

Who Are We?

A mini-history of today's congregation presented 4/12/2015

by Sandy Simon and Terry Madden

(Sandy)

On September 28th we launched our year of learning about and reflecting on our 150 year history. At that first 'Our Story' service I presented the first mini-history. It gave the setting for our founding in 1865, back when Ann Arbor was a dusty, dirt road pioneer town and our congregation was a small group of community minded liberals struggling with the aftermath of the Civil War. It was a time when the American Unitarian Association very wisely saw the great potential of establishing a missionary program to reach out and "mold the minds of the future leaders of the American West" who were enrolling in great numbers at the country's largest university, the University of Michigan.

There have been 26 mini-histories presented since September 28th, and 4 more terrific ones still to come. Each one has given us a wonderful glimpse into some piece our history.

It is now time to shift our conversation.

If you drove here on Ellsworth Road today, you know that Ann Arbor still does have dusty, rutted roads, but we are NOT people who ride horse drawn carriages to church. University students no longer mob our church library on Sundays to have Rev Gail or Rev Mark teach them about Copernicus, Darwin and Ralph Waldo Emerson; they have Wikipedia for that. We no longer have our own family-named pews here, although some of us sit in the same place every week anyway.

The Big Question now is--- Who are we TODAY? And what have we learned about ourselves in the last 197 days?

(Terry)

Who are we? What have we learned about ourselves?

Today's setting for the next chapter of Our Story is not a small church in a pioneer town, but a relatively large congregation in a large world well connected by freeways, airlines and the Internet. What do we look like?

“Visitors to our church immediately see the outward symbols that speak to who we are: the rainbow flag of welcome to people of all gender identities flies from our entryway; Some people refer to our 90 foot tall wind turbine as our steeple; A rotating solar panel stands in the prairie grass in front of the church, collecting renewable solar energy; In back of the church there are walking trails, a colorful children's playground and a memorial garden.”

And let’s read some of the things **OTHER people** say about us. Here are quotes from letters of congratulations that are posted on our 150th web site:

Quote

Reader 1st service

Reader 2nd service

#1 Partner Church

Phyllis Valentine

Gretchen Jackson

The minister of our partner church in Transylvania wrote to us in Hungarian (!)- reflecting on his visits to Ann Arbor. Loosely translated he says:

“I found that the community is living a reality that many people only speak of, dream of and plan. You truly have a community of faith, service, love, tolerance, inclusion, universal human values and safekeeping.”

#2 Mayor Proclamation

Ken Clein

Ken Clein

A proclamation signed by the mayor of Ann Arbor says that we have

“Made monumental contributions to the Ann Arbor community.... and have profoundly stood the test of time.... “

#3 Jim Toy Center

Leigh Robertson

Roberta Allen

Jim Toy from Ann Arbor’s Jim Toy Center says

“First UU Church has for more than four decades prayerfully and wholeheartedly supported and advocated for the human and civil rights of intersex, transgender, bisexual, lesbian, gay and queer people and our allies. I can't adequately express my gratitude to all of you for these forty-and-more years and for your 150 years of work for human dignity and justice!”

#4 Interfaith Power & Light

Don Winsor

Dave Friedrichs

Michigan Interfaith Power and Light calls us

“... a beacon for renewable energy use and promotion.”

#5 Alpha House

Angela Barber

Pat Herbst

Our friends at Alpha House say our congregation

“has ...been a committed leader and advocate to our mission in providing services and support for children and families experiencing homelessness in Washtenaw County.”

#6 Habitat for Humanity

Mike Muha

Barb Pickett

And Habitat for Humanity Huron Valley adds that we have shown

“... Dedication to our organization and affordable home-ownership in our community for over 15 years... our board is incredibly grateful for the deep love you show in this tangible outpouring of service.”

#7 Food Gatherers

Cathy Muha

Colleen Crawley

Food Gatherers recounts:

“[Your] members have volunteered to prepare and serve meals to the homeless ever since we opened the Community Kitchen in the Delonis Center in 2003

Members of the Mindful Eating Coalition have worked with Farmer Bill Schmid to plant, tend, harvest and donate nearly 9,000 pounds of fresh produce for Food Gatherers.

We've enjoyed the energy and spirit of youth from the Coming of Age groups who have volunteered in the bitter cold to collect donations at Rockin' for the Hungry

...”

And Rev. Bill Schulz, President of the UU Service Committee says we are a

“...vibrant, path breaking congregation...”

(Terry)

“... a vibrant, path breaking congregation”

During this our 150th anniversary year, if we have listened to the many Stories that have been recounted, the stories that have been carefully selected and crafted, we should have a better understanding and appreciation of Who We Have Been.

Today we begin thinking and preparing **for writing the next chapter of Our Story**, our Story of **Who We Are Today** as well as identifying **the core of our “Who We Are identity”** that we want to carry forward into the future.

Today marks the day on our UUAA 150th Anniversary calendar that we make the shift from looking backwards to engaging in a conversation with eyes and hearts wide open so that we can choose a direction worthy of a ***vibrant, path breaking congregation.***

(Sandy)

Today, following second service in the Fahs Chapel, you are all invited to take part in a conversation with Reverend Gail about the vision for the next chapter of this congregation’s history.

This conversation will also prepare us for a wonderful opportunity coming up on Saturday, May 16th when UU innovators from around the country will be here for a panel discussion on new directions for the UU movement and where we fit into that.

We now know a lot more about who we are. And today we start deciding just how OUR STORY is to be continued...