

For Better Things

A 40th Anniversary Celebration of the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of
Springfield, Illinois

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Consulted were: Congregational scrapbooks for the periods 1952-59, 1960-61 and 1966; board minutes for the periods 1966-68 and 1971-73; and individual letters and documents in possession of ALUUF. In addition, a fairly complete run of newsletters exists from the year 1979 on; they proved a valuable source of detail. Tape recordings of the February 1993 anniversary service, researched and narrated by the Rev. Mary Moore, and reminiscences shared in a Sunday program on Aug. 6, 1989, by charter member Herb Hines were transcribed and relied upon heavily. Theresa Pella and Diana DeWeese were consulted on the "Future Home" project, and Mark Sorenson of the Decatur Fellowship tracked down information relating to Springfield's former Universalist congregation. Richard Kaige made available a wealth of archival material in his possession — including the newsletter that reported the congregation's move to its current home on North Walnut Street — and Berkley Moore read the manuscript and made many valuable suggestions. Mary Moore reviewed the final draft in its entirety for content, tone and accuracy, and her suggestions were gratefully incorporated verbatim. Of course ultimate responsibility for the text belongs — as it always does with the writer.

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Frontier and American Politics (New York, 1970); Joseph Wallace, Past and Present of the City of Springfield and Sangamon County (2 vols. Chicago, 1904); Camilla A. Quinn, Lincoln's Springfield in the Civil War (Western Illinois Monographs, No. 8. Macomb, 1991); Edward J. Russo, Prairie of Promise: Springfield and Sangamon County (Woodland Hills, CA, 1983); Elise Morrow, "Springfield, Illinois" Saturday Evening Post 27 Sept. 1947, rpt. Krohe, Reader; R. Gustav Niebuhr, "Image of God as 'He' Loses its Sovereignty in America's Churches" Wall Street Journal 27 April 1992; Kenneth L. Woodward et al., "Time to Seek" Newsweek 14 Dec. 1990.

'Lincoln would believe'

When Springfield's Unitarians organized a congregation, it came naturally to name it after Abraham Lincoln. Chartered on Feb. 11, 1953, the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian [now Unitarian Universalist] Fellowship joined the ranks of the A. Lincoln Tourist Court, Abe Lincoln Baggage Transfer, Lincoln Advertising Agency, Lincoln Airlines, Lincoln Automotive Mechanics School, Lincoln Cab Co., Lincoln Cafe, Lincoln Cash Market and 16 similar listings in the Yellow Pages. "If you visit Springfield," wrote A.J. Liebling of *The New Yorker*, after doing so in 1950 and scanning the phone book, "you are bound to get mixed up with Abraham Lincoln."
Springfield-area Unitarians believed they had better reason than mere propinquity, however, to get mixed up with Lincoln. And charter members of ALUF took out newspaper ads quoting him at some length:

A Religion Lincoln Would Have Believed

I have never united myself to any church because I have found difficulty in giving my assent, without mental reservation, to the long, complicated statements of Christian doctrine which characterize their Articles of Belief and Confessions of Faith. ... When any church will inscribe over its altar, as its sole qualification for membership, the Saviour's condensed statement of the substance of both Law and Gospel, 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and thy neighbor as thyself,' that church will I join with all my heart and all my soul.

Unitarians, the ad pointed out, subscribe to no articles of belief nor any confession of faith. "With Illinois' great president as its guide, the new Unitarian Fellowship ...welcomes all men and women who are searching for a reasonable and inspiring religion that moves forward as knowledge does."

There is a belief, largely but not altogether unsupported by fact, that central Illinois was hostile to "liberal religion" and that Lincoln was one of its few adherents in the area. In 1958 the Rev. Harold Marley, first resident ALUF minister, would write: We may raise the query, why has the appearance in Springfield of such a worthy cause been so long delayed? Before Lincoln bade farewell to his beloved Springfield, there had been Unitarian visitors here: Dorothea Dix in '46, Ralph Waldo Emerson in '52 and Theodore Parker in '56. In '57, the Unitarian minister from St. Louis made some effort to start a church and before that, Universalist ministers had come to town to debate universal salvation. It would seem that when the war came and when Lincoln was suddenly cut off, a chilling fatalism took charge of men's minds. The hunger for creative religious thinking became fed only on traditionalism.

Springfield and central Illinois are more pragmatic than traditional in their cultural outlook, hardly likely to be hostile to any brand of religion, and Marley seems to have overlooked a Universalist church established here in the 1850s. But there is at least a kernel of historical fact in his observation. An unusually guarded man, Lincoln shied away from discussing his religion in public — especially after he was assailed as an "infidel" when he ran in an early legislative canvass against a leather-lunged, fire-and-brimstone circuit rider named Peter Cartwright. But it is clear that Lincoln shared common ethical and philosophical ground with the Unitarians and Universalists of his day.

Lincoln liked to tell the story of a frontiersman who was called upon to witness at a church meeting and said, "When I do good I feel good, when I do bad I feel bad, and that's my religion." It's not a bad summation of Lincoln's own religion.

According to Jesse W. Fell, a close friend of Lincoln's and a founder of the Unitarian Church of Bloomington, Lincoln believed in "the fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man," echoing the patriarchal but apt language of a common Unitarian quip of the day. (The third part of the quip referred to an alleged Unitarian reverence for "the neighborhood of Boston.") Noting that Lincoln "generally much admired and approved" the writings of William Ellery Channing and Theodore Parker, Fell added:

No religious views with him seemed to find any favor except of the practical and rationalistic order; and if, from my recollections on this subject, I was called upon to designate an author whose views most nearly represented Mr. Lincoln's on this subject, I would say that author was Theodore Parker. So it required no great stretch of the imagination for Springfield's new Unitarian fellowship to name itself after Abraham Lincoln.

Lincoln was well aware of the other strain in the Unitarian Universalist heritage as well. He liked to tell a story which has a decidedly apocryphal ring to it — about a Universalist minister who came to Springfield. As Illinois poet and Lincoln biographer Carl Sandburg retold it, the story went like this:

Three ministers of orthodox churches agreed 'to take turns and preach this young fellow down.' A Methodist preached the first sermon. 'He commenced by telling his large congregation how happily they were all situated in Springfield. Launching into his sermon the Methodist shouted, "And now comes preacher preaching a doctrine that all men shall be saved. But, my brethren, let us hope for better things."

There may be a just a whiff of Lincoln's early contest with Peter Cartwright here. We know that Cartwright had no use for Universalists or for what he dismissed as their "soul-destroying doctrine." But the story should not be taken entirely seriously as an exposition of 19th-century Methodism or of Lincoln's most considered views on the subject.

Lincoln's story can, however, serve as a reminder that for nearly a century and a half, Unitarians and Universalists in Springfield have been working for better things. In February 1993 the Abraham Lincoln UU Fellowship celebrated the 40th anniversary of its charter, but the history of Unitarian Universalism in Springfield goes back much more than 40 years.

First Universalist Church

Abraham Lincoln's story about the young Universalist minister probably was apocryphal many of his better stories were — but the presence of a Universalist church in Springfield is historically attested fact. Lithographed maps of the mid-19th century show it as a handsome little building on the southern outskirts of town at Fifth and Cook. It was made of brick and its value was estimated in 1880 at \$1,000, rather low for a public building of the day but not out of line with the value of other smaller Universalist churches in the state.

The fullest description of First Universalist Church of Springfield, as it was formally known, appears in a cheery little volume put out in 1871 by the Springfield Board of Trade and entitled *History of Springfield, Illinois: Its Attractions as a Home and Advantages for Business, Manufacturing, Etc.* In its entirety, it reads:

Organized by Rev. L.C. Marvin, Pastor, in 1852, and instituted in July, 1857. The society numbers 100 members, one-half of which number being members of the church. The church [building] was dedicated December 24, 1858. Rev. Mr. Lombard, Pastor. The Sabbath School numbers 60 scholars, and H.F. Smith is Superintendent. Notwithstanding this church has had to contend against the most adverse circumstances and difficulties, it is now in a flourishing and prosperous condition.

Whatever these "adverse circumstances and difficulties" may have been, the Board of Trade did not see fit to record them.

We can flesh out the record a little. The pastor, the Rev. Cyrus B. Lombard, was 31 in 1870. A native of Connecticut, he lived on South Fifth Street with a photographer named Samuel P. Tresize, 31, whose shop was above Smith & Bro. Fancy Bazaar on the public square downtown [now Old Capitol Plaza]. The following year, Lombard was listed in the city directory as sharing a residence on "Fifth above Vine" with Daniel S. Lombard, a Massachusetts native and a janitor at the Statehouse. It is thought they may have been related to the family of Benjamin Lombard, who endowed Lombard University in Galesburg, a forerunner of Chicago's Meadville/Lombard seminary. None of them stayed long in Springfield, at any rate.

H.F. Smith, the Sunday school superintendent, is almost certainly Harnden F. Smith, who was born in Massachusetts about 1850 and worked as a salesman, bookkeeper and retail clerk in Springfield until well into the 20th century. He boarded with his brother, Fred Smith, on South Fifth at Vine in 1871. Born in 1835 in Newton, Mass., Fred Smith grew Smith & Bro. into a major wholesaler of "notions and fancy goods" before his death in 1919, when he was buried by a minister of First Congregational Church. A third brother, William Smith, sold his interest in the Fancy Bazaar to Fred in the 1880s and moved to Kansas. Fred's son, Hal M. Smith, served as mayor of Springfield during the late 1920s and early 1930s. Whether or not the Smiths were Universalists, they amply reflected the New England emigration that brought Universalism to the Midwest and did so much to mold the region's entrepreneurial and cultural climate.

What little we know for certain about Springfield's First Universalist Church must be inferred from 19th-century city directories and random notices in the newspapers. It appears most likely, however, that the church's most serious difficulties were caused not so much by orthodox intolerance as they were by the logistics of nurturing a new congregation far from its cultural base in New England without much denominational assistance.

First Universalist's founding pastor was the Rev. Levi Marvin. A few days after the church building at Fifth and Cook was dedicated in 1858, he accepted the call to a church in Springfield, Mass. "During the time he has been among us," said The Illinois State Journal, "he has made hosts of friends of all denominations, who will much regret to part with him."

Whatever the factual foundation of Lincoln's story about preaching down a Universalist, the Journal item suggests a high degree of community acceptance of Springfield's first Universalist pastor.

After Marvin's departure, Springfield's Universalists were served mostly by circuit-riding ministers. At the beginning of 1860 the Rev. H.L. Hayward, who lived at Market [now Capitol] and Pasfield, was the pastor at First Unitarian. Sunday School was at 9 a.m., and Sunday services were at 10:30 a.m. and 7:30 p.m. Hayward didn't stay long, though; in fact, he was gone by the time the 1860 census was taken that summer. City directories for the rest of the 1860s list the church as having "no regular pastor."

Still the congregation appears to have been active, and brief notices would run in the local papers when a traveling preacher came to town. On Thanksgiving Day in 1863, local Universalists joined churches of other denominations in taking up a collection for the families of soldiers who were away in the Union Army.

But by the mid-1870s, the Universalists were included in city directories only on a hit-or-miss basis. In 1880, when the building's value was assessed, the Universalist Register said the parish served 30 families but had fallen "dormant."

In 1886 Springfield had a pastor again, the Rev. C.C. Conner, who was probably a circuit rider based in Cantrall. A two-week-long revival that spring got written up in the Springfield Journal, which was giving extended coverage to revivals in several city churches that month. The Journal's writeup gives us a rare glimpse into the life of the church.

On April 14, 1886, the paper reported that a Rev. Mr. Brigham, the Universalists' state superintendent of churches, preached on a text from the epistle to the Hebrews, offering many "historical, national and private proofs" of what then was called the fatherhood of God. The next day, he spoke of the mission of the Universalist Church. The Journal, or its correspondent, summarized Conner's sermon like this:

That [the denomination] had been created by the demands of this century, and is now furnishing a place for the most advanced religious thought. That its mission was a divine one — not to teach science or to take the place of the common school. That it was for those in the common walks of life, as well as the crowned head. That the best church was that which produced the best man or woman. He closed with a few remarks on the duties of parents, saying that it was their duty to join the church and to gradually rear their children in and under its teachings. The child should no more know when it obtained religion than it did its mother's love. The sermon contained many interesting declarations.

Right down to his use of gender-inclusive language — highly unusual for the 19th century — Brigham said little that would not sound familiar in a UU church of the 1990s.

On April 21 Brigham returned to his church in Hoopeston, Ill., and the Rev. Carrie Brainard of Girard took over the revival pulpit in Springfield.

"She is highly spoken of as a successful minister," the correspondent for the Journal marveled, using somewhat less inclusive language. "The Universalist church has in it more lady ministers than any other denomination and they are sustaining themselves far beyond all expectations."

Brainard preached again the following night, and the Journal's correspondent was clearly impressed with her delivery: "She speaks from notes, is very modest and unassuming in her manners and enlisted the attention of her auditors so that one regrets to have her bring her sermon to a close." [Preaching from notes was considered a remarkable innovation at the time in central Illinois. Cartwright, for one, had thought no good would come of it, so the Journal had plenty of news to report.] The revival came to a climax on Easter Sunday, April 27, with Conner back in the pulpit. It was a festive occasion:

Those in attendance at this church enjoyed a rare Easter picture. The pulpit and platform were covered with beautiful flowers. Upon their left, constructed upon a centre-table, was a couple of latticed gates swung from the sides of the overhanging arch, with one of the gates 'ajar,' and all overlaid with evergreens and flowers, the whole making a beautiful and suggestive scene. The ladies in their new spring suits and smiles lent much to the attractiveness of the occasion and the choir rendered most excellent music. Rev. Conner appeared in his happiest mood, and preached a sermon most suitable to the occasion.

First noting that "he would not enter into any direct proof of the resurrection of Christ," Conner said Easter was a time for renewed faith and upright conduct. He received 13 new members into the church, bringing the total to 31 since the revival began two weeks before.

But before long Conner, who had come to Illinois from Indiana only a few years earlier, moved on again. We find no written traces of the Universalist church here for the next four years.

In the early 1890s the church reappeared in the city directory, now listed as the Universalist Church of God the Father. At that time the churches in Springfield and Decatur were served by a husband-and-wife team — the Rev. Shuba Flint Gibbs in Springfield and the Rev. Sophie Gibbs in Decatur. In 1892 Sophie Gibbs, who hailed from upstate New York, was called to the pulpit of a Unitarian church in Janesville, Wis. [Long before the merger, the two religious denominations demonstrated an affinity for each other, often sharing ministers and pulpits.] Shuba, who had been riding the circuit to Litchfield and Girard as well as Springfield, followed her.

As the Universalist church declined throughout the Midwest, fewer circuit riders came around and the Springfield congregation ceased to exist at some point around the turn of the century. By century's end, even the little brick church was gone. In the 1900 city directory, we find the lot just north of Cook occupied by a residence. Quite a few of the Universalists transferred their allegiance to First Congregational Church, which was just up the street.

1953: ALUF gets a charter

When the Universalist church at Fifth and Cook closed for good, some of its former members joined Springfield's First Congregational Church. It was located nearby, and its cultural antecedents — like those of the Universalist Church — were in New England. Speaking at an ALUUF service in the late 1980s, charter member Herb Hines suggested that this development provided a measure of continuity when a Unitarian fellowship came to be formed in Springfield.

"I knew some members of that [Universalist] church who had joined the Congregational church when it closed," he said. "In fact, it's an interesting commentary on history here in Springfield."

One of the former Universalists who joined First Congregational was U.S. Rep. Richard Wheeler, who had served as mayor of Springfield before being elected to the U.S. House. Wheeler was one of only two members who voted against the declaration of war on Germany in 1917 that got the United States into World War I. [The other was Rep. Jeanette Rankin of Wyoming.] Wheeler's vote was controversial, and he was turned out of office in 1918. But Herb said other factors than wartime patriotism probably were involved.

"We had a habit in those days of electing every two years a Republican, and then a Democrat," Herb said. "Although Congressman Wheeler was defeated at the end of that term, another two years [passed] and he was back in Congress."

When the efforts got under way in the 1950s to organize a Unitarian church in Springfield, local Congregationalists played a prominent role. One of them was Dorothy Andreasen, first chairman of the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Fellowship.

Various contemporary and historical accounts suggest Springfield, always a fairly conservative community, was at its most conservative during the first half of the 20th century. Writing for *The Saturday Evening Post* in 1947, Elise Morrow caught something of the local ambiance when she said Springfield was "as murky with intrigue as a medieval border state" but its politicking was tempered by what she described as a "quality of flexible, open-minded, hospitable conservatism." At any rate, it wasn't until after World War II that efforts got under way to organize a selfconsciously liberal church in Springfield.

"In May of 1950 I read an advertisement in the *Sunday Journal-Register* for a meeting telling about Unitarianism," Herb Hines recalled in 1989. "It was at Washington Park pavilion. ... This was on a Sunday evening, and there were over 100 people at that meeting."

Speaking at Washington Park was Munroe Husbands, fellowship development coordinator for the American Unitarian Association. He met with a core group who decided to take steps to form a fellowship here. Before long, a Springfield Unitarian Fellowship and a Sangamon County Unitarian Fellowship were planning for a fully-fledged liberal church in town. One of the first steps taken by the Springfield group was adoption of a statement of purpose:

In the discipline of truth, in the spirit of brotherhood undivided by nation, race, or creed and in earnestness of purpose, we steadfastly set ourselves to the further building of liberal religion by which effort is necessary to bring about the early establishment of a Unitarian Church in Springfield, Ill.

In modified form, that statement of purpose remains in effect as part of the ALUUF bylaws. It would take three years and a great deal of planning and compromise, but it was out of the efforts thus launched in 1950 that ALUUF eventually grew.

According to a contemporary pamphlet, the fellowship movement stemmed from a proposal by AUA president Frederick May Eliot in 1947 that a "lay center program" develop Unitarian groups in "towns where there was no liberal church." Starting in Boulder, Colo., lay-led Unitarian fellowships were formed across the country under the program's auspices. "Some had simple discussion groups, but others developed full programs with church schools ... radio programs, planned newspaper advertising, regular Sunday worship programs and community service projects."

With Springfield's flexible tradition of open-minded conservatism, the city was considered ripe for a fellowship. "From the first advertisement in a Springfield paper in 1950 to the present group in 1953," said the Association's pamphlet, "there were many stones to be overturned" as members of two Unitarian groups formed a reorganized fellowship named after Abraham Lincoln. Central to the process, the AUA said, were the values that Unitarians held in common:

Discussions were held on what Unitarians believe and how they try to practice the ideals they preach. The concepts of liberal religion with its free search for truth, its insistence on democratic methods, its appreciation of the great men and great ideas of all religions — all these were the subject of earnest meetings in the Illinois capital whose governor, Adlai Stevenson, was himself a devoted Unitarian.

At the time Unitarians drew as much inspiration from Stevenson, whose first presidential race came in 1952, as they did from Lincoln.

Herb later recalled that a religious education program was the first tangible fruit of the organizing efforts. "One day in my office, Dorothy Andreasen came in and wondered if we might start a Sunday school," he said. "This we did, and our most active work at the beginning was a Sunday school at the Hines School of Business. Then we began meeting in houses in the evening, every two weeks or so." Herb's donation of space at his place of business on South Sixth Street, according to the AUA, helped get the ball rolling:

In October, 1952, the church school opened in Springfield with ten students and four teachers, meeting in the Hines School of Business where rooms were provided at no charge. Nine persons signed the membership book at the Fellowship's first autumn meeting. Five others signed the next Sunday. Then together the charter members prepared their application. They were to become the 100th Fellowship sponsored by the American Unitarian Association.

Herb that month was elected treasurer of the combined fellowship. Also elected were Dorothy Andreasen, chairman; Gerry Allard, vice chairman; Ruth Gowen, corresponding secretary; and Doris M. Smith, recording secretary. Other charter members were Christian Andreasen, Irene W. Allard, Eulalia O. Corbin, Grace Davenport, Norman Davenport, Noah Gullett, Frances Blane Hurie, Robert E. Hurie, Jean B. Noll, Mary C. Stierer, Robert Stierer, Martha Lou Tranquilli, Joseph Tranquilli and Vera LeVette Tims.

With a Unitarian fellowship in the organizational stages, its founding members peppered the Journal and the Illinois State Register with paid ads and press releases. Someone collected the clippings and glued them into a scrapbook lovingly decorated with cut-out flowers and lace borders.

Among the early speakers were Unitarian ministers from Bloomington, Urbana, Alton, Quincy and Chicago as well as the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn, then minister at Rockford who went on to become a prolific UU author. Mendelsohn spoke in December on "The Faith That Sets Us Free." In January 1953, members and friends received their first newsletter on Abraham Lincoln Fellowship letterhead. "NOTE THE NEW NAME!" it cheered in all-caps. "We have completed our organization and forwarded our application and by-laws to the American Unitarian Association in Boston, Mass." As treasurer, Herb reported a half-year's starting budget of \$158, with a balance on hand of \$42.82.

When the AUA issued its charter to the new Abraham Lincoln fellowship in February, accolades started coming in from all over. From the first fellowship in Boulder, Colo., came a welcome and a prediction: "You are not likely to be the latest arrival for long. Fellowships are very prolific and have demonstrated their vitality in all parts of the country." Like others, the Coloradans noted Springfield's connection with Governor Stevenson and President Lincoln — in that order:

The members of the Boulder Fellowship are great admirers of your stalwart Governor and we devoted a very profitable evening to his biography and his Unitarianism. You are also fortunate in having Abraham Lincoln as the obvious name for your Fellowship. We hope that both of those Unitarians will continue to be an inspiration to you.

Herb recalled that naming the Springfield fellowship after Lincoln struck a responsive chord in Boston.

"It had long been a dream of the Unitarian Association that there be an Abraham Lincoln Fellowship in Springfield," he said. "They had just recently established a Thomas Jefferson fellowship in Charlottesville, Va., and they hoped they would also have an Abraham Lincoln fellowship."

Partly for that reason and partly because Springfield's was the 100th fellowship to be formed since 1947, AUA president Eliot came out to a dedication service held March 29, 1953, at Washington Park Pavilion.

On the menu that day were steak with mushroom sauce, au gratin potatoes and — perhaps reflecting the Unitarian movement's New England heritage — succotash. Preceding the banquet was a worship service that began with a version of the congregational song still used by ALUUF, with a second verse to fit the occasion:

From all who dwell below the skies
Let faith and hope with Love arise,
Let beauty, truth and good be sung
Through every land by every tongue.

So may the spirit of this hour,
Spread through our lives and work abroad,
Till all shall know the Source of power,
Whose symbol is our God.

Eliot's remarks, as reported in the Journal, were concerned largely with Lincoln's religious thought and the implications of naming the Springfield fellowship after him:

Organized religion of today, as in the days of Lincoln, devotes too much time to the 'secondary purpose' and too little effort to the 'heart of the matter' — expressed in Jesus' two commandments, to love God and man ... if we are to give his name to a religious society, it must be with a soul searching and indomitable resolve to keep it from ever losing the perspective that puts first things first and keeps secondary things in their proper place.

Lincoln never joined a church because organized religion had let itself become so thoroughly entangled with nonessentials that it neglected the few things that are really essential. ... Not every church, of course, had fallen to this depth; there were then, as now, many exceptions. But the picture as a whole was bad — as it is today.

Eliot said "Lincoln's spiritual life was as profound and powerful as that of any of the great leaders and pioneers of our American democracy." In that he agreed with the Springfield fellowship's other icon, Governor Stevenson.

In March Dorothy Andreasen received a note from Stevenson, who was living in Chicago after running for president and returning to private life. He wrote:

You begin with two distinctions: one, the fact that you are the 100th such fellowship to come into being; and the other, that you bear a name which has become synonymous the world over with the mystical heights of strength and beneficence to which it is possible for the character of an individual human being to rise. It is a happy augury that your Fellowship will grow and develop in the very place where this great man lived and had his being, and where he won through to the full measure of his surpassing spirituality.

After a lapse of 50 years, better things again were in store for religious liberals in Springfield who wanted to seek them.

1950s: Beginnings

By all accounts, the dedication of the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship on March 29, 1953, was a success. A hundred people attended services at Washington Park pavilion, and 102 dinners were served. Even the weather cooperated. What followed the festivities was the day-to-day business of getting a new religious organization off the ground. And there was plenty of it.

Within the month, ALUF held its first annual meeting, electing Gerry Allard chair and Dorothy Andreasen vice chair. Herb stayed on as treasurer and Doris Smith as secretary. Meetings were held in the homes of members, and the Sunday school continued to meet at Hines School of Business. In October the Fellowship joined such area organizations as the American Legion, B'nai B'rith, the Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts, the East End Neighborhood Club, Lincoln Library, the NAACP, the Springfield Chamber of Commerce, the Springfield Colored Women's Club, the YMCA and the YWCA, along with other churches, in sponsoring a human relations workshop at the Leland Hotel. From the beginning, the new Fellowship provided ways for its members to network with other community-minded people.

Early newsletters reflect the joys and the concerns of a congregation that was moving beyond the organizational stages to become an ongoing religious community. Some milestones were sad. Charter member Norman Davenport died in January 1954. Others were happier, as when Gerry and Irene Allard represented ALUF at the installation of Thomas Maloney as minister of the Unitarian Church of Quincy. In the early 1960s Richard and June Weingardt Bray became the first couple married in the new Fellowship in Springfield.

While most ALUF meetings were held in private residences at first, the congregation began meeting at such locations as B'rith Sholom Temple, the Springfield Theatre Guild or the Urban League building when a larger crowd was expected. This pattern would continue for nearly a decade. The newsletter started coming out monthly on a legal-sized mimeographed sheet with the Fellowship's name and a small portrait of Lincoln at the top. Its name then was The Logbook, a pun, probably intentional, on the Lincoln Log construction toys that entertained children of the era. The editor was Eulalia Corbin, who was black and who took a prominent role in both black and white community organizations as well as in the new Fellowship.

Observing ALUF's first anniversary in April 1954 were the Girls Ensemble of Lanphier High School and Preston Bradley, radio commentator and minister of the People's Church of Chicago, who spoke on the United States from a historical perspective. The program included a five-point statement of principles:

The Unitarian Churches are founded upon:

- Individual freedom of belief.
- Discipleship to advancing truth.
- The democratic process in human relations.
- Universal brotherhood, undivided by nation, race or creed.
- Allegiance to the cause of a united world community.

Prominently reflected here are concerns of the 1950s, such as world brotherhood, when World War II was a recent memory and for many a fresh wound, and a belief in progress — as well as a use of patriarchal language — that would be eroded by time.

But also reflected are timeless UU concerns, in much the same way that 19th-century Universalists on the south end of town heard revivals that reflected "the most advanced religious thought" of their day.

Sermon and speech topics announced in the Journal and the Register show the same combination of national and international concerns — and some more particular to Springfield — with Unitarian principles. Among them were a reading from the poems of "great humanist" Vachel Lindsay and a talk on "Positive Liberalism for a Frightened World," followed by a 400th-anniversary remembrance of early Unitarian Michael Servetus. "This great liberal," the Logbook noted, "was burned at the stake Oct. 25, 1553."

Other early ALUF forums covered public education, racial prejudice, India, the Middle East, literary values of the Old Testament, the writings of Arnold Toynbee, the life and works of Dr. Albert Schweitzer, the recently discovered and published Dead Sea Scrolls, nuclear testing fallout and a lecture on "Unitarianism Behind the Iron Curtain" by the Rev. Zoltan Nagy of Alton, formerly of Romania.

A congregational milestone was reached in October 1954 when David Parke, student minister from Meadville seminary, started coming to town. ALUF's first minister, he was welcomed with "covered dish" dinners at the Springfield Urban League building and the lounge of Horace Mann Casualty Co. He wrote:

It was my first experience as a parish minister. I like it! Liberal religion flourishes where conviction is strong, where minds are open and active, where people are genuine, where there is cooperative labor. Because all these things are true of the Abraham Lincoln Fellowship, I know that Unitarianism will grow in Springfield this year.

Parke spent weekends at the homes of ALUF members when he visited Springfield, somewhat on the order of an old-fashioned Universalist circuit rider, until he was graduated the following year and took a parish in Peterborough, N.H. ALUF's first regular minister, Parke later became editor of The UU World.

Potlucks, described in the newsletter as "our monthly fellowship meal," were a regular event by the mid-50s. The Sunday school was expanded, and by late 1954 an adult discussion class was meeting alongside the children's RE program at Hines School of Business.

Community commitments flourished as well, as ALUF members took an active role in such groups as the Urban League and such observances as "Brotherhood Week" [later to be known as Black History Month], United Nations Day and "Freedom of the Press Sunday." On Oct. 24, 1954, Eulalia Corbin presented to President William V.S. Tubman of Liberia a book inscribed, "In the tradition of Abraham Lincoln and in the spirit of world community, we work together for humanity!" In 1955, the Service Bureau for Colored Children of Sangamon County wrote to thank ALUF for gifts collected at a Christmas party: "The little ones liked their presents, of course, since they believe the more Christmas gifts the better."

Meetings switched over to Temple B'rith Sholom. In 1955 ALUF formed "a committee working on a new home for the Springfield Unitarians," according to a letter from Western Unitarian Conference secretary Randall S. Hinton, who noted the development and asked, "Are you thinking of buying a new place?"

It would take a few years, but steps were under way to acquire a permanent home. A milestone was reached in 1956, when ALUF was registered as a corporation under the laws of the state of Illinois.

As the new Fellowship took hold, new officers were elected in 1956. Vernon Greening became chairman of the board of trustees. Ray Weingardt was elected the new treasurer.

While it was getting established as a congregation, ALUF continued to address larger concerns. On April 1, 1956, during the Montgomery bus boycott, the officers wrote the Rev. Martin Luther King, then director of the Montgomery Improvement Association:

From the hometown of the martyred Emancipator, the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Fellowship on this Easter Sunday sends greetings to all people of Montgomery, Ala. It is our hope that the present difficulties in Montgomery may be happily reconciled on the basis of justice. We are sending a contribution for your peoples' defense.

Other ALUF contributions were closer to home. In March 1956, Mrs. Vernon Greening shared a recipe for refrigerator cheesecake with the Journal and the clipping [which, in the style of the day, did not identify her by first name] was proudly displayed in the congregational scrapbook.

In 1956 the Rev. Harold P. Marley took a state agency job in Springfield and began a four-year stint as the Fellowship's part-time minister. Marley, an ordained Unitarian minister who had previously served congregations in Ann Arbor, Mich., and Dayton, Ohio, held a dual fellowship in the ministry of the Universalist church, a not uncommon arrangement before the Unitarians and Universalists merged.

In 1957 Marley served as a small-group discussion leader on "Politics, Propaganda and People in the USA" at a Unitarian conference in Urbana. A few months later he spoke on "the Unitarian Magnet" back in Springfield, where services now were being held at the YWCA. "Be sure to come to the little chapel of the YWCA," urged The Logbook, "to hear this 'magnetic' sermon. AND BRING SOMEONE." Marley also was active in the community, appearing on a WICS-TV panel to salute Mental Health Week. The commemorative week had Fellowship members Mildred Withey, Dorothy Andreasen, Eulalia Corbin and Martha Barnes "talking 'round the clock" as well.

In a ceremony held Oct. 4, 1956, at the YWCA, Marley was installed as ALUF minister. Giving the welcome from the Springfield community was Rabbi Lewis Satlow of B'rith Sholom, and keynoting the installation was the Rev. E.T. Buehrer of Third Unitarian Church of Chicago, who spoke on "The Rebirth of Liberal Religion." Later that month, ALUF hosted an area conference for Unitarians from Missouri and southern Illinois at the YWCA. Marley wrote:

The fall program, now under way, is making steady progress because of the effective services of those who teach or serve on committees. Our 'fellowship' is more than a word. It is a tangible expression of a small group of families who are making their religious aspirations into reality and who are getting enjoyment out of the process.

He added he had received pledges of support in "building a Lincoln Memorial Church" from national and Western Conference officials. About the same time, Jennell Weingardt took on the job of looking for a suitable building site.

In 1958 the annual budget was \$1,800 and the bank balance stood at \$1,249, of which \$1,098.54 was deposited to a building fund. Momentous events in the life of the congregation were about to occur.

With a part-time minister on board, ALUF evolved a system of alternating pastoral sermons with lay-led forums that has survived over the years. The Logbook observed:

The forums on alternate Sundays are not set up as a device to give the preacher a rest, or to attract outsiders, but are rather an indication of the fact that Unitarians feel the need for an intellectual approach to all living phenomena. A good slogan for the forum would be, 'Bring Your Mind to Church with You.'

Springfield Mayor Nelson O. Howarth spoke on the need for standard purchasing procedures and land use planning in municipal government. [His mother, Agnes H. Howarth, was a member of the congregation.] Other forums covered water reserves in Formosa, then the scene of a Cold War standoff between hostile Chinese governments, and the International Geophysical Year observed in 1957. The Logbook took note in 1958 of another scientific development with a reprint from the newsletter of David Parke's new congregation in New Hampshire:

The appearance of Sputnik and now Sputnik II has given rise to rumors that the Russians next plan to place a family of goats in an earth satellite. This would, it is said, constitute 'the herd shot round the world.'

Whatever else may be said about the witticism, clearly ALUF members were bringing their minds to church with them.

1960s: ALUF finds a home

Within a dozen years of its chartering, ALUF went through a period of vigorous expansion that began with glorious dreams of the future and ended with the congregation firmly rooted in the day-to-day reality of building a community in the here and now. As so often happens in Springfield, the legacy of Abraham Lincoln was mixed up in it. The legacy was not an unmixed blessing.

By the late 1950s, the new Fellowship needed a permanent home. In 1958 it had grown to 38 adult members and 27 children in Sunday school — enough people to start thinking about getting a church building. That's when Lincoln got mixed up in things, since a Unitarian philanthropist named J.G. Puterbaugh of McAlester, Okla., was interested in seeing a church "designated as a memorial to Abraham Lincoln and a reminder that [Lincoln's] religious beliefs — as evidenced by his own statements — were in entire harmony with the views of Unitarians."

That memorial nearly came to be built in Springfield, and it very nearly came to be designed by Unitarian architect Frank Lloyd Wright. What is most striking 30 years later is how close it all came to being put together — against overwhelming odds.

Puterbaugh's financial involvement was complex and it changed over time. But extant records suggest that it boiled down to this: He put up a \$10,000 donation for construction of a Lincoln memorial church and promised further donations. His offer was enthusiastically seized upon by Springfield's Unitarians, who launched into an ambitious fund-raising program.

But a decision was made — not in Springfield — that "it would probably be a good many years before a Unitarian congregation at Springfield, Ill., would be able financially to construct and maintain a church edifice that would command respect as a Lincoln shrine and be a lasting tribute to the liberal religion of the Great Emancipator to which we all subscribe." The words were Puterbaugh's, but his sentiment was shared at American Universalist Association headquarters in Boston. The Puterbaugh money instead went into a general capital improvement fund administered in Boston.

While the Puterbaugh proposal was still afloat, the little group of Unitarians in Springfield went about their end of putting together a memorial church project with unflinching ambition and great audacity. They took out an option on a Lake Springfield lot and Jennell Weingardt in 1956 wrote to Wright, a world-famous architect who had designed Unitarian churches in Oak Park and Madison, Wis. According to an undated clipping, probably from the Springfield Register, Wright's response could not have been more encouraging:

'The Lincoln Memorial Church in Springfield seems especially appropriate — 'Memorial.' I should like to design it. When do we start?' Wright replied.

Two months later Wright, who was then 86 years old, advised Mrs. Weingardt he would need a survey of the proposed site of the church, requirements as to size and facilities and the amount of money which was allotted for the Memorial.

The newspaper story, sadly, came out a few days after Wright's death in 1959.

On June 26, 1959, Puterbaugh visited Springfield along with AUA president Dana McLean Greeley

and toured the lakefront site with Jennelle, who was ALUF president that year, among others in "a very small group of very earnest Unitarians." Out of that meeting, he carried a continuing interest in the Springfield congregation. Also out of that meeting, AUA agreed to reconsider the Lincoln church project.

The proposal gained a prominent advocate in U.S. Sen. Paul Douglas of Chicago. [Douglas' wife, Emily Taft Douglas, served as first moderator of the UUA. Douglas was a Friend.] In the fall of 1959, he issued a statement:

I am happy the Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Fellowship is planning to build a Memorial Church dedicated to the principles of America's noblest citizen. Lincoln based his philosophy of life upon the principles of Thomas Jefferson and these two great liberals will stand as the best representatives of the American ideal. I want to wish you all success in your inspiring undertaking.

But the proposed Wright-designed memorial was not to be.

When the 1960 canvass season came around, ALUF succeeded in significantly broadening its pledge base but fell short of the amount that would have been needed to acquire and develop a lakefront lot, no matter who the architect might have been. The annual pledge total went from \$2,136 to \$5,841 — 273 percent of the previous year's total — but only about half the amount was raised that would have been needed to finance the Lincoln memorial.

In 1960 the fellowship had 55 adult members and 36 children in its Sunday school. Its goals and needs sound familiar one-third of a century later:

Four classes from pre-school through junior high age use the Beacon Press series to aid in developing a constructive philosophy of life that can function in the modern world. The best from the world's great religions — past and present — plus a knowledge of the world about them helps each child develop for himself a religious and ethical outlook. The needs of our Sunday School are still many. Perhaps the most pressing of these is an adequate program for our older adolescent youngsters. Another need is for equipment such as audio-visual aids, textbooks and creative materials.

The Fellowship was meeting by that time at Dodds-Blackhawk School, 2500 S. College St. Space was adequate, but the growing congregation needed a permanent home. And it soon found one. It acquired a two-story brick residence in the 200 block of Elliott Avenue that served as its Fellowship House until 1976. It was an older home, one that had been in a prominent north-end family, and it was hardly free of maintenance problems. But it was there that the congregation was able to put down permanent roots.

The new Fellowship House was dedicated Nov. 22, 1963, the day of President Kennedy's assassination. With out-of-town guests arriving for the previously scheduled event, of course it couldn't be postponed. Herb Hines later recalled:

A member of the fellowship over in Decatur stayed at our house that day, so he could go to the dedication and represent Decatur. From the time we arrived back at the house, till it was time to go to the dedication [ceremony] at 6, our eyes were glued to the television.... The speaker that night was

Ellsworth Smith, who was then the executive director of the western Unitarian conference, and he combined the two things — the dedication of our Unitarian fellowship house and the death of President Kennedy.

In any event Smith was able to do a masterful job of reconciling the two themes, and ALUF took on the joys of home ownership.

Board minutes of the early 1960s record the debate over such decisions as "to locate the Sunday school worship service room in the middle upstairs room and make the front room into a lounge which could double as a Sunday school or LRY [Liberal Religious Youth] room. The committee discussed locating a library in a room off the kitchen." There is an aura of new beginnings that fairly crackles off the yellowing looseleaf sheets of the minute books.

Sometimes an aura of something else seeps off the pages as well — as when another committee took under advisement a report "that the refrigerator is badly in need of repair and questioned whether it would be wiser to repair this one or buy another used one."

The committee voted, as committees have voted throughout history, to investigate further.

In 1963 a Women's Alliance was formed. Jean Nelson was elected president, Marilyn Elliott vice president and Dorothy Andreasen secretary-treasurer. Its officers elected, the group set about cataloging the fellowship's library books. The LRY, the religious education group for teenagers, got organized and repainted the Elliott Avenue basement.

A Peace Information Center was authorized in 1964 to use the Fellowship House, and ALUF was represented in groups working for equal housing legislation — a major issue of the day — as well as such organizations as the Springfield Human Rights Committee. State Sen. Paul Simon [now senior U.S. senator from Illinois] spoke on his recent book about abolitionist editor Elijah Lovejoy of Alton. A copy of Simon's book was purchased for the ALUF library.

More than 100 people signed the guest book for a Spring Art Exhibit in 1966 at the Fellowship House. Featured were the work of Elsa Andreasen, daughter-in-law of Dorothy Andreasen who later painted the flaming chalice that still hangs in the ALUUF sanctuary, and 12 other artists from as far away as Chicago and St. Cloud, Minn. The invitations, hand-decorated with a watercolor wash, were works of art in themselves.

Also taking place in the spring of 1966 was the ordination of the Rev. F. Alien Wells Jr., a Meadville student who had been conducting services twice a month for two years and entered into the life of the fellowship more than other student ministers. In addition to Sunday services, he met more than once with the board and advised members on matters ranging from budget committee structure to promoting forum speakers with news releases. He also offered a well-attended series of "Introduction to Unitarian Universalism" classes in the spring, and he was highly regarded by the congregation. Wells' ordination was held at Springfield's First Presbyterian Church, followed by a reception at the Fellowship Hall on Elliott Avenue.

Programs were varied during the 60s. They included "The Church in a Changing World," Islam, Buddhism and Judaism, the Conference for World Peace Through Law, the United Nations, the World Health Organization's activities in Malaysia, water pollution, the Black Power movement and changing sexual mores.

In 1966, congregational Women's Federation member Mary Kolp rendered the group's annual report in couplets:

An orthodox pedantic recounting of time?
Do you mind fellow freedom lovers
If I recount it in rhyme?
September was the month of feeling our way
Where plans for rummage and bazaars held sway ...

And so on, through the spring and "Jean Nelson's review / Of the frolicking [Phyllis]McGinley's
'Sixpence in her Shoe.' "

A significant housekeeping change was adopted at the 1966 annual meeting. Reflecting the merger of associations on the continental level, local bylaws were amended to change the Fellowship's name to reflect its Unitarian Universalist affiliation. Not only was a new acronym born, but religious liberals in Springfield thus recognized a continuity that extended back to a time more than a hundred years before when young Universalist ministers began riding the circuit into Springfield to preach of better things.

1970s: At home on Walnut

The 1970s were, according to a congregational history prepared toward the end of the decade by ALUUF member Berkley Moore, a decade of change, advancement and growing pains. The decade was marked by change in Springfield, as the city's industrial base began to erode but white-collar opportunities opened up at the newly established Sangamon State University, Lincoln Land Community College and Southern Illinois University Medical School, as well as a rapidly expanding state government. A close, although informal, relationship would be formed with the new academic institutions.

As the decade began, ALUUF had 39 members and an annual budget of \$3,956. According to a 1970 profile, the congregation's goals were "not well articulated yet" but included relocation, programming, growth and promotion.

Whatever the fellowship's long-term goals, a complete run of board minutes from 1971 through 1973 shows a wide range of day-to-day and week-to-week activity in the Fellowship House on Elliott Avenue.

As early as 1972, the Women's Alliance was discussing the possibility of moving and the board appointed a committee to explore possibilities. Within a few months, it began looking at properties around town and kept exploring for the next four years. Finding a new congregational home would gain urgency in 1975 when a state inspection found extensive fire safety code violations at Elliott Avenue.

In the meantime, the board in 1972 authorized expenditure of \$16 to rid the premises of rats. A chimney and leaky box gutters were repaired, and broken windows were replaced with Plexiglas. In a successful effort to halt vandalism, international students from Sangamon State were engaged to live in the building as caretakers.

Attendance in 1972 averaged 30 at Sunday services. Board president Benton Weathers said he had hoped for something more like 40 -- the building's rated capacity was 45 -- but he found reason to believe the people who came found what they were looking for:

One of my personal yardsticks for judging to what extent the fellowship is a fellowship is the amount of time people spent talking to each other after the service. Often people were still standing around talking an hour after the service was over.

Religious education director Barbara Weathers reported in 1973 that average attendance was seven in the nursery, eight in the class for 5- to 8-year-olds and four in the 9- to 12-year-olds' class.

The teens in LRY were publishing a magazine, which they called LEROY, but one of the kids moved out of town and left only two who participated regularly in the project. The magazine was distributed at Lincoln Land and Sangamon State University, as well as other locations around Springfield.

Sunday programs were presented in 1973 on topics ranging from early women's suffrage activist Carrie Chapman Catt to "Pop Art: The Theological Implications of a Campbell's Tomato Soup Can" and "I'm OK, You're OK, But —." An ordained Unitarian minister who had moved to Springfield to take a job with the state Environmental Protection Agency, Berkley Moore spoke once a month on topics including "The Things We Did Last Summer" [in September] and "Science and Religion —

"Two Fictions People Live By." Also conducting monthly services was Wesley Hromatko, a student minister.

Women's rights became not so much an issue as a constantly growing movement during the 1970s, and ALUUF was entirely supportive. The UU Women's Federation reported "a year of spiritual growth and renewal" in 1971. Activities ranged from selling Christmas tree decorations, for a \$45 profit, to a discussion on "the necessity of looking inward for strength and renewed vigor for the constant giving which is required of us as women, wives and mothers." In 1973 rehearsals for a production of "Bird in the Gilded Cage" put on by the local chapter of the National Organization for Women were held at the Fellowship House on Elliott Avenue.

Another growing concern of the 70s was reflected when an Ecology Committee was formed. Mary Kolp, committee chair, reported on a metal recycling project that realized a profit of \$1.62. This net helped defray the costs of longdistance telephone calls to a recycling center in Bloomington.

In another topical move, members collected \$40 to purchase the Beacon Press edition of the Pentagon Papers for the ALUUF library.

In the what-comes-around-goes-back-around department, ALUUF in 1971 donated \$20 to Meadville/Lombard Theological School, which was awarded to a young doctoral candidate from Oklahoma. Throughout the 70s, the congregation was served by student ministers whose expenses were paid by a fund donated by the estate of J.G. Puterbaugh of McAlester, Okla.

In the early 70s, the Fellowship House was decorated with one-person shows displaying paintings, prints, drawings, wall hangings and pottery. The displays were changed monthly, and public viewings were advertised in the newspapers. A precursor of what would become a longstanding ALUUF tradition was observed Oct. 23, 1971, when the Weingardts hosted a weiner roast.

In 1973 the Fellowship was one of the first groups to join in a UUA extension program called "Sharing in Growth." Berkley Moore's congregational history recorded:

The program was a process for enhancing the quality of life within each of the societies, through continuous renewal of and growth toward greater warmth of relationship, breadth of programming and depth of spirit. Congregations were involved in gathering information about themselves, setting goals and agreeing on priorities for their own future development.

Claralilly White, Leta Adler, Barbara Moore, Judy Ouzts, Stephen King and Benton Weathers were the ALUUF team members.

A more immediate priority presented itself in 1975, when the Division of Fire Protection of the state Department of Law Enforcement found 12 code violations in the Elliott Street property and ordered improvements within 30 days, including "a second means of egress from second floor (fire escape). Door shall swing out, be at floor level, and any windows within ten feet of fire escape shall be wired glass." Possibly even more expensive would have been anticipated rewiring, depending on the outcome of an ordered inspection, and construction of a basement fire escape.

The fellowship moved out of Elliott Avenue, to City Day School on South Grand Avenue. Berkley said the "shared arrangement made us aware even more that we needed our own enlarged space." Board presidents Wes Duiker and Dale Ouzts in particular made it the congregation's business to find a suitable property and put together the finances to acquire it.

In 1975 the church building at 514 North Walnut Street, ALUUF's present home, came on the market. After inquiring of Boston about the former Puterbaugh proposal and learning that Puterbaugh had released his \$10,000 to UUA [as successor to the former AUA] shortly before his death in 1965, Ouzts put together a package financed locally in Springfield. Basically it applied proceeds from sale of the Elliott Street property and a \$41,000 mortgage loan from Marine Bank [now Bank One] to the \$70,000 purchase price of the church on North Walnut. Once the deal was put together, things happened rapidly.

Closing on the sale of the Elliott Street property was completed at 4:30 p.m. on Sept. 21, 1976. Closing on the purchase of the new church was completed less than 24 hours later, at 1 p.m. Sept. 22, 1976. ALUUF newsletter editor Ellen Warman wrote:

With the closing of the purchase on Wednesday, Sept. 22, we now own a Fellowship which is well-constructed, a bargain for the price paid, and big enough to accommodate growth of our congregation. We now have the opportunity to make this Fellowship House all that we want and need it to be. We must all be willing to share our ideas and our time in helping, whenever and whatever we can, to accomplish this. There is a lot of work that needs to be done: painting, guttering, trimming trees, etc.

It is clear enough the 70s were a decade of change, but some things never change.

The October 1976 newsletter, one of only two that could be located from the decade, gives a picture of the day-to-day life of ALUUF. As always, religious and lay programs alternated on Sunday mornings. Student minister Pat Bowen of Meadville/Lombard, who also helped design the Fellowship's RE program for the year, and the Rev. Brad Carrier of Channing-Murray Foundation in Urbana alternated that month with a lay program by Dale Ouzts, broadcast services director at Sangamon State as well as ALUUF president. United Nations Sunday was observed, and Berkley spoke on the 1976 national political conventions.

The Brown Bag Lunch, then a UU Women's Federation event, was held at the Fellowship House on Walnut. "Come get acquainted with other Fellowship members and with the new building," read the announcement.

A dessert potluck was scheduled at 7:30 p.m. the next Saturday. Round-Robin Dinners, an ongoing event for the past two years, were to resume in November. And the newsletter editor needed the usual help with "collating, stapling and folding the newsletters, sticking on mailing labels, putting on stamps and taking the newsletters to the Post Office." A brief report, and request for feedback, covered the Fellowship's third annual fall retreat on Lake Jacksonville.

According to Berkley's history, a number of goals were attained in the years that followed the UUA's "Sharing in Growth" seminars. In addition to the Round Robins and Fall Retreats, he cited an expanded RE department, adult education programs and after-service luncheons, as well as "Sunday morning programs with greater UU emphasis and incorporating music" in services. Efforts were under way as well to get a minister, and in 1981 Berkley could write:

The faith and dedication which chartered our liberal religious congregation years ago is evidenced today in spiritually significant and aesthetically vital worship services; in a well organized and inquiring religious education program; in the

concerted effort to secure ministerial services; and in the expansive warmth of our fellowship.

In 1978 and 1979, the Fellowship took part in the Weekend Ministry program, another UUA extension effort that brought the Rev. John Robinson from Eliot Chapel in St. Louis for three sessions. In 1980, the Rev. Rudy Nemser of First Unitarian Society of Schenectady, N.Y. came to Springfield as part of the UUA's Minister on Loan program.

Nemser's visit, while brief, came at a crucial time and is still remembered as a sort of turning point in the life of the congregation. Also turned around was each and every pew in the new Fellowship Hall. The pews were returned to their places, but other effects of Nemser's visit have been longer-lasting.

1980s: Ministry, growth

During the 1980s Springfield registered only a slight population gain — from 101,000 in the 1980 census to 105,000 in 1990. ALUUF grew at a faster rate, and its growth would be the result of hard work and dogged persistence.

For ALUUF, the decade began on an auspicious note as minister-on-loan Rudy Nemser of First Unitarian Society in Schenectady, N.Y. "hit the track running" with a six-week program on setting long-term goals for building a UU community. Congregation members noted that his plane was on time, which was "unheard of for Ozark," Springfield's major carrier at the time.

The next few weeks were a whirl of potlucks, discussion groups, "Rap Sessions" and religious celebrations. A published poet and inveterate birdwatcher, Nemser contributed poems to the newsletter on airports, Midwestern sparrows and — a part of the Minister-on-Loan program still commented on years later — rearranging pews to accommodate all the potlucks and rap sessions. He wrote:

It's not that rearranging furniture for me has value in itself nor even interest beyond the exploration of possibility. At the risk of neoprofundity: oak's oak. The attraction rather — indeed the compulsion — lies in a Channing-like (although I daresay less lofty) passion for the free mind. I want not only minds to be unfettered, But free minds to be exercised ... I hope I'll always be a pew-turner And the Unitarian Universalist societies always have moveable pews.

Nemser left the congregation with a lot to think about.

By spring, new committees on social action, fellowship care and by-laws review were in the process of formation and the membership and RE committees were taking on new members and projects. A new teen group also grew out of Nemser's visit.

At the 1980 annual meeting, the by-laws were changed to set up a ministerial search committee and selection process. Better things were in the air — one was the first annual ALUUF Hot Dog Roast and Hay Rack Ride Nov. 1, 1980, at Roy and Jennell Weingardt's farm near Sherman.

Daily life went on as well. RE coordinator Telia Murphy asked newsletter readers for egg cartons, aluminum pie pans, an Indian sand painting and a Kachina doll. The older kids in RE went national as they got their picture in *The Unitarian Universalist World* May 15, 1984, when they made a banner illustrating famous UUs in history.

The Round Robin format was varied as members went to plays and movies together, then gathered at a host member's home for "dessert of pizza, drink and conversation." In November a group went to Champaign to see Samuel Beckett's "Waiting for Godot." On Dec. 21 new ALUUF member Richard DeTar spoke on Western philosophical ideas "which were taken to be worthless around the turn of the century but now ... are held as truths by many." Music director Bonnie Ettinger, whose "inventions [and] graceful counterpoint" had struck Rudy Nemser, was playing regularly for Sunday services.

Nemser was back in town to lead the 1980 fall retreat, on coping with change, at Lake Jacksonville.

By that time, the ministerial search committee had chosen Rachell Anderson as chair and was corresponding with five potential candidates. Broader concerns of the day were not ignored as members were asked to tutor Laotian refugees in English and how to drive a car — two prime requisites for life in America. Efforts were made, not always with complete success, to balance opposing beliefs on the difficult moral and ethical issue of abortion. The congregation noted with sadness the death in 1981 of Martha Tranquilli, charter ALUF member, lifelong pacifist and tax resister. UUs were asked, by UUA and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, to write U.S. Sens. Charles Percy and Alan Dixon opposing military aid to El Salvador.

At the June 1981 annual meeting, the congregation voted to call the Rev. Sylvia Howe as ALUUF's minister. "Minutes later in a telephone conversation with Rachell Anderson," newsletter editors Steve Ewart and Sam Murphy reported, "Sylvia accepted the fellowship's call." With a part-time appointment in Springfield, she also conducted services once a month in Macomb.

Sylvia's first sermon here was, appropriately enough, a celebration of new beginnings. Before long she was writing in the newsletter:

During the last few weeks I've been thinking about what it means to be a member of a UU society. ... It gives me an instant community into which I can go and be warmly welcomed. As a stranger I visited societies in New England and the Midwest. Wherever I went I found compatible people who see the world as I see it. These were people who, when I moved, I received letters, phone calls and visits from — UUs who just wanted to know how I am. For me, membership in a UU society means a caring group of people who are concerned about each other.

Membership, she said, is as easy as signing the book "and as difficult as any commitment to another."

ALUUF also took on not-so-very-new challenges when facilities committee chair Richard Kaige and others mopped up basement water seepage during the 1982 spring thaw.

The Fellowship's youngsters in 1981 and 1982 took on a fund-raising project selling sunflower seed gathered at the farm of June and Richard Bray in Macoupin County. It netted \$500. The book club was meeting by now, reading works by Isaac Bashivis Singer, Joyce Carol Oates and early feminist Mary Shelley. In the spring of 1983 "Sister" Sylvia and "Brother" Berkley celebrated the "Simple Gifts" of the 19th-century Shakers.

In the mid-'80s Sylvia Howe's ministerial career took her away from Springfield — she now serves a congregation in Florida — and ALUUF called the Rev. Mary Moore as a half-time minister, sharing her with the fellowship in Decatur.

In August 1985 Mary wrote that she saw a rainbow just after she received the phone call from ALUUF:

I noticed that although the sun was shining there was also a brief rainshower going on outdoors - the perfect conditions for the formation of a rainbow. I rushed outside and sure enough, there was one of the most perfectly formed arcs of color I have ever seen, flung up among the clouds of the eastern sky, as if to seal our covenant together. I feel that it is going to be a very good year.

Mary was officially welcomed to the congregation in a November reception at the North Walnut Street church, meticulously coordinated by Kathleen Knepper.

The life of the fellowship ranged, as the decade progressed, from the sublime — as a student minister spoke on psychological archetypes in religion — to the, well, to the not-so-sublime-but-necessary, as Jeff Johnson and Richard Kaige provided ALUUF with newly painted and stenciled garbage cans.

Membership stood in the 80-90 range in the mid-'80s, and the congregation was growing. Nineteen new members were recognized in February 1986, and Mary and Berkley were busy putting together a four-week "Introduction to UUism" series.

Larger concerns were addressed as ALUUF served as a training group for Hands Across America — a national fund-raising event to publicize anti-hunger programs — and Mary delivered a sermon in 1986 on the need for a sense of community during Springfield's U.S. Voting Rights Act litigation. The voting rights case, brought by black people on the city's east side, overturned the city's 75-year-old form of government and for a time threatened racial discord. Mary also served on a citywide interfaith committee to plan a celebration of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King's birthday.

The fellowship hosted an ambitious public symposium on the "Theology of Ecology," and symposium organizer Richard DeTar let it be known he had seven puppies to give away. At its annual meeting, ALUUF joined more than 2,800 cities, buildings and homes — including UUA in Boston and 72 other UU organizations — in unanimously declaring itself a Nuclear Free Zone.

In line with a longstanding commitment to human diversity, ALUUF members and friends joined the Springfield Metropolitan Community Church in an interfaith AIDS vigil on the eve of All Souls Day at the Fellowship Building. The Fellowship had been renting to MCC for several years.

Congregational concerns also took a prominent role, as the January focus month in 1987 centered on nurturing. Richard Kaige and others were still fighting "monsoons" in the basement at 514 North Walnut, now with sealer and a wet vacuum to supplement the traditional mops.

Women's issues continued to be increasingly important, and the emphasis changed as women's consciousness changed. A 1988 survey suggested only 33 percent of ALUUFers were interested in reviving the Women's Federation, some believing it "should not be just a 'women's' group," but interest was expressed in the "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" feminist theology curriculum [spelled that way to express feminist beliefs about gender issues] put out by UUA. In June 1988 the fellowship board endorsed Springfield's "Take Back the Night" march, a citywide public education event com battling against violence against women that has become an annual event with heavy participation by ALUUF women and men. In 1990 the board accepted St. John's Breadline as a congregational commitment, one honored at Thanksgiving in the Breadline Sunday fundraiser.

On Oct. 22, 1989, the fellowship dedicated four new quilted banners that hung on the sanctuary walls. The newsletter explained their symbolism:

Diana DeWeese began ... with the idea of bringing the colors of the rainbow to the walls of the sanctuary: stripes of yellow, red, blue, green and purple with the addition of a flaming chalice in the purple stripe using silver for the chalice and gold for the flame. Christina Fenner suggested quilting the banners... [to] represent things in nature. This reflects one of the UU principles:

the Interdependent Web of Life. The green strip is quilted with a pattern representing clumps of grass, the yellow with shining suns, the blue with waves of water. The red is quilted with animals of all sorts, including humans.

Sewing was done by a large number of volunteers over a 10-month period. Diana, Margaret Hade and Peggy Fenley worked on the project, in fact, at that year's nationwide Women's Rights Rally in Washington, D.C. Pat Moses made a color-coordinated altar cloth, and the facilities committee painted the sanctuary wall to coordinate with the banners.

In January 1990, Jim Redlich and John Malan coordinated a "One-on-One" outreach program that had ALUUF members and friends providing the names of people who might be interested in attending. A theater party was planned when the movie "Glory" came to town, featuring the story of Unitarian Col. Robert Gould Shaw and the black volunteers who served in his 54th Massachusetts Infantry regiment during the Civil War.

RE was bursting at the seams by the end of the decade and in 1989 the paid position of RE director was created. Jenni Dahl, the first DRE, inaugurated youth worship services downstairs and set about forming a children's choir. Bonnie Madison later worked with the choir. Jenni reported 34 youngsters were signed up for RE classes. John Collins and Jim Redlich designed room dividers downstairs, and Kathleen Knepper provided prints to decorate them.

In 1988 a future home task force was convened by Jan Smith Anderson, and a space needs assessment was conducted by Bert Munger. At that year's congregational retreat at Lake Jacksonville, Frank Kopecky pulled together a "Common Ground" mission statement out of a congregational covenant-making process.

The Fellowship was growing all the while, and preparatory steps were taken for more growth as the board set up a money market account for a Building Fund and a long-rang planning and facility needs task force began deliberations. Chairs were Kathleen Knepper and Craig Schermerhorn. A \$50,000 capital fund-raising campaign, with 10 percent dedicated to renovation at 514 Walnut and the balance to site acquisition, was launched in the fall of 1990. In the newsletter Mary wrote:

This year finally is bringing a Springfield-based Public Television outlet, one of the last state capitals to gain one. Isn't it also time that our metro area, with its favorable education and employment demographics, support a UU congregation of 150-250 members, and a facility to match? This goal may seem challenging to some, but so did our present 110 members when we only had 85, five short years ago.

The fund drive would meet its goal, and the new decade of the 1990s would get off to a promising start.

1990s: A New Home

Whatever else may be said about the 1990s, they have been a decade of transition. In the religious arena the decade has been marked by widening interest in spirituality and questioning of ancient Western images of "God as male, white as pure, black as evil and heaven as up," in the words of one observer. In Springfield as across the nation, Unitarian Universalists have been in the vanguard of these developments. Stories on inclusiveness in religion have appeared in publications like *The Wall Street Journal*. At the same time, a *Newsweek* trend-watcher said the UU belief "that each individual is the ultimate source of authority" has helped fuel its "largest growth spurt in 20 years." In Springfield as elsewhere, UUs have embraced the new while holding onto time-honored traditions of humanism, reason and empirical analysis.

At ALUUF the 90s have seen Kwanzaa and the winter solstice celebrated alongside Hanukkah and Christmas, and steps taken to develop a new church facility on the southern outskirts of Springfield. It is a time of bracing challenges and virtually unlimited opportunities.

When the 1990 capital fund drive met its \$50,000 goal, a Future Home Committee began a search for suitable property. According to Diana DeWeese, congregational president from 1989 to 1991, and Theresa Pella, 1991-92 president, it was abundantly clear that the existing church building on North Walnut was limiting expansion. In 1992 the Future Home Committee would find a suitable location on Woodside Road on the southern outskirts of Springfield.

"We had a list of criteria, and [the committee] went everywhere," Diana said in an interview.

"They scoured the city — north, south, east, west, downtown," added Theresa. "They looked at existing buildings, and they looked at land whenever two to five acres came on the market. Really, from 1989 till the spring of '92 they looked steadily."

In the meantime, it was abundantly clear that 514 North Walnut needed major renovation. That was accomplished during work days in the summer and early autumn of 1991.

Renovation literally went down to the walls — and beyond, as electrical wiring was upgraded. A handicapped-accessible bathroom was installed, new partitions were built and RE classrooms downstairs were completely redone. The partition at the back of the sanctuary was moved, double-pane window and all, and a violet carpet was installed as a final grace note. In a masterful display of consensus-building, Theresa was able to get agreement on the color.

Sunday services explored such emerging religious concerns as Roman Catholic theologian Matthew Fox's earth-based creation spirituality, and echoes of such ancient festivals as the spring equinox and the Celtic celebration of Samhain were heard in the ALUUF sanctuary. In 1991 Beverly Charles and Janene Grace led ALUUF women through the "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" curriculum. This adult RE class continued as a theology — or women's theology — group that opened its sessions to men and to people in the community.

The Judeo-Christian side of the UU heritage continued to be honored as Rabbi Barry Marks spoke about the Day of Atonement, as well as such other Jewish festivals as Succoth, and as Mary led the congregation through the shouting, clapping, foot-stomping heritage of Universalist church music. RE director Janene Grace and Mary led an intergenerational "Bible Between Bites" class that combined Genesis and the book of Judges with pizza and chili.

In the spring of 1992, ALUUF was designated a "Certified UU Extension Society" and members attended a conference in Chicago on such matters as publicity, building programs, community involvement and member assimilation. Theresa was succeeded by Mark Holberg as president, and Mark by Kurt DeWeese.

Community involvement continued as ALUUF members and friends, who might have been forgiven if they'd had enough do-it-yourselfing, in 1991 helped feed "Blitz Build" volunteers for the Sangamon County affiliate of Habitat for Humanity. More recently SOS (Secular Organizations for Sobriety), a humanist chemical dependency recovery support group, began meeting at the church. Videotapes of lectures by family systems psychotherapist John Bradshaw, left over from a 1991 adult RE series, brought ALUUF members together with MCC and 12-step recovery group people, in the spring of 1993. In 1993 the Fellowship joined other area organizations in the Coalition to Promote Human Dignity and Diversity, an alliance formed to counter hate-group activity in Springfield. The Coalition began holding its plenary sessions at the Fellowship Hall.

With the opening of what used to be called the Iron Curtain and the revival of organized religion in Romania, ALUUF joined a sister congregation program and began collecting English-language books for its 200-member Unitarian sibling in Kolozs, in the Hungarian-speaking part of that nation.

Bowlers, brown-baggers and the book discussion group continued to meet in fair weather and foul, and ALUUF members and friends kept raising money — and, perhaps more importantly, the congregation's profile in the community — by selling apples at Springfield's FirstNight arts celebration. New hymnals were purchased for the congregation, thanks in large part to the generosity of an anonymous donor. One of the hymns [No. 129] was written by ALUUF's Berkley Moore.

With record flooding throughout the Upper Mississippi Valley in 1993, floods were reported again in the basement at 514 North Walnut. They crested in July of '93.

The state Department of Transportation kept Walnut Street in a muddle for the better part of a year in 1992 and 1993 with a highway widening project, and replaced ALUUF's front steps with a walkway reminiscent of facilities maintained at Joliet by another state agency.

RE kept on growing — and growing, and growing. Average attendance for the 1991-92 church year was 28. In the fall of 1992, it averaged 37. Membership kept growing, too, and for ALUUF's anniversary celebration on Feb. 21, 1993, it stood at 123. A youth group, with assistance from Celine D'Onofrio and Brad Boston, began meeting in the fall of 1993. Jenni Dahl and Traci Somers served as RE co-coordinators.

The anniversary celebration, held in the Fellowship Hall at 514 North Walnut, was a gala occasion put together by Pat Moses, Carolyn Saunders-Munger and others too numerous to mention. Present were 100 ALUUF members and friends, including charter member Herb Hines, who lit the chalice as the service opened. Bread and cheese, grape juice, fruit and other snack foods were served. The pews were rearranged, with one nod to Rudy Nemser back in 1980 and another to a meticulous floor plan drawn up by congregation president Mark Holberg, and the gathering took on a celebratory atmosphere between that of a testimonial dinner and a picnic.

As Herb and other longtime members — including the Weingardts, Vern Greening, Claralilly White and Jean Nelson — shared their reminiscences, the congregation's kids pasted blue dots on a blown-up map of Springfield to mark the places important to the fellowship's history. To April Jouse went the honor of placing the last blue dot by the congregation's "Field of Dreams," the proposed new church facility site on Woodside Road.

Out of a brainstorming, drafting and consensus-building process coordinated by Frank Kopecky, Diana DeWeese, Betty Bailey, Jim Redlich and Berkley Moore, a mission statement was composed to take the congregation through the '90s, into the 2000s and down to Woodside Road. As adopted at the June 1993 annual meeting, the mission statement reads:

The Abraham Lincoln Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is a religious community of individuals coming together for spiritual growth and fellowship.

We shall through our fellowship nurture and support each other both in our human needs and in our search for spiritual fulfillment.

We shall provide a place for learning and the sharing of values and memories within and between generations;

We shall seek to guide the next generation in its search for meaning.

We shall strive to maintain a diverse membership that respects differing views.

Thus, we shall serve as a visible example of a tolerant religious community welcoming others to join.

In the meantime, the "Field of Dreams" project continued to progress. In June 1992 the congregation voted to purchase the five acres of cropland on Woodside Road for \$45,000, and the purchase agreement was executed in August. When the congregation's "Field of Dreams" sign was defaced by homophobic, racist graffiti in the fall of 1993, the incident was reported to the Human Dignity Coalition and the sign was promptly restored.

In January 1993, UUA capital campaign consultant David Rickard of Little Rock, Ark., recommended that the congregation launch a capital fund drive and plan for a new building on the Woodside Road property. His recommendations were adopted at the June 1993 annual meeting. Planning and fund-raising has continued.

When the problems and limitations at Walnut Street became too problematic, the Fellowship decided to purchase our "Field of Dreams" on Woodside Road. The process of building a new church with only about 100 members was quite daunting, and we realized that we would need more members to support our new home, but we were convinced that we had something important to share. Our mantra became, "If we build it, they will come!"

Church members compiled a dream list, which the Building Committee, Capital Fund Drive Committee, and our architect, Larry Quenette, faithfully consulted to design a building that would meet as many needs as possible while still respecting our budget constraints. Careful attention was given to future expansion plans, so that the building could be easily enlarged when the time comes. It proved a very amicable collaboration. Even though the Building Committee balked at some of the proposed interior colors and submitted a green compromise to our architect, nobody seemed too upset!

The move to Woodside Road was a very exciting and challenging time. We had already begun to build community by increasing interaction among members with fundraising and social activities (i.e.

Fantasy Auction, Circle Dinners, etc.), and we incorporated this sense of celebration and enjoyment of our fellowship into the capital fundraising process.

As construction got underway, we continued our bonding process as we worked side by side to do the interior and exterior finish work needed. Those who helped finish every board of the ceiling, or painted walls, or built fencing around the playground, or hauled rocks to the pond, can still remember those happy days of hard work toward a common goal.

As completion neared, the Fellowship Committee was concerned that we would have a beautiful new building, and virtually no furnishings or equipment to make full use of it, so a “shower” for the new church was organized. A wish list was published, and hundreds of wonderful items were donated. Gifts ranged from pots and pans, silverware, serving pieces and appliances in the kitchen, to playground equipment, to office equipment and furniture (Wes Duiker personally refinished the Minister’s desk). Through careful shopping, the Building Committee saved back enough money for stacking chairs to use in our multi-purpose sanctuary and tables for RE and other uses. The day our new building was dedicated (March 31st, 1996) was a joyous day for our congregation. Our RE children, accompanied by our incomparable pianist, Bonnie Ettinger, sang beautifully what was in everyone’s heart, “This Little Light of Mine, I’m Gonna Let it Shine.”

It has been nearly 150 years now since a Universalist preacher named Levi Marvin rode into Springfield, carrying in his saddlebags a message of better things and a plan for building a liberal religious community in Springfield. We can no longer retrieve from the historical record exactly what "adverse circumstances and difficulties" he faced, but we know he managed to overcome them.

We know that within a few years, a Universalist church was built at Fifth and Cook on the southern outskirts of town. And we know it succeeded in staying alive for a good 50 years, longer than Universalist churches of the mid-19th century did in other Illinois towns. We also know that in time, a Unitarian Universalist religious community was revived in Springfield. It is the 40th anniversary of that revival that was celebrated on Feb. 21, 1993.

Springfield's Unitarian Universalists have another anniversary coming up: On Dec. 24, 1858, the last bricks were laid and Springfield's first Universalist church was dedicated. Now their spiritual descendants are taking steps that will allow them to commemorate the occasion in another new church on the southern outskirts of town.

2000s: Full-time Ministry & Mission

Rev. Mary Moore encouraged the congregation to pursue its “Field of Dreams” and also to become a Welcoming Congregation. After fifteen years of service, Mary tendered her resignation, effective in January 2001.

The congregation made a conscious decision to move from part time to full time ministry. This represented a substantial commitment. The Rev. Alex Holt was engaged by the Board of Directors as our full time interim minister for two years. Alex successfully modeled what a full-time minister could provide, endearing himself to many members.

During this interim period, a Ministerial Search Committee was created and various candidates from across the country were interviewed. In the Spring of 2003, that committee presented the Rev. Martin Woulfe to the congregation for consideration. Rev. Woulfe was a graduate of the Meadville/Lombard Theological School who was then serving as an interim minister in the Chicago area. Following a candidating week during which members had the opportunity to meet Martin and his family, the congregation voted overwhelmingly to call him as our first full time settled minister.

Martin assumed his duties in the summer of 2003. The congregation celebrated its 50th anniversary that same year. During his tenure, the congregation has grown and has achieved a higher visibility in the wider community. Martin and several other ALUUC members were key participants in the interfaith service marking the dedication of the Abraham Lincoln Presidential Museum in April, 2005.

Unitarians have traditionally been in the forefront of public issues. Our congregation is no different. With each passing decade, the congregation has supported political and grassroot movements in many ways. Even as early as 1956, the congregation took a public stand in support of the work of the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr.

It would be a daunting task to list completely all the activities in which our membership has been engaged during the past half century. The following is a short list of our more recent participation.

Our current mission is extensive. While we have talked about a unique signature program, we’ve been quite busy doing a whole range of things to narrow our efforts. Also, given the relative size of the congregation, it has been often proved both practical and mutually beneficial to collaborate with other churches and organizations.

A few of our projects in recent years (and many remain annual endeavors) with which we’ve helped were: Peace Camp, a camp for children designed to teach peaceful resolution of conflict and sponsored by Heartland Peace Center; two building projects with Habitat for Humanity (the first was an all women build and the second was the interfaith initiative dubbed the “House of Abraham”), the Springfield Overflow Shelter (SOS); Helping Hands (a local homeless shelter); Hands Across America; contributing funds and goods to Sojourn, a shelter for abused women; contributed funds, goods, and labor to M.E.R.C.Y. Communities, a transitional housing and comprehensive support service for homeless women and their children; regularly collect canned food for the Kumler Food Pantry; participate in the bowling fundraiser for Big Brother Big Sister annually; raising money on “Breadline Sunday” to support a local soup kitchen; participate in World AIDS Day event; donate eye glasses, mittens, coats and other items needed by various local charities; participate as a group in biking, running and walking to raise money for social causes (including our sister church in Romania, AIDSWalk and Cropwalk); helping the Animal Protective League find homes for dogs and cats; forming a partnership with Lee School to provide opportunities for work experience at our church

and have donated school supplies and library books; speaking out as a congregation and individually against racism; sponsoring a public forum in November 2001 in response to events that had occurred since September 11; voting to become a Green Sanctuary Congregation; supporting The Phoenix Center which serves the gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgendered, and questioning community; contributing items and money to the Lincoln Memorial Garden, a local nature preserve; and raising money to assist victims of the December 2004 tsunami, Hurricane Katrina, and the March 12 2005 tornadoes.

In the later 1980s, we declared ourselves a Nuclear Free Zone. In the 2000s, many members (including our choir) participated in a community-wide Celebration of Diversity, a response to a local visit by Matt Hale, a white supremacist. We've donated the use of our building to a number of organizations such as Planned Parenthood and PFLAG. We support The Coalition to Promote Human Dignity and Diversity by having a congregation member serve on the coalition and by supporting their activities (including involvement in making Springfield a "Hate, Not in Our City" community). We have hosted one of the Study Circle groups sponsored by the City of Springfield to address racism in our community. Several members were also involved in the Study Circles.