



UUAA Religious Education Programs

I begin with a quote from our minister from 1878-1898, Rev. Jabez Sunderland:

“First the Sunday school. We are quite too apt to think of Sunday school work as of slight value. But as a fact, our Sunday school work throughout all these years has been as important as the work of our public schools, with the aim in view not only of cultivating the religious nature of the children, but also with the aim of giving to them systematic instruction in the Bible, its stories, its biographies, its history, and its ethical and religious teachings.”

After World War II, membership in the First Unitarian Church increased dramatically. Parents, wanting a progressive religious education for their children, joined the church to find that they as well as their children had an opportunity to freely explore their personal beliefs and to share with others in community social action.

By 1948 there were 70 children in 8 classes and an adult study group. The lessons were based less on the Judeo-Christian tradition and more on the natural sciences, in order to give children a growing and creative religious life and to develop a sense of wonder and a questioning mind.

By 1963 there were almost 500 children and youth enrolled in the program, and there was a “waiting list”! Imagine that, A “double session” of classes was established.

In the 1970s, The RE committee began a revision of the curriculum, which was found to be lagging behind the liberal front, particularly as regard to female roles in society. Many books were outdated and material was repetitious of the public school education.

The annual report in 1971 indicated the need for an “Energy Room” for the children who wanted to be “more active.” [I particularly enjoyed reading this as I vividly remember some of the specific children that needed this space!]

In 1972 the Beacon course on Human Sexuality was presented for the first time. The course was controversial and not totally accepted by some parents at first, but the quality of the program and its value soon became evident.

By 1980 space was becoming a serious issue for the congregation, and particularly for the RE program. After extensive planning, the property on Ann Arbor Saline Road was purchased, the congregation built this building

and made the move in 1999. But, as finances were very tight it was necessary initially to acquire portable classrooms for the religious education program. Even with inadequate facilities, the program continued to grow and flourish.

- There was an active RE Committee.
- They were beginning the planning for the Coming of Age Program.
- Adult Forums took place regularly, and
- There was a new summer RE program

Everyone recognized the importance of resolving the issue of inadequate RE space, even though finances were extremely tight.

Therefore, in 2003 the Congregation made the decision to move ahead with the building of the RE Wing. A Capital Campaign Pledge Drive was initiated and 348 pledges produced \$1.8 million dollars. A line of credit was established to provide the remaining funds necessary.

Extensive planning went into the design for the new facility. Finally, the religious education program would have adequate space that met its needs and enhanced the experience for our children and youth.

This move is unquestionably the most important step UUAA has ever made in support of our religious education program.

The program has thrived and grown beyond our dreams and now has extensive opportunities for adults in addition to a thriving program at both services from nursery through senior high children and youth

This year we have 319 registered and there are more than 145 adult congregants assisting the six professional staff we now employ.

I close with the words of William Ellery Channing:

“The great end in religious education is not to stamp our minds upon the young, but to stir up our own. Not to give them a definite amount of knowledge, but to inspire a fervent love of truth. The great end is to awaken the soul, to excite and cherish spiritual life.

As we celebrate the 150th anniversary of this congregation, we can be proud of the religious education we now have at UUAA.

Mini-History, 11/16/2014 presented by Gretchen Jackson