



Changing Our Name from First UU Church to First UU Congregation

Good morning-- My name is Marion Holt, and I have served as a member of this congregation for over 44 years. For today's mini-history I would like to tell you the history of our most recent name change, from The First Unitarian Universalist **CHURCH** of Ann Arbor to The First Unitarian Universalist **CONGREGATION** of Ann Arbor, a change that took place in 2005.

This was not the first time our congregation changed our name. In 1865 we started out as the First Congregational Unitarian Society. Then for a long time we were the First Unitarian Church. Then the Fellowship of Liberal Religion, then back to Unitarian Church again and in the 1960s we embraced the merging of the Unitarian and Universalist faiths by becoming the First Unitarian **Universalist** Church of Ann Arbor.

In 1998 a small group of congregants, myself, Emmett Bowen and Amy Broman met to discuss our concerns about our name including the word **church**. We felt that the word **church** was not faithful to our current culture and rituals.

We felt that most people think of "church" as a specifically Christian organization. In our congregation, we don't declare Jesus as our savior. Our faith embraces people from many religious backgrounds and is more concerned about the ethical life in the here and now.

Our group felt that the word "church" served as a barrier, inhibiting people who were from secular, Jewish or other religious backgrounds from joining us. The word **Congregation**, a group of like minded individuals, seemed more appropriate.

We set out to bring the issue to the whole congregation.

Small discussion groups were scheduled and opinions shared. The name change was brought up for a vote at the January 1999 congregational meeting. The Board President, Lucy Bauman noted our many name changes in the past. A lively discussion ensued and many comments were recorded at that meeting: 9 spoke for making the name change, 3 spoke against. One member from a Jewish background told how it involved mental gymnastics to be a member of a "**church**" given the historic persecution of Jews by Christians. Some disagreed and thought the change was unnecessary. Some felt those wanting the change were being over-sensitive.

One member suggested that a super majority -- $2/3^{\text{rd}}$ of those voting -- should be required for such an overarching change. We all agreed that a super majority would be necessary. The proposal went up for vote and did not pass. The name remained "**Church**".

Still, many in the congregation felt the word "church" served as a barrier to people who would otherwise feel at home with our Unitarian Universalist principles. We kept the discussion going for six years.

In 2005 the issue was brought up for another vote at a Congregational Meeting. Again a super majority was required, but this time the vote was more than $2/3$ in favor of the name change. Our legal name became **The First Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Ann Arbor**. Those of us who worked for the name change hope we took a step toward helping **everyone** feel welcome here. This change would comply with our principles which include welcoming all and making everyone feel included.

Presented by Marion Holt, November 30, 2014