



ABOUT THE UU CHURCH OF CHARLOTTE
UCC HISTORY

Early Beginnings

Ruth Teeter was an inquisitive and open-minded woman, a traveler and great patron of the arts, who would become our catalyst. Long interested in comparative religion, Ruth felt that with Unitarianism she had finally found what she had been seeking—an inclusive, non-dogmatic denomination for her family. Ruth sought out other open minded individuals in the area, and soon 25 interested families were assembled. This fledgling group petitioned the American Unitarian headquarters in Boston for help in forming a congregation. With the help of Rev. Lon Ray Call, the Unitarian Society of Charlotte was formed in 1946. On November 16, 1947, the Unitarian Church of Charlotte was formally established with 82 members. This was the first Unitarian church in North Carolina. Rev. John Morgan served as the first minister 1948-51. The early congregation met in various homes and places, the most memorable of which was the uptown Broadway Theater.

The 1950's

The congregation continued to grow, numbering around 140 in 1950. In 1951, the church built and moved into its first permanent home on East Blvd where it remained until 1965. Rev. Edward Cahill served our church from 1951-57. In their search for a new minister, the church found a young, articulate professor and Unitarian lay preacher in Lynchburg, VA. Dr. Sidney Freeman was called to serve in 1957, beginning what would become a 32-year tenure at this church. Dr. Freeman served during an era of unprecedented social and political turmoil nationally, and, within the church, a time of growth and change.

The 1960's

With membership growth and an increased need for space, the congregation decided to explore new locations. In 1962, it purchased the present site on Sharon Amity and began a building fund drive. On January 31, 1965, the 230-member congregation dedicated its new two-story home and adopted the flaming chalice as its symbol. Dr. Freeman and members of the congregation were active in the civil rights movement of the 60's, participating in sit-ins and protests for equal rights and the desegregation of local hospitals and public schools. Dr. Freeman also counseled conscientious objectors during the divisive Vietnam era. In 1966, the church established the Open Door School, a secular, integrated pre-school program at a time when there were no public kindergartens and the private ones were both sectarian and segregated. This was the first of its kind in the city of Charlotte and remains a model pre-school today. Crowded conditions in Religious Education required the construction in 1968 of a one-story wing. In 1969 the church received our fine organ, the gift of an anonymous donor.



The 1970's

In 1972, with membership near 400, a second floor was added to the RE wing. After growing steadily to about 450 members in 1974, the congregation remained at about this size for the rest of the decade. Minister Sid Freeman, together with Temple Beth El's rabbi, co-founded Charlotte's Interfaith Thanksgiving Service in 1975. While Mecklenburg Ministries now leads the organizing of this event, our ministers still play an active role in this service which takes place the Wednesday before Thanksgiving and draws over 1000 people annually.

The 1980's

Membership grew rapidly again, and in 1982 the congregation began planning another wing with large sanctuary, offices, and meeting rooms. This structure was completed in 1984. When a congregation reaches a certain size, our association encourages the formation of another congregation. In 1986 planning began for a new church in northeast Charlotte. In December 1987 a "birthing service" was held for the new Piedmont Unitarian Universalist Church. In 1989, after 32 years of service, Rev. Dr. Sid Freeman retired and was named Minister Emeritus. Membership was about 630. Rev. John Gilbert served as interim minister during the search for a successor.

The 1990's

Rev. Dr. Douglas Reisner began his service as minister in 1990. In 1993, the congregation formally honored the Universalist part of our heritage by changing our name to Unitarian Universalist Church of Charlotte. The 90's were a period of fiscal consciousness and long-range planning for the church. In 1997 active membership stood at about 600 with Religious Education enrollment of 275 children and youth. Also this year, our long dreamed of Memorial Garden was dedicated. 1999 was a year of transition to two services and two RE sessions. Major repairs to the building were made, and the staff offices were equipped with a computer network. Also in the 90s, the UUCC supported and housed Time Out Youth, an organization for GLBT (Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual and Transgender) adolescents.

The 2000's

In 2000 the UUCC voted to become a Welcoming Congregation, a rigorous process for congregations within our denomination to become intentionally welcoming to GLBT people. In 2001, Rev. Dr. Reisner retired and was named Minister Emeritus. During the minister search and transition process, Rev. Dr. Janet Newman served as interim minister from 2002-2003. Rev. James "Jay" Leach accepted our call and began as minister in August 2003. In 2006 our Board revised our mission statement and crafted our new "Ends Statements" to which we aspire. In 2007 a comprehensive four-year Envisioning Plan was developed by the Board and Coordinating Team. In 2007, we initiated a new approach to Social Justice which aims to focus our efforts on making a significant difference in one area of need in our community. In 2008 we began the process of finding a second minister.