



**The History of
Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church
Houston, Texas
Volume IV 2000-2010**

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Chapter One: Ministry

The Reverends Rebecca and Mark Edmiston-Lange

The arrival of Becky and Mark Edmiston-Lange as Co-Ministers in August 1999 brought a breath of fresh air to Emerson Unitarian Church, as demonstrated by a surplus of \$1740 in the canvass drive. Throughout the fall they worked to integrate themselves into the life of the congregation. After the first few months they took turns conducting the service, with the one not doing so spending that hour in RE.

The new Co-Ministers revised the five-week UU & You course, adding nine monthly follow-up meetings called "Discover-E" to study Unitarian Universalism and Emerson in greater depth. By spring other "E" groups (for "engaged") were forming with Becky meeting monthly with the leaders. The June 2000 Board minutes noted that two new member recognition services so far that year welcomed over 20 new members each. In 2005 the five-week UU & You course was replaced by a new program, "Pathways", featuring an all-day Saturday session instead of the weekly evening meetings.

The Ministers also took an active interest in the plans then in progress in the Growth Planning Committee, which stated the need for vision and mission statements, a master plan, possible capital improvements and the 40th anniversary celebration in October 2000. With their fresh perspective, Mark and Becky felt that the capital campaign was the most urgent, especially with regard to renovation of the spaces for RE and administration, without which they believed the future vitality of the congregation was at risk. The GPC began revisiting the 1996 plan as a start, but Mark and Becky were well aware of Emerson's history with proposed building projects and were determined to guide this one to a better outcome. They designed the entire decision-making process the GPC followed throughout the project, a process intended to maximize congregational support through the use of trained facilitators leading small groups of members to solicit their input. The successful completion of the building program in the spring of 2004 culminated in a glorious dedication service in which the choir led the congregation from the sanctuary to the new building singing a modern rendition of "When the Saints Go Marching In."

The 40th Anniversary celebration in October 2000 included Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman, former Senior Minister Jan V. Knost, former interns Kathleen Ellis and Lucy Ijams, and former Associate Minister Leonora Montgomery. Twenty-five charter members were honored and a Power Point slide show summarized church history.

The year-end services were a mix of the old and the new. The November 2000 Union Thanksgiving service was hosted by Emerson with attendees from First Unitarian Universalist Church and Henry David Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Church, with First Church's Minister the Reverend Bob Schaibly preaching. Continuing established practice, First Church hosted the service in 2001, with the Reverend Bill Clark of Thoreau in the pulpit. Emerson would again host the Thanksgiving service in 2002, but after that this service was reluctantly dropped. Emerson's traditional Vespers service, held a couple of weeks before Christmas, continued more or less as usual until 2009 when it was changed to a more casual holiday musical format. There were two innovations: a first-time-ever Christmas pageant during the morning service on Sunday December 24, 2000 plus a Christmas Eve worship later that evening.

Other worship innovations included the Turnings service on the first Sunday in January, at which births, deaths and other life transitions during the previous year in the lives of Emerson members, their families, friends and the larger community are honored. This service soon became one of the most meaningful in the opinion of much of the congregation. Mark and Becky also began solstice and equinox observances, often combined with labyrinth walks. Eventually responsibility for these services was assumed by the environmental group, Ministry for Earth.

In 2001 the Ministers held a Seder in Westwood Hall on the Saturday before Easter with 100 in attendance. Construction of the new building prevented a repeat of this event until 2005. Other special services included a commemoration of the September 11 attacks on September 11, 2002 and a “ceremony of memory” before the demolition of the old RE modules to make room for new construction in the spring of 2003. Another special service was held July 31, 2008 in response to the shootings at the UU Church of Knoxville, Tennessee.

At the 2005 General Assembly, Becky received the Vision of Justice Award from the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee for her sermon “Freedom Come” on modern-day slavery. Originally preached at Emerson on February 27, 2005 under the title “Where the Captives Go Free,” the sermon was posted on the UUSC website at the conclusion of General Assembly. Other sermons by the Co-Ministers included a series on UU views of traditional religious ideas, two on Universalism, and some addressing current controversies such as the GLBT “threat” to marriage.

In 2006 Becky and Mark introduced the concept of covenant groups to Emerson. These are small discussion groups that meet monthly, usually in members’ homes, to explore issues of faith, philosophy and life experiences in a trusting environment. Minister Intern Claudia Frost, having had experience with covenant groups previously, provided leadership in setting up the organizational framework and ensuring a welcoming, accepting discussion context. When Claudia finished her time with us Nancy Lipp and Sarah Boyd assumed leadership. Each group was also expected to perform one service project a year for the church. Several groups continued throughout the decade, with varying degrees of success.

The Lay Pastoral Ministry Team was another innovation brought by the new Ministers. Emerson’s existing program, Befrienders, was reworked and expanded in 2002 to form the LPMT. It provides a confidential “ministry of presence” to support members with ongoing life issues. In 2007 this group introduced the “Joys and Sorrows” bowl to the sanctuary—a sand-filled ceramic bowl in which congregants may light candles lifting up personal milestones or concerns for family or friends. By 2008 the LPMT had 14 members and the program had trained 6 from the Bay Area congregation. The November 2008 Board minutes note that our LPMT program has gained quite a reputation in the Southwest District, and that Becky is often asked to lead workshops at other churches.

Discussions began in November 2003 for a three-month sabbatical for the Ministers in keeping with their Letter of Agreement with the congregation. A Sabbatical Committee was formed in the spring of 2005 but for various reasons the sabbatical did not take place until the spring of 2007 during the months of April, May and June. The Sabbatical Committee and the Worship Committee worked hard to make

sure all went smoothly in the Ministers' absence, scheduling pulpit guests and arranging for pastoral coverage. Shortly after the return of the Ministers in late August a weekend series of "restart" workshops was held with District Executive Sue Smith.

The new Co-Ministers actively encouraged greater congregational involvement in local social action projects. Mark soon became a much-valued member of the Private Sector Initiative (later Rebuild Together Houston) home refurbishing crews due to his carpentry experience. Both participated regularly in the Crop Walk. Their advocacy on behalf of LGBT rights led Emerson to become certified by the UUA as a Welcoming Congregation in 2004, and Emerson has been a regular participant in Houston's Gay Pride Parade. In addition to advocacy within the congregation Mark and Becky gradually assumed larger individual roles in district-and community-wide efforts. Soon after their arrival here Mark was elected to the Board of Trustees of the Southwest Unitarian Universalist Conference. When his term was up in 2003 Becky stepped in, ensuring Emerson's continuing input in District affairs. Both mentored ministers for other southeast Texas congregations. In 2003 Becky represented local UU ministers at the Houston Area Network of UU Congregations. In addition, the 2004 Annual Report mentioned that Mark served on the Council of Congregations for the local homeless agency SEARCH, on the Interfaith Relations Committee at Houston Interfaith Ministries, and on the Pastor and Therapist Relations Task Force of the Harris County Mental Health Association. Becky was also a contributing author for a new UUA book on safe congregations. In 2008 she led a Safe Congregation workshop at Emerson just before the start of the church school year. In January 2010 Mark became president of the Southwest UU Ministers Association.

Much to the Ministers' satisfaction the Hurricane Katrina disaster that struck New Orleans in late August 2005 brought out the best in both the Emerson congregation and the city of Houston. The first Sunday after the storm's landfall was on Labor Day weekend, and despite the resulting low attendance over \$10,000 was collected in a special offering at the worship service, later growing to \$15,000. In addition the church collected toiletry kits for the evacuees at the Astrodome and the George R. Brown Convention Center, and over 100 members took Interfaith Ministries' food service training to help out at both locations. The church also responded to the Pakistani earthquake and the Indonesian tsunami, raising a total of over \$70,000 to help with these calamities.

Locally, Becky and Mark attended a vigil at Covenant Baptist Church on January 6, 2008 in solidarity with Houston's gay community over the 2007 hate crimes. They along with several other Houston clergy from a variety of faith traditions issued a statement deploring such violence and calling for greater tolerance. In October 2007 both were invited to join Houston Mayor Bill White's Green Building Advisory Council as a result of the church's construction of our LEED-certified Delaney Hall. At the Council's first meeting in January 2008, they were singled out as being committed to green practices without expectation of immediate monetary return. They were proud to say that we at Emerson Church were "living our faith."

Minister Emeritus Dr. J. Frank Schulman

Since returning to Texas after spending several years in England the Schulmans now had a home in the Northwoods area, and Frank served the Northwoods congregation for part of that time. Periodically he preached at Emerson as well as at other area congregations. The Schulmans were honored guests at the church's 40th anniversary celebration in October 2000. In 2001 they endowed a chair in Unitarian Universalist History at the Meadville-Lombard seminary in Chicago, where Frank had received his doctorate years before. Frank returned to Emerson for the Founders Day service in early 2003, and again for the 200th anniversary of Ralph Waldo Emerson's birth in late May 2003. In November 2004 Dr. Schulman, along with Mark and Becky and the ministers of First UU Church, conducted a memorial service for the Reverend Horace Westwood who had served both congregations for many years. Horace's brother Arnold was among those attending the service.

Unfortunately Frank's health was not good. His last appearance at Emerson was on December 4, 2005, at which he received an honorary doctorate from Meadville-Lombard President Lee Barker in recognition of his long service to the cause of Unitarian Universalism. Dr. Schulman died just a month later on January 4, 2006. On January 8, 2006, Becky and Mark, along with Terry Sweetser, the UUA's Vice President of Stewardship and Development, presided at a memorial service held for him at Emerson, where he had served for 25 years. Later that year his wife Alice donated many of his books to Emerson's church library, which had been named in his honor.

Interns Return to Emerson

The first minister intern under Becky and Mark's guidance was Tom Capo, as noted in the January 2001 Board minutes. He served from September 2001 to June 2003 half-time. Mark and Becky set up an Intern Committee to assist them in mentoring Tom. They and several members of the Intern Committee traveled to Beaumont, Texas for his ordination in October 2003. He eventually served in Cedar Rapids, Iowa as well as Beaumont. In September 2006 Claudia Frost became our next intern. She had specifically asked to come to Emerson through Meadville-Lombard President Lee Barker. As noted above she was instrumental in developing the covenant groups. Her internship ran until the end of May 2007, meaning that her last two months overlapped Mark and Becky's sabbatical. Reverend Leonora Montgomery assumed the role of supervisor during that time.

Committee on Ministry

The Committee on Ministry, one of two congregational committees whose members are elected by the church membership, functioned largely in the background. Originally cast as a group that would oversee the relationship between the ministers and the congregation and mediate any difficulties, it had become clear that this model was not functioning well at Emerson. Eventually the Committee and both ministers embraced the concept of "shared" ministry, acknowledging the role of individual members and groups. The Annual Report for the January 2010 meeting defined "ministry" as the use of Emerson's resources of all kinds to make a positive and profound impact on peoples' lives. The COM meets with other committees and spiritually focused groups to study how they contribute to shared

ministry. At that same Annual Meeting they presented a revision of the COM's description contained in the church Constitution Article V section E that reflected this new understanding and was more consistent with the language used in other UU congregations.

At the 2006 Annual Meeting the revisions of the Constitution approved by the congregation included dropping the covenant, "In the love of truth and in the spirit of Jesus we unite for the worship of God and the service of humanity," on the grounds that no such statement was legally required. A few years later the Committee on Ministry was charged with replacing it as part of formulating a vision statement for the church, something strongly recommended by District Executive Sue Smith. The eventual result was the Statement of Identity and Purpose adopted at the January 2010 Annual Meeting and still in use at this writing (2013): "Our beloved community of faith, reason and affection welcomes all to grow in mind and spirit as we build a better world."

At the Annual Meeting in January 2011 the COM's report continued its focus on shared ministry, holding up entities such as covenant groups and Sandwiches for SEARCH.

Worship Committee

The role of the Worship Committee was more apparent than that of the COM. Although the worship service was the purview of the Ministers, the Committee worked with them and the Music Director to develop each Sunday's service. The Committee took a larger responsibility for the services when the Ministers were out of the pulpit during their summer study break and at other occasions during the year. At such times the Committee engaged guest speakers and worked with them to conduct the liturgy. The Worship Committee's greatest task came when Mark and Becky went on sabbatical during April, May and June 2007, running without a break into the usual summer responsibilities. During the sabbatical Minister Intern Claudia Frost preached four times and several other area UU Ministers stepped up to help. Dr. Jill Carroll, a frequent and most dynamic speaker, delivered a sermon on the Book of Esther as an example of courage in the face of evil despite personal feelings of fear and inadequacy, for which she received a standing ovation. (This is a rare occurrence at Emerson, though Mark received a standing ovation when he preached on his 25 years in the ministry, and Becky received one for her sermon on Martin Luther King Jr. in January 2005.)

Summer pulpit guests ran the gamut from individual Emerson members and staff, ministers and rabbis of other congregations, to outside lay experts on various ethical issues. During the rest of the year we heard from leading denominational figures including UUA President Bill Sinkford, Dr. Peter Lee Scott, former UUA President John Buehrens and, of course, our Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman.

Starting in 2008 the Worship Committee began to organize the summer services around a theme beginning with the Seven Principles. In 2009 the topic was shared wisdom sources and included speakers on Islam, Hinduism, Buddhism and Judaism. The 2010 summer services centered on the upcoming 50th anniversary of Emerson Church in October 2010. Tim Lawrence celebrated our musical history, Bob Hopkins spoke on Emerson's tradition of service, deForest Ralph reviewed the 25-year ministry of Dr. Frank Schulman, and several former Sunday School students described what it was like to

grow up at Emerson. Long-time friend and Foundation for Contemporary Theology Executive Director Bob Tucker offered his observations, Interfaith Ministries Executive Director Elliot Gershenson spoke about Emerson's interfaith commitment, and Carolyn Truesdell challenged the congregation to look ahead to the next fifty years.

CHAPTER TWO: OTHER STAFF CHANGES

The first decade of the 21st century would see a nearly complete turnover in church staff, the sole exception being the ministry. Emerson was fortunate that these changes, while often unsettling at the time, in the end worked to the benefit of the church.

Religious Education Director

Denise Stickle had been hired as permanent RE Director in 1998. In the spring of 2000 she married fellow Emersonian Bill Atkerson and announced her intention to resign at the end of June. However, Denise agreed to stay on through the summer at half time if she could have some temporary clerical help with routine paperwork. The Board of Trustees agreed to consider Co-Directors for RE.

In the fall of 2000 Judy Williams joined Denise as Co-Director of Religious Education on an interim basis. She worked with the program for the younger children while Denise carried on with the older children's programming. The following June Denise and Judy were hired as permanent Co-Directors of RE and would work together for six more years.

In early 2007 Judy and Denise announced their intention to resign in May and a Search Committee was set up in February. For the first time, someone from outside the congregation was chosen: Jo Ann Reeves, who moved here from the east coast. She was hired as Acting DRE in March 2007 and would start in May, giving her some overlap with Judy and Denise. She was to be considered for the permanent post after 12 months but left in September 2008. For the next 1 ½ years RE was run by the RE Committee and other parent volunteers under RE Chair Christi Walters with the indispensable help of Patti Withers, half-time DRE at Thoreau Unitarian Universalist Church. The RE Committee decided to seek an interim director.

The Search Committee's choice was Barbara Stoddard, a credentialed professional interim RE director then working on a two-year contract in Seattle. The Committee wanted to offer Barbara a two-year contract here, but there were major financial considerations. Barbara was hired in May 2009 on a two-year contract through the generosity of Alice Schulman, who underwrote a significant portion of the cost. In late 2010 the permanent position was again being advertized and the following year Katy Carpman was hired as Emerson's Director of Religious Education.

Nursery Assistant

Our nursery attendant, Reba Assad, a neighbor of Denise's, was hired in 1998, and soon joined by her daughter Maushami. In June 2000 Reba's younger daughter Rini also joined the team. The following year Maushami was headed to the pre-med program at the University of Texas at San Antonio. Emerson members raised \$1000 as a gift for her. In October 2005, a professional child-care agency was hired to staff the nursery.

Youth Choir Director

Kim Nocella was hired as Youth Choir Director with high hopes in August 2000, but by the following March Judy Williams, who had served in this position before, was again Chalice Choir Director until January 2006. Christina Paz was hired briefly, then replaced by adult choir members Josh Wright and Evanne Winograd. They continued until sometime in 2008, when the Chalice Choir folded, citing scheduling and logistical problems.

Music Director

Dorothy Rosenberger had served as Music Director since the summer of 1985. She, along with Sexton Gerald Moran and Operations Manager/Secretary to the Ministers Susanna Painter, had the distinction of serving under all three of Emerson's settled ministers plus both interims. She continued in that post until April 2002 when she retired. The Board named her Music Director Emerita in honor of her long service to the church and retired her choir robe. Dorothy continued to work on several national committees of the UU Musician's Network and was proud to represent Emerson.

John Branch was hired as Interim Music Director in July 2002 and secured the permanent post in May 2003. He was with us until June 2010. In September 2009 the Music Department was re-organized when John secured full-time employment as a math teacher and had to scale back his work load at Emerson. The post of Music Director was split in two: John became Artistic Director, overseeing all of Emerson's performing arts and working with the AV Committee. Alto Section Lead Bonnie Wellington was promoted to Choir Director. When John left the following spring, the Music Department reverted to its previous form with Bonnie as Music Director. Men's section lead singer Adrian Rodriguez was named Head Section Lead to act as Bonnie's assistant.

Organist

Jason Roberts had been Organist since mid-1999 and continued until May 2002. At that time he received his BA from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music and headed to Yale to pursue graduate studies. Tony Golmon served as Interim Organist from late 2002 until Anita Butt was hired in 2003. She remained with us for the rest of the decade.

Office

Bob Watkins was hired in December 1995 as $\frac{3}{4}$ time Business Administrator and continued in that post until the end of 2004. In January 2005 Karen Van Horn was hired as full-time Business Administrator. When Leisure Learning Unlimited leased a major portion of our facilities in 2007, the Personnel Committee recommended hiring a part-time office assistant to help with extra clerical work. Emerson member Nancy Lipp filled that role for most of the rest of the decade. In 2008 she also took responsibility for the newsletter when our outside editor, Jane Nilsson, resigned.

In 2008 the Board, recognizing that communications technology had opened up many new possibilities for both internal communications and outside PR, created a Communications Task Force to study the

topic and bring ideas forward. At their recommendation the post of Office Administrator for Communications was created that would oversee the monthly newsletter, weekly e-blast, website and the church accounts on Facebook and Twitter amid a host of similar responsibilities. The post was temporarily filled by Nancy Lipp until early 2010 when Molly Martin was hired.

Susanna Painter continued as Secretary to the Ministers until the spring of 2010 when she retired after many years of service to the church in a variety of roles, including that of Emerson's first Operations Manager in the early 1990's. She was honored at the 50th Anniversary celebration in October 2010.

Volunteer Office Workers

Although not paid staff, a group of loyal volunteers did much to keep the office work running smoothly. Each Monday morning Jan Mills, and later Mary Ann Stanley, entered pledge payments from the previous Sunday's collection. Jill Rose kept the membership data base up to date with the assistance of Karen Tidholm and Anne Goodman. A group of women Reverend Mark named the Fabulous Folding Fingers showed up regularly to help prepare the mailing of *The Emersonian* to those members who still received it through the mail. Nancy Lipp, in addition to her other responsibilities, also stepped up as a volunteer when needed.

Sexton

Gerald Moran, hired in 1985, continued as Sexton until suffering a stroke in July 2007. The Board of Trustees helped him seek approval for disability status with Social Security and agreed with the Personnel Committee that a self-funding short-term disability policy was needed to fill the 90-day gap between the onset of the condition and eligibility for Social Security. By December Gerald had been approved for disability with Social Security and retired.

Because Gerald was not usually available on Sunday mornings the Board hired Emerson member Hans Coster as Sunday Sexton in January 2004. With the onset of the LLU lease in January 2007 Clifton Walls was hired as Night Custodian to provide janitorial assistance during LLU's evening classes. In his report at the January 2008 Annual Meeting President Phil Richardson commented that Clifton stepped up to help with the broader assignment when Gerald had his stroke.

In January 2008 the Personnel Committee recommended going to full-time for the Sexton position but that the hours not be limited to weekdays. In April 2008 Luis Guandique was hired and the position renamed "Facilities Engineer" in light of his HVAC certification. All parties hoped that this would be a permanent solution, but a medical emergency in his family obliged him to seek a better paying job and he resigned in October. Once Luis secured full-time work elsewhere he was willing to work part time for us in the evenings and weekends on a stop-gap basis. The Facilities Engineer post remained vacant for two years and in May 2010 was scaled back to Sexton. In September 2010 Efrain Vasquez was hired as Emerson's Sexton and Luis continued to work part-time for the Tanglewood Academy.

CHAPTER THREE: RELIGIOUS EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN AND YOUTH

Sunday Program

The children's Religious Education program entered the new millennium at full speed under Denise Stickle, RE Director since 1998. Perhaps RE's biggest challenge during this decade was maintaining a fully functioning program during the construction of Delaney Hall, which necessitated the demolition of all RE buildings in the spring of 2003. The Co-Directors (see below) were shoe-horned into the choir robing room at the back of the sanctuary, which also doubled as the bride's room. The high school class met at the nearby Congregation for Reform Judaism. The middle grades met in the front foyer of Westwood Hall, the pre-schoolers in cubicles in the main fellowship hall, and the K-5th grades were combined into a complex multi-age program that included the usual curriculum topics. Everyone concerned was relieved to move into the new quarters in the summer of 2004.

The year 2000 saw the introduction of Our Whole Lives, a new UUA sex education course for Emerson, with First UU Church and the Thoreau congregation also included. Ongoing programs included Coming of Age, Youth Follies and the Houston area Youth Rally, which was held this year at the Bay Area congregation. A special garden was being planned in memory of former RE chair Brittan Fuller who died in February 2000. She had worked hard to bring the OWL curriculum to Emerson and also shaped the two-hour Sunday School program adopted in 1993. She loved gardening and worked on many projects with Urban Harvest as well as the Emerson Sharing Garden, and even helped Co-Ministers Mark and Becky Edmiston-Lange plan their yard in their new home. The site eventually chosen was just outside the north entrance to the sanctuary, and it soon became a favorite retreat for quiet conversation or contemplation. Her husband Bill Buchanan did much of the installation work himself on weekends and evenings.

As described in the chapter on staff changes, Denise, having married fellow Emersonian Bill Atkerson in the spring of 2000 and wishing to have more family time, announced her resignation effective at the end of June. By October long-time member and RE stalwart Judy Williams joined her as Co-Director. They would remain a team until the end of May 2007 and were followed by Jo Ann Reeves, who served little more than a year. In the spring of 2009 Interim DRE Barbara Stoddard was hired for two years followed by Katy Carpman in 2011.

For the first several years the curriculum continued much as it had been in the late 1990's, starting with cooperation and general getting-along for the youngest children and moving into Bible stories for the early elementary grades. Unitarian and/or Universalist history would come next, followed by a year-long curriculum on the life of Jesus and another on other world faiths. Denise and Judy worked to make sure that every student who remained at Emerson experienced each of these topics, though enrollment varied from year to year and often meant combining grade levels. The high school class tended to focus on ethics, personal morality and articulating our faith. In 2000-1 it was revised around what the UUA identified as the five elements of balanced youth programming: worship, service, fellowship, education and leadership, and took up the entire two-hour block. The teens would attend some Adult Education

classes and have their own discussion. They also designed worship services for the younger children and held numerous service projects such as the Freed Park Christmas Party. The year 2000 ended with Emerson's first-ever Christmas pageant—a new tradition launched by long-time RE volunteer Jill Rose.

In 2004 a "life-skills" course was added for middle-school youth that addressed issues of self esteem, stress, family conflict, bullying and relationships. By the spring of 2006 the Coming of Age program, in which the students work out an expression of their personal beliefs, had become the 8th grade course. In 2007, Jo Ann Reeves adopted the UUA's "Compass Points" course for the 6th and 7th grades as a good lead-in to COA. For the high school teens, the topic was "Thinking the Web" and "Popcorn Theology" in which they would study appropriate movies such as *Field of Dreams* for deeper content. In 2009 Interim DRE Barbara Stoddard revised the curriculum almost completely:

"Faithful Journeys" (2nd and 3rd grades), develop UU identities through stories of faith in action

"Windows and Mirrors" (4th and 5th), perception of self and others,

"You the Creator" (6th and 7th), which included lessons on transient art such as sand paintings

In September 2010 she introduced "Gather the Spirit", part of the larger "Tapestry of Faith" program. It was a new multi-generational curriculum that was held every 2nd Sunday during the 10 am Activity Hour jointly with adults to promote cross-generational ties. (At this time RE returned to its old format, with Activity Hour at 10 am and RE classes at 11. The worship service had also been moved to 11 am. As before, children attended the first 15 minutes or so of the service with their families before going to their classes.) The year-long topic was water as a resource and the importance of conservation.

Summer Program

RE's summer program Discovery Club, begun in the 1980's, continued uninterrupted throughout the decade. Each summer the program was centered on a theme different from the usual curriculum. In 2000 the topic was based on Dr. Seuss stories that illustrate our UU principles followed by "Honoring Our Mother Earth" in 2001 (repeated in 2006). "I Like Being Me" was the topic for both 2002 and 2003. It focused on children ages 4 to 9. Children ten years old or older could choose to help with the younger ones or go to church with their families. The same held true in 2004, when RE reached back into the past and resurrected DUSO (Developing Understanding of Self and Others) for grades K through 3rd. Other activities were held for the 4th and 5th grades. Again, older children could help or go to church with their families. In 2005 a new topic was introduced: "UU Superheroes", which studied historical UU icons Theodore Parker, King John Sigismund, Joseph Priestly and Norbert Capek plus contemporary UU figures Christopher Reeve and Pete Seeger. Other topics included the seven UU principles and "Teaching Peace Through Play", in which participants would "visit" several countries.

Service Projects

Service projects and the wider community have always been an important part of Emerson's RE program. The long-running UNICEF Carnival was held every year. In 2001 the Carnival raised \$1460, the

largest sum to date. The following spring UNICEF sent a thank-you letter naming Emerson a 2001-2 Ambassador. The older children regularly took part in Freed Park activities which had started under Emerson member Tom Matney. Each December the Mitten Tree collected warm hats, gloves, jackets, scarves and mittens to be distributed to Central American immigrants. In January 2001 the 5th and 6th graders donated gently used toys to Texas Children's Hospital. The Coming of Age class collected and donated old cell phones for domestic abuse victims. The phones would be reprogrammed to dial 911 and also the phone numbers of emergency shelters. Spring service projects included SEARCH, The House of Tiny Treasures and Freed Park. In May 2001 LRY member Brian Dillon turned to the rest of the group for help with his Eagle Scout project: supervising the younger children in making UU-themed 4"x4" ceramic tiles for a wall display that later would be placed in the RE wing of Delaney Hall. The group donated \$400 plus labor for Brian's project. After the September 11 attacks the children collected money for the victims' families and planted flowers in memory of those who died. The LRY held a Hunger Banquet the Sunday after Thanksgiving 2001 with the proceeds going to the Mount Vernon Food Pantry. This was repeated in some form for at least five years. In 2002 RE collected Box Tops 4 Education for Rodriguez School, one of the Outreach Board's projects. With Emerson member John Pepper, the LRY took part in the Relay For Life, an American Cancer Society benefit. They raised over \$1200 and were the only team that stayed for the entire event. This project was repeated in 2003 and 2004. In the fall of 2002, the LRY, COA and Schweitzer Club all turned out for Interfaith Ministries' Day of Service, a tree-planting event along Brays Bayou. Counting both adults and youth, we had 21 participants out of a total of 150, planting 25 of three hundred trees. In September 2002 the LRY was featured in a *UU World* article on successful youth groups. In early 2004 the 6th and 7th grades collected glasses and hearing aids for the Houston Eye Glass Center to be refurbished for those in need. The annual Easter Egg hunt was modified to collect nonperishable food items that were then exchanged for the customary goodies. Also in 2003, the LRY and Coming of Age class volunteered at the Special Olympics.

In 2004 RE began a monthly collection of personal grooming items for SEARCH. The Junior Finance Committee, revived in 2003 and composed of the 5th grade class, chose the recipients of the Sunday School collection: America's Fund for Afghan Children, Casa de Esperanza, American Cancer Society, Heifer Project International and the Histiocytosis Association. In the spring of 2004, the high school class attended an event sponsored by the Texas Coalition to Abolish the Death Penalty to hear Sister Helen Prejean, author of the book *Dead Man Walking*, and actress Susan Sarandon, who played Sister Prejean in the movie based on the book. In the spring of 2005 the Church School Day of Service was held May 22. The children made "Welcome Home" backpacks for children of SEARCH who are moving into new housing with their parents. This project involved the whole RE department including the teens, who delivered the backpacks.

In November 2007 RE Director Jo Ann Reeves began a "My Soldier" project, raising enough money to send "our soldier" (in Iraq) a package every month for four months. The RE Committee report for the 2008 Annual Meeting noted that the Junior Finance Committee donated the Sunday School collection to, among others, the Houston Zoo (adopting a baby elephant in honor of Jill Rose) and to the Houston

SPCA in memory of Olivia Aucock, one of our children who died in the spring of 2005. They also contributed to the cost of a bench placed in the RE playground in her memory. The same report added that in 2007 the UNICEF Carnival raised \$2400, a new record. This included over \$300 from a bake sale at Post Oak School organized by two of our 5th graders. In May 2008 Emerson's RE hosted Pangea Day, a world-wide event to focus attention on tolerance and compassion. A group of Emerson middle-schoolers made a short video to be submitted for the program, which featured films from all over the world. Emerson was one of only two UU churches to host this event, and was the only site in Texas.

In 2009 under Interim DRE Barbara Stoddard, the 2nd and 3rd grade classes conducted an accessibility audit of the campus and submitted a report to the Board of Trustees, who promised to keep it in mind for further action. Among the barriers the children found were sanctuary doors that cannot be opened by people in wheelchairs and gaps between concrete slabs in the sidewalks that are troublesome to those using walkers.

RE continued to include a worship component as part of the Sunday School hour, though this was not easy during the construction of Delaney Hall. According to the DRE's report for the 2005 Annual Meeting, RE started brief opening and closing worship services for the 1st through 5th grades(later the closing service was dropped). The opening service continued until the spring of 2007, when the children were included in the first part of the main worship service in the sanctuary.

In 2007 the Child and Youth Protection Policy was amended to require criminal background checks on RE teachers and youth advisors, and another amendment specifically forbade alcohol consumption by adult supervisors of any youth activities. At the January 2011 Annual Meeting Interim DRE Barbara Stoddard reported that RE's enrollment had grown to 145 registered children, up from less than 100 in January 2010. With the class component moved back to 11am attendance climbed to an average of 70 per week, up from 50. Coming of Age met at 10am and the YRUU during both hours. "Community in Action" was a new program adopted for grades K through 7th to give more structure to Activity Hour. The RE Committee report for the same Annual Meeting described the new program as including social action projects, arts and crafts, music and drama. It would be dove-tailed with the monthly intergenerational "Gather the Spirit" program. The Committee also noted that the Coming of Age program had 15 participants compared to 6 the previous year, and that YRUU (formerly the LRY) had 23 members, up from 14.

CHAPTER FOUR: ADULT EDUCATION

Sunday Program

Emerson's always-strong adult education program continued seamlessly into the new century with a wide variety of topics and speakers from the larger community as well as our own congregation. A typical list included popular visitor and former Episcopal priest Michael Jost with his thought-provoking insights on questions raised by the assumptions of conventional Christianity. Emerson member, religion professor and former Baptist minister Mark Whitten concentrated more on the Hebrew Bible with talks on Job, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. Later he would also speak on the separation of church and state. Emersonian Ken Vincent gave an overview of various ways to salvation, including Unitarian, Universalist, mysticism, pre-destination and mainstream Christianity. Another frequent speaker was church member Laura Agrons (now Emerson) who addressed the Jewish content of the Gospels, while Pippa Wiley and others led discussions of UUA study/action topics to be considered at the General Assembly. Topics that were less obviously religious were also addressed: a Great Decisions series (a discussion sponsored by the Houston World Affairs Council and the National Foreign Policy Association), environmental issues, social justice concerns and drug policy to name a few.

In addition to the usual Sunday morning classes, in the fall of 2001 Jerry Wendelin and Jim Vague led a series on Taoism, Buddhism and Zen which met after church on Sundays. Becky Edmiston-Lange taught a series on spirituality that met on Wednesday evenings concurrently with Mark Edmiston-Lange's UU and You series. Adult Education also introduced the First Friday Film series, which continued more or less until the summer of 2010 in the capable hands of Leticia Anderson and Joann Hendrick. In early 2002 Minster Intern Tom Capo presented a new series on "Ethics: An Exploration in Personal Morality", a UUA curriculum written by "Building Your Own Theology" author Richard Gilbert. That spring saw the beginnings of the 14-session UUA "Welcoming Congregation" curriculum designed to address barriers to the acceptance of LGBT persons. Becky led a two part class on UU parenting. In the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, many Adult Education speakers, including Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman and Dr. Jill Carroll of Rice University, covered Islam and other eastern religions and nations.

The big challenge to the Adult Education Committee in 2003 was the same as for many other groups: the construction of Delaney Hall, which necessitated the demolition of the entire RE wing and thus reduced the amount of space for all classes for both children and adults. The adult curriculum was scaled back to one class each week that was held in the sanctuary before the worship service. Attendance was high, with over 50 during the summer and increasing to 60-65 in the fall. The Annual Report for 2003 states that the Committee planned to add a second track when the new building was finished, as well as offering more multi-week evening programs.

Even before the opening of Delaney Hall adult education got off to a fast start for 2004 with a new Life Issues series that covered a history of the concept of family, blending religious traditions in mixed families, and the moral development of children. Jill Carroll returned to introduce a series on mystical

religious traditions (with two other speakers). Another speaker was Drug Court Judge Caprice Cospers. An eight-week "Building Your Own Theology" series began in late March.

When Delaney Hall opened in late spring the Adult Education Committee began a second track of classes designed for a smaller size to promote discussion. One of them was a series led by Emersonian John Pepper on Hebrew and Christian scriptures. In September a parent education hour was offered by experienced moms and RE stalwarts Bonnie Homier, Valerie Blair and Zena Taylor.

In October 2004 Jill Carroll presented a five-week evening course on world religions held in Emerson's sanctuary and advertised to the public. According to the 2004 Annual Report 145 tickets were sold for the series, and attendance averaged 95 per session even with the Houston Astros in the major-league baseball play-offs! The proceeds easily covered Dr. Carroll's fee and netted nearly \$4000 for the Adult Education Committee. They used a little over half that sum to purchase a digital projector for Power Point presentations.

In 2005 a third track was added covering programs offered on days other than Sundays. These included Jill Carroll's series on religion in America, a Foundation for Contemporary Theology series, an introduction to spirituality by Becky, the power of myth by John Pepper and a two-program offering on loss and grief led by Emerson member and grief counselor Kay Bergen. Emerson member Dick Cheney, and attorney/ethicist at Methodist Hospital, offered an end-of-life series entitled "A Gentler Embrace" that would be repeated at least twice. Track II Sunday classes, which included a four-part series on Zen meditation, were renamed "Issues and Ideas" but continued the small-group discussion format.

In 2006 the three-track system continued with Track I labeled the "Speaker Series." Jill Carroll returned for a presentation on "The Gnostic Gospels and the Early Jesus Movement." In 2007 the Committee took a break over the summer. In the fall Mary Ann Stanley began a Track II class, "Sunday School for Adults."

In 2008 the UUA announced a new curriculum, "Tapestry of Faith," intended to integrate all ages. It was to start in the fall. Emerson member Judy Richardson gave an overview at two Adult Education sessions in June. When the curriculum apparently was not yet ready, Judy led a year-long adaptation re-titled "Living Our Faith." Other topics also were presented as the three track system continued, including a series by Laura Emerson in the spring. Meanwhile, Susan Green began a new program, the Sunday Morning Book Club. The Committee also developed a core curriculum consisting of UU history, personal theology, spiritual discipline practices, Bible study, world religions and the new Living Our Faith series. At the instigation of the Committee, Emerson joined the Boniuk Center for Religious Tolerance headed by Emerson friend Jill Carroll.

In 2009 the Adult Education Committee began what eventually became Exploration Sundays on the third week of the month. Initially there were four small groups: Book Club, Journaling, Poetry and Dreamwork. At the request of EPIC (Emerson Parents in Community) Judy Richardson added a new third-Sunday group, "Parents as Spiritual Guides," in conjunction with the RE Committee. Adult Education also sponsored the Welcome MAT film series after church on Sundays, which presented films

dealing with LGBT issues. In October Exploration Sunday featured five groups: the Book Club and Poetry groups continued, plus Parents as Spiritual Guides, UU History and Being One with Mother Nature.

In 2010 the worship service was reset back to 11 am (from 11:15 during the construction of Delaney Hall) necessitating a tight turn-around in Westwood Hall after the Intergenerational Orchestra rehearsals, and limited speakers to 45 minutes. Exploration Sunday continued. In addition a new multi-generational curriculum, "Gather the Spirit," was added on each second Sunday at the instigation of our Interim Director of Education, Barbara Stoddard. The focus was on the importance and responsible uses of water. The intention going forward was for more intergenerational interactive programming melding both adult education and the children's program with the hiring of our new Religious Education Director, Katy Carpman in the spring of 2011.

Kilgore Lecture

The Kilgore Lectureship was founded in memory of Emerson charter members Faye and Hartman Kilgore and funded by their bequest. Lectures during the years 2000-2010 included the following:

- 2000 February 13: Dr. Steven Michael Tipton of Emory University, "In Search of the Self and Community in America."
- 2002 December 13: Rev. Fred Small, son of Emerson members Roger and Ellen Small, author of the UUA's Green Sanctuary program and minister of First Church Unitarian in Littleton, Massachusetts, "Wake Now, My Senses: The Religious Imperative of Earth Stewardship."
- 2005 October 23: The Houston Ebony Opera Guild Chorus in concert, presenting arias, duets and choruses from great operas and African American spirituals.
- 2007 February 11: Dr. William Brinkley, Senior Vice President for Graduate Studies and Dean of the Graduate School of Biomedical Sciences at Baylor College of Medicine, "The Science and Public Policy of Embryonic Stem Cells."
- 2008 May 4: Dr. David Hillis of the University of Texas, "Teaching Evolution is Vital."
- 2009 September 30: Dr. Eugenie Scott, Executive Director of the National Center for Science Education, "The Evolution of Creationism." A joint presentation with Darwin 2009 Houston at the Museum of Natural Science.

CHAPTER FIVE: MUSIC

Emerson's always-strong music program would blossom even more in the new millennium with the establishment of several new groups and diverse events, evolving away from the tight focus on liturgical music to a broader performance emphasis. The Emerson Intergenerational Orchestra, Suoni Dolci and the rock band Waldo all formed during this period. A Music Task Force charged with bringing in community-based musical events was authorized by the congregation at the 2004 Annual Meeting and reaffirmed in 2005. Headed by Emersonian Bill Atkerson, it led to numerous community concerts in 2005 and the establishment of UniTunes, a coffee-house-style folk music series in the spring of 2006. In 2009 another Emerson member, Don Whittaker, fostered the development of the Emerson Players to present dinner-theater performances a couple of times a year. In early 2009 the Performing Arts Council was created to oversee all aspects of the church's performing arts groups including the Audio-Visual Committee. Mary Ann Rusk was the first chair. Later that year the Board agreed to a reorganization of the Music Department in which Music Director John Branch was named Artistic Director and Alto Section Lead Bonnie Wellington became Choir Director. This arrangement lasted until John's resignation the following year when he secured full time employment elsewhere.

In the summer of 2000 through the efforts of Emerson member Karen George, the church's music program received a major boost in the form of a \$10,000 grant from the Martel Foundation for special music over the next ten years. In Late May 2000 the congregation celebrated Dorothy Rosenberger's fifteen years as Music Director. In a letter of thanks published in *The Emersonian*, she was especially pleased that the behind-the-scenes contributions of her husband Don were recognized. He not only sang in the choir, he served as events coordinator, tuned the harpsichord and took care of many other mundane but essential details.

In late November 2000 Dorothy was speaker at a Lecture-Recital of the Houston Tuesday Music Club, which was meeting at Emerson while their usual venue at the auditorium of the Museum of Fine Arts was being remodeled. In fact the Houston Tuesday Music Club continued to meet at Emerson and, as of this writing (2013), still does. Dorothy retired at the end of April 2002 as she and Don moved to New York. Her choir robe was retired and she was named Music Director Emerita. A month later our popular and talented organist Jason Roberts, having graduated from Rice University's Shepherd School of Music, resigned to continue his musical studies at Yale University.

Adult Choir

The adult choir, in addition to providing liturgical music for worship services, put on a wide variety of concerts and performances. One of Dorothy Rosenberger's last appearances featured Schubert's *Mass #2 in G*. When John Branch became Music Director in 2003, Emerson's choir joined with the Northwoods UU choir to present the Rutter *Requiem* on April 5. Two performances were given: one at Emerson raise funds for Emerson's lead singers, and the other at Northwoods. That year the choir also performed the Saint-Saens *Christmas Oratorio* for Vespers. A spring fundraising concert the following

year included the Chalice (children's) Choir, and both groups took part in the Houston Area UU Network's Music Festival that March.

In the spring of 2005 the Music Department staged a major production of *Joseph and the Amazing Technicolor Dreamcoat*. Later that summer the new group Suoni Dolci along with other choir members presented music from the new supplement to the hymnal *Singing the Journey*. The annual spring concert, by now a tradition, continued in 2006 with Vivaldi's *Gloria* at which Suoni Dolci and the choir were joined by professional soloists and a chamber orchestra thanks to Martel funds. Vespers 2006 included Randol Bass' *Glad Tidings*.

The spring of 2007 saw three major musical events: the musical *Pippin*, performed on March 2 and 3 as a fundraiser for the new organ console, was immediately followed by the dedication concert for the console on March 4, which featured Dr. David Hemming from St. Martin's Episcopal Church and the Houston chapter of the American Guild of Organists. In late May three current and former choir section leads--Beth Hill, Bonnie Wellington and Sarah Crain-- gave a classical vocal concert. The choir performed Bob Chilcott's *And Peace on Earth* for Christmas Vespers.

In April 2008 the choir presented *Missa Gaia*, raising money for Urban Harvest and Emerson's Ministry for Earth. In June Alto Lead Bonnie Wellington presented a Wednesday evening lecture series on "Basics in Music Theory and Vocal Production." Vespers saw a reprise of *Glad Tidings*. *Missa Gaia* was repeated in 2009, with proceeds split between Emerson's Ministry for Earth and KPFT Radio for Peace. The Vespers service that year was an original program written by John Branch and Don Whittaker, "Traditions of Christmas" featuring music from *A Feast of Carols* by Randol Bass.

In May 2010 the choir performed the Faure *Requiem*, John Branch's final concert after nine years' service to Emerson. Bonnie Wellington succeeded him as Music Director, and Adrian Rodriguez became Head Section Lead. Vespers 2010 included a *Messiah* sing-along.

Children's Choir

The children's choir got off to a promising start with popular director Kim Nocella. But before the end of the year she married and moved out of state. Adult choir members stepped in to lead the children's choir through the end of the year. Judy Williams became Youth Choir Director in early 2001 and the youth choir was named the Chalice Choir. By spring the choir was giving well-received performances decked out in their new t-shirts. In the spring of 2004 the Chalice Choir performed at the Spring Music Festival at the Houston Fellowship sponsored by the Houston Area UU Network, at Emerson's Easter service, and in a choir fundraiser on April 18. Judy continued as Director until 2006, when another attempt was made at hiring an outside director. After an encouraging start the new director suddenly left for another job only a few weeks before a major spring performance. Adult choir members again stepped up, with Josh Wright and Evanne Winograd serving as youth choir directors. But in 2008 scheduling conflicts and other issues became too great, and the Chalice Choir was discontinued.

Equipment Issues

In March 2000 through the efforts and donations of several people the 25-year-old gold choir robes were replaced with beige, lighter-weight robes that were much more comfortable. In the summer of 2001 Music Director Dorothy Rosenberger anticipated the need for major repairs to the organ. She estimated that we had about ten years before re-leathering of the organ would become necessary, a \$25,000 expense, and began plans to gather the required funds. In January 2002 section lead Lionel Brackins gave a concert to help start the fundraising. In 2003 Laurie Hammons designed and made a full set of multi-colored stoles for the choir, as well as a set of Christmas stoles. In 2004 another fundraiser was held to buy risers for the choir. Meanwhile the Music Task Force's success in bringing in outside musical events plus the choir's performances highlighted the need for better lighting and other equipment. In the Music Director's report to the Annual Meeting in January 2006, John Branch noted that an anonymous donation paid for a new AV soundboard and microphones and another donation made possible the upgrade of both sound and lighting. Spotlights were added in 2006.

By the fall of 2006 the need for major organ repairs was becoming increasingly serious. Rather than incur a large expense for repairing the organ, the Music Committee instead recommended upgrading to a movable, electronic hybrid console that would add flexibility and minimize future repair costs. They had about \$15,000 in the organ repair fund, roughly half to one-third of the cost of a new instrument. Chair Kit Taylor and Music Director John Branch proposed to raise the remaining money over the next few years by sponsoring an annual church-wide cruise out of Galveston on Carnival Cruise Line, which was willing to work with the church on this project. The Board gave its approval at the October 2006 meeting. However, at the December Board meeting John Branch said that he had learned of an opportunity to buy, from a local source, a used console that had everything we wanted and more. The Board agreed to lend the money to the Committee, which would be repaid by proceeds from the cruises and other fundraisers. Past President Pippa Wiley was able to negotiate a better price, the console was installed a few weeks later, and the dedication concert held at the end of February.

Other Performing Groups

The fall of 2000 saw the beginning of a recorder group organized by former choir director and long-time member Herman Naeseth. It continued on and off for several years as Herman patiently revived it for special performances. In the fall of 2001 the Emerson Intergenerational Orchestra was formed under the auspices of Emerson member and dedicated musician Bill Atkerson. Musicians of all ages and abilities took part as Bill, in the best UU tradition, welcomed everyone who was interested. He edited scores to fit his musicians' abilities and even wrote several pieces for them. Their first performance was at the 2001 Christmas pageant, and they enhanced worship services on a regular basis thereafter, becoming more and more skilled with each performance. By 2008 they had 40 musicians equally divided between youth and adults. So great was their dedication that even when Bill had to spend three months in Qatar on business in 2009, Music Director Bonnie Wellington, Allyson Applebaum and others were able to keep the orchestra going.

In 2003 Emerson's rock band was formed and named Waldo in 2005. By 2008 the name had been changed to Harmonic Tonic, and eventually they would assume the name Western Sky when playing country music. They enlivened many of Emerson's social events and a few worship services.

As noted earlier at the 2004 Annual Meeting Bill Atkerson was named to head the Music Task Force to promote community concerts; the Task Force was reauthorized at the 2005 meeting. By 2006 this project was in full bloom and Emerson hosted five Guitar Houston concerts, the Millennium Voices, the Montrose Quartet (composed of Houston Symphony musicians) and several recitals for local piano teachers. In addition, the UniTunes coffee house series began in 2006 with five concerts. These featured live folk music on themes consistent with UU principles by musicians from all over Texas and beyond. The proceeds from these concerts were divided between the church and a local charity. This popular series would continue the remainder of the decade.

In early 2005 several choir members and some others who wanted to tackle more challenging music began a small vocal ensemble named Suoni Dolci, "sweet sounds" in Italian. Working closely with Organist Anita Butt, most of their performances were *a capella* and classical with some variations. They too performed at many worship services and other church events over the rest of the decade.

Finally, The Emerson Intergenerational Drama Troop, later called the Emerson Players, was formed in 2009 under the direction of John Branch and Don Whittaker. Their first performance was *Love, Sick and Montezuma's Gold* by Daris Howard. It was followed by *The Complete History of America (Abridged)* that September as a fundraiser for Congregations Helping in Love and Dedication (CHILD), a service of the Texas Department of Family and Protective Services. Later productions would include *Our Funny Valentines*, an evening of one-act plays. After Don's untimely death in the summer of 2010, the Emerson Players performed Agatha Christie's *Ten Little Indians* dedicated to his memory. With the play already in rehearsal, Emerson member Tamekia Jackson stepped in as replacement director. Later productions were directed by Hilary Henderson Ritz. The Emerson Players have also taken part in the annual Christmas pageants and occasionally other worship services. As of this writing (2013) they continue to put on a couple of productions a year.

CHAPTER SIX: FACILITIES, FINANCE AND GOVERNANCE

Facilities

As Becky and Mark Edmiston-Lange settled into their ministry at Emerson they quickly perceived the need for a major upgrade in the church's physical plant. The three RE modules, built in 1966, had long outlived their usefulness. Staff offices were scattered around the campus and new communication technologies threatened to overwhelm wiring capacity. In early 2000 the Growth Planning Committee was revisiting the master plan from 1996. With the strong support of the new Ministers the GPC formally recommended to the Board that a building program be undertaken. As a first step they suggested enlisting the Past Presidents, who were convening to plan the church's 40th anniversary celebration in October 2000. Later the GPC endorsed the approach put forward by Mark and Becky, which envisioned a congregational meeting led by the Ministers to discuss surrounding issues, leading to a series of small group meetings to generate support and solicit input. The results of these meetings would be collated and presented to the congregation. Fifteen small group meetings were held in January 2001 with about 200 members participating, including youth.

At the February 2001 Board meeting the Trustees endorsed the GPC's recommendation that any new facility would be energy efficient and voted \$20,000 to begin the process. The GPC presented the proposal, designated the Millennium Project, at a congregational meeting on the auspicious date of March 4th and received unanimous approval to proceed. The Committee continued to seek congregational input and formed subcommittees to focus on three main areas: architect selection, chaired by Larry Huelbig; financing, chaired by Will Irwin, and program priorities, chaired by Ann Wood.

In August the GPC announced the selection of Ray Bailey Architects to develop, within the constraints of our budget, an energy-efficient and environmentally friendly design. Mr. Bailey and others from his firm attended an Adult Education session in September, and by November details were emerging on the architectural plan.

Meanwhile Andrew Delaney stepped forward with a \$500,000 gift toward the project's financing. In June GPC chair Betsy Gelb announced an additional substantial gift from the Martel Foundation. The Board contacted UUA financing consultant Dave Rickard, who recommended that we achieve an approval level of 80% before proceeding to a fundraiser.

Ann Wood's programming subcommittee (also called the Transition Team) had the daunting task of allocating and coordinating space for our many and varied programs, which would have to function for several months with a sizable chunk of our campus unavailable. Emerson's long relationship with the Congregation For Reformed Judaism, located farther north on Bering Drive, bore fruit when they agreed to lease space to us for our high school Sunday programs. Younger children occupied various corners of Westwood Hall and adult classes were held in the sanctuary. Committee meetings were relegated to evenings, Sunday afternoon or to off-campus locations such as homes and restaurants. As of June 1st 2003 it was decided to start the worship service at 11:15 am to make these adjustments work more smoothly.

As plans for the building program began to take shape, the relationship with our Post Oak YMCA tenants was coming to an end. The Y's new Executive Director attended Emerson's March 2001 Board meeting. He thanked the church for 20 years' support but added that they were running a \$100,000 deficit and their enrollment was down by nearly a third. He requested that Emerson assume 100% of utility costs but did not ask for a rent reduction. The Board took the matter under advisement, seeking input from both Finance and the Building and Grounds Committee, but at the May Board meeting it was announced that the Y preschool would close August 10. Emerson would lose a total of \$16,000 in rent for the rest of 2001. In addition, RE would need about \$13,600 worth of furniture and equipment.

At the 2002 Annual Meeting in January the congregation unanimously approved the architect's proposal, which initially included what is now Delaney Hall plus a new, larger fellowship hall and kitchen wing on the western side of the campus. Originally the plan also called for a covered walkway between Westwood Hall and what would become the Gathering Place, but enough objections were raised that this part of the design was dropped.

Having exceeded the 80% threshold, Dave Rickard proceeded with the financial feasibility study. He later recommended a \$2 million capital campaign of which \$600,000 was already pledged. A kick-off dinner at Lakeshore Country Club was planned for April 6, 2002.

At the February 2002 Board meeting Will Irwin recommended a goal of \$2.5 million toward a total cost of \$4.5 million. In March the congregation approved the goal by a margin of over 91%. Fundraising proceeded over the summer and reached \$2 million in late August, but was not expected to go much higher. The design was scaled back to the current Delaney Hall and the cost reduced to \$3.56 million. The GPC asked that the congregation approve the building project and authorize expenditures from the capital campaign plus \$750,000 from the Endowment Fund and a \$1 million mortgage. Interest during the first five years would be paid by "an anonymous foundation." In the fall of 2002 the modified design and the financing package passed by a 97% favorable vote.

In November 2002 the Board approved naming the new building Delaney Hall in recognition of Andrew Delaney's major contributions to the church over many years in addition to the current building campaign. Long-time members and benefactors Dick and Karen Mullineaux had also been offered naming rights; they requested that the enclosed space between the entrance to the sanctuary and Delaney Hall be named the Clara Barton Gathering Place. The Board endorsed this proposal and appropriate plaques were ordered for both. In June 2003 the Board voted to name the new library in honor of Minister Emeritus Dr. J. Frank Schulman, and designated a double classroom on the first floor as the new Schweitzer Room.

Meanwhile the Environmental Group was weighing in on the design. In the spring of 2003 the architects were preparing a list of options for the project to seek LEED certification ("Leadership in Energy-efficiency and Environmental Design"). They said that their design already met 90% of the requirements with items such as heat-reflective roofing and paving materials, 13 designated carpool parking spaces, and the removal of the curved driveway in front of Westwood Hall which added to our green space. It

was estimated that achieving LEED status would cost between \$15,000 and \$24,000. The Board voted that up to that sum would come from a bequest from former long-term members Rudy and Mary Liz Weichert, which they had specified for the building campaign.

Demolition of the old Religious Education modules took place in June 2003 with 85% of the debris recycled. Groundbreaking for the new building was set for June 15, but a snag in obtaining the building permit meant a three-week delay. The estimated completion date was March 31, 2004.

In January 2004 the new building was finished to the point that tours were offered on January 25 for those above the age of 16. At the February board meeting the Building Utilization Team recommended that Emerson's use would have first priority followed by community organizations that fit with our goals, with non-profits having precedence over for-profits. Within that framework the BUT sought to balance income-producing rentals with support of non-profit organizations sponsored by Emerson committees and groups. The Environmental Group presented recommendations on life-time green space, carpool parking (equivalent to 5% of our membership) and the establishment of green maintenance policies, all of which would contribute to LEED certification.

At the March 2004 Board meeting the Trustees established two new subcommittees of Building and Grounds: Building Aesthetics and Landscaping. Aesthetics would control use of our buildings and grounds in such matters as placement of posters, announcement flyers, bulletin boards and other signage. The Landscaping subcommittee would promote the use of native plants along with non-toxic weed and pest management. A green housekeeping policy was adopted and open space equal to double the square footage of Delaney's footprint designated. The Building Utilization Team was renamed the Building Use Committee (BUC) to seek rentals.

By the middle of June move-in had been accomplished. Room 204 was named the Thoreau Room in honor of the Weicherts. Our building was featured in the *UU World* in the summer of 2004 as we sought LEED certification. In July the Board approved leasing three rooms to the Tanglewood Academy, a small private pre-K-to-first grade school. In the fall of 2004 Delaney Hall was designated "Best Green Building" in Houston by the *Houston Press*. The Ministers' Report for the 2005 Annual Meeting announced that LEED certification had been received. Delaney Hall was the first church-related building in the United States to receive such certification, the second LEED-certified building of any kind in Houston and the sixth in Texas.

By 2005 things had started to calm down after a rather frenetic two years. In April the new Memorial Garden in front of Westwood Hall was dedicated. Plaques commemorating deceased members, ordered through the church by their families, were placed on the low north-south wall that was part of the sanctuary design from 1975. The garden also includes two stone benches and a bronze statue in memory of Jana Joseph, daughter of long-time member Jane Joseph, who was tragically killed in an accident in January 2005. In late summer at the request of the architects a final meeting was held with the Environmental Group, Building and Grounds and representatives of the Ray Bailey firm to give feedback on Delaney Hall.

In 2007 troublesome signs of what the Building and Grounds Committee's Annual Report described as "settlement problems" appeared. The architect, engineer and building contractor, Fretz Construction, worked to resolve these problems. Ray Bailey Architects and Fretz were both proud of the building and featured it prominently in their promotional materials, so they were strongly motivated to maintain a good relationship with the church.

In addition to Delaney Hall a number of other significant facility improvements were made. April 2005 saw a major computer upgrade. The church was gradually moving to e-mail distribution of *The Emersonian* and electronic archiving of Board minutes and addenda. Jerry Wendelin was making great improvements to the website, including a password-protected Intranet accessible to church members only. In addition to on-line church documents it would include a members/friends directory that could be readily updated, with an opt-out provision for those who so wished.

A lovely pastel by a Transylvanian artist was given to Emerson by our partner church, St. Nicholas. Other improvements included a major facelift of Westwood Hall spearheaded by B & G chair Larry Kelly, a new password-protected WiFi system, the installation of which was donated by a BUC member, a shade structure for the pre-school patio, video information monitors in the Gathering Place, new office furniture and a major upgrade of playground equipment. The Audio-Visual Committee switched from the analog recording of worship services on cassette tapes to digital CDs. At the instigation of long-time member Carol Groppe, who felt that the Gathering Place needed a focal point declaring who we are, a flaming chalice wall sculpture with the religious symbols of six major world faiths was commissioned from a Texas artist. It was funded primarily by Jane Joseph and Belle Johnson in memory of Jane's daughter Jana and Belle's husband, former *Chronicle* publisher Richard J.V. Johnson. In 2006 two kopjafas (carved wooden poles) were presented to Emerson by our partner church congregation. The poles, rich with ancient symbols from Transylvanian history and culture, match two others erected at the St. Nicholas church. (See Chapter eight, Partner Church, for more details.) After treatment with wood preservative to protect them from our steamy, insect-plagued climate, they were placed at the entrance to the Memorial Garden by Partner Church Committee chair deForest Ralph.

Throughout the decade one frustrating problem proved very stubborn. Roof leaks in Westwood Hall had been an on and off occurrence for years, but shortly after the completion of Delaney Hall the sanctuary roof developed leaks that simply defied all attempts at repairs. Matters reached a head in the spring of 2009 when a heavy thunderstorm one Sunday morning resulted in an embarrassing interruption to the worship service with a guest speaker in the pulpit. Needless to say this situation put a damper on our marketing efforts. Since 2000, Emerson has hosted the monthly Houston Tuesday Music Club concerts in the sanctuary. Their new season would start in October, and the Board feared further embarrassment by an ill-timed rain. At the August 2009 Board meeting Business Administrator Karen Van Horn said we had spent over \$9500 on roof repairs since 2005. The Board decided to sever relations with the current roofing contractor and finally, in 2010, our new contractor, Carlson Roofing, not only devised an improved run-off system as a fix for Westwood Hall's roof, but helped diagnose the

reason for the sanctuary leak. We found that the blockage of an underground drainpipe by a large chunk of concrete dating from the construction of Delaney Hall caused a backup that led to our roof leaks. Once again Fretz Construction was called upon, the pipe was replaced and as of this writing (2013) both roof repairs seem to be holding.

One more addition to the campus came in the spring of 2010 when the Partner Church Committee successfully petitioned the Board for the installation of two rectangular aluminum “Peace Poles” with the sentence “May peace prevail on earth” rendered in sixteen languages, two on each of the 8 facades. At the suggestion of Building and Grounds the poles were placed just outside the north entrance to the sanctuary. The Board also endorsed Partner Church Committee chair deForest Ralph’s request that the poles be dedicated in honor of his wife Martha Austine Ralph for her long record of service to the Partner Church project.

Finances

The invigorating presence of the new ministry team quickly boosted Emerson’s financial picture for several years. At the January 2000 Board meeting it was reported the 1999 fall canvass had a surplus of \$1740, and that collection of 1999 pledges reached 98%. The church also achieved the greatest rental of its facilities since 1997. At the 2001 Annual Meeting President Lincoln Gray noted that the fall canvass for 2000 exceeded \$500,000 for the first time ever. Both canvass results and pledge income continued to exceed goals until the fall of 2003, then surged again in 2004 and 2005 in the excitement over the new building. But starting in 2007 pledge income began to drop, and the recession that characterized the rest of the decade had its effect.

In February 2007 the Board first discussed a concept that would lead to renaming the Canvass Committee the Stewardship Committee. President Phil Richardson wanted some means to encourage gifts to the Endowment and suggested the formation of a Planned Giving Committee. Trustee Billye Smith suggested that a Stewardship Committee be formed, which would serve as an umbrella for both a planned giving program and the annual canvass drive. She envisioned creating a culture of stewardship as a spiritual principle, and said that a Stewardship Committee that functioned year-round could make sure new members are canvassed as they join and spread the canvass drive itself through the year. The Stewardship Committee was formed later that year much along those lines, though the fund drive is still conducted mostly in the autumn. In 2010 the Committee started a new program: a “Time and Talent” committee sign-up event to promote the idea of non-monetary service to the church.

At the end of 2000 the Endowment Fund stood at \$1.6 million, mainly in energy stocks. The Investment Committee, wary of the volatile energy market, transferred half of the Endowment to Certificates of Deposit and money market funds. At the end of 2003, as a consequence of withdrawals for the building program, the Endowment had just over \$1 million, including \$150,000 designated for the new building but not yet spent. The Committee decided to move the remaining energy investments to Certificates of Deposit and money market funds. The following year, on the advice of Investment Chair Henry Groppe,

the Committee re-entered the energy markets, and through his efforts the church secured the management services of the highly effective and respected Mitchell Group, which normally requires a minimum investment of \$10 million. As of December 31, 2004 the fund was \$929,279 and hovered just over \$1 million for the next three years until reaching \$1,745,045 at the end of 2007 with the surge in oil prices. The fall in oil prices in 2008 brought the fund back to just under \$1.2 million, and by December 31, 2010 it reached \$1,856,448.

As described earlier, in early 2002 the congregation undertook a capital campaign to partially finance the building of Delaney Hall. Chair Will Irwin told the February 2005 Board meeting that he expected 98% completion by the end of May, but also predicted a shortfall of \$90,000. Even so this was considered a success. It helped that the cost overrun on the new building was only around 1% due to the diligence of Larry Huelbig and Ann Wood. In October 2005 the mortgage, \$915,575 was signed at a fixed rate of 6.7%, considered a coup at the time, but no prepayments would be allowed. The Delaney Foundation agreed to pay the interest on the mortgage through 2007, later extended to the balloon payout date of June 2014.

The energetic Building Utilization Committee actively sought rentals of our new space, both to help pay for it and to extend our community presence. One of the first was Tanglewood Academy, a small private preschool that approached us in January 2003 after a fire destroyed their previous location. Emerson's RE Directors Judy Williams and Denise Atkerson reviewed their curriculum to make sure it was consistent with our values and recommended that the Board approve the lease. For the rest of the decade Tanglewood rented several of our first floor classrooms during the week. After a rough start their program stabilized in 2006 and then began to grow, eventually gaining a considerable reputation in Houston's Middle Eastern and South Asian communities. As their program extended gradually into the lower elementary grades they rented more space. Tanglewood's director of many years, Glenda Lane, cultivated a cordial relationship with the church, and the school has been regarded as a model tenant by the Board, the Business Administrator and the Religious Education Department.

Other rentals included Toastmasters, the Rebel Investment Club and, for 2007 and 2008, Leisure Learning Unlimited, whom we hoped would become a major long-term tenant. Led by Laura Emerson and Jerry Wendelin, the BUC initiated contact with Leisure Learning just as they were hit with a hefty rent increase by their current landlord. After several months' negotiation a two-year lease was signed for LLU to move most of their operations to Emerson. For the next two years Emerson hummed with activity on weekday evenings and most Saturdays. But just as renewal negotiations began in the summer of 2008, Leisure Learning's previous landlord, unable to find another tenant for the space vacated by LLU, lured them back with a five-year package we could not match.

Over the next several years both the Board and the BUC tried in vain to secure another long-term commercial lease, and finally concluded that our space was not suitable for office use. In May 2008 we were approached by the Feldenkrais Center of Houston for their four-year training program. According to the Business Administrator's Annual Report in January 2011, the Feldenkrais Method uses

“movement and directed attention to develop awareness in the service of improving the quality of human experience and function.” The students come from all over the country, and graduates of the program would be certified to teach the method. According to the agreement, they would rent Westwood Hall for three two-to-three-week sessions each year beginning in 2010 and running through 2014. This rental has also been a good experience for both parties.

One unqualified financial success during the first decade of the new millennium was the Service Auction. Jane Joseph and Cindy Clifford led a fun-filled evening in March, 2001 that netted over \$12,000. Following the usual practice a second Auction was held two years later in May 2003 and raised over \$16,000. After that it was decided to hold the Auction every year despite some fears that this would erode support for the project. The 2004 Auction raised \$16,500 and in 2005 it netted \$12,566. In 2006 some other fundraising options were added in which donors could underwrite some of the costs. The take in 2006 dropped to around \$11,000 but surged to \$25,000 in 2007, well over budget. In 2008 the sum was over \$20,000, again \$12,700 over budget despite difficulty in finding a chair. In 2009 the Auction brought in \$23,000 and in 2010 \$36,000, all well in excess of the fundraising line item in the budget.

With the hiring of our new Business Administrator Karen Van Horn in January 2005, President Pippa Wiley led the Board into a multi-year effort to tighten up our financial procedures. The Board had taken a step in 2004 when they adopted a fiscal calendar to provide a framework within which the annual budget would be developed. Now Pippa turned her attention to the multiplicity of special funds, some of which had been around for years. The Board decided that special fund monies were to be disbursed within 45 days unless otherwise specified by the donor instead of being allowed to linger on the books. Investigation revealed serious discrepancies between special funds on record and money actually in hand. After several months of hard work by the Treasurer the special funds were reconciled and consolidated with the use of about \$40,000 from the Endowment.

In February 2006 the Board adopted a policy stating that special funds were to be completely separated from both the operating and Endowment accounts and were not allowed to go into deficit. This meant that the Business Administrator could no longer borrow from these funds for cash flow purposes during the summer as had been the practice. Thus it became necessary to borrow \$30,000 to \$40,000 from the Endowment every summer when pledge income dropped but bills still had to be paid. In the fall pledge income would rise again and the borrowed sum was repaid to the Endowment by the end of the year.

Towards the end of the decade several members of the congregation became increasingly disturbed by what they considered irresponsible management by the Board of Trustees. As pointed out by Finance Chair Tony Collins at the August 2010 Board meeting, part of the problem was that borrowing any sum from the Endowment requires a formal Board vote, which is recorded in the minutes. Repayment, however, does not require a vote and while it is entered into the financial records, most likely it will not be found in the minutes. Anyone studying only the Board minutes could plausibly but erroneously conclude that the Board was raiding the Endowment Fund. At that same meeting Karen Van Horn

presented a report showing that of \$114,294 borrowed from the Endowment during the last five years, \$98,623 had been repaid, and the shortfall may have been an allocation to the 2006 budget rather than a loan.

The August 2010 Board meeting also featured a major discussion on pledge patterns researched by Karen Van Horn and former Board President Jill Rose. Out of 293 pledging units (defined as a household that may include one or more related church members) slightly less than half pledged money for the 2010 budget and are paying on it. Some others did not pledge but do contribute, others pledged but have not yet paid, and 100 units have done neither, though most have contributed in the last 24 months. The Board agreed that what is or is not a contribution to the church needs to be more precisely defined and that new members, some of whom may never have belonged to a church before, need to understand the need for financial support of the church. Although some of the last few years have ended with large budget surpluses, these are usually due to staff vacancies, greater-than-expected Service Auction income and below-budget utility costs due to Karen's careful management.

Meanwhile Treasurer Billye Smith, working with a Board subcommittee, continued working toward bringing the church's record-keeping into compliance with "Generally Acccepted Accounting Practices (GAAP) in the belief that this would be a factor if the church decided to re-finance the balance of the Delaney Hall mortgage in 2014.

When the Board compiled the proposed 2011 budget, the mortgage payments were to come out of the Endowment on the grounds that this was a capital expense. But at the December 2010 congregational budget meeting the congregation rejected the budget and sent it back to the Board with instructions to find a way to pay the mortgage out of operating funds. A second congregational budget meeting was set for January 23, 2011 at 10 am with the Annual Meeting to follow after the worship service. Two budgets were presented, a revision by the Board of Trustees and an alternative put forward by three former Treasurers and three former Finance Committee chairs. The Board's revision did, as instructed, pay the mortgage out of operating funds, but used Endowment funds for the new Director of Religious Education position, which involved roughly the same amount of money. This was justified as being tied to future goals rather than paying for an existing building. President Janet Meininger said that the canvass drive was very successful and that the Stewardship Committee was strong. Much pro-and-con discussion ensued, running well into the worship/RE hour despite several motions to suspend. With part of the discussion centered on the new DRE a number of the high school youth were in attendance. When the question was finally called on the budget, Janet declared a five-minute recess and sent the teenagers out to round up members for the vote. (Several people with duties elsewhere, such as choir members or RE teachers, had been obliged to leave the meeting.) Janet also had the foresight to provide paper ballots for the vote. The Board's revised budget passed 87 to 60 with one abstention.

Governance

The first few years of the new century saw considerable tinkering with the Constitution and Bylaws but relatively few major changes. In late 2000 the congregation voted to remove the minimum age requirement for membership but retained it for voting, thus creating two categories of membership: Member and Voting Member. Youth under 16 who had completed the Coming of Age program as certified by the Director of Religious Education could be given a waiver of the age requirement.

In 2001 a Symbolic Witness policy was adopted which grew out of a request to carry Emerson's banner in Houston's Gay Rights Parade. The Board of Trustees approved the request but asked the Outreach Board to develop a policy regarding participation in such outside events and bring it to the Board for approval. The policy states that the church's banner (or other item bearing the church's name) may be displayed at a non-UU sponsored event as a public affirmation of UU principles if the event embodies one or more UU principles, doesn't violate any others and is approved in advance by the Outreach Board (later the Social Action Council). Later that year an Active Witness Policy was adopted covering oral or written statements on behalf of the church on an issue. This requires the same criteria as the Symbolic Witness Policy with the additional requirement of a clear, well-written statement plus provision for 80% congregational approval if at all possible, or Board sanction if they believe that congregational approval is highly likely but there is no time to schedule a congregational meeting on the matter.

At the 2003 Annual Meeting the distinction between Member and Voting Member was removed, and provision was made to allow financial hardship cases to retain full membership rights, including voting, when approved by the Board of Trustees on the recommendation of the Ministers. A 2004 amendment to Article IV, "Welcome," specifies welcoming those of all ages, races and ethnicities regardless of gender, economic status, sexual orientation, marital status or abilities. This provision extends to all aspects of church life including membership, programming, employment and the calling of religious professionals. This provision helped the church gain Welcoming Congregation status in the UUA in 2004.

During 2005 Board President Pippa Wiley led a major review of the Articles of Incorporation, Constitution and Bylaws, and the Policy Manual, assisted by Gary Rosin as legal counsel. These changes were approved by the congregation at the 2006 Annual Meeting: the name of the church was changed from Emerson Unitarian Church to Emerson Unitarian Universalist Church; Articles II and III, which dealt with the Covenant and Purposes, were deleted; and Article IX (Ministers' Compensation) was reworded to be consistent with their Letter of Agreement.

In 2008 the position of Parish Clerk was renamed Board Secretary which was considered more appropriate for the duties of this post. At the 2010 Annual Meeting a Statement of Identity and Purpose was adopted: "Our beloved community of faith, reason and affection welcomes all to grow in mind and spirit as we build a better world."

CHAPTER SEVEN: EMERSON IN THE LARGER COMMUNITY

The new millennium would see an expansion of outreach programs at Emerson with several new efforts joining ongoing projects. In 1995 the church had established an Outreach Board to oversee and coordinate the increasing number of outreach projects through the Community Services Committee, which had the responsibility for hands-on management. In an attempt to ensure a smoothly functioning operation several members of the Community Services Committee were included on the Outreach Board. In 1998 the Outreach Board announced the goal of elevating community service/social action efforts to equal importance with worship and education.

In November 2000 a Social Justice Forum was held at Emerson led by UUA facilitators. They were impressed with the number of service projects conducted by the church but pointed out that these led to a limited local profile for both Emerson and Unitarian Universalism, addressed symptoms rather than causes, and did not involve our youth. The leaders suggested education on social justice issues leading to advocacy, witness and community organizing.

Outreach Board and Social Action Council

The early 2000s saw increasing friction between the Outreach Board and the Community Services Committee. At the April 2006 Board meeting the Trustees voted to form a Social Action Council that would assume the responsibilities of both groups effective June 1st of that year. The new SAC, chaired first by Laura Emerson and later by Barb Adams, would also supervise the Active and Passive Witness policies adopted in 2001. The new SAC attracted a large number of Emerson supporters with a monthly meeting attendance of 15-20 members. Even so a certain amount of dysfunction remained as the SAC struggled to develop a sense of identity. For a brief time the SAC was also charged with revitalizing the moribund Denominational Affairs Committee (renamed Denominational Relations) but it was soon realized that this was not helpful to either group. With the denominational committee separated out, the SAC was free to develop a clearer focus on its mission.

In 2007 the SAC was pondering ways to get the church as a whole involved in social action projects through a substantial yearly corporate donation from the church in addition to the special collections, which they considered individual gifts. After considering several options, in December 2007 the SAC brought a proposal to the Board of Trustees stating that 10% of any year-over-year gain in the Endowment Fund would be devoted to social action projects researched by the SAC, approved by the Board of Trustees and ratified by the congregation. The issue was placed on the agenda for the January 2008 Annual Meeting. After much discussion on both sides of the issue, the proposal passed with only four opposed. The date set for determining the amount available, if any, was September 30 of each year. Due to the economic downturn it was September 2010 before any such funds were available. The first award under the 10% Solution was approved at the January 2011 Annual Meeting, with \$1500 going to the Drug Court Foundation and the remaining \$1098 to the Northwest UU congregation, which was facing serious building issues.

In early 2010 new co-chairs Phil Richardson and Christel Erickson-Collins announced that SAC would undertake quarterly projects in addition to the special collections: Souper Bowl of Caring, Rebuild Together Houston, and one each educational and mental illness-related project to be announced later. In May 2010 Emerson was named the third most generous supporter of Houston Interfaith Ministries among religious organizations. Most of the programs listed below were continuations of long-established Emerson efforts but now came under the SAC umbrella.

Hunger Programs

Our long involvement with the food pantry at Mt. Vernon United Methodist Church in Houston's 5th Ward continued, being gradually merged into the Houston Food Bank by the end of 2004. Food for Seniors, another hunger project run by Interfaith Ministries, was faithfully supported by Emerson members. In July 2000 *The Emersonian* reported that Emerson had seven routes that served 70 to 75 seniors out of a city-wide total of 807. It was funded by a once-yearly special collection at the Sunday worship service. In mid-2001 Food for Seniors was merged with the Houston Food Bank. The September 16th *Emersonian* noted that in the last ten years Emerson had donated more than \$20,000 and that at that time 15 Emerson members were helping with weekly distribution. In 2003 it was decided to replace the yearly collection with half of the cash raised on the second Sunday collection for Mt. Vernon, which would be directed to Interfaith Ministries for Mt. Vernon-area seniors. The remaining cash and all of the non-perishable food items would be given to the Mount Vernon Food Pantry as usual. In late 2004 fund-raising for Mt. Vernon was completely folded into Interfaith Ministries, joining Food for Seniors. Our second-Sunday donations now go to Interfaith Ministries and they decide how to divide it.

The LRY's Hunger Luncheon, held the Sunday after Thanksgiving, also benefitted the Mt. Vernon Food Pantry on several occasions. In the Annual Report covering 2007, chair Barb Adams said that the SAC had decided on hunger issues as Emerson's main focus, citing our long record with many hunger initiatives that are easy for all ages to understand and support. In 2007 SAC also held its first Social Action Fair, inviting representatives from many of the organizations we support: SEARCH, M. D. Anderson's Blood Bank, Houston Food Bank, Interfaith Ministries, Hospitality Apartments, CROP Walk, Partner Church Council, Unitarian Universalist Service Committee, Ministry for Earth and Drug Court Foundation.

Other food-relief projects included the annual Church World Service CROP Walk, at which Emerson frequently fielded the largest team and raised the most money. On several occasions Emerson Co-Minister Becky Edmiston-Lange was asked to give the invocation at the start of the Walk. In 2007 Emerson's participation was dedicated to the memory of Margaret Kaye, who for many years was Emerson's most effective fundraiser for the Walk. In November 2010 Emerson again had the largest team (50 walkers) and raised enough money to sponsor one senior for Meals on Wheels for a full year. Emerson members also undertook to deliver day-old donuts and kolaches from Shipley's to the Catholic hunger mission Loaves and Fishes every Friday morning (early!!) to be served to the homeless for breakfast.

February 2007 saw the start of another ongoing hunger project when Emerson began to take part in the Souper Bowl of Caring, which raises money for the Houston Food Bank. That year 500 pounds of food was collected. In 2008 the Coming of Age class took on this project and constructed a labyrinth of donated canned goods in Westwood Hall to stimulate interest. They collected over 600 pounds of food and over \$700 in cash. In 2009 donations climbed to 981 pounds and \$1649. In 2010 the Souper Bowl of Caring featured “can-structions” in the Gathering Place by teams of youth. Church members “voted” with cash contributions, and the project raised \$2117.84 and 1151 food items.

SEARCH

For many years Emerson has been part of the Council of Congregations that runs the homeless agency SEARCH (Service of the Emergency Aid Resource Center for the Homeless). SEARCH provides many services such as job and substance abuse counseling, a facility for laundry and showers, street distribution of food and a daycare facility for homeless preschoolers known as the House of Tiny Treasures. In the spring of 2000 *The Emersonian* mentioned a baby shower for two expectant homeless women. In early 2002 SEARCH offered other volunteer opportunities such as GED tutoring and clerical help with the Job Bank. In August 2006 an interfaith service was held at South Main Baptist Church for SEARCH. Emerson Co-Minister Mark Edmiston-Lange and Emerson member Gay Lambirth both served on the Board. Emerson’s RE Department collected warm clothing to donate to SEARCH. In addition, the Women’s Alliance began Sandwiches for SEARCH in late 2006, making upwards of 50 sandwiches and sack lunches after each monthly meeting to be distributed to street people. This project was carried on under Barbara Hopkins even after the Alliance disbanded.

Education Projects

In January 2000 *The Emersonian* reported that 96 children’s books had been donated to Adopt-A-Teacher’s Empty Shelves project which seeks to stock school libraries. The books were divided between Mt. Vernon’s after school program and Crawford Elementary, the HISD school across the street from Mt. Vernon. Just before school started in the fall of 2000 194 books were collected, thanks largely to Margaret Kaye and others who sold children’s books from the River Oaks Bookstore at coffee hour. Two boxes of new school supplies, three boxes of used books plus underwear, socks and other items were also collected.

In late 2001 the Outreach Board first proposed a partnership between Emerson and a new HISD school built nearby, Sylvan Rodriguez Elementary. The school opened in early January 2002 with help from many Emerson members and for a while the partnership flourished. Books were donated, Emersonians served as classroom tutors, and bilingual church member Leticia Anderson helped immigrant Hispanic parents with various issues. In late 2002 a new principal arrived at Rodriguez, and by the fall of 2003 the Community Service Committee was having difficulty recruiting tutors. Their Annual Report in January 2005 said that the tutoring project kept getting postponed, impacting Emerson members’ enthusiasm.

In August 2005 it was decided to transfer Emerson’s involvement to Maude Gordon Elementary, a nearby Title One school. The school required volunteers to be cleared with the Houston Police

Department, a process that took three weeks. In addition, Gordon was heavily impacted by the influx of children from New Orleans after the Katrina disaster, so things got off to a slow start. The December 2006 *Emersonian* mentioned that Bob Hopkins did “science boxes” at Gordon. In December 2009 SAC donated \$400 to each of two elementary schools and Family Services of Greater Houston for school supplies. In January 2010 the church collected 290 “Box Tops 4 Education” for Wharton Elementary, another Title One school. Over the summer of 2010 SAC headed a book drive for Jones High School. This time members were asked to donate only specified titles and editions for classroom use, which required uniform pagination.

The spring of 2005 saw the start of another education initiative now known as the Groppe Scholarships. Emerson member Carol Groppe was working with the guidance counselor at one of Houston’s historically black high schools, Booker T. Washington. She wanted to identify promising students who would be the first in their families to attend college and to provide them with scholarships for two years at Houston Community College. By the start of the fall semester three girls who had graduated from Washington were sponsored at HCC. Citing the high cost of books, the girls were most grateful for assistance. In January 2006 we learned that the three were nursing students. At the January 2005 Annual Meeting a Groppe Scholarship Task Force was authorized by the congregation, but the following year Carol was not yet ready to bring another proposal. A number of years later the project was revived and named the Groppe Scholarships in honor of its founder.

PSI Homesavers/Rebuild Together Houston

PSI Homesavers (renamed Rebuild Together Houston in 2004) was another outreach project that continued throughout the decade. Frequently combining with other area UU congregations, Emerson members would spend a couple of weekends both in the spring and fall making exterior repairs to the homes of low-income elderly or disabled Houstonians, often adding wheelchair ramps. PSI would select the recipients and assign volunteer crews based on skill level. Corporate donations provided the materials. Frequently this was the social action project that drew the greatest number of Emerson participants, including youth. For much of the decade Bob Hopkins led this effort; he was honored at a PSI luncheon in 2002. In 2004 he mentored one of our teenagers, Cathryn Homier, who organized the spring project as she worked toward her Girl Scout Gold Award. Cathryn more than earned her award when several weekend rainstorms prolonged the work to a total of five Saturdays. In late 2005 Laura Emerson took on leadership of Emerson’s involvement in Rebuild Together Houston as Bob turned his attention to helping rebuild homes in New Orleans devastated by Hurricane Katrina. In 2007 Emerson was awarded RTH’s Golden Hammer for the third time. In 2010 Laura Emerson led the church’s crew as it tackled its 43rd house.

Hospitality Apartments

The Men’s Breakfast and Women’s Alliance continued their support of the Hospitality Apartments, which provide temporary low-cost lodging to people from out of town undergoing treatment at the Medical Center. Dr. Eva Haufrect was on their Board in 2000; both she and Dr. Tom Matney were on the

Board in 2005. About this time M.D. Anderson Hospital was expanding, and the Hospitality Apartments building was among the properties condemned for the project. Anderson's Board of Directors was unaware of their existence until Tom Matney wrote a strong letter of protest to Anderson CEO Dr. Mendelssohn, challenging him to match Tom's \$50,000 donation toward new quarters. Dr. Mendelssohn not only matched the contribution but helped the group get additional major funding. At Tom's request other Emersonians were glad to pitch in. Unitunes gave 20% of the proceeds from six performances in memory of Eva Haufrect who had died that year. The Women's Alliance gave all of their theater party profits. The Hospitality Apartments soon had their new facility.

Mental Health Projects

Emerson first began collecting Christmas gifts for the mentally ill in 1986, led by Shirley Coster. Each December church members contributed small wrapped gifts such as toiletries labeled "for men" or "for women." Cash contributions were also accepted and used to purchase more gifts. These were distributed to several centers that served the mentally ill. In 2000 Lauren Raun, daughter of Bob and Barbara Hopkins and an Emerson member herself, asked those invited to a party she was hosting to bring gifts to add to those collected by the church. Other mental health initiatives included an educational series presented by Susan Raffle and the National Association of the Mentally Ill (NAMI) for families of those affected (2008) and another series in both Adult Education and RE on mental health stigma awareness (2010).

Refugees from Kosovo

A major new initiative began in the summer of 1999 when Emerson agreed to adopt a refugee family from Kosovo that was officially sponsored by Interfaith Ministries under their refugee resettlement program. Don Wines and Jean McClintic led this project, befriending Mustafa and Drita Shahini and their three children, keeping the Emerson community informed about the family's trials, tribulations and, eventually, triumphs as they struggled to adjust to life in a new country. Due to a combination of circumstances another son, Ghemal, had been forced to stay behind, and bringing him to the United States would prove a multi-year effort.

Both parents and oldest daughter Ardiana had jobs near the airport. Taxi service arranged by Interfaith Ministries proved unworkable, and many church members drove them to and from their jobs, often at odd hours, until Emersonians Ann and David May gave the family a used car. Board President Lincoln Gray worked to obtain insurance for them. When they were subjected to vandalism and abuse at their apartment complex, Will Irwin wrote a letter to Houston Mayor Lee Brown about the problem.

In July 2000 the family had been here one year. Mustafa, Drita and Ardiana were working, and the two younger boys, Alban and Illir, were in school. The attacks on Kosovars had eased and they were applying for green cards. They were grateful to the Mays for the car and to all for our help. In December they sent Christmas greetings to the congregation. By now their car was beyond repair and they had saved \$3000 toward another. Donations from Emersonians brought in \$2000 more to allow them to buy a 1996 Toyota Tercel. Early in 2001 their daughter Ardiana and son Alban were learning computers. Later

that spring Mustafa and Drita were working at Ft. Polk, Louisiana to help US armed forces learn about Albanian and Kosovar customs before their deployment there. In July 2002 they were able to purchase a home.

In the spring of 2004 Mustafa was job-hunting. He had learned Spanish in his previous position and now hoped to work with English-speakers to improve his English. In May he found a job at their local Walmart. In August 2005 Ardiana, studying in Boston, was to be married to a young man from Kosovo. Illir and Alban were both working at Walmart, and Illir was in training for an office position.

In September 2006 a letter from the Shahini family was reprinted in *The Emersonian* announcing that they had now been in the United States seven years and had attained American citizenship. Ardiana and Illir were both in university, they all had jobs and were homeowners. They expressed heartfelt gratitude to the US government and to the members of Emerson church.

Closer to home, the torrential rains of Tropical Storm Allison in June 2001 directly impacted several Emerson families: Sze-Fou and Constance Chien, Daniel and Jean Johnston, Jud and Betsey Sevy, Bob Watkins and his family, Eunice Alleman, Gerald Moran's son and Joan Douglas's parents. Betsey Sevy's status as a kidney transplant patient susceptible to infection raised the level of concern considerably. The congregation rallied around all our affected families, raising nearly \$3000. Later in the year the Sevy family made a major donation to Heifer Project International in Emerson's honor as a thank-you for all the help they received.

Task Forces

At the Annual Meeting in January 2002 the task force concept was adopted by the congregation. To achieve Task Force status, five members would have to commit to work actively on the proposed project and five more would agree to support it. They would be given \$250 seed money from the Outreach Board plus authorization to hold a fundraising event at church and potential access to a special collection and an Adult Education time slot.

At the January 2003 Annual Meeting the congregation approved two Task Forces proposed by the Outreach Board: Beyond Welcoming, headed by Pam Bass and John Pepper, which extended the Welcoming Congregation concept to an active support of GLBT's, and Alternative to the War on Drugs, (later the Drug Court Task Force) led by Gabe Gelb. By the Annual Meeting of January 2004 the Beyond Welcoming Task Force had achieved its objectives as Emerson was recognized as a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA. The congregation voted to reauthorize the Drug Court Task Force and added two others: the Separation of Church and State, led by Roger Mills, and a Task Force to promote community concerts headed by Bill Atkerson.

Drug Court Foundation

The State of Texas mandated that all Texas counties with populations in excess of 300,000 set up drug courts for first-time non-violent offenders to offer a treatment alternative to incarceration, but provided

no funding. In the early 2000's several Emerson members began to address this problem. In the spring of 2004 Emerson's Drug Court Task Force was raising money for the Bonita Street House of Hope, a substance abuse and transitional treatment program. In June, with the help of local law and PR firms, the group filed papers to incorporate the Drug Court Foundation. The Harris County Drug Court opened in September 2004 with 62 participants.

On January 12, 2005, Task Force member Gabe Gelb was interviewed on the local TV program "Drugs, Crime and Politics" on Houston Media Source (channel 17). He discussed Emerson's participation in the Harris County Drug Court and our efforts to form a 501(c)3 foundation. In June the Houston *Chronicle* noted that "an independent church group has donated \$26,000 to help the Harris County Drug Court program." The money came from the Mullineaux, the Groppes and one anonymous member plus the May 15 special collection. In July Business Administrator Karen Van Horn received a letter from the four judges that were doing Drug Court work --on a pro bono basis and in addition to their regular dockets-- thanking the church for our contributions and our efforts to set up the foundation. By late September 2006 the Drug Court Foundation, through the efforts of Gabe, Max Buja and Christel Erickson-Collins, had been granted tax exempt status by the IRS. Interfaith Ministries agreed to provide space for a part-time executive director with grant-writing expertise and to help recruit more people to the Board of Directors. The Catholic Archdiocese also provided a \$10,000 grant.

In November 2006 the SAC brought a proposal to the Board of Trustees asking Emerson Church to donate \$50,000 from the Endowment to the Drug Court Foundation to hire an executive director. After some discussion it was decided to add this request to the agenda for the January Annual Meeting with Board support (though not unanimous). At the Annual Meeting in January 2007 the proposal was defeated, but an alternative motion by Past President Pippa Wiley offering a two-year loan of the same sum was approved. At the January Board meeting Max Buja asked permission for a direct solicitation of the congregation to raise \$75,000 to repay the loan and provide expenses and benefits for the executive director. Max said he had someone in mind for the post who was available now, so he wanted to move quickly. SAC had agreed to this idea and the Board approved it. By March 2007 the executive director had been hired and the Emerson group had exceeded their goal, raising \$78,284 (eventually the sum exceeded \$85,000). But later that year the Executive Director had to resign due to a recurrence of cancer. After losing a second Executive Director, the Foundation was managed by a group of volunteers under the leadership of Christel Erickson-Collins.

A report in the December 2008 *Emersonian Quarterly* stated that the Foundation was thriving and had received a \$45,000 grant from the Houston Endowment. They had 160 graduates from their STAR (Success Through Addiction Recovery) program and 200 current participants. Unfortunately all four of the (Republican) judges doing Drug Court work had been voted out of office in a county-wide Democratic Party sweep, but they would continue in office until January 2009, and replacements were being sought.

The *Emersonian Quarterly* for March 2010 reported that former Drug Court judge Brock Thomas had joined the Drug Court Foundation Board of Directors. A volunteer executive director had been hired.

New “wrap-around” programs were being started to help with post-graduate entry to the work force, housing, medical and transportation issues. A team of MBA students at the University of Houston’s Bauer College of Business was helping with research.

Environmental Group/Ministry for Earth

Emerson’s involvement with environmental causes went back to the mid-1970’s when Gwen Essinger instigated one of the first recycling programs in the city. As recycling was adopted more widely, our program was gradually diminished, until all that remained was a dumpster that collected paper. In early 2000 the Board decided to eliminate this as well, citing the damage caused to our driveway by the heavy truck that came to collect the dumpster, and readily-available recycling opportunities elsewhere.

The Environmental Group begun by Ann May operated independently of the Outreach Board/SAC but often coordinated with them. From the beginning the group vigorously pursued a variety of environmental projects, such as publicizing proposed shrimp fishery regulations to reduce by-catch of endangered sea turtles, letter-writing campaigns in support of environmental legislation, and city tree-planting efforts. In February 2001 Ann wished to pursue Emerson’s certification as a Green Sanctuary with the UUA, a desire supported by the Outreach Board; by October 2003 certification had been attained. In the spring of 2001 the group sponsored the first of several clean-up work parties at Matagorda Beach and conducted an energy audit of the church, looking to reduce costs. Building and Grounds member Don Weaver was able to institute improvements that saved the church \$2750 over 5 months on utility costs, keeping the equivalent of 45,000 tons of CO₂ from being emitted into the atmosphere. Later that year they urged the replacement of incandescent bulbs with more energy-efficient compact fluorescent bulbs. Emerson’s recycling effort was carried on by Business Administrator Bob Watkins and RE’s Judy Williams, using green wastebaskets to collect recyclable paper. The Environmental Group recruited volunteers to pick up these materials and take them to recycling centers. In September 2002 they began a Voluntary Simplicity study group using materials developed by the Northwest Earth Institute that promote an earth-centered ethic. Ann was elected to the Board of the Seventh Principle Project at the UUA’s General Assembly in June 2004.

At the February 2004 Board meeting the Environmental Group presented several recommendations to the Trustees as plans proceeded for the new building: carpool parking equal to 5% of the church membership, the establishment of green maintenance policies, and an allocation of life-time green space (later specified as equal to double the footprint of Delaney Hall) that would also allow for future expansion at the back of our property. At the April Board meeting the church also committed to serving only Fair Trade coffee at church events.

In May 2005 the Board approved a proposal from the Environmental Group that Emerson participate in the Green Mountain Energy Program in which Green Mountain Energy, an electricity provider that offered wind-generated power, would give the church \$50 for each new customer they signed up from the church membership. The April 14, 2006 *Emersonian* reported a \$550 donation to the church from Green Mountain, adding that the sign-up period would continue for the next month.

In July 2005 the group urged people to sign on to a “virtual march” on global warming organized by UUA President Bill Sinkford. They also presented a “CARnival” at church showcasing hybrid and fuel-efficient cars. In May 2006 they were promoting former Vice President Al Gore’s film *An Inconvenient Truth*, which was to be shown in June at the Hobby Center by the Progressive Forum. In October the film was shown at Emerson, one of 2000 congregations to do so.

In January 2007 the first of several Urban Harvest Fruit Tree sales was held at Emerson, making \$50,000 for Urban Harvest. The following year we offered hot food from our caterer and Emerson’s rock band Waldo performed. That brought in nearly \$72,000. Our environmental activism resulted in the church being asked to stage an advance screening of a new TV series on the Discovery Channel. The group also planned to take part in “Step It Up 2007”, a national effort to call for action on climate change.

In May 2007 the Board approved the group’s request that Emerson serve as one of the hosts of the nation-wide Bioneers conference in October. This group, founded in 1990, promotes practical, community-based environmental strategies. President Phil Richardson later learned that our green building was what attracted them.

By the fall of 2007 the Environmental Group had become Emerson’s Ministry for Earth, part of a UUA affiliated but independent organization that began the Green Sanctuary program in 2001. Ann May served on the MFE Board at that time and the Reverend Fred Small, son of Emerson members Roger and Ellen Small, had helped to design the Green Sanctuary program. Emerson was the 14th congregation certified.

In November 2008 the Board voted to join the Citizen’s Environmental Coalition of Houston, an umbrella organization for all the city’s groups involved in environmental causes. Emerson was the first religious institution to do so.

Boniuk Center for Religious Tolerance

Emerson often hosted lectures by Rice University professor Jill Carroll and she occasionally preached at our Sunday morning services. In the early part of the decade she left Rice to help found the Boniuk Center for Religious Tolerance. In October 2006 the Amazing Faiths project was begun as a joint effort between Interfaith Ministries and the Boniuk Center. Several Emerson members took part in the Dinner Dialogues in private homes with people from various religious faiths to promote understanding.

At the April 2008 Board meeting the Trustees approved a SAC request that the church join the Boniuk Center, citing a convergence of purpose with them and our long association with Jill. In addition two Emerson members were active participants. The \$1000 fee would come from SAC funds. deForest Ralph, a long-time Boniuk Center supporter and Rice graduate, joined its Board in 2010.

CHAPTER EIGHT: PARTNER CHURCH

Emerson's relationship with our Transylvanian partner church, St. Nickolas, continued to grow throughout the decade. Since joining the UUA program in 1993, we had tried, with limited success, several ways of securely transferring the funds and other materials we raised for St. Nickolas. Finally, in February 2000 this problem was solved, and \$5500, mainly from Belle Johnson, was sent over.

We continued to work with the Reverend Domokos Simen, minister to several churches in Transylvania. St. Nickolas was a subset of his church in Csikszereda that voted to become an independent congregation in early 2000. In the spring of 2000 Emerson began to raise money for the new church with a special collection authorized by the Outreach Board. Around the same time Emerson's Partner Church Committee chair deForest Ralph became a Partner Church Networker, representing the UUA's Partner Church Council in the Southwest District. A report in *The Emersonian* in July 2000 states that the UUA Partner Church Council was instrumental in putting US pressure on the Czeck government, with the result that the Czeck Unitarians were able to reclaim the church property of WWII Unitarian martyr Reverend Norbert Chapek in the heart of Prague old town. The President of the Czeck Unitarian Association attended the 2000 General Assembly in Nashville, Tennessee, and spoke at the annual meeting of the Partner Church Council.

In July 2000 another letter from Reverend Simen announced that he would retire in October. He would enjoy six years of retirement before dying in October 2006. The St. Nickolas congregation was trying to raise money for their own church building. At this time Emerson was raising money to help two St. Nickolas girls whose family had suffered a financial disaster.

The January 2000 Board minutes note that Emerson's Partner Church Committee was to offer assistance to the UUA's Partner Church Council in fundraising. Emerson led the Bell Ringers program, which was organized along the same lines as Chalice Lighters but raised money for Unitarians in central Europe. The Partner Church report for the January 2002 Annual Meeting stated that Bell Ringers raised \$3000 for Unitarians in the Czech Republic. The 2004 Annual Report said that 3 appeals had raised nearly \$10,000.

In May 2001 the Partner Church Committee was authorized to raise \$10,000 for a historic Unitarian building in Koloszvar that had recently been deeded to Transylvanian Unitarians but needed a lot of work. That September the Partner Church Committee held a dessert-and-coffee evening at the church to hear Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman speak about his trips to Transylvania. Other area UU congregations were also invited.

In June 2002 the Committee asked Emerson's Board of Trustees to guarantee a loan of \$20,000 for St. Nickolas to acquire a church building. The Board approved a loan of that sum from the Endowment to be repaid in three years. This loan was guaranteed in turn by the Partner Church Committee and chair deForest Ralph. A fundraising effort within the congregation for the same purpose was also approved. With this guarantee in place, St. Nickolas secured a \$10,000 loan from the Pension Board of the Unitarian Church of Romania plus a \$5,000 loan from another source. They hoped to complete the financing in late July and begin renovating the building.

In late April 2003 Reverend Bela Krizbai, minister to both the Csikszereda and St. Nickolas congregations, visited Emerson along with two teenagers. They observed Easter at the Shelter Rock UU church in New York (partnered with the Csikszereda congregation) then came to Emerson. The congregation pitched in to help host the group. The girl, Agnes Magyari, stayed with the Homiers and the boy, Endre Dane, stayed with the Sanders family. In addition to social and worship events at the church the group toured Rice University, the Texas Medical Center, NASA, the San Jacinto Monument, Bellaire High School, and many other Houston attractions. The teens joined in the LRY's Relay For Life and then went with them to Astroworld. The Committee used this visit to kick off the fundraiser authorized by the Board. All Houston/Galveston area UU congregations were invited to the events at Emerson.

By September 2003 nearly \$29,000 had been raised. Of this sum about \$21,000 was sent to pay off the loan and the remaining funds were held in reserve. The refurbishing was completed by Christmas 2003. A February 2004 e-mail from Reverend Bela Krizbai informed us that 100 Unitarians attended the "Christmas sermon" in the new prayer house.

Another result of this visit was that Reverend Krizbai was introduced to the UUA's (and Emerson's) intern minister program. The August 27, 2004 *Emersonian* announced that St. Nickolas would soon get its own intern—Endre Nagy Jr., the son of a Unitarian minister who would later become St. Nickolas's full-time minister. Endre Nagy Sr. was minister to a church that was partnered with the Cedar Lane congregation near Washington DC. In October 2004 deForest attended the consecration of the prayer house as Emerson's representative. He led a worship service at Emerson on July 31, 2005 reporting on his experiences.

The September 16, 2005 *Emersonian* reported severe flooding in Transylvania. Emerson's special offering for relief was forwarded to the UU Partner Church Council. A few weeks later, on September 25th (Thanksgiving Day in Transylvania) Reverend Endre Nagy Jr. was installed as St. Nickolas's full time minister. In Houston deForest presided over a Transylvanian-style communion service on December 18, and planned another for April 13, Maundy Thursday. In 2005 deForest and Laura Nagel of First UU church were appointed to the Stewardship Committee of the UUA's Partner Church Council. The following March Martha and deForest Ralph donated two engravings depicting Francis David engaged in the debate that led to the Edict of Torda establishing religious tolerance in Transylvania in 1568.

Reverend Krizbai and his family visited Houston in late March 2006, bringing with them two hand-carved kopjafas as thanks for our help in acquiring their prayer house. The dedication of the kopjafas was held in April with Bela Krizbai present. "Kopja" means "spear" in Hungarian. In ancient times when a warrior died his spear was driven into the ground as a headstone. Later a carved timber was used instead, called a "kopjafa." When the Hungarian tribe converted to Christianity the kopjafa became a commemorative piece often honoring other events. Our two commemorate the relationship between Emerson and St. Nickolas, and the fact that both congregations acquired new buildings at about the same time.

Hand carved by Endre Gal, a St. Nickolas member, the top of each is a stylized warrior's helmet (a male symbol). Beneath the helmet is a long neck, indicating the expectation of a long relationship. Below that is a world symbol followed by a star, then another star with a St. Andrew's cross (symbolizing Christianity). The larger kopjafa (Emerson) has a sun symbol below; the smaller one (St. Nickolas) does not. An identical pair of kopjafas stands in the grounds of the St. Nickolas church. After treatment to protect them from our climate, our pair was installed in the memorial garden.

DeForest wrote a column in the February 23, 2007 issue of *The Emersonian* in honor of Partner Church Month in March. In addition to Transylvania, the Partner Church Council has relationships with congregations in Hungary, the Czech Republic, Poland, the Khasi Hills in northeast India, and the Philippines. The largest concentration is in Transylvania. Both the Indian and Philippine movements began independently and then learned about Unitarianism (India) and Universalism (the Philippines) and made their connections with the respective North American groups before the Unitarian Universalist merger in 1961.

DeForest also reported that Reverend Nagy said things are going well. St. Nickolas has about 110 members and there are 20 more Unitarians in nearby villages to whom he also ministers. They recently had an ecumenical program with Unitarians, Roman and Armenian Catholics, Orthodox, Reform (Calvinist) and Lutherans taking part. On March 18 a special collection at Emerson brought in \$1735.

In the summer of 2007 two teens from Emerson joined a two-week youth pilgrimage to Transylvania composed of 8 to 10 young people. Emerson's representatives were Eleanor Schorre, daughter of Tim and Gail Schorre, and Carolyn Ralph, deForest's and Martha's granddaughter. They were formally commissioned as Ambassadors from Emerson at the worship service on June 10 and conveyed our greetings to the people of St. Nickolas. In addition to spending three days with the congregations of St. Nickolas and Csikszereda they met Bishop Szabo in Kolozsvár, visited venerable Unitarian landmarks such as Torda (site of King John Sigismund's Edict of Tolerance) and Deva (where Francis David was imprisoned and died). They also did service work at a Unitarian high school and attended two weddings. During their weekend as honored guests at St. Nickolas they met Reverend Endre Nagy's fiancée Eva. The two were married shortly thereafter.

Eleanor and Carolyn reported to the Emerson congregation at Thanksgiving weekend and also to the LRY. Eleanor and the representative from First Church also spoke to the Thoreau congregation's Adult Education class.

In 2008 deForest was appointed to the Board of the Partner Church Council and traveled to Transylvania in that capacity in April. He visited the Unitarian church in Budapest as well as St. Nickolas. The 2009 Annual Report states that the Partner Church Committee broadened its scope to include the UUA's International Office, especially the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU), an umbrella organization for national UU associations. It includes the governing bodies of many nations. During 2008 the Committee held two special collections: one for the Leadership Conference for Emerging African congregations and the second for St. Nickolas.

In early 2008 the Partner Church Committee asked for and received the Board's permission to conduct a fundraiser for an upgrade to the center for students and pilgrims in Kolozsvár. Their goal was \$20,000 to be matched by Alice Schulman. Emerson's Minister Emeritus Frank Schulman would be recognized in some way.

Endre Nagy was named the 2008-9 Balazs Scholar at Starr King Unitarian seminary in California. He and his wife Eva visited Houston during his semester break from December 17 to January 7. Endre presented an Adult Education class on December 21 and hosted a Transylvanian communion service on December 28. By this time the kopjafas had been permanently placed at the entrance to the Memorial Garden on bases designed by deForest and made by his neighbor. They were re-dedicated by Endre and Mark Edmiston-Lange on December 21. Endre and Eva attended many events and venues while here, including social events with members of Emerson and First UU Church. They took part in the New Year's Eve Labyrinth Walk, with Endre playing guitar while Emerson member Steven Lipp sang. In January they went to Chicago to visit Meadville-Lombard, then to Boston before going back to California.

Endre Nagy received his certification from Starr King in May 2009. He and Eva attended General Assembly in Salt Lake City before returning home. In 2010 the Committee planned to consider a trip to Transylvania over the summer and wanted to try to set up regular video communications with St. Nicholas over the Internet.

Throughout deForest's long chairmanship of the Partner Church Committee he was fortunate to have the unstinting help and encouragement of his own partner, his wife Martha. Unfortunately her worsening health meant that she had to withdraw more and more into the background. In April 2010 the Committee brought a proposal to the Board for the placement of two Peace Poles on the church grounds in Martha's honor. The four-sided aluminum poles would carry the phrase "May peace prevail on Earth" in up to 16 languages of the purchaser's choice.

All of Emerson rejoiced when Martha Austine Ralph was honored at the 2010 General Assembly in Minneapolis by the UUA's Partner Church Council. She was one of only 20 recipients of the First Annual Stewardship of Partnership Awards.

CHAPTER NINE: DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS

Initially the Denominational Affairs Committee carried on as in previous years, publicizing UUA study/action issues and promoting other national, district and local UU-related events. The Committee promoted the District Leadership Experience workshop in July 2000. Earlier that spring the Southwest District Annual Meeting was held in San Antonio; Gay Lambirth, Gay Ann Gustafson, deForest Ralph and Judy Richardson were delegates. The September 8, 2000 issue of *The Emersonian* carried a report from the Committee on the actions of the UUA Commission on Social Witness. The new study/action issue selected at that year's General Assembly was "An Alternative to the War on Drugs," which joined the ongoing study/action Statement of Conscience: "Economic Injustice, Poverty and Racism—We Can Make a Difference." In addition, six Actions of Immediate Witness were adopted concerning support for Tibet and the Dalai Lama, a protest against racial profiling, promoting handgun legislation, an end to the death penalty, campaign finance reform and the national missile defense system. In October 2000 the Southwest UU Conference, hoping to make leadership training more widely available, held the first weekend Leadership Training Module at Emerson. The DAC publicized the General Assembly for 2001, held in Cleveland, Ohio, and offered to pay for up to nine delegates to the Southwest UU Spring Conference in Baton Rouge in April. A report from the Committee stated that five adult delegates and two youth plus the ministers attended GA in Quebec in June 2002. The following year 16 Emerson members attended GA in Boston, billed as the largest gathering of UUs ever. In June 2004 a brief summary of the Board minutes in *The Emersonian* stated that the Hopkinses and the Mays represented Emerson at GA in Long Beach, California.

But for a number of years after that the Denominational Affairs Committee at Emerson was minimally active despite the best efforts of several members including Gay Ann Gustafson, deForest Ralph, Billye Smith, Bob and Barbara Hopkins and Gay and Gene Lambirth. Planning for the SWUUC Fall Conference, held at Emerson in November 2004, was done by a "Conference Committee" convened by the ministers. Although the Conference was a great success carried off by a number of denominationally-dedicated Emerson members, the DAC as such had little to do with it. When the Social Action Council was formed in the summer of 2006, it was proposed to place the Denominational Affairs Committee with the SAC as related to the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and other outreach programs, but after a few years' trial this did not seem to be a good fit.

At the General Assembly in June 2005 Emersonian David May was elected to the UUA Commission on Social Witness. But at the July 2007 Board meeting Trustee Billye Smith mentioned that due to the DAC's non-function Emerson had no congregational representative to the UUA. At this time the Commission on Appraisal was seeking congregational input on its review of the Principles and Purposes, so Emerson's lack of a formal UUA connection had some consequence. At the October Board meeting Billye mentioned that a new group was forming under the name "UU Connections." The March 2008 Board minutes state that there is still no chair but there are funds in the budget for basic Committee functions. The Board approved the expenditure of \$200 for delegate expenses to a denominational peace-making workshop. As plans proceeded to separate denominational issues from the SAC in the spring of 2008 it was proposed to have the SAC concentrate on local (city or county) issues and revive

the DAC for national/world-wide issues. These would include Partner Church, UUSC, disaster response fundraising and the Boniuk Center as well as the customary UU connections.

In August 2008 Gay Ann Gustafson and deForest Ralph presented a written mission statement and description to the Board of Trustees for a "Denominational Connections" Committee, following up on an earlier discussion at the May Board meeting. They laid out the history and context of our place within both the UUA and the Southwestern UU conference and proposed detailed responsibilities of the Committee with regard to the UUA, SWUUC and the Houston UU Network of local congregations but did not mention activities outside that scope. The proposal was still under study at the September Board meeting. Trustees also agreed that the draft of the proposed revision of the Principles and Purposes be sent to the congregation on behalf of the Commission on Appraisal and that church members be instructed to reply directly to the UUA. After two more revisions the revision would be submitted to the General Assembly.

At the December 2008 Board meeting formal approval was given to a Denominational Relations Committee along the lines proposed by Gay Ann and deForest. But the next two years passed without finding a chair and the Committee remained non-functional. The Board was usually able to find delegates to GA each year, though not always the number to which we were entitled, and Emerson continued to pay full "Fair Share" dues to the UUA Program Fund. In April 2010 Bob Hopkins agreed to start working again to revive the DAC once he finished up as chair of the Social Action Council later that year.

The one bright spot was the Houston Area UU Network, which hummed right along largely under the efforts of Bob and Barbara Hopkins. In March 2000 the Network sponsored a weekend workshop at Bay Area UU Church that included a keynote speaker, a ministers' panel discussion and an after-lunch speaker. The topic was "Agenda for a New Millennium." Similar workshops were held every spring through 2003, at which Bob Hopkins led a community service component. In April 2002 instead of the usual program UUA President Bill Sinkford spoke at a union service sponsored by the Network in honor both of 103 years of UU ministry in Houston and Reverend Robert Schaibly's retirement after 20 years at First Church. In addition the Network brought a UU presence to Houston's Gay Pride Parade for the first time in June 2000. On at least a few occasions Network members helped answer phones during the local public radio station's membership drive and the Network was heavily involved in the UUA's 2005 media campaign in Houston, the Uncommon Denomination, resulting in a big boost in Emerson's membership. In May 2003 the spring workshop was closely followed by a UU Network Musical Festival at the Wirt Road Fellowship featuring musicians from all eight congregations and a picnic. The Music Festival in one form or another was repeated every spring through 2010.

The Network sponsored an all-day workshop in March 2007 by author and motivational speaker Michael Durall on growth. The President's Report for the 2010 Annual Meeting noted a Network discussion held among 11 church presidents and vice presidents, plus membership and stewardship chairs from the eight area congregations, with more meetings planned.

CHAPTER TEN: PUBLIC RELATIONS AND COMMUNICATIONS

Emerson Church continued the process, begun in the 1990's, of greater integration of electronic media, both for internal communications and external publicity. This would include continued development of the church website, refinements to the format as well as the electronic distribution of *The Emersonian*, improvements of exterior signage, participation in the UUA's nation-wide Uncommon Denomination media campaign, and eventually led to the creation of a new staff position: Office Administrator for Communications.

With the exception of newspaper coverage of the opening of Delaney Hall it became increasingly clear that print publicity was becoming less effective. In the spring of 2001 the Public Relations Committee decided to drop the newspaper listings though they did continue to publicize specific events in the *Houston Chronicle's* "Collection Plate" feature and other local outlets. By the end of the decade further changes in the *Chronicle's* religious coverage had the Committee once again seeking alternatives. Throughout the decade they continued radio spots on the local National Public Radio station, eventually joining with other congregations in the Houston UU Network to share expenses, and several times area UUs helped staff the station's fundraising phone bank. Yellow Pages ads also continued but were gradually phased back. Feedback from visitors and new members revealed the increasing importance of electronic media in spreading our message.

In May 2000 the Ministers' "Revels" column announced that long-time member Ivy Dorough had donated funds for a new sign out in front of the church. This was the first of several improvements that over the next ten years would lead to a substantial lighted sign with the sermon title updated weekly and placement of a paper "Wayside Pulpit" sign in the south-facing window of Westwood Hall, also changed weekly.

In March 2000 Jo Ann deForest resigned as webmaster to be followed by Mark Lytle and Jerry Wendelin. By the spring of 2001 the site had links to the UUA's website and that of the Southwest District, plus a subsite for Emerson's Environmental Group. The webmasters sought digital photos from the congregation for further enhancement. As of September 2002 sermons were posted and a link to Amazon.com added in August 2003. Emerson members could purchase items from Amazon using this link and generate a contribution to the church. In December 2003 the first attempt was made to make *The Emersonian* available on the website, though it would be 2005 before security issues were resolved.

In January 2006 the Public Relations Committee wrote a website content policy and expanded the website's design. A password-protected Intranet was added allowing church members to access current and historical church documents, a list of current Committee chairs and an on-line membership directory (with an opt-out feature for those who so wished). Other items included room dimensions, floor plans and the church policy manual. In March 2006 a password-protected WiFi was added. The domain name was changed from emersonhou.org to emersonhouston.org to avoid the unfortunate association "EmersonWHO?" Most of these improvements came under Jerry Wendelin, who resigned in December 2006 with the Board's deep gratitude. His successors Doni Hieronymous and Pat Grealy

served for the rest of the decade and beyond. In 2008 the Board minutes were added to the Intranet portion of the website.

In the fall of 2007 for the first time the website was used as the main platform for a church-wide survey, which led to the creation of a Communications Task Force to study all aspects of communications and publicity, including announcements at the worship services. The Task Force was composed of representatives from four Committees: Public Relations, Audio-Visual, Worship and Aesthetics. In January 2008 the Task Force recommended greater use of the Internet, a complete redesign of *The Emersonian*, and a major upgrade of office equipment. The Public Relations Committee was renamed the Communications Committee, assuming responsibility for the newsletter and exterior signage as well as its previous duties. Over the next three years much effort was devoted to carrying out these proposals.

Outside contractor Jane Nilssen continued to serve as editor of *The Emersonian* until early 2008 when she resigned and the Public Relations Committee decided to bring it back into the office under Nancy Lipp's direction. By this time electronic distribution had been in use for several years, though the format remained the same and a significant number of people still preferred to receive it by mail. As recommended by the Task Force a major redesign debuted in March 2008. The newsletter was now published in color on a monthly basis with a quarterly supplement. It featured more photos and focused on events occurring within the next few weeks. The quarterly would include the Co-Ministers' column "Revels", now renamed "A Message From Becky and Mark", Social Action Council updates and more detail on programs and events that happen once or twice a year such as labyrinth walks, solstice and equinox services, RE's UNICEF Carnival, etc. Time-critical information such as memorial service announcements were sent to the membership by e-blast. However, the quarterly supplement did not work out as hoped and was phased out in 2010.

Both the Worship Committee and the Aesthetics Committee were exploring other means of disseminating information. Worship was already working to ensure that announcements at the beginning of the Sunday service conveyed information concisely and in an appropriate manner. The AV Committee helped train those who made the announcements in the proper use of the microphone. In August 2008 the Board authorized the purchase and installation of two flat-panel wall-mounted TV monitors for the Gathering Place with the expectation that this would serve as a clutter-free, unobtrusive means of publicizing church events. A video screen content policy was adopted and Emerson member Mary Ann Stanley kept the Power Point displays current.

In January 2005 Houston was one of several sites chosen by the UUA to take part in its "Uncommon Denomination" media campaign. Paid for by private donations, the campaign featured ads on several radio stations, a multi-page newspaper spread and several billboards as well as targeted mailings. During a tryout in Kansas City the previous year visitors to area congregations increased 25%. In February 2005, just after the start of the five-month campaign, the Ministers' column reported a significant increase in visitors, especially young singles, some of whom joined. By August the Membership Committee noted a sharp increase in the number of visitor cards filled out compared to the

previous year. They credited both the media campaign and the publicity generated by our new building. In the Ministers' Report for the January 2006 Annual Meeting they said that membership was up by 15%.

Finally, in 2008 the Board authorized a new staff position: Office Administrator for Communications. Emerson member Nancy Lipp, who had been instrumental in the redesign of *The Emersonian*, filled the post on a temporary basis while a permanent employee was sought. In 2010 Molly Martin was hired, much to the satisfaction of the Communications Committee. Her job description covered all aspects of church communications, both within the congregation and as authorized with the wider community.

CHAPTER ELEVEN: SOCIAL ORGANIZATIONS

As in the past, Emerson's social organizations were as many and varied as our members' diverse interests. The new millennium would bring many changes in the fellowship activities of the church as long-established groups faded and new ones emerged. In October 2004 the Board of Trustees created the Community Life Committee to promote the concept of the Beloved Community and organize church social activities toward that end. In effect this meant that the new Committee assumed the functions of the former Fellowship Council. The Committee was specifically charged to plan at least one all-church party or potluck each year, assist church members in creating new groups, assist existing groups to recruit new members if needed, and to generally coordinate with groups, other committees and the Board of Trustees. The Congregational Committees (Committee on Ministry, Nominating Committee and any Search Committee) were excluded from this arrangement, and the Community Life Committee was exempted from fundraising responsibilities.

At first the arrangement worked well. The Committee planned the Homecoming party for September 2005 and took over the functions of the Committee Fair. In the spring of 2006 Board President David Bates attended a luncheon meeting with members of the Community Life, Membership and Growth Planning Committees and Gwen Essinger of Circle Dinners to find ways to better integrate new members. The Committee was saving proceeds from the sale of hot dogs and hamburgers at church events to put toward a barbecue pit.

By the end of 2006 the Committee was no longer organizing other committees and groups to host Coffee Hour. Sunday Sexton Hans Coster would set up for Coffee Hour and other groups or individuals could bring refreshments if they wished. In both 2007 and 2008 the Community Life Committee teamed up with the Prime Time group to sponsor a Trivia Nite. According to the 2009 Annual Report (covering 2008) they sponsored a Field Day in May, Homecoming in September and arranged refreshments for Vespers. *Emersonians* for May 2009 through September 2010 mention several fellowship activities: Field Day, Homecoming, Hanging of the Greens and Vespers without any reference to the Community Life Committee.

Sunday lunches also continued during the decade, varying in frequency from monthly to weekly depending on turnout.

Women's Alliance

For much of the decade the Alliance continued as it always had. Two Rummage Sales were held, raising \$5000 in 2000 and \$3000 in 2002. The money was donated to a variety of community organizations as well as for specific non-budgeted needs at the church. Later fundraisers centered on theater parties held at Theatre Southwest, occasionally featuring plays written by Emersonian Anna Louise Bruner. Speakers at the regular monthly meetings covered a wide variety of topics ranging from environmental issues to a 2004 program on "down-ballot" races leading up to the general election with discussion led by church members representing both major political viewpoints. Spring field trips took Alliance members to interesting places near (the Houston Museum of Fine Arts) and far (the Painted Churches

near New Braunfels). The year's program always ended with an elegant spring luncheon. At the May luncheon in 2000, the Alliance presented the UU Women's Federation Susan B. Anthony Roll of Recognition Award to Barbara Hopkins for her long and tireless work for the church and the denomination generally. In May 2002 the same award was given to Elizabeth Babcock, Jo Irwin and Judy Williams.

However, after a few years articles began to appear in *The Emersonian* that were more than just meeting notices, indicating that attendance was falling off. Women from other area UU congregations were invited to Alliance events in an effort to boost interest.

In late 2006 under the leadership of Barbara Hopkins several Alliance members began preparing bag lunches (Sandwiches for SEARCH) after the conclusion of their regular program. The lunches were distributed to street people by SEARCH volunteers. The Alliance sandwich crew would go out afterwards for their own lunch at a nearby restaurant. Normally the May Spring Luncheon signaled the finale for Alliance events until activities resumed in the fall, but the lunch-making continued through the summer on the usual meeting date in both 2007 and 2008. Sadly, 2008 was the last year of regular Alliance meetings, though Sandwiches for SEARCH continued long afterward. Alice Circle, another long-standing women's group that met on Saturday mornings, also folded in early 2006.

Men's Breakfast

Men's Breakfast was another venerable tradition that started out strong but faded away by the end of the decade. The meetings were held on the last Saturday morning of the month and began with a breakfast (usually eggs) prepared in the Westwood Hall kitchen followed by a program presented by one of the members or, occasionally, an outside speaker. In January 2000 Joe Hightower, the President of Hospitality Apartments, was the guest speaker. The Hospitality Apartments provided low-cost temporary lodging to patients undergoing treatment at the Medical Center and their families. Both the Men's Breakfast and the Alliance supported this endeavor with a variety of fundraisers.

As time went on the meeting notices in *The Emersonian* mentioned fewer formal programs. As they had done in years past, Men's Breakfast sponsored an Italian Luncheon benefitting the Hospitality Apartments after the church service on March 30, 2003. Meetings became more sporadic in 2004 and were not listed for most of 2005 and 2006, though a contact person was included in the list of Committee chairs and group leaders published in *The Emersonian*. Meetings were again scheduled in November and December 2007 and March through May 2008. Beginning in December 2008 and running for the next 12 months an effort was made to revive the group, but no meetings were mentioned in *The Emersonian* in 2010.

E-Groups

The e-groups (e standing for "engaged") were begun in August 1999 by our new Co-Ministers and continued well into the new millennium, covering a wide variety of topics. Some groups that had existed previously, such as the environmental group, the Latitudinarians and Men's Issues discussion

group, were listed under the e-group heading in the spring of 2000. The environmental e-group eventually became Ministry for Earth (see Chapter Seven on social action). Other durable e-groups included the Daytimers, Moral Aspects of Current Events and the Theological Study Group.

Covenant Groups

In October 2006 the Co-Ministers began promoting a new concept, that of Covenant Groups. At first glance it appeared to be a reboot of e-groups minus the special interest focus. Covenant Groups retained the small group discussion format but had leaders who were trained to promote a trustful, accepting atmosphere for the consideration of deeper life-experience issues. One of the first tasks of each Covenant Group was to develop a mutually-agreed-upon “covenant” on how members would be treated. Covenant Groups were limited in size and, once formed, did not admit new members. Instead new groups would be formed when there was enough interest. Each group was expected to perform at least one service project for the church and one for the larger community each year. The Ministers anticipated that the arrival of new intern Claudia Frost in the autumn of 2006 would jump-start this program since she had previous experience with it in another congregation. A number of Covenant Groups began over the next several months, meeting with varying degrees of success. The Memorial Area Covenant Group began making sandwiches for SEARCH once a month after the church service, an addition to the Alliance effort.

Circle Dinners

Undoubtedly the social organization with the longest pedigree was the one named Circle Dinners. It had evolved from the Couples Club in the mid-1970's to Friday Nites. In the fall of 1999 it was renamed Circle Dinners. The format remained the same throughout: 10-15 members gathering for potluck dinners in host homes every two months or so, with the May dinner held for the whole roster in Westwood Hall. The only change was to Saturday night instead of Friday. Gwen Essinger was the driving force behind Circle Dinners for virtually all that time until her death in July 2012.

Young Adults

In December 2000 an organizational meeting for a young adult group was held for ages 20-40 that soon became known as the Prime Time group. They met during the Second Sunday Lunch after church every month and also held a monthly evening potluck dinner with a speaker. Childcare was provided. Prime Time thrived at least through 2005 and surfaced occasionally thereafter, co-hosting a Trivia Nite in both 2007 and 2008 with the Community Life Committee.

In 2003 Prime Time redefined its focus to the 30-50 age group and a second young adult group formed for those 18-35. They sold Fair Trade coffee through the bookstore to raise funds for their programs. They fell off the radar in early 2004 but occasional notices in *The Emersonian* indicated they were still functioning in early 2005. There were some hints that the age range was still too broad, and life styles too varied (single/married, student/career, childless or not) to make a social group viable. Nevertheless attempts would be made periodically hoping to hit on the right mix.

Other Social Groups

Another long-running social program was the Women's Book Group, meeting at the church the 3rd Thursday of the month under Jo Irwin. An evening group began in the spring of 2009 under Jill Rose and continued through 2010. A few attempts were made to launch a Men's Book Club, the most recent in 2010.

The First Friday Film series was spearheaded by Joann Hendrick and Leticia Anderson and continued until the summer of 2010. A second film/discussion series with a focus on GLBT issues began in the fall of 2009. Named Welcome MAT ("movies and things") it took place after church once a month through 2010.

Other Special Interest Groups

The Culture Caravan was organized in 2004 by Anna Louise Bruner and Mary Ann Rusk. They met periodically after church to car-pool to plays, museum exhibits, art galleries and other cultural events. In a related development an Arts Council was formed in 2007 to promote art shows by Emerson members and other artists in the Gathering Place and the first-floor hallway of Delaney Hall. The Arts Council revived an earlier effort led by Shirley Coster when art work was displayed in Westwood Hall, but was necessarily discontinued during the construction of Delaney Hall.

In January 2000 Sew Be It, a social/service handwork group led by Barb Adams, was making capes for M. D. Anderson cancer patients. They continued to meet into the spring of 2005, making lap robes for the elderly residents of Bayou Manor as well as a beautiful wall quilt for Delaney Hall. In February 2005 a group called the Stitchers began meeting in the Gathering Place every Wednesday morning to work on their own projects and socialize.

The Latitudinarians, a small group that held discussions on matters of religious or cultural interest, had been meeting many years and continued into 2006. Each member was expected to present an original paper about 20 minutes long that would be the subject of that meeting's discussion. Topics included fundamentalism, trust, the rate of change in society, alternatives to the UU principles, and a humanist appreciation of Christmas and Easter stories. The group was named after Benjamin Franklin's term for the first philosophical society in the US in Philadelphia. The August 6, 2004 issue of *The Emersonian* mentioned that the group was seeking participation from other UU congregations.

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