

Mini-History on the Gaede Years



Returning Draft Cards

The Rev. ~~Erwin A. Gaede~~ accepts the draft cards of six of the seven young men who turned them in last night. From left to right, they are: Jay Callahan, Michael J.

~~THE DEC 5 1967~~
Bedamo, Leonard Scallio, Arnie Bauchner, James A. Mason and David L. Duboff. Rabbi Harold S. White (in background, second from left) looks on.

Unitarians Support Impeaching

~~MAR 20 1974~~
A resolution calling for the impeachment of President Nixon has been passed unanimously by the Ann Arbor First Unitarian Church's Board of Trustees.

Rev. Gaede 'Won't Resign'

~~MON MAR 30 1970~~



My name is Eric Ericksen. My parents brought me to this church in 1961. I was 10 years old.

I have been a member of this congregation since I was 18. At this point in time, I have been around UUAA for over 50 years, fully one-third of our history. I am honored to speak about Dr. Erwin Gaede, who served as this congregation's minister for the 18 years from 1962 to 1980.

Besides my own memories, we are fortunate to have other sources about Erv. There are other living, active members who were close to Erv, there are newspaper articles about him from those times. You can also read Marge Reade's *History of our UU Church-the First One Hundred Years*, full of details, some painful to recall, of this period in our UU history.

My personal connection to Dr. Gaede was strong. In the late 60's, I was an active member of our UU high school group. Our group listened to his anti-war reasoning, and many of us agreed with his anti-war opinion. To avoid the draft, I applied for conscientious objector status, for which Dr. Gaede wrote the necessary letter of support to the draft board.

Dr Erwin Gaede's years of service to our congregation were during a wild and turbulent time of strong divisions in opinions over the Vietnam War and Civil Rights unrest. Dr. Gaede was not a man to keep his opinions to himself and frequently showed up in the Ann Arbor News standing on the side of peace and working for human dignity.

Dr. Gaede was vigorously opposed to the war in Vietnam, at a time when many local citizens had never yet considered the Viet Nam war as unnecessary, brutal and inhumane. Dr. Gaede counseled conscientious objectors and had a weekly radio

program on Friday mornings, speaking on current affairs, airing his anti-war sentiments.

And then, there was the matter of this peace symbol (*to be hung on podium front*). Dr Gaede was handy with tools, and he made a wood version of the peace symbol, painted it day-glo pink, and boldly displayed it on the front of his home on Dartmoor Drive. It was hard to miss when driving by on adjacent Liberty Street. Both the symbol and the hard-to-miss color were new to Ann Arbor in the 60's, loved by my student generation, and thought of as somehow subversive and anti-American by the established generation. And that peace symbol permanently hung on his home, persisting in its traffic-stopping glory, to remind us all, that peace-on-earth is an everlasting value, and worth working to keep.

While working with young draft resisters, Dr. Gaede found a cause that the whole congregation joined in to support. The local sheriff, Doug Harvey, was notorious for his severity in arresting and imprisoning draft protesters. Once, when Dr. Gaede was visiting a jailed draft resistor on Christmas Eve, he discovered the "incurable cell", a tiny, concrete windowless box within the jail where Harvey liked to keep long-haired, rebellious youth until they mended their ways. The whole congregation came together to protest, collecting several hundred signatures on petitions and writing letters to newspapers.

The congregation placed an ad in the Ann Arbor News calling attention to the illegality of the incurable cell. A great crowd came to hear Sheriff Harvey when he actually accepted an invitation to speak at our church on his philosophy of penology. An investigator from the Office of State Prisons met with our Social Action Committee, assured them that the cell was illegal, and that Sheriff Harvey had been ordered to close it, which shortly thereafter, he reluctantly did. Fortunately, Harvey was defeated in the next election and Gaede moved on to other battles.

In this same time period, our Sunday pulpit was literally taken over by, a bold, black man, fire in his eyes, who strode to the pulpit just as Dr. Gaede was beginning his sermon. Gaede, with the congregants consent, gave up the pulpit. Our co-chair of the 150th anniversary committee, Sandy Simon, has revealed to me that this very day was her first ever to attend UUAA. Surprise, surprise! Just another day in the activist 60's.

Although our church was the first, this same man, Charles Thomas, went to other Ann Arbor churches in the following weeks to deliver his 'Black Manifesto,' demanding money for clothes for children on welfare and for more economic opportunities for Blacks. Responding to his demands, the Social Action committee pledged support and joined in a community political action that resulted in the formation of BEDL-WRO (Black Economic Development League-Welfare Rights Organization) that brought about positive results in both welfare and support and economic opportunity. Another result of Thomas' stirring up the churches of Ann Arbor was the creation of the Interfaith Council of Congregations, which is today's Interfaith Council for Peace. Our church made a \$5000 donation to the cause.

There is a lot more to the Erwin Gaede story than can fit in a mini-history. Erwin Gaede's time with this congregation was eventful, productive and at times quite divisive. When he and his wife Marge Gaede retired and moved to Arizona, the newspaper headline read "Friends of Peace leaving Ann Arbor"... Except, they left something behind. When Dr. Gaede finally removed this peace symbol (*hold up newspaper photo of him removing it*) it left its mark in the wood stain beneath it--a perfect sun-shadow peace symbol on his home, until years later, the new owner painted the house! It looked something like this (*remove pink peace symbol, revealing brown cardboard peace symbol behind*).



Transfer of the Peace Symbol from Erv Gaede's house to Eric Ericksen in October, 1988.

Presented by Eric Ericksen, January 4, 2015