

Our History

Each of us who would tell our history has their own wonderful story to tell and their own style of telling it. Rather than merging the stories together and losing something in the retelling, we present each of the different stories here. We have two stories now, and more to come. When the church building flooded we lost many documents, but in time we hope to recover copies of many items from members' homes. For a history of Unitarian Universalism in New Orleans prior to the founding of CCUU, we refer you to the History page of the [First UU Church of New Orleans' web site](#).

Our History - An Overview

(multiple authors over time) Community Church, Unitarian Universalist was formed when two fellowships (congregations without ministerial leadership) which had left First Unitarian Universalist Church, New Orleans, merged in 1969. The new group called its first Unitarian Universalist minister, the Rev. James L. Jones, in 1970.

The church met in several locations before finding a permanent home and building the present building in 1973, at the same time they called a new minister, the Rev. Matthew McNaught.

As with most congregations, it took some time to get a sense of who they were and their purpose, but during the tenure of their third minister, the Rev. Donald Beaudreault, they spawned an offshoot, North Shore Unitarian Universalist Society in Lacombe, LA, which is still thriving.

The Rev. Kathleen Damewood Korb was called in 1986 and served as minister for fifteen years until 2001. She was then called to a congregation in Florida, a locale where she intends to eventually retire.

In the fall of 2001, the Rev. William Murchison came to us to serve as our Interim Minister for a one year period. His task completed, he moved on to another interim position in Reno, Nevada on June 30. His Interim Ministry provided a period of time for the congregation to evaluate its goals and prepare for a new permanent ministry.

On April 21, 2002 the congregation voted unanimously to call the Rev. James ("Jim") VanderWeele to serve as its next called minister. Jim accepted and began his ministry with us on August 1, 2002.

Although the church is still small it has gained a sense of itself as a center for free religion in the New Orleans area, valuing the integrity of the mind and spirit, and preaching and practicing freedom of belief and conscience, the inherent worth and dignity of each individual and the importance of ethical living.

Certainly hurricane Katrina and the associated breaking of the levees in September 2005 is a

historical event to note. The resulting waters, which not only came but stayed for several weeks destroyed our Church building and the homes of many of our members.

We live in the present though, and the present is about rebuilding and restoring. Some day it will be nice for us to write the "history" of the flood and our subsequent rising again as a congregation. For now this is still considered "current events" and as the rest of our web site shows we are busy unfolding that future history.

CCUU - Into the Millenium

(Excerpted from CCUU—The Last 30 Years, by Douglas Trotter—edited and added to by Elizabeth Trotter.)

CCUU slipped into the year 2000 – not the millennium of most of the country, since Rev. Kathleen Korb explained that the millennium was not entered until the end of the year 2000.

There were a number of parties, budget problems were easing, thanks to a \$25,000 gift of stock from Avis Ogilvy, there was a joint work party with First Church to clean up the tomb of patriarch Parson Clapp, and Rev. Korb was given the Russell Lockwood Award for "service to the Southwest District." The next year there was even a joint three-day retreat for all area UU's at a campground in Covington.

One area in which Rev. Korb was consistently active was the music program supporting her Sunday services. She secured on two occasions paid, highly-qualified pianists, and when they in turn departed, Rocile Muller and the ever-ready Burt Brunson would accompany hymns and collections.

The apex of the sometimes erratic music program came when Mignon Kolp was hired as music director. An electronic piano-organ was purchased and she quickly enlisted a full-fledged choir whose numbers would at times exceed ten or 12. They performed major selections programmed by Mignon and boosted the output of the congregation when singing hymns.

The hymnals were acquired when the UU Association produced a revised one and bookplates can be found in many of them, dedicated to the memory of some member; this went far to defray the cost of replacing the old hymnals. There is also a plaque of honor in the sanctuary to which names of the departed are placed in recognition of a \$1,000 gift.

By 2001 there was a proposed budget of \$104,000 and assets were at a record \$348,000.

The death of Inside Mardi Gras was quietly observed and replaced with an ongoing program of Bed and Breakfasts by a small cadre of hosts. No parties.

Bang! In quick order, the minister announced that she was candidating for the pulpit in Naples, FL. Then she resigned effective Sept. 1.

Many remembered the difficulties of doing without a minister during periods of transition, so it was decided to go with the stricture from Boston that we seek an interim minister for a year. Rev. Crump was named our Ministerial Settlement Representative to steer CCUU efforts to attract a permanent spiritual leader.

There was a packed farewell dinner party for Katy, and she was given a book of CCUU memories just as Rev. Bill Murchison signed on as the interim, his term to run not a day longer than a year into 2002.

The search committee was set up and funded and in time the focus narrowed to Rev. Jim VanderWeele. It was no handicap to our attractiveness that CCUU was designated a "Fair Compensation" Church, which meant we met the salary guidelines from UU headquarters. He was called unanimously.

At the same time, the church was nudged into the cyber age by David Wadleigh, who set up our first website (currently with 68 members and friends on the Internet), the directory for the first time contained photos of these worthies, the biweekly Newsletter repaired to monthly, and it was felt that the roof needed more than patching, it needed professional help. Alas, the original roofer was out of business.

The stage was set for a major upgrade of the entire plant.

A Long Range Planning Committee was formed and put together a wonderful five-year plan for growth. It was approved by the Board and presented to the congregation at the 2005 annual congregational meeting in June.

An Endowment Fund was established in the bylaws. It has been in existence about four years. We have 12 members who have named the fund in their wills and have four people who are giving annual gifts over a ten year period. We established February as "Endowment Fund Month" in 2005, with good return on the solicitations. (It was cancelled in 2005 due to Hurricane Katrina. We hope to have it again in 2007.)

We conducted a drive to purchase new hymnals and supplements. For the first time, anyone who wished to purchase a hymnal could download the donation form directly from our internet website.

By the summer of 2005, and after a successful capital fund drive, CCUU had finally fixed its longstanding problem with the leak in the roof, had been completely repainted and upgraded on the inside, new thermostats were installed, new siding was hung on the outside, membership was up, and prospects for the future were bright.

(Excerpted from CCUU—The Last 30 Years, by Douglas Trotter—edited and added to by Elizabeth Trotter.)

Community Church History Post-Katrina

When Katrina struck on August 29, 2005, our church and our minister's home, located within blocks of the breached floodwall, were inundated with 8 feet of floodwater. Many of our members lost their homes, jobs, and schools, and we all experienced exile and an enormous sense of loss. Within days, our webmaster David Wadleigh and Rev. VanderWeele had established a CCUU e-mail group which for many of us was our first connection with home. Rev. VanderWeele returned to Baton Rouge very soon after the storm and began to minister to our diaspora, meeting with members who were in Baton Rouge and contacting the rest of us through e-mail and phone.

By October, 2005, enough members of CCUU and First UU had returned to the City that the churches were able to begin holding joint worship services at Jefferson Presbyterian Church at 2:30 p.m. Thanks to financial support from the UUA, our ministers were paid and our rental expenses covered. Rev. Jim rented office space in a downtown office building, where we could hold small meetings. Board members who had returned gathered there to meet with others by conference call.

By April of 2006, we had regrouped and established the Post Katrina Planning Committee which met bi-weekly, usually for supper at Ann Duffy's home, solving immediate problems and planning for the future. With four of our seven board members having relocated out of town, Ann had agreed to serve as president-elect and taken the a leadership role in the City. President Cathy Larimer and other relocated officers kept in touch by e-mail and phone from their new homes. The congregation held frequent meetings, usually combined with after-service coffee hour or pot luck suppers, to stay updated and make decisions.

We were also very fortunate to have partner churches around the country who were supporting us in many ways, and in April 2006 they all sent representatives to New Orleans for a partner church weekend. We combined social events, a tour of the devastation, and planning sessions which allowed us to get to know each other and plan for ways in which we could work together toward recovery and rebuilding.

The UUA was also assisting, sending leaders to New Orleans regularly for meetings of a strategic planning group which included the minister and a lay leader from each of our three metro area UU congregations – First UU, CCUU, and North Shore. During those meetings a strategic plan for creating a strong, vital UU presence in New Orleans was created. At CCUU, we merged that plan with our own long range plan, which had been completed prior to the storm, and our congregation adopted it in November, 2006. As an outgrowth of those meetings, we three congregations joined together to form GNOUU – the Greater New Orleans Unitarian Universalists.

Susan Smith, District Executive, has also provided valuable counsel and support, visiting frequently in New Orleans and staying in touch by phone and e-mail.

Meanwhile, adaptations to our new situation continued to evolve. In the summer of 2006, the two congregations moved to First Presbyterian, across the street from the First UU location, and continued joint services until the Sunday after Labor Day when CCUU re-established our presence on the Lakefront and our individual worship services by moving to Chapel of the Holy

Comforter for a 12:30 p.m. service. We had hired a choir director and pianist who were both at UNO, so we were able to hold choir practice in their choir room. Jazz Music by the Cindy Scott trio welcomed us to our new location, and we signed our new membership book, a gift from the Church of the River in Memphis.

Realizing that planning for and financing a new church building would be a long process, and having become comfortable that Lakeview could once again become a safe and viable neighborhood, we purchased the small house adjacent to our church building. Our indefatigable building committee went to work on renovations, and by July of 2007, after having moved once more – this time to Congregation Gates of Prayer, a synagogue in Metairie – we held a triumphant, tearful, celebratory first worship service at 316 38th St., which remains our home. It combines a worship space, a fine new kitchen, office space for the minister and for the GNOUU capital campaign administrator, and a space for children. We have housed UUSC volunteers when the volunteer center at 1st Church is over-full and we plan to become both a tutoring site and a polling place in the fall of 2008.

A selection of other notable events during our 2.5 years of post-storm life together:

We attracted a few visitors at our Metairie site and many more when we returned to Lakeview, which is beginning to repopulate. We now have increased from our post storm low of 53 members to 68.

The UUA funded an intern minister for our three churches for the 2007-2008 church year. Erik David Carlson was a godsend, adding immeasurably to the quality of our ministry, both for our own three churches and to the larger community. He was an invaluable member of the GNOUU leadership team as that group evolved.

Leigh Henderson, a leadership training consultant from Community Church New York, led a congregational planning session and the organizational meeting for GNOUU as well as providing regular telephone consultations with Rev. Jim.

Rev. Aaron Payson, from the UUA trauma response ministry, came immediately after the storm and accompanied Rev. Jim on his first trip (by boat) back to his flooded church building and home. He's been twice since, bringing volunteers from his congregation on his third trip, and has provided support and valuable context for our post-traumatic emotional recovery.

Our Community Outreach Ministry has worked with Rev. Jim to begin our ministry in the larger community. Jim is on the board of All Congregations Together and CCUU has been the site for monthly lectures on ethics, sponsored by the Center for Ethical Living and Social Justice Renewal, the nonprofit arm of GNOUU.

The Building Committee retained architect Brian Gille, who created plans for renovation of the church building, and our representatives to GNOUU have worked on their leadership team to develop a three-church national capital campaign. We have solicited our members, friends and alumni for pledges to the campaign, and their response has been all we could have hoped for.

Our History

Monday, 21 April 2008 12:12

Our partner churches continue to walk with us, holding fund raisers, sending volunteers, and keeping in touch by e-mail and phone. We are working with them now to determine how they will assist us with the national capital campaign.

A member of the Tallahassee, FL, church, remembering the tapestry tree which had hung in our sanctuary, offered to restore it through the fabric restoration department at the University of Florida. It hangs again now in our worship space, beautiful and inspiring, making the space feel like home.

In May, we celebrated our 50th anniversary with a special worship service and a party on the lawn afterward at which neighbors joined us. Long time members shared memories of critical times in our history; Cindy Scott's jazz quartet provided wonderful music; we had champagne; and an artist member created a memory book covered in gold.

With energetic leadership from Rev. VanderWeele, a strong new board beginning their work on June 1st, the combined strength of our GNOUU congregations, and continued support from our partner churches, we look to the future with hope and confidence. (May 26, 2008 - Suzy Mague)