

Celebrating 75 Years of UUC

On May 31, 1951, fifteen people gathered in Clearwater to begin a fellowship with the blessing of the UUA. They envisioned a place grounded in “love of freedom of thought and expression, and the opportunity to express it, and a desire for truth, wherever its discovery may lead us.”

They had no building and very little money, so they rented space as the small group began to grow. In 1957, Rev. Frank Smith — labeled a heretic by the Lutherans because of his liberal sermons — was called as the congregation’s first minister.

As membership increased, the congregation voted to build what is now our social hall, financed by a \$30,000 loan. The building was dedicated in 1963 and featured a “Tower of Light” proclaiming UUC as “The Liberal Church of the Free Spirit.”

The years that followed brought both growth and challenge. UUC experienced controversial ministries, breakaway groups, financial struggles, and spirited debates over worship leadership and social causes. Yet from the beginning — and continuing today — social justice has remained a powerful force in the congregation’s mission. During the 1960s and 1970s, members wrestled deeply with issues of justice and conscience, conversations that often placed strain on the congregation but also shaped its identity.

In 1984, our present sanctuary, the Octagon, was dedicated. Dr. Whitehead later reminisced about entering it for the first time:

“As someone gradually raised the lights, we experienced the glorious amber glow of the cedar wood and the true orange-colored oak pews. Original artworks enhanced the ambiance of this marvelous church.”

A major milestone came in 1999, when the mortgage was finally paid off.

That same year, Rev. Abhi Janamanchi was called as UUC’s minister. During his tenure, the congregation grew significantly. After his departure for a ministry in Maryland, attendance declined, and the COVID epidemic in 2020 created additional challenges. However, the congregation responded creatively by implementing Zoom services and meetings, helping the community remain connected and resilient.

In 2022, Rev. Amy Kindred joined UUC as developmental minister. Since then, the congregation has grown once again and now enjoys a balanced budget.

Many important stories and details of our history are not included here, but the orange booklet containing a more complete history of UUC can be found online in the membership section of our website.

Now, we celebrate 75 years of community, courage, and free spirit.

Join us this Sunday as we celebrate together!

— Judy Toth