

Unitarian Universalist Society Congregational Timeline

1838

Universalists are one of the very few denominations to carry their message to the American frontier, and circuit-riding Universalist preachers meet with Iowa City settlers in their homes from the earliest days.

1841

A Universalist fellowship is created in Iowa City; members continue to meet in cabins, then in Territorial Capitol (over objections of other denominations).

1841

An Iowa City Universalist congregation is organized at the Edward Foster home; Mrs. Rosella Andrews is the first member. Rev. A. R. Gardiner comes to serve as their first settled minister. The congregation purchases a wooden building for \$90.00 in order to be eligible for the land grant offered to churches by the city.

1843

Rev. Gardiner travels to the East to raise money to for a new a church; he spends \$290.93¼, and raises \$1,402.33 from eastern Universalists who include Horace Greeley and P.T. Barnum.

1844

The small, brick Universalist church is at the SE corner of Dubuque and Iowa Avenues. Rev. Gardiner soon has “a large following from among a class of broadminded, charitable individuals.”

1845

Upon Rev. Gardiner’s departure, S. Bailey is hired to preach for one year for \$100 plus board, and Presbyterians share Universalist space.

1846 to 1849

Rev. I.M. Westfall arrives, "...a good scholar and a first class controversialist, which gave him great power when debating differences of doctrine with ministers of other denominations."

1866

When Rev. Kinney is hired, the congregation promised that it would, "during the year, give a donation party to Brother Kinney as an addition to his salary."

1868

A new building at Dubuque and Iowa is being built but burns before being finished.

1869 to 1873

Rev. Augusta Chapin becomes minister; services are held first in former bowling alley at corner of Burlington Avenue and Dubuque Street; later in Lutheran church. In 1893 Chapin earns a Doctor of Divinity degree by Lombard University, the first ever awarded to a woman in America. She is also a charter member of the American Woman Suffrage Association.

1871

Iowa City's First Unitarian Church is formed; its members include 35 men and 62 women

1873

The Universalist congregation built, at corner of Clinton Street and Iowa Avenue, an "elegant building of Byzantine order... with campanile tower... furnished with all the modern conveniences for heating and ventilation" — but so cold in winter that Col. Irish comments one Sunday that the temperature in the sanctuary had indeed "risen 3 degrees during the hour: 2 degrees due to the sermon, and one due to the furnace."

1878

Five years later, the congregation has dwindled, and finances lead to the building being closed. The American Unitarian Association agrees to provide the minister, Rev. Oscar Clute, if Universalists will provide a building. When the Professor of Applied Religion at the University of Iowa worried about this denomination's ideas and influence, Clute sent a written invitation to every single university student to attend his services.

1881

The First Unitarian Society of IC is formed, under leadership of Rev. Clute; it absorbs many Universalists; and the terms Unitarian and Universalist are used interchangeably in documents. Thus it was that in this year there “passed from view and from active participation in the church work of Iowa City that brave little association of Universalists whose organization antedated even that of our statehood.”

1896

Eleanor Gordon is our minister for four years. A member of the “Iowa Sisterhood” of Unitarian women ministers, she advocates for the education of women, is active in recruiting women to the ministry and supporting them when they undertook that role, and is a leader in the movement for suffrage in Iowa.

1900

Rev. Gordon becomes Field Representative for the Iowa Unitarian Association, and works closely with Rev. Robert Loring to design the building that will be our new home at 10 South Gilbert.

1900

A “domestic idiom” guides its design, for they wanted this “little church that looked like a house” to be home to a personal and civic ethos that would “prove to be a source of good” for the wider community.

Rev. Duren J.H. Ward, minister and anthropologist, comes to UUSIC. He compiles a written record of the Meskwaki that includes oral history, a tribal census, a Meskwaki word list; a tribal history; a record of Meskwaki land purchases, and a map of “Meskwakia.” Ward also commissions a collection of borrowed as well as original photographs of the tribe.

1906

Financial shortfall leads to the Gothic church being sold to State University of Iowa; the congregation is allowed to continue meeting in old building until new building finished in 1908.

1905

A design for a new building is discussed; Ward wants modern downtown church with shops below, but the congregation disagrees.

1907

Rev. Robert S. Loring, the new UU minister, works closely with Eleanor Gordon to design the new church, and supervises its construction at corner of Iowa Avenue and Gilbert Street. This design purposely emphasizes that it is to be a home to an organization that will “prove a source of good to all the city.” Andrew Carnegie provided funds for our classic church organ, the “Mighty Felgemacher”

1908

The Des Moines Ministerial Association charges that the University of Iowa is a “semi-infidel” institution. The Iowa City Citizen, rising to the defense of UI, surveys the faculty and finds that of 181 faculty members, 124 are church members (9 are Unitarian), and another 57 have denominational preferences.

1908

The new building, at 10 South Gilbert Street, is dedicated in October. Its design is adapted from one in an American Unitarian Association booklet, called Plans for Churches, written “... in the hope that our societies will be guided by its recommendations and be persuaded of the possibility of building convenient and beautiful churches without undue expense, without discord, and without debt.”

All agree that although the church should be built economically, it “should not be in any way mean or small or stingy,” and should provide “... down to earth workability, the democratic provision of comfort, and the spirit of magnanimity fostered by self-sufficiency, [for] a ...church’s responsibility is not confined to its immediate family but includes the whole of society.”

1918

During Spanish flu epidemic, which kills an estimated 675,000 Americans, UUSIC serves as annex to University Hospital (then located in what is now Seashore Hall), providing over a three-week period 3500 meals to health care providers. Women serve lunch and dinner; men, breakfast. The Women’s Alliance also makes “gauze masks for children” to help slow spread of infection.

1920

UU minister Franklin Doan is well known for his pacifism; he is remembered as the Unitarian minister to use the term humanism.

1922 to 1929

UU minister Rev. Arthur Weatherly, devoted to social concerns, is honored as an “outstanding minister in the field of social justice; the Unitarian Universalist

Association creates the John Haynes Holmes/Arthur Weatherly Award for people who demonstrate "distinguished service in the cause of social justice."

1931 to 1951

Rev. Evans A. Worthley, originally a Methodist minister, comes as a substitute minister, and stays 21 years. Shortly after the Worthleys come to Iowa City, their 4-year-old daughter killed by truck traveling down Gilbert Street.

1933

"...one thing you've got to give this church credit for, we were always on the liberal front. We never tied strings to our ministers. We were sometimes too liberal for the American Unitarian Association, but we always managed to hold our ground." Edna B. Wilson

1933

At Lizzie Ward's funeral, husband Duran Ward passionately urges that "no university be allowed to close its doors to any person because of their sex" — for Lizzie had been denied entrance to Harvard, his alma mater.

1933

Rev. Worthley is named director of the Johnson County Re-employment Office.

1935

UU Women's Alliance collects clothes to send to Europe

1940

Worthley works with Baptist minister to integrate Iowa City restaurants.

1948

Worthley is named local chairman of American Overseas Aid – United Nations Appeal for Children.

1949

Our congregation ranks 6th among similar groups in the nation for the amount of clothing collected and sent overseas.

1950 to 1960

Annual reports show the UU Women's Alliance is responsible for sending aid to the Navajo Project, collecting and shipping clothing for Hungarian and Spanish refugees, and providing bedding for the Johnson County Home as well as speaking out about the need to improve conditions there.

1951 to 1957

Rev. Alfred J. N. "Al" Henriksen, UU minister, accompanies African-Americans to local barbershops that practice segregation.

1953

Henriksen recommends UUs "forget about" joining Iowa City Council of Christian Churches because it is "more rigid than liberal." Children send Christmas boxes to "mountaineering folk" in Tennessee and to Navajo Indians.

1956 to 1957

Women's Alliance sends 1400 pounds of clothing to Hungary.

1958 to 1964

Rev. Khoren Arisian, our minister, is active in the Ethical Culture movement, eventually becoming senior leader of the NY Society for Ethical Culture, and emeritus minister of the Minneapolis Unitarian Society.

1960s

UUSIC tests an evolution curriculum, "Man the Meaning Maker," developed by member Jane Latourette, and later published by the UUA.

1961

National union of Universalists and Unitarians, which had happened in Iowa City 60 years earlier.

1963

Congregation votes to erect a new religious education building, now known as the Worthley Building next door, on site of old parsonage .

1965 to 1970

Rev. Bill Weir helps found Iowa City's Community Mental Health Center; participates in Selma Freedom March. Weir voices his continuing commitment in

such sermons as “What Kind of Freedom?” (1966); “Black Power: Prerequisite to Integration” (1967); and “Martin Luther King: His Dream and Our Action” (1968)

1965

Our name is formally changed from the First Unitarian to Unitarian Universalist Society of Iowa City.

1966

UUSIC Social Concerns Council offers forums to study reproductive law reform and lack of low-income housing. Town Meetings for Peace, daily meetings of Vietnam Vigil.

1968

Members help secure low-rent housing in Iowa City.

1971 to 1983

Tom Mikelson, minister from 1971 to 1983, is president of the local office of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP),

1973

UUSIC Board sets “open door policy” allowing building use for political party functions, drama and dance performances, gay and lesbian dances, yoga classes, and music recitals.

1980

Congregation considers women’s pension rights in cases of divorce, environmental concerns, AIDS, emergency housing, and whether Iowa City should become a Nuclear Free Zone.

1985

UUSIC passes the Nuclear Free Zone Declaration, and works for the adoption of a similar resolution by the City Council, which they do later this year.

1986 to present

UUSIC begins serving lunch on the second Friday of each month for the Iowa City Free Lunch Program.

1991

UUSIC is one of ten congregations to form Greater Iowa City Housing Fellowship, marking the first time financial support is provided for outside organizations from operating budgets.

1995

UUSIC becomes a full participant in Iowa City's Consultation of Religious Communities.

1996

UUSIC installs an elevator to make all levels of both buildings accessible.

1997

Members, believing it important to formally welcome lesbian, bisexual, gay, and transgender people because much of their oppression is religiously motivated, vote unanimously to receive training and then become a formal UU "Welcoming Congregation," opening its doors and its heart to people who are LGBT.

2004

UUSIC provides active support for the Shelter House Overflow Project, and begins the tradition of hosting an annual lunch as a fundraiser for Shelter House.

2006 to present

New direct donations program distributes all Sunday morning cash donations to 12 community service organizations identified by congregational poll at the beginning of each year.

2007

UUSIC institutes a project to provide transition support to parolees and probationers.

2008 to present

UUs sew 150 to 250 book bags each year, to be filled with schools supplies and given students at Grant Wood Elementary School.

2011

Zach Wahls, UUSIC member, addresses the Iowa House Judiciary Committee public hearing to defend gay marriage and in opposition to a constitutional

amendment to ban gay marriage in Iowa. A year later, Zach published My Two Moms.

2012

UUs volunteer with Rummage in the Ramp, and grow a UU garden whose produce goes to the Food Bank.

2014

UUSIC becomes part of the Iowa UU Witness and Advocacy Network, a state-wide effort of education, organization and advocacy to promote social justice. US Senator Bernie Sanders and Nicholas Johnson, former FCC Commissioner, advocate at UUSIC for a free and democratic media. Harvey Harrison facilitates a discussion at UUSIC about prison reform, the New Jim Crow, and mass incarceration.

2017

UUS relocates to a new home in Coralville.