emerge as a local version of the national organization known as the UU Christian Fellowship. Attendance was as high as nine at one session but nobody attended one later session, and no ongoing group was launched. While this may reflect the relatively small number of UUSS congregants who felt curious about or fed by liberal Christianity, there is no written evidence of a strong reaction against his program within the largely Humanist (non-theist) membership.²⁰⁶

Speaking of Karpeles and Strong, Ginny Johnson recalled: “Both [of the interim ministers] helped us grow up a little bit [and helped] us move from the small-church mentality.”²⁰⁷ Strong’s describing UUSS as “a large church” notwithstanding, Strong also cautioned the congregation against “falling victim to the numbers game” in church life. He said: “Thinking that bigger is better... may not make us nicer.... We may become

²⁰⁵ Strong, “A Strong Opinion,” *Unigram*, January 31, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰⁶ *Unigram*, March 8, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.*

pugnacious and catty.” He said the church had too much work to do and “too many people to help” to be distracted by such a performance goal.²⁰⁸

In April 1991, as his time neared its conclusion, Strong wrote, “I am excited that my colleague John Young is your ministerial candidate.” Noting that the Young family would be guests at his rented house during the ministerial candidating week, while Strong and his partner went out of state, he said this “marks an impressive savings to the church budget,” over having to host them in a hotel.²⁰⁹

Given the last-minute loss of the Search Committee’s selected candidate in 1990, the search team had worked together for two and a half years, one extra year over the typical search process’s duration. The committee of nine volunteers had lost two members and gained two replacements. Moreover, it had considered over forty potential candidates and brought six ministers or co-ministry pairs to town for weekend-long interviews. They had also talked with ten potential candidates at the denomination’s General Assembly in June 1989. Finally, they had a candidate to present to the congregation in Sacramento.²¹⁰

Chapter Five covers Rev. John Young’s ministry at UUSS, a tenure which included the Society’s ventures of two part-time specialized ministries (led by Rev. Richelle Russell and the Rev. Dr. Shirley Ranck). It also recounts the dynamics of controversy and Young’s resignation, and the later service of Ranck and then the interim

²⁰⁸ Strong, “A Strong Opinion,” *Unigram*, February 22, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²⁰⁹ Strong, “A Strong Opinion,” *Unigram*, April 5, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²¹⁰ “Ministerial Search Committee” report in the 1990-91 Annual Report, UUSS Archives.

ministry of a couple, Rev. Sydney Wilde and Rev. Dennis Daniel. Chapter Six looks at the culture of mistrust and conflict illuminated by a series of interim clergy in the 1980s.

Chapter Five

Ministries in the 1990s: Ambitious Ventures in Specialized Ministries, Progress Derailed amid Conflict, and Interim Ministry by a Clergy Couple

1. The Ministry of the Rev. Dr. John Young, 1991-98

The congregation's annual meeting on May 19, 1991, lasted thirty-six minutes, including approval of a budget. USS Board President Jack Davidson said that achieving the hoped-for "maximum" budget would take an increase of seventy-five dollars per pledging unit and announced his own increase of \$100. At the meeting, fifteen members added \$2,689 in pledges. The minutes would be published in the *Unigram* so absent parishioners could read of the "chance to increase pledging." In so doing, Board Secretary Polly Watson said, "Please consider this very carefully so we can start out a great year with John Young."²¹¹

In the prior month, the Search Committee was happy to introduce Young as its candidate by way of a thick newsletter insert with a schedule of meetings for Candidating Week. With an interest in world religions and membership in peace organizations, Young had served thirteen years at the church in Paramus, New Jersey, and earlier for six years in Bloomington, Indiana. He was a Kansas native and a graduate of Meadville Lombard Theological School, a UU seminary affiliated at the time with the Divinity School at the University of Chicago. The latter school also granted him a concurrent

²¹¹ Minutes of Congregational Meeting, May 19, 1991, "Board of Trustees December 1991-June 1991," USS Archives.

master of arts degree. The committee said, “He has a strong intellectual, philosophical, analytical bent. . . . At the same time, he is a ‘people person.’” It noted that he and his wife (Madhavi Young, who had a master’s degree in economics) had two “impressive children,” whose interests and accomplishments Young also mentioned in his written greeting and later in occasional newsletter articles or Board reports.²¹² Regarding his “ideas and hopes” for the ministry, he wrote: “By the end of my third year, I would like for UUSS to have a second full-time minister.” He also recognized “that UUSS is already committed to the new South Sacramento neighbor, UUCC.”²¹³ (Chapter Seven discusses that new congregation.)

At the end of a week of meetings and preaching on two Sundays, the congregation would vote. On April 14, his sermon was “Everyday Miracles?” and on the day of the vote, April 21, he preached “Roots and Wings.” The weekly UUSS Forum discussion still took place at 9:30 a.m., with a UUSS member speaking about solar-box cookers on April 14 and a guest speaker on the environment and the United Nations the next week, on the day of the vote.²¹⁴ After the latter service the members voted by an overwhelming margin to call him. Young and his family²¹⁵ would arrive in Sacramento in late summer to start his settled ministry.

²¹² *Unigram*, April 5, 1991, insert, “Unigrams 1991,” UUSS Archives.

²¹³ *Ibid*

²¹⁴ *Unigram*, various dates, UUSS Archives.

²¹⁵ Madhavi Young had grown up in India. They had a school-age daughter and son. As she recounted later in a transcribed interview with Evelyn Watters, Mrs. Young was undergoing cancer treatment during the ministerial search season and it continued in the family’s first year in Sacramento.

His tenure was marked by growth in membership and program initiatives, such as a Pastoral Care team, and by Young's local interfaith participation and involvement with the Unitarian Universalist Pacific Central District and collegial activities. He also traveled overseas to liberal religious conferences. He had an active interest in nonviolence, including gun violence reduction and international peace. He included a letter to the congregation in the Order of Service for Sunday, December 6, 1992, urging members to make visible their commitments to nonviolence during the holiday season.²¹⁶ His tone in church reports and newsletter columns was generally full of pride, optimism and ambition for the congregation under his ministry.

For example, in his Board report dated April 18, 1992, Young mentioned plans for achieving membership of 550; indeed, they had certified 532 members to the denomination in January. He said, "My hoped-for 100 new members during my first year with you is still possible." He expressed hope also for enough special donations not only to fund and expand the Music Director position (soon to be held by church member Mary Howard) but also to hire the Rev. Richelle Russell, a recent seminary graduate and neighbor to the church, for a half-time position. The Board did vote to confirm a contract with Mary Howard as Music Director and to commit to a contract for half-time ministry by Russell, who would focus on ministry to younger adults at UUSS and the Sacramento State University campus, as well as a children's advocacy project. Both hires were made possible by a 100-person donor appeal at UUSS known as "\$100 by 100" plus denominational matching grants for the young adult ministry and a UU Service Committee grant for advocacy work.

²¹⁶ John Young, Order of Service insert, December 6, 1992, "Orders of Service 1992," UUSS Archives.

These bold moves called for more giving to the overall budget. At its April 23 meeting, the Board approved a full-page letter to be sent to those who had not yet renewed or made a pledge for the coming fiscal year, which would begin July 1. The Congregational Meeting was already scheduled for May 3, but that did not leave enough time to present a final budget proposal, so a second session would be needed. The packet for the May 3 meeting included a 1992-1993 budget proposal--five pages in length! Treasurer T. Leslie Corbin wrote that financial pledges were up by 11.8 percent, making the recent canvass for pledges “the most successful in years.” Nevertheless, due to “creative ideas” and “ambitious plans,” he was presenting both a “growth” budget and a “bare bones” alternative budget. As planned, the May 3 meeting was recessed until May 31 for a final vote on an amended budget, allowing time for contributors to respond and lay leaders to prepare a budget. In eighty-five minutes on May 31, UUSS members voted on four separate individual sections of the budget: business services (including a trial period of publishing only a monthly newsletter), capital outlay, Religious Education, and the remainder of the budget. All parts were approved.

In his June 18, 1992, report to the Board, Young said, “I am very pleased with my first year of ministry at UUSS.” Noting ninety-six new members had joined since he started serving UUSS, he said, “Our net increase makes us one of the fastest growing UU congregations in the country.” He was apologetic about what he saw as his own slow response to correspondence and his inability to visit as many parishioners in homes or institutions as he would have liked. To enhance his ministry, he looked forward to “more

secretarial support, pastoral volunteers, [his] use of the office computers, ... and, in the long run, ... an Associate Minister.”²¹⁷

Unfortunately, the stress between ministerial and congregational personalities would lead to a painful parting in the eighth year of this ministry. Yet signs of that stress were evident as early as the first year. In March of 1992, Young reported to the Board that pastoral visits, meetings, and phone calls alone took about fifty hours a week. In addition to that and preparing and leading worship and memorial services, he participated in “community ministerial meetings and denominational affairs” and spent time keeping up on current affairs. Noting he had heard members’ concerns of “burn out” on his part, he assured the Board that he was devoting time to family, exercise, and amenities of the local area. He regretted he was not keeping up with replies to many letters or “more than 50 phone calls a week.” (This was before parish ministers began to receive most inquiries through the internet, which in my experience has not improved the sense of always running behind in responding to correspondence.) Young expressed his hopes for an increase in congregants’ giving so that USS could fund more secretarial hours and more of “the wonderful variety of programs we are contemplating.”²¹⁸

Also in March 1992, he said that “the most difficult part of ministry is that some people are so ready to take affront. They appreciate strong views... and proactive leadership... as long as these characteristics do not much challenge their comfortable assumptions.... [particularly] in relation to their pledges and volunteer service.” He

²¹⁷ John Young, report to Board, June 18, 1992, “Board of Trustees January 1992-June 1992,” USS Archives.

²¹⁸ John Young, Minister’s Report March 26, 1992, “Board of Trustees Minutes Jan. 1992-June 1992,” USS Archives.

concluded, “Their own pastoral needs are presumed paramount, others’ seem... a wasteful extravagance on the part of their minister.”²¹⁹

In January 1997, the congregation certified an adult membership of 507 people in its report to the denomination—a decline from five years earlier but more than the 486 members when Young had arrived in 1991. In May of 1997, Young wrote of numerous reasons for pride in the congregation, including “the most successful religious education attendance in more than two decades.” On one hand, he shared praise generously, saying that “hundreds of you are doing your best to create... the congregation of your dreams.”²²⁰ On the other hand, there is evidence that his dreams for growth and success were at least as great as the congregation’s. More than one member has made comments to me echoing this anonymous one in an interview with a lay leader, who told me that Young had “wanted a large church and saw his importance as too hooked up in ... how big it was.”²²¹ Another recalled to me that Young’s sermons had come across as negative, and he seemed controlling. Due in part to her feelings about his tone, she chose to follow some of her friends who had left to found the UU Community Church of Sacramento.²²²

In his report to the Board on August 22, 1997, Young spoke of “some exciting evidence of good congregational health.” At the same time, he revealed the existence of

²¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²²⁰ John Young, Minister’s Report, USS Annual Report 1996-1997, May 1997, “Annual Reports” file, USS Archives.

²²¹ Anonymous, interview with author, November 2016.

²²² Anonymous, personal interview with author, November 2016.

problems: “I will also work with the Committee on Ministry²²³ on continuing ‘communication’ concerns, and I expect to work with the Conflict Resolution Committee, both to help try to resolve [individuals’] problems, and to develop proactive strategies to make future problems less likely.” He anticipated “a productive and creative autumn at UUSS. It is good to be working with you.”

Young went through significant changes in his family life during his time at UUSS: divorce and remarriage. It is unclear when Dr. Young’s marriage to Madhavi Young ended in divorce, but it continued at least until 1994. This announcement appeared in the Order of Service for September 20, 1992: “The flowers for this morning’s service are in honor of Madhavi Pandya Young on the occasion of our 25th Wedding Anniversary, September 24.” Another flower tribute appeared for the service of September 25, 1994.²²⁴ On October 13, 1994, Evelyn Watters conducted an oral history interview with Mrs. Young, the minister’s wife; it was the program at the Women’s Alliance (part of an interview series for the Alliance, covered in Chapter Two and no impending divorce was mentioned in that interview.

However, in Young’s newsletter column in late spring of 1995, he mentioned that his son (by then at Stanford University) and his daughter (in high school) were away on school-related travels, leaving him in the house with only his daughter’s cat and “my housemate, Madhavi.”²²⁵ I have not read of an earlier statement by Rev. Young that they

²²³ The Committee on Ministry is a group of members appointed to be a confidential sounding board and advisers to the minister.

²²⁴ Order of Service, September 20, 1992, and September 25, 1994, “Orders of Service 1992,” and “Orders of Service 1994,” respectively, UUSS Archives.

²²⁵ John Young, “Minister’s Note,” *Unigram*, May-June 1995, “Unigrams 1995,” UUSS Archives.

had separated or divorced, so this mention could have been his way of disclosing that change to the congregation. It is possible that the fast pace and many hours of Young's ministry added stress on the marriage, but I have not read any mention of that or a direct announcement of the divorce. It is also conceivable that John Young's divorce from Madhavi or his later marriage to a woman who was his parishioner at UUSS was upsetting to lay leaders.²²⁶ However, as will be seen below, documents of the conflicted ministerial relationship do not include mention of such concerns, so it is unclear what role his family situation played in church life, or vice versa.

In his Board report of August 1997, Young told the Board, "Kathleen [Moran] and I will be married at UUSS at 10:00 a.m., October 4th. I do hope you and your intimate circle will be there."²²⁷ (Moran had joined UUSS in October of 1991, soon after Young's arrival.) On Sunday, October 5, the guest preacher at UUSS would be the Rev. William Schulz, recent past president of the denomination. Presumably he officiated at or least attended the minister's wedding on the day before.²²⁸ Young and his new wife had originally asked, in lieu of gifts, that donations be directed to the Ministerial Discretionary Fund. Later he made the request to the Board that the funds be reallocated to the Pastoral Ministry Fund to fund the position that the Rev. Dr. Shirley Ranck had

²²⁶ While Madhavi Young was married to the minister before they moved to Sacramento, his next wife had been his parishioner before she and Young were married.

²²⁷ Young, Minister's Report to Board, August 22, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

²²⁸ Young, Minister's Report to the Board, September 19, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

begun serving in October. The Board voted to deny this reallocation, “pursuant to previously established Board policy regarding gifts.”²²⁹

Young’s personal life was full of new promise and his vision for a second minister was near to coming true, as Ranck had been appointed for a half-time pastoral ministry. (See Section 3, below.) Jackie Graham had been serving as the Director of Religious Education (DRE) since before his arrival, and attendance of children and youth was strong. Writing after his brief honeymoon in October, he wrote to the Board: “I believe it is fair to say that my sermons this autumn have been particularly relevant, focused, practical, and inspiring for the good crowds that have chosen to attend.”²³⁰

Yet Young’s tenure at UUSS was heading to a hard ending. In a recent interview, one lay leader recalled that Young “came off as strong and demanding.” He was “not really good with being questioned,” and “not particularly politically astute.”²³¹ At lunchtime on October 13, 1997, Young and Graham, the DRE, approached a sixteen-year-old church youth in the UUSS parking lot. Then he approached her mother waiting in her car and asked her to turn off the car so they all could talk. Concerned about the slow development of the church’s youth group, Young questioned the youth about progress being made in developing the group, as she was its facilitator. Evidence from Young’s and Graham’s accounts indicate that the manner of his questioning was hostile. Later that same day Young wrote to the mother and daughter separate letters of remorse.

²²⁹ Minutes of Board meeting, December 19, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²³⁰ John Young, Minister’s Report to the Board, October 1997 (for the meeting of October 23), “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²³¹ Anonymous, interview with author, November 2016.

He apologized, tried to explain his intentions, and made practical suggestions for building the youth group. He expressed his love and respect for the family and hoped that his letters would “get us back on track.”²³² Unfortunately, the family had already decided to leave the church.

In writing her two-page resignation letter, the mother said that she and her daughter were “verbally abused and attacked.” The mother resigned from the Endowment Committee; her husband resigned from the Property Management Committee, and they both resigned from the church on October 14.²³³ They had been the only adult advisors for the high school youth group, and their daughter had been the group’s facilitator.²³⁴ The Religious Education Committee wrote to the chair of the Committee on Ministry to express concern, frustration, and anger at the interchange and its fallout, and requested a meeting with the Committee on Ministry.²³⁵ The DRE submitted a letter of resignation from her job, asserting that she could not continue to serve with a minister whose “anger is so out of control that he continues to offend congregants.”²³⁶ Though she had “seen some improvement over the years [in Young’s

²³² John Young, letters to Eroca Nichols and Rhodea Nichols, October 13, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²³³ Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, “Continuing Membership Count,” October 23, 1997, Board of Trustees July ’97-December ’97, UUSS Archives. All citations of UUSS membership statistics come from one of these reports, which were included with the minutes of nearly every Board meeting.

²³⁴ Jackie Graham, Report to the Board, October 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²³⁵ Shirley True, letter to Lance Ryen and the Committee on Ministry, November 5, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²³⁶ Minutes of Board meeting, November 20, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

behavior]... the improvement [had] not proved enough. This time he verbally abused, attacked and tried to induce guilt in a child.”²³⁷

In closing, Graham urged the Board to ask for Young’s resignation. (She was urged by Board members to stay in the position while the Board explored the matter and then while USS looked for her successor. She was put under the supervision of the Board’s Executive Committee instead of the Minister. She continued as DRE until early 1998.²³⁸) She attached a copy of a letter from herself to Young, also dated November 5, and asked that it be kept attached to her resignation letter as part of her file, which it was. Her letter directly urged him to resign to “do what’s best for the future of the church.” She said it had taken too much of her time to deal with pain or concerns that his negative pattern of behavior had caused among Religious Education volunteers. She said she feared that the Committee on Ministry would “excuse you and try once again to work with your abrasive, controlling manner.”²³⁹

The archives include a memo from the church President to the Board of Trustees about their winter retreat, coming up on Saturday, November 22, with an agenda to review goals set at the summer retreat (goals regarding communication, fundraising, and a new church constitution), to consider strategic planning for the next five years and to discuss plans for the church during Young’s upcoming sabbatical. Both ministers would be present, as would the Business Administrator (a church member of long standing who

²³⁷ Jackie Graham, memo to Carrie Cornwell (USS President), November 5, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” USS Archives.

²³⁸ Graham, memo to Carrie Cornwell, November 14, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” USS Archives.

²³⁹ Graham, letter to John Young, November 5, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” USS Archives.

had been Board President before being hired for this job).²⁴⁰ There is not a record of the retreat, but given the ongoing crisis over Young's ministry, the meeting was no doubt burdened by feelings of tension, pain, and uncertainty in many of the participants. Furthermore, it seems likely that the Board of Trustees had many conversations among themselves and with members about the crisis.

On November 19, 1997, Young wrote an apology to the Board and tried to explain his behaviors. He wrote, "I know that some people perceive [my] persistent persuasion as being manipulative. Yes, I do get impatient.... because this congregation has been putting up with serious misbehaviors on the part of individuals, groups and committees for many years." Noting a "refrain" about him that he was defensive, he said that "most people defend themselves when criticized." He recounted the ways he had supported Graham and the Religious Education program over his six and a half years at UUSS. Since Graham would be leaving, he said, "you do not have the option of keeping her by firing me." He noted the congregation's present "difficult situation," that some members were likely to resign in reaction to whichever course the Board would take. He wanted to renew the formal covenant and heal the ministerial relationship. He asked for "an opportunity to grow and heal with you."²⁴¹

On November 30, Young wrote to the congregation: "I have been accused by Jackie Graham of causing... suffering and pain." His typed, single-spaced letter of over three pages is filled with a painful confession, an appeal for a restoration of relationships,

²⁴⁰ Carrie Cornwell, memo to Board of Trustees (Winter Retreat Agenda attached), November 10, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

²⁴¹ John Young, letter to Board of Trustees, November 19, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

and some words of defensiveness. He described the encounter in the parking lot with the teen (who he noted was a friend of his daughter) and with her mother. He said that he later wrote them letters of remorse “at having asked them questions which angered them.” He said he was “aware that I have a sharp tongue, and I do feel remorse.” He committed himself to working on his behavior and expressed his hopes to continue serving UUSS after his planned sabbatical. He noted that in Graham’s letter of resignation and “condemnation,” the DRE had also listed his accomplishments and strengths. However, he said, it was clear that for six years of working under his supervision, Graham had “consistently withheld her feelings from [him]” and neglected to use proper and available channels in UUSS for feedback. She also had “nurtured over the years a state of deep discontent among her Religious Education Committee.” Her behavior, he said, was “unprofessional and morally suspect.”²⁴²

With a letter so charged going to the congregation, it would be unusual if no letters came from members expressing themselves about this crisis. The Board’s archives include letters from several members expressing support for Young’s continued ministry, particularly for his “intelligent” and “inspiring” sermons and his “welcoming attitude.” The late Helen Bradfield, a member for forty-nine years, gave her experience of “having five permanent and five interim ministers” at UUSS. Recalling that “four fellowships [had] been formed as the result of [dissatisfied members].”²⁴³ She said, “We do not need

²⁴²John Young, letter to Congregation, November 30, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²⁴³ While there is evidence that dissatisfaction with the Society was behind the formation of two new congregations, it is not clear that other new UU congregations in the area had been founded for that reason. Chapter Seven describes the relationship of UUSS to the formation of several congregations in its region.

to go through another period of upheaval involved in changing ministers....so let's support John Young." At the same time, the archives include letters from members angry about the "actions of the minister and his admirers" and some calls for action. The chair and members of the Religious Education Committee requested a congregational meeting on the question of retention of Young.²⁴⁴

Member and longtime Unitarian Jeannine Newcum wrote in late November 1997 that "the letter sent out by the Board [implied] that we all know what is going on. This is not true." Since joining in 1995, she said she had heard "complaints and innuendos about John Young. Each time I asked the person, 'Have you talked to John about this?' The answer... is no." She said the congregation was not doing well "in the communications field."²⁴⁵ Chapter Eight documents the efforts of lay leaders to foster more effective communication, especially with regard to disagreements in the congregation.

Young wrote a letter to the Board and Congregation on December 5, 1997. He noted that on November 22, 1997, the Board of Trustees wrote the congregation about the need for a series of discussion groups "to consider whether John Young retains the confidence of the congregation and what his status should be after the sabbatical." The UUSS Board placed him on administrative leave in December, and his sabbatical was planned to begin in January. He said, "I regret these behaviors" and disclosed that he was in counseling in order to improve. He offered "to meet with any member of UUSS who has a grievance with me in the Conflict Resolution process." He said, "If the Board and

²⁴⁴ Various authors, letters to the Board of Trustees, December 2, 4, 8, 15, 18, 21, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

²⁴⁵ Jeanine Newcum, letter to Board, November 30, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

congregation decided to continue with me as its minister, I would presume that there will be an annual evaluation process, and renewed covenant between the minister and the Board, that would serve as the basis for this evaluation.”²⁴⁶

Judy Bell said that after her time of service on the Board had ended, she “helped to facilitate Board meetings with John Young and about John” and the controversy around him. She said that she and Young had used to meet about once a month for lunch, but when the controversy took place around his ministry, “I wanted to help facilitate the process, and I was not able to help the congregation and [provide support to Young] at the same time. I didn’t have the energy,” so she no longer met with him frequently. “I always felt kind of bad about that,” she said.²⁴⁷

The Board met in Executive Session with Young on December 10, 1997. They “candidly discussed... the problems surrounding the resignation of the Religious Education Director” and “plans for the sabbatical and return from sabbatical.” During his administrative leave in December, Young said he was clearing up “mountains of files,” and sending poems to magazines and a manuscript to a publisher. He submitted a “Draft Sabbatical Plan” to the Board for its December 17 meeting. He said, “I expect to continue treatment and to do spiritual direction related to my lapses into anger, criticism, impatience, defensiveness, micromanagement, and related... concerns.” He planned to attend a seminar on “conflict dynamics.”²⁴⁸ He included a draft of his “Minister’s Note”

²⁴⁶ John Young, letter to Board and Congregation, December 5, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²⁴⁷ Judy Bell, interview with author, December 3, 2016. Quoted with permission.

²⁴⁸ John Young, “Draft Sabbatical Plan” for Board meeting of December 17, 1997, “UUSS Board of Trustees July 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

for the January newsletter, expressing “sincere regret and deep remorse for any pain or harm I have caused... [by being] inappropriately angry, unduly critical, impatient, and, then, defensive when these situations have been brought to my attention.... I am sorry.”²⁴⁹

During his leave, he said, he had “begun treatment with a Kaiser psychologist clearly focused on these lapses in my behavior.” He would be working also with a spiritual director during the sabbatical, and even said he would be available to meet, through the facilitation of the Conflict Management Team or Personnel Committee, with persons who had grievances with him. His hope was clear that UUSS would consider him “worthy to continue to serve as your minister in the autumn of 1998.”²⁵⁰

The archives include a two-page letter to the Board of Trustees, dated December 22, 1997, from Mary Howard, a “long time member... and former staff member” as a prior Music Director; after five and a half years, she had stepped down in June of 1997. She noted that she had been a member of the Ministerial Search Committee which had chosen Young. She wrote, “I do not question John’s love for the institution [or] his intelligence and interest in people. I do have problems with his methods and motivations.” This included putting “pressure on UUs who were active but not members to join [the church] ... [and making] negative comments regarding women members whose husbands are not members.” She said Young had a pattern of “[digging] up insignificant incidents to justify [his] inappropriate actions.” She had seen him “dominate meetings” and called his encounter with the mother and daughter in October a “verbal

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

tirade.” Howard asked for “the Board to call for his resignation effective at the end of his sabbatical.”²⁵¹ This would turn out to be the point at which his ministry would, in fact, end at UUSS.

The controversy drew many to speak out. At the Board meeting of January 22, 1998, in addition to the attendance of nine of the eleven Trustees, Pastoral Minister Shirley Ranck and Membership Services Coordinator Kate Throop (later to be hired as the DRE), seventeen other people were present. One of the guests, Ronn Kaiser, “presented a petition from several committee chairs and co-chairs to set a congregational meeting to discuss the ministry” of John Young. Those present “discussed the matter at some length.” The Board passed a motion to hold a Congregational Meeting March 1, 1998, “to vote upon the future of the ministry. At its February 11 meeting, the Board would draft a recommendation on this issue for the congregation.”²⁵²

A congregational vote seems to have been averted by Young’s decision to resign before that date, and a growing sense that the rift could not be healed. There were several listening sessions facilitated by members of the UUSS Communication and Conflict Management Committee, entitled “Healing Circles” or “UUSS Steps Toward Healing.” Designed for attendance of eight to ten people, these confidential meetings took place with two co-facilitators from the Committee; each one had a similar structure. Confidential summary reports indicate a variety of perspectives on Young’s ministry, appreciating his strengths but also pointing to many times of pain attributed to his words

²⁵¹ Mary Howard, letter to the UUSS Board of Trustees, December 22, 1997, “Board of Trustees July 1997-December 1997,” UUSS Archives.

²⁵² Board meeting minutes, January 22, 1998, “Board of Trustees January 1998-June 1998,” UUSS Archives.

and actions. In addition to this series of conversations, Anglin recalled attending a congregational meeting “where it was decided it would be best to ask John to go. People were lining up one after the other with [negative] things he had said to them.” She recalled some people voiced concerns that he had become involved with (and then married) a church member.²⁵³ Anglin said it was unfortunate that Young’s young daughter was present for the meeting. “I felt bad that she heard all that about her dad.”²⁵⁴ Johnson, a former Board President, announced her opinion at the meeting that it was necessary to negotiate a conclusion to Young’s ministry. However, she told me, “In some respects he was wonderful.” He provided pastoral support after her husband had left and after her mother had passed away. He “was helpful and understanding as a counselor.”²⁵⁵ Bell also reported to me that Young had been helpful to her. “I had one [pastoral] visit with him,” Bell said, “and it was one of the best I’ve had with anyone.” She added, “New people liked him real well. His sermons were good at first, but [grew more negative and scolding in tone] later.”²⁵⁶

²⁵³ While Young’s former wife, Madhavi, no doubt had been very involved in the church and likely was a UUSS member, they had been married before Young’s ministry began in Sacramento. Following their divorce, Young married a parishioner, a woman who had joined UUSS after he had begun his ministry there. The discomfort voiced by some UUSS members about Young’s second marriage reflects part of the reason for guidance from the ministers’ professional association: clergy should refrain from dating those they serve. Following discussions begun in 1985 and policies made in 1988 about clergy sexual boundaries, the UU Ministers Association (UUMA) has more recently clarified and enhanced the UUMA Guidelines, which caution against sexual and romantic relationships by clergy with members of congregations they serve. See Section II. G., “Personal or Romantic Relationships,” *UUMA Guidelines*, accessed February 25, 2017. <https://uuma.site-ym.com/?guidelines%E2%80%9C>. See also “A History of Guidelines and Its Revisions,” accessed February 25, 2017. https://uuma.site-ym.com/?guidelines#_Toc299361220

²⁵⁴ Anglin, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁵ Johnson, *op. cit.*

²⁵⁶ Bell, *op. cit.*

In spite of his open apologies and public efforts to regain trust and retain his ministerial relationship, the breach was beyond repair. Young was present at the February 26 Board meeting, which is notable because he was on sabbatical. The Board went into Executive Session for discussion during part of the meeting. After that session, the trustees voted (eight to two) to

accept the negotiated resignation of Rev. John Young. Accept the conditions of vacation and sabbatical pay, write a thank you letter, place photograph in the library [alongside photos of most of the other called ministers since 1946], and pay for 6 months' severance pay. Ask John to perform a farewell service.²⁵⁷

Following completion of his sabbatical, Young's final Sunday service was June 7, 1998.

The above quotation and the details therein come from the approved minutes of the Board of Trustees meeting. I did not interview any persons who were UUSS officers at that time or who may have been involved in the negotiation of Young's departure.

Part of the stress of this ordeal was its effect on church finances. At the February 26 meeting, it was reported that in the prior fiscal year the church had a deficit of \$18,000. Trustee Jeff Watson said a revenue shortfall of \$87,000 was projected for the coming year. The Board approved Finance Committee recommendations for reductions in hours for several staff members and for shifting some duties to another staffer's workload. Yet Trustee Janice Sutcliffe noted the Personnel Committee would soon advertise for a new RE Director, at a full-time salary.²⁵⁸

On March 28, 1998, the Board met from 7:05 to 10:00 p.m. The "Treasurer's Report described continuing loss. [Treasurer] John Williams announced his resignation

²⁵⁷ Minutes of Board meeting, February 26, 1998, fax copy dated March 10, 1998, UUSS Archives.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

from the board and from the UUSS,” and the Board accepted it. In a Budget Update at the meeting, Terry Throop estimated a shortage of \$75,000, and Trustees discussed how to increase revenues or reduce payroll expenses. The agenda showed this item: “Follow up to Resignation of John Young,” including discussion of the severance agreement and a “call for PCD Conflict Management Committee.” Meeting minutes report, “Severance Agreement not yet signed because of lack of meeting between John Young and [Board President] Carrie Cornwell.” The minutes continue, “Any decisions expressed between John Young and Carrie [are to] be made known to the Board and Board input gained before finalization.”²⁵⁹

The Board held another special meeting on May 4, 1998. In attendance were thirteen guests and the outgoing Business Administrator, the outgoing Membership Services Coordinator, and the Pastoral Minister, Rev. Dr. Shirley Ranck. The minutes note, “John Young’s Closure Service is June 7. Board members who wish to participate may do so.” The Board called a Congregational Meeting for June 14, mainly to elect a search committee to find a settled minister candidate for the fall of 1999. It is common practice now and recommended by the denomination for a congregation to allow for two full years of intentional interim ministry after a troubled ministry ends or after a complicated or painful departure (or both). The congregation’s goal of electing a search committee to do the work to be able to present a ministerial candidate in only a year was ambitious--and eventually would be abandoned. At this meeting the Board named Ranck to be the Associate Minister for the coming church year, when she would be the only minister. Her ministry is described below in Section 3.

²⁵⁹ Minutes of Board meeting, March 28, 1998, “UUSS Board January-June 1998,” UUSS Archives.

John Young's six and a half years of ministry at UUSS were characterized by ambitious growth and new, specialized ministries in outreach and pastoral care by two female colleagues. But those years were marked also by controversies and a painful parting with Young. On the other hand, through the controversies the congregation began to show signs of moving beyond earlier patterns of behavior. Lay leaders engaged with the crisis over Young's ministry in an open and courageous way. They promoted listening across differences and hearing alternate perspectives. They reduced the risk of polarization and averted an irreconcilable split in the congregation. This and later developmental growth in the congregation will be addressed in depth in Chapter Eight.

2. Chaplain to Young Adults: Rev. Richelle Russell, 1992-1994

In the fall of 1994, the Rev. Richelle Russell moved to Sacramento so her partner could begin a medical internship and residency. Newly ordained, Russell had completed a parish-based internship at the First Unitarian Church of Portland, Oregon. The couple was living near UUSS, and she paid a call on Rev. John Young to introduce herself as a UU colleague and let him know of her plan to attend and join the church during her stay. She recalled, "At our first meeting, John enthusiastically expressed interest in employing me ASAP. He had an energetic interest in promoting congregational outreach and growth."²⁶⁰ Young arranged for her to meet lay leaders and spoke to the Board of Trustees about his plan for a part-time ministry for the two years she would be in Sacramento. He had Russell write a letter of interest to the Board President, John Davidson.

²⁶⁰ Richelle Russell, e-mail to author, December 16, 2016. Quoted with permission.

The Board appointed her, and she served under Young's supervision in a half-time role with three areas of responsibility. Her title was Chaplain to Young Adults, reflecting Young's focus on outreach. Funding would come from special donations ("\$100 by 100," as noted in the above section), and Russell obtained grant funding and consultation from the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston, which was devoting resources to helping congregations to reach and serve those from age eighteen to thirty-five. Russell promoted the ministry in the local area and started weekly gatherings on Sunday evenings. The group named itself U2T2, for UUs in their Twenties and Thirties. She told me, "Most participants had been raised UU and were [living in the area] but had rarely or never attended local UU services prior to the young adult group." Not only did meetings continue through her tenure, the group connected with young adults from the UU church in San Francisco. In the eighth month of her service at UUSS, Russell reported attendance of twelve to twenty younger adults since weekly meetings had begun in October 1992, and a mailing list of sixty names. She and a team of UUSS volunteers obtained recognition for a group of UU Students and Friends on the campus of Sacramento State University.²⁶¹

The second aspect of her part-time ministry was a partnership between the UUSS Social Responsibility Committee and Promise the Children, an advocacy campaign of the UU Service Committee, a denominationally related organization based in Cambridge, Massachusetts. As a larger congregation in the capital city, UUSS would be the base for a program to train and coordinate advocates in UU congregations around

²⁶¹ Richelle Russell, Report from the Chaplain of Young Adults, 1992-93 UUSS Annual Report, "Annual Reports" file, UUSS Archives.

California; their focus was for children at risk in California.²⁶² In her annual report in 1994, Russell noted that she spent considerable time on grant applications and other fundraising activities for the programs and her position. She conducted many local weddings for couples who were not UUSS members and “occasionally assisted John in worship,” and met with him and Jackie Graham, the Director of Religious Education. Also, for a local not-for-profit organization, Russell facilitated a drop-in bereavement group for area teenagers; the Society served as the host location for the group.²⁶³

She recalled her service at UUSS as a “short, productive ministry.” It ended when her partner’s residency ended and Russell was called to a settled ministry out of state.²⁶⁴ Her farewell sermon was in July 1994. There would not be a second minister on staff at UUSS again until the search for a part-time Pastoral Minister in 1997 brought Shirley Ranck to Sacramento.

3. A Very Full Part-Time Job: Rev. Dr. Shirley A. Ranck, 1997-99

The Rev. Shirley Ranck, Ph.D., began a called part-time ministry at UUSS in the fall of 1997 with the title of Pastoral Minister. Well known as the author of the denomination’s feminist spirituality curriculum *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven*, she was also an experienced psychological counselor. She had been retired and based in Sonoma County after a career of four interim and two settled ministries. Her appointment at UUSS was unconventional for two reasons. In lieu of a full week of candidating, she

²⁶² Russell, email to author, December 16, 2016.

²⁶³ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

would be present from September 26 to 28, and the congregation would be asked to vote on her calling after church on that Sunday, September 28. Usually a called ministry is full time and the vote follows a full candidating week of seven to ten days. Yet the brief introduction did not hinder the congregation's acceptance. Though some members voiced concern about the budget for her part-time salary, members voted 200 to eight in favor of calling her.²⁶⁵ Also unusual: given the half-time salary, it was "the intention of the congregation to provide... [her with] the opportunity for fee-based" counseling services on church premises. In addition to moving expenses, UUSS would pay for Ranck to reactivate her psychologist's license and insurance. Before the vote, some members did ask questions about having a counseling practice at the church. In addition, Ranck would spend one week every month for the next church year (usually starting in September, though the fiscal year begins July 1) as an interim minister for the UU Fellowship in Reno.²⁶⁶ The Search Committee chair told the congregation that Ranck saw the position at UUSS "as her dream job."²⁶⁷

After Young's resignation in spring of 1998, Ranck proposed to the Board that her position be renamed Associate Minister, as she was ministering beyond the specific role for which UUSS had contracted with her. Indeed, she said she was enjoying ministry to the congregation as a whole. In March, for example, she had led three Sunday services and participated in meetings, including one with the Search Committee

²⁶⁵ Minutes of Congregational Meeting, Sunday, September 28, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

²⁶⁶ "Letter of Agreement between Shirley Ann Ranck and the UUSS," August 28, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

²⁶⁷ Minutes of Board meeting, September 25, 1997, "Board of Trustees July 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

for a new Director of Religious Education. She had spent seven days with the congregation in Reno, as she had in February, given her part-time position in Sacramento.²⁶⁸ With the Senior Minister, Director of Religious Education, and Church Administrator all planning to leave, she offered to provide continuity. She requested that her position be raised from half time to three-fourths time, until an Interim Minister would arrive in September. Since Young's administrative leave had started on December 1, she had been reporting directly to the Board, and she wished to keep it thus when a new minister would arrive. She said the earlier agreement for her to use her own time to have a counseling practice at the church had not generated many clients, and she found it ethically dubious as well as unfair to undercharge competitors who did not have the benefit of free rent for their therapy offices.²⁶⁹

Regarding the needs of the church, she wrote: "Many people in the congregation have fallen into a habit of criticizing everything and everyone to death. I don't know how this has come to be, but I see part of the ministry here to be about promoting a more positive and cooperative way of being together." She proposed "intentionally recognizing and giving strokes to members and staff who are in fact doing all kinds of wonderful work here, and... biting our tongues for a while whenever we feel critical. This is our wonderful UU community and we are all in it together."²⁷⁰

²⁶⁸ Shirley Ranck, report to Board meeting of March 28, 1998, "Board of Trustees January 1998-June 1998," UUSS Archives.

²⁶⁹ Shirley Ranck, memo to Board, April 21, 1998, "Board of Trustees January 1998-June 1998," UUSS Archives.

²⁷⁰ *Ibid*, emphasis original.

The Board President proposed sending a letter to the congregation with both an “Austerity Budget” (which would include cuts in two part-time staff positions) and a “Target Budget,” which would include raising Ranck’s role to three-fourths time, and for which volunteers would work on securing pledges not yet received and asking other members to help obtain \$10,000 in matching funds by increasing their pledges by ten percent. The congregation voted to authorize the broader ministry and larger position for Ranck.²⁷¹ The congregation did not fund an official Interim Minister position for the next fiscal year, leaving Ranck as the only clergy on staff.

No doubt her compassion and pastoral attention provided ministerial continuity to the church, and her prior experience as an interim minister also was no doubt helpful in the 1998-1999 church year. In her farewell report in the summer of 1999, she recounted that she had preached nineteen sermons, worked with committees and staff members, counseled people, and officiated at several weddings and memorial services, including the service for *Minister Emeritus* Ford Lewis, who had died December 22, 1998.²⁷² More staff continuity came from the promotion of the Society’s half-time Membership Services Coordinator (and church member) Kate Throop to be the new Director of Religious Education. Given that Throop was on site already, she had the benefit of several weeks of training by her departing predecessor before assuming the new job. Ranck and Throop were installed on November 8, 1998, in their new positions (Associate Minister and Director of Religious Education) in a collaborative ceremony to bring equal attention

²⁷¹ Board meeting minutes, April 21, 1998, “Board of Trustees January 1998-June 1998,” UUSS Archives.

²⁷² Shirley Ranck, Associate Minister’s Report, Annual Report 1998-1999, “Annual Reports” file, UUSS Archives. Rev. Dr. Ford Lewis had served UUSS from 1960 to 1970.

to and celebrate both of the roles of these two women. Young adult member Holly Heckerth was hired as Membership Services Coordinator.

Not surprisingly, in spite of the continuity of many staff and lay leaders, the conflicts of 1997 and 1998 led to a new budget crisis the next year. In the spring of 1999, the Board of Trustees heard from former Trustee Milt Ritchie, by then part of the Interim Minister Search Committee. Seeking an Interim Minister to start in August or September, the committee had only two possible candidates left. The preferred candidate, Ritchie said, “has put us off due to the salary which was lower than he was expecting.” Ritchie had asked the denomination’s Department of Ministry in Boston if Associate Minister Shirley Ranck could be hired as the Interim Minister. The denomination recommended against that path and gave UUSS four additional ministers’ names to consider. However, according to the minutes, Ranck had both applied for the interim job to UUSS and appealed to the denominational office, “despite the advice.” In the same vein, the UUSS Board agreed that Ranck could be a candidate for the interim position and planned a special Board meeting to vote on interim ministry. With a loss in revenues, UUSS was facing the prospect of hiring and moving an Interim Minister to Sacramento while keeping Ranck as either a full-time or three-quarters time Associate Minister. Hence, the Board voted five to four in favor of hiring a *half-time* interim and leaving Associate Minister Ranck “in place for one year.” This would require the withdrawal of a standing offer to another minister for full-time interim ministry.²⁷³ Their vote also controverted a vote of the Congregational Meeting of January 31, when

²⁷³ Board meeting minutes, April 22, 1999, “Board of Trustees Jan. 1999-March 199,” UUSS Archives. This was one of many challenges on the agenda, and this meeting was not adjourned until 11:15 p.m.

members approved ministry expenses to fund a *full-time* Interim Minister and a half-time Associate Minister.²⁷⁴

The Board of Trustees meeting on April 22 lasted more than four hours, and a special Board meeting on Sunday night, May 3, would last more than three. The April 22 meeting covered five options for funding either an Interim Minister or an Associate Minister, or both. “There was debate” over the denomination’s recommendation for an “outside” Interim Minister, including a reminder that the reason for this was to “have a new, ‘objective’ person.” The Interim Search Committee had “approached every minister available with the half-time option,” but without success. Concerned that the “clock was ticking,” they had begun conversations with a married couple of ministers who might share the full-time position. The committee “recommended hiring them.” Ritchie brought a video of the couple being interviewed about their approach to interim ministry, though there is no evidence that the Board watched the video together. The committee reported that the couple “would be happy to work with this church on the visioning process,” and it had contacted their references in Chicago and New Jersey, all with positive comments.²⁷⁵

Board President Rich Howard said that a staff member from the Unitarian Universalist Pacific Central District had said she had “identified more than one minister” in the region who might serve on a part-time basis, but “we would have to ask the District to give the names to Boston [headquarters] so it could go through the regular process.”

²⁷⁴ Congregational Meeting minutes, January 31, 1999, “Board of Trustees Jan. 1999-March 1999,” UUSS Archives.

²⁷⁵ Special Board meeting minutes, May 3, 1999, “Board of Trustees April 1999-June 1999,” UUSS Archives.

He said the District was “aware of our situation,” i.e., that UUSS had spent \$80,000 in reserves over the prior three years. Ranck then said she no longer wished to be considered for the interim position. The Board voted “to go forward with the search for a full-time interim” and to “raise what it takes to balance the budget, approximately \$14,000.” Two members moved that the interim position be offered to Ranck, but she reminded them that she had removed her name from consideration, so the motion was withdrawn. (The approved option meant that her Associate Minister position would not be funded in the coming fiscal year.) The Board then authorized the Interim Search Committee to negotiate with the ministry couple.²⁷⁶

At the Board meeting on June 17, Settled Minister Search Committee member Mary Howard came to report on their progress and upcoming work. The Board voted to budget \$200 for congregant Thelma White to spend on the “farewell potluck dinner” for Ranck on the coming Saturday, June 19. Then, on June 30, the Board would meet the new Interim Ministers, Rev. Sydney Wilde and Rev. Dennis Daniel, “at a party in their honor.”²⁷⁷

In summary, Ranck had begun as the half-time Pastoral Minister on October 1, 1997, then found herself as the only minister on duty as of December 1, and ministering to a sizeable congregation in conflict. On July 1, 1998, her role was recognized as Associate Minister and her position enlarged to three-fourths time, both at her request. In June of 1999, the congregation would bid her farewell and thank her as it welcomed a clergy couple to share one position, that of Interim Minister.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷⁷ Board meeting minutes, June 17, 1999, “Board of Trustees April 1999-June 1999,” UUSS Archives.

The Rev. Dr. John H. Weston, the denomination's Ministerial Settlement Director, sent an e-mail reply to Rich Howard on May 28 in response to his letter of concern for Ranck's ministerial career. Weston wrote: "Shirley will be able to assure you that I am sending her name to a very good number of eminently suitable societies. I very much appreciate your concern that her conduct in Sacramento be recognized."²⁷⁸ In his President's Report in the spring of 1999, Howard offered thanks for the ministry of Shirley Ranck and noted the good news that she had obtained a full-time interim ministry in Olympia, Washington. He added that Young had been called to Jacksonville, Florida, and wished him the best. Howard also remembered *Minister Emeritus* Ford Lewis, who had passed away in Sacramento in December 1998.²⁷⁹

Ranck was likewise gracious and affectionate in parting. In her submission to the Annual Report, she said she was overwhelmed by the send-off party and gifts. She gave "special thanks to the Board, Interim Search Committee and Committee on Ministry for leading us through important but difficult decisions so that the future will be bright for UUSS."²⁸⁰

4. Collaboration and Covenant: Rev. Sydney Wilde and Rev. Dennis Daniel

Sydney Wilde and Dennis Daniel were a co-ministry partnership as well as a married couple. For their year at UUSS (late summer of 1999 through June 2000), they

²⁷⁸ E-mail from John H. Weston to Rich Howard, May 28, 1999, "Board of Trustees April 1999-June 1999," UUSS Archives.

²⁷⁹ Rich Howard, President's Report, Annual Report 1998-1999, "Annual Reports" file, UUSS Archives.

²⁸⁰ Shirley Ranck, Associate Minister's Report, Annual Report 1998-1999, "Annual Reports" file, UUSS Archives.

lived in an apartment across the street from the church. Given that they were sharing one ministry position and one salary at UUSS, they provided part-time service (known as “consulting ministry” at the time in the denomination) to the lay-led Sierra Foothills congregation, which had been started in Auburn in the 1980s. UUSS President Rich Howard explained this in his newsletter column in October 1999, telling fellow members not to expect both ministers at every event or committee meeting at the Society.²⁸¹ Judy Bell recalled Wilde and Daniel’s ministry as a time of calm and rebuilding. After two major conflicts (one leading to the suspension of a member and then his arrest for trespassing and the other leading to the negotiated resignation of the settled minister), it seemed to Bell that “we had done such a good job of helping ourselves. They [Daniel and Wilde] helped us procedurally.”²⁸²

The ministers were engaged from the start in the “five developmental tasks of interim ministry,” as formulated by the Unitarian Universalist Association to guide congregations and clergy. Wilde noted in her September 1999 newsletter column that an interim ministry consisted of “more focused and intense [work], fast paced and goal directed.” Wilde explained the following five task areas for the year: “coming to terms with your [congregational] history” with its causes for grief as well as things to celebrate, “discovering a new identity” by looking at how the church and its context have changed over time, “facilitating needed changes in leadership structure and training,” “renewing denominational ties,” and “facilitating a commitment to new directions in ministry.”²⁸³

²⁸¹ Rich Howard, “President’s Letter,” *Unigram*, October 1999, “Unigrams 1999,” UUSS Archives.

²⁸² Bell, *op. cit.*

²⁸³ Sydney Wilde, “Wilde Wanderings,” *Unigram*, September 1999, “Unigrams 1999,” UUSS Archives.

Wilde touched on grief in her first sermon of the church year, based on the book *Necessary Losses*. Announcing the sermon, Wilde said, “How we deal with the many losses we encounter along life’s path defines... who we shall become.”²⁸⁴ She said “facilitating a commitment to new directions in ministry” would be their “main task,” in order for the congregation to enter its next ministerial relationship with intention about how it wanted to work together “to create the church of your future.”²⁸⁵ This echoed the words of Eileen Karpeles of nearly a decade before: “The way in which [a minister’s] arrival is greeted does much to determine the success or failure of that ministry for many years to come.” (See Chapter Four.)

In the January newsletter, Wilde invited everyone to participate in the series of workshops and services at which they would discern their behavioral commitments to one another, and she looked forward to “a covenant of mutual respect and support...with an awareness that everything we do affects the lives of others.”²⁸⁶ Details of the steps toward the USS Covenant are in Chapter Eight. Johnson told me that Daniel and Wilde “did a lot of good work. They helped build the Covenant.”²⁸⁷

During their year, the ministers went about this by highlighting examples of the need for more thoughtful and attentive ways of interacting among the members. For example, Daniel said, rather than “playing the devil’s advocate” and arguing against another’s proposal or idea, he urged people to “switch roles and be an angel’s advocate.”

²⁸⁴ Wilde, “Month of Sundays” insert in *Unigram*, September 1999, USS Archives.

²⁸⁵ Wilde, “Wilde Wanderings,” *Unigram*, September 1999, “Unigrams 1999,” USS Archives.

²⁸⁶ Sydney Wilde, “Wilde Wanderings,” *Unigram*, January 2000, “Unigrams 1999,” USS Archives.

²⁸⁷ Johnson, *op. cit.*

That is, he urged members to “look for the good in a new idea,” and to work together to see “how we can accomplish something in spite of the difficulties.”²⁸⁸ Of course, newsletter articles alone cannot turn a church around or perhaps even change individual behavior. Yet Daniel and Wilde’s words reflect that they were attentive and engaged in their goal of helping volunteers work together with more flexibility, trust, and cooperation. Howard has fondly recalled working with Daniel and Wilde when he served as UUSS President:

Sydney and Dennis were COLLABORATIVE - both with each other and with the congregation. Their style was so perfect for what we needed at the time. They invited the leadership team (including myself) to meet with them on a regular basis to take the pulse of the congregation, and made themselves available to all who wanted to talk. If there was pushback, they accepted it so graciously that it sort of melted away. They were definitely a key part of our healing.²⁸⁹

Like interim clergy before them (described in Chapter Four and Chapter Six), the couple pointed out lay leaders’ habit of forgetting to take other people into consideration, and how this detracted from the experience of one another as church volunteers. Referring to the Hebrew Scriptures’ depiction of the Ark of the Covenant as a source of holy power—and a source of trouble for King David—Daniel identified some “holy objects” at UUSS, which can “become a source of contention among church members.” He said volunteers give of themselves (in upgrading the “holy object” of the sanctuary’s sound system, for example), but their devotion of time and energy can lead to “ownership and protectiveness.” After a project is done by a devoted few, others may complain about the job or step in to improve on it. “So we have an endless chain of hurt feelings. People

²⁸⁸ Dennis Daniel, “The Parson’s Pen,” *Unigram*, November 1999, “Unigrams 1999,” UUSS Archives.

²⁸⁹ Rich Howard, e-mail correspondence with author, December 21, 2016. Quoted with permission.

of good will feel hurt,” he wrote. Volunteers rebuff one another’s efforts. Daniel, in closing, prayed, “May we learn to be kinder and gentler with one another.”²⁹⁰ Daniel wrote this for the newsletter of March 2000, two-thirds of the way through the interim year. The story reflects long-standing patterns at UUSS and shows one more example of the importance of the covenant-building work in which the congregation was engaged at that point in the interim ministry year.

In their shared farewell column for the July newsletter, the Co-interim Ministers wrote: “We have watched you struggle with yourselves and with the history and structures of this Society.... We applaud the progress you have made toward reconciliation, healing and growth in both depth and understanding.” They pronounced the congregation “ready” for its newly called minister, the Rev. Douglas Kraft, and said it had “chosen wisely.” He would arrive in August to begin his settled ministry with the Society. Daniel and Wilde wished the congregation and minister “many loving, challenging, and rewarding years together.” Yet they also offered a reminder to act in good faith with one another, to see the best in one another, and embody “the essence of our faith” by treating everyone with “respect and appreciation.” They were on their way to Reston, Virginia, whose Unitarian Universalist congregation had called them as settled Co-ministers. On July 23, the day of the couple’s last worship service in Sacramento, the Society would hold a farewell picnic and present them with a memory book to represent the year at UUSS.

After a series of workshops, the congregation adopted its Covenant in June of 2000; the statement continues to be a frequent reference point in church life as of this

²⁹⁰ Dennis Daniel, “The Parson’s Pen,” *Unigram*, March 2000, “Unigrams 2000,” UUSS Archives.

writing. Chapter Eight explores the congregation's journey toward being ready to articulate both a Vision statement and a Covenant. It was a journey of setbacks and conflicts, but there was at the same time progress toward giving priority to the quality of relationships among the members and progress in moving away from individual agendas toward the well-being of the Society at large.

5. Conclusion

As described in this chapter and the preceding one, the ministers to the Unitarian Universalist Society in the 1980s and 1990s reflected a great variety of styles, areas of responsibility, length of tenure--and variety in the manner of their arriving and leaving (or being asked to leave). Diversity of gender and (not always revealed) sexual orientation in the UUSS ministry began in this historical period, and UUSS experimented with part-time specialized ministries. (For a list of all the clergy serving UUSS from 1983 to 2000, see Table 4.1 at the start of Chapter Four.)

It is said, "Ministers come and ministers go, but the church keeps on going." That is true, but the time that clergy and congregation spend working together in relationship can be pivotal—a time of progress or a painful setback. While together, the minister and congregation affect one another, shaping their individual development as well as that of the mutual relationship. Through settled and interim ministries, congregation members at UUSS often struggled with one another and with the challenge of leading a membership organization. Chapter Six looks at the observations of three of its interim ministers about the congregation's gifts and the bad habits which characterized a culture of conflict.

Chapter Six

From Task-orientation to Trust-orientation: Insights from Interim Clergy

1. Introduction

This chapter illuminates the dynamics and characteristics of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS) in the 1980s, especially the relationships among Board members, other lay leaders, paid staff, and church members in general. Bringing their varied ministerial experience and the fresh perspectives of outsiders, a series of interim ministers identified recurring patterns of behavior which caused harm to people and hindered the progress of the Society; at the same time, they cited its gifts and praised its potential. Two significant points emerge from the observations and recommendations of these interim ministers. One is that UUSS provides an example of how persistent a church's culture can be, as mistrust and factionalism run through the time period covered here. The other point is that a managerial culture, with recourse to the language of duty and the fueling of congregation-wide anxiety (especially if manifested by leaders) can crowd out any shared reflection or discernment about the organization's religious calling or about the members' caring for and promises to one another.

As noted in Chapter Three, the congregation adopted many traits of the larger secular culture, particularly those of the bureaucratic and political organizations the lay leaders had grown up around and worked in. There is much evidence from the period under study—and a strong sense of identity in the current day—that the congregation promoted, externally, many of the social and religious values of the Unitarian

Universalist religious tradition. However, the evidence from the archives is that on many occasions the congregation failed to embody those religious values internally, in the ways that members dealt with one another, how clergy and laity interacted, how power was shared and how decisions were made.

The period covered in this chapter includes the interim ministries that took place before and after a long-term ministry (Rev. Theodore A. Webb, 1971 to 1983) and after a short-term ministry (Rev. W. Donald Beaudreault, 1985 to 1989). The chapter relies on the primary sources of Board and Congregational Meeting minutes, reports from ministers, other staff and committees, UUSS newsletters, and recollections of some UUSS lay leaders. Of particular use were the records of three clergypersons who served this congregation as interim ministers (the Rev. Josiah R. Bartlett, the Rev. Aron S. Gilmartin, the Rev. Eileen B. Karpeles).

2. Looking in from the Outside: Interim Ministers' Appraisals

Interim clergy can bring a fresh perspective as newcomers as well as considerable freedom to speak. As “short timers,” they can point out the truths as they see them without fear of jeopardizing their livelihood. In 1970, at the end of his hiring as Interim Minister to UUSS, the Rev. Josiah Bartlett (whose earlier work as Dean and President of Starr King School for the Ministry had brought parish field work into the seminary curriculum) made a striking series of observations of the congregation and recommendations to the UUSS Board of Trustees (then referred to as the Board of Directors). He diagnosed a long-standing pattern of apathy and mistrust. Bartlett had been hired mainly for a brief preaching ministry (and claimed that worship attendance

had risen in those three months). “But preaching ... is not enough,” he said, “unless the church can develop a much broader program ... to meet people’s needs.”

In September of 1988, the Rev. Don Beaudreault resigned as the settled minister to UUSS after four years (he had started in March 1985). He would leave January 15, 1989, to take a call from a church in Rancho Palos Verdes, California. Soon afterward, Business Manager Patti Lawrence attached an old memo from Josiah Bartlett to her monthly report to the UUSS Board of Trustees and advised them to read it. She said: “I was amazed at how many of the same problems/situations/concerns face this church today as they did in 1970.”²⁹¹

What were the problems which remained unrelieved nearly two decades after Bartlett had pointed them out? Bartlett said the church had “unlimited potential” with regard to its Sacramento context, physical plant, and “large and talented congregation,” but it appeared to be “stuck in a rut.” It gave one the impression “of middle aged middle class whites listening to sermons or ‘interesting discussions’ and little else.” He noted that several consultants’ reports and parish surveys over the years had provided valuable feedback to the congregation, but “with almost no results.” Such a pattern of apathy, he said, “is not the creation of any single minister or one board,” but it had become so pervasive “as not to be perceived. It will take real effort ... to become conscious of it; more effort to break through it.”²⁹²

²⁹¹ Patti Lawrence, Church Administrator report to Board, September 1980, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives. Patti Lawrence later became an esteemed instructor of congregational studies and Dean of Students at Starr King School for the Ministry and a Trustee representing the Pacific Central District on the continental Board of the Unitarian Universalist Association. She died in 2009.

²⁹² *Ibid.*

He sensed a “low degree of commitment,” with only a small core of people serving out of a sense of duty to “keep the wheels turning.” Merely “carrying on,” he said, is what drags down morale. He urged longtime leaders to encourage others, “newcomers especially,” to try things that spark their interest. Veteran leaders should not “look on new ventures as threats,” but as sources of new life in the church. If they can risk “taking some exciting small steps, then thinking BIG will follow” in the congregation, he said.²⁹³

For example, Bartlett urged the church to refurbish unattractive rooms and reduce their cluttered appearance. It needed to catch up on deferred maintenance and reserve money to enable future improvements and repairs. It is notable that Bartlett made this observation when the main building was only ten years old and the education building even younger. He said that the Society’s lay leadership gave the impression--in the congregation and in the larger community--that it resisted change. It “shocked and saddened” him when people timidly would ask his permission to try things. “I say that the church exists to tempt people to try things!”²⁹⁴

At the heart of the present problem, Bartlett said, was the “either-or” mentality of stakeholders, those who pit “my program” versus “your program.” What was lacking was any explicit loyalty to “our congregation” or any sense of trust or shared commitment. Eileen Karpeles would identify the same dynamics on her arrival as a full-time Interim Minister in 1989. Looking back on that arrival, she said many of the members had identified less with the congregation as a whole than with their subgroups

²⁹³ *Ibid.*

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

(the Women's Alliance, the Forum Committee [organizing lectures on public issues], Religious Education, the music program, Theater One, etc.). Not trusting people outside of their "tribe," people were "bound together by their loyalty to a particular leader" or by long-standing social ties.²⁹⁵ For example, in early 1990 the Board approved a policy requested by the Religious Services Committee: "No sales or promotions of any kind shall be conducted on the premises" during the worship service.²⁹⁶ Perhaps the need for this policy was that some parishioners felt that drawing folks to their particular group's ticket sales, fundraising activity, event registration, or social justice advocacy was more important than having the whole community share the experience of common worship.

On arriving, Karpeles had gotten the "impression ... of a well-housed, strong congregation... with very poor skills in coping" with its diversity of opinions and values. She said, "A low level of trust in one another acted as both cause and effect in perpetuating non-productive ways of dealing with ... disagreements." She made the case that newcomers could sense, but not understand, the underlying tension. From a congregational systems perspective, newcomers would either intuit that they would not be at home in such a church and then drift away, or they would stay and adopt the group's attitudes and habits of behavior. Ideally such habits would be those of leaders gifted at inviting newcomers into trusted leadership roles, but in a congregation known

²⁹⁵ Interim or transitional ministers intentionally serve a congregation in advance of the calling of a settled minister, sometimes for a few months but often for one or two years. Typically, they strive to help lay leaders and other congregants to confront and reflect on congregational habits and challenges, to try new approaches, and to enter the next ministerial relationship with open eyes and new commitments. An implicit goal is for the congregation to assume responsibility for its own aspirations and processes, not presuming that it is up to the next called minister to "fix" long-standing problems. Some, like Karpeles, are Accredited Interim Ministers. Nearly all of them, however, bring a newcomer's fresh observations on a church culture and system and the freedom to say what they think without fear of losing a long-term job. See www.uua.org/careers/ministers/interim.

²⁹⁶ "Board Highlights," *Unigram*, February 1, 1990, "Unigrams 1990," UUSS Archives.

for conflict, leaders may hold on to control but always feel frustrated and isolated, while the gifts of others remain untapped, as they remain less active observers. At UUSS Karpeles pointed out a lot of active participation, but much of it was limited to separate subgroups of the church (that is, being committed within their own “tribe”).²⁹⁷

Looking back at her work at UUSS, Karpeles wrote that she had intentionally set about building a “sense of a caring community.” She did this through attention to the excellence and energy of worship services, emphasizing the expression of joy in the congregation as well as the virtues of “understanding, patience, forgiveness and love.”²⁹⁸ Her goal was to promote and point out such spiritual values and religious aspirations, a wise approach given the absence of much explicit reference to such values or aspirations in UUSS life during the decade preceding her arrival. I describe this more below.

On a form provided by the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), Karpeles evaluated her first nine months at UUSS. On the form’s category of “working through ‘termination emotions’ with respect to their former minister,” she indicated this had not been a significant priority for the congregation. She added, “I am haunted by the LONG record of ministerial terminations at UUSS, and worry that I’ll do the next minister a disservice if I don’t increase congregational awareness. But no one else seems to feel it’s important.” Likewise, she observed that *lay leaders put less importance* on “improving their skills in dealing with conflict” than those *without* leadership positions did. She said her own motivation was high for promoting such skills. Her final report (June 1990)

²⁹⁷ Eileen Karpeles, interim minister’s final report to the Board from January 1989 to June 1990, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

noted that eighty people had attended her series of conflict management workshops, looking at causes of conflict and productive and unproductive ways of responding. Formally and informally in church life, she said, they had tried out the interventions learned. A new-congregation start in South Sacramento was then being planned by departing members of the congregation. Its launch had been planned for a few years, with denominational support, but not without some resistance and resentment at UUUS. (Indeed, the behaviors in UUSS were cited as one of the reasons some people wished to start a new church; see Chapter Seven for details.) Karpeles made sure that members would “acknowledge the elements of conflict which fostered the [new-congregation] split as well as the more positive reasons behind it.” She created a “sending forth” liturgy for the last worship service before the organizers departed to start services in the new church. About another area of her work, she noted success at recruiting new Board and committee leaders, and thanked UUSS Board President John Berke for the hours he had given to the task.

Striking in its honesty is her memo to the UUSS Board of Trustees on August 23, 1989, in which she describes her own “outburst” at a recent meeting with them. Karpeles noted that she had been encouraging and training the leaders to avoid any similar “reaction to stress.” She admitted to feelings of loneliness, particularly from feeling so little interest by lay leaders in collaborating with her on the renewing work she was aspiring to do. While apologizing, she used that incident as an example of how conflict and frustration might be handled productively in meetings: stop the business discussion immediately and deal with the feelings. Ask the person(s) to step back from the encounter for a moment and talk about what is eliciting their harsh words. Ask others what

emotions the person's outburst has generated in them.²⁹⁹ She recommended appointing a "process observer" for any meeting to help the group reflect more on its dynamics, especially "for a group that's new at this [kind of practice]." However, she noted it is "everyone's responsibility" to speak up and intervene when conflict is building.³⁰⁰

3. Stresses of a Long-term Ministry

The Rev. Theodore Webb was called by the congregation in May of 1971, six months after the Board had received the diagnosis from Josiah Bartlett that the culture of mistrust and negative habits would continue to impede its great potential if leaders did not acknowledge and start to address those habits. The congregation's Administrator, Patti Lawrence, would refer the UUSS Board to Bartlett's interpretation as still relevant after three more ministries had begun and ended (those of Webb, Aron Gilmartin and Don Beaudreault).

Webb began serving in the fall of 1971. Many current-day members of this congregation recall him with deep fondness for his gentlemanly professionalism, clear social analysis, and passionate urgency to action, approachable style, scholarship, humor, and kindness. There is no evidence of arrogance or stridency in his style in the archives I reviewed, and none has been reported to me.³⁰¹ In the spring and summer of 1981, two

²⁹⁹ Eileen Karpeles, memo to Board, August 23, 1989, "Board Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁰¹ The authorized history, *In Good Times and Bad*, includes many of the successes of Webb's tenure, including in the program life of the church and its engagement with social issues. This chapter's focus is on congregational culture. After resigning, he and his wife, Marguerite, lived in four other cities where he served in interim ministries. They retired back in Sacramento and participated in the congregation, which named him a *minister emeritus*. Marguerite died several years ago, and Ted died in 2014 at age 96.

years before his resignation, Webb published a series of recollections in the *Unigram* newsletter about his childhood of living in poverty in Maine, his early calling and education for ministry, and his career. First he was a New England parish minister, then the Massachusetts Bay District Executive for the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), and then the minister at UUSS. He titled his *Unigram* columns “The Minister’s ‘pinion.” In addition to showing appreciation for the people of the congregation, he did express regrets in those 1981 recollections. He recalled that when he had begun his tenure, “the people of this Society desired... involvement of more people running the affairs of the Society, and sharing of pulpit privileges.”³⁰² He pointed with pride to the organization of a Religious Services Committee and its series of chairpersons, the result of which was a wide variety of Sunday service topics and speakers (lay members as well as clergy), as well as varied modes of presentation of the programs.

Yet his other aim fell short. He had attempted in his ministry to “emphasize the place and power of the Board... in the setting of goals and in carrying out functions, policies and programs.” He had promoted lay leadership and ownership, trying to “see that the vacuum was filled” whenever a Trustee failed to see their “challenge and responsibility.” At yearly leadership retreats, he said, “attempts have been made to shift the weight of *imaginative decision-making* from [the Minister] to the leaders” [emphasis mine]. He concluded that he had achieved only “limited success with this democratic venture.”³⁰³ My interpretation of his words is that he sought to help lay officials to be

³⁰² Theodore Webb, “The Minister’s ‘pinion,” *Unigram*, June 29, 1981, “Unigrams 1981,” UUSS Archives.

³⁰³ *Ibid*

reflective and creative leaders instead of managerial ones, but he felt success only in the program life of the church, not in governance.

Another disappointment for him was “less than adequate pledging.” He wrote, “Our 600-member [congregation] has not provided financial support commensurate with this fine Society.” As a result, “employees [were] poorly paid,” and he had not been able to have a “full-time assistant.” He said, “I have not even mentioned the felt need [for an assistant] until this 10th year.”³⁰⁴

4. Finances and the Ministry

Indeed, many of the stresses of Webb’s tenure dealt with the low degree of monetary generosity and commitment in the congregation, and its effects on him and other staff. At the Board meeting of June 22, 1981, Webb spoke of the need for “radical surgery in our funding process [because] some churches of comparable size [do] exceed their pledge goals.” He also reported that he had “made a few [phone] calls regarding an assistant minister.” The minutes show no Board action toward the hope for a second minister, and nobody was hired for more than a decade.³⁰⁵ In 1982, Webb included in a Board report his demographic summary of UUSS entitled “What Is this Society Like? Who Is in It?” He cited the average yearly pledge as \$312 and quoted a 1967 summary from the denomination that said Unitarian Universalists are “dominantly an upper-income, highly educated, professionally employed group.” He then showed a table of occupations represented in UUSS, with professor/teacher as the most common of the

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

³⁰⁵ Board minutes, June 22, 1981, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

many professions listed, including both active civil servants and those retired on pensions. His message was implicit that there was more capacity for monetary support.

Minutes and reports from this era show the contradictory messages by lay officials of (1) insisting on more commitment and generosity from the congregation *and* (2) not wanting the congregation to feel surprised if giving did not rise. In a guarded message not unlike those made by other treasurers reporting in other years to the Board or congregation, at the UUSS Board of Trustees meeting of January 25, 1982, the Treasurer said this: “While we look good now, we may run into financial problems later.”³⁰⁶ It is as if leaders might be loath to encourage optimism, either because they fear other members will slack off on supporting the church or they fear members will attack them as dishonest or ignorant if the financial performance were to get worse in the future. The Treasurer’s note on the 1982-1983 budget proposal said that a proposed “modest increase” for ministerial costs still did “not close the gap” for compensation relative to “comparable UU churches.”³⁰⁷ At the Congregational Meeting on May 16, 1982, a deficit budget was approved (forty-nine votes for it; nine against), but only after a motion was discussed and defeated to adopt a contingency budget “in case the deficit was not made up.” By the time of that action in the meeting, only fifty-eight votes were cast, which constituted only eleven percent of the 535 UUSS members that year.³⁰⁸

In his Board report in June of 1982, Webb brought forth the fact that some members had told him they were “troubled” by his asking a church secretary to type

³⁰⁶ Board minutes, January 25, 1982, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

³⁰⁷ Board minutes, April 26, 1982, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

³⁰⁸ Congregational Meeting minutes, May 16, 1982, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

pages of his book in progress. He defended his decision, noting that such an assignment was only “filler” at times when there was no office work, and saying he considered the project relevant, since it was a book of Unitarian Universalist history. He said, “My time is taken, from morning ‘til night, throughout the church year as minister.” Webb said, however, that he did not want to cause upset, so he would reimburse UUSS for the cost of typing. “Let the matter rest,” he said.³⁰⁹

5. Burdens and Bleakness

Minutes of Board of Trustees meetings from this era are organized and quite thorough, with every motion summarized, its makers’ names noted and the outcome stated. Nearly every report given was “accepted” by a formal vote of the Board. The large number of agenda items makes it impressive that most Board meetings ended in two and a half hours, though the current UUSS lore about meetings of years past says that some sessions lasted to midnight and included harsh demands by UUSS members, especially those coming as delegations from committees. Much of the archival Board meeting minutes and correspondence from this era reflect a permission-seeking culture, and sometimes a permission–withholding one, between congregation members and lay leaders. In 1970, Bartlett’s memo said that such a culture is based in the need to be in control, which is based in fear. In my ministry at UUSS since 2008 I have heard or seen some examples of this way of granting and withholding power, but only occasionally.

Many passages from the well-ordered meeting minutes reflect that lay officials were burdened by their assumed expectations to manage the church and by their felt lack

³⁰⁹ Board minutes, June 24, 1982, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

of congregational support in doing so. At the Board meeting in June 1981, Erwin Cooper, the new President-elect since the May congregational meeting, made a motion to set a minimum annual pledge of \$45 for a member to maintain voting membership.³¹⁰ The Board approved it and asked him to announce it in the newsletter.³¹¹ Four days before the next (July) Board meeting, Cooper and his wife resigned by letter. They wrote, “An accumulation of pressures and commitments is making it impossible to fulfill our membership obligations.” They would “take a leave of absence of up to one year” and wished to be listed as friends of UUSS rather than members. He added a note by hand that this meant he would not be President.³¹² The Board met informally without a quorum, discussed the Coopers’ letter, and tried to select a new President from among the group. Some declined due to lack of experience on the Board. “William Lambert said he would take it if Lila [Gibson] wouldn’t,” the minutes reflect. After the next regular Board meeting, the Board Secretary notified church members of Lila Gibson’s appointment as President, which would last through the next annual Congregational Meeting. In what surely was a time of uncertainty and anxiety about lay leadership in the community, this very important congregational communication began, “To whom it may concern.”³¹³

³¹⁰ The UUSS Constitution indicates that the Board is expected to set a minimum pledge for a person or a couple to remain members. It has not done so in recent years. The focus of leadership has been on promoting growth in giving, not in setting a minimum acceptable gift for the retention of membership.

³¹¹ Board minutes, June 16, 1982, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

³¹² Erwin and Vera Cooper, letter, July 23, 1981, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

³¹³ Board notes, July 27, 1981, and Board minutes August 24, 1981, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

There was heavy involvement of Board members in managing staff, responding to committees, covering tasks at levels big and small--as well as in policy setting. Committees apparently saw Board members as power brokers, and often as targets. The sense of duty pervades minutes of Board and Congregational Meetings, with many instances of leaders' communicating to members that they, the members, could be doing more. The tasks at the Board meeting of February 20, 1989, ranged from significant to minor: authorizing the Ministerial Search Committee "to announce a starting salary of \$42,000 to \$48,000"; allowing a church-planting committee to contact UUSS visitors from the South Sacramento area (who had not continued visiting UUSS) "to see if they are interested in a UU group in that area," and appointing someone to attend to problems with Sunday coffee service. The late Dorothy Englestad, a former President and at this point the Adult Education chair, "asked for a temporary chair for this committee while she is out of town."³¹⁴ Present-day lay leaders at UUSS would be shocked, as would I, if a committee chair did anything more than ask a fellow member to do the favor of chairing a meeting at which the chair would be absent.

6. Exhortations and the Human Touch

Webb's resignation took effect November 30, 1983. The next interim minister, Aron Gilmartin, arrived in December. He wrote of gratitude for a warm reception and praised the church in these words for the UUSS Annual Report: "My impression is of a strong church with many deeply devoted members." Yet he identified a weakness in financial support. He said, "I get the feeling that DEFICIT casts a continuing shadow,

³¹⁴ Board minutes, February 20, 1989, "Board Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

which eats away at creativity and enthusiasm.” Indeed, deficit budgets were the norm every year. After that first month, Gilmartin was absent for six weeks due to a prior commitment to be the Minister-on-Loan at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Reno. This was a denominational program to help lay-led congregations benefit from a minister’s presence and consultation.³¹⁵ He returned to Sacramento in mid-February and in August his contract was extended. His ministry at UUSS concluded in late February of 1985; Don Beaudreault began his called ministry in March 1985.

Dorothy Englestad, having served many years as a Board member, was UUSS President in Webb’s last year. In her President’s Report of 1984, she listed the major work handled by multiple committees, including fundraising events held at the church. Yet she noted “many problems”: UUSS needed better monetary support through the annual pledge drive, committees were “understaffed,” some with only a chairperson “who gets stuck with the whole job.” Nearly every chairperson’s submission to this report ends with the same sentence, which must have been the standard format for every leader to use in that year’s report. It said, “I am willing (or unwilling) to continue as [title of role] for another year.” Englestad wrote an expanded answer: “I am willing to serve another year as president, but I do need the help of each and every member.... Sometimes the burden gets a little heavy on my shoulders.”³¹⁶ Her President’s report a year later was more brief and more optimistic in tone. She expressed appreciation of the committees and church members. The Treasurer, on the other hand, confessed a “lack of optimism,” citing a “continuing practice of deficit budgeting, and the inability, year after

³¹⁵Aron S. Gilmartin, Annual Report, January 22, 1984, “Board Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

³¹⁶Annual Report, January 22, 1984, “Annual Reports,” UUSS Archives.

year [of UUSS] members to even come close to (let alone meet) its canvass goals, even though these goals are reasonable and necessary.”³¹⁷

A striking fact about the stressful exhortations for more volunteer help and better financial pledging in this era is how large the membership was. In his report to the Board of Trustees in September 1984, Gilmartin asked, rhetorically, “Can you imagine the richness of talents and skills, experience and knowledge that a congregation of 500 UUs must possess?” His report offered a diagnosis of the problem: a lack of real and felt connections among people and a need for trust among the members and leaders. Regarding the scarcity of new volunteers on committees, he said, “A significant part of the membership seems not to be asked,” especially newer members. Committee chairs were left “on their own” to recruit help, and he cited two primary causes for the gap: “A large part of our membership is not ‘known’ and is consequently overlooked. Frequently people do not have a ‘good’ experience and hence avoid further involvement on committees, etc.” The first step, he said, is “getting to know people we do not know.... Really getting to know them. And because we really want to know them. (Not just use them.)”³¹⁸

In November 1984, Gilmartin wrote a memo to the Finance Council with concern that this elected body of five people (The Council was established in 1982 “to anticipate financial problems before they [became] serious.”) had not yet recruited a chair for the annual canvass or pledge drive. He observed there was “no continuing [group] with the assigned responsibility of raising and collecting the money the church needs,” and there

³¹⁷Annual Report, January 20, 1985, “Annual Reports,” UUSS Archives.

³¹⁸Aron Gilmartin, Minister’s Report to Board, September 24, 1984, “Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

was a lack of the use of “any personal, human touch” in following up when people would fall behind. To seasoned parish ministers, the need to fill such an important leadership role might not be shocking, as all programs in a church do not all function at peak performance all the time. There is always at least one area for serious improvement. However, given a membership of more than 500 and the many programs and group activities reflected in the newsletters and annual reports, there was an apparent inability in this congregationally governed Society to attend to its own health.³¹⁹

7. Staff Relations and Trust

Three days after Christmas in 1981, Program Director Virginia Stephens reported involvement of fifty-three children from forty-three families on a regular basis, and “ten more occasionally.” She asked the church’s Board of Trustees to send a letter of commendation to the Religious Education (RE) Committee, presumably to promote a cordial spirit between the two bodies. If that was the case, the Trustees did not discern her intention. The minutes report, “A [Board] member suggested [to Ms. Stephens that] she draft a letter to that effect.”³²⁰ There is no indication from later meeting minutes of the Board’s having taken up this matter again.

On November 22, 1984, Interim Minister Gilmartin sent a confidential memo to the Board, staff, and chairs of the Personnel and Property Management Committees entitled “Trust.” Trust, he said, had been “a matter of concern all the time I have been here.” He said that working to resolve it would take the church beyond his departure in

³¹⁹Gilmartin, Memo to Finance Council, November 15, 1984, “Minutes 1980s,” USS Archives.

³²⁰Board minutes December 28, 1981, “Minutes 1980s,” USS Archives.

just a few months. In his view, neither the written Personnel Policy nor the Personnel Committee “served ... adequately,” noting that some congregation members unilaterally concluded that certain staffers should be let go, and others decided which ones to advocate for. He cited gossip among staff members and between staff and church members. He lamented that staff members acted to “police” one another, rather than be “on the same side” in supporting one another. Indeed, trust was lacking. Gilmartin stated that the custodians had confusing job expectations, many of which were not explicit. He noted confusion arising about “on duty” status and payment when custodians were actually participating in church activities. In my analysis of memos and reports, both custodians serving at that time did have blurry boundaries between their jobs and their life as UUSS participants. In hindsight, it is perplexing. For example, one of them lived in a cottage on the premises—apparently at reduced rent, in lieu of compensation for his time “on call,” i.e., walking the premises and locking doors at night. This was the custodian who several current UUSS members have told me had engaged in and boasted of sexual relations with several women of the congregation, including married women, in the cottage on church grounds. In 1985, the UUSS President wrote to ask this longtime resident custodian to resign, or the Board would need to fire him; he did. As noted in an earlier chapter, one member recalled that this custodian earlier had attempted to foment complaints against the Rev. Theodore Webb and force his resignation. While the custodian was not successful at that, he continued working for UUSS for two more years.

The newsletter once published “A Letter to the *Unigram*” from another custodian, though he was not identified in the article as a staff member. He wrote to object to the

Society's advertisement of itself in the *Sacramento Bee* as "an inter-racial church."³²¹ In 1982, some UUSS members were helping start a lay-led congregation in Auburn, about thirty-five miles east. Having had only four meetings, the organizers were "planning to ask either [one of the custodians] to talk about Theology" at Auburn in the near future.³²² There is no indication why either of them would be prepared to speak on that topic or suitable to represent UUSS at a newly forming congregation. By itself, this information seems odd and perhaps amusing. To be sure, it is likely not as damaging as a church custodian's practice of having sexual encounters with church members or other staffers, on church property, no less. From the recollections of several longtime members, various archival documents, and my own observations, there has been stress and conflict regarding role boundaries for staff serving the congregation. This reflects both a failure of staff to observe their role boundaries and of congregation leaders to make such boundaries clear to staff and the congregation. Encouraging a staff member (other than one trained in the subject) to represent UUSS and speak about UU theology to a nascent congregation is an example of vagueness about roles in church life.

The hiring of church members to serve on the staff is the subject of discussion and some disagreement among UU clergy, but many congregational consultants recommend against the practice. In addition to the possible confusion about whether a person's particular words or actions are those of a paid staff member or of a committed participant in the life of the community, there is the risk that church members who serve on staff could lose their sense of community if they lose their job. Likewise, they could find it

³²¹ Lyndon Biddle, "A Letter to the Unigram," June 8, 1981, "Unigrams 1981," UUSS Archives.

³²² Board minutes, February 22, 1982, "Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

confusing to have people who are their spiritual companions become their supervisors or expect them to provide more service than the hours for which they are compensated. This can be even more painful if there is not clarity about who holds the real supervisory authority. One example from the archival records is that of Karen Hawkins. A UUSS member, Hawkins came on staff in March 1982 as Program Director, a position which would be revised to be Director of Religious Education by the time of her resignation in October 1984. The Board's 1982-1983 budget proposal included a wage increase for her position to \$12 per hour for twenty hours per week, with a note in the minutes "that [our] Program Directors have always worked more than 20 hours a week" but clearly did not get paid for it. It was not clear if this was intended to defend the practice or lament it, but the note did not suggest a path to sustainable job expectations.³²³

On March 29, 1984, Hawkins wrote to the Board about a "breach of trust... between us for five months," saying the Board had been having discussions "about my job, my integrity and the overall programming... outside my presence." She asked for their concerns in writing, for the establishment of an evaluation committee (citing its mention in her contract produced in the prior August), for written yearly evaluations of her work, and for "a clear statement of the lines of communication between the Board and the Program Director."³²⁴ She wrote a second letter April 15, asking for a written response, as she was certain the Board had considered her earlier letter at its retreat on April 1. The President acknowledged her letters, but there are no details in subsequent minutes of a Board response to her concerns. However, in July the Board's liaison to the

³²³ Board minutes, April 26, 1982, "Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

³²⁴ Karen Hawkins, letter March 29, 1984, "Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

Religious Education program (Wynne B. Skow) wrote to Hawkins of the Board's concerns about the lack of Sunday school planning for the fall and about "an antagonistic atmosphere created between the Religious Education [RE] Committee, parents and the rest of the church and board." Two women of the RE Review Committee (church members who were both former RE staff directors) had "rescinded their endorsement" of Hawkins. The Board requested a plan from her in five days "outlining how you plan to remedy the 6 concerns listed." Hawkins wrote to her two reviewers (her predecessors in her job from an earlier decade) of her disappointment about their letter to the Board, insisting that she had been seeking a "brainstorming" session with them in advance of planning the church year.³²⁵ She resigned a few months later. It is not clear if she was no longer performing well or not, but clearly there was poor communication; the paths of accountability are not clear from the records of this event.

Hawkins submitted a report for the Board's November 26 meeting after having given her notice of leaving. She thanked the Interim Minister (Gilmartin) for "his concern and action" regarding trust "between staff and between staff and congregation." She urged the Board to "address this work, and work with consciousness on it with the new minister." She also expressed optimism about the "new [recently called] minister's dedication to the program and to the development of extended family." Her gracious words notwithstanding, she must have felt continued stress. Consider the following examples. The interim and new ministers both had asked her to call the parents of all UUSS children to get feedback and ideas before her departure, and she was willing to do so. With regard to "turning [her] office and the program over to" her successor, she

³²⁵ Incidentally, both of her reviewers were active in the Women's Alliance, but I saw no archival evidence that Hawkins herself was part of that UUSS sub-organization.

wrote this to the Board: “I request any specific instructions you have for me with regard to training for Dawn” [her successor]. Finally, she indicated that she had not heard a reply to her request to take off the last Sunday in December; it was still “in committee at this time,” she said.³²⁶ There was confusion about the supervising authority over her position. It looks as if she was subordinate to multiple entities in the church, depending on the issue at hand: minister(s), church parents, the Board of Trustees, and the RE Committee. It seems likely that there was confusion about supervisory authority over custodial staff as well, whose improper actions are described above. Note that all of these entities had some sense of ownership of the custodians’ work: Property Management Committee, Personnel Committee, Board of Trustees, Business Administrator, and perhaps even the Minister. Such a diffusion of authority among UUSS leaders arguably did leave many opportunities for misunderstandings about paid staff members, and even for harm.

8. Conclusion: A Plea for Trust-orientation before Task-orientation

From 1970 to 1990, three ministers came from outside the system of this congregation for brief terms of consultation, along with the regular duties of ministry. Each one challenged the congregation to reflect on its habits of interacting and to try to learn better ones. They all echoed one another in their observations and hopeful urgings to the leaders and members at UUSS. In 1989, after two months on the job, Interim Minister Karpeles made this observation: “I see the trust level here as quite low, the spirit as factional, the vision of purpose (and dedication to that vision) shaky.” She promoted

³²⁶ Karen Hawkins, Report to the Board, November 26, 1984, “Board Minutes 1980s,” emphasis original, UUSS Archives.

an upcoming workshop that she would be leading to “focus on the role of committees... in building a spirit of belonging and mutual trust” in the congregation. The impulse to task-orientation, she said, “must be resisted until members and friends have a greater sense of cohesiveness, a core from which to invest themselves in the congregation’s future.” The process to do this, she said, “is simply learning techniques for dealing with one another less rancorously.”³²⁷

With the benefit of hindsight, it seems evident that the congregation looked to the secular culture to model its church systems and ways of interacting. In archival records of committee and Board business from 1983 to 1990, there was nearly no evidence of the words such as *trust, covenant, forgiveness, patience, imperfection, compassion, or gratitude*. To be sure, there are signs that appreciation was expressed for hard workers and those who devoted themselves in service to the church, and there were calls for more involvement by others in the work. Yet there are many more examples of concern for close adherence to parliamentary procedure, thorough documentation, and orientation to task. The practices and habits were governmental and managerial ones, not relational ones. I discern in the records of their work and the advice of their interim clergy a lack of ease with one another as fellow members, at least in their interactions while doing the work of the church. Perhaps for many lay leaders the work was kept in a separate emotional compartment from the social activities of church life. Interim ministers urged lay leaders to consider the organization as a spiritual community and to see their work together as a reflection of that. Karpeles reported on the ways she encouraged them to interact as members who shared important ethical and spiritual values. Chapter Eight

³²⁷ Eileen Karpeles, Minister’s report to the Board, February 20, 1989, “Minutes 1980s,” UUSS Archives.

charts how the Society took steps toward a covenantal understanding of being together in the 1990s, especially through painful controversies which could have split the congregation in half.

As described in Chapter Two, the members of the Women's Alliance adapted their structure and reduced the demands on their leaders so the Alliance could find a new and sustainable way of operating. While evidence and interviews indicate that women in the Alliance enjoyed a greater degree of mutual affection than the congregation at large in the 1980s and 1990s, it is worth noting that Karpeles listed it as one of the sub-groups of UUSS to which many members showed more loyalty than they did to the congregation as a whole. Though women have made up the majority of participants in this congregation (and in nearly all other U.S. American religious institutions), many of the women in UUSS have not been Alliance members. Moreover, its identity as one of the separate "tribes" in the congregation (as Karpeles wrote) may have kept it from providing to the congregation at large a clear example of a more supportive way of being in community.

In the archival record and the memories of members who remain a part of the congregation, there are past episodes of frustration, disillusionment, and grief. Also recalled from the past are joyful milestones, relief at challenges met, and gratitude for generosity, encouragement, loyalty, and love in the Unitarian Universalist Society. So it must be for most congregations. Margaret Bendroth is a historian at the Congregational Library in Boston and a clergy spouse. She writes that knowing our history is "central to the life of any spiritual community hoping to survive and thrive in the world today." We can study our congregational predecessors, she says, as we might encounter another culture: with respect, without letting our hindsight tempt us into seeing them as less

enlightened than we are. They are “available to us” not necessarily as role models but as our spiritual companions as we now “run the race” as faithful congregants and clergy ourselves.³²⁸ This close-up look at this congregation in one particular era sheds light on the not always helpful habits of lay leaders and other members, yet it also shows major dedication and many gifts of time by the lay leaders of that era. Their commitment was largely honorable, and their aim was to keep the church viable, even if habits of risk aversion had the contrary effects of dampening creativity and limiting a shared sense of ownership. The lesson I draw is the one made by Karpeles. It is beneficial to practice avoiding, even resisting, a task orientation as the first priority of leadership in a congregation and instead to practice a trust orientation, thereby offering to everyone gathered “a greater sense of cohesiveness, a core from which to invest themselves in the congregation’s future.”³²⁹

³²⁸ Margaret Bendroth, “The Weight of Congregational History,” Unitarian Universalist History and Heritage Society website, undated essay (accessed October 17, 2015). <http://uuhhs.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/CHBendrothEssay.pdf>

³²⁹ Eileen Karpeles, Minister’s report to the Board, February 20, 1989, “Minutes 1980s,” USS Archives.

Chapter Seven

New Congregations in the Sacramento Area, 1960 to 1990

1. Introduction

As noted in Chapter Three and Chapter Eight, the concept and practice of covenant is historically significant in Unitarian Universalism. A covenant does not specify what a group of people believe in common; rather it reflects how they strive to behave and serve together in a spiritual community. In a religious tradition that eschews creedal formulas and affirms a diversity of theological views and spiritual practices, what provides identity and holds members of a congregation together is a sense—and often an explicit statement—of covenant. A covenant is a promise of mutual support and care, shared values, and interdependence among members of a church.

Furthermore, in our free-church tradition the understanding of covenant extends beyond the walls of a church to include cooperative relationships among Unitarian Universalist congregations, especially those in proximity to one another. The Rev. Alice Blair Wesley, a Unitarian Universalist scholar, has written:

If a free congregation is a body of persons covenanted to walk together in love, must there not also be a *covenant of the churches* to walk together in love *as churches*, so that no congregation becomes only local? That is, too parochial in its concerns or *too isolated* to be helped in time of trouble? How ought free churches be related so that they can help one another?³³⁰

In her six lectures as the presenter of the endowed annual Minns Lectures, Wesley traced the origin of congregational polity and covenantal organization to our Puritan

³³⁰ Alice Blair Wesley, “How We Came to Forget the Covenant for a Long Time,” lecture three of *The Lay and Liberal Doctrine of the Church: the Spirit and Promise of our Covenant*,” Minns Lectures (various U.S locations, 2000-2001). Accessed March 24, 2017. <http://minnslectures.org/archive/wesley/wesley.php> Emphasis original.

forbears in England and then in New England in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. She asserted that free congregations should and did learn from and support one another and even chastise or correct one another, as persons in relationships of authentic love are expected to do. Wesley traced the early history of such relationships and the subsequent loss of that ideal of cooperation among neighboring congregations. She stated that Unitarian Universalist congregations are “so uncooperative” in our own time because of early theological controversies in New England, the later development of a denominational hierarchy, and the legal innovation of the not-for-profit corporation. First in Massachusetts and later nationwide, this innovation turned congregations and their mutual association into business corporations, with hierarchy, competition, and isolation as results of that model. She called our congregations and leaders to practice being covenantal again, to work toward the vision of a *community* of independent congregations, rather than isolated or competitive congregations.

One aspect of cooperation among congregations could be that of extending the faith, founding new congregations, and helping them to thrive. This chapter recounts a number of instances in which new congregations were formed in the general area of Sacramento and with some degree of relationship to the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS). Such relationships included greater or lesser support from that established congregation. At least two of them resulted out of dissent from or strong dissatisfaction with the culture or leadership of UUSS. I include this chapter in part because it reflects some of the culture of UUSS of the time. There was not a widespread missionary zeal on the part of this established congregation; even when some UUSS members led efforts to found new congregations, there was ambivalence in UUSS clergy

and lay leadership toward supporting them. The new congregations depended less on UUSS as a congregation than they did on the organizing energy of individual religious liberals and the Unitarian Universalist Association's (UUA) Pacific Central District or the Boston-based denomination itself.

This chapter includes even congregations that began with minimal or few ties to UUSS because they were formed in the same regional context, and because relationships have grown over time among their respective clergy and some of their members. In addition, the origins of all these congregations have yet to be included together in any other historical narrative.

From 1960 to 1990, some of the members of UUSS involved themselves in the formation of other Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregations in Sacramento or nearby counties. Sometimes the purpose of starting new UU groups was to extend the benefits of liberal church community, broaden the reach of the faith, and grow in number. At other times a new group's founding could be called a "split" or a "dissident" action, if its founding was based in pain or anger at the original home congregation. Furthermore, some "new starts" in the Sacramento area showed evidence of both motivations: the longing to find a more desirable church community by founding one, and the wish to serve a wider geographic area. This chapter summarizes those developments and notes the connections between UUSS and newer UU groups, focusing especially on the dynamics of the launching of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Sacramento in 1989.

2. The Fellowship Movement for Extending Unitarian Universalism

In the 1950s, the American Unitarian Association began its Fellowship Program, and this continued into the late 1960s after that denomination had consolidated with the Universalist Church in America to become the Unitarian Universalist Association in 1961. The Director of Fellowships was Monroe Husbands, a Unitarian lay person; he served from 1948 until his retirement in 1967.³³¹ The strategy of the program was to spread the reach of Unitarian Universalism by planting or supporting new congregations in areas that showed potential for growth, mainly areas with a density of educated and professional adults, such as university or college towns, or newly growing suburbs drawing professionals and their families.

Many religious denominations “planted” new congregations during the postwar Baby Boom and suburbanization of the country. Sometimes these began as house churches or sprang from informal, lay-led prayer circles. Yet my observation is that most other denominations in the 1950s and 1960s intended for their new congregations to be served by clergy. Unitarian fellowships, in contrast, were envisioned mainly to be lay-led congregations, with no need for a minister. Sunday services often were called “programs,” and consisted of discussions and lectures rather than sermons. Hymn singing was not seen as integral to the worship experience in some fellowships, but often music was performed as a feature or as the whole program for the morning (or afternoon) gathering. This program style was congruent with that of the culture of many of the Unitarian churches where the dominant theological orientation was non-theistic Religious

³³¹ “Husbands, Monroe” in David Robinson, *The Unitarians and the Universalists* (Westport, Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1985), 280, found on website www.webuus.org, accessed December 7, 2016. http://webuus.com/timeline/Munroe_Husbands.html

Humanism, with an interest in rational discussions of political, social, philosophical, and ethical matters, especially those covered in contemporary literature and the social sciences. In many fellowships, however, the congregation or its most influential lay leaders did not want a regular minister to provide those programs, or to have any reminders of conventional religious community.³³²

Well into the 1980s many newly forming Unitarian Universalist congregations would take the name *fellowship*, especially one forming as a split from a local church, though some Unitarian Universalist laypersons would organize a fellowship after relocating to a new area with no UU church in driving distance. This would describe the Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in remote Woodruff, Wisconsin. It was founded in 1989; I was an occasional student preacher there in the fall of 1994 and winter and spring of 1995.³³³ In addition, some lay-led congregations were founded overseas by expatriate U.S. Americans, such as the UU Fellowship of San Miguel de Allende, Mexico, established in that city in 1987.³³⁴ The UU Fellowship of Paris, France, was founded in 1985; it has no minister but most of its monthly worship services are led by clergy visiting from North America and Europe.³³⁵ While some parishioners can speak the local languages, church programs at both fellowships are in English.

³³² *Ibid.*

³³³ Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Fellowship, "About Us: Who We Are," on website accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.nuuf.com/about-us/who-we-are>.

³³⁴ Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Miguel de Allende, "About Us: History," on website accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.uufsma.org/our-history.html>

³³⁵ Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Paris, "About Our Fellowship," on website accessed December 5, 2016. http://word.uufp.info/press/?page_id=6.

Publications and articles by other Unitarian Universalist writers have sought to describe the degree to which fellowships have tended to have damaging conflicts more than clergy-led churches have. Some conflicts in both settings include anti-clerical and anti-authority sentiment and behaviors. At the same time, other authors have covered the fruitful effects that many fellowships have had on their members and families and on their local communities, which usually were not large urban areas. Others have written also that, among fellowships in particular, congregational sizes and styles have been static over time. At many fellowships, adult membership levels have held steady at 100 or fewer members.³³⁶ It is arguable that lay leaders in many fellowships held on to power, either by remaining in the same elected or appointed roles for many years or by using their influence to stifle change. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to cover those topics but worth noting that most of the fellowships described below were short-lived.

3. Sacramento-area Fellowships in the 1960s and 1970s

The Town and Country Fellowship was established in 1954, approximately. I have not located the dates of its creation or dissolution in the archival records of the Unitarian Universalist Society or the Unitarian Universalist Association. However, in the latter archives are two field reports by denominational staff members. On October 12 and 13, 1955, Frances W. Wood came from Boston to Sacramento to meet area congregations on behalf of the Division of Education for the Council of Liberal

³³⁶ A useful book cited by many ministers, lay leaders and consultants in describing categories of congregational size and culture is Alice Mann, *The In-Between Church: Navigating Size Transitions in Congregations* (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield/Alban, 1998). The author's website is <http://www.congregationalconsulting.org/alice-mann/>.

Churches. The Council was an early federation of the Unitarian and Universalist denominations, which united their offices of education, publication, and public relations.³³⁷ She noted: “Visit requested [by local leaders].” After the Rev. Theodore Abell (the Sacramento minister) met her at the train station, she met with staff and lay leaders of the First Unitarian Society (now UUSS), and separately with lay leaders of the Davis Fellowship³³⁸ and the Town and Country Fellowship.³³⁹ After meetings with “Doris Hollister, Supt.” (presumably of Religious Education at the Town and Country Fellowship), Wood noted: “Program by family units in a.m. Fellowship meetings in evening. Dissatisfied, splinter group [from] Sacramento.” Of all the new congregations formed in the same region as UUSS, this Fellowship was the only one I have seen referred to explicitly in records as a dissident or splinter group.

The First Unitarian Society was located at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street. On her 1955 visit there, Wood toured six new “church school rooms, just completed in the annex.” Even so, the high school group met “in [a] home” and “Jr. High in church building.” She also toured a “new church lot which they hope to secure shortly. Well located, far out of town but in the center of church population.” She had lunch with eleven church school teachers, dinner with Mr. and Mrs. Abell, and an evening meeting

³³⁷ Unitarian Universalist Association, “Timeline of UU History,” handout from Workshop 1, *Faith Like a River* curriculum, from website accessed December 6, 2016. <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/river/workshop1/175621.shtml>

³³⁸ It does not appear that the Sacramento Society was directly involved with the founding of the congregation in Davis, though at least one person from Davis frequently visited UUSS to get ideas and inspiration (and perhaps encouragement). The Davis congregation was organized in 1954 first to provide religious education for children, and was chartered as a Fellowship by the American Unitarian Association in 1958. See Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis, “Milestones in Our History,” website accessed December 27, 2016. http://www.uudavis.org/PDFs/Congregational/History_Milestones.pdf

³³⁹ Frances W. Wood, “Field Report, October 12 and 13, 1955, Sacramento, Calif., Area Conference,” Council of Liberal Churches, Division of Education, in “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Congregational Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

at the Society's church building, leading a discussion on "R.E. trends." Members from Davis came to attend both meetings.

Her visit included meetings with the new Unitarian Fellowship in Davis; she noted that the Chico Fellowship "did not show" for her meetings. The Davis Fellowship had at least twenty-four families and "fifty-three children ready to go." Having been planning since 1954 to launch a church school, it was now meeting in the local Girl Scout house and using denominational materials from Beacon Press. She concluded: "Better prepared than most groups. We must keep close to this group."³⁴⁰ Her optimism was borne out, as the Unitarian Universalist Church of Davis (as it is now named) called its first minister in 1963, has a large property, two full-time clergy and more than 300 adult members at the time of this writing.

Nearly three years later, in March of 1958, Edna P. Bruner made a two-day site visit to Sacramento on behalf of the Division of Education. The Town and Country Fellowship's thirty-five families (with sixty-five children) were "scattered all over Sacramento." Having started four years earlier (hence 1954) with a small group for Sunday meetings in "fellowship groups," the members were still meeting in homes rather than at a rented or other church location. Its name could refer to the Town and Country Village, one of the first large shopping centers in the area and in California. The shopping center was built in a rural (now suburban) area of the county, about eight miles from the First Unitarian Society's site in Midtown Sacramento. The youth of the Fellowship regularly would "join the Youth Program of the Sacramento Church [i.e., the Society]," whereas the programs for younger children followed a common theme for all grade levels

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

every month and used the denomination's Beacon Press curricula. Bruner's view was that the Fellowship was having problems because "they have grown enough in numbers to have gotten beyond the intimate angle of" being in a smaller congregation. She said "[The] impression that members of the fellowship gave" was that of a "dissident group" from the larger church.

In March of 1960 Frances W. Wood returned to the area for another two-day visit, meeting with "the Sacramento church" [i.e., Society] on her first day and holding an "area meeting" with members of other congregations on the next day, a Saturday. Her Field Report noted a registration of 344 children at the Society "with an average attendance of 'about' 130" (quotation marks hers, implying perhaps there was not sufficient documentation of child attendance). "The fact that guests [from Davis and the Town and Country Fellowship] were present [at the meeting] prevented much of a discussion of the present church crises due to the [recent but not yet effected] resignation of the minister under some pressure." She also listed that minister, Abell, as present in the discussion and called him "wholly supportive [during her] weekend sessions."

It is remarkable to see the resources of the denomination's staff time and travel expenses devoted to on-site consultation to local churches and fellowships in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Their comprehensive "field report" summaries reflect the gift of their presence and attention to congregational life, with a special focus on Religious Education programs. This demonstrates that church and denominational growth was not guaranteed—it was not merely an automatic outcome of the growth of families in the postwar Baby Boom and suburban development in places like Sacramento. There was a

deep local commitment, experimentation with new models, and openness to denominational guidance as well the provision of such guidance—in person!

It is not clear when the Town and Country Fellowship dissolved. The California Explore website lists its incorporation date as a “domestic nonprofit” as of April 13, 1955, and lists its “company status” as “FTB Suspended,” meaning it was no longer listed by the California Franchise Tax Board.³⁴¹ There is no mention of Town and Country in the application materials or correspondence regarding admission of a subsequent fellowship to the denomination in 1962.

4. Central Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

Two years after the First Unitarian Society moved into its new facilities on Sierra Boulevard, a new fellowship applied for membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association through the Fellowship Program. It was accepted as a member congregation by the denomination’s Board of Trustees at its meeting in June 1962.³⁴² The Central Unitarian Universalist Fellowship was organized on January 7, 1962, with twelve members. The President was Carl W. Anderson and the Secretary was Jean C. Abell, the young widow of Theodore Abell, who had been pressed into resigning from the Society in early 1960, when the new facility was under construction on Sierra Boulevard. He later was diagnosed with brain cancer and passed away in November of 1960.

³⁴¹ California Explore, “Town & Country Unitarian Fellowship,” accessed December 6, 2016. <https://www.californiaexplore.com/company/00301305/town-country-unitarian-fellowship>

³⁴² Letter from Mrs. J. Russell Bowman, Secretary of the Board of Trustees, Unitarian Universalist Association, to Carl W. Anderson, June 30, 1962. “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Congregational Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

The official history of UUSS claims that in the early 1960s, “There was some discussion of adding a second minister to the staff. But it became evident that with current expenses and mortgage payments on the main building plus the anticipated construction of badly needed church school facilities,” that was not an affordable goal. It is worth noting, however, that the Society was not weak. It had grown to 500 members by 1962 and would continue growing by 100 adults in each of the next two years. In any case, the official history claims that an “alternative” to adding a minister was to encourage new fellowships in hopes they would grow into “full-fledged” congregations.³⁴³ It seems clear that the Central Fellowship carried more of an endorsement by the Society than the Town and Country Fellowship had received, given the latter’s characterization as a “splinter group,” as noted in Section 3.³⁴⁴

Central UU Fellowship President Carl W. Anderson wrote to Monroe Husbands at the Unitarian Universalist Association that the Board of the First Unitarian Society (now UUSS) had “recognized and sanctioned the new organization.” Indeed, the two congregations had been in conversation about transferring ownership of the Society’s Twenty-seventh Street property to the Fellowship. The denomination still held the mortgage on this property’s main building and the Society still owned the Religious Education annex. The Fellowship began renting space there and holding biweekly services in late 1961, which Anderson said was an intentional delay so the Society could

³⁴³ Rodney Cobb and Irma West, *In Good Times and Bad: The Story of Sacramento’s Unitarians 1868-1984*; Doris Simonis *et al.*, editors (Sacramento, 2008: Unitarian Universalist Society), 104.

³⁴⁴ A side note is that this Fellowship was the first local congregation to take the name Unitarian *Universalist* in recognition of the denominational consolidation in 1961. The First Unitarian Society would not be renamed the Unitarian Universalist Society until the 1970s.

get established in its new location (which it had dedicated in the summer of 1960). In May 1962 Anderson was happy to report having had their “first full dress church service” on April 8, 1962, with the president of Starr King School for the Ministry preaching. It would now be holding weekly services, he wrote, using guest ministers and students from the seminary.³⁴⁵

In his report to the Fellowship’s Annual Meeting of the Membership on April 19, 1964, Anderson said that the Rev. John Flint had preached thirty-five of the prior year’s forty-two Sunday worship services, and other speakers had filled the other seven Sundays.³⁴⁶ He also reported the disappointing news that the Board of the Society had voted to sell the property, and in any case the Fellowship was limited to using only the chapel, and only on Sundays. The Pacific Central District’s executive leader “and the Boston office of the Association” had urged the Society to sell, Anderson said, but he was hoping for a change of mind.³⁴⁷

Unfortunately, two years later the Fellowship would suspend operations. Emily W. Sundquist, its new President, wrote that the congregation had concluded that it was now “hopeless” to purchase the old church property for the purpose of “Unitarian

³⁴⁵ Carl W. Anderson, letter to Monroe Husbands, May 31, 1962, in “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Congregational Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

³⁴⁶ The Unitarian Universalist Association has a record that a Rev. John Flint (1880-1976) served a congregation in Pacifica, California, from 1963-1966. If he provided pulpit supply in Sacramento (approximately 200 miles away) in 1963, he would have been about eighty-three years old. Source: Robert Kipp, e-mail correspondence with author, January 4, 2017.

³⁴⁷ Carl W. Anderson, “Report of the President and Chairman of the Board of Directors to the Annual meeting of the Membership,” April 19, 1964, “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School, Chicago.

extension.” In a letter to the Unitarian Universalist Association in August of 1965, she said the congregation “[had] voted to go out of existence as of the end of June 1965.”³⁴⁸

The Fellowship’s remaining funds were to be donated to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and Starr King School for the Ministry (both organizations independent of the denomination), but not to the denomination or the First Unitarian Society. Though there is no direct evidence, this may indicate disaffection with the Society and the denomination, perhaps out of resentful feelings at what Fellowship members felt was a lack of sufficient support for their venture. (The constitutions or bylaws of many UU congregations, including UUSS at present, direct that in the case of a church’s dissolution, any remaining assets would be given to the denomination.) In any case, what began as an ambitious effort and with the endorsement of the larger congregation (the Society) was out of operation in fewer than three years. The old church building was eventually sold and residential apartments built on the land.

5. James Reeb Unitarian Fellowship

Less than a year after the Central UU Fellowship dissolved, a new group started services in the old church building at 1415 Twenty-seventh Street. According to the Society’s official history, about forty families “organized under the name South Area Fellowship” in June 1965, but there is no evidence of a public worship service before September 1965, by which time they had changed the name to the James Reeb Unitarian Fellowship, honoring a young white Unitarian Universalist minister who had been

³⁴⁸ Emily W. Sundquist, letter to Unitarian Universalist Association, August 10, 1965, “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Congregational Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

attacked and murdered by a white mob while he was in Selma, Alabama, for a civil rights march in March of the same year.³⁴⁹

“Approximately eighty persons participated” in the first worship service of the James Reeb Fellowship at 11:00 a.m., Sunday, September 19, 1965. Dick Tarble, a Unitarian Society member, was announced as the person who would conduct “a family service.” (He is introduced in a section below.) Not long after, Society minister Rev. Dr. Ford Lewis conducted a service for the Fellowship and “presented the membership book to those who wished to join.”³⁵⁰ While I have not located a date in any archival files, the official history of the Society recounts that the Fellowship dissolved in the summer of 1968 after the “old church building” was sold.³⁵¹ This Fellowship appears to have been another new congregation formed in cooperation with the Society rather than as a dissenting alternative. Even so, it was short-lived.

6. North Area Unitarian Fellowship

Before the James Reeb Fellowship formed, another group had formed, also with the support of the Society and its minister, Ford Lewis. The Society’s official history says that “after a series of informal discussions by several members of the First Unitarian Society,” seventeen people started a Religious Education program in rented space of the Fair Oaks Grange Hall, a drive of ten to thirteen miles northeast of the Society, in what

³⁴⁹ Rodney Cobb and Irma West, *In Good Times and Bad: The Story of Sacramento’s Unitarians 1868-1984*; Doris Simonis *et al.*, editors (Sacramento, 2008: Unitarian Universalist Society), 105.

³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 106.

was a rural area of Sacramento County. In September 1964 they began classes with twenty adults and twenty-five children attending. They named their fellowship the North Area Unitarians, and received a charter from the denomination as a member congregation. As he would do a year later for the James Reeb Fellowship, Lewis attended in late November of 1964, and he “presented the membership book, which 31 adults signed.” In June of 1965, the Board of the North Area Unitarians wrote to express its “gratitude to the First Society ... for the financial and moral support... [in] this first year,” giving credit to Lewis and the Society’s Board, and anticipating a warm relationship into the future.³⁵²

In 1975, Fellowship President John Norris and Treasurer Edward Blanchette filed a yearly certification of membership with the denomination, showing fifty members and “church school registration” of ten.³⁵³ This is the latest record of activity, showing over a decade of existence. I have not located a date of dissolution. Current and late members of the Unitarian Universalist Society told me it did continue meeting into the 1970s, and never had its own minister. They said the many demands of running a congregation were exhausting for the young adult volunteers who were building families and working full time. In contrast to the James Reeb Fellowship, this outreach effort apparently lasted longer, had the benefit of renting a public facility which would not be sold, and was in a remote and growing location, not a mere few miles away from the Society.

³⁵² *Ibid.*

³⁵³ Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, Annual Congregational Report, dated “received” on August 7, 1975, “Sacramento” file, Unitarian Universalist Association Congregational Archives, Meadville Lombard Theological School.

As the official UUSS history cites, both the James Reeb and North Area congregations received active support from the established Sacramento congregation's leadership. Current UUSS member Maxine Cornwell said that to her knowledge the North Area Fellowship was not founded out of dissatisfaction with UUSS. She wrote, "For Bob and me there was only one reason: We wanted a church closer to our home, because we had four children, including a baby, and traveling so far to church was difficult with them.... I don't remember that anyone was unhappy with UUSS."³⁵⁴ She noted also that U.S. Highway 50 had not yet been built in those years; hence, a long drive to UUSS from their rural home was made longer and slower than it is today.

7. Auburn and Grass Valley: Regional Growth in the 1980s and 1990s

Perhaps to a lesser degree than with the fellowships noted above, UUSS supported the formation of two congregations in growing towns farther away—but the latter two have survived to this day. The Sierra Foothills Unitarian Universalists in Auburn (thirty miles away from UUSS, in Placer County) was "founded in 1982 by 15 people."³⁵⁵ The Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains in Grass Valley (fifty-four miles away from UUSS, in Nevada County) was founded in 1994.³⁵⁶

The UUSS Board of Trustees made a supportive commitment to the Auburn group. Being a "Covenant Congregation" implied financial support but did not require it. I have not seen evidence of any financial contribution from UUSS to the Auburn

³⁵⁴ Maxine Cornwell, e-mail to author, March 24, 2017. Quoted with permission.

³⁵⁵ Sierra Foothills Unitarian Universalists, "Who We Are," website accessed December 5, 2016. <https://www.mysfuu.org/who-we-are/>

³⁵⁶ Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains, "About Us: UUCM History," website accessed December 5, 2016. <http://www.uugrassvalley.org/about-us/uucm-history/>.

congregation. In the church year 1999-2000 (roughly September to June), UUSS was served by a married couple of Interim Co-ministers, the Rev. Sydney Wilde and the Rev. Dennis Daniel. Since they had to share one full-time position and salary at UUSS between themselves, Wilde and Daniel provided part-time services to the Auburn congregation as “consulting ministers.” On at least one occasion, they showed the newer congregation that an aspect or benefit of having regular clergy was a higher profile and moral presence in the community. That is, Wilde contributed an opinion column (a monthly rotation shared among local clergy) to the *Auburn Journal* newspaper. In December 1999 she wrote to praise a Vermont court decision allowing same-gender domestic partnerships; she noted her joy at having conducted many gay weddings. She let Sacramento UUs know of this by reprinting the article in the UUSS *Unigram*.³⁵⁷

The younger of the two congregations, the one in Grass Valley, was organized primarily by members of the Auburn congregation who lived in Nevada County, and they eventually transferred their membership to the new church. The now-deceased John and Maybelle Church, who had been members of UUSS, were leading organizers of the Grass Valley congregation; his first wife remained at the Society. (Maybelle was his second wife. Annette Church, his first wife, was a member of UUSS until her death a few years ago; she told me they had remained on friendly terms.) In October 1995, UUSS President Ginny Johnson reported, “Our Board took another action to help build Unitarian Universalism in the area... [We] will covenant with the UU Community of the Mountains (Nevada City). Unfortunately, the Board felt that we could not provide financial support at this time but will consider a payment...in next year’s budget

³⁵⁷ Sydney Wilde, “Wilde Wanderings,” *Unigram*, January 2000, “Unigrams 2000,” UUSS Archives.

cycle.”³⁵⁸ At a Congregational Meeting held in January 1996, the UUSS Board asked the congregation to covenant with the congregation in Grass Valley as “a mentor” and “to help out” for three years, but without a required financial commitment. The yes vote was unanimous.³⁵⁹ I have not seen any evidence of a budgeted or special donation by UUSS to the new congregation in Grass Valley.

Each of those two congregations eventually achieved the purchase of property for a church home in the downtown area of its city. Both have called ministers to full-time settlements, including LGBT-identified clergy at both. It is not unusual in my experience for members of one congregation (among Auburn, Grass Valley, and Sacramento) to transfer their membership to another, often based on relocations for retirement, a new home, or employment.

8. Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada

Forty-five charter members founded the Unitarian Fellowship of Reno in 1959 with the encouragement of Monroe Husbands, the Director of the Fellowship Program of the denomination. While gathering over the years in a dozen rented meeting locations, it purchased its property in 1984, moved a small building onto it and renovated it, though this was not a sanctuary building. In 1999 the Fellowship began raising funds and designing a new main church facility for the same site. With sanctuary, offices, classrooms, and a social area with walls for displaying art, the building was dedicated in 2002. The congregation is part of the denomination’s Pacific Central District (PCD), and

³⁵⁸ Ginny Johnson, “President’s Message,” *Unigram*, October 1995, “Unigrams 1995,” UUSS Archives.

³⁵⁹ Congregational Meeting minutes, January 28, 1996, “Board Minutes January 1996-June 1996,” UUSS Archives.

is one of only two churches in the District which are not in Northern California (Honolulu has the other one). The only other UU congregation in the State of Nevada is in Las Vegas, which is in the denomination's Pacific Southwest District.

Over many years, the church in Reno made use of visiting preachers from elsewhere in the PCD.³⁶⁰ Later voting to rename itself the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada, the congregation moved to full-time professional ministry with the advice and support of District staff members and a three-year Extension Ministry grant from the Unitarian Universalist Association, which appointed and trained an Extension Minister for Reno; she served for three years. Since that period, the Fellowship has called two full-time settled ministers (2003 and again in 2008) and has paid the costs of full-time ministry for them, as well as for the interim ministers who served before each called minister.

In January 1982, the Rev. Theodore Webb (the Unitarian Universalist Society's minister from 1971 to 1983) reported to the Society that he had "spent a week working for the Fellowship in Reno."³⁶¹ After Webb's resignation, the Rev. Aron Gilmartin started serving the Unitarian Universalist Society as Interim Minister. However, after working at UUSS in the month of December, he interrupted his service for six weeks (starting in January) due to a prior commitment he had made to serve in Reno through the denomination's Minister-on-Loan program.³⁶² In the 1997-1998 church year, the Rev.

³⁶⁰Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Northern Nevada, "About the Fellowship: A Half-century of Unitarian Universalism in Northern Nevada," website accessed December 6, 2016. http://uufnn.org/fileadmin/About_the_Fellowship/Half_Century_of_UUFNN.pdf

³⁶¹ Theodore Webb, "Minister's Report," Annual Report 1981-1982, January 17, 1982, UUSS Archives.

³⁶²Aron S. Gilmartin, Annual Report, January 22, 1984, "Board Minutes 1980s," UUSS Archives.

Dr. Shirley Ranck spent one week per month as Interim Minister in Reno while she served UUSS half time as its new Pastoral Minister. The Reno ministry concluded when her duties increased in Sacramento following the departure of its lead minister. I am not aware of any direct connections between the Northern Nevada Fellowship and the Sacramento Society other than those ministerial services and later pulpit visits, but recent years have seen a high level of collegial friendship between clergy of the two congregations. In the past year, a longtime lay member from Reno left the Fellowship to move back to a home she had kept in Sacramento. She has joined many activities and committees in Sacramento and speaks well of both congregations.

9. Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Sacramento

The founding of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Sacramento (UUCC), in 1989, relied on the active involvement of many members of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS), and the new church received both financial support and charter members from UUSS. The history of its founding sheds light on some dynamics within the Unitarian Universalist Society.

JoAnn Anglin served on the UUSS Board of Trustees in the late 1980s. She said UUSS member John Sugar “came to the Board several times” to report on progress and encourage support of the venture. He and his wife would be longtime leaders in the new church. Anglin mentioned a few other former UUSS members who left to plant the new church.³⁶³ One UUSS member who was pivotal in founding UUCC was Dick Tarble, now in his late 90s. He and his wife, Georgene, had been Unitarian Universalists since

³⁶³ JoAnn Anglin, interview with author, December 6, 2016. Quoted with permission.

1954, when they first lived in Sacramento. From 1955 to 1962 they were active members of UU congregations in Maryland and the District of Columbia, and they were founding members of one in College Station, Texas.³⁶⁴ They returned to Sacramento and to membership in UUSS in 1963. During this time, he was active in the founding of the short-lived James Reeb Unitarian Fellowship, which began renting the Society's former church home in 1965.

After that effort, Dick Tarble's career as a U. S. Weather Service hydrologist took his family to Malaysia and Kenya for a United Nations assignment.³⁶⁵ The Tarble family settled in Sacramento one more time, in 1979. In addition to serving on the Board at UUSS, Dick served on the Board of the Pacific Central District (made up of thirty-five congregations in Northern California, Reno, and Honolulu). For nine years he served on the Extension Committee for the District, five of them as chair.³⁶⁶ The committee had a goal of launching three new congregations in the District. He told me, "I was really disappointed in how much opposition there was" to starting new congregations, noting opposition from the established congregations in San Francisco, Walnut Creek, and Sacramento. "They all felt they would be losing all these members--and money."³⁶⁷

He prepared an announcement to be inserted into the Order of Service at UUSS. A "Town Meeting" would take place at UUSS after the service on September 25, 1988, on the topic of starting a congregation in the Sacramento area. He invited a few leaders

³⁶⁴ Read about the College Station congregation, with credit to the Tarbles: <http://uucbv.org/uucbv-history/>

³⁶⁵ Dick Tarble and Georgene Tarble, interview with author, November 28, 2016. Quoted with permission.

³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

from the First Unitarian Church of San Diego to come to Northern California to explain the benefits of starting a new church. In downtown San Diego, he said, “they would send people out from their church to start new ones, and the downtown church still grew.” Alas, he said, this example “didn’t make any difference” to opponents of new church starts in the Pacific Central District.³⁶⁸

He quoted John Berke, a UUSS President, saying “over my dead body” would there be a new Sacramento church. Another lay leader, Charles Diggs, “wrote a two-page letter as rancorous as all get-out, [saying] that we weren’t following the guidelines from [the denomination]. You could feel a sense of desperation in them to stop it.” Yet, he said, “the opposition wasn’t overwhelming.” Dick Tarble called a meeting for volunteers at a member’s home, “and twelve people showed up.” He added that the Rev. Eileen Karpeles, the Interim Minister at UUSS from early 1989 to summer of 1990, “was a very big help. She found a group of people in the church who agreed with us and helped us. Marge Francisco made us a banner” as a going away gift for the group starting UUCC.³⁶⁹

Board meeting minutes reflect discussions of having a subsidy in the Society’s budget for the first few years of the Community Church’s operations. Ginny Johnson, a UUSS member since the middle 1980s, recalled that these funds were to provide part of the help the congregation needed to compensate a full-time minister. However, she said the Rev. Dr. John Young seemed to feel competitive with what was called the “South Church.” He had been called as minister by the Society in 1991, after the financial

³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

commitment had been made, but he did not want to continue the subsidy.³⁷⁰ JoAnn Anglin confirmed this: “He wanted to cut off any support as fast as possible. He felt that it took away from energy that should be at our church,” which she said he had envisioned “as being the diocesan cathedral of Northern California for Unitarian Universalism.”³⁷¹

It appears that USS did maintain a partial commitment to UCC for four fiscal years (July through June, coinciding with a typical UU church year, in which many programs gear up in late summer and slow down in early June). There are four years of Income and Expense reports with a line item (under the Denominational Affairs category) that reads: “UCC Congregational Support.” In April 1992, the Treasurer noted the following on the budget proposal for fiscal year 1992-1993: “Share cost of minister for UCC for 3-5 years on a declining basis (\$8/member).”³⁷² With approximately 500 members at the Society, the total would calculate to \$4,000, which was achieved in fiscal year 1992-1993. As this table shows, the subsidy took place over four years.³⁷³

Table 7.1 Contributions by the UU Society to the UU Community Church of Sacramento

<u>Fiscal Year</u>	<u>Amount Contributed, \$</u>
1991-1992	2, 992
1992-1993	3, 996
1993-1994	3,004
1994-1995	1,002

³⁷⁰ Ginny Johnson, interview with author, November 11, 2016. Quoted with permission.

³⁷¹ JoAnn Anglin, interview with author, December 6, 2016. Quoted with permission.

³⁷² T. Leslie Corbin, Treasurer’s letter to congregation and budget proposal, April 23, 1992, “Board of Trustees Minutes Jan. 1992-June 1992,” USS Archives.

³⁷³ Unitarian Universalist Society, Income and Expense Statements, Annual Reports for years 1990-1991 through 1995-1996, “Annual Reports” file, USS Archives.

Johnson's impression was that part of the motivation for founding a new church was that "some people were upset about Religious Education (RE) and that we didn't honor the kids and their participation."³⁷⁴ Judy Bell said the same: "I heard that the stated reason for the departure was that we were not very focused on children." She described some of the tension in the Society by characterizing some attitudes this way: "We want a big RE program, but do we have to have the kids in the service? They're so noisy." In other words, she said, "We wanted growth but we didn't want things to change." Annette Emery had a similar observation. She had been an active Unitarian Universalist in Santa Cruz County before she moved to Sacramento and joined the Society in 1986. When I asked for painful moments from UUSS history, she recalled "being a Religious Education [RE] teacher and having to continually define why RE is important. It was difficult when people looked at RE as money and [asked], 'Why are we spending money on this?'" She recalled that UUSS Board members Charles Diggs and John Alden "would never look outside their own circles" of UUSS activity and were against having a paid Religious Education Director, among other staff. She said, "Charlie Diggs admitted it had been seven years since they stepped foot in the RE building." They had the attitude that "RE was something women should volunteer to do for free," as many women had done for years. Emery said the church leadership did not seem to appreciate that serving thirty or more children and youth every week called for paid leadership. Moreover, they did not seem to know that many women were needing to work outside the home, reducing the

³⁷⁴ After several months of conversations, UUCC members voted in 2014 to suspend operations as of June 30, 2014. A number of members began attending UUSS and have since joined UUSS, but a group of UUCC members continued to meet on a biweekly basis in member's homes and later in a rented venue. Nearing the end of an intentional three-year trial, remaining members recently voted to dissolve the organization in June of 2017.

time they might have to organize and run an RE program.³⁷⁵ The same social trend—increasing numbers of women in the work force, leaving less time for volunteer service—also had an impact on the congregation’s Women’s Alliance. (See Chapter Two.)

Judy Bell had joined the Society in 1982, so when members departed in 1989 to establish the UU Community Church, “letting go of those people was painful.” Most of the UUSS members whom I interviewed referred to the new church’s formation as a “split.” I asked Johnson why she used that word. She said, “You were separating people that knew each other.” Writing about her intentional ministry of conflict management in her mid-point interim ministry evaluation, Rev. Eileen Karpeles said she had made sure to initiate a farewell ceremony during a service for those departing to be part of the newly formed congregation.³⁷⁶ During interviews, two UUSS lay leaders recalled this event to me as a gracious and positive one. Bell said that Karpeles had “helped us heal any hard feelings about the congregation that was splitting off” and Bell gave the minister praise for “a neat service and ritual she did that was a send-off for them.”

Other evidence indicates general support of the new church. In early 1990, UUSS granted permission to UUCC to use its bulk mailing permit “for a large mailing to South area homes.” In December 1990, the *Unigram* newsletter at UUSS included a note of thanks to Georgene Tarble for inviting UUCC to participate in the large holiday Bazaar fundraiser at UUSS.³⁷⁷

³⁷⁵ Annette Emery, interview with author, November 29, 2016. Quoted with permission.

³⁷⁶ Eileen Karpeles, “Evaluation of Congregation by [Interim] Minister,” September 18, 1989, UUSS Archives.

³⁷⁷ *Unigram*, December 21, 1990, “Unigrams 1990” file, UUSS Archives.

In the announcements of upcoming activities listed in the Sunday Order of Service at the Society (UUSS) could be found a listing for the UU Community Church's speaker and sermon topic, usually for that afternoon but in some cases for a week later. The Community Church originally rented space at a Japanese United Methodist Church in South Sacramento and held afternoon services there. UUCC followed its 4:30 p.m. service with a potluck meal nearly every Sunday. From the UUSS archives it appears that such courtesy listings of UUCC sermons and preachers began September 23, 1990, a date when the Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong would be the guest preacher. He had just given his first sermon at UUSS as the Accredited Interim Minister two weeks earlier.³⁷⁸ This courtesy listing at UUSS was still in practice during 1992, when UUCC was meeting at 5:00 p.m.

Through the Extension Ministry program of the Unitarian Universalist Association, the new church received a modest grant for a few years to support its new minister. Appointed by the denomination as New Congregation Organizing Minister was the Rev. Judith Morris, whom the UUCC congregation would call to be its settled minister in a few years. In the early years, she preached at least twice per month. Several lay leaders often preached as well, and they heard from guest ministers, seminarians, local not-for-profit leaders (like Dan Delaney, the co-founder of Loaves and Fishes).³⁷⁹ In the Society's newsletter listing for an afternoon sermon at UUCC in

³⁷⁸ Orders of Service for September 9, 16, 23, 30; "Orders of Service 1990," UUSS Archives.

³⁷⁹ Order of Service announcement inserts, various ones in 1992, "Orders of Service 1992," UUSS Archives.

December 1990, it noted that Morris would preach on her recent “week of training as a New Congregation Organizer” at denominational headquarters in Boston.³⁸⁰

The *Unigram* newsletter displayed an invitation to the USS congregation to attend a “Recognition and Acknowledgment of Judith Morris’ First Parish Ministry,” on Sunday, January 27, 1991, at 4:30 p.m., at the Japanese United Methodist Church location. Given that Rev. Morris was an appointed Extension Minister and not a called minister, the ceremony was not an installation but likely served as a time of celebration and commitment for all who were part of the new church.³⁸¹

In spite of her frustrations at USS, Emery did not leave USS for the UU Community Church until 1992 because her daughter had formed strong bonds with her junior high school group in the Religious Education program at USS. After she did join the Community Church, she was involved nearly every year in Religious Education. In most years, there was no paid staff member for the program, and much work fell to her. Among other volunteer offices and roles at UCC, Emery served once as President. She told me that she was President at the same time that Johnson was President at USS. She recalled, “We met for lunch a few times then to share ideas. I don’t think any of the other [church presidents] have followed that.”³⁸²

In October 1995 as USS President, Johnson wrote that the Board had received a “gracious letter” from Emery thanking USS for its support of the formation and

³⁸⁰ *Unigram*, December 7, 1990, “Unigrams 1990,” USS Archives.

³⁸¹ *Unigram* insert, January 17, 1991, “Unigrams 1991,” USS Archives.

³⁸² Emery, *op. cit.*

maintenance of the new congregation launched in Sacramento a few years earlier.³⁸³ The November 1995 issue of the *Unigram* newsletter quoted Emery's letter, thanking UUSS for "including us in your annual bazaar as well as the Christmas Concert," appreciating the "ways our two congregations have been able to get better acquainted" and noting the "generous financial support you have given us during the past four years."³⁸⁴

Some years after its founding in 1989, UUCC moved to a second rental location, an office park in South Sacramento, with its own dedicated space, and it then shifted its service time to Sunday morning. A few years later, high rent charges led UUCC to move to a third rental location. It used a few upstairs rooms at the Pioneer Congregational Church. This was in Midtown Sacramento, not the South Area where the church had been founded for extension of the faith. Noting that a decline in membership and money made it harder to sustain a full-service congregation, the UUCC Board conducted a series of open conversations for the membership during 2013 and early 2014 about options for sustaining the congregation or closing. The members voted in the spring of 2014 to cease operations as of June 30, 2014. It did not relinquish its not-for-profit registration, however. It elected a new group of officers to manage its modest financial reserve and to study future possibilities for a church presence in the South Area of Sacramento. In the fall of 2014 a small group of members began holding biweekly sessions in a house church format. In the fall of 2016 they began meeting every other Sunday morning in a rented room at the Asian Community Center in South Sacramento.

³⁸³ Ginny Johnson, "President's Message," *Unigram*, October 1995, "Unigrams 1995," UUSS Archives.

³⁸⁴ Emery, letter to UUSS congregation, *Unigram*, November 1995, "Unigrams 1995," UUSS Archives.

A few people participated in both the Community Church and the Society since UUCC's concluding service at the end of June of 2014. Several of the Community Church's former lay leaders and other members—including its most recent settled minister—have joined the Society. Two of those “new” members of the Society are Annette Emery and her husband. She recalled to me the tensions of the 1980s at the Society—especially the dynamics that made some families with children feel that Religious Education had not received the support of many lay leaders—and she told me, “Coming back, I did have the feeling: ‘Am I going to have the same feeling of not being welcome?’” Fortunately, she said, while she can find the larger size of UUSS intimidating, she has experienced the culture as hospitable. Now the people seem to be more genuinely interested in others, including newcomers and families with children.

In June of 2014, the concluding service at the Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Sacramento was an occasion of high emotion. The suspension of operations was a disappointment to those who had put such time, talent, and money into that institution, through which they had forged loving friendships with fellow members. While acknowledging the disappointment, it is worth noting the success of their effort. The congregation did achieve sustainability and an active presence for twenty-five years. It called three full-time settled ministers and hired two interim ministers. It also brought many new persons into the Unitarian Universalist fold and watched and loved several children as they grew from infancy to adulthood. The fact that many of its lay leaders and other members have joined the Society since 2014 is evidence of the Community Church's formation of committed and generous religious liberals. It is also an affirmation

that the culture of the Society is more open and warm than may have been the case when several members departed in the early 1990s to launch the new congregation.

10. Summary and Conclusion

As discussed in the three chapters preceding this one, church archives from the 1980s and 1990s indicate an inward focus at the Unitarian Universalist Society in those years. There was a managerial, procedure-based culture around church governance and the activities of affinity groups and committees. With mistrust among its members, there were arguments over authority, and use of the language of rights and duties rather than words of shared commitment for the well-being of the congregation as a whole. It seems from the records that the external concerns that did capture the attention of the Society were largely political and cultural concerns, not relationships with other UU congregations or the formation of new ones in the region. Though UUSS was large and had steady growth, there is little evidence that the congregation as a whole was enlivened by a calling to extend the reach of the faith, or change lives by bringing more people into religious community. There were exceptions, however, as noted above and summarized below. One exception to this culture at UUSS was in the Unitarian Women's Alliance. From its early decades into the 1960s, it paid dues and sent members to gatherings of regional Alliance chapters and heard reports from those conferences. It corresponded and exchanged gifts with Alliance chapters across the country. In the 1980s, however, it ceased paying dues to its national women's organization. Also, UUSS archives have no evidence that robust inter-chapter relationships continued into the late 1900s. Chapter Two narrates a history of the Alliance at UUSS.

Near Sacramento, the Town and Country Fellowship was founded in 1954 as a “dissident” group, separate from the Society and not an extension project of it. It folded in the middle 1960s. Some other new congregations, however, did receive modest support from the Society. In the 1960s, lay-led groups in Sacramento bore the names Central UU Fellowship, James Reeb UU Fellowship, and the North Area Unitarians (or North Area Unitarian Fellowship). The two first actually rented space at the Society’s vacated Midtown church facility, and the third rented space in a more distant location. Even with some encouragement from clergy and lay leaders of the Society, however, these groups lasted only from three to ten years. With the support of some USSS clergy and lay leaders, and greater support from the denomination (the UUA) and its Pacific Central District, new congregations were founded in Reno, Auburn, and Grass Valley. All three have become self-sustaining; they have called ministers to full-time positions and have purchased or built their own church homes.

In 1989, the UU Community Church of Sacramento (UCC) was launched (with active denominational and District support) by several USSS members. It was founded in part for denominational growth and in part to develop an alternative to the Society’s programs and established culture, which seemed not to welcome newcomers or champion ministry to families with children. Some leaders at the Society were ambivalent about or vocally opposed to this local new start, but several made sure to maintain close ties. Twenty-five years after its founding, the members of UCC voted to suspend operations. During its nomadic existence in three rented spaces, UCC counted many successes in local outreach, the building of a harmonious community, three settled ministries, and a strong history of lay leadership.

Whether the Society's support of the new congregations, especially those that achieved notable track records, was widely appreciated in the congregation, there was at least awareness on the part of some of the Society's leaders that their congregation was part of a larger religious movement and that they could play a role in its extension.

Since the 1990s, no new congregations have been established in the Sacramento area. The denomination's Fellowship Program ended not long after the retirement of Monroe Husbands in 1967—a run of nearly two decades. The Extension Ministry and New Congregation programs, which had supported the UU Community Church of Sacramento starting in 1989, ended in 2001 when the Extension Department was closed by a new administration at the Unitarian Universalist Association. Some observers have named the UUA's Fellowship Movement as the most sustained and successful growth strategy of this denomination in the twentieth century. Of course, many American denominations created programs to respond strategically to the Baby Boom in the decades after the Second World War, as young families grew and suburban residential development accelerated. Yet perhaps the Fellowship movement was distinctive from strategies of other clergy-focused religious denominations in that it rarely made use of ordained clergy to lead the new congregations, even though both Unitarian and Universalist traditions historically had been minister-oriented. In 2008, Unitarian Universalist author Holley Ulbrich noted that forty percent of the UU congregations that had been founded as fellowships were still in existence in some form. While forty percent might seem like the results of a failed experiment, it is probably to be expected in any entrepreneurial project in American religion. A closer analysis would be interesting but is beyond the scope of this thesis. The many now-dissolved congregations from the

Fellowship Movement include the short-lived ones that started in close proximity to the UU Society of Sacramento. On the other hand, congregations founded as fellowships in Reno, Davis, and Walnut Creek, among other cities, are thriving. According to Ulbrich, “Thirty percent of the UUA’s current congregations—323—started as fellowships in [the 1950s and 1960s].”³⁸⁵ Hence, this particular model for the extension of liberal faith communities continues to have local influence on the American religious landscape.

As I noted in this chapter’s introduction, various clergy and lay leaders disagree on the benefits of the Fellowship Program. Many of the lay-led fellowships gained reputations as anti-clerical, theologically narrow (with non-theistic Humanism dominating most groups), stingy, contentious, and unwelcoming to newcomers. Often lay leaders would not know how, or not be willing, to turn over positions. Defeating the aim of growing the faith, many fellowships would rent or buy facilities that could accommodate only a small number of people and perhaps have no room for children’s programs. Given the importance of the principle and practice of “covenant” in Unitarian Universalist heritage, I find it notable that I have not read any examples of the use of congregational covenants in the fellowships founded in the 1950s and 1960s. Yet neither did the long-established UU Society of Sacramento seem to articulate and live by a covenantal understanding of itself during the same era. Many congregations that formed as fellowships have since adopted covenants; many of them have chosen also to fund and

³⁸⁵ Holley Ulbrich, “The Fellowship Movement,” *UU World*, April 21, 2008. Accessed February 26, 2017. <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/the-fellowship-movement>. The article mentions her UUA-published book, *The Fellowship Movement: A Growth Strategy and Its Legacy* (Boston, 2007: Skinner House Books).

provide full-time settled ministry.³⁸⁶ While most are of modest size, a few have grown markedly, even funding multiple ministry positions.

Chapter Eight describes internal changes at the Society, as the congregation moved through major conflicts toward an understanding of shared commitments among the members and the articulation of a congregational covenant.

³⁸⁶I was the first full-time settled minister at the UU Fellowship of Sunnyvale, California. It had had an erratic history, both with clergy and without clergy since its founding in 1962. I was appointed to serve as a full-time Extension Minister in Sunnyvale in 1997 by the UUA, which provided a small subsidy for three years. After a series of meetings, the congregation voted to call me as settled minister in 2000. I served there ten years, voluntarily leaving in 2007. Its current full-time minister was called in 2009.

Chapter Eight

Conflicts, Conflict Management, and a Covenant

1. Introduction

This chapter shows the steps which leaders and other members of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS) began to take in the 1990s in the direction of articulating common visions and creating a shared covenant. Earlier chapters give examples of the hardships experienced earlier, caused by the lack of a shared commitment to the well-being of the congregation. In Chapter Six, for example, the observations and recommendations of three of the interim ministers (serving in 1970, 1984, and 1989-1990) reflect a Society plagued by mistrust and frustration among members, a lack of common purpose, and an inability to speak about the congregation as a religious community instead of a secular membership organization to be managed and controlled by lay leaders.

Indeed, Judy Bell has recalled the climate in the congregation in the 1980s and 1990s as “more adversarial.... [and] there wasn’t as much of a sense of community as now.” Also, she recalled that lay leadership was not “as open and transparent about leadership and decisions as it is now.”³⁸⁷ Leaders sometimes did not explain changes or decisions as much as they might have before making changes, she said. There was a culture of second-guessing and unkind criticism of the Board of Trustees. Yet she told me she believes the challenges and changes of the 1990s led to a growing “sense of trust in the Board. The congregation no longer had to know about every little decision.” Sometimes people feared changes because they “worried about losing what they were

³⁸⁷ Judy Bell, interview with author, December 3, 2016. Quoted with permission.

familiar with.” For example, she said, “I remember when we first held hands at the end of [the worship service]. We made sure we said, ‘Only if you want to.’”³⁸⁸ She recalled tension between the Religious Education (RE) program and other parts of the congregation in the 1980s and 1990s. She described the attitude: “We want a big RE program, but do we have to have them in the service? They’re so noisy.” In other words, she said, “We wanted growth but we didn’t want things to change.”

Ginny Johnson recalled that in the 1980s and 1990s, many congregation members did not feel that their views were respected or their presence honored: “There was a sense among some people that if you hadn’t been here a long time, your opinion didn’t matter. Some people left, I’m sure, because of it.” At least one couple left to join the new Sacramento congregation because of that experience, she said. Johnson, on the other hand, has recalled standing up to Charles Diggs, a long-term member (now deceased). Indeed, three separate interview subjects brought up his name and recalled his opinionated, controlling, and aggressive manner of leadership. Johnson said to him, “Charlie Diggs, my opinion matters just as much as yours does!”³⁸⁹

2. Leading with a Commitment to Congregational Health

In the 1990s, leaders and other members of the Society engaged with setbacks and challenges to the health of the congregation. In two major events (the expulsion of an antagonistic member and a minister’s negotiated resignation), it is clear that they were learning how to relate to one another by a sense of shared covenant for the shared benefit

³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁹ Ginny Johnson, interview with author, November 11, 2016. Quoted with permission.

of the congregational body, even though they did not use the word *covenant*. (Indeed, an explicit UUSS Covenant did not yet exist.) By making and enforcing boundaries of behavior, they put the *health of the congregation as a whole* ahead of the demands of individuals or groups who argued on behalf of individual rights but failed to articulate a common vision of congregants on a journey together.

3. Ira Saletan's Controversies

One of the conflicts that live in the memory of congregants who have been part of UUSS for at least two decades was centered around (and brought about by) the late Ira Saletan. His relentless pushing of boundaries and intimidating manner led to his expulsion as a member of the congregation and his removal by police officers for trespassing during a worship service after he was instructed to stay away. Given that I still hear references to events surrounding his involvement (even when I am not interviewing veteran church members), it is worth detailing those events here and considering how the congregation's leaders navigated through the crisis.

In his first year as a member of the church, Saletan gave a sermon on July 28, 1991. As with many UU congregations not long ago (and fewer in this day), UUSS had a variety of speakers, sermon topics, and styles of worship in July and August--months when most parish ministers were away on vacation or study leave. Saletan's topic was the Rev. Thomas Starr King, a Unitarian Universalist forbear. Saletan's archived sermon text from that day is six pages long, typed single-spaced. Attached to it are six pages of related readings, presumably all used in the service. He began the sermon with an admission that a staff member at UUSS had warned him it would be too long. He said

that he himself had learned that summer services typically were shorter than usual. Then he asked for the congregation's patience as he went ahead, starting with several paragraphs on how he had gone about conducting his research.³⁹⁰

Such exuberance could be the sign of a seminarian in the making who would later cringe at his indulgence of the privilege of preaching for the first time. Or his behavior could be the sign of a person who would always push against boundaries without much empathy regarding the effect his behavior might have on the community. Saletan would emerge as the latter. About a year later, on July 7, 1992, he was scheduled to be talking about Thomas Starr King again, this time as a lay preacher at the UU Community Church (UUC), a new congregation which had been meeting Sunday afternoons in South Sacramento since 1989.³⁹¹ I do not know if he gave the same long sermon.

Saletan attended the Board of Trustees meeting of the Unitarian Universalist Society as a church member (not yet a Board member) on October 24, 1991, escorting a representative of Sacramento's Interfaith Service Bureau, though Saletan was not the church's official liaison to that group. The Trustees then appointed him as the UUSS "co-representative" to the Service Bureau, along with another UUSS member, who was already the liaison. In accepting what might have seemed like a goodwill gesture from Saletan, the Board likely encouraged his intrusiveness.

In her April 1992 report to the Board, Committee on Ministry chairperson Jo Bloom said that Saletan had been "added" to the Committee on Ministry for a two-year term. It seems that he was not appointed by the Board or the minister, and one wonders if

³⁹⁰ Ira Saletan, "Starr King: Exploring His Story and World, Seeking Lessons for our Lives and Times," text of sermon given July 28, 1991, "Sermons-Misc, (2)," UUSS Archives.

³⁹¹ Order of Service, July 5, 1992, "Orders of Service 1992," UUSS Archives.

either party had any say in the appointment. This is the first recorded evidence of Saletan's having a leadership role other than giving a summer sermon. He would go on to serve on the Board (but not succeed at reelection to it) and serve on many committees and activity groups. From 1991 to 1996, his name appears in many *Unigram* newsletter articles and committee reports dealing with Social Responsibility, Denominational Affairs, and Religious Education, among other committees. It appears that his talents and intentions were met with gratitude for a time. Indeed, in one "President's Column" in the newsletter, Ginny Johnson thanked Saletan for having coined the phrase that UUSS was "filled with gifted and giving people." Yet it seems clear he did not know how to measure his own giving or govern his impulses. Perhaps others did not give him explicit feedback or set boundaries for him soon enough. Perhaps he did not read social cues or heed criticism. In any case, he chose to ignore boundaries and take up as much time and attention as he could while frustrating others in the congregation, especially those in leadership.

On April 20, 1995, Saletan wrote a letter to "Dear friends and associates," announcing that he had recently been fired (his word) from his job at the Sacramento Municipal Utility District (SMUD), a publicly-owned electric utility. He invited people to a "drop-in brunch" on the morning of April 29 at UUSS to stand in place of a retirement party. A copy in the church archives shows a handwritten "Dear Bobby and Robert" over this letter; they were two UUSS staff members he was inviting. In an attached two-page letter to everyone, he detailed his ordeals and his intention to make public his criticisms of SMUD's management, using "the press and the Sacramento

County Grand Jury process and other forums.”³⁹² It is not clear whether or how he obtained permission to use church facilities for this event.

The UUSS Board of Trustees authorized a congregational survey in March 1995. In September 1995, the Board received a report from Saletan, Milt Ritchie, and Merritt Winans, with a summary of the results and several actions recommended for the Board’s consideration. According to Saletan’s newsletter article about it, 344 congregants had completed the survey. He said members could request a five-page summary of the results or read a fifty-page report of the written comments and tabulated results if they came to the church office.³⁹³ The report asserted the Board’s responsibility to carry out the recommendations, and Saletan viewed making that happen as his personal cause. In February 1996, the Board sent a written response to the authors of the report. Saletan (and perhaps others displeased with that response) circulated a petition to call for a Congregational Meeting in accordance with the UUSS Constitution.

Though the Board had not initiated this Congregational Meeting, it organized and led it. On April 28, 1996, the meeting began with a statement of the rules and process for the meeting and the naming of the now-deceased member Carol Weilgart as parliamentarian. The agenda was limited to four resolutions which would direct the Board and commit the congregation to several actions. The resolutions would require the Board to (1) “plan and initiate a volunteer and leadership development program by September,” (2) establish a regular process for conducting evaluations of the congregation, and (3) establish a process for evaluating the minister and other staff.

³⁹² Letter from Ira Saletan, April 20, 1995, “Board of Trustees, January-June 1995,” UUSS Archives.

³⁹³ Ira Saletan, “Congregational Survey Report, *Unigram*, October 1995, “Unigrams 1995,” UUSS Archives.

Especially notable is the fourth proposal, which would give the congregation “an opportunity every 3 to 5 years for ... reviewing and changing its agreements ... with the minister and other paid staff.”

The minutes of the meeting show proposed amendments to each resolution and a motion to table the fourth resolution. All four resolutions went to a vote, and all four failed by margins as large as eight to one. Fewer than ninety votes were cast in total.³⁹⁴ This barely met a quorum, for official UUSS voting membership at the time was approximately 506.³⁹⁵ In other words, Saletan’s advocacy could generate a small measure of support, but the opposition to his demands was overwhelming. Bell told me that she spoke to Saletan after the meeting, trying to affirm that he had gotten a hearing on his ideas and brought them to a vote. She said his reply was, “Yes, but they didn’t pass them. I’m not done yet.”³⁹⁶

Saletan had served on the Board of Trustees, but was not elected to a second term; the above events took place after he had left the Board. Bell had been President when he was on the Board. She said, “He gave us a lot of trouble. We nicely but directly tried to talk to him” about his relentless pushing of his own ideas, but Saletan did not change his behaviors.³⁹⁷ Johnson, the next President, said that after Saletan’s Board service ended, he addressed the Trustees at Board meetings, spoke up at Congregational Meetings, and often wrote letters of his concerns, ideas, and recommendations. Of course, any such

³⁹⁴Special Congregational Meeting minutes of April 28, 1996, oddly filed in “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

³⁹⁵“Continuing Membership Count” report to the Board, October 24, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

³⁹⁶ Bell, *op. cit.*

³⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

action is the right of a church member. However, Saletan showed no ability to manage his enthusiasm, follow common courtesy, or accept feedback. For his letters, for example, he used the church equipment and paper to make photocopies to give to every member (nearly 400 households). Furthermore, Johnson said, “He would drive around delivering envelopes to every member at their homes, or where they worked.”³⁹⁸ The manner of Saletan’s relentless communications was wearing down the Trustees and scaring members. Johnson cited members who feared for her safety as President and others who feared for their own. One member lived in a rural area and used a post office box. Saletan phoned her to ask for her physical address. He phoned another one to ask for her office address and fax number. Both refused. Johnson told him repeatedly not to bring a letter to her workplace (a State agency), but to leave it at her home, and then she would read it after dinner with her family. He brought it to her workplace anyway and tried to have her called to the reception desk to get it.

On May 9, 1996, the Board of Trustees voted to suspend Saletan’s membership for six months. While Saletan’s behavior at the recent April 28 Congregational Meeting or his actions afterward are not captured in meeting minutes, correspondence following his expulsion sheds light. On May 23, longtime church member Anna Andrews wrote to ask the Board of Trustees to rescind the suspension. Noting that Saletan’s “methods were offensive” and that she herself was offended by his call on members to withhold pledges, Andrews said that the “freedom of speech [means] his words and actions should not threaten us.” Pete Martineau and six other people signed a June 5 letter on Martineau’s letterhead saying Saletan’s “behaviors in no way justified” expulsion and “we should all

³⁹⁸ Johnson, *op. cit.*

welcome him back.” The letter argued there should be a congregation-wide process to expel a member rather than leaving such a thing to the Board alone, and it asked for a Congregational Meeting “to approve new procedures for expulsion.”³⁹⁹

On June 10, UUSS member Merritt Winans, Ph.D., wrote to the Rev. Dr. John Buehrens, the President of the denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Winans said he was asking only for information (but “not a prescription”) about congregations that have expelled members. He said the UUSS Board had suspended Saletan for a term of six months, and now it was “requiring the indignity of a reapplication” for his membership to be renewed. Winans wrote that it was his hope the UUSS Board would reconsider and undo its action so it could “avoid the disgrace of no longer standing for inclusion... freedom of thought, and for the necessity of, not merely the toleration of, dissent.” Winans asked Buehrens to direct his reply to the Board and to copy Winans.⁴⁰⁰

In his reply to Winans (with copy to the UUSS President and Minister), Buehrens noted that he had heard also from the expelled member but would not reply. Furthermore, he said, the Association would not “adjudicate complaints or appeals from individual members.” He noted: “It is strictly a local matter how a congregation enforces its own covenantal norms.” It is notable that Buehrens referred to the norms of covenant, meaning the mutual commitment of congregation members about their actions and intentions, whereas Winans appealed to freedom and dissent as principles, but not at all to

³⁹⁹ Pete Martineau *et al.*, letter to UUSS Board, June 5, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, Jan. 1, 1996-June 30, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

⁴⁰⁰ J. Merritt Winans, letter to John Buehrens (President, Unitarian Universalist Association), June 10, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

Saletan's behavior. His only worry for the congregation's well-being would be the risk of "disgrace" for its actions, with nothing said about the need for volunteer leaders to be protected from harassment.

It seems likely that Buehrens or a subordinate spoke with UUSS leadership about the controversy, as his reply made reference to some of the proposals that Saletan had made. However, the impression I have gained in the past three decades as both a denominationally active lay leader and a minister is that the UUSS experience was all too familiar to denominational officials. That is, controversies engineered by the relentless campaigns of "dissenters" have distracted and burdened many clergy and lay leaders in this and other denominations. I have heard how such crises have split apart many UU congregations, often ones much smaller than UUSS, with fewer dedicated leaders and resources to help a church to thrive again. Buehrens weighed in on the damage that Saletan's controversy could cause. Quoting from the 1988 book *Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict*, he averred that the expelled member had made "insatiable demands.... Tearing down rather than building up." He wrote: "It isn't easy dealing with people who behave badly. It is *very* difficult in the liberal church. Democracy and 'tolerance' do not require tolerating intolerable behavior." Buehrens said: "I believe, strongly, that church leaders are perfectly within their rights in saying 'Enough!'" He advised that church leaders should turn to Association staff for support as soon as "antagonistic policy proposals emerge." For example, he said, UUA District staff can confirm that "the Association does not recommend surveys as a way of doing congregational assessment, ... or that ministers be subject to term-contracts or to [periodic] votes on their tenure." District staff, he said,

can offer “more constructive methods for assessing congregational life and ministerial development.”

The controversy continued into July 1996, as various letters to Board leaders asked for the Board “to rescind the sanction ... and invite Ira back,” or to reinstate his membership but with “limits on ... participation and use of church facilities” as the Board said it had tried earlier, in a March 3 letter to the membership. The Board received a package of letters and documents about this issue, dated from May 5 to July 1. The collection was entitled “Voices of the Fighting Answerers.” It was noted that photocopies of it were paid for by member Betty Ch’maj “for distribution to the congregation in connection with her service on Charles Ives, July 7.”⁴⁰¹

In a memo to the congregation dated July 1, 1996, the now-deceased Dr. Betty Ch’maj, a professor at Sacramento State University, asked fellow UUSS members to sign a petition with a resolution calling for an ad hoc committee whose mission “shall be the same as that of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission now meeting in South Africa... to seek the facts about what has happened but then move beyond that ‘truth’ toward the ‘reconciliation’ of former opponents, and make its recommendations to the UUSS Board before its next meeting.” Given that none of the parties to the disagreement had been tortured or killed by any of the others, the comparison to the healing that was needed in post-Apartheid South Africa seems disproportionate. No doubt it granted Saletan the prominence that he had been pursuing. Less charged but more significant about that proposed resolution was the idea that a new committee would find out “the truth” and then make its recommendations to the UUSS Board. In other words, the proposal

⁴⁰¹ Special Board meeting minutes of July 21, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

undermined the authority of the Board members to make decisions for the overall well-being of the congregation. While raising the banner of democracy, Saletan's supporters inadvertently were fueling mistrust in volunteer leaders who had been nominated and then elected by fellow members of their faith community.

In her memo, Ch'maj noted that she would be leading the upcoming Sunday service and would use that opportunity to recruit volunteers for the new committee.⁴⁰² In response, member Milt Ritchie wrote to call this out as "advocacy from the pulpit to take action against the Board's decision." He named it "abuse of the pulpit." For his part, Ritchie said he would propose "a half-day workshop on how to deal with difficult people... to start a process of therapy for Board members to relieve the terrible angst" of the past year.⁴⁰³

President Ginny Johnson replied individually to (among other correspondents) every signer of the June 5 letter written on Pete Martineau's letterhead. She let them know that, in response to their requests, a Special Meeting of the Board of Trustees would take place at 2:00 p.m. on Sunday, July 21. In a certified letter dated July 12, she notified Saletan that witnesses would "discuss events [at] which... you acted in a way that was [likely to subject UUSS or a member to] physical harm, severe emotional harm or distress, or ... civil or criminal liability." They would be speaking about instances of

⁴⁰² Betty Ch'maj memo to UUSS members, dated July 1, 1996, "UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996," UUSS Archives.

⁴⁰³ Milt Ritchie, letter to Board, July 7, 1996, "UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996," UUSS Archives.

his “verbal assault,” “trespassing” on members’ properties, and “misuse of the copy machine [at church] and of the U.S. mail boxes of some members.”⁴⁰⁴

At the July 21 Board meeting, as quoted in the minutes, Johnson announced the sole purpose was to “consider Ira Saletan’s membership under... our Constitution.” The agenda limited the speakers to the Trustees, Saletan, five witnesses, and twelve other people: six “representatives for each side.” Surely there were several interested observers also present, but only the Board members were allowed to ask questions of the guests and of Saletan. After hearing from witnesses and reading aloud one anonymous letter, plus hearing from the twelve representatives for three minutes each and from Saletan himself, the Board met in executive session. The Board returned and voted unanimously (with two members absent) to affirm the expulsion and “to tell Ira he may not enter the campus.” Two days later nine Trustees signed a certified-mail letter to Saletan confirming the decision.⁴⁰⁵

On November 21, 1996, attorney-at-law James Skow, a member of USS who had transferred his membership to the UU Community Church of Sacramento, wrote on behalf of USS to Saletan to say he could not enter church property.⁴⁰⁶ If Saletan did appear, he would be “committing trespass” and law enforcement would be called to have

⁴⁰⁴ Ginny Johnson, letter to Ira Saletan, dated July 12, 1996, “USS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” USS Archives.

⁴⁰⁵ Ginny Johnson, letter to Ira Saletan, dated July 23, 1996, “USS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” USS Archives.

⁴⁰⁶ In 1995, Skow had helped USS deal with another disgruntled member. In a newsletter article, he said he had filed a Motion for Sanction against a plaintiff, “asking for attorney’s fees involved in defending this frivolous lawsuit” and he planned a Motion to Dismiss. The lack of later notes about the case lead me to assume it was dismissed and not settled or adjudicated. Source: James Skow, “Lawsuit Update Burrell v. USS, *et al.*,” *Unigram*, April 1995, “Unigrams 1995,” USS Archives.

him removed.⁴⁰⁷ In a letter dated two days later, Saletan responded to that “threatening letter,” noting that it must have been “prepared... following my appearance” the prior Sunday. Defiantly he wrote: “I was gratified by the warm welcome I received that day from so many members.”⁴⁰⁸ Annette Emery has told me that leaders of the Unitarian Universalist Community Church eventually became wary of letting Saletan give even an announcement when he would make a visit to their afternoon worship services, let alone a sermon. Moreover, she said, several of the “big guys in the church” were appointed to watch out for him to arrive one Sunday in 1996. She said, “He was after Jim Skow,” the church member and attorney who had written to inform Saletan that the Board of the Society had prohibited his presence on church grounds.⁴⁰⁹

There is no evidence of the Rev. Dr. John Young (UUSS minister from 1991 until 1998) having written on the conflicts to which Saletan was central in 1996.⁴¹⁰ Johnson, the President from July 1994 through June 1996, told me that Young was aware of the challenges that Saletan was posing to lay leaders, “but he didn’t tell us what to do.” Young’s lack of reported guidance to the lay leaders could be understandable. In the words of Johnson, “Ira knew how to push every one of John’s buttons, and John reacted.”⁴¹¹ It can be hard for a minister to maintain perspective on a challenge to the

⁴⁰⁷ James Skow, letter to Ira Saletan, dated November 21, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

⁴⁰⁸ Ira Saletan, memo “to UUSS,” dated November 23, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

⁴⁰⁹ Annette Emery, interview with author, November 29, 2016. Quoted with permission.

⁴¹⁰ According to Saletan’s 2011 obituary, after 25 years in Sacramento, he moved to Napa, where he died. “Ira Saletan,” obituary in Napa County Register. Accessed November 12, 2016. http://napavalleyregister.com/news/local/obituaries/ira-saletan/article_8ada6c4a-be4d-11e0-b6a3-001cc4c03286.html

⁴¹¹ Johnson, *op. cit.*

system or to lay leadership that is unfair and relentless, if the minister has felt helpless in the face of similar challenges or attacks to him personally.

Johnson recalled an insight she gained in a mediation session with Saletan. She and another Trustee met with Saletan with the facilitation of the Rev. Fred Keip, at the time serving the UU Congregation of the Monterey Peninsula. He had been recommended by staff of the UUA's Pacific Central District. Johnson said, "At one point, Fred told Ira to leave! We looked at each other. After he left [the room], Fred said, 'He's beyond reasonable; you can't possibly work with this man.'" If Johnson gained perspective on the need for leadership to establish boundaries and maintain them, some church members did not. She told me, "I said, I can't spend ninety-nine percent of my time on one person, and people looked at me as if I was being mean and nasty." She recalled saying, "We have other things we need to do." Indeed, it was a busy church year. In addition to that special Board meeting on a Sunday afternoon in July and the monthly Board meetings on a weeknight and the Trustees' committee liaison assignments, the Board of Trustees had to prepare for and oversee five Congregational Meetings in 1996: special ones on January 28, March 17, and April 28, and regular meetings on May 19 and September 22.

Given that such a crisis has been common enough in American congregations for consultants to write books like *Antagonists in the Church*,⁴¹² Johnson's recollections as a past USSS President provide a useful insight for leaders of other congregations and for the members who elect them to lead. That is, the time and energy spent in responding to

⁴¹² A definition of the term *antagonist* and useful current resources are available from Stephen Ministries, a large not-for-profit education and training organization for churches: "Antagonists in the Church: How to Identify and Deal with Destructive Conflict," Stephen Ministries website (accessed December 18, 2016): <https://www.stephenministries.org/courses/default.cfm/741?mnbcc=1>.

the relentless criticism and boundless exhortations of one or two persons—and responding to a group that such persons can enlist as allies or advocates—are time and energy *not available* for taking initiative on any larger goals or purposes of the congregation, including the oversight of infrastructure, fundraising, financial management, strategic planning, or staff achievement. In supporting the UUSS Board’s autonomy on choosing to suspend Saletan, the denominational president had written about the need for any congregation’s leaders to uphold its own “covenantal norms.” While the Society would not adopt an explicit covenant until four years later, it seems this controversy revealed the leadership’s willingness to hold members to standards of behavior which reflect a covenantal understanding of mutual encouragement and respect in honest disagreements.

Johnson said, “Ira came in the back [on a Sunday morning], and we had him arrested. Police in the service! It was awful. It was all show--he was getting a huge kick out of it.” She added, “In retrospect we could have done it differently.” She noted this, however: “Part of our justification was that people didn’t feel safe [in Saletan’s presence].”⁴¹³ With appreciation Johnson recalled that even if most members disagreed with the Board’s decisions, there were not general attacks on her character. Some lay leaders quietly offered their support, she said, especially former UUSS Presidents. In spite of that history of crisis and controversy (or perhaps because of her steady leadership), two years after her term ended, congregation members elected her to the Search Committee for a new settled minister. In a letter to the Board, Marion and John Alden wrote that, in dealing with Saletan’s “inordinate demands and actions,” the Board

⁴¹³ Johnson, *op. cit.*

had “demonstrated appropriate leadership with a great deal of deep caring, thought and patience.”⁴¹⁴

4. Conflict Management and Communication: A New Commitment

In the same years that USS leaders were navigating through antagonism and criticism, they led the congregation in learning that it is normal to have disagreements, miscommunication, and even conflicts in a church community, and to help leaders and other members learn how to deal with differences in direct, fair, and patient ways rather than in ways that are indirect, manipulative, intolerant, overbearing, or unkind.

As is detailed in Chapters Four and Six, the Rev. Eileen Karpeles, Accredited Interim Minister from January 1989 to July 1990, held multiple workshops on engaging with disagreements and conflicts. During the interim ministry of the Rev. Douglas Morgan Strong (from August 1990 to July of 1991) the church launched a Volunteer Development Committee, which would offer some of the same skills that a Conflict Management and Communication Committee (CMCC) would later teach. A key staff member and Strong’s colleague in this training effort was the late Patti Lawrence, the Church Administrator at USS for several years.⁴¹⁵ In the *Unigram* newsletter they announced four upcoming workshops to train volunteers in “leadership styles and skills,” including how to run meetings, decision-making styles and techniques, communication

⁴¹⁴ Marion and John Alden, letter to Board, July 15, 1996, “USS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” USS Archives.

⁴¹⁵ The late Patti Lawrence left USS in early 1991 for an administrative position at Starr King School for the Ministry and would later be Dean of Students and Vice President. Though not clergy, she became a professor of congregational studies and managed the field education and internship programs. She served on the Board and committees of the denomination’s Pacific Central District (PCD) and was elected by delegates of PCD congregations as a Trustee on the Board of the Unitarian Universalist Association.

styles, conflict management, “getting past we/they [language],” sources of motivation, and self-care. People could register and indicate their areas of interest on an enclosed sheet.⁴¹⁶

While those trainings were taking place, there was also a Conflict Management Team in existence. Board minutes from June 1990 say: “The... Team now consists of Rich Howard, Dee Pollett, Shirley Brainin, Pete Martineau and Paula Squire.” The Team was planning to seek training from the Conflict Management Team of the UUA’s Pacific Central District (PCD), which was based in the Oakland area.⁴¹⁷ The PCD team included clergy and lay leaders with relevant experience (some who had been counselors) and training. However, as of this writing the PCD team has not existed for more than a decade. Though it is beyond the scope of this dissertation, it would be an intriguing study to know of the kinds of training and theories or models of intervention the PCD provided.

In the 1992-1993 church year⁴¹⁸ at USS, the Communication and Conflict Management Committee (CCMC) became a standing committee of the congregation. The CCMC chairperson would be an elected position, held from the start and for several years by member Shirley Hewitt, now deceased. In Section 3 above I described the conflicts brought about by church member Ira Saletan in 1996. Perhaps not surprisingly, 1996 Board minutes and reports show that the USS Board devoted significant time and attention to endorse and promote the CCMC. On December 19, 1996, the Board confirmed a charter for it, which listed the CCMC’s purpose: “To work toward improved

⁴¹⁶ “Volunteer and Leadership Development Series,” *Unigram* insert, December 14, 1990, USS Archives.

⁴¹⁷ Board meeting minutes, June 18, 1990, “Board of Trustees January 1990-June 1990,” USS Archives.

⁴¹⁸ The USS church year is the same as the fiscal year, July 1 to June 30. However, leaders of many UU congregations think of the start of the church year as September, when many church programs gear up after a summer hiatus, clergy are back in the pulpit regularly, and local schools are back in session.

communication between the Board... and the congregation and among the various committees and among the congregation.” The CCMC would “make a brief presentation... in the fall of each year regarding the work of this committee” to the Council of Leaders (a nonelected body of committee chairs and the forerunner of the elected Program Council, which would be chartered in 2000).

The CCMC’s work would include assisting “individuals and groups in dealing with conflicts which affect the Society” and “developing procedures for conflict resolution through a loving, caring and supportive process that promotes the inherent worth and dignity of each individual member.” It would publicize guidelines for conflict management, provide forums for “involvement of the congregation in problem solving,” and “make the services of the committee available to groups and individuals.”⁴¹⁹

CCMC members would serve three-year terms, and the chair would be elected by the congregation. “At least five [of its members] would serve on the Conflict Management Team.” This team of Conflict Managers would consult in particular situations or mediate in conflicts, even facilitating up to five negotiation sessions at the request of the involved parties. If needed, a member of the team could also provide an “on-the-spot conflict resolution,” with no formal request or planning needed. The goal of the CCMC as a whole was to raise awareness and provide training to church members on listening skills, personal anger management, and negotiating skills, as well as promoting proper conduct over disagreements, such as ensuring “mutual respect, fair hearing, and personal safety.”⁴²⁰ Judy Bell recalled that the Conflict Management Team was made up

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*

⁴²⁰ “Statement of Definitions and Functions,” USS Communication and Conflict Management Committee, “Board of Trustees July 1996-December 1996,” USS Archives.

of therapists and counselors, whereas the open workshops were provided by others on the CCMC, depending on their own training and expertise. The workshops and mediation sessions would promote “separating persons from the issues, empathic listening, accepting responsibility for one’s anger, learning how to be assertive,” and other skills.⁴²¹

From archival materials, it is my impression that the CCMC was interdisciplinary and not reflective of one theory of conflict analysis and resolution. It was made up of committed members from various disciplines such as teaching, training, counseling, social work, and psychotherapy. This was confirmed to me by Leonard Campos, Ph.D., a clinical psychologist who had served on the CCMC.⁴²² Indeed, he had proposed a monthly series of “in service” training sessions for Conflict Management Team members and those interested in applying to join the team. He called these Peer Consultation meetings, in which they could discuss and practice methods of conflict resolution or management.⁴²³ As a practitioner of Transactional Analysis, Campos told me, he had a training session on how to stay out of the “drama triangle” when in conflict or when mediating one. He also offered a workshop on the same topic to the general congregation. In the *Unigram* newsletter he said, “Individuals can get caught up in a drama triangle, playing roles of victim, rescuer, and persecutor, without effectively solving a problem.” Tools or practices to avoid these roles would include “clarifying our

⁴²¹ Bylaws 205.18 “Communication and Conflict Management Committee,” attached to Board meeting minutes of December 19, 1996, “UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996,” UUSS Archives.

⁴²² Leonard Campos, conversation with author, December 21, 2016.

⁴²³ *Ibid.*

options, refusing drama roles, and learning how to be part of the solution rather than part of the problem.”⁴²⁴

Judy Bell told me that CCMC members had also received training, support, and materials from the Pacific Central District, and they learned the approach of the best-selling book *Getting to Yes: Negotiating Agreement without Giving In*, originally published in 1981. *Getting to Yes* was popular in business and many other kinds of organizations. Some of its guidelines are reflected in CCMC articles and reports, such as the guidance to “separate the people from the problem,” meaning to clarify perceptions and recognize emotions but not let them distract from a clear view of the problem. Another mediation goal is to “focus on interests, not positions,” meaning to look below asserted positions and find the motivations and needs of the parties in a disagreement. The authors, Alfred Uhry and Roger Fisher, highlighted a set of basic human needs as having a powerful role in any negotiation, and hence urged paying attention to these needs: the “need for security, economic well-being, a sense of belonging, recognition, and control over one’s life.”⁴²⁵ Two more guidelines: to seek resolution, they said, the parties to a disagreement should “invent options [which might entail a] mutual gain” for both parties, and the parties should “insist on using objective criteria.” It seems that such guidelines could be of great use in a congregation when some persons assert their personal preferences as universal absolutes or others let hearsay or opinion serve as facts, instead of checking things out with others. Likewise, aiming for “mutual gain” resonates with the spirit of sharing responsibility for the well-being of the congregation as a whole.

⁴²⁴ Leonard Campos, memo to *Unigram* editor, November 24, 1997, “CCMC 1990s” UUSS Archives.

⁴²⁵ Cited in a review of the 2004 edition of the book by The Negotiations Experts on negotiations.com, accessed December 19, 2016. <http://www.negotiations.com/book-reviews/getting-to-yes/>

It appears that the CCMC did pursue these goals in general, if not by name. The CCMC published a seventeen-page manual in April of 1997. It lists the CCMC charter, the services available from the CCMC, its members' contact information, guidelines for Conflict Managers to follow in a mediation session, and two forms: (1) a Request for Conflict Management Services (where a person may describe the issue, note the other party to the conflict, and name the preferred Conflict Managers to co-facilitate a mediation), and (2) a Conflict Manager Report Form (to use after a mediation session). The manual includes a page from the Agenda Book of Congregational Concerns. Members could write questions and concerns about church issues in this notebook, which was on a table in the Auditorium (i.e., sanctuary). The topics of concern would be taken in order at the monthly General Concerns Discussion Group.⁴²⁶ This is discussed below.

I think the underlying approach of the CCMC, rather than reflecting a specific discipline of mediation, was to help the members learn how to listen to one another. By listening rather than acting on personal bias, hearsay, or the opinions of those close to them, members might understand there were honest differences of perspective and experience. Moreover, the many training workshops and smaller number of mediation sessions promoted listening without interrupting or abusing the other party, as well as having the confidence to speak of your own experience with respect and to feel heard by others. Shirley Hewitt went to great lengths to urge church members and committees to communicate their intentions and plans and coordinate their efforts with one another. Her memo entitled "Letting the Left Hand Know" was inserted in the *Unigram* newsletter

⁴²⁶ Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, Communication and Conflict Management Committee Manual, April 1997, "CCMC 1990s," UUSS Archives.

of August 1997 and addressed to the whole congregation. She said, “Too often [a person or church entity will] fail to take notice of how a specific decision or action impacts other units in the organization.”⁴²⁷ She said that preempting others at UUSS from fulfilling their volunteer roles causes them to lose interest in serving. While it is intriguing to speculate on any particular conflict which caused Hewitt to speak out, she was addressing a dynamic which is reflected in numerous committee reports, minutes, and newsletter articles in the years before and after this memo. In Chapter Five, for example, I quote Rev. Dennis Daniel in pointing out (three years after that memo by Hewitt) the frustration and ill feelings that such habits cause among committed volunteers.

For the goal of more thorough communication among various leaders and the congregation at large, the CCMC added two subcommittees in addition to the Conflict Management Team. One was responsible for a monthly “Congregational Concerns Agenda Book” discussion. A notebook (the Agenda Book) was kept in the back of the Auditorium (sanctuary), and members could write topics they wished to discuss.⁴²⁸ Committee member Sharon Alexander coordinated “Agenda Book meetings” on issues requested by members, such as the sound system, expectations of staff, and the democratic process at UUSS.

Judy Bell coordinated monthly “discussion workshops,” leading some and recruiting a variety of UUSS presenters for others. Some topics included active listening, forgiveness, a two-part series ironically titled “dirty fighting techniques” (with

⁴²⁷ Shirley Hewitt, memo to the UUSS Congregation, August 15, 1997, “Unigrams 1997,” UUSS Archives.

⁴²⁸ The position of Communications Facilitator (formerly the CCMC Chair) remains to this day. The Nominating Committee recruits a member to be elected to it, but different Facilitators have embodied the role in a variety of ways, such as offering workshops on topics related to spiritual growth. The Agenda Book has been out of use since at least 2008, when I arrived at UUSS. To my knowledge, no member has complained about the lack of regular meetings.

a list of not-recommended approaches, and a role play), defining different kinds of gossip and techniques for controlling destructive gossip, “conflict entrapment—how to stay out of other people’s conflicts,” nonverbal communication, “how to survive holiday parties,” and a demonstration of a mediation process by the committee.⁴²⁹

In a typical conflict mediation, one person would apply for the service, and the Conflict Management Team would obtain the assent of the other party for a joint session. Each party to a disagreement would select one member of the Conflict Management Team to be a mediator, and the four of them would meet privately. Apparently not until the fall of 1997 did the process get used, and the first parties to use a mediation were Rev. John Young and Merritt Winans. Hewitt, citing their permission, reported in the *Unigram* newsletter their two-hour session, for which she had been a co-facilitator. She said it had led to “a full understanding of each other’s perception of [an] incident... and a mutual apology and a commitment” to use the process if needed in the future.⁴³⁰ However, Young’s ministry at UUSS would end in six months.

It is unclear how significant the mediation sessions were, but they seem to have been less frequent than the open workshops and the monthly Agenda Book discussions. In two annual reports, Hewitt reported that there had been three requests for mediation sessions in the 1998-1999 church year (or fiscal year, from July through June). In 1999-2000, however, there were only a few inquiries but no requests for a mediation. Hewitt concluded: “It is our hope that the individuals concerned were able to work it out on their

⁴²⁹ Judy Bell, *Unigram*, various issues, “Unigrams 1999” and “Unigrams 2000,” UUSS Archives.

⁴³⁰ Shirley Hewitt, “Listen to What I Mean,” *Unigram*, December 1997, “Unigrams 1997,” UUSS Archives.

own.”⁴³¹ I have identified from CCMC minutes and files no more than eight mediation requests (and mediators’ follow-up reports). It appears that no mediation process took more than one session (though there was an allowed maximum of five sessions at two hours each). However, a few people requested (or found themselves requested to be present at) more than one conflict mediation session. Most of the parties in the sessions were clergy or staff members and lay officials. In four of these eight cases, it was the chair (now deceased) of the CCMC who requested a mediation for herself and others (for four separate issues with a minister, staff leader, and two Board members with whom she had a disagreement or had experienced an unpleasant interaction).⁴³² On one hand, it seems that the leader of an entity charged with promoting communication might have been able to have face-to-face meetings about her concerns without facilitators present. Perhaps she did have several additional conversations without facilitation; those would not have been noted in writing, of course. On the other hand, perhaps the chair made requests for mediation sessions so that her fellow volunteers would have some actual experience in providing the service at UUSS. Yet again, it could be that relationships among UUSS leaders were so fraught with tension in the late 1990s that even a recognized expert felt a need for support in having frank conversations.

In 1999, the CCMC Chair reported to the CCMC on having attended a Board meeting at which the Board took up a CCMC complaint. She had sent a two-page memo

⁴³¹ Shirley Hewitt, “Communication and Conflict Management (CCMC),” in Annual Report 1999-2000 and Annual Report 1998-1999, “Annual Reports,” UUSS Archives.

⁴³² Unitarian Universalist Society, “Request for Conflict Management Services” and “Conflict Manager Report Form,” various dates in 1997 and 1998; these confidential files are not in UUSS Archives, but the parties for the requested interventions are cited also in minutes of CCMC meetings, which often were open meetings and are in the UUSS Archives.

entitled “UUSS and the Democratic Process” to President Rich Howard.⁴³³ The memo raised concerns about “procedural due process in decision making.” From her notes to the CCMC, it appears that she was objecting to the Board Executive Committee’s decision to remove announcements of the Agenda Book discussion topics from the printed Sunday Order of Service. She reported that one Trustee claimed that the announcements set a negative tone, particularly one on “dirty fighting techniques.” Although the Board reinstated the regular listings after the complaint, the CCMC chair wrote that the Board was likely to forget this lesson and make more decisions beyond the Board’s purview.⁴³⁴

The name of the Communication and Conflict Management Committee (CCMC) appears often in records of the crisis that led to the resignation of Young in 1998. Young had been called by the congregation to be its Minister in 1991. The number of adult members grew steadily year after year, as he cited in his reports for Board of Trustees meetings and in the Annual Report to the congregation. Young also documented a very full schedule: many pastoral calls to members, leading worship and adult education, scholarship, denominational and international interests and commitments, and involvement in the local community, as well as having a wife and children. Young reflected his pride in shared accomplishments and ambitions for the congregation’s further growth and a higher profile in the denomination. Yet he also wrote of his disappointment in the lack of sufficient commitment by all. He said that some members felt their own needs were paramount to the needs of others. In recalling Young’s

⁴³³ Tiffany Urness, “Agenda Book Meeting May 16, 1999,” summary dated June 4, 1999, “CCMC 1990s,” UUSS Archives.

⁴³⁴ Shirley Hewitt, Memo to CCMC Members, “Re: Board of Trustees meeting 5/27/99,” “CCMC 1990s,” UUSS Archives.

ministry, several lay leaders have said he often showed criticism, impatience, defensiveness, and anger. In the controversy that brought an end to his tenure at UUSS, Young acknowledged those shortcomings, expressed remorse, and said he was committed to improving himself with professional support. However, he also (in a letter to the congregation) called into question the moral integrity of the Director of Religious Education (DRE), who had resigned her position because of his actions and had urged him to resign in a letter she made public. After witnessing what she called a verbal attack on a teenage parishioner (as the youth group leader) and her mother in the church parking lot, the DRE wrote to Young that she no longer could make excuses for his pattern of hostile behavior. The Board President convinced the DRE to delay her resignation for a few months, by which time Young was not present at UUSS.

The Board of Trustees authorized an administrative leave with Young for the month of December, and he began a sabbatical in January. The Board voted in late February 1998 to negotiate the terms of his resignation, which took effect after his sabbatical. He led a farewell worship service on June 7, 1998. For other details and citations for the above, see Chapter Four.

In December 1997, the Board accepted the offer of the CCMC to facilitate a series of small-group meetings about the crisis over Young's ministry, known as "Healing Circles" or "UUSS Steps toward Healing." In making that offer, CCMC Chair Shirley Hewitt did not speculate that the meetings would lead to a decision about Young's tenure; she said their purpose was to "help people express their distress... and move toward a personal resolution."⁴³⁵ On December 18, Young wrote to the CCMC: "The Board has

⁴³⁵ Shirley Hewitt, letter to Carrie Cornwell (President), December 10, 1997, "Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997," UUSS Archives.

asked me not to participate in your series of small group meetings.” He asked if their sessions would cover “any and all ‘woundedness’ that may be dividing the congregation.”⁴³⁶ Presumably, he felt it was unfair for a church with a history of conflict to have meetings to discuss only his interpersonal behavior in the church.

Young was not the only leader excluded from the discussions, as the CCMC voted (five to three) to not allow Trustees to attend the Steps toward Healing sessions; this decision came a week after the first session, at which one unnamed Trustee had been present.⁴³⁷ The CCMC did, however, provide summaries to the Board after the series of meetings. Facilitators agreed on a common structure for facilitating the sessions and summarizing the discussions. Pairs of CCMC members planned to lead seven sessions in January, hosting six to eight persons for one or two hours each time. In fact, reports exist from ten sessions held; attendance ranged from six to twelve people--newer members, longer-term members, and former members of UUSS. In a session, after introductions, the questions for discussion included asking about the most positive outcome of the situation which participants could imagine for the congregation and asking for the qualities desired in a minister. All the summaries report that attendees voiced appreciation for the sessions, even if some of them had expressed strong feelings and emotions about the topic.⁴³⁸

⁴³⁶ John Young, letter to Communication and Conflict Management Committee, December 18, 1997, “Board of Trustees June 1997-Dec. 1997,” UUSS Archives.

⁴³⁷ Minutes of CCMC meeting, January 11, 1998, “CCMC 1990s,” UUSS Archives.

⁴³⁸ Reports titled “Minutes of Healing Circle,” “Steps Toward Healing Facilitators’ Report,” or similarly, from January 4, 13, 14, 17, 19, 22, 25 (two of them), 29 and 31. Confidential file, Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento

Bell had served on the Board of Trustees earlier and was later on the Communications and Conflict Management Committee. She said, “We had loads of small meetings [about Young’s ministry]. The people who liked him could hear how others felt wounded, and the people who felt hurt could hear from people who liked him. It kept us from splitting.” Bell recalled the lay leadership’s management of the conflicts with Ira Saletan and John Young as “courageous” and “above board.” She cited the Board’s handling of them as signs of health for the church. Before then, she said, “We weren’t very good at saying [to someone]: ‘You don’t play well with others!’”⁴³⁹ She recalled the controversy over Young’s ministry and resignation as a time of pain but also one of growth for the congregation. The members handled the situation well because “we did not allow ourselves to get polarized but to talk to each other and understand one another. Even if [some people] did not like the decision [to ask Young to leave], they accepted it.” She saw it as an example of learning to balance the tensions between the rights and wishes of individuals and the rights and well-being of the whole community.

5. How to Be Together: A Stepwise Journey to a Covenant

After troubling events and painful transitions, members of the Society were learning to keep healthy boundaries, communicate their assumptions and intentions, listen to one another’s perspectives, and interact with more kindness and appreciation. It was not an easy or steady progression, but with the work of lay leaders and the support of staff and interim clergy, the members made progress. For example, by November 1996, President Ginny Johnson and others had spent countless hours dealing with the conflicts

⁴³⁹ Bell, *op. cit.*

generated by the antagonistic behavior of Ira Saletan. Yet she and the Board of Trustees wanted to show appreciation for the constructive contributions of some less prominent volunteer leaders. She sent several letters thanking individual members for their service, such as operating the church's Beacon Bookstore "for more than a decade" (Patricia Reitter) or coordinating monthly meals at St. John's Shelter (Carol Goodin). She concluded each letter: "You are truly a UUSS Community Builder."⁴⁴⁰

Another tangible and systematic step forward in supporting the congregation as a whole community came about when UUSS members took time together to craft and formally adopt explicit statements of shared vision and especially of covenant. The importance of covenant in many Unitarian Universalist congregations comes from the heritage of American Unitarians—and before that of New England's Congregational churches.⁴⁴¹ This tradition of autonomous, self-governed congregationalism emphasizes not uniformity of religious belief, but a commitment to religious practice. Saying that we emphasize "deeds over creeds," many Unitarian Universalist ministers have preached that what matters in our tradition is not what we believe about theological questions, but the quality of our actions and interactions. In addition to "deeds" of service, generosity, and advocacy to make the larger world a better place, it matters how we treat one another and our neighbors.

While never called its covenant, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento's Bond of Union has been an early and enduring statement of the reason that

⁴⁴⁰ Ginny Johnson, various letters signed as president, dated November 23, 1996, "UUSS Board of Trustees, July 1, 1996-Dec. 31, 1996," UUSS Archives.

⁴⁴¹See Conrad Wright, *Walking Together: Polity and Participation in Unitarian Universalist Churches* (Boston, 1989: Skinner House Books), out of print but a PDF is free at the online Harvard Square Library. <http://uuhhs.org/research-resources/recommended-books/walking-together/>

members come together in the congregation. However, the statement has not been prominent in usage by clergy or lay leaders. I cannot recall having heard it used or cited by anyone at UUSS since my arrival in August 2008. The Bond of Union was adopted by members of the congregation on January 6, 1913, two years in advance of when the church would move into its first permanent residence in the Midtown section of Sacramento.⁴⁴² However, it must have received attention during the period covered by this dissertation, as a revision of it is dated October 27, 1985. It was revised again in 1999. This current version reads:

We, members of this Society, associate ourselves together as a religious Society for mutual helpfulness in promoting the “Principles and Purposes” of the Unitarian Universalist Association and liberal religion in the community; and we hereby *pledge to bear our part in the common cause and to care for the welfare and influence of the Society* of which by this act we become members.⁴⁴³

The italics are mine, indicating words of shared commitment. The only revision to the Bond of Union from 1985 to 1999 was to put the words of the phrase “Principles and Purposes” in the proper order, which matches that of the Unitarian Universalist Association; the 1985 version had them switched. The “Seven Principles” are the ethical and aspirational heart of the denomination, and the denomination’s “Purposes” are, simply, to support member congregations and to help to establish new ones.

Other than updating the Bond of Union, it appears from archives that the next major effort to describe congregational purposes and relationships at UUSS took place in

⁴⁴² It is worth noting that the Jewish scriptures recount the establishment of the Mosaic covenant while the Hebrews were traveling in the wilderness. Even before they reached their promised home destination, it was crucial for the people to have a code of behavior as they traveled together. Amplifying its holy origins and importance, they carried it in the holy object known as the Ark of the Covenant.

⁴⁴³ Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, Article II of the UUSS Constitution, dated October 31, 1999, accessed November 30, 2016, emphasis mine. <http://www.uuss.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/03/UUSS-Constitution-with-5-12-13-amendments.pdf>

1994. The congregation adopted a six-point “Vision Statement” on May 15, 1994. The five primary category titles appear italicized in that statement (as quoted below) and are shown also in a hexagonal diagram, each title taking up a side of a hexagon. (This is the architectural shape of the congregation’s Main Hall, and it is a motif for window frames in the concrete walls and for a frosted design on glass panes in wooden windows, made in the early 1960s. The 1994 Vision Statement reads:

We, the members of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento, commit to maintain a *growing*, open and *inclusive community* based on *ethical standards* and the *democratic process*. We will work to embrace individual differences and encourage religious and *intellectual freedom*. Through our personal and congregational examples of shared leadership, *spirituality* and respect for life, we expect to make real our dreams for a more just and loving world.

Judy Bell was UUSS President at the time. In her 1994 President’s Report, she said that the Vision Statement was shepherded by a task force of lay leaders, one of three task forces established by the Board of Trustees for the 1993-1994 church year.⁴⁴⁴ She thanked the congregation for participating and working on the statement “at its various stages of development,” meaning there was an iterative process of crafting the statement. She said it had passed by an overwhelming vote at a Congregational Meeting in April 1994. The new statement appeared in the Annual Report for 1993-1994 and it was not forgotten a year later. “Our Shared Vision Statement” appeared in the congregation’s *Unigram* newsletter in the May/June issue of 1995.⁴⁴⁵

⁴⁴⁴ Judy Bell, President’s Annual Report 1994, “Annual Reports,” UUSS Archives. Also reported: the Campus Development Task Force explored the need for facility expansion and a building campaign, but it recommended postponing further action regarding expansion. Another task force “studied the need for an Associate Minister; the congregation voted to proceed with calling an Associate Minister pending an assessment of the financial feasibility...at the annual meeting in May.”

⁴⁴⁵ “Our Shared Vision Statement,” *Unigram*, May/June 1995, “Unigrams 1995,” UUSS Archives.

While not a covenant of behavior or mutual expectations, the statement has aspects of mutual commitment, as does the Bond of Union (i.e., “mutual helpfulness” and the pledge “to bear our part in the common cause.”) A version of each of those six italicized phrases from the Vision statement appears as a category title, or a theme. Under each one is an expanded statement of how that theme should be lived out. For example, under “Ethics in Action,” the Vision Statement reads: “We want our ethical process to be noncompetitive, patient, and accepting of others. Our members will teach nonviolent conflict resolution and be proactive while accepting the appropriate role of compromise.” Under “Democratic Process,” it envisions leadership that is “collaborative, shared and representative.” The expanded statement for “Growth” includes, among other things: “We want to grow to allow participation by people of all ages and by people with unmet needs in the community.”

What the stated vision lacks, however, is explicit attention to matters that were plaguing the congregation’s sense of well-being and consequently holding back its progress, as had been pointed out to the congregation by interim ministers Josiah Bartlett, Aron Gilmartin, and Eileen Karpeles in 1970, 1984, and 1990, respectively. (See Chapter Six for details.) Neither this Vision Statement nor the Bond of Union addresses the members’ ways of working and being together, the ways by which members, lay leaders, and clergy speak to and about one another.

6. A Religious Community Makes a Covenant

In his President’s Report in the spring of 1999, Rich Howard outlined the major goals which the Board of Trustees had set for itself for the year on which he was

reporting: “Strengthening Our Religious Community,” “Developing Our Infrastructure,” and “Strengthening Our UU Connections.”⁴⁴⁶ Though the “job of building community is never finished,” he said, it was worth noting “that we made significant progress toward meeting these goals.” His wording of the first goal is notable, as I have uncovered scant evidence of the congregation’s lay leaders using the words “religious community” to describe their organization in the two decades prior to this point. The archives of Board meetings, correspondence, committee reports and minutes, as well as minutes of Congregational Meetings and various Annual Reports of the 1980s and 1990s show the stresses, achievements, and hopes of lay volunteers elected or recruited to positions of organizational management and service to constituents. Yet there is little reflection on the nature of their leadership of this congregation in the spirit of its Bond of Union or with a sense of covenant or shared promises. Chapter Three looks at the congregational culture of that era through the lens of class. Arguably the culture reflected the secular culture of bureaucratic organizations and the contentious nature of democratic lawmaking with which many members were familiar. The late 1990s appear to have been a turning point for UUSS. The years of effort by ministers and lay leaders to build a shared vision and commitment and to enhance trust and goodwill had brought the congregation to a point in its development when it could be affirmed as a religious community. By the middle of 2000, the congregation would craft a covenant and ratify it by a vote of the membership.

A personal observation: When I began serving as the Family Minister at the Society in August 2008, the Order of Service for nearly every Sunday included the words

⁴⁴⁶ Rich Howard, [Report of the] President, Annual Report 1998-1999, “Annual Reports,” UUSS Archives.

of the congregation's Mission, Values, and Covenant. Worshipers would be led in reciting these words in unison, usually after the ritual early in the service of the Chalice Lighting (lighting an oil lamp held in the sculpted metal form of a large chalice). At first I saw the weekly recitation of that statement as merely an expected ritual, perhaps primarily a habit. I did not know the history of the crafting and adopting of those words by church members. Since then, I have learned that the very existence of the statement which congregants recite, and which many have committed to memory, is evidence of a turning point in the congregation's self-understanding.⁴⁴⁷

Not one of the Sunday Orders of Service for worship at UUSS prior to 2000 lists *any* part of a "Mission, Values, or Covenant" statement, let alone the lines for all three components; nor does any Order of Service show a unison recitation of the Bond of Union or the Statement of Vision. (Occasionally the latter appeared for informational purposes on the back page of a Sunday Order of Service, but usually that space included words of explanation of the Unitarian Universalist religious tradition. The writing and adoption of "Mission" and "Values" statements would come early in the ministry of Douglas Kraft (2000 to 2013), as would the practice of reciting the statement almost weekly. The Covenant statement had been the first segment of those three statements. It was created and adopted by the congregation in 2000, during the service of the interim co-ministry of the Rev. Dennis Daniel and Rev. Sydney Wilde.⁴⁴⁸

⁴⁴⁷ The Order of Service in a Unitarian Universalist congregation is typically determined by the minister in charge, though in many congregations there may be weekly variations depending on the topic, structure, or speaker at a given service.

⁴⁴⁸ Typically, but not in the case of every minister at the Society, a new interim or settled minister would start in August of a year. The traditional preaching season for clergy was September through mid-June. Departing ministers leaving in the summer often save their vacation time to use when they depart in July.

In her January 2000 *Unigram* newsletter column, Wilde invited people to participate in a series of workshops and forums at UUSS in the spring. She said these would lead to a “covenant of mutual respect and support, a covenant of behavior which honors the worth and dignity of all our members and friends, a covenant of justice and mercy with an awareness that everything we do affects the lives of others.”⁴⁴⁹ The process would begin with a retreat for the Board, staff, and Council of Leaders (though the text says “Leadership Council”) in January. A guest minister from denominational headquarters would speak about covenant in a Sunday sermon in February, and then a series of discussions and workshops would follow. After a workshop in May (later rescheduled to June) there would be a “Ritual Signing of the Covenant.” Wilde noted that the congregation would be creating “other visions” later in the year, making explicit their dreams, goals, and intended structures for operation and governance. However, Wilde said, without a “covenant of right relationship [as the foundation], the others [i.e., other goals] will fail. In the final analysis, how we treat each other makes all the difference.”⁴⁵⁰

In February 2000, Rich Howard (who had been serving as UUSS President since July of 1998) wrote that nearly fifty staff and lay leaders had attended a retreat. He said:

[We] reminded ourselves of why we are here, what keeps us from achieving our vision, and how we might move through these blocks to building the community we seek. We set goals for ourselves, such as becoming more welcoming to visitors, improving communication within the congregation, increasing financial and volunteer commitment,

⁴⁴⁹ Sydney Wilde, “Wilde Wanderings,” *Unigram*, January 2000, “Unigrams 2000,” UUSS Archives.

⁴⁵⁰*Ibid.* In the March *Unigram*, an article by Barbara Amberson noted that the final meetings on the covenant were postponed until June to allow for the weeklong visit of the settled minister candidate.

improving our listening skills, and creating socially-responsible community outreach.⁴⁵¹

They came up with specific actions. At another event, an “Agenda Book discussion meeting,” a large group of members met to express feelings and listen to one another about the “painful” topic of a choir director’s recent resignation. Howard said this event “showed a willingness to work together to learn from the experience and move forward to improve both our music program and our relationships with all our staff.”⁴⁵²

In the newsletter, Wilde urged congregants to attend the “neighborhood focus groups” in April and the covenant workshop and ritual signing in June: “The process of achieving the covenant is far more important than the statement itself. The more people who are willing to be part of the process...and to consider their expectations of and commitment to a way of behaving in community, the more real the covenant will be.... This is the work we must do together to prepare the ground for new growth.”

Bell was part of the group of leaders which led and facilitated church members in the drafting of a Covenant. “We took it from this huge roomful of ideas and then met in smaller groups” to winnow the ideas and statements into shorter summaries for eventual creation of the Covenant. In separate interviews, she and Johnson both recalled a similar moment of insight and responsiveness on the part of the group. Johnson said, “When we word-smithed [the draft covenant], we talked about [the phrase] ‘we walk together.’ No, we don’t, because some people can’t walk. So we [revised it to say], ‘We *travel*

⁴⁵¹ Rich Howard, “President’s Letter,” *Unigram*, February 2000, “Unigrams 2000,” UUSS Archives.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*

together.”⁴⁵³ The following is the current UUSS Covenant, which members crafted and adopted in 2000:

UUSS Covenant

We, an intergenerational community, travel together
with open minds, open hearts, and helping hands.
We value justice, compassion, integrity and acceptance.
We seek spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation,
caring and laughter.
To these ends we pledge our time, talents and support.

This remains in use today. On many Sundays, it is printed in the Order of Service (with the statements of Mission and Values, which were adopted after the Covenant) for the congregation to recite in unison early in the service.

A covenant is a guideline by which people in a congregation measure their conduct with one another. It is a reflection of their identity as a religious community and of the publicly proclaimed values and principles of their tradition and their own local church. As the Rev. Sydney Wilde noted, the primary need is more than having words on a page, but the experience of shared buy-in or consensus. Many Unitarian Universalist Society members participated in reflecting on, brainstorming about, and articulating a covenant, and then the congregation voted to adopt it.

A Covenant is not a panacea for congregational challenges or a prevention against conflicts or other disappointments in the life of a community. Yet it can be a standard to which members can hold themselves and one another accountable, especially in times of conflict. As Interim Minister Eileen Karpeles wrote to the congregation in 1989, “If the

⁴⁵³ Ginny Johnson, *op. cit.*

glue that holds any group together is this common value structure, it behooves us to pay attention to how we handle differences.”⁴⁵⁴

UUSS has come so far in transforming a culture of conflict into a renewal of covenant. Indeed, the ministry of the Rev. Douglas Kraft (2000 to 2013) was marked by a deepening of relationships and of growing spiritual diversity and practice in the congregation, anchored in the adoption of statements of Mission and Values. By learning to work together, listen to one another, and engage in challenges cooperatively, the congregation completed a strategic planning process and accomplished the goals adopted in it. This led to a successful capital fundraising campaign and the launching of the first major expansion and renovation project in a half century. We seem poised to engage one another in healthy ways that lead to spiritual growth and a further deepening of community. But the context in which we exist and minister has changed; the religious landscape of the United States and California has altered since the early 1980s. Chapter Nine will explore major shifts in this landscape and move us to consider how they will affect UUUS—and other congregations—in the future.

⁴⁵⁴ “Biography of Rev. Eileen Karpeles,” *Unigram* attachment, December 13, 1988, “Unigrams 1988,” UUSS Archives.

Chapter Nine

A Congregation amid Shifting Patterns of Religious Participation

1. Changing Patterns of Religious Participation

The foregoing chapters have narrated how the Unitarian Universalist Society traveled through an extended period of conflict, mistrust, misplaced energy, and individualism. By courageous leadership, raised awareness, hard work, and generosity, UUSS has emerged into a new era of shared effort for the well-being of the congregation as a whole and commitment to its mission. Now that the members and ministers have traveled together to a new culture of covenantal words and behaviors as a religious community, one might ask: is there very much interest in religious community anymore? Do people still look for a congregational home? In some parts of the country and some organizations, including some Unitarian Universalist (UU) churches, it may not seem so.

In their article “Dark Night of the Church,” L. Roger Owens (a seminary professor) and Anthony Robinson (a minister) give these blunt symptoms of decline in mainline (i.e., moderate) denominations and established congregations: “Loss of market share. Conflict. Absence of young adults. Financial crisis.”⁴⁵⁵

The trends of U.S. American religious participation do seem to indicate declining numbers and increasing hardships as ministers and laity work to sustain religious congregations. Many mainline or moderate Protestant congregations have been looking

⁴⁵⁵Anthony B. Robinson and L. Roger Owens, "Dark Night of the Church," *Christian Century* (December 26, 2012), 28.

sparse in their now-oversized facilities; some of them seem close to closing their doors. Similar trends affect UU congregations in New England and some sparsely populated areas of the country, though overall our denominational membership numbers are stable or declining less rapidly than those of denominations close to us in moderate or liberal social values and in our socio-economic profile. Although Pentecostal and evangelical churches have grown in the period when mainline churches were shrinking, arguably they are now leveling off. Catholic congregations have grown mainly from the immigration of Catholics from other countries, which has more than offset the loss of those who have left the faith of their upbringing. The Unitarian Universalist Association counts about 160,000 adult members in 1,018 congregations; while this gives a mean of 157 members, it is notable that 705 of our churches have 100 or fewer members.⁴⁵⁶

In the aggregate, religious participation has declined in the United States. Statistics about the changing religious landscape have been calculated by the Pew Research Center and LifeLong Faith Associates. In its 2009 document “Faith Formation 2020,” the latter organization reported that “in 1990 about 20.6% of the U.S. population was in church on any given weekend; today only 17.3% are in worship.”⁴⁵⁷ This means that eighty-two percent of U.S. Americans are not weekly religious participants.

⁴⁵⁶ Christopher Walton, “UUA Membership Growth, 2001-2011,” *Unitarian Universalist World* (accessed December 23, 2016). <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/membership-growth-2001-2011>

⁴⁵⁷ LifeLong Faith Associates, “Faith Formation 2020,” 2009, accessed January 2, 2013. http://www.faithformation2020.net/uploads/5/1/6/4/5164069/ff_2020_chapter_1.pdf

2. Growth Segments in Religion: “Nothing in Particular”

From the results of the study cited above, it is worth noting the statistics for the aggregate category of people in “other faiths.” Identification with traditions outside of Christianity has grown from four percent to six percent of the U.S. population in two decades. That is a fast rate of growth, reflecting the ethnic, cultural, and religious diversity brought by immigrant families and to a lesser extent by U.S.-born persons, such as those converting to Islam, taking up a Buddhist practice, etc.

However, the most significant change in religion has taken place among those who are not religiously affiliated. These are more than three times as large as a share of the U.S. population than are those in the “other faiths” category. While there have been declines in membership in Protestant denominations and in church attendance in general, the “religiously unaffiliated” category has grown. The “religiously unaffiliated” include self-identified atheists and agnostics, and those who say “nothing in particular” in reply to a question about their religious affiliation. (These have been called “the Nones” by the Pew Research Center and other analysts.) The U.S. American population of religiously unaffiliated people now stands at twenty-three percent, nearly one fourth of the population.⁴⁵⁸ Furthermore, they represent one third of U.S. Americans under age thirty.⁴⁵⁹

Indeed, the most striking aspect of the unaffiliated is age-related. Every newer generation of Americans has a higher proportion of religiously unaffiliated people than

⁴⁵⁸Gregory A. Smith and Alan Cooperman, “The Factors Driving the Growth of Religious ‘Nones’ in the U.S.,” Pew Research Center website (addressed December 26, 2016). <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2016/09/14/the-factors-driving-the-growth-of-religious-nones-in-the-u-s/>

⁴⁵⁹ Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” October 9, 2012 (accessed December 23, 2016). <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>

the generation older than it. As older generations pass away, the average proportion of religiously unaffiliated will grow. As shown in the table below, a 2012 Pew survey charted people with “no affiliation” by the era in which they were born.

Table 9.1 Generational Differences among Religiously Unaffiliated U.S. Americans

<u>Generation Cohort</u>	<u>Years of Birth</u>	<u>Percent Unaffiliated</u>
Younger Millennials	1990-1994	34
Older Millennials	1981-1989	30
Generation X	1965-1980	21
Baby Boomers	1946-1964	15
Silent Generation	1928-1945	9
Greatest Generation	1913-1927	5

Molly Worthen refers to the religiously unaffiliated as “spiritual independents.”

As a historian, she asserts that these people have been a significant presence in American and European history long before now, but they are now more visible. In a 2012 article, she said that rates of American church attendance were never as good as the Christian Right likes to assert when attacking this “secular generation.” Before the Civil War, for example, “regular attendance probably never exceeded 30 percent.” Worthen says, “The good old days were not so good after all.”⁴⁶⁰

Religious attendance in the United States rose to a high of forty percent around 1965, the decade when many congregations were growing with families of the postwar Baby Boom. Many large new churches were built, especially in areas of suburban development. This was our story also. In 1956 the Unitarian Universalist Society bought five acres of land just beyond the Sacramento city limits; in 1960, it built and moved into a new church facility on that site. Worthen says that from the 1965 high point of forty

⁴⁶⁰ Molly Worthen, “One Nation Under God?” *New York Times*, December 22, 2012, accessed December 26, 2016. <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/12/23/opinion/sunday/american-christianity-and-secularism-at-a-crossroads.html>

percent, religious attendance in the nation has fallen “to under 30 percent in recent years.” UUSS membership and attendance numbers likewise declined, especially after the conflicts of the 1990s. In recent years, however, attendance and membership have modestly and gradually grown, even as a number of beloved elders have passed away. Every Sunday brings new and returning visitors. Building on the UUSS Covenant and given focus by our Mission, members and staff have expanded programs and our facilities, streamlined processes, improved internal communications, and spurred greater generosity and creativity in fundraising. Hence, we are poised for further growth. The potential for this growth rests among the religiously unaffiliated. Sixty-nine percent of “spiritual independents” (the religiously unaffiliated) in the United States have said they are “very” or “moderately” religious, according to a 2012 Gallup survey.⁴⁶¹

3. Key Traits of the Religiously Unaffiliated or “Spiritual Independents”

Regarding the present religious landscape, Molly Worthen says, “Today’s spiritual independents are not unprecedented. What is new is their increasing *visibility*.”⁴⁶² Who are the religiously unaffiliated, and where do they come from? About seventy-four percent of the unaffiliated report having had a religious background. Hence, they left some faith identity or an actual community. As we might expect in a nation with a majority of Christians, most of them left a Christian faith. According to the Pew Research Center, the share of Christians has declined from seventy-eight percent of our population to seventy-three percent, even as the overall population has grown. (This

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

category includes Catholics, Protestants of both Evangelical and mainline streams, plus Mormons and the Orthodox.)⁴⁶³ Pew says: “The growth of the unaffiliated has taken place across a wide variety of demographic groups,” i.e., education level, income, and geographic region. What is the level of theological belief, religious curiosity, or spiritual interest among the religiously unaffiliated? The Pew Center says:

Two-thirds of them say they believe in God (68%). More than half say they often feel a deep connection with nature and the earth (58%), while more than a third classify themselves as “spiritual” but not “religious” (37%), and one-in-five (21%) say they pray every day. In addition, most ... think that churches and other religious institutions benefit society by strengthening community bonds and aiding the poor.⁴⁶⁴

However, most of the unaffiliated are not looking for a religious institution. The Pew Center says: “Overwhelmingly, they think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power, too focused on rules, and too involved in politics.”⁴⁶⁵ I have read over the years that “politics” means, in the thinking of most of the religiously unaffiliated or disaffected, socially conservative politics in particular. Given that many in the younger generations are, for example, supportive of reproductive rights for women and equal rights for LGBT persons, it seems likely that the aggressive profile of the religious right has given most religious persons and institutions a bad image. I do not think the concern that a church is “too involved in politics” applies to the newer and younger members of the Unitarian Universalist Society. That is, most of them seem to be socially aware and concerned, and fired up for education about and advocacy against racism,

⁴⁶³ Pew Research Center, “‘Nones’ on the Rise,” October 9, 2012, accessed December 23, 2016. <http://www.pewforum.org/2012/10/09/nones-on-the-rise/>

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

sexism, and homophobia. They are engaged with the church in supporting refugees, immigrants, and our homeless neighbors. Many young people not in any congregation do work in these areas through secular organizations, as volunteers or employees. Many younger (as well as older) congregation members often do such work as part of their congregation as well as in secular organizations. Given that most of their peers remain religiously unaffiliated but socially engaged, why do some younger adults still choose to participate in this church or any church?

4. The Appeal and Potential of Established Congregations

The Rev. Carol Howard Merritt is a Presbyterian minister and writer on trends of church growth and renewal, especially in mainline Protestant denominations. She has concluded that some younger adults have made a home in established mainline congregations because they find support there, including support from people in older generations. A politically and socially progressive Christian, Merritt cites with joy the decline in the power and growth of evangelical megachurches. She highlights the potential for small and midsize liberal churches to promote nurturing and authentic relationships across generations and to feed the spiritual hungers of younger adults. She knows younger adults who respond well to the spiritual and liturgical resources of the mainline heritage. Not impressed with the grand scale and production values of megachurch life, the folks Merritt knows are progressive and justice-minded. They need mentors who respect who they are and show patience for the people they are becoming. In contrast, she asserts, many evangelical churches look for people who fit a type: white, male, conservative, charismatic, and corporate. Merritt gives thanks for the patience and

mentoring she received as a younger person and as a woman in denominational churches, where she discerned and tried out her call to ministry. That evangelical “type” would not describe the people she knows; nor would it characterize most of the people who have made their home in the Unitarian Universalist Society the past several years. I have seen growing evidence that newer members, including young adult ones, are drawn to this congregation’s clarity of message about where it stands on social issues. They appear happy to be engaged in congregational endeavors which embody UU values.

5. The Appeal of Unitarian Universalism to Spiritual Independents and Seekers

What can Unitarian Universalists conclude from the trends of changing religious participation and from Merritt’s observations? The growth in the “unaffiliated” category may hold promise for a spiritually inclusive, non-dogmatic and socially progressive congregation. That is, a UU congregation may appeal to some of the religiously unaffiliated. After all, many of them are not drawn to strict or traditional views about God, human sexuality, or gender roles. Many identify as “spiritual but not religious,” though there is no shared agreement on what that means. A UU congregation has special opportunities for ministry among the “spiritual independents,” as Worthen calls them.

As noted earlier, people in the “religiously unaffiliated” category of survey respondents were asked: “Are you looking for a religion that would be right for you?” Eighty-eight percent said “No.” Two percent said “Don’t know” or refused to answer. However, ten percent did say “Yes,” they are looking. Hence, if ten percent of an unaffiliated twenty-three percent of American adults are looking, I think that means that as much as 2.3 percent of the population is “looking for a religion”—or at least could be

open to participation in one. Using recent U. S. Census Bureau data, this would indicate more than 400,000 U.S. American adults might be “looking for a religion that would be right for [them].” Of course, this “looking” question does not even count those who answered “No,” but who might be surprised to find a religious community about which they can say, “I had no idea a church like this even existed.” I have heard such comments from visitors and new members alike. I recall how touching it was in the 1990s when a new friend who was a church member of just a few years made this testimonial: “I didn’t know how much I needed this place until I found it.” The “religiously unaffiliated” category no doubt has a few more people who could be pleasantly surprised to find a community that suited them even when they were not seeking one.

To see hope in the new religious landscape, Merritt offers a “new frame.” She observes that our mainline congregations offer grounding in tradition and historical awareness, some tried and true spiritual practices, and the opportunity to build friendships based in shared values and in a covenant. Members of established congregations can provide practical support, empathy, and spiritual encouragement to one another. Seasoned clergy and lay leaders are sources of wisdom and experience in social analysis and prophetic proclamation, as well as in organizing projects to help other people. Mainline congregations provide an invitation to fellowship and friendship across generations, and a location for such friendships to emerge.

It is important to consider how the lives and the needs of young adults in this era are different from those of two, three, or more decades ago. Faith Formation 2020 says: “[The] transition to adulthood today is more complex, disjointed, and confusing than it was in past decades. [For example, the] steps through and to schooling, first real job,

marriage and parenthood are simply less well organized today than they were in generations past.” Merritt notes that “the median job tenure of workers from 25 to 34 is just 2.7 years.” They change jobs and industries more often and “have more frequent periods of unemployment and underemployment.”⁴⁶⁶ This rings true with my experience with younger adults in church, nearly all of whom are smart, creative, compassionate—and living with large debts, non-professional-class incomes, or both. I know plenty of congregants, colleagues, and my own relatives whose adult children are living at home—still or again—or depending on regular financial support from their parents. Financial-advice columnists worry that most younger workers have saved or invested very little toward their retirement needs. Stagnant incomes and frequent changes in jobs make this hard. So does the merchandizing of our consumer culture, and the rapid pace of upgrades, making our dependence on technology even more costly.

Recall that seventy-four percent of the “religiously unaffiliated” adults surveyed had a religious background. Perhaps this fluidity is just a persistent aspect of the American religious landscape now. Ever since Alexis de Tocqueville first came to observe our society and write *Democracy in America*, we have been known to have a marketplace of competing congregations, all with their own traditions, spiritual styles, ways of outreach and hospitality, and church programs. As U.S. Americans have become less rooted in one place for the long term, it seems natural that congregation-switching would accelerate. So would withdrawal from participation. As people move around, it can be harder to establish a new congregational involvement after leaving a place where you had gained a deep sense of connection. However, looking through the frame of

⁴⁶⁶ Carol Howard Merritt, *Tribal Church* (Herndon, Virginia, 2000: Alban Institute), 55. She is citing Anya Kamenetz’s book *Generation Debt* (New York, 2006: Riverhead Books).

ministry and mission, we should see this geographical transience, and the personal isolation that often comes with it, as an opportunity for ministry by congregations, including Unitarian Universalist ones. Instead of hand wringing over statistical trends of church participation, we can get curious about understanding the needs that we might be poised to serve.

6. What Spiritual Seekers Are Not Seeking

An important point about what Owens and Robinson called “the absence of young adults” is that some young adults *are present* among us already. Perhaps not in great number, and perhaps their attendance fluctuates. Young adults or other spiritual independents may not show up at every Sunday service, Saturday work party, Wednesday choir practice, or spring budget meeting. Yet I imagine every kind of congregation has occasional young adult visitors. Some of them just might join the congregation! However, they may never bring a dozen friends to fill the pews. Indeed, they may be attending because they need friends, or because they seek different kinds of friends.

How does a congregation appeal to those younger adults (or seekers of any age) who do attend, and how do we keep those who seek to deepen their participation among us? Recall the summary of the Pew Research Center: “[The unaffiliated] think that religious organizations are too concerned with money and power [and] too focused on rules....” That sentence could characterize some of the dynamics that plagued the Unitarian Universalist Society’s quality of life in the recent past, as documented earlier in this work. Likewise, Owens and Robinson noted that conflict has been endemic to the cultures of many mainline congregations and denominations. It is unlikely that those two

traits will appeal to seekers. To be sure, UUSS and other congregations can expect that some spiritual independents and religiously unaffiliated neighbors will hear about us from a friend, check us out online, or be curious enough to wander in. Some will come back, and some will join if they see signs of promise that the congregation could be a place of belonging, healing, inspiration, or transformation for their lives. However, we can expect something else: most of the seekers will *not* be looking for a place that appears “too concerned with money and power,” for a congregation that is so “focused on rules” that it has no sense of mission, or for a community burdened by conflict. Unless they have an antagonistic impulse, no newcomers to a church will be looking for a place to argue in meetings about the finer points of Robert’s Rules of Order, take sides in church fights, question others’ motives, or sow mistrust and resentment in the community. If a church allows or promotes such behaviors, it will dishearten some longtime loyal members, rob the congregation of a sense of mission, and undermine its potential. Furthermore, it will show newcomers that it probably is not “a religion that is right for them.”

In the Conclusion, I consider the journey made by the Unitarian Universalist Society away from deep-seated habits of conflict, mistrust, and factionalism toward practices of making the well-being of the congregation a primary and shared priority. Its members adopted a Covenant, which has encouraged and reflected a spirit of mutual support and respect. Furthermore, UUSS adopted a Mission, which has called us forth, and a statement of Values, which have informed and shaped the ways we have expressed and pursued that Mission. In addition to these gifts, we will need also to show humility as we travel the shifting religious landscape in service of our shared Mission and Values.

Conclusion

Current Life at USS and Lessons Learned

1. A Web of Mutual Dependence

By returning to its religious denomination's heritage of covenant, the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (USS) entered the twenty-first century with a sense of shared purpose and a commitment to mutual support. Members began learning how to engage in disagreements respectfully, protect the well-being of the congregation from the personal agendas and antagonisms of individuals and factions, and show appreciation to one another for deeds of kindness, generosity, and service. The members adopted an explicit statement of Covenant in 2000, and in a few years they would craft and adopt statements of shared Mission and Values as a congregation.

At the same time that these changes were coming about at USS, its heritage of covenantal relations was illumined by a new denominational statement. In the 1980s, the Unitarian Universalist Association's General Assembly delegates (from congregations) revised and adopted the official "Principles" of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), and crafted the Seventh Principle: "The interdependent web of existence, of which we are a part."

The Seventh Principle's metaphor of the web relates primarily to the natural world and our human responsibility as part of it, but it has a spiritual resonance as well. Consider, if you will, that being in a setting where we feel ourselves part of that web can evoke a sense of awe, gratitude, and humility. The concept of interdependence implies responsibility to and reliance on resources, beings, and forces beyond oneself. Likewise, at the microcosmic level of the congregation, the web implies mutual dependence and

mutual responsibility. On reflection, this fact about being bound together in community can elicit feelings of awe, gratitude, and humility. By relating to one another as voluntary members united by a covenant, congregation members and clergy affirm and promote a theological principle as alive and operational in our midst.

It seems that the various times of crisis in the 1980s and 1990s were occasions and opportunities for members of the Society to achieve a new maturity of mutual dependence. Their struggles brought them to acknowledge that they represented not a mere association of interests, but a religious community. This reality is what has drawn me to serve the Society and to accept gladly its members' vote of call to be its Associate Minister and now its Senior Minister. The love of the members for one another and for their shared mission has deepened my love of them and my gratitude for the privilege to serve the congregation.

2. Looking Back in Order to Look Forward

Though this thesis is a historical study, I hope it helps us all—as lay leaders, clergy, and congregation members—to reflect on how we are working and serving and living together, and how we lead into the future. Likewise, I hope it may be useful to leaders and members of other congregations who seek to embody values rooted in their traditions and pursue a mission or purpose relevant to the needs of the larger world.

My purpose is not, with the benefit of hindsight, to allege that our forebears were doing it all wrong. Of course, members of the Unitarian Universalist Society in the main period covered in this work did make mistakes, and they showed some unhealthy, disheartening habits. However, members also came to recognize the toll which those

habits were taking on one another and on the vitality of their congregation. With the assistance of some clergy and the courage of lay leadership, the members took steps toward better health. As a congregation, they matured into a covenant-centered, mission-focused institution. At the same time, the purpose of this work is not to catalogue and celebrate in detail all the variety and excellence of the Society and its members in earlier eras, though there is much to praise from our history. We can honor our history without living in it or longing to re-live it.

Rev. Peter Morales, President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, told the 2011 General Assembly delegates that human organizations decline or fail not so much because of problems they face but *because they hold on too much to past success*.⁴⁶⁷

Anthony Robinson and L. Roger Owens write that “we [of the mainline denominations] have allowed external measures of identity to define us—numbers, money, social prominence, and proud peak moments in our history.”⁴⁶⁸ To the extent that we have adopted the individualistic ethos of a corporate and entrepreneurial economy or the mindset of a competitive global superpower, we have diminished our awareness of the center of our faith—the covenant of mutual support and presence, interdependence, and trust in one another.

3. A Time for Discernment and Humility

Whether we are facing the scary plummet of moderate Protestantism’s dominance in American society or the sobering plateau of Unitarian Universalist membership

⁴⁶⁷ Peter Morales, President’s Address to the UUA General Assembly, June 2011.

⁴⁶⁸ Anthony B. Robinson and L. Roger Owens, “Dark Night of the Church,” *Christian Century* (December 26, 2012), 28.

numbers, the present moment is a spiritual in-between time for established and mature organizations. For churches, it is like the “dark night of the soul” which St. John of the Cross identified as part of our individual spiritual journeys, as noted by Owens and Robinson.⁴⁶⁹ The dark night is not death and not necessarily depression, but it is a time of uncertainty and of discomfort. This calls for enough discipline to explore, consider, discern, and try out new ideas and possibilities. It calls for humility.

We can be humbled that we might ever have presumed to know exactly how to “make” a church grow. We can be humbled even more that we might have thought that our membership numbers were the primary or best measure of how any congregation or denomination has embodied our values or achieved our purpose. The troubling times through which the Unitarian Universalist Society traveled were largely years of its numerical growth, but they were marked by adversarial and rancorous interactions and a lack of trust among members. It took a long time for the congregation to do the work of self-examination and the work of putting the quality of our relationships back at the center of church life.

Owens and Robinson mention “conflict” and “absence of young adults” as two trends of life in many congregations.⁴⁷⁰ Two important points can be made about the purported “absence of young adults.” One is that it reflects nothing new, but a trend long in the making—that of declining religious participation. The second point is to remember that some younger adults do express an interest in finding religious community and they do show up. This fact represents an opportunity for ministry by congregations today. To

⁴⁶⁹*Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

the extent that we do not wish to know them or take the time to learn their needs, we will forfeit an opportunity for ministry. To be sure, it will require intention, money, and time to pursue such opportunities for ministry. However, if we view their absence only as a loss of human resources for keeping the church going, we lack any sense of ministry whatsoever. The First Principle of the Unitarian Universalist Association—the inherent worth and dignity of every person—calls us to see people as ends in themselves, not as means to an end which others have chosen. It is my hope that younger adult spiritual seekers—or seekers of any other demographic—will keep looking until they find a faith community that wants to know them, include them, and love them as they are, as ends in themselves.

4. From Humility to Creativity

In this “dark night of the church,” we can continue to work and serve, and to be confident that curiosity and creativity are crucial resources for congregational communities. Each congregation must discern and articulate its primary mission and practice that mission wisely and bravely. To do this is to be the church, to be the religious society, to be much more than a mere membership association of people of common opinions or shared identities of ethnicity or social class. To do this is to be faithful to our proclaimed values. As the demographics of our local communities continue to shift and change, as the people who seek us out arrive with changing needs, ideas and gifts, we must be aware, observant, and creative to discern and engage with new opportunities to live out our mission.

Those congregations now seeking to be relevant must look for the ways we might

serve real people with real needs, rather than serve the needs of our institution. It is fruitless to seek to survive in the forms and habits that we are used to, when those habits and forms have no inherent or necessary connection to mission. Rather than spending precious energy trying to preserve a church only for the sake of its preservation, we can energize ourselves in exploring new forms for ministering to and making an impact on the world.

In the shifting religious landscape, our goal and focus as congregations must not be to survive, but to serve! Some may ask: Can't we do both? Can't we work on surviving and on serving? Probably so, but we--the leaders of congregations--need to determine which purpose is calling to us. If we are drawn mostly by nostalgic longings to perpetuate the church of our idealized memories, I fear we will continue to be frustrated and confused. If we put energy into preserving the church of our personal preferences and familiar comforts, we will miss out on creative opportunities to enrich our souls and serve our larger community. On the other hand, if we feel called primarily by the opportunity to be of service as a religious community, we will enliven ourselves. If we approach our shared mission with curiosity, patience, flexibility, and perseverance, I am confident we shall find and summon the resources to follow this calling.

5. Epilogue: Evidence of a Mission-focused Congregation

Except for the chapters about the Women's Alliance at UUSS and the founding of new congregations in the Sacramento region, the historical period of study for this thesis has been the 1980s and 1990s. However, it may be interesting and even inspiring to read briefly about some UUSS history since 2000, the year the Society adopted a Covenant and called Rev. Douglas Kraft as its minister. In the early years after Kraft's arrival, the

congregation members continued in discernment on their life and purpose together. They crafted and adopted statements of Mission and Vision (see Appendix I). Kraft's practice of having congregants recite the words in unison at the beginning of nearly every Sunday morning service kept the statements alive and promoted a common understanding of the congregation to its visitors, newer members, and long-time congregants.

Under his ministry, the USS Board of Trustees and members created a Program Council, an elected body which oversees and supports the church's activity groups, committees, and program life, thereby freeing the Board to focus on infrastructure, finances, policy, and long-range planning. Board work ideally is policy-setting, not gatekeeping, permission-granting, or managing details of church facility use or of staff duties—matters around which conflicts often centered in earlier decades. Hence, with Kraft's urging and input, the Board adopted a formal policy for parishioners and outside renters who wished to use the facilities (among other policies). Kraft and others launched a small-group ministry program, with several "Ministry Circles" led by volunteers whom he trained and supported. The congregation made the transition from one to two Sunday services (in September through May) and adopted a practice of giving away half of the non-pledged offering receipts to local not-for-profit service agencies every Sunday. For this outreach activity, members nominate agencies and vote to select twelve of them to be "Community Partners" for each calendar year. This has enhanced giving so much that the Society's half of the non-pledge contributions is now above the amount received in the years before the money was shared; it yields approximately \$25,000 to local agencies each year (and the same amount to USS).

The most historic change has been the adoption of a Long Range Plan in 2008

after several conversations by clergy, Board members and other UUSS members with the help of a consultant as facilitator. The five-year goals adopted in 2008 were to strengthen the congregation's ministry to families with children, to improve its processes to welcome newcomers, to help new members be engaged in fulfilling ways, and to create a Master Plan process (with the help of an architect) for enhancing the buildings and grounds to serve the congregation for the next fifty years.

The resulting Master Plan was adopted by a unanimous vote! In 2012 the first capital campaign in decades raised commitments of \$1,200,000 toward a planned expansion and renovation of the main (sanctuary) building, which would begin in 2014. The congregation celebrated its relationship with Kraft at the tenth anniversary of his calling, with a party and the publishing of a book of his sermons and newsletter columns. In 2013, Kraft's ministry ended after thirteen years, with his voluntary resignation. His retirement was marked by standing ovations at both his farewell party and final service.

In 2014, the congregation called its Associate Minister (me) to succeed Kraft in the lead role, in a secret ballot with a ninety-eight percent majority, a sure sign of trust and forbearance after nearly six years with me. UUSS also navigated a financial setback when leaders learned that building renovation cost estimates had jumped one million dollars beyond available donations and bequeathed funds. In the wake of that stressful surprise, a series of challenging conversations led to a lively Congregational Meeting at which more than ninety percent voted to authorize a bank loan of up to one million dollars. The congregation bid farewell to its home and for thirteen months resumed Sunday programs in rented space at a Congregational church a mile away, and moved offices from the Main Hall into the Education Building. Fundraising continued for

bridging the gap of higher costs, as well as for furnishings, decorations, fixtures, and landscaping. The move home and a rededication ceremony took place in September 2015 with local and denominational officials and interfaith guests present and speaking. Much of the success of the construction project and relocation is due to the leadership that volunteers, staff, and contractors received from the Rev. Lucy Bunch. The UUSS Board appointed Bunch as Assistant Minister in 2013; we have worked together well for nearly four years. Among other achievements, she has managed and mentored the administrative staff, organized creative worship services to appeal to all ages and learning styles, and devised and managed a new model for small-group ministry, which served as many as 100 people in one recent year. She has been pivotal in the improvement or innovation of many church programs and in outreach for social justice.

Amid the challenges of serving families with diverse needs, UUSS has developed strong connections between the Children's Religious Education program and the rest of the congregation—connections which were strained at best in earlier decades. In recent years, more than half of our volunteers who serve children are elders or others without small children at home. One Sunday per month we schedule a worship service for all ages, which many adults without small children have praised rather than avoided. We work to revise the model with feedback to help us make services more accessible. Recent months have seen crowded services and a full parking lot. Especially since the building's rededication, we have seen steady growth in attendance by younger adults, with some of them quite active. Congregational business meetings have no trouble achieving a quorum of longtime and newer church members. Lasting an hour or so (rarely more than ninety minutes), the meetings include insightful or challenging questions and alternative

suggestions, but little acrimony or evidence of mistrust between leaders and other members. To be sure, revenue shortfalls during the Great Recession led to extra meetings and longer ones, but stressful deliberations were navigated in good faith. Lay leaders aim to provide clear explanations of budgetary issues and monetary needs. Pledge drives and other appeals for donations do not convey a tone of duty or shame, but optimism and gratitude. Board meetings are not marked by antagonism, even when leaders must wrestle with tough decisions. In contrast to an earlier era, all of this reflects and enhances a culture of shared commitment and trust in one another.

In the past two years, the Society has engaged in conversations and training about racial justice, begun providing space for meetings of the local Showing Up for Racial Justice white allies group and of Black Lives Matter Sacramento. Spurred by some UUSS high school youth group members, church members discussed, voted on, and paid for a large outside banner proclaiming “Black Lives Matter Here” and “Standing on the Side of Love”; the latter phrase is our denominational justice-organizing slogan. Over a year ago, the Board selected the theme of “confronting economic inequality” to embrace a variety of new and continuing activities of learning, reflection, worship, local solidarity, and action for social justice. For a decade UUSS has hosted homeless families overnight in our buildings four weeks every year. Recently a group of newer members came forward to coordinate this large volunteer effort. In the past year, the congregation has established a refugee support program. Our teams provide hospitality, child care, English-language teaching, and other support for neighbors recently settled by the International Rescue Committee. We’ve also given funds, household supplies, and bicycles to refugees. UUSS has provided funds and volunteers for a Habitat for Humanity interfaith

construction project intended to promote unity among Muslims and other local religious groups. Most recently the Society is engaging with a congregation-based community organizing entity. Internally, new activity groups have sprung up and new vitality shines from some long-standing ones, like Theater One. In the near future, lay leaders may pursue the next phase of our multi-part Master Plan for the building and grounds.

6. Lessons Learned

In recent years at UUSS, attendance and membership have been growing, and I think this trend reflects the current vitality of church life. However, we must remember that neither growth for its own sake nor survival for its own sake is the goal of our work. Membership numbers must not be the primary measure of how any congregation or denomination has embodied its values or achieved its purpose. Especially in the shifting religious landscape of these times, fidelity to a clear and relevant mission must be the measure of strength and success. The steady arrival of spiritual seekers to the church and the presence of newer members in UUSS have caused the congregation to pay attention to our ways of treating one another as well as newcomers. We now cast a view beyond the walls of the church much more than UUSS could do in the years of conflict. We see not only the world's need for healing but also our potential visitors' needs for religious community, spiritual inspiration, and hope. The regular welcome of newcomers among us provides an opportunity and a need to review our reason for being a congregation and to reclaim our mission.

To be sure, none of the Society's progress has been smooth or assured, and nothing is ideal or perfect in congregational life. Yet the current culture stands in contrast with the one that I have narrated from the study of archives and the accounts of several members of long standing. As noted in these chapters, lay leaders and other members showed courage. They made their priority the well-being of the congregation as a whole, especially when faced with harassment or hostile challenges under the guise of guarding individual rights. As noted in Chapter Six, the Rev. Josiah Bartlett said (in 1970, during his brief interim ministry at UUSS) that this congregation's self-defeating habits and culture of conflict were "not the creation of any single minister or one board," and it would take time and the sustained efforts of many members and clergy to arrive at a better culture and unleash the great potential he saw in the congregation. He said the culture of apathy and mistrust had become so pervasive "as not to be perceived. It will take real effort ... to become conscious of it; more effort to break through it." With encouragement and guidance from clergy—both interim and settled ministers—the congregation discerned and proclaimed a Covenant, a set of Values, and a guiding Mission. Key lay leaders and clergy have affirmed the congregation as a religious community with a mission, not a mere association of people with varied interests. Instead of a sense of belonging which arises from social class or a dominant ethnic identity, UUSS has been growing steadily in its ability to practice the qualities of shared participation, interdependence, commitment, trust, empathy, respect, and love. These qualities constitute the definition, the measure, and the purpose of a religious covenant.

Looking back over the seventeen years of progress and vitality in the Society since 2000 (following many years with a culture of mistrust, conflict, and lost potential),

it is clear that learning to live by a sense of covenant and to pursue a shared mission has revived the congregation. It can be easy, but would be mistaken, to think that a written mission statement is the same thing as (or substitute for) having a clear *sense* of mission. Before it adopted its formal mission statement, UUSS began to act and work together with a sense of mission because it renewed a sense of covenant and promoted practices of mutual dependence and support, respect, care, generosity, and love.

For this congregation and for any congregation's leaders who may wish to benefit from our experience at UUSS, it is worth noting this: recent success can be traced to the congregation's use of and attention to a clear and inspiring mission, loyalty to the congregation's guiding values, and shared commitment. Paraphrasing H. Richard Niebuhr (cited in Chapter Three), over time and with careful attention, this congregation has become able to think again of its goals and its calling not as tasks or burdens, but as free gifts and opportunities. The Covenant has held us together, the Values have guided us, and the Mission has called us forward.

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Appendix I

Statements of Covenant, Mission and Values and the Bond of Union

Mission Statement (adopted 2002)

We come together to deepen our lives
and be a force for healing in the world.

Values Statement (adopted 2002)

We value the goodness in everyone,
the openness and curiosity that illuminate that goodness
and the love and courage that sustain us.

Covenant (adopted 2000)

We, an intergenerational community, travel together
with open minds, open hearts, and helping hands.

We value justice, compassion, integrity and acceptance.

We seek spiritual growth, intellectual stimulation, caring and laughter.

To these ends we pledge our time, talents and support.

Bond of Union (adopted 1913, revised 1985, 1999)

We, members of this Society, associate ourselves together as a religious Society for mutual helpfulness in promoting the “Principles and Purposes” of the Unitarian Universalist Association and liberal religion in the community; and we hereby pledge to bear our part in the common cause and to care for the welfare and influence of the Society of which by this act we become members.

Appendix II

Human Subjects Protocols and Interview Questions

Review of Planned Research Involving Human Subjects for D. Min. Dissertation

1. Research Overview

- a. My project focuses on aspects of the history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS).
- b. This includes the history of the Women's Alliance, which began in the early 20th century and continues today as a monthly activity group of the church. I plan to interview 15 to 30 subjects who have been leaders or participants in the Alliance *or* who were UUSS lay leaders who had communication with Alliance leaders. I plan to ask about their perceptions of the mission and purpose of the Alliance, perceived changes over time in the Alliance's purpose, activities, and membership, and key moments in its recent history—both “successes” and “hard times.” I'll ask about former leaders who are no longer at UUSS or are deceased.
- c. My thesis also includes major struggles, achievements, and turning points in the recent history of UUSS, in particular the 1980s and 1990s. After a review of UUSS Archives of those decades, I plan to interview two to 10 subjects who were lay leaders of the congregation during part or all of that time period. I will ask them when their involvement began at UUSS and whether it has been continuous since then, and what lay leadership roles they served in. I will ask them to think broadly and name three pivotal events in the (whole) history of the congregation, and later ask them about the 1980s or 90s. I will ask what events or changes—the painful as well as the gratifying ones--they recall as most important and which gave them important insights. I will ask for specific examples of the actions of people they wish to name and of actions and decisions of the congregation. However, many of the actions, written opinions and accounts of turning points of this period are already well documented in the archives, so the interviews are intended to flesh out the narrative I assemble from the archives, and perhaps to offer a counterpoint to it.
- d. I will interview subjects in their home, at the church, or another location they may choose. I plan only one interview per subject, though I may later ask follow-up questions of one or more subjects (nearly all are parishioners of mine). The interview should last 60 to 90 minutes, not counting the initial small talk on arrival. I will take notes during the interview but make no voice recording. If anyone prefers to give written answers by e-mail only, I will consider doing that but try to follow up in person with questions. I plan to contact the subjects by phone or e-mail.
- e. Alliance interview subjects: I generated subjects from detailed minutes of Alliance meetings and noting names of women now in the church or still in town. I announced at their meeting of October 2014 that I will conduct interviews and

invite them to contact me if they have recollections of specific moments of Alliance history.

- f. Lay leader interview subjects: I generated subjects from seeing the names of lay leaders active in the 1980s and 1990s who I know are still active in UUSS or still in the area.
- g. For over eight years I have been one of the UUSS pastors to most of the subjects. A few of them have not attended UUSS services recently or even attended recent monthly Alliance meetings, but they currently have no other congregation or pastor to my knowledge.
- h. Benefits: Subjects could experience the spiritual benefits of reflecting on and recounting their lives in their church, their church group(s), and leadership roles. They could gain a deeper sense of connection to their minister, who wants to hear their stories. Lay leaders could feel appreciation for the progress made since the 1980s or 1980s, or they could feel wistfulness for a fondly remembered sense of activity or status they treasured at UUSS.
- i. Risks: Recollection of past conflicts, fallings-out, or losses by death could bring up sadness. Being quoted in print puts people at risk for relationships affected when someone else reads something they said. For Alliance members, recollection of past accomplishments in programs, fundraising, governance, or attendance numbers could lead to sadness or anger about the state of Alliance now, which is smaller and less active.
- j. Confidentiality and Anonymity: Ideally all subjects would let me attribute by name all quotations or paraphrases of what they tell me. Yet I will promise confidentiality (not using a particular quotation) or anonymity (not giving a person's name with a quotation) if requested about specific statements during the interview or in their review of the list of quotations I plan to use. Whenever I conclude my service with the Unitarian Universalist Society (by resignation, retirement, or dismissal by the congregation), I will destroy all notes of any interview components which a subject asks to be anonymous or confidential. I will leave attributed interview notes in my locked office. My UUSS colleague in ordained ministry will have access and can destroy them if I die or become disabled before completion.

2. History of the Women's Alliance -- Interview Consent Form

As part of my studies at Pacific School of Religion (PSR), I am writing a thesis on aspects of the history of UUSS, including the Women's Alliance at UUSS. My thesis advisor is the Rev. Dr. Randi Jones Walker, the Doctor of Ministry program director at PSR. If my thesis is approved and a degree granted, I will be expected to have the thesis bound and it will be catalogued and available in the Graduate Theological Union Library, and potentially available to the public in an electronic form. It is conceivable that parts of my thesis could appear in sermons, articles, or other public forums.

In addition to reading archival materials at UUSS, I hope to interview several people who have been involved with the Alliance and some UUSS leaders who have interacted with the Alliance's leaders or programs. I invite you to aide me in this research by letting me interview you. The

ethics of using interview subjects for a research paper require me to obtain your consent and to inform you of the nature of the project and what I am asking of you.

I expect to interview you for 30 to 90 minutes at your home, at UUSS, or at another place that is agreeable to you. I plan to speak with 15 to 30 people. I have a set of questions to ask you about the Alliance's history, but would be happy to hear any other thoughts and recollections you might bring up. I will need to take written notes. I will not make a voice recording without your written permission first.

The benefits of your participation could include the experience of reflecting on important occasions of your time at UUSS and with the Alliance, providing future generations a glimpse of past issues, challenges, and accomplishments, and giving UUSS a fuller picture of its heritage. The risks you might consider would be any effects on your relationships with those who read your quoted reflections in my thesis. If there are any statements you wish me to use anonymously, I could do that in my thesis (such as by saying "one longtime Alliance member, or Respondent # __.") If you request it, I can omit your name fully from my paper. However, I encourage you to allow me to attribute to you by name all statements you might make. In any case, you will always be free not to answer any specific question or questions, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Before I submit my thesis for approval, I will show you the quotations and paraphrases I am attributing to you and you will be able to ask me to omit any part.

I will be happy to lend you a printed copy or give you an electronic copy of the thesis after it is revised., and I will place a copy in the UUSS Archives. While I will retain all intellectual and commercial rights to the interview materials (copyright), I freely consent to give you access to the statements and quotations pertaining to your interview to cite or quote for your own use.

I can be reached at 916-400-1417 (cell phone) or rjones@uuma.org. I will be in touch soon to set an interview if you are willing to participate. Thank you!

I, _____, voluntarily and with understanding

Please Print Name Above

consent to be interviewed by Roger Jones as a participant in his doctoral project research on the history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS) and the Women's Alliance. I understand that my name will be used in the final product except where I request that a quotation by me be listed anonymously, and any information I give to Roger Jones with the request that it not be used would be kept in confidence.

Please sign here _____ Date: _____

I DO NOT agree to waive my right to anonymity.

I DO agree to waive my right to anonymity, except for statements I will identify to be used anonymously.

Please sign here _____ Date: _____

3. Lay Leaders' View of UUSS in the 1980s and 90s-- **Interview Consent Form**

As part of my studies at Pacific School of Religion (PSR), I am writing a thesis on aspects of the history of UUSS, including events of the 1980s and 1990s. My thesis advisor is the Rev. Dr. Randi Jones Walker, the Doctor of Ministry program director at PSR. If my thesis is approved and a degree granted, I will be expected to have the thesis bound, and it will be catalogued and available in the Graduate Theological Union Library, and potentially available to the public in an electronic form. It is conceivable that parts of my thesis could appear in sermons, articles, or other public forums.

In addition to reading this congregation's archival materials, I hope to interview a few people who were involved in lay leadership in the 1980s or 1990s. I invite you to aide me in this research by letting me interview you. The ethics of using interview subjects for a research paper require me to obtain your consent and to inform you of the nature of the project and what I am asking of you.

I expect to interview you for 60 to 90 minutes at your home or at another place that is agreeable to you. During my sabbatical I won't be holding meetings at UUSS. I plan to speak with two to 10 people. I have a set of questions to ask you about your recollections and experiences congregation's history and of your involvement, but would be happy to hear any other thoughts you might bring up. I will need to take written notes. I will not make a voice recording without your written permission first.

The benefits of your participation could include the experience of reflecting on important occasions of your time at UUSS, providing future generations a glimpse of past issues, challenges, and accomplishments, and giving UUSS a fuller picture of its heritage. The risks you might consider would be any effects on your relationships with those who read your quoted reflections in my thesis. If there are any statements you wish me to use anonymously, I could do that in my thesis (such as by saying "one lay leader" or "Respondent #__.") If you request it, I can omit your name fully from my paper. However, I encourage you to allow me to attribute to you by name all statements you might make. In any case, you will always be free not to answer any specific question or questions, and you can withdraw from the study at any time. Before I submit my thesis for approval, I will show you the quotations and paraphrases I am attributing to you and you will be able to ask me to omit any part.

I will be happy to lend you a printed copy or give you an electronic copy of the thesis after it is revised, and I will place a copy in the UUSS Archives. While I will retain all intellectual and commercial rights to the interview materials (copyright), I freely consent to give you access to the statements and quotations pertaining to your interview to cite or quote for your own use.

I can be reached at 916-400-1417 (cell phone) or rjones@uuma.org. I will be in touch soon to set an interview if you are willing to participate. Thank you!

I, _____, voluntarily and with understanding

Please Print Name Above

consent to be interviewed by Roger Jones as a participant in his doctoral thesis research on the history of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento (UUSS). I understand that my name will be used in the final product except where I request that a quotation by me be listed anonymously, and any information I give to Roger Jones with the request that it not be used would be kept in confidence.

Please sign here _____ Date: _____

___ I DO NOT agree to waive my right to anonymity.

___ I DO agree to waive my right to anonymity, except for statements I will identify to be used anonymously.

Please sign here _____ Date: _____

4. Women's Alliance Interview Questions:

- 1) In what years have you been a member or a participant of the Alliance? Was your involvement continuous over time, or were there times when you were not involved?
- 2) Describe the ways you have been involved in the Alliance (e.g., any roles).
- 3) How would you define the mission or purpose of the Alliance at UUSS?
- 4) Has the mission or purpose changed in your time in the Alliance?
- 5) Have you viewed Alliance as a) a program of the church or an activity group of the church *or* b) as a related but autonomous organization? Can you give some examples to show this? Has this relationship changed over time?
- 6) What are three of the major events you can recall from the Alliance's history? Who was involved in them? How were you involved? What happened? What changes resulted?
- 7) What are three of the major events you recall from the congregation's history?
- 8) What do you recall as some of the turning points in the history of the Alliance—transitions in terms of people, activities, purpose, or relationship to the church?
- 9) What was the hardest thing that has happened for the Alliance?
- 10) What do you remember about the Alliance leadership's relationship with UUSS
 - with regard to ministers?
 - with regard to adults in the church and children in the church?
 - with regard to Board members and other non-Alliance lay leaders?
 - with regard to financial issues?
 - with regard to our involvement in charitable, social service, cultural, political, academic, or other organizations and areas of involvement in the larger community?

11) Here is a list of persons formerly involved in the Alliance who are either deceased or are no longer at UUSS. Do you recall the roles that any of them played? What major efforts or accomplishments did she lead in Alliance or at UUSS in general?

--Phyllis Gardiner [founder of local Planned Parenthood; Alliance president]

--Polly Hamilton/Polly Watson

--Betty Nash [there's a year crafts sale in her memory]

--Aubrey Herrington

--Dorothy Parness [there was a bequeathed fund with this last name]

--Rae Sachs [involved in Mental Health Association as peer counselor]

--Rev. Ford Lewis & Barbara Lewis [served UUSS 1960-70; retired here]

7. Lay Leader Interview Questions:

- 1) In what year did you start attending UUSS? When did you start serving in a volunteer capacity? Was your involvement continuous over time, or were there times when you were not involved? What were the reasons for any gaps in involvement?
- 2) Regardless of when you started participating here, what are three of the major events you would cite from this congregation's history?
- 3) What do you recall as some of the turning points in the history of the congregation during the 1980s and 1990s? What were the transitions in terms of people, activities, mission or quality of relationships?
- 4) Describe the lay leadership roles you served in the 1980s and/or 1990s. What roles did you play in the times of the major achievements, or struggles, or transitions?
- 5) Recall two gratifying moments from your leadership then which you see as important.
- 6) Name two painful times from your leadership then which gave you important insights.
- 7) How would you describe the congregational climate or culture of relationships in UUSS in the early 1990s and then in the late 1990s? If that changed, to what

congregational or individual actions or decisions do you attribute the change?
Who was involved in those actions or decisions in a pivotal way, and how?

- 8) What was going on in the wider community of the Sacramento area at that time?
- 9) Was the congregation and lay leadership's attention focused internally or externally, beyond the church body? Give some examples for this opinion.
- 10) Were the congregation's culture, systems, or ways of relating a reflection of the social culture or socio-economic structure of this metropolitan area or did the congregation's culture, systems or ways of relating stand in contrast to the larger context of the church?
- 11) Can you name two other persons involved in the major events of this era whom you would recommend for an interview? Is there anyone no longer involved in UUSS whom you recommend I meet and interview about this era at UUSS?

Appendix III

Unitarian and Universalist Churches on the Pacific Coast in the 1800s

Years Church Was Founded-Closed	Location	Original Denomination	Notes
1873-1880	San Francisco	Universalist	Church splits led to 3 separate churches, all in rented space
1860-continuing	San Francisco	Unitarian	Rev. Thomas Starr King, <u>Universalist</u> came from Boston
1892-1892	Seattle	Universalist	Phony minister/thief
1913-continuing	Seattle	Unitarian	
1885-continuing	Pasadena	<i>Congregational</i>	Now is a UU church
1886-continuing	Pasadena	Universalist	founded by wealthy donor A. Throop
1892-continuing	Santa Paula ⁱ	Universalist	Bldg dedicated 1892
1953-continuing	Costa Mesa ⁱⁱ	Universalist	Merged UUA 1961
1881-continuing	Riverside ⁱⁱⁱ	Universalist	Merged AUA 1938!
1887-continuing	Spokane ^{iv}	Unitarian	C. Wendte came as Unit. missionary
1893-1913?	Spokane	Universalist	Minister left denom.
1947-1959	Hollywood ^v	Universalist	
1905-1959	Los Angeles ^{vi}	Universalist	
1877-continuing	Los Angeles	Unitarian	
1869; reorganized 1881 with same minister; continuing	Oakland	Unitarian in name since 1881	At first, Independent Presbyterian Church
1873-continuing	San Diego ^{vii}	Unitarian	
1877-continuing	Santa Barbara ^{viii}	Unitarian	
1884-1905, 1916-60	Oakland ^{ix}	Universalist	No clergy after 1940
1869-continuing	San Jose	Unitarian	
1867-continuing	Portland, Oregon	Unitarian	
Founded 1868, Incorporated 1892 ^x	Sacramento	Unitarian	declined in 3 U.S. financial panics
1891-continuing ^{xi}	Berkeley	Unitarian	Moved from Berkeley to Kensington 1961
1872-93	Olympia, Wash.	Unitarian	New church in 1955

The highlighted congregations are those that ceased operation. Note that most of the defunct congregations were of Universalist origin. This list leaves out most churches founded in the twentieth century, but includes Costa Mesa. While it began in 1953 as a Universalist church, its denomination merged with the American Unitarian Association less than a decade later.

Notes for Appendix III

- ⁱ Joseph Woodard, "Structures: Proud Centenarian: Santa Paula's Universalist Unitarian Church Is Steeped in History and Civic Memory." *Los Angeles Times*, October 29, 1992. http://articles.latimes.com/1992-10-29/news/vl-827_1_santa-paula
- ⁱⁱ David S. Lawyer, "Notes on Universalist Community Fellowship, Newport Beach/Costa Mesa," online summary, 2002. http://www.lafn.org/~dave/uu/universalism/costa_mesa.html
- ⁱⁱⁱ Universalist Unitarian Church of Riverside website, visited December 9, 2011. <http://www.uuchurchofriverside.org/content/our-historic-building/>
- ^{iv} Arnold Crompton, *Unitarianism on the Pacific Coast* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 109.
- ^v David S. Lawyer, "Universalist Church of Hollywood 1947-1959," online essay, December 2002. http://www.lafn.org/~dave/uu/universalism/hollywood_history.html
- ^{vi} David S. Lawyer, "First Universalist Church of Los Angeles 1905-1959, History," online summary, November 2004. http://www.lafn.org/~dave/uu/universalism/LA_univ_history.html
- ^{vii} First Unitarian Universalist Church of San Diego website, visited December 10, 2011. <http://www.firstuusanidiego.org/about-us>
- ^{viii} Crompton, *op. cit.*, 89.
- ^{ix} David S. Lawyer, "First Universalist Church of Oakland," online summary, November 2003. http://www.lafn.org/~dave/uu/universalism/oakland_history.html
- ^x Unitarian Universalist Society of Sacramento website, visited December 10, 2011. <http://uuss.org/History/>
- ^{xi} Merv Hasselmann, *The First Unitarian Church of Berkeley: A History* (Berkeley: First Unitarian Church of Berkeley, 1981), 4.