

A CELEBRATION
OF THE 60TH ANNIVERSARY OF
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM
IN OLYMPIA
1952-2012



Preface

To commemorate the passage of 60 years since the beginning of the “modern” history of our congregation – the founding of the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia in 1952 – we have brought together here two ways that we celebrated the passage of the first fifty years, ten years ago.

The first, *50 Years of Unitarian Universalism in Olympia, 1952-2002: A Short History of the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia, Washington, and the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Words and Pictures*, was the result of an Aural History project involving many members of the congregation. It was compiled by Tim Ransom.

The second consists of a series of short articles, written by long-time member Emily Ray, based on the congregation’s archives and her own memories, and published in our newsletter, *The Unitariana*, in 2002. Emily has updated them for this publication.

It is a truism that the past always seems to recede faster than the future arrives. As Emily points out in her final essay, *Capturing and Honoring Our History*, we owe it to those who will follow in our footsteps to keep our history alive. We offer these pages in hopes that they will help us understand better where we have come from, for only then can we truly know where we are going.

Tim Ransom and Emily Ray, 2012

**50 YEARS OF UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALISM IN OLYMPIA
1952-2002**

*A Short History of the Unitarian
Fellowship of Olympia, Washington, and
the Olympia Unitarian Universalist
Congregation in Words and Pictures*



19th Century Tumwater and South Olympia from the East

Compiled by
Timothy W. Ransom
Olympia, Washington
2003

This project would never have happened without the driving force of two members of the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation: Emily Ray and Jeanette Whitcher. To them go the lion's share of the kudos and thanks. Thanks also to the other members of the Aural History Advisory Committee: Les Kreger, Janet Fisk, Melanie Ransom.

And great thanks to those behind the scene wonders, Jane Brody and Lu Brighton, whose endless labor at transcription of the interviews made all this possible.

TWR

50 YEARS OF UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM IN OLYMPIA

Some people say we're made of flesh and bone. Scientists say we're made of atoms. But I think we're made of stories. When we die, that's what people remember, the stories of our lives and the stories we've told.

Ruth Stotter, Storyteller

The Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia began in 1952 with people and their stories.



Migrant Workers

Herb Legg

Herb Legg was born in Hawkins County in eastern Tennessee, but moved to Kittitas, Washington, at age six. His sharecropper parents wanted more for their children.

One of the reasons we came west, my mother says, "You could get a better education in the state of Washington than in the state of Tennessee," and the college at Ellensburg was six miles away. And I got a degree from there.

After World War II, Herb used his G.I. benefits to get a law degree. His first job as law clerk was in Olympia.

The grateful government, after World War II, gave us the G.I. Bill. I had a degree before I went in and so I went to law school afterwards. Got out of there in '51 and came to Olympia where I was a law clerk and decided...hell, I was here in Olympia and I liked the place, and I knew a few people, including some Unitarians by then...

Herb was a founder of The Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia.

Somewhere I saw an advertisement for The Church of the Larger Fellowship. I wrote to them. I think I sent them a dollar or so. And joined that. And then Jerry Kuykendahl – it so happened that I was working for him at the time, I was a lawyer with the Public Service Commission – he called me in one day and said, "I

understand you are a Unitarian." I said, "How'd you know?" And he said, "Well, I got a list." And so we contacted several people, including the Burnses. There might have been some others, I don't remember.

Buck and Betty Harmon

Buck and Betty Harmon came to Olympia in the early 1950s after Buck's developing career in social services had taken them all over the country. At their last posting, in Baltimore, the Harmons had attended a Unitarian Church with friends. Soon after they moved to Olympia, Buck discovered plans to form a fellowship here.



The Harmons

Buck: *So one day I picked up the Daily Olympian—it used to be called the Daily Olympian—and a little notice—couldn't have been more than two inches high—that a fellow named Ian Christopher, because he had signed this little thing, mentioned that he was holding a meeting at the Community Center, which was then on the East Side, and was interested in gathering people that would be interested in starting a Unitarian Church. Betty: Fellowship! A Unitarian fellowship. Buck: Thank you, you are correct. So, I was interested in that, and went to that meeting, and enjoyed Ian Christopher who was a charming little guy. He owned an insurance office here.*



The Founding Members

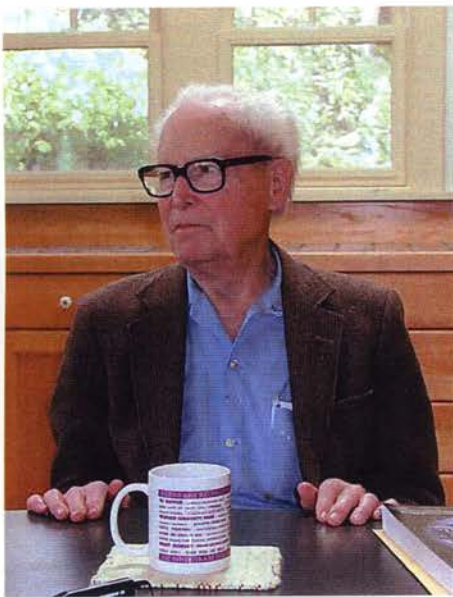
Ultimately we became very close friends to Ian Christopher and his wife, and others that later joined the group.

Anyway, this group was interested in a Unitarian church, or fellowship. We knew we weren't mighty enough to start a church! But a fellowship. So we talked about it, and at a second meeting, same place, we covered a few details, what had to be done. Money, being one of them. To rent a building and so forth..

Buck left to answer a call to serve from Washington, D.C. and so missed signing on as a charter member.

So, I'm back in Washington D.C. now for three months, while a group that we had first talked about at this meeting with Ian Christopher finally got a group organized under the leadership of an attorney with the Assistant Attorney General's Office, who got a group together. And the people at his meeting signed as charter members of the group.

Phil Vandeman



Phil Vandeman

Phil Vandeman grew up in Ohio, where his father was a traveling paint salesman.

So, actually, Dad wasn't at home as much as would usually be the case, but my mother and my brother and I managed very well. And, of course, as I got older into high school, we were moving into the Depression. I graduated from high school in 1933. Jobs were very scarce, and [I] couldn't afford to go to college then. Worked at the library and took a postgraduate year in high school. That was in the days of the CCC [Civilian Conservation Corps]. And so they had a program of a postgraduate year in high school. I took French and Russian from a Swedish landscape architect, who had been a landscape architect for the Czar. So I learned some Russian with a Swedish accent. That was interesting. Then I went to work in the printing plant that did Redbook Magazine with plans, patterns, for making dresses in it.

Later Phil entered Ohio State University (also Buck Harmon's alma mater, though they didn't know each other at the time) to begin his medical studies. There he married his first wife, Dorothy, who gave birth to two children before Phil was drafted into the Army in 1943. Phil was shipped off to Casablanca, then to Italy, where he was able to indulge his fondness for fishing.

We were way up in northern Italy at the end of the war.... That was nice, because there were trout in the streams coming down



from the mountains there. We used to go out and spear them. Yeah, well, they were brown trout, and they are not very bright. They seemed to think that if their head was hidden behind a rock, you couldn't see them although their tail was sticking out... So we could sneak up on 'em with a pole, to which was attached a sharpened fork or something like that, and spear them. Nice trout.

Fish also brought Phil to Olympia after the war.

We used to fish in Ohio in muddy ponds and muddy, cloudy rivers. I had heard about western Washington and all these nice trout in the streams. And there was an opening--the Memorial Clinic was advertising for a pediatrician.

In 1948, Phil began a long and distinguished career as a physician and mental health professional here. By 1953 he and his second wife, Mary, were members of the Fellowship.

Lois Bergerson

Now 81, Lois Bergerson grew up in a suburb of Chicago.



Lois Bergerson

I grew up outside of the Chicago area, in a suburb. In between Brookfield where the famous Brookfield Zoo is and then Clarendon Hills. My mother was English and my father was German, which made quite a mixture. We grew up and had some very hard times during the Depression, which were never to be forgotten. But my mother made the best of it. My father decided to leave home, and I still don't know where he went for two years. In the top of his life he was the vice president for Louis Stevenson and Company when the depression happened and [he] lost everything.



I can remember coming home when I was nine years old and my parents were sitting on the steps with suitcases. Three suitcases: one for myself, one for my brother, one for them, and my bike and everything else was gone. We moved to a miserable house with no heat, and my father ended up digging ditches. And he left home. My mother was one of 14 children, so she was used to being broke. So what she did was drape the living room and we put on shows. She put the shows on to make two pennies here and there. My mother was an actress.

Lois studied nursing, and her first job was in Walla Walla, where she met Wally Bergerson. Wally's work brought them to Olympia in the early 1950s, but then suddenly and unexpectedly, he died. Lois had become a Unitarian in Seattle when looking for a choir to sing with as a student. After Wally's death, it became even more important for her to take her children to the Unitarian Fellowship.

It was very close, very close. That was why we really went, because the children were getting a great deal out of it. I don't know if they were understanding, 'cause they would come home and say a little bit about Buddhism or a little bit about this or that. I don't know if they were getting very much of that, especially when I talked to them later on. But what they were getting was a great deal of friendliness and love. And then after church, often we would be invited somewhere or the children would be invited somewhere, and it helped them a great deal because it was very tragic, losing their dad. And I felt that people really cared about me! You see, even though I had known some people in Olympia, I really didn't know anybody. But some of the individuals in the Fellowship felt that I had a lot of friends, but I didn't. And I was very fortunate that there was a woman living across the street that I was able to hire. But the Fellowship was our base.



Games at the UFO



Jocelyn Dohm

Jocelyn Dohm

Jocelyn Dohm was born and raised in Olympia on the hill above the 4th Avenue Bridge. Social activism brought Ms. Dohm, now proprietress of Sherwood Press, to Unitarianism and the Olympia Unitarian Fellowship in the 1950s

Well, I'm sure it must have had not only influence on me but I hope maybe I influenced them too, because I have always been very socially active.... Send some money here and there, but like during the Viet Nam war and even probably before that, that type of activity. Unitarians have always had a very good record for their social consciousness, which is the most important thing. And that was, of course, a two way thing. Some people complained that it wasn't religion, that it was really, not apolitical but political [advocacy]. And I think they've taken their lumps about that. But that's why it appealed to me, of course, in the first place, because even then I didn't really

believe in some of the so-called Christian beliefs. But they seemed to be quite reasonable about all that. And they were very accepting about everybody, which I think they still are.

Jeanette Whitcher

One of the longest-standing, still active members of the congregation, Jeanette Whitcher was born in La Push, where her father earned a living as a fisherman. After growing up in western Washington and Alaska, she met and married Ladd Whitcher from Nebraska.

After Ladd and I were married, we lived in Nebraska for 18 months, and when I was pregnant with John I knew that if I didn't get out of Nebraska then, it might be a long time. And I did not like the Midwest; neither did Ladd. So he had to find a job on the West Coast. He went ahead and looked around, and got some part-time work, and then was able to go to work for the telephone company, either in Portland or Olympia. And we thought Olympia was much better for raising a family. A good decision, I think.



Jeanette Whitcher

Jeanette had been raised both Catholic and to think for herself.

Well, After Ladd and I married, I just decided I couldn't be a Catholic. In fact, I went to the priest to talk to him about getting our marriage blessed, because we weren't married in the church. And I remember this priest--I'm sure he was a dear man--but he gave me the standard lecture about how the husband is the head of the household, and the wife submits, etc., etc., and I never went back. That was too much.

In 1954, after 10 years of looking for an alternative, Jeanette met Gladys Burns, Herb Legg and other members of the Fellowship.



Jeanette Whitcher in the early 1960s

So essentially I spent 10 years looking, thinking, reading, studying... I met [Gladys Burns] because I was a member of a preschool PTA. She gave a talk there about Sophia Lyon Fahs and how young children learned, and it just sounded so wonderful. I had known several people from Great Books – Herb Legg and the Guerins, and, oh, quite a few other people. And they talked about the Fellowship; it had been going for a couple of years. They were so pleased with it. And when Gladys told me about Sophia Lyon Fahs, I knew that was something I was very interested in. So I attended the Sunday after that, and stayed.

Emily Ray



Emily Ray

Emily Ray was the oldest of four children, born to parents with backgrounds in Appalachia and the Midwest. She grew up in northern Virginia, and went to Grinnell College in Iowa. Her first job was as a teacher in a junior high school in Maryland.

Fortunately for me, a friend of mine had gotten unexpectedly pregnant, and then unexpectedly married (luckily, it was a happy marriage). She was from Grinnell College. And she had had a job teaching in the school system (the Montgomery County, Maryland, school system). And I parlayed that first temporary job into a job in a junior high school. And in those days they were so desperate for teachers, they were happy to have me, even

though I'd never taken one education course. I quickly learned in that year of teaching (plus I taught night school English during that time too, to immigrants and embassy staff) that I really was not cut out to be a teacher, not at least in the school system as it was. We had so many difficult things to deal with...it just wasn't me. I couldn't be free enough, I couldn't be outspoken enough. At the end of that year I knew I probably would not continue on with teaching.



About this time she met Dave Ray, a musician in a U.S. Army band. One thing led to another, they married, had a baby and were transferred to Ft. Lewis. Emily's parents had sent her to an Episcopal Sunday School as a child.

I haven't mentioned that, but my parents, even though they were not involved in a church, had sent us to Episcopal Sunday School. We would ask questions like, "How come you don't go?" Anyway, eventually Dad, through a carpool he was in, realized that one of his good friends... was a Unitarian.

And he and his family went to the All Souls Unitarian Church with A. Powell Davies, who was the big thing in those days. And when I was fifteen, Dad said, "I want us to try that." Because by then I had stopped going to the Episcopal Church, and my sisters and brother, all of us had boycotted it. It was just too absurd. It was just a fantasy of somebody's. We never could understand why anybody believed any of it. And so we started going into D.C., and I got involved in LRY [Liberal Religious Youth].



When Emily and Dave came to Olympia, she had been looking for like-minded people for some time. As she told Jeanette Whitcher...

Anyway, I finally decided to look up the Unitarian Fellowship, or to

see if there was a Unitarian Church. I think I just looked in the Yellow Pages one day, and discovered there it was, at the Women's Club by then. And I went there, and it was a warm sunny day. I remember very well—maybe you remember—standing on the sidewalk afterwards, talking to you, Gladys, and Arlene Hagen Anderson[]. And I remember saying, “You must have been a teacher” to one of you, I think it was Gladys. And she says, “No, but I’ve done a lot of stuff like this.” And Arlene, of course, had been a teacher, and was a teacher then. And I just had this feeling [that] “I am home. I have finally met the people I need to meet.” I mean, all of you were older than I, but I just felt like this is the kind of person and place I need to be. And that was it.

Les Kreger

Les Kreger grew up in Oregon and Washington, moving frequently due to his father’s work.

[He was a] door patcher, and he moved from one door factory to another and worked in Portland, Tacoma, and McCleary and a lot of different places. And then [during] the last part he got out of the mill and stopped door patching and did carpentry work. And he was a helper in [my mother’s] restaurant. That’s what he was doing. He had been helping Mother in the restaurant, and his sister Hattie wanted him to come down and put on a room because he was a carpenter. So he went down in a week and put on this room for ‘em so they could have a downstairs bedroom. But he wasn’t used to the heavy work he used to do before, and he had a heart attack soon after. That eventually killed him. My parents didn’t go to church, but they sent their children to church. So I was sent to church wherever I moved around. So, I went to a lot of different churches.

Les explored a variety of churches as a student at the University of Washington and discovered an interest in ecumenical work. He joined the Olympia Fellowship in 1962.



Les Kreger

Well, I was invited by one of Mother’s friends to come to the University Church when I got back from the service, being overseas. When I got back, I knew I wasn’t Christian because I’d been through that and failed. I knew of Unitarians, but the friend said, “Why don’t you try Unitarians?” And I tried them.

Interesting! I went to a little Christmas program, and the kids didn’t know the names from the Bible, but that was all right. [That was in Olympia at] the Women’s Club. I came to the Fellowship twice and then they invited me on the board.

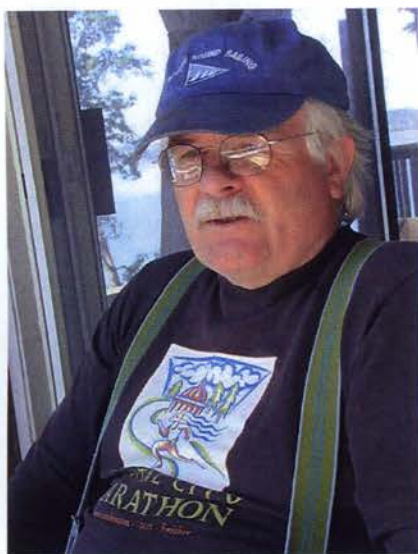


University Church, Seattle

Les enjoyed representing the Fellowship at district and national meetings.

My position was somewhat unique because I was the connection to the greater Unitariana. I am the one that went to the annual meetings. So I knew the hierarchy and things about the big picture. The other people had a good sense of what it's like because the annual meeting is very similar to our district meetings, because of the district we are in. Now that isn't true for any other place. But because we are a large district, we come together for district meetings. We have people from all over coming together. And we have people putting out materials that they are going to tell about--books, tapes, selling things--as well as the program, and eating together. They're all similar to what it was on the national level. So, they knew, but I knew the National because I was actually there. [I went] because it's somewhere to go, and I like to tour. That's what I did, working for the state by this time, and that was my vacations. I would go to the Nationals wherever they were. I'd drive there, go to the National, and drive back. That was my vacation. It was something to do.

Pete and Pat Holm



Pete Holm

Both Pat and Pete Holm's Scandinavian ancestors migrated to Minnesota, but the two young people reached Washington state in the 1960s by very different routes. Pat grew up in Minnesota but eventually fled to the west, in a family way and following her boyfriend who enrolled in the University of Washington. Pete was born in Bend, Oregon, and eventually moved with his parents to a grandparents' farm near Rochester.

Pete: I went to school down there. I graduated from Rochester High School in 1956 and went to Washington State University. Graduated from there in 1960, and sort of bummed around for a few months, you know. Ended up hitchhiking from Chicago to Boston. Then I came back to Seattle. I sort of crashed and burned. Actually I remember one time I got to the point where I had to sell blood in order to buy

breakfast. Ultimately I was forced into the indignity of writing to my folks and having them send me money for a bus ticket home. I landed in Seattle around Christmas time in 1960.



Seattle in the late 1950s

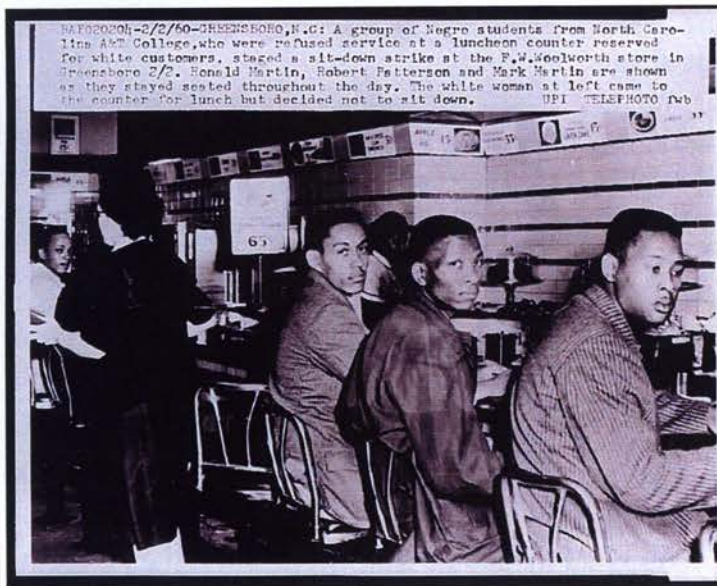
A year later, Pete met Pat and through her, Bob and Bonnie Gillis, their eventual partners in *The Null Set*, the coffeehouse on Harrison in Olympia.

Pete: So I wanted to have a coffee house--remember this is the 60s, this is a coffeehouse, this is a Bohemian type coffee house like something you might find in North Beach or New York City, or something like this--where we'd have poetry readings, real Bohemian type people would hang out.

Pete: I was the only one that really knew anything about actually running a coffeehouse, the menu of a coffeehouse and how to make espresso drinks. Of course, in those days we didn't have good coffee. We had Medaliadoro espresso out of a can, you know, which I think they'd still be doing a good thing if they served the French Market coffee, which is half coffee and half chicory. And so we served café au lait, which is hot milk and coffee. French Market coffee **Pat:** Here's our menu right here. We would make a trip to Seattle to get all the ingredients at the Farmers Market. You know, the special cheeses, and the coffee, and we had – what did we call those drinks, the tall drinks—the Italian sodas, something called Roseoleo or something like that. And then we put the syrup in and mixed it and sometimes we put ice cream in it too. **Pete:** Shyruppit, we called it. Shyruppit. We had ice cream and cheesecake. Patricia had a really good cheesecake. **Pat:** Yeah, I was really good at making cheesecake and Bonnie was really good at making the chocolate cake, as I recall. We fought terribly in the kitchen, because two women have a very different way of operating in a kitchen. Bonnie believed in absolute recipe control and very careful ordering of things, and I was more, I like to think, more creative.



Pat Holm



In the early 60s, the Null Set was a hub of social and political activity as the country struggled with civil rights issues and the growing problems in Asia.

Pete: And we had a number of interesting things, of course, going on there all that time. We got involved politically. I see the ACLU is talking about forming a Thurston County chapter again. I wonder if I should get involved in it. **Pat:** Oh, really! **Pete:** We had a Thurston County chapter of the ACLU, we had Thurston Country Friends of Mississippi project. We sponsored a volunteer in Mississippi in the summer of 1964. **Pat:** And that was part of the reason we wanted the

coffeehouse, too. It was going to be a place where political action took place, people met and people talked about radical ideas. And the Null Set – why we chose that name – I thought of it. It was a mathematical term that stood for the empty set. But the empty set as we thought of it was the set of things that hadn't happened yet, that were going to: the first woman president, you know, the first civil rights action. So the Null Set was the empty set, but it was this possibility. **Pete:** Unrealized possibilities. **Pat:** But at the end we said the Null Set meant, in fact, there were no numbers, because we couldn't make any money out of it at all!

Pat and Pete were no strangers to Unitarianism, and quickly found the Olympia Fellowship.

Pat: We were in Centralia, and the first time we came, we went to the Women's Club. It was probably 1961. We came from Centralia to go to the church. Pete: I think we read about it in the paper. Pat: Yeah, probably so. I was a Unitarian, actually. Pete: Oh, we'd been married in the Unitarian Church, actually, in Seattle. We were married by Pastor Peter Raible. I had been singing in the choir up in the Unitarian Church in Seattle. So, we'd found the Unitarians before we moved down here. Pat: Right. I was a Unitarian when I went to college at the University of Minnesota. That was a big part of my life. I was a Socialist, a Unitarian, a Communitarian.

Arlene Anderson

Arlene Anderson's grandparents founded the Icelandic Free Unitarian Church in Blaine, Washington, in 1929. Her mother married a Swedish Lutheran who broke from family tradition to join his wife's church.



Arlene Anderson

Well, ... my grandparents were part of the group in Blaine that left the Icelandic Lutheran Church and formed the Icelandic Free Church Unitarian in 1929. And I notice one of my uncles and one of my aunts, my mother's sister and brother, were part of that group also. My mother's picture is in the early pictures of the church, but in the very beginning she wasn't there, probably because she married my dad, who was a Swedish Lutheran, and she came home to the farm where his parents lived. She lived in with them and with her husband's brother and sisters. They, as I said, were Swedish Lutheran and I don't believe she had felt the freedom to go to the Icelandic Church immediately. But it didn't seem to be very long after the church was built that she was—I see her pictures in front of the church and that sort of thing. So, then my Dad was the board president for 40 years at the church. So, much to the dismay or consternation of his sisters, he did become a

Unitarian, and very strong, and worked in the church all those years. His sisters kept after him to come back to the Lutheran Church, and it was rather sad that they just couldn't accept his beliefs and let him be. So, the beginning of my affiliation with the Unitarians was with the Icelandic group in Blaine.

Born in 1927, Arlene grew up on the farm in Blaine.

Our farm was seven miles south of Blaine, which is right on the border, so we were seven miles south of the border. Our farm was 60 acres and we had fifteen milk cows. When I was little we did raise

chickens, but by the time I was six or so we had gotten rid of the chickens. But we always had milk cows and we raised our own pigs. We had two horses to do the work and we raised the hay to feed the animals and we raised straw, oats for straw. We had apple trees. That's what we had on the farm.

We did a lot of harvesting from the water, from the salt water. We would go down every spring or summer after the haying was done. Dad would load mattresses on the hay wagon, and the tent. We would go down to Birch Bay, it's a mile and a half, and the horses would pull the wagon. And we'd set up tent and then a lot of our relatives came and camped with us and then of course, we always dug clams. Loved to dig clams and catch crabs, and we'd dig the clams and we'd make a fire pit and wrap the crabs in seaweed and then we cooked the crabs in a big tub over the fire.



Arlene (rt) and Luci Phillips dig clams

I went to a two room school house. Grades One through Four in the downstairs and Five through Seven upstairs. Each grade had one row and I think there was eight in my grade. I had a cousin in the grade above me; there was only two people in that grade. That was at Birch Bay. It was a mile and a half. And the school bus, I remember it being a wooden box on wheels. And when we would go down to Birch Bay in the wintertime to school, that water would come up over the bulkhead and splash onto the bus. In the summer or spring I would walk home from school when it was nice. And then at the end of the Fourth Grade we were then sent into Blaine.

Arlene met and married Vern Hagen at Washington State College. Both teachers, Vern and Arlene had several postings in the state before landing in

Tumwater. They joined the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia in 1961.

Well, it was our religious home. We just really felt at home there and I was so pleased to find it, you know.

Lynn Harmon Lumpkin

Lynn Lumpkin was very young when she first attended the



Lynn Harmon Lumpkin

Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia with her parents, Buck and Betty Harmon.

My first memory is when we met in the basement of the Governor's Hotel, which isn't there any more. It's where the Ramada Inn is. And it was the Governor's Hotel. There were two hotels downtown: the Olympian and The Governor's Hotel. And I was very little – I must have been in Kindergarten, First Grade?

Lynn's parents were not particularly religious.

Well, you know, it's very interesting. I think Daddy kind of grew up in an agnostic situation, and yet, as many Unitarians do, wanted to have some kind of spiritual thing for his kids... He wanted to have some kind of a place where we could explore spirituality, but in a way, of course, that was not customary. In the meantime my mother had not religiously – funny word – gone to a Swedish Baptist church, but enough that she felt that it was probably her church. And when she was very young, they asked her to pledge allegiance to Jesus Christ, and she didn't quite feel that. And they all got down on their knees and started praying for her, and she left that church and never went into a church again. And yet she is a very soulful lady and wants, to this minute, to have some profound spiritual feeling. So they were not in a church mode whatsoever and, nevertheless, wanted to have some kind of a spirituality thing....

Buck and Betty Harmon made church-going a family affair.

My mother was my Sunday School teacher, and I can remember that, you know, we had a closet where we could keep our things. And my mother, the artist, had made this diorama of a farm. And oh! I was just captivated with the whole thing. And she also would read us Mrs. Piggle-Wiggle stories and stuff and illustrate them as she told the story. And I remember the chairs being set up on the floor down there, and I remember Helen Christopher, Marge Montgomery, Carlye LaBelle, and those are the impressions that I recall from those days...



Helen Christopher teaches (l-r) Linda Whitcher, Molly Maguire, Keith Vandeman and Vaughn Hagen



Celia Whitcher-Tobin

Elder daughter of Ladd and Jeanette Whitcher, 51 year old Celia Whitcher-Tobin remembers the very early days of the Fellowship.

I remember Sunday School in the old Governor Hotel, because there was an elevator. It was pretty exciting.



Celia Whitcher-Tobin

And I suppose I remember Christmas programs the best because it was a big deal. I remember, just vaguely, the traditional children's choir collars for some Christmas program. I don't know if they were paper or real, I don't remember that part. I remember having an incredibly exciting time being the Lucia Bride. Dad made me a candle crown. I still have my crown. It was the traditional Christmas pageant. Kids in nightgowns with angel wings...



The Lucia Bride

Raised in the Fellowship, Celia returned to Olympia after college to work. Eventually she got married at the Fellowship church in Tumwater.

After I got married and had kids, little kids, babies, I stayed home. And then the church had a preschool. [Later] I was working at the preschool and she [Linda Whitcher, her sister] was head of RE [Religious Education]. We had this horrendous, decrepit, old rug. I think the church Board gave us a little bit towards it, and then we

had a raffle to make up the difference. And believe it or not, this is how hard it was to get things funded. Linda and I went out and bought those little Santa Hats, and we were selling raffle tickets out in front of Top Foods at Christmas time to get the new rug for the Fellowship area. We did it, too. My dad and mom and probably our husbands too. We ripped that old carpet out and got the new carpet in.



Linda Whitcher

Linda Whitcher

Celia's younger sister, Linda Whitcher, began life as a UU at the Women's Club.

My memories of the Women's Club are very fond ones. The Sunday School rooms were wonderful! We had the whole upstairs in this big, old wooden building, with huge windows in it. So the rooms were really filled. There were two big rooms up there.



The Women's Club

The nursery was the second largest room, I think. I remember it being a room full of lots of blocks, you know, blocks so you could really build something big.



That's kind of my snapshot of my preschool years there. There were, I think, four Sunday School rooms up there, and over the years you rotated through the rooms. My memories kind of go room by room.

For Linda, the Fellowship took on a special significance when she was 16 and her brother, John, was sent to Viet Nam in 1969.

I think the impact of the church in the late 60s that had the greatest impact on me was the opposition to the war in Viet Nam. When I was 16, my brother was in Viet Nam, and the congregation was very supportive. John was in Viet Nam, and Bill Knudsen, another church member, was in Viet Nam. The congregation was very supportive to the Knudsen family and to our family having the boys there. And they were both real young. John turned 21 when he was in Viet Nam. Through the church it was that I was able to be in contact with the anti-war effort. [There were] things that I could participate in so that I didn't feel so lost, having my brother be in Viet Nam. That was a pretty lost and hopeless kind of feeling...



John Whitcher in Viet Nam, 1968

The Buildings We Have Gathered In

Our history can be measured by the buildings we have gathered in. After meeting at the Olympia YMCA, the Girl Scout Little House and the Governor Hotel, members of the Fellowship rented the Women's Club in downtown Olympia for their gatherings.



Buck Harmon remembers early meetings at the Women's Club.

That's where we began to have our meetings, every Sunday. And we began to get to know each other.

Most of the members are in that picture [of the founding members]. We had some very significant people in that organization, as small as it was.



We had a member of the Supreme Court. At the time we had several physicians and--no surprise to you--whether you are a good doctor or a bad doctor isn't important, but you are a significant member of society if you are a doctor. We had quite a few doctors. We had Phil Vandeman, a young, new doctor here in town; anyway, three, four other doctors...

Linda Whitcher remembers the Women's Club fondly.



At the Woman's Club, the closing was always standing in a circle, holding hands, singing "As We Leave This Friendly Place." And I remember that as an absolutely wonderful ceremony.

You know, that standing and singing, and being able to look and see everybody in the congregation. It was really nice.



Jeanette Whitcher remembers that early on, services were held in the evening, and were led by members of the Fellowship. ...

We did have support from Boston and from the local ministers, but the people who were the movers and shakers in the church were pretty anti-clerical. So most of the talks were given by them or people from non-religious backgrounds, on ethics and what's happening. We did have visiting ministers occasionally, and the mood I think was just exhilaration. Or maybe that was influenced by my exhilaration, I don't know. It was wonderful for me.

There were problems with renting the Women's Club, though, and Lois Bergerson, for one, was ready for the Fellowship to buy its own building in Tumwater when the time came.

I thought it was a great thing because of the cleanup. We had to spend a lot of time folding chairs and unfolding chairs for the adults. A lot a time was spent setting up and tearing down for the children upstairs, so that nothing that belonged to us [was left out].

No, I thought it was the one thing that we needed to do. We needed to have everybody understand that we needed a place that belonged.



The decision to buy and move to a new building, the church in Tumwater, in 1968 was not an easy one, and according to Jeanette Whitcher, it came with a price.

We began to wonder if it weren't possible to have a place of our own. And Gladys and Bart [Burns] were really driving characters in that. There were many, many places they looked at, and some were pretty awful, as I remember. But we ended up, of course, at the church in Tumwater.



Bob Jacobs jacks up the church in Tumwater

And it actually did cause a little bit of schism in the church. Some people thought it was improper for us to spend all that money, and to have a building, which wouldn't be used all the time. It was wasteful. And some people actually left, because they didn't agree with the idea of our having ongoing expenses and all that went with it. But most people were delighted.



As services moved to Sundays, family participation became the rule. Arlene Anderson remembers:

We had the four candles; happiness, sadness, wishing and remembrance. Every Sunday one family would do a 15-minute family service before the regular service. We'd take turns and all the kids would take part and then they would go to their Sunday School classes after this family service.



The church in Tumwater

It was a really special time, and the kids loved it because they got to take part. They got to tell about why they were happy, why they were sad, why they were remembering what they remembered, and what they were wishing for.



*A Family Service at the
Tumwater Church*

Eventually the Fellowship began to outgrow the church in Tumwater, and the idea of building a new church, one designed to meet our needs, took root.



Planning a new church



Jeanette Whitcher remembers the important role that

Reverend Sandra Lee played in this transition.

The way she helped us, as we were beginning to talk about launching a drive to build the church, and how we were going to fund it...



Sandra Lee and Don Bell



And Don's help! Don was just an amazing helpmate to her. The innovative way he had of helping us to figure out how to finance it. And Janet Fisk's leadership then! Because we met, and we talked, and we evaluated and we prioritized what things we wanted in the church.



Lucy Phillips plants a tree at the new church site.



And when we finally came to a vote, I am sure there were some people who still thought we shouldn't do it. But they didn't come, or if they came they didn't vote, and we had a unanimous vote to go ahead. I think Sandra's enthusiasm, Don's enthusiasm, and ours, helped by theirs, made it happen.

In 1993, the move took place, and a year later the Fellowship evolved into a Congregation.

From Fellowship to Church

Our history can also be measured by changes in how services have been conducted, from lay-led to minister-led, and from part-time, visiting ministers to a full-time minister in residence.

Initially, services were led by members of the Fellowship, and could require significant preparation. Lynn Harmon Lumpkin remembers:



Families would do different things. In some they probably talked about what they were going to do on the way to church. Others, they spent weeks! You know, one of the kids would play the piano, another kid would share his artwork, somebody else would tell a joke that he learned. The kids were involved. What you did was entirely at your option...

I enjoyed it when our family did it. I felt kind of bonded to it when other families did it, because these were kids I went to Sunday School with... And then we would be dismissed and go to our classrooms.

As I got older I know that you would be responsible for the services for a month. I imagine that probably involved whether you actually gave a report on whatever, a speech, or saw to it that there were speakers to cover it. Of course, we didn't have a minister at the time. I remember my folks took the topic of mysticism, and by this time I think I was just about in high school, and so I got interested in this. And I remember they were studying all these things about stigmata and all of these things...



A Lay-led Service at the Tumwater Church



Rev. William Arensmeyer, 1978

Then, in 1978, Bill Arensmeyer became the Fellowship's first minister.

He was soon followed by **Roger Kuhrt**, the Fellowship's first paid, part-time minister.

Emily Ray remembers Reverend Kuhrt: *He was with us, actually, seven years, I believe. He gave us a sense of what at least one kind of minister could be in the pulpit. He brought a good background in religious studies. He had been trained in a mainline Christian church, which he had left. He was very interested in Jung and Jungian analysis. I guess he gave us a dimension we hadn't explored before, and for a number of years it worked really well.*



Rev. Roger Kurht, 1978-1985

When Reverend Kuhrt left in 1985, the search for a new minister began.



Rev. Donna DiScuillo
1986-1989

Emily Ray: *I was on the Search Committee for **Donna DiScuillo**, so I do remember that. Jim Knudsen and myself, and maybe Diana [Larsen-Mills], and certainly one of the Burnses, because we met in Bart and Gladys' house. And we interviewed three or four people who wanted to come down and take that position. But she had moved out here with her husband who was the minister of Plymouth Congregational Church. She had not been a minister of a church yet; she had been a DRE [Director of Religious Education], and she had recently finished theological school as a mid-career "thing," and she was very interested in church organization, committee structure, being clear about policy, that kind of thing.*

Jeanette Witcher: *And she was a warm human being. She was the first minister I knew, from the time I left the Catholic Church when I was seventeen, that I felt that I could go and talk to her about personal matters, and she would understand.*

Reverend DiScuillio resigned her ministry in 1989, when her husband took a job at Princeton. Our next minister, **Sandra Lee**, came to the ministry after a career in science.

Emily Ray: *She had been living in Bremerton area, by Poulsbo, and she'd been a microbiologist for*



Rev. Sandra Lee, 1989-1999

many years, and then become inspired while being a Unitarian Universalist Fellowship member there to go off and became a minister. And then she was looking for her first posting.

Sandra brought special talents to the Fellowship.

Linda Whitcher: *Sandra was so good at community building. She was a delight to watch over the years, as she brought the music in. And I think it was a lot of Sandra's impetus that started the music building, and kept it building, until now we've got Troy [Fisher, Music Director].*

In addition to starting the music program, Rev. Lee led the congregation in formally recognizing and welcoming important groups within the church: the Pagans and the Gay and Lesbian community.

Sandra's departure in 1999 followed months of difficult debate and dissent within the church. The congregation was splintered and leaderless. **Shirley Ranck** came to serve as Interim Minister.

Emily Ray: *Well, Shirley was the great bridge. She was a good choice. She was not emotionally expressive, but very thoughtful, logical, attentive to healing and not creating fuss and rifts. Just very mature, very stable, very wise. Very focussed on feminist issues, to the exclusion of a lot of other stuff, but very supportive of staff. Sandra was the first person to hire staff, but Shirley continued to work with Darlene [Sarkela, Office Administrator] and be very much an advocate of her, and of Bill [Arensmeyer, Community Minister], wanting to formalize his role, recognize his important contributions.*



Rev. Shirley Ranck, 1999-2001

Then, in 2001, **Arthur Vaeni** arrived from the East to assume the post of permanent minister to the Olympia Unitarian Universalist Congregation.



Rev. Arthur Vaeni

It Takes a Community to Build a Church

Another measure of our lives as Olympian Unitarians has been the activities we've pursued as a community. Unitarian Universalists are great ones for having fun, whether floating down the Deschutes, taking the train to Seattle or Portland for plays and music, or simply having potlucks and dinners for eight.

Linda Whitcher remembers mushroom hunts...



Oh, we'd drive up to Mason County, and meet at the Courthouse in Shelton. Somebody would have picked out where we were going on, probably, private forest land—I don't know where we went. And we would park all the cars along this road and, you know, some people would take off to the left and some people take off to the right. And we would come back with pounds and pounds and pounds of chanterelles. Whoever was picking out these spots did a great job.



I remember, you'd just set off into the woods, and then when it was lunchtime, somebody'd start honking the horn on the cars, so then you could find your way back to the cars from the horns honking. So, you'd come back and you'd leave what you'd gathered in the morning, eat lunch, and then head off again, out into the woods.



It was a big church turnout. Lots of people'd go!



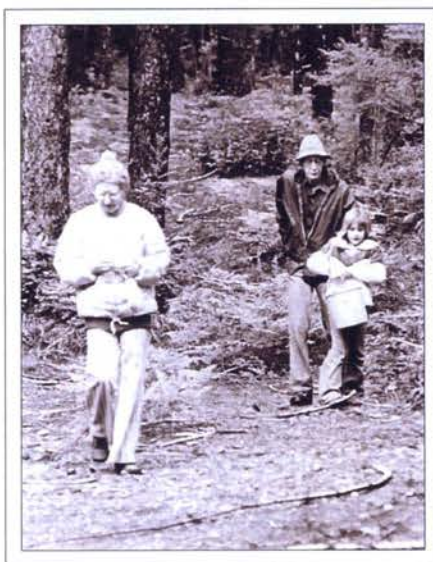
Arlene Anderson learned to like chicken livers at church picnics.

And then at the Vandeman Lake we had wonderful picnics. I always remember, at the Vandeman Lake, I didn't particularly--when I was growing up, or even in my young adult [years]--I didn't particularly like chicken livers. And this one Sunday, when we were out at the lake, having a picnic, when I got ready to eat, the only thing left was the livers and the gizzard. But luckily I had had a glass of wine or two, and it tasted wonderful! And I have eaten livers and gizzards ever since! It's my favorite part of the chicken.



Celia Witcher-Tobin remembers campouts, and hikes with mountaineer Bart Burns.

Bart Burns taught us about hiking. There we were, wearing our brother's old logger boots that they'd outgrown, and Army Surplus backpacks. Wooden, and they didn't fit very well. Oh! And Bart could set the pace, let me tell you! I mean, I was young and fairly fit, but that man could move! That was pretty special, though.



Bart and Gladys Burns on a mushroom trek
with Linda Hoffman





This congregation, this fellowship, has gone through many rites of passage, from building to building, minister to minister, event to event. But it is the stories in our faces that tell the most about who we are and what is special about Unitarians in Olympia.



Glimpses into the Past

Our Gathering Places

Today we occupy a rose-brick building with over 10,000 square feet of space. It was not always thus.

The first public meeting of the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia was in 1952 at the former Olympia Community Center. Through the years, the fledging group met in other places: the Olympia YMCA, the Girl Scout Little House at 11th and Washington (since demolished), the basement of the Governor Hotel, and the Olympia Women's Clubhouse.

In 1968 we moved into the little white church at 2nd and B streets in Tumwater. It had been built as a community church in 1872. We purchased it from the Methodists for \$10,000, paid in full before our occupancy. Through the years we made a number of improvements while retaining the appearance of this building of statewide historical significance.

In 1993 we built and moved to our present location at 2300 East End Street. In 2010 we completed a major construction project, adding a new religious education wing and a "commons" for socializing and dining. In the process we enlarged the church administration office area and the kitchen with much needed work space and storage.

In the near future we will remodel our space again, adding 1,587 square feet for a new sanctuary. Our space will then include over 11,000 square feet!

From UFO to OUUC

The past 60 years have seen our church go "from UFO to OUUC."

In 1951, an Olympia attorney, Jerome Kuykendall, read a definition of the Unitarian religion in a *Time Magazine* article. It so impressed him that he contacted the American Unitarian Association (AUA). In the absence of any Unitarian church in the Olympia area he became a member of The Church of the Larger Fellowship. Through this "church by mail" he began receiving sermons and other materials.

A year later, AUA staff identified a handful of others in Olympia on the same mailing list. They were Bartlett and Gladys Burns, Frederick Hamley, and Herb

Legg. Kuykendall decided to pull the group together. He also advertised his intentions in *The Daily Olympian* (as it was then called).

The meeting attracted additional people who had been Unitarians elsewhere. More meetings followed. The group decided to form a fellowship – that is, a church without a minister. This decision was welcomed by the AUA, which had begun encouraging the formation of fellowships across the nation in the late 1940's.

UFO – the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia-- was officially recognized as a member of the AUA on October 6, 1952. There were 13 charter members. Today, we have 270 members.

Music to Delight the Senses and Soothe the Soul

Today on many Sundays we enjoy the spine-tingling sound of a large choir directed by Troy Fisher, a professional musician, composer and actor. We have a fine grand piano and electronic equipment for playing tapes and CDs, recording services and amplifying sound for our hard-of-hearing friends. We enjoy guest performers and periodic choir concerts and participatory drumming circles. We sing hymns during services. Back in the 1950s our music scene was very different.

The people who formed the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia were interested more in discussion than in music. But some longed to sing during Sunday service, and they were persistent. In 1953, almost a year after the Fellowship organized, the members tried group singing for the first time with hymnals borrowed from Tacoma. A newsletter of the time said, "Those with attitudes for or against such a feature in the future are asked to make their feelings known to the program committee." In October the music committee was formed.

In November 1955, the Fellowship voted to continue hymn singing. In 1958 the Worship Committee surveyed folks and found a variety of opinions regarding hymns. For some people, hymns contained archaic concepts and were reminiscent of the traditional churches they sought to leave behind.

The first chair of the Music Committee was Helen Christopher, who died in 2008.

Eventually a piano was loaned to the Fellowship. Later we were given the use of an organ owned by the Metropolitan Community Church, which rented the building. The very sound of the organ caused one member to leave in a huff,

vowing not to return unless the instrument remained tightly closed. (He drifted back anyway.)

In 1993 the Unitarian Universalist Association published *Singing the Living Tradition*, the book we use today. This compilation recast many old hymns and introduced new ones, giving us hymns suitable for the UU perspective.

Professional Leadership

On April 28, 2002, we installed the Rev. Arthur Vaeni in a splendid celebration. Arthur is the first minister we have called for full-time service since our ancestral fellowship began in 1952.

Through the years many ministers visited to deliver sermons. Our own Bill Arensmeyer, once ordained as a Methodist minister, filled the pulpit for a number of months. In 1978 the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia took a big step, financially and philosophically, and called the Rev. Roger Otis Kuhrt. He served us one-quarter time, at the same time serving the Tacoma church, until June 1985. Among his sermon titles: "The Yin and the Yang: Moral Decision Making."

In 1986, after a year of lay leadership, we called the Rev. Donna DiSciullo to serve us on a part-time basis. A native of Boston, Donna had an accent that remains as unforgettable as her thought-provoking sermons and her attention to church governance. At the close of three years, Donna moved to Princeton with her husband, a Congregational minister.

The Rev. Sandra Lee became our part-time minister in 1989 and moved to full-time status after several years. A microbiologist by profession, Sandra was inspired to become a UU minister through her involvement in the Kitsap UU Fellowship. Sandra hired Darlene Sarkela as our first paid office staff. With Sandra in the pulpit, our numbers outgrew our space. Her husband Don Bell found creative ways to finance our new land and building.

In 1999, the Rev. Shirley Ranck joined us for a two-year, interim period. Shirley was already well known to us as the author of Cakes for the Queen of Heaven, an investigation into the feminine roots of religion. A clinical psychologist in her former life and an "interim minister" by choice, Shirley was able to help us come together as a community and articulate the qualities we wanted in our next minister. Which brought us Arthur!

Summertime – When the Living Was Easy

In the Fellowship days, summer was a quiet time for our community. The doors were shut. Services and religious education classes were suspended. Committees and the Board of Trustees generally took a long hiatus.

In 1953, a year after its formation, the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia began a tradition of holding a summer picnic. The early picnics were clam bakes at Barnacle Beach, the home of Alison and Frank Mathews. In 1957, 89 people attended according to the astonished *Unitariana* editor.

In 1961 the picnic relocated to land on Springer Lake owned by five Unitarian families, including that of OUUC member Phil Vandeman, who died in 2009. The tradition continued into the 1970s when that land was sold. Then for a number of years Virginia Saibel hosted the picnics at her home on Hewitt Lake. After Virginia's illness and death, the Unitarian community lost its annual swimming *cum* picnic event.

In the ensuing years, picnics were held at Tolmie State Park, Tumwater Historical Park, and the home of member Mary Jane (Dexter) Allison, now deceased. Sometimes we had three picnics, one for each summer month. Sadly, during a few summers we missed having any.

In 2002, our 50th anniversary year, we were invited to party at the farm of Lois Chowen and David Hare in the Independence Valley near Rochester. There they had a number of intriguing out buildings, a lovely home, flourishing gardens, and a variety of animals. Lois and David had hosted events for us a couple of times in the early 1990's. What better way to honor "Tradition!" than to reinstitute a summer picnic!

Bringing Sweetness of the Past into the Present

For many years we held a strawberry festival in June. You might think it was just another excuse to consume a favorite treat while being jostled by friends. You're partly right. It was also a way to remember the earliest Unitarian presence in Olympia, 141 years ago.

In 1871, the American Unitarian Association sent a minister-at-large to the Pacific Northwest. The Rev. John Kimball established his headquarters in Olympia, Washington Territory. *The Washington Standard*, local paper of the day, regularly announced his sermon topics. An early one explored the Unitarian idea of salvation, taking up the question, "What is it we are saved from?"

In April 1872, the First Unitarian Society of Olympia became a member of the national association. That summer, the church hosted a social event. Strawberries, shortcake and lemonade were served “by the hands of beautiful ladies,” the newspaper reported.

That early church grew and prospered until an economic panic in 1893. Within a few years the group was forced to sell its imposing building at 9th and Franklin streets. The strawberry festival might have been lost to memory except for the diligent research of Gladys Burns, a founder of our Fellowship.

In 1972, 20 years after its formation, the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia revived the strawberry festival. And it has been celebrated periodically ever since. Some years we’ve gone to the fields to pick the berries. Some years we’ve purchased flats. When the season has been late, we’ve even bought frozen berries and thawed them. Whatever our means, we recreate an event with meaning, fusing the past with the present.

Money Matters

Financially speaking, life was simple in the early days of our parent organization, the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia (UFO). With no property or staff – or hymnals – the main expense was renting a meeting room. Even our newsletter, the *Unitariana*, was a minor expense.

From the first, though, the Fellowship gave some thought to raising money. The founding bylaws of 1952 established \$1.00 as the membership fee. (In 1956 the bylaws were revised to require \$1.00 “from active members.”) In addition to pledges for the Fellowship, people were asked to contribute to the United Unitarian Appeal and the Unitarian Service Committee. In 1953, the Fellowship’s budget was \$539, with \$103 earmarked for the United Unitarian Appeal.

By 1955 the budget had more than doubled, to \$1300. That amount included an allocation of \$100 toward the expenses of a member to attend the Pacific Coast Unitarian Council in Alameda, CA. That year also saw the formation of a Fellowship Finance Committee chaired by Herb Legg.

By 1963 the budget had crept up to \$2000, with the lion’s share going to rental of the Olympia Women’s Clubhouse. Some members professed to be developing “an edifice complex,” and the group began to look seriously at buying property.

Even after UFO bought the little white church at 2nd and B in Tumwater, costs remained relatively low for a number of years; the building had been purchased outright and the group was lay-led. It wasn't until we called a quarter-time minister that costs increased significantly. Our budget 30 years ago was \$16,842.

In the 1980s we actually brought in an expert in church fund raising to teach us how to think about money and commitment. Historically, Unitarians haven't liked to talk about money, and so for many of us this was a difficult transition. In 2001 we established a Fund Raising Committee to orchestrate year-round events as well as the annual canvass for pledges.

By 2002, our 50th anniversary, we had two buildings on adjoining land, a minister, church administrator, director of religious education, music director, custodian, and a multiplicity of programs. Our annual budget was \$247,000. As people who value Unitarian Universalist principles, we have had to learn that money helps us actualize our values.

Subsequently we built a wing for religious education, retained a part-time bookkeeper and a part-time volunteer coordinator, and boosted our religious education director to full time.

Today our annual budget is on the order of \$450,000, and we are embarking on a \$1.3 million expansion of our sanctuary.

Those Who Are Seen and Heard

While the primary focus was on adults, religious education (RE) for children was a concern right from the start for the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia in 1952. An active cadre of committed adults – not just parents – ensured a continuing RE program for children.

The historic “first” RE chair was Gladys “Mrs. Bartlett” Burns, one of the founders of the Fellowship. Gladys traveled out of state to curriculum workshops and was responsible for introducing the materials of Sophia Lyons Fahs to the Fellowship. These materials were the backbone of the children's classes for many years, not just in Olympia but throughout the Unitarian movement.

The expectation of an enrollment fee was established early. In 1958 the cost was \$1.00 per family. Today the suggested donation is \$40 per child and is intended to cover a portion of the RE cost. Debate over whether to charge a registration

fee or to fully fund the RE program from the general revenues of the church arises periodically.

The children's Christmas program became an annual affair very early in the life of the Fellowship. The 1955 performance was "How the Christ Child Got His Birthday" and was directed by Helen Christopher. The ambitious nature of these programs is evident from the titles – for example, the 1965 performance was "A Medieval Christmas," directed by Pat Holm and Dorothy Punderson.

The number and combination of classes have undergone many changes. In 1956 the fellowship offered four classes: nursery and kindergarten; 1 and 2; 3 and 4; and 5 through 7. In the face of fluctuating enrollments, space constraints and inconsistent adult participation, other configurations have been tried. In 1965, children 3rd grade and up were divided into interest groups on art, drama and nature. In the 1980s, we experimented with short field trips one Sunday each month, visiting local parks and nature trails.

In 1993 we moved to our current building on East End Street. With RE enrollment soaring, we at last recognized the need for paid professional leadership and hired our first RE Director, Penny Sodhi (now Chatfield). She and Mary Ann Thompson, who followed in 1994, were both quarter time. In 1996, the position was expanded to half time and filled by Andy Bartels for three years. Peggy Olsen-Missildine took the reins for a year in 1999, and in 2000, Steven Hendricks succeeded her. He was followed by Sierra-Marie (Gerety) Gerfao. Since 2008 Sara Lewis has served as fulltime director, overseeing programs for about 120 children from infants through high school in age.

Retreats

To the woods!" hisses the villain. "No, no, no," whimpers the fair damsel in the old vaudeville skits. The answer of Unitarians has always been, "Yes, yes, yes, to the woods!" For our church community, a favorite way to build community has been through retreats.

In our early days, the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia (UFO) did not sponsor its own retreats but participated in events put on by others. The August 1962 *Unitariana* advertised a family camp out at Black Mountain Boy Scout Camp near Bellingham. It was described as "a new venture for the Unitarians who have enough stamina to combine convocations and conversation with KP." Cost for five days of campsite and two group meals was \$25 per family.

More rustic adventures became available in 1966 when the Northwest Wilderness Society, an associate of the Pacific Northwest District, opened a 160-acre wilderness camp on the shores of Kootenay Lake in British Columbia. UFO founders Bart and Gladys Burns were among those who traveled the many miles to the camp nestled between the Selkirk and Purcell mountain ranges. The camp is accessible only by boat; the last leg of the trip begins when aspirants signal the camp director. In early years newcomers waved an orange tarp to request pick up. Today, the boat comes to the pickup point at specified times – except in the case of bad weather or unless pre-arrangement by unreliable cell phone coverage. (If stranded, you are instructed to pitch a tent and wait until the next day.)

Eventually the local Unitarian community began planning and holding its own retreats. At first these were billed as “family” retreats, but they were really all-church events and were held at such sites as Fort Worden, Seabeck, Panhandle Camp, and Camp Solomon Schechter. Despite their popularity, it was difficult to generate the energy for organizing them on an annual basis. By contrast, women’s retreats, initiated by former member Gretchen Meyer at Gwinwood in 1993, became firmly established at once and have happened annually ever since.

In 2001 the first of several annual all-church retreats was held at Camp Seymour and was a resounding success. The momentum has continued but with a change of venue; given families’ busy schedules, the event is now held at nearby Millersylvania State Park on Black Lake, with camping optional. The all-church retreat has become an integral part of our church community. To the woods!

Social Activism

In the early 1950s, Pat Guerin delivered a talk titled “Loyalty Oaths and Our Security Program” to the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia (UFO). It was the McCarthy era, and the concerns of Pat and other UFO members were eerily similar to those of today.

Public expressions of conscience are integral to Unitarian Universalism. From the earliest days, our members and friends have actively sought to create a better world in a variety of ways. And since 9-11 Rev. Arthur Vaeni has shared his concerns about the erosion of civil liberties in the name of national security in the pulpit and in columns in *The Olympian*.

Early on, a dearth of local mental health services was a major issue for members of the Fellowship. They didn’t just worry, they acted. The *Unitariana* of May 1958 reported that the Thurston County Mental Health Association “has an

almost embarrassing number of Unitarians among its leaders, with Harry Parmalee as President, Jeanette Witcher as Vice-President, and Gladys Burns, Jean Ross, Warren Winslow, Bonnie Hansen, and Buck Harmon as Board Members.”

UFO member Alison Mathews co-chaired the successful candidacy of Pearl Wanamaker for Superintendent of Public Instruction in 1956. Other UFOers on the campaign steering committee were Phil Vandeman and Herb Legg. Herb was elected to the post of Olympia Commissioner of Public Works the same year. Alison later ran unsuccessfully for our state House of Representatives. The public’s loss was Unitarianism’s gain, however, because she put her energy into leadership positions in the Northwest District and national Unitarian organization.

Other early UFO members held significant positions related to their professional fields. Two were Maurice “Buck” Harmon, who in 1961 became president of the National Association of Training Schools and Juvenile Offenders; and Dr. Barney Bucove, who in 1964 was elected president of the Association of State and Territorial Health Officers.

In the late 1960s and 1970s, the Fellowship was involved in draft counseling and Native American rights, among many other causes. Within recent years our local church has taken on issues of hunger, homelessness, racism, economic globalization, homophobia, marriage equality, and more. Our denomination takes positions on pressing issues and through lobbyists is a moral and ethical presence at the United Nations and the U.S. Congress. On the world stage and at home, the tradition of involvement continues.

“Unitariana” Through the Years

The early newsletters of the Unitarian Fellowship of Olympia (UFO) were typed manually on onionskin interleaved with carbon paper. Eventually, UFO founders Bart and Gladys Burns purchased a mimeograph machine. They donated it to the YMCA with the agreement that UFO could bring in paper and print the newsletter there.

Darlene Sarkela, church administrator, started working for OUUC in 1991. At that time she shared a tiny office with the minister. The single computer was used primarily for preparing the Sunday order of service, and copies were made downtown at Olympia Copy Printing Center.

The move to the new building on East End Street in 1993 brought separate offices for the minister and church administrator. It also brought a copy machine and a new computer. The order of service and newsletter could now be duplicated in the church office.

In recent years, the church has encouraged digital subscriptions. As a consequence, colors and more photos have been added. The publication is more web friendly (e.g., articles only one page vs. continuing on another page as in print). Live web links are added whenever possible.

In a bow to privacy concerns, personal phone numbers and addresses have been eliminated, with email contact the only way to reach individuals.

Editor Linda Crabtree says our congregation is very tech savvy. "The next iteration of the newsletter is pending. I don't know what it will look like yet but stay tuned."

And More Changes in Technology

For many years, bookkeeping was done on paper by a volunteer treasurer. After the move to the new building on East End Street in 1993, bookkeeping was computerized. Church data was now managed by a program specifically created for church management, Church Windows. Eventually, the onerous chore of bookkeeping was separated from the board position of Treasurer, and a part-time specialist hired to keep the books. We had become a big business, with multiple accounts and detail to manage.

The new sanctuary included a sound system with devices to assist the hearing impaired.

Our website was created in 1995. (OUUC was the first church to list a website address in the *Olympian* advertisement!)

2005 brought more email communication with the creation of googlegroups - email groups that were used to send messages to the congregation or to groups created for specific committees or efforts, such as Caring Friends.

"This Week at OUUC" started in 2007. The building expansion brought more upgrades in technology - a new multi-line phone system with individual mailboxes for staff, electronic door locks with key cards, a video monitor in the Commons, and two computers at the visitor's kiosk.

Recent years have brought the following: an online calendar; online photo directory; podcast of the sermons on the website; online forms to sign up for classes, retreats and events; an online payment page; a smartphone payment page app; improved weekly announcements and newsletter emails (with the majority of people receiving the newsletter by email); many members receiving giving statements by email; a Facebook page; and a cloud version of our church management software (making it available to multiple users, and at any location).

And Looking to the Future in 2012

Imagine the astonishment of the Rev. John Kimball, should our 1871 pioneer Unitarian minister arrive in Olympia today. In his capacity of “minister at large” for the Pacific Northwest, he was dependent on his horse and slow postal service to reach his congregants. He could have benefited from today’s technological advances.

Changes in technology will continue to delight the proficient and confound the Luddites among us. Eventually, all of the forms we use may be interactive – thus able to be completed online. With scan-able membership cards, people could sign up for classes and events. A more responsive membership database would allow us more easily to track visitors, new and old members, make name tags, and give us a better feel for our demographics.

The high finance demands of our annual auction have driven some of our advances in technology. On the wish list is a web-based auction program developed by another UU church. Features include the ability for people to enter their own items, access their invoices, see who else is going to an event, and create a calendar of events. It also automatically emails the donor and participants when the date of an event is approaching. It even saves data from year to year.

The future will bring the installation of security cameras (already purchased). It will also bring OUUC online access to neighborhood groups (for carpooling, disaster preparedness and socializing) and an OUUC smartphone app. Both of these are in the planning stage. And who knows? We may eventually have UU satellite locations via which we could broadcast the worship service in real time over the internet to satellite groups in Aberdeen or Chehalis! We have left the horse and buggy days far behind.

Capturing and Honoring Our History

In 1981 the Pacific Northwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association undertook a project to document the district's history. Gladys Burns, one of our Olympia church's founding members and an early president of the district board, led the effort.

The project grew and grew and consumed the next nine years of her life. The result was the publication in 1991 of OUR STORIES: A 25 Year History of the Pacific Northwest District of the Unitarian Universalist Association 1962-1987. I immediately bought a copy, took it home, and, well, put it away. Our church's 50th anniversary as a continuous society in Olympia prompted me to pick it up again. I'm pleased to say that in 2002 I at last read this fascinating history.

The 249-page book is superbly organized. Section I is a year-by-year chronology. Each year begins with significant continental events (until 2002 we were a Canada - US organization) providing a social and political context for our denomination's activities. But the real "life" is in the taped conversations with district leaders. The leaders revealed not only the challenges and accomplishments of their time in office but also something of their spiritual journeys.

Section II is a history of the district committees and associates, such as the Women and Religion Committee on which Diana Larsen-Mills and I served. And Section III explores the Pacific Coast connections with the continental organization starting in 1850.

A look at the credits reminds me that our members Jeanette Whitcher, Joe Joy and Diana assisted Gladys in producing the book, too.

In her preface, Gladys wrote: "OUR STORIES is our gift to our present day readers and a legacy to other historians who we hope, twenty-five years beyond our 1987 stopping point, will be motivated to write the story of our second twenty-five years." Folks, that's the year 2012, this year! History is being made with every passing minute.

OUR STORIES gives an excellent district and denominational context to our church's growth and development. Other valuable sources are our boxes of board notes, orders of service, *Unitariana* newsletters, and other miscellaneous records. I made a foray into their dusty contents, but admit much more information can be mined in their depths.

OUUC's 60th anniversary is an opportunity to become more resolute about capturing and telling our local church's history. Do we need a committee, some specific policies, a trained records manager? I hope we will find a way as an organization to become more mindful about our history, for the benefit of our successors at home and in the district.

Emily Ray
2012