



**The History of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church Volume 3  
1990 - 1999**

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

<b>Chapter One: Ministry</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>The Reverend Jan Vickery Knost 1990-1994</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Dr. Frank Schulman Named Minister Emeritus</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Return of Minister Interns</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>The Reverend Jan Vickery Knost 1994-1997</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>Interim Minister William Leggett, Summer 1997</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Interim Minister David B. Parke, 1997-1999</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>The Reverends Rebecca and Mark Edmiston-Lange</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Chapter Two: Other Staff Changes</b>	<b>12</b>
<b>Chapter Three: Life Span Religious Education</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Youth Program</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Adult Education</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Chapter Four: Beyond Our Walls</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Denominational Affairs, Partner Church and Chalice Lighters</b>	<b>22</b>
<b>Local UU Activities: Membership, Houston Network and Public Relations,</b>	<b>25</b>
<b>New Congregations</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Community Service: Established Programs, New Programs</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Adopt-a-Teacher, Children of Chernobyl, Refugees from Kosovo</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>The Outreach Board</b>	<b>35</b>
<b>Chapter Five: Facilities, Governance and Finances</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Facilities</b>	<b>37</b>
<b>Governance</b>	<b>38</b>
<b>Finances</b>	<b>39</b>
<b>Chapter Six: Social Organizations</b>	<b>43</b>
<b>Board of Trustees 1990-1999</b>	<b>45</b>

## Chapter One: Ministry

### Reverend Jan Vickery Knost, 1990-1994

January 1990 began with Arthur Jellis completing his interim ministry at Emerson Unitarian Church. In February 1990 the Reverend Jan V. Knost arrived as the new settled minister. At the time this appeared to complete the transition from the 25 year ministry of Dr. Frank Schulman to a less centralized form in which lay leadership would play a more prominent role. In the long run this would prove largely true, but the process was far more protracted and difficult than anyone anticipated, culminating in another change in ministry.

In September 1989 the Search Committee, after nearly 1 ½ years of work considering 30 candidates, had unanimously voted to present the Reverend Jan V. Knost of San Antonio, Texas, to the congregation, which in turn voted to call him by over 97%. Since Reverend Knost had not considered a change in settlement until we approached him, he needed time to prepare his San Antonio congregation for his departure. This delayed the announcement of his selection until late October, and Candidating Week was held in early November. The impact on the fall canvass drive was unavoidable but nevertheless significant. At the January 1990 Annual Meeting Treasurer Gary Knutsen presented an austerity budget with no salary increases or program funding except minimal RE expenditures. Still, there was a sense of optimism as the congregation looked forward to Reverend Knost's arrival in mid-February.

Meanwhile, much attention and affection were lavished on Interim Minister Arthur Jellis and his wife Marion in gratitude for all their services under what to us were unfamiliar circumstances. Arthur had decided to retire from the ministry for health reasons. His last Board meeting was January 9, and they departed for their home in New Hampshire in February leaving behind many new friends in Houston. They returned for a visit in early November 1992, and Arthur preached at the November 1 service.

The Reverend Jan Knost began his Emerson ministry in mid-February, 1990. His wife Lorna and two youngest daughters, Jana and Amy, remained in San Antonio to complete the school year. Later that summer the Knost family settled in the Copperfield subdivision in northwest Houston.

In early 1990 neighborhood group meetings in members' homes were organized by zip code to help Jan meet the congregation. He announced a contest to name his minister's column for *The Emersonian*. The winning entry was "An Altar'd State." In May the Board approved his proposed Pastoral Assistants program, initially under the leadership of Dorothy Rice, and later Frances Dunagan and Harrie Swinford, which has continued in one form or another ever since. Reverend Knost's installation service was set for September 30, 1990 at 8 pm. Those attending included the Reverend Robert Schaibly of First Unitarian Universalist Church Houston, the Reverend Don Vaughn-Foerster of Northwoods Unitarian Universalist Church, Dr. Leonora Montgomery of Bay Area Unitarian Universalist Church, the Reverend William D. Mains of the Unitarian Fellowship in College Station, Dr. Dwight Brown, Southwest District Executive, and Dr. John Wolf of All Souls Unitarian Universalist Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma. Two of Reverend Knost's long time friends, the

Reverend Alan Deal from Portland, Oregon, and the Reverend Brandoch Lovely from Pasadena, California also attended. First Church Minister Emeritus Horace Westwood gave the Charge to the Minister, and the Reverend Laurel Hallman of First Unitarian Universalist Church Dallas gave the Charge to the Congregation. LRY President Chris Williams presented greetings from Emerson's youth, and Councilwoman Eleanor Tinsley represented the City of Houston. Rabbi Marc Brownstein of the Congregation for Reformed Judaism welcomed Reverend Knost on behalf of Houston area clergy, and Ms. Kathleen Hunter presented greetings from Canadian UU churches.

Jan promoted greater involvement with the wider community, locally and abroad as well as in the UUA. In June 1990 Emerson hosted a meeting and reception for Jun Yamamoto, son of the Chief Priest of Tsubaki Grand Shrine of Tokyo. Yamamoto and Hitoshi Iwasaki were named honorary Emerson members. October 1990 saw Emerson's first participation in the Crop Walk, a Church World Service program which raises money for hunger programs here and elsewhere. Emerson had more walkers and raised more money than any other denomination represented, and Jan was asked to serve as opening ceremonies coordinator for the 1991 Crop Walk, and emcee for the 1992 walk.

In November Jan urged the Board to join the UUA's Sister Church program (later renamed Partner Church), which matches Romanian Unitarian churches with American congregations to help our Transylvanian co-religionists recover from decades of Communist repression. Emerson joined the program in December 1990, and has developed a close relationship with the congregation at Gregory St Niklos in Transylvania.

At the December Board meeting Reverend Knost's Minister's Report described the founding of the Houston Interfaith Clergy Fellowship. Also, with the Board's approval he was beginning the process of obtaining a student intern, something that had not been done in over ten years. He further noted that there was some interest in starting a new congregation on the west side of Houston.

In his Minister's Report for the Annual Meeting of January 1992, Jan stated that he has "tried to support the wish that the congregation had in taking more responsibility for the day to day running of the church upon itself" while he would concentrate on "raising the congregation's visibility in the greater community of Houston." The October 1993 Board meeting raised the first discussion of a sabbatical for Jan, proposing a four month sabbatical in 1995 or 1996, following what had become standard UUA practice. In November 1993 former minister Horace Westwood and his wife Virginia were honored guests at Emerson's Founder's Day celebration. That Sunday Horace preached on "The Expectant Faith of Founders." At the budget meeting in November, Jan submitted a letter stressing the need for an associate minister, and also requested an intern to focus on youth ministry.

## **The Congregation names Dr. Frank Schulman Minister Emeritus**

In October 1991 the Council of Past Presidents requested that the Board recommend to the congregation that former minister Frank Schulman, now in Horsham, England and associated with Manchester College of Oxford University, be designated Emerson's Minister Emeritus. The congregation voted its overwhelming approval, and Frank was so named when he returned to Emerson's pulpit on December 15. During the summer of 1993, *The Emersonian* featured several "Notes From Across the Pond" columns keeping members informed about Frank's activities in England and his observations. When the Schulmans returned to Texas in December 1995 he made several visits to Emerson. He also accompanied Jan Knost to Transylvania in 1994, the two personally delivering our gifts and cash collected for our partner church since there had been recurring problems delivering such aid by other means. In the February 23, 1997 *Emersonian* it was announced that Frank had a new book coming out: *Blasphemous and Wicked: The Unitarian Struggle for Equality 1813-1844* on a difficult period in English Unitarian history. When long-time member Bill Roberts died in November 1998, he and Jan Knost jointly conducted the memorial service.

## **Minister Interns Return to Emerson Church**

In September 1992 Kathleen Ellis, from the Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University, became our first minister intern since 1979. She was ordained in March 1993 and was eventually settled first at the Waco church and later at the College Station church. Jan Knost delivered the sermon at her installation in Waco in February 1994.

Our next intern was Lucy Ijams, who graduated from the Andover Newton School of Theology in June 1994 and started her internship at Emerson in September. She was formerly a chaplain at the Doolittle Home in Foxborough, Massachusetts, a student minister at the First Universalist Society of Franklin, Massachusetts and had worked with the Central Maine Agency on Aging. Her first sermon was on The Children's Sabbath, October 16. In her first column in *The Emersonian* she said she would serve as co-adviser of the LRY and was interested in youth religious education, administration and management, and extension and growth. In late 1997 she was installed as minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden, Connecticut.

Arrangements for an intern in 1995 fell through, and in May 1996 Ann Fox was selected to begin her internship in September 1996. She had just finished her first year at the Boston University School of Theology. In her first *Emersonian* column she identified her goals as getting the new Befrienders program started, and working with Adult Education focusing on spirituality.

Ann would play a crucial role during her time with us when Reverend Knost fell ill in mid-November. In her *Emersonian* column for December 1 she expressed her appreciation to Jan for insisting that she accompany him to the Prairie Group conference (he had a 2-for-1 ticket on Southwest Airlines), and to the congregation for their support of both Jan and herself. Other

columns followed, helping to keep the congregation informed. The Reverend Leonora Montgomery took over as Ann's mentor until Jan recovered.

In January 1997 a robe was purchased for Ann. In May she announced that over the summer she would be doing her Clinical Pastoral Education unit at Southwest Memorial Hospital before returning to Boston to continue her studies at Boston University. The Board expressed its gratitude for her help and paid her a bonus for work "above and beyond." In a letter to the congregation included in the July 25 *Emersonian*, Ann said she was "overwhelmed" by the Board's gift that would pay for most of her next year's studies. In addition she said that Jan Knost helped her get a part-time internship at First and Second Church of Boston. She was very grateful to the church and sorry to leave.

To our surprise and delight, she returned to serve Emerson in the summer of 1998. In March 1998 an anonymous donor offered funds for Ann to return as summer minister June 15-August 15 during Interim Minister David Parke's summer break. She preached on three Sundays in July, and also hosted 3 evening discussions centered on Bill Moyers' PBS series "Healing and the Mind." In her last *Emersonian* column August 16, she said she was going back to Boston for her last year of seminary and would then seek preliminary fellowship. The Partner Church Committee hosted a "Farewell Ann/Welcome Back David" party on August 14. Ann described her visit to Transylvania the previous May as part of a 15-member group from First and Second Church of Boston. On June 13, 1999, she was ordained at First and Second Church in Boston with Karen and Dick Mullineaux in attendance.

### **The Reverend Jan Vickery Knost 1994-1997**

There is little indication in the written records of when an undercurrent of discontent first arose, but it simmered in the background, building steadily. On the surface things continued much as before. Early in January 1994 Jan had one of his occasional "talk-back" sermons, in which he would provide an opportunity for members of the congregation to express their views, especially when the topic was controversial or potentially polarizing, such as abortion. This time the topic was Stephen Carter's book *The Culture of Disbelief*. Another such occasion followed in April after a sermon on the nature of prayer. In May 1994 Emerson hosted the Foundation for Contemporary Theology conference. Both Jan Knost and Emerson member Laura Agrons (now Emerson) served on the Foundation's Board. A non-smoking Alcoholics Anonymous group had been formed in the spring of 1993; by September 1994 it was averaging 30 attendees per weekly meeting. As mentioned earlier, in September Jan and Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman journeyed to Romania to personally deliver gifts and cash to our partner church. The Parish Assistants were making hospital calls and visiting shut-ins and nursing home residents.

At the July 1994 Board meeting the Council of Past Presidents "strongly recommended" that we hire an associate minister. At the next Board meeting the Ad Hoc Committee on Growth and Ministry Planning endorsed the Council's recommendation, and added that we also should proceed

with Phase II of the building plan. Chair Ken Vincent said we should call an associate minister by September 1995, and recommended starting a Search Committee. No decision was made.

In his President's Report at the Annual Meeting January 1995, Bill Hammons referred to beginning the process of calling an associate minister, but at the January Board meeting the associate minister proposal was postponed. On a lighter note, new President Jill Rose organized a "Jan Knost Sort-of Centennial" roast and toast event, centered around Jan's 60<sup>th</sup> birthday, his 35<sup>th</sup> year in ministry, and 5<sup>th</sup> year at Emerson, with a Chinese New Year lunch provided by Sze-Foo and Constance Chien. In February the church hosted a concert of the sacred music of Tibet, with the proceeds split between Emerson and the Drepung Loesching monastery in India, thus following up on Jan's Minister's Report for the Annual Meeting stressing the importance of Emerson Church "institutionalizing religious freedom." In April the church welcomed the minister of our Transylvanian partner church, Gregory St. Niklos, Domokos Simen and his wife Evae to Houston. The Reverend Simen preached at the April 2 service with the help of a translator.

In February 1995 Jill formed a Task Force to study the associate minister issue. In the April 2 issue of *The Emersonian*, the "Splinters from the Board" column by Trustee Tim Lawrence indicated that the Board was considering hiring a full-time business administrator and full-time DRE as well as an associate minister. In May the Board approved the formation of an Ad Hoc Committee for calling an associate minister. In the October 1 *Emersonian* the Nominating Committee presented a slate for a Search Committee and the Board said there was a line item in the budget for this purpose. But the canvass drive fell short and at the November 13 budget meeting the sinking fund for an associate minister was dropped. There was no mention of the proposal in the call for the 1996 Annual Meeting and the matter was tabled again.

Meanwhile a congregational survey was performed in late September 1995 yielding what both President Jill Rose and Jan Knost, in their joint report for the Annual Meeting in January 1996, described as strongly positive (over 70%) in most categories, though strongly negative (by 60%) in public relations. They also stated that for the first time the budget for 1996 included Emerson's full Fair Share to the UUA Program Fund, which had unanimous congregational support at the November budget meeting. The Council of Past Presidents' report for the same Annual Meeting asked the Board to consider four items: retiring the church mortgage in May, possible building plans, the hiring of an associate minister and plans for Jan Knost's sabbatical.

In January 1996 Jan began a sermon series on controversial historical figures and their religious context, including Paul of Tarsus, Simone Weil, Frank Lloyd Wright, George Washington, Abraham Lincoln and Edward Elgar. In his report to the Board that same month he announced that a bronze flaming chalice was being created for the church by Emerson member Mary Ann Stockton. It was to be 25" tall and 44" wide and would use Sterno-type fuel. The cost would be about \$800, plus extra for a mahogany plinth on which it would be placed. Eventually more than enough money was collected to cover these additions. He also asked the Board's authorization to form a Twelve-step Alcoholics Anonymous group at the church provided it was consistent with our rules and criteria.

In February he began a support group for divorced people and called for more volunteers to support RE's two-hour Sunday morning program. Later that spring his column referred to his Life

Crisis file, one of the first projects of his ministry, and urged people to make wills and join the Houston Memorial Society. He favored the church's adoption of the Befrienders ministry in June 30, and in September this became a major project for intern Ann Fox. By May the new chalice was being engraved with the names of the donors and it was announced that it would be used at the General Assembly's Service of the Living Tradition in June. In August Jan recommended that RE develop a child protection policy.

Meanwhile the background discontent grew more serious as the congregation was becoming increasingly polarized over issues centered on ministry. In an attempt to promote a positive outlook, at the April Board meeting President Carole Huelbig and Jan jointly presented an Emerson Development Proposal and the hiring of an outside consultant to strengthen intra-staff and member relationships. After researching several options the Board hired the Albans Institute as the outside consultant. In the April 28 issue of *The Emersonian* Carole took over Jan's column on the subject of moving forward, saying that the Board and the Minister were trying to develop a church vision and identity. Several "Dialogue with the Board" features in *The Emersonian* followed throughout the summer as Trustees and other members aired their views.

That September Terry Foland of the Alban Institute began interviewing a total of 135 members of the congregation, and Jan urged everyone to take part. Small discussion groups followed with Carole encouraging members to participate and trust the process. Trustee Tim Lawrence said that the Board should emphasize that this is a positive way to discover direction for the church and that it was being "done at the suggestion of the pastor and the leadership of the church." Nevertheless, financial support for the church, both in terms of current programs and future plans, was showing signs of erosion.

The Albans Institute compiled surveys, comments and feedback from small discussion groups in their evaluation of church relationships and goals. A summary of the report was printed in the October 27 issue of *The Emersonian*. Among the points made, many people saw the need for an associate minister. The summary carefully pointed out that when asked what is lacking in the relationship between the minister and the congregation, "a significant number of people are satisfied and happy," but it was also clear that an equally significant fraction faulted ministerial leadership in several aspects. Others identified needs such as improved communication or "sufficient church staff to do the job". The summary further noted that "a substantial number of people made strong statements of support for the minister", "across the board support", citing his enthusiasm and compassion. Finally, the summary noted that Emerson Church, with nearly 500 members, was moving from a "pastoral" church to a "program" church. Jan Knost reported that he received "an inordinate amount of support" following the results of the survey. Nonetheless, the relationship between the minister and key church members deteriorated sharply, even as other members staunchly defended him. Issues that had simmered in the background now burst into the open.

In November 1996 the Council of Past Presidents, chaired by immediate Past President Jill Rose, sent an open letter to the congregation via *The Emersonian* referring to the survey's distinction between pastoral and program churches and stating that the survey supported their contention that we needed an associate minister. They pointed out that "Emerson Unitarian Church has had a



membership hovering around 500 members for the past 15 years. That time frame has included three ministers with three very different styles...suggest(ing) that the characteristics of the minister are not the primary reason for our not moving beyond the 500 member barrier." They proposed calling an associate minister "immediately" for a three-year term that could be extended by mutual agreement. Initial funding would come from the Endowment, with full funding for the first year and gradually reducing that share by 1/3 each year. Any extension beyond three years would be fully supported by the congregation. The Council announced they would hold open meetings after church on November 10 and 17 to discuss this proposal.

At the November 18 Board meeting Jill Rose again pressed the Council of Past Presidents' recommendation of hiring an associate minister. The Board accepted "in principle" but deferred action until the leadership issues were resolved. Instead a 9-member panel was appointed to renegotiate the partnership agreement between the congregation and Jan Knost. Three members of the panel were to be his supporters, three opposed, and three neutral.

In late November Jan required emergency surgery while out of town at the Prairie Group conference in Alton, Illinois. Writing in *The Emersonian* for December 1 both intern Ann Fox and President Carole Huelbig reassured the congregation, saying that the first priority "was to make sure that he was well cared for." Then, while Ann coordinated pastoral needs with the Parish Assistants, the Befrienders and other area UU clergy, Leonora Montgomery took over as her temporary mentor.

At the December 16 Board meeting the leadership recommendation (presumably the 9-member panel) was postponed until Jan had recovered sufficiently to participate. Once again Jill asked the Board to consider "in more detail" the Council's recommendation of hiring an associate minister, but the Board repeated its previous decision.

Jan was out of the hospital by Christmas, but then re-hospitalized in January for a life-threatening complication. A series of speakers for Sunday worship was arranged by the Worship Committee with the help of other area UU clergy. The church leadership continued to try to keep the situation under control. At the Annual Meeting in January 1997 Ramon Williams, Chair of the Committee on Ministry, declared that the "church-wide trauma prompted by the Foland report dramatically influenced efforts to 'minister to the minister.' Jan's equanimity and grace in that difficult time were gratifying and ought to be applauded by the congregation." Meanwhile at the January meeting the Board decided to call on the UUA Department of Ministry to assist in negotiations instead of the 9-member panel. Jan returned to the pulpit February 16, and in March he helped Will Irwin launch an 8-week series on John Buehrens' book *Understanding the Bible* for Adult Education.

With Jan's health a continuing issue, by mid-March a retirement package had been negotiated and unanimously backed by the Council of Past Presidents. Jan announced his resignation in his *Emersonian* column dated March 16, citing his continuing health problems and the need for the church to move forward. The details were communicated to the congregation in a letter from the Board, which was appended to the March 17 Board minutes along with the Council of Past Presidents' report. Jan would retire March 31, 1997, with March 30 (Easter Sunday) to be his last

day in the pulpit. The Board would continue paying his monthly package until March 31, 1999. On April 1, 1999, a lump sum payment would be made to cover a 7-month sabbatical, due under the terms of his original agreement. The total came to \$219,325 and would be paid from the Endowment (now standing over \$1 million). A congregational meeting to vote on the retirement package was called for April 6 with informational meetings planned ahead of the vote. The congregation was reminded that according to the Bylaws a quorum of 10% of those who had been members for at least 90 days was required. No need to worry about that--President Gene Lambirth reported an amazing turnout of 200 for the meeting.

The retirement package was presented at the meeting by President Gene Lambirth on behalf of the Board and with the strong endorsement of the Council of Past Presidents. In light of recent events the Board withdrew the recommendation to employ an associate minister in favor of a study of overall staffing needs. They further noted that Emerson was becoming a strong program church that needed two ministers to work as a team, that both should be funded from the operating budget supported by the congregation, and that expectations needed to be clear and complete.

Andrew and Polly Delaney hosted a retirement party for Jan and Lorna Knost at the Briar Club on May 16 attended by 150 Emersonians. All four of the Knost children were also present. A few days later Jan had more follow-up surgery that seemed successful at first, but additional setbacks resulted in a slow recovery. He eventually regained his health to the point that he was able to serve a few years as an interim minister in Florida and New Mexico before retiring to Rhode Island in 2002.

The seven-plus years of Jan Knost's ministry can be considered as among the most turbulent and the most dynamic in Emerson's history. Recalling his statement in the 1992 Annual Report that he aimed to honor the congregation's wishes for greater autonomy and increase the church's visibility, it was perhaps inevitable that various groups and interests would start pulling in different directions. But the record shows that much was accomplished during this time due to his leadership or his support of others' ideas:

- Emerson became an Honor Congregation in 1996, paying our full Fair Share to the UUA Program Fund, a goal long sought by the Denominational Affairs Committee.
- He encouraged both the Community Services Committee and Outreach Board, and instigated or strongly advocated participation in such wider-community programs as the Crop Walk, Private Sector Initiative and Alcoholics Anonymous.
- He led the successful resumption of our minister internship program.
- In December 1990 Emerson joined the UUA's new program to assist Romanian Unitarian congregations emerging from decades of Communist repression, later known as Partner Church.
- The development of the Pastoral Assistants and Befrienders programs gave the congregation wider involvement in the pastoral aspects of ministry.
- He strongly supported RE's two-hour Sunday morning program, urged development of a child protection policy and supported multi-track Adult Education programs.

Another consideration is the fact that despite 3 years of advocacy by the Council of Past Presidents an associate minister was never engaged. During the last four years of Dr. Frank Schulman's ministry he had the assistance of Leonora Montgomery, first as Parish Assistant and later as Associate Minister. Jan Knost's ministry saw a significant expansion of church activities, programs and membership. In addition he supervised three ministerial interns in four years. By the end of Jan Knost's ministry Emerson Church was a very different place, having been stretched in new directions.

#### **Interim Ministry: Reverend William Leggett, Summer 1997**

Following Reverend Knost's resignation in March 1997, the Board began considering a summer interim minister to serve a couple of months until a longer-term interim arrived in September. Upon the recommendation of Southwest District Representative Dr. James Brown, the Reverend Bill Leggett was chosen, who had just finished his internship at First Unitarian Church/Dallas. With one more semester to go at Meadville-Lombard, he had already been approved by the UUA Ministerial Fellowship Committee. In his first *Emersonian* column June 8, Bill stated that he is drawn to the pastoral aspects of ministry. Bill was a big success during his two months at Emerson. As a gay man he had been warned about Emerson's reputed homophobia, a subject he addressed forthrightly in his final sermon August 31. Instead, he found himself warmly welcomed. He said that the reports he had heard simply weren't true and that he had enjoyed his time with us. The congregation, for its part, respected his long-standing relationship with his partner Steve Gilbert and greatly appreciated his calming presence following several months of turmoil.

By September the Board was receiving letters from Emerson members urging that we short-cut the UUA's resettlement process and engage Bill as the new permanent minister. The Board held an open breakfast meeting before church October 12 to give everyone a chance to speak, but considered it best to use the full two-year process. Following a second meeting after church October 19 the Board agreed to ask the UUA's Ministerial Fellowship Committee for a waiver of Rule 11 of its settlement procedure that would allow Emerson Church to include Bill on its list of candidates, a request that was denied in March 1998. Bill was ordained at his home church in Newberry, South Carolina on June 14, 1998 with Emerson members Will and Jo Irwin in attendance. He received preliminary fellowship at General Assembly in Rochester, New York later that month. The following year he was called to the ministry in Portland, Maine

#### **Interim Ministry: Reverend David B. Parke, 1997-1999**

At the April 1997 Board meeting President Gene Lambirth informed the Trustees that he had made a formal request to the UUA for an interim minister to start in September. Settlement Representative Marjorie Montgomery was to meet with the congregation on May 25 to explain the next steps. The Selection Committee, composed of representatives of the Committee on Ministry,

Worship, RE and the Council of Past Presidents plus others recommended David B. Parke, a former editor of *UU World* and also of *Kairos*, an independent liberal religious quarterly. Having just finished an interim ministry in Ithaca New York, he began his ministry here on September 1, 1997, with a contract for one year plus an option for a second. David attended his first Board meeting July 21. In his first column for *The Emersonian* (September 21), he mentioned attending the inauguration of the Center for Theological Studies at Christ Church Cathedral. The Reverend Bob Schaibly of First Unitarian Universalist Church hosted a social gathering of area UU clergy at his apartment to greet him. Reverend Parke said he was glad to be in an area with eight congregations. In a series of columns he said he was interested in process theology, the biblical basis of faith, and humanism

In September David recommended restructuring the Personnel Committee, which had consisted of the President, Past President and Vice President, to include church members skilled and experienced in human resources, personnel and conflict management. The Board found merit in this suggestion and by the January Board meeting the change had been completed. Later in the year the "Wheel of Life" feature was added to *The Emersonian*.

A Minister Search Committee was elected at a congregational meeting November 2, 1997. *The Emersonian* for November 2/9 included a letter from David Parke and Gene Lambirth. The Committee put together another survey to help define the congregation's wishes and expectations of the next minister. In his Minister's Report at the 1998 Annual Meeting, David endorsed the Outreach Board's goal to increase the congregation's participation in outreach programs to 50% by the year 2000. He noted that the transition from a pastoral church to a program church is continuing and said that we need either an associate minister or a "membership and program coordinator" who need not be ordained.

At President Betsy Gelb's suggestion, in February 1998 David began a "small group reflection" on sermon topics. These were held in his study on Sunday evenings at 7 pm a week before the sermon was to be delivered. About the same time he announced that Family Worship, long an RE feature, would take place in the sanctuary on Sunday mornings from 9 to 9:30. In the February 15/22 *Emersonian* his column noted that planned contributions for 1998 topped \$293,000, a new record, but there were too many empty pews on Sunday mornings. At the February Board meeting Reverend Parke's contract was renewed for another year.

In March 1998 David began exploring the idea of a prison ministry. He had been corresponding with a UU prisoner at the Rosharon unit. David designated paperback books left over from the book sale to be given to the Books For Prisoners program. Unfortunately this effort was blocked by unspecified "red tape", so thanks to Carole Groppe and Bob Hopkins the books were eventually given to the University of Houston for their remedial reading program. David left for the summer on June 15 and Ann Fox returned to provide summer ministry, as mentioned above. He returned on August 14.

In August Will Irwin, Chair of the Minister Search Committee, reported that the Committee was considering a husband/wife team. The Board minutes for October 12 note that a special Board meeting was called for October 15 to meet with the Search Committee. On November 9 the

Search Committee announced that it had reached agreement with candidate co-ministers Rebecca and Mark Edmiston-Lange. But the proposed 1999 budget did not include funding for two ministers, and additional funds were needed if they were to begin serving on August first, the start date we were requesting. A supplemental canvass was planned to follow Candidating Week.

At the January 11, 1999 Board meeting Candidating Week was set for January 23-31, and all members were asked to wear their name tags. Following the service January 31 the congregation voted to call Becky and Mark Edmiston-Lange, and they accepted. At the February 8 Board meeting David said that a special luncheon meeting of the Greater Houston UU Ministers' chapter welcomed them. David Parke's last Sunday with us was June 20. At the service he was presented with a bound volume of his "From the Minister" columns and messages from the congregation. At the June 14 Board meeting he was given a shopping bag of Texas food specialties. In late July numerous Emerson members helped him pack his U-haul truck. *The Emersonian* for July 11/18 has thank-you notes from him and Bruce Power, our departing organist. David said he enjoyed his time with us and the chance to explore a city he knew little about. On September 1<sup>st</sup> he began another interim ministry at First Unitarian Church of Richmond, Virginia.

David's ministry at Emerson can be summed up in his report at the 1999 Annual Meeting. He lauded the church's accomplishments in 1998, including our association with the Foundation for Contemporary Theology, saying that Emerson was emerging as a "center of theological inquiry and discourse." He also listed three disappointments: he had wanted a prison ministry program, had hoped for a coalition of west side congregations to combat homelessness, and had hoped that Emerson would become a major player at Lee High School, where member Paul Belanger was a science teacher.

### **The Reverends Rebecca and Mark Edmiston-Lange**

After two years of interim ministry, the church was ready to welcome Becky and Mark Edmiston-Lange. The Minister Search Committee had been elected November 2, 1997. Over the next two years they considered 25 candidates. In June 1998 Becky and Mark Edmiston-Lange were interviewed by members of the Committee attending General Assembly. As stated above, negotiations proceeded through the next several months and the Edmiston-Langes were named as the Committee's choice in November. Their Candidating Week sermon titles were "The Passion of Faith" and "Come Build a Land" respectively. Immediately after the January 31 service the congregation voted to call Becky and Mark, and they accepted, with a starting date in late August.

A letter to the congregation from the Search Committee included with the January 24 *Emersonian* gave some details. Mark is a graduate of Marlboro College and Andover Newton Theological School. He is a life-long Unitarian and has served several UU churches in Pennsylvania, Ohio and Virginia. He was then interim minister at the Rockville, Maryland church. Becky holds a bachelor's degree from the University of Virginia, a Master's in Divinity from Union Theological Seminary, and a PhD in psychology from Catholic University of America. She had a professional counseling practice for

some years before entering the ministry. She served 12 years at the Accotink UU Church in Burke, Virginia.

The Edmiston-Langes attended their first Board meeting August 16. Homecoming Sunday was set for September 12 and their first "Revels" column appeared in the August 22/29 issue of *The Emersonian*. They thanked all who helped them make the move from the East Coast. Later they said they would place an emphasis on three aspects of ministry: "excellence in worship, institutional health and ministerial presence." Their installation service was set for October 24.

On October 2 the Canvass Committee, chaired by Larry and Carole Huelbig, held the Fellowship Dinner at Regal Ranch. It was an intergenerational affair, with attendees from 92 year-old Rudy Weichert to the newest 2-month-old Emersonian. Several awards were given out to the member who lived closest, farthest, had spent the most years in RE, etc. Anna Louise Bruner, Tim Lawrence and Larry Kelly inducted Mark and Becky into our Texas life style, coaching them on "talking Texan", presenting them with Texas t-shirts and, thanks to Ray Lemmon, a Texas flag that had flown over the state capitol in Austin.

The Installation Service on Sunday October 24 at 7 pm included President Pam Bass, Search Committee Chair Will Irwin, the Reverend Leonora Montgomery, the Reverend Laurel Hallman (First Unitarian Church Dallas), the Reverend Bill Clark (Thoreau), the Reverend Bob Hill (Southwest District Co-Executive), Brenda Mendiola (President of First Unitarian Universalist Church Houston), and Jackie Russell (Houston UU Network). Mark Whitten, the first new member since Mark and Becky arrived, joined Margaret Kaye, representing the longer-term members. Also included were Dr. Bill Murry and the Reverend Marge Corletti, two close friends of the Edmiston-Lange's. As the winter holidays approached Emerson Unitarian Church looked to the future with confidence.

## **Chapter Two: Other Staff Changes**

The changes in office staff during the 1990's were characterized by a gradual shift to more professional management from what had been a total dependence on church members, both paid and volunteer. This shift was mirrored by a greater use of the new technologies of the time as the church offices, records and communications became computerized.

Susanna Painter had been named Operations Manager in 1988 and served until late September 1990, when she became Program Secretary, and Norma Chandler became Operations Manager. Both positions were part time, about 3 days a week. In 1993 the Personnel Committee recommended hiring Ned Stroud as Business Manager, and Norma stayed on one day a week doing the newsletter. This arrangement continued until December 1995, when Bob Watkins was hired as a ¾ time Business Manager. This marked the first time this position was filled by someone outside the congregation, but Bob brought excellent credentials and considerable experience to the task. In 1998 a professional newsletter editor, Jane Nilsson, was added.

Dorothy Rosenberger, hired as Music Director in 1985, continued in that post throughout the 1990's. Dorothy's high profile in Houston's classical music scene brought much attention to Emerson, and our highly regarded musical instruments attracted top-level artists. In mid-March 1990 Dorothy was elected to the Board of Directors of the Houston Harpsichord Society. Shortly thereafter the Society held its Spring Concert at Emerson featuring the famous baroque music quartet from the Oberlin Conservatory. In 1995 she became President of the Harpsichord Society, having just finished two years as President of the Tuesday Musical Club at the Houston Museum of Fine Arts. Dorothy's husband Don was also an immense asset to Emerson's music program, tuning the harpsichord, adding his fine voice to the choir, and quietly taking care of numerous nuts-and-bolts issues behind the scenes. At the September 17, 1995 service they both were honored for ten years' service to the church. A new bench for the harpsichord was dedicated to both of them and numerous other gifts, tangible and otherwise, presented.

In November 1995 Dorothy was interviewed on the local ABC-TV affiliate, Channel 13, by TV personality Alvin Van Black. One Saturday she discussed early music on KUHF radio with Dean Dalton (a member of First Church), and she appeared with Houston City Councilwoman Eleanor Tinsley at various charity events. In 1999 Dorothy was appointed to a six-person National Review Commission to raise the standard of music in UU churches. This body would approve all new anthems and hymns.

Geralda Barker was hired as organist in March 1987 and served until August 1994. Bruce Power, holding a Masters degree from Rice who had studied under Clyde Holloway, succeeded her in early 1995. The following year he and Dorothy Rosenberger attended the UU Musicians Network National Conference held at First Church, at which they found that Emerson's music program was well known in the denomination. From October 1997 through June 1999 Bruce instituted a series of Fourth Sunday Concerts in the sanctuary starting shortly after the conclusion of the worship service. The concerts lasted about 30 minutes and featured a variety of pieces, some of which had been transcribed from other instruments. Bruce served Emerson Church until July 1999, at which time he returned to his home congregation, Christ Church Cathedral. Jason Roberts of Rice's Shepherd School was hired as Bruce's replacement, becoming the fourth Holloway student to serve at Emerson.

In December 1990 RE Director Nancy Slugg announced her resignation after nine years on our staff, seven of them as RE Director. The Board of Trustees hired Edith Catrett as Interim Director while the position was advertised. In June 1991 Edie was hired as permanent RE Director with Laurie Hammons as clerical assistant. By October Laurie was promoted to Assistant RE Director. She made a major contribution toward bringing computer technology to the RE department, studying the 500-page WordPerfect manual and applying that knowledge to RE's mission. Remembering that in pre-Windows 1991 most computers still worked on the more cumbersome DOS system her efforts take on even more significance. Edie worked toward certification by the Liberal Religious Educators Association, with the goal of becoming a Minister of Religious Education through the UUA's independent study program. In 1995 Laurie resigned as Assistant Director and was replaced by Denise Stickle (now Atkerson).

In 1998 Edie resigned, having secured a full-time teaching position. In her six-plus years on our staff she and RE Chair Brittan Fuller developed the two-hour program and got each class involved in community service projects outside the church. She also gained recognition in the wider UU community with her appointment to the Board of Directors of the Southwest Unitarian Universalist Conference in November 1994.

Denise Stickle was hired as Interim Director in June 1998 with a contract for 18 months. Meanwhile the Personnel Committee advertised for a full-time DRE to serve a congregation of 450, and eventually hired Denise as the permanent full-time Director in 1999. In her stint as Assistant Director she had managed the “nuts and bolts” aspects of the program, further upgrading RE’s computer literacy. As Director she hoped to enhance intergenerational bonds and continue the work toward life-span religious education.

After years of relying on volunteers, Reba Assad, a neighbor of Denise Stickle, was hired in June 1998 as Nursery Attendant. That year the church offered the Red Cross Babysitting Class to our youth. Graduates could sign up as child care providers at church functions.

In late 1999 the Child Care Task Force recommended a new child care policy which was later approved by the Board of Trustees. Child care was to be provided one night per week and one Saturday each month, with Wednesday evening and the 3<sup>rd</sup> Saturday being the dates proposed. Reba would be assisted by her daughters Maushami and Rini. This proposal would allow RE parents to join the choir and attend Alice Circle or E-groups. It was suggested that other groups plan meetings at the same time. The church would no longer provide child care on an as-needed basis, though other times could be arranged directly with the child care providers.

Our Sexton, Gerald Moran, hired in 1985, continued throughout the 1990’s and well into the new millennium, making sure that the floors were cleaned and the coffee perking when Sunday morning arrived.

### **Chapter Three: Life Span Religious Education**

The convergence of the adult and youth religious education programs was well underway by the end of the 1980’s. This process would accelerate with the introduction of a two-hour Sunday School program in 1993. The expanded format allowed for more social contact among the Sunday School students, and especially benefited the two youth groups. The adult program also grew enormously since more RE parents could take part. It is fair to say that by the end of the decade life-long religious education was a reality at Emerson Church.



## Youth Program

As before, the Religious Education program for children encompassed classes, worship services, social activities and service projects. The bare-bones budget adopted for 1990 funded only the Director's salary with no provision for other expenses; the same was true for all other committees and church programs. The RE Committee considered and rejected a proposal to charge a registration fee. Instead several fundraisers were held during the year. Even so, it was necessary to rely on previously adopted curricula and materials on hand. The program continued to focus on UU history, Old and New Testament, and, for junior and senior high school, an emphasis on values, decision-making, spirituality and other life issues. Family Worship continued in its established time and manner and so did both youth groups. On a couple of occasions the LRY (senior high) attended films dealing with historically contentious issues such as the war in Viet Nam and the 1960's struggle for civil rights. Such films were followed by discussion with adult members who had been involved in those issues. The Junior Finance Committee continued to choose one recipient each month for the Sunday School collection such as Freed Park, SEARCH, Heifer Project International, the Clara Barton Camp For Diabetic Girls, and the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. During the 1989-1990 church school year they disbursed over \$800 to such causes. RE also continued the Richmond State School project centered on Nancy Ford until new state policies prohibiting those under 18 from taking part and requiring criminal background checks forced us to drop this effort. The Youth Choir continued sporadically, first under Jacquie Roach (1993) and later under Herman Naeseth (1995-6). In late 1998 Kim Nocella was contracted as youth choir director, leading a good performance at Vespers with only four weeks rehearsal time.

The most significant change in the RE program came in March 1993, when the two-hour Sunday School format, developed by Brittan Fuller, was adopted on a trial basis. Classes with the regular curriculum were held at 10 am, with Activity Hour immediately following. This included supervised play/activities for the younger children, and weekly meetings of the Schweitzer Club and LRY. The Committee hoped to generate greater interest in the Sunday School program, especially for families that had to travel a significant distance; increase regular attendance and participation, enhance social contact among our youth and allow RE parents to attend Adult Education classes. Minister Jan Knost gave strong support to the two-hour format, devoting several of his "Altar'd States" newsletter columns to it and urging the congregation's support. An evaluation the following September showed 71% support for the program, with attendance increasing 14% over the same period (Easter to the end of May) than the previous year. Church attendance as a whole was up and the children were included in more services. Youth friendships were strengthened and Adult Education classes averaged 60 attendees per Sunday. By the end of October RE attendance had increased over 31% compared to the same time the previous year.

The new format was somewhat more labor-intensive in that four extra adults, known as "Guardian Angels", were required each Sunday to supervise Activity Hour. All RE parents were expected to help in one way or another four times a year, but Edie stressed that wider congregational support was critical. Initially the corps of Guardian Angels included an average of 2 volunteers per Sunday who had no children in the program. Periodically the pool of willing volunteers dried up, and usually a reminder from Edie or Jan Knost addressed the problem. In May 1997 it was necessary

for the Board of Trustees to ask all members to help four times a year when Edie said they may have to go back to the one-hour format. With the exception of the one-hour Discovery Club summer program the two-hour format has continued from spring 1993 to this writing (2009).

In addition to the Sunday morning program several other classes and activities were offered. The Sexuality Seminar, which combined materials from the UUA, Planned Parenthood and our previously developed curriculum was offered at regular intervals to our junior high group. It covered values and decision-making, dating, risky situations, peer pressure, childbirth and birth control, touch issues, personal safety and AIDS awareness. In late 1999 the RE Committee adopted Our Whole Lives (OWL), the UUA's new curriculum, replacing About Your Sexuality (AYS).

After a lapse of a few years during the transition, Affirmation classes were offered once again to the 8<sup>th</sup>-graders every year. The five-week class was led by the minister and held in his study. Each student was helped to articulate his/her own religious beliefs. At the conclusion of the course the students read their statements at a special church service, and received flaming chalice pins in recognition. In 1998 this program was reworked into Coming of Age (COA) by Denise Stickle and RE Chair Ann Wood. In this new format each student was assigned an adult mentor.

In the spring of 1993 the Scouting programs "Religion in Life" and "Love and Help" were offered to Girl/Boy Scouts and Brownie/Cub Scouts respectively. In 1998 Louise Upshaw-McClenny organized Scout Recognition Sunday, which was to be an annual worship service honoring Scouting. All Scouts, current or former, were urged to wear their uniforms and/or badge sashes for that service.

Discovery Club continued as the one-hour summer Sunday program throughout the 1990's. Topics ranged from just-plain-fun activities to a greater emphasis on new UUA curricula as RE became aware that over the summer many visitors were checking out our program. In 1994 and 1995 the new "We Believe" curriculum was used. In 1996 the topic was "Native American Spirituality", followed by "Tales From Africa" in 1997. In 1998 the Discovery Club was split into two sections based on age; both used the UUA curriculum "In Our Hands" focusing on peace and social justice issues. In 1999 the topic was UU Principles.

Under Edie's leadership the community service component of RE gained greater prominence. The Junior Finance and Helping Hands Committees, each composed of one representative from each Sunday School class, had always had service projects, and the annual Halloween Carnival to raise money for UNICEF (a record \$1800 in 1995) had an equally long history. Starting in 1991 RE put up a "Mitten Tree" every November to collect warm clothes for needy children from Central America attending Benavides Elementary School. Donated items were distributed by Emerson member Anna Wilson, a bilingual kindergarten teacher at that school.

In the spring of 1993 RE worked to increase the Sunday School's involvement in the church's long-standing Mount Vernon United Methodist Church food pantry project, placing shopping bags near classrooms to encourage the children to participate. Also in 1993 both the Schweitzer Club and LRY were encouraged to take part in Emerson's Private Sector Initiative (PSI) project sponsored by the Community Services Committee, in which the homes of elderly and disabled low-income Houstonians were repaired. Late that year the Schweitzer Club painted garbage-can type

containers to collect aluminum soda cans to be recycled; the proceeds from that effort plus a car wash (\$275) went to their service project, the purchase of Christmas toys for the children at the Women's Center. Leading up to Thanksgiving, the Sunday School children collected Turkey Bucks being given out by a couple of grocery store chains, resulting in 220 pounds of turkey donated to the SEARCH homeless center. A large poster of a turkey was placed in the RE patio, with the Turkey Bucks forming his fan of tail feathers. At an outdoor Thanksgiving service RE collected canned goods for the Mount Vernon food pantry. In later years (1997) the children were urged to bring jars of peanut butter and cans of tuna to improve the snacks and lunches of Mount Vernon kids. In 1999 each class competed to see who could collect the most food by weight, reaching over 200 pounds by the end of the school year.

In the spring of 1994 "The Activity Hour Players," a children's drama group, wrote and performed two short skits at Coffee Hour, with the money going to Emersonian Dr. Tom Matney's Adventure Play program at Freed Park. A second project followed in December when RE asked for donations of yarn and knowledgeable volunteers to teach Activity Hour kids to knit or crochet hats for a homeless shelter. A month later this project was modified to make squares to be assembled into an afghan that would be raffled with proceeds going to a homeless shelter.

In the fall of 1995 the 4<sup>th</sup> grade had a Bread Bake Sale during Coffee Hour. The proceeds were used to buy a water oak tree to be planted on our church playground in memory of the victims of the Oklahoma City bombing. A copy of the dedication service and the children's remarks was sent to the First Unitarian Church of Oklahoma City, which lost two members in the blast.

The 1996 project hit closer to home: the second-graders collected money for the Histiocytosis Association to be added to \$1294 already raised by a special collection during the worship service. Brent Adams, the young son of Emerson members Barb and Rick Adams, suffered from this little-known condition and his older sister Hilary was in the second grade class. Three years later the Kids Helping Kids project made clay pots to be sold at a silent auction for the Histiocytosis Association. At the May 23 worship service they presented a check for \$255 to the president of the national organization.

In the spring of 1999 the LRY worked with Urban Harvest to create a community garden in the Fourth Ward for SERVE HOUSTON Day. This project generated so much interest that Urban Harvest agreed to help create an Emerson Church School/YMCA Preschool Shared Garden at Emerson Church as a Family Service project on May 23. By the end of June the garden had herbs, plants to attract butterflies and hummingbirds, and a Beatrix Potter bed. This project helped improve relations with our YMCA tenants and was continued all summer.

Family Worship in the Schweitzer Room continued as established in 1980, a short informal service held before classes began. With the adoption of the two-hour program in the spring of 1993, a change had to be made. Starting in November 1993 the Sunday School students attended the first 15 minutes or so of the regular worship service on the first Sunday of each month before being dismissed to Activity Hour. RE continued to hold their curriculum-based worship services and those centered on seasonal holidays such as Thanksgiving, Christmas/Solstice and Easter. In 1994 Intern Minister Lucy Ijams led an intergenerational service for the annual Children's Sabbath.

With the arrival of Interim Minister David Parke in August 1997, the children's attendance at the worship service was extended to every Sunday for 15 minutes, a format that continues to the present. But several RE families missed the informal, child-centered Family Worship and in January 1998 an attempt was made to revive it. A new Family Worship Committee was formed, with two representatives each from the RE and Worship Committees, plus the Minister and Interim DRE. Minister David Parke announced that an intergenerational worship service would be held in the sanctuary every Sunday from 9 to 9:30 am. In May the service was moved back to the Schweitzer Room, though the children continued to attend the first 15 minutes of the regular worship service. RE petitioned the Board to allow the use of the sanctuary for Family Worship, but as of September 1998 the service was still held in the Schweitzer Room.

As already noted the youth groups blossomed with the introduction of the two-hour Sunday School program. Even before, in the spring of 1990, our LRY went to a lock-in at Bay Area Unitarian Universalist Church for all local LRY/YRUU groups. Both LRY and the Schweitzer Club had outings to Camp Cullen on Lake Livingston, initially in the spring but later moved to autumn to build enthusiasm for the school year ahead. On more than one occasion Camp Cullen staff remarked on the good behavior of our youth and how well they worked together in solving the challenges of the ropes course--much appreciated validation for our program.

In June 1998 the Schweitzer Club was revamped. Sixth-graders were invited to join after attending the first two meetings in August. Those who joined were expected to attend Schweitzer Club meetings every Sunday or attend church services with their parents. Those who chose not to join remained Activity Hour participants subject to all second-hour rules. At the semester break in January these middle-schoolers could reconsider their fall decision.

Throughout the decade the LRY held social events with local UU youth and attended district-wide rallies, hosting several. A rally held at Emerson in 1998 drew 130 participants; the following year the number was 141. In 1998 the LRY gathered on Wednesday evenings for "food and fun"; other area UU teens were welcome. They were also involved with the monthly Youth Worship service at First Unitarian Universalist Church. In the summer of 1998 a Youth Social Action lock-in at the Thoreau congregation resulted in participation in the Galveston Beach Clean-Up Day July 19. In addition, both groups held their established Youth Sunday services once a year and the yearly Youth Follies, which raised money for their programs.

In July 1998 the LRY was invited to a barbecue at Intern Minister Ann Fox's home to hear about her trip to Transylvania, and how their donation of \$600 to the Partner Church Scholarship fund would make a difference. Later the Partner Church Committee thanked the LRY for their donation, which they matched, and said it provided enough funds for room, board and tuition for five high school students in Transylvania. In December the LRY had a gift drive for Gifts for Seniors, delivered to Interfaith Ministries by December 17. The year ended with a Network New Year's Eve party at the Northwoods congregation December 31 through January 2.

In January 1999 both youth groups served as Guardian Angels so that adults could attend Candidating Week services featuring proposed new ministers Mark and Becky Edmiston-Lange. In late November Mark and Becky hosted a Christmas party in their home for the LRY.

PG 13, a support group for parents of teenagers that was founded in 1986, had become a close-knit group of families who continued to meet periodically even though most were becoming empty nesters. Two new parent-support groups were formed: NC-17, which followed the PG 13 format, and the Koala Club, a group for families with babies and toddlers.

### Adult Education

Emerson's Adult Education program continued in much the same manner as it had in the late 1980's, with Sunday morning programs and occasional evening offerings. Some used UUA materials while others were discussion sessions presented or organized by church members.

The popular "Building Your Own Theology" course continued from December 1989. In the spring of 1990 Emersonian Mindy Lawrence organized a Tuesday evening series on hospice care. With the tight finances of that year the Adult Education Committee sold Gold C coupon books to fund their programs. They also held a Friday Night at the Movies fundraiser in June, presenting the film *Advise and Consent* followed by discussion. In April the Committee announced a six-week series, the UUA curriculum "The Haunting Church", in which participants seek to retrieve the positive aspects of previous religious affiliations. In May they began Sunday morning open discussions running concurrently with the Haunting Church program. Named the Adult Education Forum, it would continue throughout the summer. By late fall the group was meeting sporadically, being noted in *The Emersonian* calendar as "some Sundays." The December 9 *Emersonian* featured an article by Reverend Jan Knost on fine-tuning the Forum, including giving Forum topics equal billing with the sermon title.

The 1992 Annual Report lists the following courses offered that year:

- *The Prophethood of All Believers* by James Luther Adams
- Coping and Caring: Mindy Lawrence on hospice care
- Bioethics and Genetics by Krishna Dronamraju
- *Conversations with the Bible*, a Bible study course by Walter Wink of Auburn Theological Seminary for the UUA
- *Testament*: John Romer's PBS series
- A Visit to Heaven and Hell: religious motifs in music, led by Paul Hyde
- *The Power of Myth*: a PBS series by Joseph Campbell and Bill Moyers

The report also states that the Adult Education Committee purchased a TV/VCR with the proceeds of a book sale organized by Norma Chandler.

With the Religious Education Department's adoption of a two-hour children's program in March 1993, Adult Education received a much-needed boost. A two-track format was adopted, with one track focusing on religious or philosophy issues, and the other on family and self-or-community growth topics. Several religious classes, including those studying the church covenant, Jan Knost's

series on UU heretics, becoming a UU parent, and studying the Bible from a liberal perspective, drew over 40 attendees. Average attendance at both tracks doubled from 30 to 60 per Sunday.

The summer of 1993 had Adult Education going full speed. "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven," a UUA curriculum that has been used in women's groups in several main-stream Protestant churches and community colleges, was offered on Tuesday evenings in July with the Bible course continued on Sundays. Emerson member Will Irwin moderated a course on the religious and philosophical roots of the United States Constitution. The summer finished with courses on spirituality and the environment, Bill Moyers' tapes on crisis in democracy, and a two-part program on the Ethics of Everyday Life.

In the fall the Committee again offered "Building Your Own Theology, Part One," this time inviting the high school youth to join the class. Reverend Knost began a series on interpersonal communication and discussed new trends in pastoral counseling. Other fall subjects included overpopulation, creation and evolution, and issues in public education.

In 1994 two new features were added to the Adult Education program: a series of Saturday seminars and a Spiritual Seekers group that met on Wednesday evenings. The two-track Sunday program continued as before. Debby Watters led a seven-week course discussing Steven Covey's book *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Bob Mabry presented a series on canon and sacred writings. With Denominational Affairs, Adult Education presented three sessions on that year's UUA resolutions, addressing problems of environmental justice, a healthy start in life, and urging a halt to arms sales. Joe Watters offered a class on proposed changes to Emerson's constitution. Another four-part series centered on Bishop John Spong's book *Rescuing the Bible From Fundamentalism*. Adult Education also repeated the "Parents as Resident Theologians" course as a means to help all UU adults articulate religious beliefs.

The two-track program continued over the summer with courses addressing sustainable development, "parenting your parents," family law, global warming and care of the soul. Fall courses included a two-part session on proposed legislation to protect the religious rights of Native Americans under the First Amendment and discussion of a proposal for a new west-side UU congregation. According to the Annual Report, attendance that year averaged 60 a week and sometimes surpassed 100. In November 1994 Edith Naparst led a Saturday seminar on relationships, and Sandra Nichols led one on the Celestine Prophecy.

The same pattern of two-track Adult Education courses each Sunday on a wide variety of topics, presented by Emerson members and outside speakers continued throughout 1995. Some sessions were devoted to important congregational issues such as the building project, the need for an associate minister, and the possibility of purchasing what was then a vacant lot to our north. Occasional Saturday workshops and evening sessions also continued.

In January 1996 RE Director Edie Catrett led the first of six sessions entitled "Parents as Social Justice Educators," a follow-up to the "Parents as Resident Theologians" course. In February the Committee hosted the award-winning debate team from Texas Southern University on the issue of bilingual education. The Committee also established the First Friday Film Nite at which films on

relevant political or social issues were viewed and discussed. The first film was *The Panama Deception*, a documentary on U.S. policy in Panama during the Reagan-Bush years. Other films in the series included *Anatomy of a Murder*, *Lost in America* and *Inherit the Wind*.

The arrival of Interim Minister David Parke in August 1997 brought a Tuesday evening series on UU themes, "Affirming the Future", led by Reverend Parke. A new two-part class on process theology was offered. The usual two-track Sunday courses continued. A Spiritual Explorers group met on alternate Thursday evenings, led by two Emerson members, Janet Berzins and Denise Harrison. Summer Interim Minister Ann Fox held evening discussions on the Bill Moyers series shown on PBS, "Healing and the Mind." David Parke and Ashley Kress launched a theological discussion group.

In January 1999 religion professor, former Baptist minister and new Emerson member Mark Whitten began a seven part series on "Encounters with World Religions" based on Thuston Smith's book *World Religions*. Other topics included a debate on child advocacy by Emerson Church, and a discussion on breast cancer led by radiologist and former LRY member Dr. Clark Sitton. In late 1999 the Adult Education Committee presented, in three sessions, the videotaped interview of Emerson member and Holocaust survivor Eva Haufrect for Steven Spielberg's *Survivors of the Shoah* project. Dr. Haufrect described her experiences as Jew in Nazi Germany during World War II and answered questions.

As the foregoing illustrates, the congregation of Emerson Church not only holds wide-spread interests but believes that all aspects of life are worthy of consideration from a religious point of view.

#### **Chapter Four: Beyond Our Walls**

During the 1990's Emerson Church continued a trend begun in the mid-80's of increasing involvement with the denomination, both locally and nationally, and with the wider community. Attendance at General Assembly and involvement with other denominational programs slowly increased along with our monetary contribution to the UUA Annual Program Fund. Participation in Southwest District events continued and the Houston UU Network met monthly to share ideas, resources, and solutions to problems. The most significant denominational local efforts led to the creation of three new congregations.

The Community Service Committee continued previous projects: the Mount Vernon Food Pantry, quarterly blood drives and assistance to the mentally ill at Pyramid House. Other groups also performed community service projects such as RE's UNICEF Carnival and Richmond State School efforts, and the Women's Alliance's work with the Houston Women's Center and the Blalock Nursing Home. More stringent privacy rules and protection policies eventually forced us to drop the nursing home and state school projects, but many others were added. By the end of the century Emerson was heavily involved in additional hunger programs, indigent home repair, medical center

hospitality and recreation/after-school programs in low income neighborhoods, culminating in the sponsorship of a Muslim refugee family from Kosovo in 1999.

### Denominational Affairs

The arrival of Reverend Jan Knost resulted in a higher profile for the Denominational Affairs Committee, though that may not have been obvious at first. The Committee, which was seeking new members, continued its usual practice of presenting study groups for proposed resolutions to be considered at the next General Assembly. In March 1990 the Board approved the transfer of Emerson's participation in the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee from Denominational Affairs to the Community Service Committee. Due to the draconian 1990 budget the DAC, like all other committees, had no money and could not send any Emerson delegates to the Southwest District Spring Conference held in Fort Worth. Furthermore, *The Emersonian* for June 17 stated that not enough money had been raised to send any delegates to General Assembly in Milwaukee, and that Reverend Knost would be Emerson's sole representative. But a week later, through the efforts of Committee members and contributions from individual Emersonians, enough money had been collected to send one additional delegate. The following September the second annual "DA Folly" (the first was held in October 1989) was held to raise money for the DAC. In 1993 Emerson sent 7 delegates (one more than we had votes) to GA, with the DAC paying registration fees. This practice continued more or less consistently through the 1990's.

Up to this time Emerson's financial support of the UUA Annual Program Fund had lagged considerably below the "Fair Share" standard, and despite the efforts of individual members the church had taken little part in national denominational affairs. The new minister made it a goal to gradually raise Emerson's Annual Program Fund contribution to full Fair Share level. Despite the fact that the UUA kept raising the threshold, this goal was finally met in the 1996 budget and Emerson received the Honor Society certificate from the UUA for their fiscal year 1996-7. In a letter to Interim Minister David Parke in December 1998 read at the December Board meeting, UUA President John Buehrens stated that the Annual Program Fund received nearly \$4.2 million that year, and that nearly \$1 million of the sum was raised by the top 50 "Leadership Societies", which included Emerson Unitarian Church.

Other monetary contributions to the UUA included a Board-approved second collection at the October 7, 1990 worship service for the Living Tradition Fund, which provides scholarships for ministerial students, grants to help recent graduates with debt, plus any other emergency assistance for ministers. The Fund is administered by the UUA Department of Ministry. In October 1995 Emersonians Carol and Henry Groppe held a dessert party at their home to present the UUA's Capital Campaign for Unitarian Universalism's next century. Henry Groppe took over Jan Knost's newsletter column in the November 12 issue of *The Emersonian* to describe the capital campaign for the congregation. Half of the money raised would be designated for congregational growth and half would go toward building a \$5 million Endowment Fund for Ministry. "Ministry Sunday" was set for November 19. According to a report the following March the congregation raised \$5600, the



second highest sum in Texas, helping the Southwest District to be a leader in the effort. Nationwide over \$1 million was raised.

In June 1991 the Board approved a request from District Executive Dwight Brown that Emerson host a social justice workshop the following December. In 1994 the Mid-Size Church Conference was attended by Jan Knost, Will Irwin, Jill Rose and John Daniel. One result was the beginning of an effort to form a vision statement for the congregation. .

In 1994 Jan King (now Mills) assumed the chair, relieving Gay Ann Gustafson, who had served as chair for several years. She was followed by Bil Cusack in 1995. Barbara and Bob Hopkins, also Committee stalwarts, returned as co-chairs in 1996. Later chairs included Judy Richardson and Valerie Blair.

In late October 1995 Emerson hosted the Diversity Within Congregations Workshop, which was underwritten by the Houston/Galveston Metropolitan Growth Committee, a part of the Houston UU Network. Assistant Professor of Sociology Richard Lewis of the University of Texas/San Antonio was the speaker.

The Southwest District Spring Conference was held at Emerson in April 1996. As it happened costs were less than budgeted, and the DAC found itself with several thousand dollars in leftover funds. The Board agreed to their proposal that the money be split evenly between the Southwest District, the Houston UU Network, and Emerson.

In February 1998 the DAC was instrumental in bringing the "Piecework Soulwork" exhibit to Emerson as part of the UUA's interfaith outreach effort. The exhibit consisted of 10 art quilts created by the Reverend Laurie Bushbaum of Minneapolis. Reverend Bushbaum was here for three days in mid-February and preached at the February 15 Sunday worship service. The purpose of the SoulArts workshop was to explore the connection between the expressive arts and religious experience. It included hands-on elements in several media. A repeat of the SoulArts workshop was held in February 1999, with works by artists from all 8 Houston-area congregations. The Reverend Carol Fincher of Stillwater, Oklahoma was the featured guest.

In addition to these denominational efforts, the Committee had at least partial oversight of the UUA Partner Church project, SWUUC Chalice Lighters, and worked with the Houston UU Network on several events.

### **Partner Church**

As religious persecution eased under the post-Communist Romanian government, the UUA began a program by which North American Unitarian Universalist congregations could offer assistance to Unitarian congregations in Transylvania, where modern Unitarianism began 400 years ago. Known

at first as the Sister Church Program, the name evolved through Sibling Church and, finally, to Partner church.

Originally a part of Hungary and still populated by ethnic Hungarians, Transylvania was ceded to Romania following World War I. In addition to being a religious and ethnic minority, the condition of Unitarian Transylvanians suffered a further setback with the Communist takeover following World War II. These two factors added up to more than 70 years of repression as church property was confiscated and seminaries closed. By the time the Communist government collapsed in 1989, Transylvanian Unitarianism hung by a thread.

Emerson's participation in the Sibling (Partner) Church program was first proposed at a Board of Trustees meeting in November 1990, and the church formally joined the following month. In February 1993 the Sibling Church Committee was formed under the auspices of the Denominational Affairs Committee. The Sibling Church Committee raised about \$2100 but had difficulty finding a reliable means of transferring the funds. For the next couple of years our gifts, monetary and otherwise, were conveyed by Emerson members personally. Reverend Leonora Montgomery made one such trip in the early 90's. Reverend Jan Knost and Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman traveled to Transylvania together in mid-September 1994. By early 1995 packages were getting through and the connection between Emerson and Gregory St. Niklos was strengthened considerably. Throughout the 1990's the Partner Church Committee held frequent events to raise the congregation's awareness of this project and collect money and other needed items. At the end of 1995 the Committee appealed to the congregation for donations of warm clothing and/or warm fabrics and sewing patterns.

In April 1995 the minister of St. Niklos, Reverend Domokos Simen, was welcomed to Emerson's pulpit, where he preached with the aid of a translator. Another Transylvanian minister, Forkas Denas, was our guest in October. In addition, Jan Knost hoped to arrange for a Transylvanian teenager, Victor Sata (who had been his translator during the 1994 trip) to attend one year of high school in Houston. There were problems getting a visa for him, and despite the best efforts of several Emerson members the red tape proved too much.

In 1998 Emerson Unitarian Church joined the UUA's Partner Church Council. Our former intern Ann Fox went to Romania in May and described her trip to the LRY in August. Another former intern, Kathleen Ellis, made the journey in 1999. By this time St. Niklos had become a full-fledged church, and in recognition Emerson sent one of our banners that had been to General Assembly. Furthermore, a secure means of transferring funds had finally been found, and we were in e-mail contact with Reverend Simen.

In early 1999 Emerson member deForest Ralph, who has been the driving force behind the Partner Church project at Emerson, was asked to be the Partner Church Council Networker for the Southwest District. At a meeting of the Council in Boston he met other Networkers from North America and district representatives from Transylvania and Budapest. According to the Annual Report of January 2000, Emerson was recognized for its leadership role in developing fundraising programs to raise money for seminary students and students at the Unitarian high school in

Kolozsvar. In addition money was provided for scholarships for rural students and infra-structure needs. Finally, deForest was working to raise the project's visibility in the Southwest District.

### **Chalice Lighters**

Chalice Lighters is a UUA program begun in 1990 to promote UU growth organized by district. It assists churches, especially small congregations, in that district with purchase, new construction or major renovations. Membership is on an individual basis, and members are asked to contribute \$10 or \$20 no more than three or four times a year. A special collection at the June 5, 1994 service netted \$467 for the Southwest UU Chalice Lighters, which was presented at General Assembly by Gabe and Betsy Gelb, for the UU church in Norman, Oklahoma, and to help First Church Houston with their expansion. Another special collection in July 1995 benefited the Community UU church of San Antonio, which was building a meeting room for their 120 members. By the end of 1998 the Chalice Lighters had assisted 14 congregations in the Southwest District.

### **Local UU Activities; Membership**

The Membership Committee stepped up its activities, compiling a New Member Packet and introducing the "New UU" classes. Photos were taken of new members and posted on the bulletin board in Westwood Hall. The new member pot luck suppers continued, and there were new member recognition services held about twice a year. In an attempt to better integrate (and thus retain) new members, each was assigned a contact person from the Membership Committee, but this had mixed results. As of December 31, 1991 the membership rolls stood at 502, with 55 joining during the year. As expected, though, the number dropped back below 500 when the results of the 1991 canvass were factored in, and the church reported 476 members to the UUA in early 1992. At the Annual Meeting in 1993, chair Larry Trissel reported that 70 new members joined in 1992 bringing the total to 525. His research showed that about a quarter of that number had joined in the last two years, and that the previous year had no net change after several years of net losses. He estimated that about 35 names would be removed as a result of the canvass, once again dropping just below 500.

During the early 90's the Committee made a determined effort to ensure that our membership numbers were solid. After the fall canvass every name was reviewed and non-pledgers contacted. Names that no one on the Committee recognized were checked with the RE department, the minister, plus secretary (and charter member) Susanna Painter. The church was attempting to reach Honor Society status with the UUA, which meant paying our full share of the program fees. At the same time the UUA fees were going up each year, so it behooved us to make sure we weren't carrying any extras. However, the Committee also wanted to avoid dropping members whose personal circumstances limited their participation in church activities, such as home-bound elderly or those in similar situations.

The Committee also fine-tuned the New UU program, renaming it "UU and You" to welcome visitors and long-time Emersonians as well as new members. Instead of being held in the evening it was worked into the Adult Education program, hoping to enhance attendance. A Greeters program was begun, with Committee members actively watching for visitors on Sunday morning not only in the sanctuary narthex but out on the parking lot. New name tags were produced and a Visitor's Information packet compiled. The guest book was replaced by visitor information cards, with visitors receiving follow-up calls. In 1993 and 1994 colored dots were added to the name tags of new members for that year to increase their visibility. Also in 1993 the Committee added an "Ask Me" designation to the name tags of Committee members so that visitors could easily identify knowledgeable church members. By 1999 the Committee was working closely with the Public Relations Committee in the design of the church web page. In late 1999 the "UU and You" class was again being revised with our new ministers.

Church membership peaked in 1994, with the Annual Report showing a figure of 528. The following year the figure dropped to 512. At the September 1996 Board meeting new business manager Bob Watkins reported a membership of 475, having just completed entering the list into the computer. Church membership steadily declined during the rest of the decade, with 385 certified in January 1999.

### **Local UU Activities; UU Network and Public Relations**

Throughout the 1990's our custom of sharing Thanksgiving Day services with the congregation of First Church continued, occasionally with the participation of other groups and frequently followed by a luncheon. March 1995 saw the first ever Houston/Galveston Union Service (at Emerson), with UUA President John Buehrens speaking. The following year a UU Network Union Service featured Terry Sweetser on articulating a vision for Houston.

In June 1995 the Network sponsored a UUA workshop led by Susan Madison of First Church in Dallas on a new concept in pastoral care involving lay people: the Befrienders program. This idea was considered an auxiliary program providing a "ministry of presence" to those with certain types of ongoing needs, extending the reach of pastoral care. According to Network representative Gene Lambirth, in June 1996 an anonymous donor from First Church gave \$2000 to begin the program in Houston. It would eventually become the Lay Pastoral Ministry Team.

By the end of the decade the Network was sponsoring city-wide youth worship services and dinners on a regular basis. Two other initiatives that would continue into the new century were the Welcoming Congregation program, first considered in 1995, which aimed to increase awareness and acceptance of gay/lesbian/bisexual/transgender issues, and covenant groups. The latter was presented at a UU Network workshop in the spring of 1999 by District Representative Bob Hill. These small (8-10) groups within a congregation are either interest- or service-oriented but tied to the church and involve some quasi-worship practices. They meet twice a month and begin with a "check-in" and use opening and closing UU readings.

The spring of 1999 also saw the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of First Unitarian Universalist Church, celebrated April 25. The congregation was originally established as Universalist, and then became Unitarian sometime in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In late March longtime First Church member and UU history buff Jackie Russell presented an Adult Education session on 100 years of Unitarian Universalism in Houston.

In 1992 Emerson Unitarian Church joined the UU Network Growth Steering Committee with David May as our representative.

The Public Relations Committee pursued the usual means of getting the word out, using monthly press releases to the *Houston Chronicle*, *Houston Post* and other local papers. Sometimes the *Post* had a separate "Unitarian" slot in the Saturday Religion section. In 1992 they also carried an article on our intern minister Kathleen Ellis. In October 1992 the first Westwood Lecture, featuring Roe v. Wade lawyer Sarah Weddington, garnered TV coverage. The *Houston Press* included our June 14, 1992 Bluegrass service as a "pick of good things to do." Ads for Emerson were run in the 1992-3 issues of the Chamber Music series of the Houston Friends of Music. Announcements were carried on KUHF and Emerson was listed as a program fund contributor. Our ad in the Yellow Pages was expanded.

In 1993 the sign in front of the church was upgraded, and the PR Committee joined the UUA's Houston/Galveston area growth program, "The Religion That Puts Its Faith in You." We received \$9000 in matching funds from the UUA and the Southwest District, and the program was set to begin September 1. It featured multi-faceted radio spots, newspaper ads and some local magazine ads. The PR Committee put up new signs around our campus, added an RE Greeter and scheduled a Visitor Sunday for September 19. They also worked with the Membership Committee to develop a tracking system.

Emerson joined other local UU congregations to continue the public radio spots for another year at a total cost of \$5000. The Committee publicized all Emerson events in both dailies plus neighborhood papers. In 1994 we began using the Wayside Pulpit quotes, changing them every week. The sign was now lighted for the first time. Along with these efforts the PR Committee took *The Emersonian* through several revisions and upgrades, moving from the old mimeograph technology used for many years to computerized production. The radio spots and newspaper ads continued through the rest of the decade. The PR Committee's report for the Annual Meeting of 1998 announced that Emerson Church was now on the web, thanks to new members Cletus Lee and David Brewer.

In January 1991 the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the church was celebrated with a pot-luck supper, and over the next several months retrospectives by former Board presidents were included as part of the Sunday service. In November 1993 a Founder's Day celebration was arranged, with former minister Horace Westwood and his wife Virginia in attendance. Two attempts were made, in 1990 and 1996, to add "Universalist" to the church's name but neither succeeded. .

Beginning in the early 1990's various Alcoholics Anonymous groups met at Emerson, seeking a non-smoking and religiously inclusive atmosphere. They expressed gratitude to the church and

donated a portion of the contributions they collected at their meetings. By August 1996 the 12-step group numbered about 40.

Emerson Church took part in several city-wide ecumenical efforts. Jan Knost's report to the Board of Trustees for December 1990 noted the formation of the Houston Interfaith Clergy Fellowship. Another example was Houston Metropolitan Ministries. Founded in 1969 (with Frank Schulman as one of the early presidents), this group worked for better community through numerous programs. In 1996 it became Houston Interfaith Ministries, and invited Emerson to send a member to sit on their Board of Directors. In 1997 Emerson was asked to join the Council of Congregations for SEARCH. (See below.) In November 1998 we received the Theonora Davis award presented by Interfaith Ministries' Health and Nutritional Services Branch for our work in hunger programs.

### **New Congregations**

During the 1990s three new congregations formed in the Houston area, and others grew to the point of needing new or expanded facilities. In late May 1990, Jan Knost was invited to participate in the groundbreaking ceremony for Bay Area's new building in Clear Lake by their new minister, former Emersonian Leonora Montgomery. Both Emerson and First Unitarian Universalist Church supported this undertaking by purchasing bonds. Less than two years later Bay Area's new building was dedicated, and in late 1992 the Wirt Road Fellowship broke ground for a new building.

As early as December 1990, according to Jan Knost's report to the Board of Trustees for that month, some consideration was being given to founding a new congregation in the Houston area. In the summer of 1993 a New Congregation Committee was formed consisting of members from Emerson, First Church and Wirt Road. Likely locations were either northwest Houston or Fort Bend County. In early 1994 the northwest area was chosen, and Emerson took steps to become the sponsoring congregation. According to the Board minutes of March 1994, the New Congregation Committee requested a commitment of \$30,000 over three years. The Board endorsed the proposal, which was presented to Emerson's congregation in a May 15 informational meeting, and approved the following October. Emerson's commitment to serve as the "covenanting" congregation allowed the new church to apply for UUA funds.

Meanwhile the New Congregation Committee held a public meeting in the summer of 1994 that drew 90 attendees, including 17 from Emerson. The first worship service was held January 22, 1995 in a northwest Houston elementary school. The 1995 Service Auction, held in April, was dedicated to the new west side church, which was eventually named the Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church, and raised \$13,198. Many from the new congregation participated in the auction.

Meanwhile, a group of UUs in the fast-growing Ft. Bend County area began the process of forming a congregation there. They began with a post-card mailing to a target group of families, plus some randomly chosen addresses. Their first informal meeting in September 1994 in a Tex-Mex bar and

grill drew more people than they expected. Several more organizational meetings followed, including an ice cream social at the home of Gary and Lupe Rulapaugh on June 17, 1995. The first public meeting was held at the First Colony Conference Center on August 27, 1995. Ninety-five people and four local ministers attended. A steering committee and organizing committee were hard at work, having already begun a newsletter, grant proposals, and the establishment of a pass-through bank account to allow them to collect donations. Emersonian Joanie Havlick was a major player in this effort from the beginning. She wrote, "we were truly a church in a trunk. We brought all the stuff in and out every Sunday, including the coffee pot."

Jan Knost's column in the September 10<sup>th</sup> *Emersonian* noted the encouraging turnout at the first public meeting of what would become Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Church. He was most pleased at being asked to address a newly forming Houston-area congregation for the second time in less than two years. Shortly before Christmas Bay Area's choir held a fundraiser for Thoreau, and by March 1996 they were holding regular services. Charter Sunday was proclaimed for May 12 at Dickinson Elementary School in the Greatwood/Sugarland area.

The Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church continued to thrive, becoming officially affiliated with the UUA as of January 1996. In March 1996 Ken Bilecki reported that about 45 adults were in regular attendance. When they reached 75, they could apply for an extension minister, and were considering a sharing arrangement with Thoreau. By July he reported that the Southwest District Representative Reverend Robert Hill was engaged to speak once a month through August. He was also interviewing their members, considered a major contribution. Northwest requested and received a \$4000 donation from Emerson to cover Reverend Hill's fee, plus newspaper ads for September, October and November. Northwest's membership helped out with our 1997 Children of Chernobyl project (see below), and the Service Auction that year raised \$10,000 to fulfill our commitment to them. The April 20 *Emersonian* lauded Jane Joseph, reporting that over the three years her efforts raised nearly \$28,000 of the \$30,000 we pledged. Both auctions had many participants from the Northwest congregation. By August 1997 their membership had grown 14%. They expected to be financially independent in 1998 and were very grateful for Emerson's support.

In the spring of 1997 Thoreau moved to Stafford, having secured a 3-year lease on a shared space in a storefront. In October 1998 Thoreau was seeking funds from the UUA's New Congregation Ministry Program for a full-time minister. Leonora Montgomery was among the Thoreau members present at the October Board meeting at which the Board offered \$800 remaining from the last auction. The Board also promised to ask Emerson's Outreach Board to consider Thoreau as one of 1999's special collection recipients. In addition, Thoreau would be invited to take part in the next service auction and share in the proceeds. The District Chalice Lighters program held a special collection at Thanksgiving to help Thoreau raise enough funds for a minister.

Finally, in late 1998 a third new congregation, All Souls, began forming in the Woodlands. As the century ended there were nine UU congregations in the Houston/Galveston area where there had been only six ten years earlier: First Unitarian Universalist, Wirt Road Fellowship, Emerson Unitarian, Bay Area Unitarian Universalist, Galveston Fellowship, Northwoods Unitarian Universalist,

Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist, Thoreau Unitarian Universalist, and All Souls Unitarian Universalist.

### **Community Service**

Community service projects of all kinds greatly accelerated during the 1990's. Several projects from earlier years continued while new ones were added. Continuing projects included the quarterly blood drives, the Mt. Vernon Food Pantry, the Hospitality Apartments, and Christmas gifts for the mentally ill (originally known as Pyramid House). Projects added during the 1990's included Food For Seniors, the annual Crop Walk, fundraising for various HIV-AIDS agencies, Private Sector Initiative, Freed Park Adventure Play, Adopt-A-Teacher, Children of Chernobyl, and culminated in Emerson's sponsorship of a Muslim refugee family from Kosovo through Interfaith Ministries' Refugee Resettlement Program in 1999. Some of these projects were instigated by individual church members and others by the Community Service Committee. Many new programs were offered matching funds by Emerson member Dr. Tom Matney to help them get established.

### **Established Programs**

The quarterly blood drives held jointly with our neighbors at the Bering Drive Church of Christ yielded an unexpected but crucial benefit in July 1991, when Gary Rusk, son of longtime members Mary Ann and Sigsby Rusk, was shot in a robbery attempt outside their home. Gary's life-threatening injuries required some 290 units of blood. When our blood bank credits were quickly exhausted, our Bering Drive Church of Christ neighbors offered theirs. A special blood drive was held August 26 to replenish both accounts. That October, when Gary had recovered, Emerson invited the members of the Bering Drive Church of Christ to join us for a joint coffee hour in Westwood Hall after our respective services. The Rusk family was present to thank both congregations, with Gary climbing on top of a table to better address the group. At this writing (2009) we and the Bering Drive Church of Christ still hold joint quarterly blood drives.

Another continuing outreach program was the Mt. Vernon Food Pantry. Begun in 1986, contributions of cash and non-perishable food were collected monthly and delivered to a Fifth Ward church food pantry. According to *The Emersonian* for October 14, 1990, the cash raised was turned over to the Interfaith Hunger Coalition, which supervised 135 pantries. At the time Mt. Vernon was only of only 12 that had a group sponsor. The Interfaith Hunger Coalition periodically used Emerson's cash donations to purchase food wholesale for Mt. Vernon, while the non-perishables we collected were delivered immediately, providing more variety for Mt. Vernon's clients. In 1991 Community Service Chair Sue Brewer visited Mt. Vernon and set a goal to raise 1 pound of food plus \$1 cash per month for every Emerson pledging family. This effort fell short, but did result in 2647 pounds of food and \$3080 in cash. The following year a goal of ½ pound of food and \$1 cash per family per month was easily exceeded. In 1998 Mt. Vernon's gospel choir sang at our July 19 service, which included a special collection for the food pantry.



A different sort of community service project was begun by one of Emerson's social groups, the Men's Breakfast Club. As the name implies, they meet in Westwood Hall for breakfast and a program one Saturday morning each month. In 1989 they voted to donate \$1 from each meal price to the Human Resources Development Foundation, which runs Hospitality Apartments. Begun in the 1960's by Jim Hightower, a member of our neighboring Bering Drive Church of Christ, this charity provides free temporary housing to medically indigent families coming to Houston for treatment at the Texas Medical Center. By 1989 Hospitality Apartments had served over 1300 families from 44 states and 36 countries. No money is spent on professional management or fundraising, with all services provided by 100 or so volunteers. In the 1990's the group consisted of 19 local churches, civic organizations, corporations and the American Red Cross, and had 21 units operating at \$5 per day. In late 1993 the Men's Breakfast group made it their goal to raise enough money to sponsor one apartment for one year, and successfully raised the required \$1825. In addition to collections at their monthly meetings, they sponsored the annual Italian Luncheon one Sunday each year led by group member Bruce Barthlow. This fundraiser continued through the 1990's. Occasionally the Women's Alliance hosted luncheons at the Hospitality Apartments for the families staying there.

A fourth continuing project was the practice of collecting Christmas gifts for Houston's mentally ill, begun in 1983 by Emerson member Shirley Coster and originally known as the Pyramid House project. Practical, inexpensive wrapped gifts, labeled "for men" or "for women", were collected from the congregation a month before Christmas and delivered to Pyramid House, a day-time facility where those who suffered mental illness could gather in a supportive setting. In the early 1990's gifts were delivered to the Bristow Center as well as Pyramid House. By the end of 1994 the program was expanded to include 5 Harris County Mental Health/Mental Retardation agencies. That year 309 gifts were collected, plus \$656 cash for additional purchases. These were delivered by social workers to homeless mentally ill people living on the streets in addition to those at the centers. This project continued to be well supported throughout the decade.

### **New Programs**

Seeking more involvement in hunger programs, in 1991 the Community Service Committee adopted Food For Seniors, a project of Houston Metropolitan Ministries (later Interfaith Ministries), on a 6 month trial basis. Volunteers worked two Saturdays a month to package and deliver sacks of staples to three needy seniors, and the church contributed \$100 a month, initially from the Community Service budget. In 1993 Emerson's operating budget included a line item of nearly \$1000 for Food For Seniors, plus an annual fund drive. By the fall of 1997 Food For Seniors, now in its sixth year, was considered an established program of the church and therefore no longer eligible for Matney matching funds. Even so they raised \$2776. In 1998 their goal was to raise \$3000 (without matching funds) to help 20 seniors. Also that year a change in the way the program was run meant that each participating group would be assigned one date to do a month's worth of sacking for the whole program. Emerson's turn came on March 14, and 24 church members, including 4 young people, arrived at Interfaith Ministries' warehouse on the Hempstead

Highway to pack 520 grocery bags. The March 29/April 5 *Emersonian* noted that the bags were fuller and heavier than usual. The project was prospering.

In October 1990 Emerson Church participated in the Crop Walk, sponsored by Church World Service, for the first time. We had more walkers and raised more money than any other denomination represented. Jan Knost was asked to serve as master of ceremonies for the 1991 and 1992 Crop Walks. The money raised is divided between local (25%) and world-wide hunger programs (75%). Crop Walk has become another regular feature of Emerson's outreach programs.

Emerson Unitarian Church held several fundraisers to help various HIV-AIDS organizations in Houston. The first came in March 1991, when Emersonian and Rice faculty member Dean Shank organized a benefit concert by several of his Shepherd School colleagues, which raised \$1000 for the Omega House AIDS hospice. The following year \$1300 was raised, including matching funds by Dr. Tom Matney. In November 1994 the Community Services and Music Committees jointly sponsored a concert featuring 5 Rice faculty to benefit a new agency, the Houston Institute for the Protection of Youth, which served homeless HIV-positive teens. This concert raised nearly \$1000, again with matching funds. But by October of 1995 this effort appeared to have played out, as a benefit that year for the Women's HIV Coalition suffered poor attendance.

In January 1992 the Board of Trustees approved a proposal from the Community Service Committee to join Private Sector Initiative, a semi-annual community-wide effort to provide exterior structural repairs and repainting of the homes of low-income elderly and/or handicapped Houstonians. Corporations and unions provide materials and skilled labor, while churches and other community organizations field less-skilled volunteer labor crews. Weather permitting, the work is generally completed on two consecutive Saturdays, with one project each in the spring and fall. PSI (later renamed "Rebuild Together Houston") has been regular program ever since and in 1996 was expanded to include other area UU congregations, including youth.

The Freed Park Adventure Play program was yet another local outreach, headed by Emerson member Tom Matney. The Adventure Play concept provided creative, self-esteem-building after-school activities for low-income children; Tom had been involved with this program at Freed Park for some ten years. In July 1993 he proposed to raise enough money (\$115 each) to send some of the boys in the Freed Park Boy Scout troop to summer camp for a week. The troop was sponsored by the Boy Scout Council as part of their year-round Urban Scouting program, which invited economically disadvantaged youth lacking parental involvement to take part in Scouting. In November 1993 the Boy Scouts of America sent a thank-you letter to Emerson Church and Tom for raising \$1390 to send 11 boys to Camp Strake. Uniforms were provided and many of the boys earned merit badges. For most of them this was their first experience outside an urban setting. Throughout the 1990's Emerson groups—the Alliance, the LRY and other members—helped Tom put on various activities, including a spring kite-flying afternoon and a Christmas party. Frequently bilingual Emerson member Leticia Anderson served as translator. In the June 4, 1995 *Emersonian* Tom described Adventure Play at Freed Park, then beginning its 12<sup>th</sup> summer. The program served 80-110 children under 18 and included free lunch and snacks. Services of a pediatric dental clinic run by the University of Texas Dental Branch were provided, and the program had just secured the services of a licensed alcohol/drug abuse counselor available 3 hours a week. Tom reported good

attendance at these sessions, and wanted to expand the counseling program to 17 other community center parks in poor neighborhoods. In April 1996 Greg Nesbitt of the Houston Parks and Recreation Department spoke at the Sunday service and asked Emerson to concentrate its efforts in this area. He said a second program had been started at Quillan Park in Alief, and he hoped to make Freed Park a training center for other park employees to expand the program. The amount raised by that Sunday's special collection was \$1996.74, including matching funds from Tom. In a year's time the program had been expanded to two more parks. At one of them the counselor was able to head off the formation of a gang. Again, the special collection netted \$1527, which would be matched, and the LRY agreed to help at Freed Park that summer.

### **Adopt-A-Teacher**

Adopt-A-Teacher was an in-house project begun in 1994. The idea was to connect Emerson schoolteachers in low-income, resource-poor schools with other church members who could offer support in a variety of ways. Teachers and donors alike would meet for supper one Saturday a month to discuss issues in public education and match requests with solutions. The teachers ranged from kindergarten up to community college levels. Support came in many forms: all types of classroom assistance, chaperones for field trips, and provision of enrichment materials of many kinds. Issues of *The Emersonian* from 1996 through 1997 contained frequent notices by coordinator Gay Ann Gustafson thanking donors on behalf of Emerson teachers who took part. Several schools also expressed thanks: the Whittier School choir sang at the Sunday worship service on May 18, 1997, and both Benavidez Elementary and Cunningham Elementary Schools sent thank-you notes. In 1997 Sue Brewer wrote an *Emersonian* article describing her experience volunteering in Anna Wilson's class at Benavidez, and urging others to step up.

In 1999 the project was expanded to meet Crawford Elementary's need for books for their library. Crawford is next door to Mount Vernon United Methodist Church, and the project also gave money to Mt. Vernon's new after-school program. That fall children's books from the River Oaks Bookstore were displayed in Westwood Hall for 3 weeks. Emerson members were urged to purchase the books and donate them to Crawford or Mt. Vernon. The impetus came from the UUA's Empty Shelves project that our delegates had learned about at GA. Emerson member Margaret Kaye of the River Oaks Bookstore helped arrange this project, offering a 10% discount and no sales tax charged. By October, 97 books had been purchased and each had a custom-made bookplate (designed by our business manager Bob Watkins) announcing that the book is "a gift from the members of Emerson Unitarian Church." Adopt-A-Teacher was given a special collection slot on August 29, 1999.

## Children of Chernobyl

In June 1996 the Community Services Committee won approval to host 6 Byelorussian children, survivors of the 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident, for 4 weeks. Two fundraisers, Family Games Night (sponsored jointly by the singles group and RE) and the proceeds from the First Sunday Lunch, were the first held to gather the needed funds. However, it took longer than expected to navigate the bureaucratic hurdles, and the project could not move forward until the spring of 1997. Meanwhile we needed to raise \$1000 per child to cover travel expenses, medical insurance and travel documents. An additional \$1400 was needed to bring an adult translator/chaperone. Denise Stickle would host one child, and up to 9 others would be hosted by families at Northwest Community Unitarian Universalist Church and other area churches. A notice in the May 15<sup>th</sup> *Emersonian* said that the project was still \$5000 short, but on July 11 the children arrived for 6 weeks. Denise hosted one boy and one girl. The August 17-24 *Emersonian* reported that the children had visited Astroworld, NASA and the Cockerell Butterfly Collection at the Houston Museum of Natural Science. In addition they were being given medical exams. Denise was collecting "care packages" to send home with them. She noted that each child was allowed two 70-pound bags plus a 35-pound carry-on, and asked for used duffle bags as being less likely to be stolen. Items solicited were as diverse as over-the-counter medications (which would be relabeled in Russian), warm clothing, non-perishable food and snacks, toiletries, shower curtains with rings, flashlights with batteries and cassette players with tapes. In late August the Children of Chernobyl project garnered a favorable article in the *Houston Chronicle*. The project was repeated the following year, with the same child, Yuliya Selanova, returning to stay with Linda Burke and Rod Carr.

## Refugees From Kosovo

In May 1999 DRE Denise Stickle urged the church to get involved with Interfaith Ministries' Refugee Resettlement Program. The Board approved the proposal in June, and appointed Denise and Jean McClintic to head up Emerson's sponsorship of a refugee family. A special collection was authorized in July, which yielded \$1400. Emerson's Community Services Committee invited smaller local UU congregations to be part of our project, noting that First Church was also sponsoring a family. Our obligations would be limited financial support, assistance in finding living quarters, and the offer of a welcoming, helping hand in navigating an unfamiliar city and culture.

Nationally the UUA and UUSC collected over \$180,000 to help the citizens of Kosovo, including \$531 from Emerson's May special collection. The UUSC partnered with the American Friends Service Committee (AFSC) to direct aid to a Macedonian charity that focused on women and children. Other agencies contributing were the Turkish Red Crescent and Norwegian Church Aid.

In late July 1999 Mustafa Shahini, an Albanian Muslim refugee from Kosovo, arrived in Houston with his wife Drita and three children, Ardiana (age 20), Ilir (18) and Alban (12). Their new home was an apartment complex in west Houston with Albanian-speaking neighbors. As they arrived

here with only one small suitcase and a few photos, the family was most grateful for our help. Their immediate goals were to find jobs, get their youngest son into school, and learn English.

From August through the end of 1999 *The Emersonian* carried frequent updates on the Shahini family. Their Spicewood apartment complex provided English as a Second Language (ESL) classes on site, though not always at convenient times. Daughter Ardiana had studied English in Kosovo, and Alban, enrolled at Owens Intermediate School, was learning fast. By the end of October all family members had been properly documented and both parents as well as the two older children had full-time minimum-wage jobs. Denise noted gratefully the help given to the family by many Emersonians. Appropriately timed for Thanksgiving, the November 14-21 issue of *The Emersonian* carried two items: a reprint of an article written by Alban for his 6<sup>th</sup> grade class on Albanian culture, and a heartfelt if awkwardly phrased letter from Mustafa (translated by Ardiana) thanking Emerson members "from the youngest to the oldest" for all the help they had received. Within seven years, another letter from Mustafa would be read at an Emerson Board meeting, announcing that the family had purchased a home, the two younger children were in college, all members of the family had jobs, and all were proud American citizens.

### **The Outreach Board**

Perhaps anticipating the surge in community service projects, in January 1993 Dick Mullineaux, chair of the Board-appointed Church in Change Commission, recommended the formation of an Outreach Board to unify the church's outreach and community service efforts. He noted that in 1992 monetary contributions to outreach efforts had totaled nearly \$20,000, plus untold non-monetary donations. The proposal was approved at the January 24 Annual Meeting "after vigorous discussion". In March the first appointees to the Outreach Board were announced: Dick Mullineaux was chosen as chair and would serve a three-year term, along with Paul Coffman, Dorothy Wait and Will Irwin. Pat Whitten-Lege, Mary Koch and John Daniel would serve two years, and Ellen Wilkerson, Sue Brewer and Tom Matney would serve one year terms. The idea was that the Outreach Board would coordinate, promote and encourage participation in the church's outreach programs, while the Community Service Committee (renamed Community Services) actually conducted them. But the new arrangement did not always run smoothly, and by the end of the year it was decided that the Outreach Board should always include at least one member of the Community Services Committee.

From 1994 through 1996 Outreach Board Chair Dick Mullineaux published quarterly reports in *The Emersonian* detailing outreach efforts. The first quarterly report for 1994 said that over \$20,000 had been collected and disbursed in 1993. Projects listed included the Hospitality Apartments, Food For Seniors, Freed Park, four hunger projects, two UUSC projects, several "special needs" projects and the Minister's Discretionary Fund. By the end of 1994 many more projects had been added for a total of \$31,531, an increase of 38%. The total includes Tom Matney's matching funds for most donations. In 1995 the total reached \$32,193, including funds raised after the Oklahoma City bombing. In 1996 collections for the Children of Chernobyl project plus the UUSC's call for

donations to help southern black churches that had been fire-bombed raised the total to \$34,007, and volunteer hours increased by 45%.

In the 1995 Annual Report included the following description of the Outreach Board: its purpose is "to provide support to all committees, organizations and individuals within the church who are carrying out outreach activities", publicize such activities and coordinate to avoid scheduling conflicts, promote new efforts and "provide mechanisms for enhancing fundraising." By the end of 1995 the Outreach Board was seeing increased participation in Community Services Committee projects, increased youth involvement, and improved communication and coordination.

In the 1998 Annual Report, new chair Phil Richardson stated the vision of the Outreach Board as elevating social action projects to a core value on an equal status with spirituality and education. The Board decided to focus on children, hunger and education. Local initiatives would be given priority (80%) and specific programs would be chosen in which we could make a difference. The goal was to involve at least 50% of the congregation by 2000 and to spend the equivalent of 25% of Emerson's overall operating budget by 2000. New money would come from fundraisers and pledge income (8% in 1997). The 1999 Annual Report restated these goals, dropping those alluding to financial commitment since monetary contributions dropped sharply: only \$22,000 compared to \$37,000 in 1997. Chair Phil Richardson noted the lack of a galvanizing cause comparable to Children of Chernobyl, the lack of matching funds, and lower Sunday attendance leading to reduced collections. The Outreach Board decided to focus the church's efforts through three organizations: SEARCH, Interfaith Ministries, and Children at Risk. Teams were set up for each. A 1997 *Emersonian* article (April 13) provided some background on SEARCH: Service of the Emergency Aid Resource Center for the Homeless. Founded in 1989, SEARCH serves over 4000 people each month and is governed by an ecumenical Council of Congregations. In 1998 Emerson member Gay Lambirth joined SEARCH's Board of Directors.

In 1998 the Outreach Board and Community Services Committee were holding joint meetings with the aim of increasing Emerson's participation level to 50% and to quadruple both time and money. In July the Outreach Board published the results of a questionnaire showing that 80% of the congregation strongly agreed with the Board's overall aim of elevating social action to an equal core value, with an emphasis on local programs. There was less but still substantial agreement on the goal of bringing participation to 50% and money to 25% of budget by 2000.

In addition to ongoing programs, one-time efforts included fundraisers for survivors of several hurricanes, an earthquake, the UUSC's work in Rwanda, the Oklahoma City bombing, guide dogs for the blind, and the Histiocytosis Association, which raises funds for a rare blood disorder that afflicted one of Emerson's children, Brent Adams (see Chapter Three).

In early 1999 the Board of Trustees voted for Emerson to join the Coalition of Greater Houston Children and to become an Interfaith Ministries Covenant Church. Both groups are child-focused. The Board's action followed research by the Outreach Board and Emerson's record of working with them for several years. Formally joining meant that Emerson Unitarian Church could take a greater leadership role in the future.

## Chapter Five: Facilities, Governance and Finances

### Facilities

In 1991 the Board addressed the serious building and maintenance concerns originally raised by past president Larry Huelbig in 1989. Working with the architectural firm Tackett and Lodholz on behalf of the Council of Past Presidents, Larry presented to the Board a list of upgrades, repairs and renovations ranging from new doors in Westwood Hall and upgraded restrooms in both the sanctuary and RE wing to resurfacing the parking lot. The estimate totaled \$150,000, and on June 2 the congregation approved the project. The work was completed over the summer and came in about \$4500 under budget, attesting to Larry's careful preparation.

Representing the Council of Past Presidents, Larry continued to study building needs. As critical as the 1991 effort was, Larry stressed that it was only the first step. In 1993 he began presenting information to the congregation on a proposed Phase II building project. At a congregational meeting on March 28, 1993 the Board of Trustees cited the church's sound finances resulting from the growth of membership as justification for proceeding. The Phase II proposal included an addition to the front (east-facing) side of Westwood Hall to bring all offices and equipment into one space. Other features included upgraded landscaping and playground equipment, additional classroom and meeting space, and a larger library. The estimated cost was \$450,000 of which half would come from a new mortgage (the current mortgage on the sanctuary was scheduled to be retired in 1995) and half from a two-year capital fund drive. The proposal passed with an amendment requesting a feasibility study, to be reported back in 90 days.

Later in 1993 the Board established an Architecture Committee with a wide representation of differing facets of the congregation plus a non-voting observer from our YMCA tenants. The Committee chose the firm of church member Carrie Glassman Shoemake, working with her partner Ernesto Maldonado. They were given generous latitude: the sanctuary was to be preserved but the rest of the campus was negotiable. The architectural plan was to be submitted to the Committee in January 1996, and to the congregation two months later.

In June 1996 President Carole Huelbig reported a positive attitude toward the building program in the groups consulted so far, but some cracks began to appear as a competing proposal featuring a two-story education building was offered. Erosion in support for the current ministry further weakened the plan, which was abandoned in light of Jan Knost's major illness and subsequent retirement.

Other facility issues simmered on. Emerson Church was being sued by Buffalo Floor for \$2067, the balance remaining on the re-carpeting of Westwood Hall in 1989. We contended that they owed us \$30,000 for the asbestos mess. The matter was eventually settled in June 1991 for \$19,000, not really satisfying either party. Meanwhile, the bookstore and library were moved to the front of Westwood Hall through the efforts of the Glasers and the Hopkinses, and the former library space

became Jan Knost's study. Since the Knost family preferred to make their own living arrangements, the manse was put up for sale in early 1990. Jane Joseph supervised the necessary upgrades and it was sold in July 1990.

In late December 1990 much-loved Emerson member Glenda Matney was killed in an auto accident as the family returned from an out-of-town Christmas celebration. Her husband Tom and son Monty were seriously injured, though both recovered. Glenda had been a stalwart member of the choir and the Women's Alliance, and was Emerson's first female Board President. In her memory, Tom donated a nine-foot Steinway concert grand piano for the sanctuary. It was dedicated in February 1992, and is considered to be one of the finest pianos in the city. Along with our handmade harpsichord, provided by an anonymous donor in 1988, the piano has proved a major attraction for keyboard musicians.

Emerson was plagued with numerous roof leaks throughout the decade, in the sanctuary, Westwood Hall and the tunnel leading from Westwood Hall to the Schweitzer Room. In late 1996 the Music Committee recommended that the chancel carpet be replaced with a hardwood floor. It was installed in 1998, being paid for by an anonymous donor. The Building and Grounds Committee restored and repainted the exterior of the sanctuary, Westwood Hall, and the RE wing, but by the end of the decade Building and Grounds chair Don Weaver warned of major expenses ahead. The three RE modules in particular showed evidence of nearly 30 years of heavy use.

The sign out in front of the church was upgraded twice, once in 1993, when Tim Lawrence and David May laid wiring for lighting, and then again five years later, when an earmarked contribution to the Endowment Fund specified that it be spent on a new sign. At about the same time the lots to the north and west of our campus were sold for residential development, as the open land along Bering Drive was slowly filled in.

Other facility issues were more limited in scope but no less important. Major equipment upgrades were made during the 1990s in keeping with the technological advances of the time. The church's records and mailing list were computerized and other major office improvements made, including a heavy-duty copier, a fax machine (courtesy of charter member Ray Lemmon) and a new phone system. As helpful as these advances proved to be, none of them came easily. Hours of volunteer time were needed to enter the required data, and getting the newsletter computerized proved a major headache for Operations Manager Norma Chandler, a problem compounded by the fact that the 1991 renovation was proceeding at the same time. Another factor is that technological improvements kept evolving relentlessly, so that purchases that seemed adequate when authorized soon became obsolete, or meshed poorly with the equipment we already had. In 1995 a proposal to spend \$25,000 on a new integrated communications system, including computers and phones with voicemail, hoped to address this problem. It was approved, with \$18,000 to come from the Endowment. But in October 1999 the looming Y2K crisis led to the purchase of yet another set of computers with money raised by Betsy Gelb.

The new technology also affected the sanctuary. The Montgomery challenge grant made a badly needed new sound system possible; it was installed by September 1991. For the first time cassette tapes of the services became available. An Audio-Visual Committee was founded in early



1992. Otto Glaser's construction of a handsome cabinet for the machinery handily disguised the tangle of wires at the back of the sanctuary. Further improvements meant that duplicate copies of the service could be created in real time, and the addition of a high-speed dubbing unit provided multiple copies shortly after the conclusion of the service. New microphones were purchased, costing about \$7000, half of which was donated by member Jeff Rasco.

The final facility issue did not concern technology at all, at least not directly. In 1975 the Tanner family had donated five oil paintings to the church, the most valuable of which was by French artist Henri Martin. For several years it hung in the sanctuary behind the pulpit, but in 1990 the Board decided to sell it. Local dealer Hart Gallery expressed an interest in representing the church at auction. At the June Board meeting the Board approved proceeding, and appointed Elizabeth Glaser to negotiate a price. Initially it seemed likely that a price of \$70,000 to \$80,000 was reasonable, but at about that time the art market began to slide. Hart eventually placed the painting in auction in September 1996 with an estimated value of \$50,000 to \$60,000, with the stipulation that it not be sold for less than \$50,000. The painting did not sell, and Hart tried again in September 1999 with a minimum price of \$40,000. Again there was no sale, and the matter would not be resolved for several more years.

## **Governance**

The decade saw several major changes in the way the church was run, reflecting the shift from the more top-down approach of previous years to a greater role for lay leadership. In 1990 the Program Council was begun, charged with facilitating communication among church groups, coordinating community-building activities and keeping the church calendar. It consisted of one representative from each committee or organization and met quarterly. Known variously as the Committee of Committees and the Council of Committees, the group also scheduled the use of tables in Westwood Hall by various church organizations to promote their activities, though in 1994 the keeping of the church calendar was transferred to the business office. By 2000 the group was once again named the Program Council, now consisting of all committee chairs. The Council was given a free hand in coordinating fundraisers and was chaired by the Vice President of the Board of Trustees.

In late 1992 a petition was brought to the Board of Trustees to update and amend the constitution, specifically to alter the church covenant and alter or delete the provision that the Board of Trustees approve new members. The Board appointed an Ad Hoc Committee on Constitutional Revision to study the matter. The Adult Education Committee scheduled several sessions to discuss constitutional issues, including the covenant. In July 1993 the Ad Hoc Committee reported their recommendations to the Board. The covenant, contained in Article II, was left unchanged for the time being, but it was understood that this issue would be revisited later. The wording about the purpose of the church was moved to a new Article III, which spelled out the purposes in detail:

"The purposes of this church follow from its covenant. They are:

- To seek the truth freely and responsibly, and to appreciate the variety of religious responses resulting from that search;
- To provide a place of worship;
- To nurture religious education and spiritual growth;
- To promote the common good of our community, our nation and our earth;
- To be a place of fellowship and community open to all."

The previous Article III, which dealt with membership, was re-numbered as Article IV and amended to drop the Board approval provision. Membership was to be open to anyone at least 16 years old who would sign an agreement to support the purposes of the church and commit both time and resources. As before, voting rights were conferred on those who had been members for at least 60 days. Article V (now Article VI) set the quorum for congregational meetings at 15% of recorded membership.

A second addition, Article IX, spelled out how church assets were to be managed. Any transactions involving sale, purchase or encumbrance of property (defined as "real property or substantial improvements thereon") or any single expenditure of 20% or more of the Endowment Fund required the approval of two-thirds of the members present and voting at a properly called and publicized congregational meeting.

At the January 1994 Annual Meeting one more change was made, permitting the election to the Presidency of the Board of Trustees a Board member who has already completed three years' service as a Trustee provided that s/he is being elected President for the first time.

The changes recommended by the Ad Hoc Committee detailed above were presented as a package at a May 1994 congregational meeting but did not pass. A new Committee on Constitutional Revision was established and the amended Articles presented individually at a congregational meeting in October 1994. The congregation amended two of the Articles: under Membership, the amendment stipulated that applicants for membership be interviewed by the minister (or associate minister) and presented to the Board for recognition, and extended the waiting period for voting rights to 90 days. As before, membership continued until "death, voluntary withdrawal, or unexcused failure to make any form of recorded financial contribution for two years." The previous provision for discharge by a majority vote of the congregation present and voting was dropped. New Article VI was amended to set the quorum at 10%.

At the January 1995 Annual Meeting the Ad Hoc Committee on Direct Elections presented more changes: the President and Vice President of the Board of Trustees were to be nominated by the Board at their December meeting, but elected by the congregation at the Annual Meeting the following January. The Nominating Committee and Committee on Ministry (and the Minister Search Committee, when needed) were designated Congregational Committees, and their members were to be elected by the congregation for staggered three year terms. Nominees for the Committee on Ministry were to be approved by the minister. The following year President Jill Rose proposed a clarification of Bylaw #6, allowing for nominations from the floor for vacancies on Congregational Committees as well as the Board of Trustees in addition to the slate presented by the Nominating

Committee, provided that any such nominees to the Committee on Ministry are cleared in advance with the minister.

In January 1998 the Board appointed a Growth Planning Committee charged with creating a rolling five-year plan. The group was given a wide mandate: goals for membership, RE registration and attendance, Adult Education and Sunday worship attendance and other forms of participation; ministerial and staffing requirements and resources; and budget requirements, all in the context of the five-year plan. The Growth Planning Committee consisted of nine members serving staggered three year terms, appointed by the Board of Trustees. They met several times in 1998, guided by the principle that the church's long-term viability depended on attracting and holding young adults and families, and therefore the church needs to develop programs that appeal to this population. Specific recommendations included developing a mission statement, hiring a full-time Membership and Program Coordinator, holding Family Worship in the sanctuary, developing a Religious Education/Youth Choir, "dynamic" Sunday worship, and addressing accessibility/visibility issues such as signage.

In 1996 the Board, in an attempt at greater transparency, began the monthly "Splinters from the Board" column in the newsletter, a summary of each Board meeting. Later that year another series, "Dialogue with the Board" began, in which individual Trustees shared their visions for the church and invited other members to do the same. In 1998 President Betsy Gelb initiated another column entitled "The Listening Post."

At the suggestion of Interim Minister David Parke, the Personnel Committee was recast as the Personnel Technical Advisory Group, or PTAG. The practice had been that this Committee consisted of the current Board President, the Past President and the Vice President. The PTAG remained a special committee of the Board, but was now comprised of personnel and human resources professionals in the congregation. They developed job descriptions for all staff positions and guidelines for dispute resolution, all duly approved by the Board of Trustees. The PTAG would also conduct performance evaluations. A report at the 2000 Annual Meeting indicated that they were reconciling employee contribution issues relative to both Board and UUA policy as well as the contract with the new ministers.

Finally, in late 1999 David May and Larry Huelbig were at work amending the Articles of Incorporation to be presented at the December Board meeting and then to the congregation at the Annual Meeting.

## **Finances**

The financial fortunes of the church would turn full circle during the 1990's, from bare necessities to relative affluence and back. The congregation began 1990 with a spartan budget containing no funds for salary increases or committee expenses. By November Canvass Chair Will Irwin was reporting a successful canvass totaling \$230,000, and a balanced budget was presented to the

congregation. Finances continued to improve throughout 1991, and at the 1992 Annual Meeting President Mary Pedersen reported that for the previous 14 months no Endowment Funds had been needed to meet operating expenses. In fact, in mid-year the Finance Committee recommended additional funding for several line items and staff raises were approved by the Board of Trustees in June. The Treasurer reported that pledge collections were up by more than 28% over 1990 levels, and over \$13,000 was paid in advance for 1992.

In November 1992 the sanctuary mortgage was retired using Endowment funds, which were being repaid with interest. In 1993 a sinking fund was established to take care of unexpected building expenses. The church closed out 1995 with a surplus of \$609, and the Treasurer announced that pledge collections totaled 101% of budget.

In 1996 several problems arose. Rentals and the open offering were below projections, and expenses were running ahead of budget. Business Manager Bob Watkins was asked to send out quarterly statements. By October Will Irwin, Finance Chair, projected a deficit of about \$14,000. Turmoil in the congregation over ministry issues plus Reverend Jan Knost's serious illness contributed to the feelings of uncertainty, resulting in a decline in the number of pledges for 1997 and increasing arrears in payments for 1996. Still, by mid-December the canvass drive had reached nearly \$285,000.

By August 1997 there were more signs of trouble. Will Irwin reported that 63% of pledge income had been received, but most of that had come early in the fiscal year. Furthermore, 62% of the income had been spent. The deficit for 1997 climbed to nearly \$44,000. Finance Chair George Binder said that a "substantial amount" of pledges had not been paid, and he estimated that \$13,000 of that was not collectable. The fall canvass drive topped out at \$292,000 but as of May 1998 42% of the congregation had made no payments. Although cash flow improved somewhat, George Binder said the deficit could reach \$30,000 in 1998 and \$40-50,000 in 1999.

In November 1998 things looked better. The Minister Search Committee had announced their selection of Mark and Rebecca Edmiston-Lange as candidates for co-ministry at Emerson, with Candidating Week set for late January. Treasurer Mike McGlaughlin predicted a deficit of only \$15,000 and there was the likelihood that even that gap would be closed. Rental information had been added to the website. Nevertheless a challenge remained: the proposed budget did not include funding for two ministers, and an additional \$26,000 would be needed for ministry in 1999 with our August 1 start date. A supplemental canvass would be needed after Candidating Week. By December, the projected deficit had grown to \$44,000, mainly due to unpaid pledges.

The first quarter of 1999 continued in the red with 44% of pledges not being paid. In April things began to improve, largely due to the efforts of President Pam Bass, the Finance Committee and Business Manager Bob Watkins. By the October Board meeting contributions were at 96% of pledges. Canvass Chair Carole Huelbig reported at least \$323,000 in pledges, an increase of 14% over 1998. But Finance Chair Zena Taylor noted that deficits were increasing again, and said we would still need to use Endowment funds, as we had been doing since 1996. The Annual Meeting in January 2000 noted a deficit of \$7866 in 1999 due to "unanticipated shortfalls in miscellaneous income" and a \$4000 shortfall in pledge collections.

The Endowment Fund's fortunes during the 1990's were just as checkered. In May 1985 the original mortgage on the sanctuary had been refinanced with the M. D. Anderson Foundation. The new note was for ten years and \$260,000. Pointing out that a ten-year time period meant a rapid build-up of equity, the Finance Committee recommended that, in light of Houston's (and Emerson's) continuing economic difficulties, the Board authorize the transfer of \$12,000 a year from the Endowment to the operating fund to assist in meeting the higher mortgage payment; this arrangement was to continue until the mortgage was paid off in May 1995. In 1988 the retirement of long-term minister Frank Schulman and the necessity of a ministerial transition was further justification for this practice.

As already mentioned, in 1991 no such transfers were needed to cover operating expenses. However, the \$150,000 building renovation project approved by the congregation in the summer of 1991 dropped the Endowment balance to \$238,000. In 1992 the Board decided to pay off the mortgage early, using \$92,455 in Endowment Funds. The operating fund continued to pay back the Endowment at the same rate (with interest) as the M.D. Anderson note. By the end of 1993 the Endowment stood at \$352,000 with about half of the mortgage monies being repaid. The Endowment continued to increase in both 1994 and 1995, reaching \$594,000 by the end of the year.

In the May 10-17 1998 edition of *The Emersonian* President Betsy Gelb described a challenge grant that originated in 1994 by an anonymous donor. The Board decided to revive this effort, and the resulting campaign to enhance the Endowment brought in over \$132,000 in contributions from all Trustees and 20 Emerson households. With the matching funds from the challenge grant the Endowment was raised to over \$1 million. But stock market volatility and the settlement with Reverend Jan Knost brought it back down to \$630,733 at the end of the year. In 1999 the fund recovered to slightly over \$1 million due to a major run-up in the stock market.

## **Chapter Six: Social Organizations**

Social organizations established in previous years continued throughout the 90's: the Women's Alliance, Alice Circle, Men's Breakfast and Friday Niters. New groups included Latitudinarians, the Fellowship Council, High Rollers, and the Upper Crusts.

The Alliance continued its Blalock Nursing Home project, in which members put on a monthly birthday party at the southwest-area facility. Begun by Gwen Essinger in 1974, this was one of the Alliance's longest-running projects and continued a good 20 years, into the mid-90's. Another continuous thread was the biannual Rummage Sale, which raised money for off-budget church needs. In September 1990 the Alliance began answering calls at the Hunger Hot line, putting in one four-hour session every two months. The Alliance sponsored an International Feast on March 7, 1993, which was repeated in 1995 and 1997.

In September 1996 the Alliance honored Sue Brewer of the Community Services Committee with the Susan B. Anthony award, presented through the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation. Previous Emerson recipients include Gwen Essinger and Dorothy Rice. In May 1997 Jan King (now Mills) became Emerson's fourth honoree.

The Alliance's recycling program, begun in the mid 1970's, had continued with paper-only recycling through cooperation with the Sacks Paper Company. At some time during the early 1990's Sacks terminated their arrangement with us, and in September 1995 the project was re-started with the Champion Paper Retriever Program. This city-wide program had bins at churches and schools all over town, feeding their de-inking and recycling plant in south Houston. But in late 1999 the Board, citing damage to our parking lot pavement by the heavy trucks used to empty the dumpster-like container, decided to terminate the project. Trustees noted that there were now many other recycling opportunities available, which had not been the case twenty years ago.

The Alice Circle continued in its usual format, meeting one Saturday a month, with the topic announced beforehand. Small Group II, begun in 1989, also continued through the decade as did Men's Breakfast, supporting the Hospitality Apartments (see Chapter Four.) In the fall of 1999, Friday Niters (originally founded as the Couples Club in the mid-1970's) became Circle Dinners. They met in groups of 10-12 in members' homes three times a year, with the whole group meeting for dinner in Westwood Hall in May.

The singles group had an on again, off again experience in the 90's. In 1987 a second group for older singles, the Singletarians, was formed, but was soon folded back into the first group. In the mid-90's the singles group was revived under the energetic leadership of Bill Atkerson, and once again had a full calendar of activities.

Several new organizations were formed. In 1995 Dick Mullineaux, Will Irwin and Jill Rose founded the Latitudinarians, a discussion group dedicated to religion and philosophy, especially the foundations of Unitarian Universalism. Each member was expected to present a paper once a year. The group met roughly once a month. A notice in *The Emersonian* in September 1996 mentioned that they were looking for four or five new members to join the current 10.

The Fellowship Council was created in September 1992 as a merger of the Food Committee and the Program Council. Their tasks was to promote and coordinate various social events at the church, such as the Fellowship Dinner, which kicks off the annual fund drive, Coffee Hour, the Service Auction, and the First Sunday Lunch. In the spring of 1993 they sponsored the first church picnic. They also maintained the activities calendar. The First Sunday Lunch was sponsored by various groups or committees through 1999, when a caterer was engaged to provide lunch for a nominal fee.

The High Rollers Investment Club grew out of the Fellowship Council in 1993, and continued throughout the 90's. It proved popular enough that in September 1996 some consideration was given to forming a second such group.

The Upper Crusts began as the Widow's Club but was renamed in the early 90's when some widowers wanted to join. They met in members' homes for lunch every third Wednesday and had other outings. In 1993 they raised \$200 for Pyramid House.

Several other groups with special interests also thrived: a couple of book clubs, a group of play readers and one of bridge devotees. One such group was led by avid golfer Jan Knost, who started the Floggers scramble tournament in 1991; it continued through 1995. In 1996 Jan and three other Emersonians represented the church at the Houston Interfaith Ministries fundraiser golf tournament, which raised \$10,000 for IM programs. A second group of outdoors types formed what was eventually named the Escape Artists. They held weekend campouts a couple of times a year at area state parks. In August 1999 e-groups were started with the involvement of our new ministers. The "e" stood for "engagement", and members communicated by e-mail. There were different topics and each group maintained an empty chair to welcome new members, with the optimum size at about 14. Each group had a leader who met monthly with the ministers and the groups were committed to care about each other as people.

#### **BOARD OF TRUSTEES 1990-1999**

- 1990: Bob Hopkins, President; Larry Huelbig, Past President  
Wallace Bond, Leonard Meltzer, Michelle Sorenson (to 1991)  
Gay Ann Gustafson, Bob Hopkins, David Tidholm (to 1992)  
Will Irwin, Mary Pedersen, Brad Raffle (to 1993)
- 1991: Mary Pedersen, President; Bob Hopkins, Past President  
Gay Ann Gustafson, David Tidholm, Ramon Williams\* (to 1992)  
Will Irwin, Mary Pedersen, Brad Raffle (to 1993)  
Bill Hammons, Jane Joseph, Jan King Mills (to 1994)
- 1992: Will Irwin, President; Mary Pedersen Past President  
Otto Glaser\*, Will Irwin, Gregor Riesser\*\* (to 1993)  
Bill Hammons, Jane Joseph, Jan King Mills (to 1994)  
Laura Agrons Emerson, Stan Hutchison, Joe Watters (to 1995)
- 1993: Jan King Mills, President; Will Irwin Past President  
Bill Hammons, Jane Joseph, Jan King Mills (to 1994)  
Laura Agrons Emerson, Joe Watters, Otto Glaser\*\* (to 1995)  
Nia Bauer, Jill Rose, Larry Huelbig\*\*

- 1994: Bill Hammons, President; Jan King Mills, Past President  
 Laura Agrons Emerson, Bill Hammons, Joe Watters (to 1995)  
 Nia Bauer, Pat Hammons, Jill Rose (to 1996)  
 Carole Huelbig, Jeff Rasco, Ken Vincent (to 1997)
- 1995: Jill Rose, President; Bill Hammons, Past President  
 Nia Bauer, Pat Hammons, Jill Rose (to 1996)  
 Carole Huelbig, Jeff Rasco, Ken Vincent (to 1997)  
 Betsy Gelb, Tim Lawrence, Judy Williams (to 1998)
- 1996: Carole Huelbig, President; Jill Rose, Past President  
 Carole Huelbig, Jeff Rasco, Ken Vincent (to 1997)  
 Betsy Gelb, Tim Lawrence, Judy Williams (to 1998)  
 Constance Chien, Gene Lambirth, Marsha O'Brien (to 1999)
- 1997: Gene Lambirth, President; Carole Huelbig, Past President  
 Betsy Gelb, Tim Lawrence, Judy Williams (to 1998)  
 Constance Chien, Gene Lambirth, Marsha O'Brien (to 1999)  
 Pam Bass, Lincoln Gray, Ann May (to 2000)
- 1998: Betsy Gelb, President; Gene Lambirth, Past President  
 Gene Lambirth, Constance Chien, Marsha O'Brien (to 1999)  
 Pam Bass, Lincoln Gray, Ann May (to 2000)  
 Fay Bixler, Beverly Hanson, deForest Ralph (to 2001)
- 1999: Pam Bass, President; Betsy Gelb, Past President  
 Pam Bass, Lincoln Gray, Ann May (to 2000)  
 Fay Bixler, Beverly Hanson, deForest Ralph (to 2001)  
 Laurie Hammons, Gay Lambirth, Wayne McCullough (to 2002)

The President stays on the Board for one more year as Past President but has no vote. When a second-year Trustee become President, as in 1990 and 1991, a Trustee must be elected to fill out his/her third year, designated by \*. The double \*\* indicates those who filled out unexpired terms of Trustees who resigned.