

FIRST  
UNITARIAN  
CHURCH OF  
HONOLULU

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ANNIVERSARY

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## Introduction

In February of 1978 The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu celebrated its silver anniversary. Part of the celebration was the publication of "After Twenty Five Years: Historical Notes and Observations." Now, in 2013, we are celebrating our sixtieth anniversary, and we are continuing to tell our story with more recollections and observations.

We have not tried to re-write the history so carefully prepared by Lyle Webster in 1978. It remains available in a separate volume. For this current effort, we have used the extensive notes prepared by Martha Spengler and Eunyce Swift in 2003 which were intended to be published in a fifty year history. That publication did not happen, but we are grateful for the research and notes left for us to use now. They were preserved and made available to us by Mary MacKay.

In the course of our work, we have come across several good stories that illustrate how rich and quirky this congregation can be. A few of these stories are included as an addendum.

Written material has been produced by members of the Kupuna Anthology Project, with additional words provided by Roger Wickenden, Nan Kleiber, Judy Hepfer, David Friedman, Rev. Richard Allen, Lois Allen, Rev. Mike Young, Rev. Lee Bond-Upson and Rev. Jonipher Kuponon Kwong, our current minister. Don Dvojacki provided technical support.

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## **Congregational Polity**

For Unitarian Universalists, "Congregational Polity" means that all authority regarding worship and church governance rests with the individual congregation not with the UU Association of Congregations. Just as we do not subscribe to a creedal authority, we do not subscribe to an institutional authority. In accordance with this commitment the selection of a minister is determined only by a vote of the congregation as specified in our church By-Laws.

## **Ministerial Leadership**

A narrative of the Ministers who have served the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu over the last 60 years is both a reflection and an expression of the changes in society and culture in Hawaii, on the mainland and in the Unitarian Universalist Association of Congregations. To be complete, this narrative needs to begin with the lay leaders who founded the initial Fellowship.

In 1952 two men, John Crosson and Donald Gowing, felt so keenly about the need for a liberal church in the islands that they decided to do something about it. Crosson was a teacher and Gowing was a plant scientist with the Pineapple Research Institute. They sought names of local Unitarians from the American Unitarian Association in Boston and requested literature to serve as a guide in the formation of a fellowship. The first meeting was held on October 26, 1952 at Castle High School in Kaneohe. A small group of religious liberal Air Force people joined in this organizational meeting. Through a succession of steps, the Unitarian Fellowship of Honolulu was launched with twenty-four charter members. The AUA issued the Certificate of Membership on February 11, 1953.

Meetings were first held Sunday evenings in temporary facilities--the Honolulu YWCA, the Community Church of Honolulu and Temple Emanu-El. In 1955, meetings were changed to mornings and were moved to Makiki at the Hawaiian

Mission Academy, a Seventh Day Adventist church, in order to have space for a church school. That was an important aspect of the Fellowship from the beginning, and for some years was held on the lanais of various members. After two years, the Fellowship received further financial assistance from the Unitarian Association to call a Minister.

### **Rev. Frank Ricker: 1957-1962**

Dr. Ricker, then AUA Pacific Coast Regional Director, came in December 1955 and did much to further the spread of Unitarianism during his visit. By March 1957, the required minimum of 65 members was met and the congregation invited Dr. Ricker to be the first minister of The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. He arrived in August 1957. Bylaws were adopted and the Hawaii incorporation papers filed on September 11, 1957.

Dr. Ricker first commuted about 25 miles from rural Wahiawa where housing was provided on the old Dole homestead. By August 1958, the Church had purchased a parsonage in Manoa. The parsonage became not only a home for the minister but a center for board meetings and other church activities. Sunday services, however, were continued at Hawaiian Mission Academy. The congregation included many persons with close connection to the University of Hawaii, and others seeking free thought and active discussion. Sunday sermons were expected to last 45 minutes, followed by a 15 minute discussion period.

There was also a Sunday evening radio forum conducted over KGU by Dr. Ricker which did much to let the community know about the Unitarians. The forum topics were in the full range of political, economic, religious and other aspects of life in Hawaii. By the Spring of 1961, membership had grown to 168 members. Dr. Ricker decided to return to the mainland and departed in February 1962.

## **Rev. Gene Bridges: 1962-1971**

The next big step in the growth of the church was the purchase of our present home, the Cooke Mansion at 2500 Pali Highway in 1962 and its dedication on December 15, 1963. The first meeting in our new home took place on Christmas Eve, December 24, 1962 with Rev. Gene Bridges presiding.

Rev. Gene Bridges came from Tacoma, Washington on November 1, 1962. He had received his law degree from Southern Methodist University and practiced law before entering Starr King School for the Ministry and receiving his B.D. in 1959. He served as Minister in Tacoma, Washington for three years before coming to Hawaii.

The first years of Gene's ministry saw significant growth; by 1965-66 church membership was reported at 247 as compared to 203 the previous year.

On the mainland the civil rights movement was gaining momentum under the leadership of Martin Luther King Jr. In 1965 the church raised the funds to send Rev. Bridges to Selma Alabama for the memorable march there. Attendance on Sunday morning was often more than 150.

In the Fall of 1967, after Rev. Bridges returned from his sabbatical, there seemed to be a growing change in the sense of unity within the congregation. Issues concerned not only the national issues of Civil Rights and Vietnam; but the church designation as a GI sanctuary, and the church serving as a refuge for homeless young people were both at the forefront.

Gene came back from his sabbatical with disdain for the role of preaching, a talent for which he was noted, and introduced the Venture Program of group interaction, offered both to church members and the public.

Although Rev. Bridges received a vote of confidence at a congregational meeting in 1968, church support was affected by

his own divorce and continued to decrease. The idea of establishing a divorce clinic at the church caused further negative feelings.

In June, 1971, Gene decided to resign as Minister and to remain a church member in the private practice of law in Honolulu. He held meetings of a humanist discussion group at his home for more than 25 years.

### **Rev. Richard Allen: 1972-1980**

The church continued under lay leadership until February 1972 when Dr. Richard Allen arrived. Rev. Allen was our second career-change minister. He had received his Masters degree in engineering from Ohio State in 1949. After several years "working in the brickyard," as he describes his early career in industry, he enrolled and received a B.D. from Harvard in 1967; then in 1971, a Ph.D. from Star King which was at this time a member of the Graduate Theological Union, a consortium of several seminaries which exchanged libraries, classes, and professors to provide a breadth of faith resources.

Due to the divisiveness following the Gene Bridges ministry, the church and finances were down significantly. Then there was a death and a substantial endowment. Dick recalls that this led the church to decide to hire a Minister and a Religious Education Director, telling him that if, when the money ran out, he had not grown the Church enough to pay his salary he would not have a job. Fortunately he did, with an assist from his wife, Lois, who served as the Music Director, receiving a small honorarium.

The Allen ministry moved to heal the congregation after the tensions that had divided the congregation during the Vietnam War. Dick introduced the Extended Family program, modeled after one established in Santa Barbara, California. Members wanted stimulating and intellectually satisfying church services and free-wheeling discussions.

Dick remembers the church membership as largely haole with a few Japanese and Hawaiians who had married haoles, a lot of military people and a lot who weren't — "quite diverse," he says, "even by Unitarian standards." It was also during this time that the church became home to Congregation Sof Ma'arav and the Metropolitan Community Church, as well as participating in the annual Thanksgiving Service which gathered together the diverse churches of Nuuanu Valley. Dick also notes, on looking back, that the East West Center at the University of Hawaii gave both courses and lectures which he attended, and that "the very existence of the East West Center is a significant statement about the situation of the seventies."

A big event was the Silver Anniversary of the church on February 11, 1978. After a successful ministry, Richard Allen left in June of that year to become minister of a larger church in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma.

### **Rev. Conrad Dippel: 1981-1983**

For over a year the church functioned under lay leadership until Conrad Dippel arrived in August 1981. Rev. Dippel received his A.B. from the University of California at Berkeley in 1973, and his M.Div. from Starr King in 1979, following a year's internship at a church in England.

After one and one-half years, Rev. Dippel submitted his resignation with the statement that his ministry and the congregation "were not a good match." Also, his Canadian wife and new infant never quite adapted to Hawaii. Conrad went to Saskatoon, Canada to serve the Unitarian Church there.

### **Rev. Dr. Peter Samson, Interim: 1983-1984**

Members of the congregation in a series of neighborhood meetings indicated that they wanted an Interim Minister for a year or two. Rev. Peter Samson was invited for a one-year interim ministry beginning September 1983. He came with his wife and grown daughter from the Community Unitarian Church



of White Plains, New York. Dr. Samson's year was a good match for Peter as well as the congregation. Dr. Samson recalled to us that he thinks of his experience with warmth and gratitude. From Hawaii, Dr. Samson went to Evanston, Illinois.

### **Rev. Oren Peterson, Interim: 1984-1985**

From the Fall of 1984 to the Spring of 1985 the church was served by Rev. Oren Peterson who came from Eugene, Oregon with his wife and two children. Rev. Peterson enjoyed being a member of the choir, and helped renovate the church office. He left Hawaii to go to Canoga Park, California

### **Rev. Robert Fraser: 1985-1995**

Rev. Robert Fraser arrived on August 15, 1985 from the Rockville, Maryland, Unitarian Church. He was our third career-change minister, having worked as a ranch manager in Montana, after getting an M.A. in the Philosophy of Science at Columbia University in 1960, discovering Unitarianism in a Fellowship, then receiving his M.Div. from Starr King in 1969. Rev. Fraser served the Honolulu church for ten years, except for a sabbatical period from February to June 1991, when Rev. Ray Manker from Arizona filled the pulpit with good support and appreciation.

It was during this period that the UUA began a process of significant change in ministerial leadership which included: Certification of Religious Educators as Ministers, increasing placement of openly gay and lesbian ministers in the pulpit, and a dramatic increase in the number of women enrolling in our seminaries and becoming settled ministers.

When Rev. Fraser began his ministry here, there was still a lingering emotional fallout from the era of Rev. Gene Bridges' ministry. Gene presided over weekly "Fellowship" meetings at his home attended by both active and inactive members of the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu. This had presented a problem for Rev. Conrad Dipple. Bob welcomed Gene's

"Fellowship" as a semi-auxiliary program of the Church, which supplemented rather than distracted from Church offerings at the time. Gene, having been esteemed as an excellent preacher, was also invited to preach at the Church on occasion during Bob' s tenure.

In Hawaii, attention had shifted from the dramatic issues of National Civil Rights and Vietnam to social justice concerns at the local and state level. Bob was active on the Human Needs Committee of the Hawaii Council of Churches, the Steering Committee of Solidarity for Sovereignty, speaking out on such concerns on regular radio broadcasts, lobbying on such issues before the State Legislature as affordable housing, gambling, firearms control. He was long time Chair of the Religious Advisory Board of the State Department of Safety, and received an award of merit from the State legislature for the establishment of the Public Access Room in the Hawaii State Capital.

Bob's preaching style was a definite contrast from that of his predecessors. He describes it as often more akin to Socratic dialogue in which he sought to explore our struggle to reconcile our personal and UU values and beliefs with our actions, with ourselves, and with each other. He was described by one scientist member as a process thinker. This did not always result in successful preaching when the listener was left with questions rather than answers.

Perhaps the most notable event of Rev. Fraser's ministry here was the Babcock legacy from a long-time member. Mabel Babcock willed \$775,000 to the church. How best to use this money galvanized the congregation with much discussion and debate, but also infused a fresh surge of interest in our renaissance. The church building was invigorated in the areas of plumbing, termite control, electrical system and re-roofing.

The congregation voted to invest \$500,000 of the Mabel Babcock legacy in one of the UUA pooled funds. The income

generated is used for meeting church needs. Unfortunately, we have dipped into the capital to meet our budget.

Bob thinks the low point of his ministry in Honolulu came in 1993 with his unsuccessful leadership regarding our attempt to decide on use of the Mabel Babcock Legacy to settle differing views on our future church building needs—whether to stay, make building changes, or develop a plan to move elsewhere. This was added to by a decline in young parents, perhaps partially related to our not having an R.E. Director with the time and resources to engage these parents in the program. These factors, along with the loss of 29 active members—due to death, ill health, or departure from the island—resulted in what he described as a "low point" in Church spirit.

### **Rev. Michael G. Young: 1996-2008**

Rev. Young got his B.A. from the University of Redlands, in 1961, his M.Div. from Andover Newton Theological School in 1965. Mike was very much a part of Oahu beyond the church. He wrote columns for one of the daily papers, was active in progressive political issues and was a driving member of the interfaith community.

His greatest strength was his intellect. He offered regular weekly classes on the Old Testament, the New Testament, Buddhism, Hinduism, the history of doubt and Unitarian Unitarianism. He had a powerful memory and an easy-to-follow way of explaining things.

Mike introduced the covenant group process to us in 2006. He also had a deep understanding and curiosity about people. Many of his sermons dealt with how people interact. Mike was at his best when in front of people, not interacting with congregants. His working relationship with the church staff was amicable and efficient.

One of Mike's greatest assets was (and remains) his partnership with his wife Nancy. Together they made a great team.

## **The Next 25 Years**

(Written by Reverend Mike Young in 2003 for our 50th birthday.)

The next 25 years, as the last, will be partly shaped by what history throws at us in the state, the nation and the larger world community. An essentially stagnant state economy, despite the dot com bubble on the mainland, placed limits on the commitments to growth on the part of the church in the late '90s.

Still, the church has grown. Not in numbers. We still grope toward 200 members, but we have added many new younger families, lowering the median age of the congregation significantly. We have grown in programming, with several activities going on at the church almost every night of the week and many in the daytime. We are again active in the larger community, both as individuals as of old, but also as a congregation via groups like FACE (Faith Action for Community Equity, an inter-faith community organizing group) and the fledgling Interfaith Alliance. This solid growth of the congregation as a community can and we trust will, form a reliable foundation as we respond to the challenges before us.

The church is committed to being a family-friendly community, sometimes in ways that leave non-kidded members feeling less appreciated. And, of course, we differ in our responses to war. With valued members in the military—active duty and retired—chaffing at various degrees of opposition to the war, we try to tread a careful line to maintain our covenant of agreement. These are potential fault lines along which the congregation could easily fragment if confronted by a major stressor. The size we need to be in order to maintain the current level of professional service and programming is...a bit larger.

Yet, our beloved building and its attendant parking limitations mitigates against any significant growth. And that building, its ambiance, and the style of community that has grown up in it, are a major factor in attracting people to us. So,

we are a) unlikely to move, b) unlikely in the current financial situation to buy either of the two next door properties which would give us significantly more space, or c) grow the "bit" we need to without finding some creative alternatives. So we talk about a shuttle service from relatively nearby parking areas and about alternative church services on a different day and time. (Double services on a Sunday morning would only multiply the parking nightmare.)

That's the current outlook: a healthy, vibrant congregation with serious challenges from outside and inside. Some of them, we'll find something we can do about. Some, we'll just have to ride out, ministering to one another as we go. But the foundation is there, awaiting a more or less stable political and economic situation, from which to continue to grow.

Specifically, I want the church to get financially healthy enough again to become a Teaching Congregation. We have a lot to give an Intern Minister, and a new voice with questions and ideas would have a lot to give us. We committed to it last year before the bottom fell out of our portfolio. So, it could happen sooner rather than later. Our participation in the Partnership Church program has wonderful potential to let some good things happen. Our partner church in Caican, Negros Oriental, the Philippines needs an economic development project. What do we know that would assist such a development without creating dependence upon us? That will be the challenge. Finally, I hope to see us build a new specific hands-on ministry to the larger community. Perhaps it will be something involving us with University students and young adults. Maybe in cooperation with the Buddhist Community? Maybe an unabashedly controversial Issues Forum. Something!

We need to get back in the business of stirring things up. And at some point, we need another UU congregation. Where? Somewhere in the Pearl-Kapolei-Mililani triangle. How to launch that with an initial congregation of 100+ at the outset would be the challenge. It's hard to think 25 years ahead! The one thing I can see from looking back and trying to look forward is that many of the problems and the possibilities will be different. I suppose most people feel that they live in a watershed time. But at this moment, in the midst of a war that could alter the national

and international landscape for decades to come, it certainly feels like the compass is getting ready to take a spin. As Adam said to Eve as they left the Garden, "My dear, we have entered a transitional age."

## **Addendum.**

Mike looks back now (in 2012) on an early conversation with the church. "When I was candidating for the job of Minister to the First Unitarian Church of Honolulu in 1995, I was asked how long I was likely to stay. I told the search committee that as long as we were happy with each other I would likely stay until my son, Daniel, graduated from high school. That would be 14 years. I'd lasted 13 years in my previous settlements in L.A. and Tampa, so that seemed about my attention span.

During those last few years of my tenure, I was delightedly caught up in the interfaith community with the All Believers Network and The Interfaith Alliance. Those involvements were one of the highlights of my time there. But some of the needed changes were already beginning to happen.

Sangeet had brought us international music along with his fine flute and piano playing. However, as the choir fell apart, we went on to develop the combo and more contemporary music. I remember especially Julian's glorious trumpet playing! The other highlight of our shared ministry was working with Nan Kleiber, our DRE. Not only did we get accolades for our work in sex education, but when the Catholic Social Services got the contract to do sexual education for the public schools they came to us (and Nan!) to train their staff.

The most dramatic event of that last year was the Memorial Service for Barack Obama's grandmother, complete with secrecy and Secret Service agents interviewing every spider in the church building.

## **Laura Friedman, Intern: 2007-2008**

Laura attended and helped lead our annual women's retreat. Due to her influence, some people in the congregation got involved in street ministry. She also initiated a Saturday evening service from 6-7:30. It was participatory and varied by the member leading it. A paid music position supported the service. Unfortunately this service only continued for two years.

## **Rev. Louise Ulrich, Interim: 2009-2010**

Little if any real progress was made on the interim minister tasks during this year. Physical problems, which Louise acknowledged were a problem for her, played a role in her performance. She made an effort to challenge the status quo, i.e., not singing the same closing song, varying announcement times, some sermon topics.

## **Rev. Leland Bond-Upson, Interim: 2011-2012**

Lee Bond-Upson fulfilled his proscribed role as Interim Minister by helping the congregation learn more about what they wanted from a minister, after having the same minister for 14 years. It was a challenging year in which we grappled with and gained a deeper understanding of the role of the Minister in governance, and the question of "who's in charge".

People were attracted to his substantial sermons filled with references from literature and poetry. People still talk about his warmth, how they felt cared for, that he brought real presence to any conversation.

He and his wife welcomed people to their home, serving ice cream sundaes and conversation, fostering community.

One of his sermons was published in the *Honolulu Star-Advertiser* bringing a greater awareness of Unitarianism to the community.

Lee provided an assessment of our church building and presented the pros and cons of keeping it or looking for a new location. No action was ever taken to explore his findings.

Lee came with a special asset in the form of his wife, Deborah, with whom he revamped the church communication system bringing it into the present by designing a website and making us more aware of the need for an internet presence.

The Bond-Upsons supported a team of folks in reorganizing and invigorating the Gallery on the Pali, the oldest art gallery on Oahu. The reorganization enabled the church to renew its historic role in supporting arts in Hawaii with a highly visible and influential gallery.

During his year, he increased attendance and revenues, renewed our vision and stewardship and prepared the church for new growth and new professional leadership.

### **Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kuponon Kwong: 2011-Present**

Rev. Jonipher got his B.A. in Film Studies from the University of California, Santa Barbara in 1997, his M.Div. and D.Min. from Claremont School of Theology in 2004 and 2006, respectively. Rev. Jonipher was ordained and credentialed with the Metropolitan Community Churches until 2012. He was the Minister of 'Ohana MCC, Honolulu from 2005-2008. He was also the Executive Director of the Counseling & Spiritual Care Center of Hawai'i. He then went back to California to work against Proposition 8, which would have taken the freedom to marry for same-sex couples. Rev. Jonipher was called to be the Settled Minister of our Church on April 10, 2011.

### **Perspective August 2011-March 2013.**

Continuing to build on the legacy inherited from previous ministers, The Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kuponon Kwong heard the congregation say they wanted to grow. Indeed, this desire was integrated into the new mission statement that was officially



adopted on April 15, 2012 to "boldly grow compassion, justice, and joy."

Realizing some of the constraints of the building, a temporary solution became the addition of a second service on Easter Sunday, April 8, 2012. While the first service is reflective and shorter, the second is celebratory and includes the keiki in the service. In a period of 1.5 years, the average combined attendance at Sunday services went from 80 to 125. During the same timeframe, membership grew steadily from 132 to 150.

Growth also meant supporting the work of neighboring islands, including two groups on the island of Hawai'i — one in Puna and another in West Hawaii. The Unitarian Universalists of Hawai'i Nei was born Fall 2012, with a new way of partnering to spread the good news of our faith that transcends walls of brick and mortar congregations and geographic barriers.

Technology also became the vehicle for supporting the new ways of relating, with the increased use of social media and other online tools to facilitate staff and committee/team relations. The sermons were recorded and made available on the church's website beginning February 2013. An online donation system was also setup early on during Rev. Jonipher's tenure. A complete overhaul of the Sunday services took place, including the installation of flat-screen monitors in the sanctuary to enhance the worship experiences and to facilitate content distribution to other congregations.

Under Rev. Jonipher's tenure, new staff was also hired, including an Office Manager (Jennifer Kane) and a new Director of Lifespan Religious Education (Emily Carroll). Staffing and liturgical changes were implemented to provide a container for this growth as the church transitions from being pastoral to program-sized.

## **Lay Ministers 1992-Present**

A significant step in preserving ministerial functions during periods when the church had no minister was taken in 1980 when Maggie Setliff was confirmed as our first lay minister. Maggie had been a leader in church life and in the community and was well qualified to serve in this new role. Over the years the role of lay minister has expanded beyond serving only when there is no minister. After training and receiving congregational confirmation, lay ministers are authorized to perform marriages, services of union, memorial services and child dedications, as well as the important function of pastoral care. They work in concert with the settled minister. In 1993 Mickey Selwyn, Catherine Graham, Jo Ashmore and Ben Goodwin became lay ministers, and Dorothy Baranski was confirmed in 1998. Currently active lay ministers are Marilyn Bornhorst, Lorraine Fay, Joan Schumacher, Mickey Selwyn and Lisa Wong Jacobs.

## **Decisions for Growth**

Beginning in August, 1993, the Board and Rev. Bob Fraser created a "Leadership Covenant" to structure a process for the Board and Minister to work together in a congregational reassessment of the workings and status of all Church activities and programs. This was undertaken under the stimulus and guidance of Rev. Gary Blaine who was made available to us through the support of the UUA. The result was an intensive series of group discussions and analysis finalized in a Decisions for Growth with objectives to be worked on during the year prior to Bob's resignation and retirement announced in February 1994 to be effective August 1995.

## **Mission Statement (1993)**

(This statement and mission-based objectives were developed and adopted in November of 1993, to be revisited in 1998.)

We are an open and diverse community which seeks to create and nurture a supportive environment that empowers individuals to spiritual growth, experience intellectual stimulation and seek justice for all people through principled action. Our commitment is based on love, mutual respect, and shared responsibility

## **5 Mission Objectives**

1. A Membership Growth Plan reflecting diversity, seed fellowships, networking statewide, with a goal of 300 members, in conjunction with an Intentional Caring Plan which enhances closeness, enables conflict resolution and assimilates new members.
2. Identify specific needs, design and implement a social action plan based on education, service, and political action.
3. Renovate our present building to meet the congregation's needs.
4. Lifespan Religious Education program with a full-time professional leader with goals of 60-80 children and youth and 50-60 adults.
5. Develop a new approach to worship services to meet personal and social action needs. (In August, 1996 Nan Kleiber was welcomed as DRE, kicking off a period of growth and enthusiasm in RE and together with Rev. Young, a revitalization of Sunday services.)

## **Vision and Mission Statement 2 (1998)**

### **Vision:**

To be a self-sustaining, growing, vibrant and inclusive community serving as a beacon of religious freedom and expression.

### **Mission:**

To celebrate diversity within our beloved community dedicated to spiritual exploration, intellectual stimulation, social justice and principled action.

## **Mission Statement 3 (2012)**

We are a Unitarian Universalist Community, inspired by our Principles, boldly growing compassion, justice and joy.

### **Religious Education**

In the early years the Religious Education program was designed and implemented by the RE Committee, which often included trained teachers. In 1976, the congregation decided a professional religious educator was needed, and Rev. Clifford Vessey, a retired UU minister was engaged. He served until 1970 and was succeeded by Bobbie Alicen, a professionally trained RE director. Bobbie served ably with the support of an active RE committee for ten years. For several years after that, the church was constrained by finances and had to function with very part-time RE coordinators. After receiving Mabel Babcock's generous bequest, we decided to fund a half-time professional RE director, and Dr. Nan Kleiber was engaged. Nan revitalized the program and remained until her retirement in 2012. Nan has summarized below the last ten years of our RE program.

Like many other Unitarian Universalist churches, our programs for children use a variety of curricula which focus on UU principles, history, beliefs and values, World Religions, Social Justice and Service and Environmental Education and Action. All of these programs include material directly related to life here in Hawaii.

For youth, Sunday morning programming depends very much on how many teens made a habit of attending. Before 2009 we had a large number of 9th-12th graders; in 2009, sixteen youth graduated and moved on. Sunday mornings focus on discussions among youth and the adult advisors.

Teacher training is included in each RE program offered. These sessions are primarily for teachers but also open to parents and others in the congregation.

In 2000, the UUA made available the first part of the *Our Whole Lives* program, human sexuality education. Recognizing the centrality of parents in their children's sexuality education, we introduced the *OWL* program, with classes for youth and parallel classes for parents at the same time. We now have added programs for Kindergarten through 12th grade, all with concurrent classes for parents. Since 2010 we have been offering these classes with the Church of the Crossroads, a huge step toward making the program available to the wider community. A major component of *OWL* is Leader Training. These trainings are open to the community, and we have had participants from Catholic Charities, the Pacific Buddhist Academy, Boys and Girls Clubs, Planned Parenthood and other health and service agencies in the state.

Emily Carroll was welcomed as Director of RE in 2013.

### **Support Staff**

Over the years, the church has employed several people who served our administrative, clerical, housekeeping and groundskeeping needs.

Our longest term secretary was Florence Gallagher who brightened the office with her cheerful presence for over twenty five years. After Florence came a series of short term church administrators, and then Don Dvojacki came on board in 1992. He served as church administrator until 2012. He did double duty when he became our live-in custodian. He currently serves as resident manager. Our current office manager is Jennifer Kane.

Custodial services have been performed by live-in caretakers and groundskeepers who also provided building security. Merle Goodell succeeded his sister Bonnie and served

for thirteen years. Ogden Myers served for forty years and enhanced our premises with his artistic talent and personal flair.

Sylvia Himeda and Phyllis Keohohou have provided loving care to our infants and toddlers for many years.

### **Community Activities of the UU Church**

The church's community service is based on Unitarian Universalist principles as spelled out by resolutions approved by the congregation after careful research and discussion. On this basis, members of the church lobby government, raise public opinion, and generally try to make our world a better place.

The congregation has made donations to the Vietnam Early Intervention Group, Planned Parenthood, United Nations Association, Affordable Housing Alliance, Sierra Club, and Common Cause.

In recent years, Wahine Choice has been funded by a tea party at the church. Wahine Choice was started by two members of our church to provide a special fund administered by Planned Parenthood Hawaii to help poor women have access to reproductive rights. A high percentage of those helped have paid back Wahine Choice.

One interesting lobbying tactic was the setup of a letter writing table to legislators and editors. The first effort was in support of Common Cause on campaign finance reform.

The church committed to be a Covenant Church for Habitat for Humanity.

We contribute canned goods and money for the Hawaii Food Bank.

Members of the church cooked and served meals to the homeless at the Institute for Human Services – originally known as the “peanut butter ministry.”

Family Promise is a multi-church project to help homeless families rent a home. The families live a week at each church, then move on to the next participating church. Members of the participating churches bring food to the church where the families are staying. The families are employed and are expected to save enough money to pay a deposit on a

home, plus the first month's rent. We are part of a national organization, but are run locally.

The success rate is very high.

The Unitarian Universalist church isn't suitable for residency by the families, but members of our church provide food for the families.

We are involved in interfaith activity. These include Open Table, All Believers Network, The Interfaith Alliance Hawai'i, and the Honolulu Mindfulness Community (a joint program with the local Buddhist group).

Our current focus is WARP.

The "W" is for Welcoming Congregation which is committed to equal rights for all people regardless of sexual/affectual orientation.

"Ā" is for 'āina, which includes respect for the land and all its diverse people.

"R" is for reproductive justice.

"P" is for political justice.

## **Welcoming Congregation**

The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu went through the process of becoming a Welcoming Congregation in 2004 and 2005. A Welcoming Congregation means a church that is welcoming and affirming to the lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) community.

In order to become one, the church had to fulfill a list of 16 requirements determined by the Unitarian Universalist Association. The requirements included conducting a series of workshops designed to combat homophobia and to understand issues important to the LGBT community. Other requirements included using inclusive language and content as part of the worship service, supporting efforts in the community to create justice and equality for LGBT community, and celebrating and affirming LGBT issues and history during the church year. The Welcoming Congregation Committee coordinated a series of nine workshops. Topics were drawn from the Welcoming

Congregation Handbook based on preferences of the committee and members of the congregation.

Attendance at the workshops was significant and encouraging. Anywhere from 45-60 members of the congregation attended. These numbers represented a large percentage of our relatively small congregation.

During the 2005 legislative session, we worked with local LGBT organizations to work toward passage of two bills, one of which prohibited public accommodations discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, and the second to include gender identity in the protected classes for employment. Our church marched in the Honolulu Gay Pride Parade in June 2004 and 2005 and promoted the Life Foundations' AIDS Walk for Life.

After about 18 months we believed we had met all the requirements and were ready for a congregational vote. At the annual meeting on May 22, 2005, church members voted on a proposal to designate First Unitarian Church of Honolulu as a Welcoming Congregation. The proposal passed overwhelmingly. A letter was sent to the Unitarian Universalist Association in Boston indicating the results of the vote and outlining how the church met the criteria necessary to be designated a Welcoming Congregation. The church was then officially named a Welcoming Congregation by the UUA.

## **Finances**

Once upon a time, when the congregation was meeting in the downtown YWCA in the early fifties, ten cents per person per meeting was enough to keep the financial suit from pinching too tightly. We have grown well beyond that world of dimes, but the work of growing without overstretching does not change.

We have (more or less) kept the amounts of our pledges growing in parallel with our expenses and aspirations. Beyond that, we have had a congregation with the vision to respond when emergencies arose, and we have benefitted from the



generosity of members' bequests. A big turning point came in 1991 when the legacy of Mabel Babcock became available in the amount of \$775,000. The congregation struggled to decide on the best way to handle that amount of money. By 1993, some steps ahead had been made. We decided to undertake an intentional growth program with the help of the denomination. \$75,000 was approved for building improvement, \$100,000 was reserved for exploring relocation possibilities and \$20,000 was allocated for social outreach. In 1994, \$500,000 was set aside for long-term investment. That fund has fluctuated with the market and with our need to draw on it.

Financial management of church funds has seen changes over the years. Commercial services were employed to perform bookkeeping. The commercial computer software system used for data entry and report generation was replaced by a software program specifically designed for use by churches.

The primary source of church income has been pledged donations, primarily from church members, with pledge drives conducted each year. The second largest source of income has been earnings from church monetary investments, and the third largest has been from rental fees charged for use of church facilities. A major source of rental income has been weekly use of the building by Congregation Sof Ma'arav.

Major expenses have been for personnel, principally for the Minister, Religious Education Director and Office Manager. Custodial services have been received in return for living space.

The overall trend has been such that our needs to draw down the financial investments of the church have grown smaller each year.

### **Members' Philanthropy**

The Fred Harper Room was named for an interior designer member who selected the furnishings and art for it,

and which were paid for by Cecil Dotts. Except for the two lamps on parsons tables, through the years the furniture and art have been replaced, but the name remains. Fred Harper also provided the Sunday service decoration for years. His ample source of live and dry plant materials was a windward nursery owned by two friends who were also members. The decorations were large and striking, so much so that Cecil Dotts would photograph them for a church album.

Another example of Cecil Dotts' philanthropy was providing for screening the sanctuary from passers-by on Niolopa Place. He paid for the stone and mortar to extend the wall, soil backfill behind it and to have planted the areca palms.

More recently, the board authorized a memorial garden and stonework for it was installed in January 2008. The memorial garden was financed by Jim Setliff, and the ashes of his wife Maggie are scattered there. His plaque is on hand and awaits his ashes from the mainland before its installation. Other plaques in place as of this writing are those for Maggie Setliff, Pat Perry, Bill Perry (prematurely), Cecil Dotts and Mary Dotts.

The stained glass panel above the sanctuary sill vent was furnished through the generosity of Santa Barbara snowbird, Clarence George and executed by his friend, Ken Solter.

## **Music**

Music has been a major part of Sunday services, although there is a record of considerable discussion over whether or not Unitarian Universalists really wanted to sing. In the early years, a member of the congregation transported an organ weekly to whatever rented space in which services were being held. Piano accompaniment became part of services after the congregation was settled at 2500 Pali Highway. Most of the time, a trained pianist has been engaged as well as a choir director.

Choir directors of note and duration have been Lois Allen, Nola Nahulu, Clarence Awaya and Sangeet. Our current music director, Karen Valasek, was engaged in 2008. Her emphasis has been on developing the congregation's singing ability and on instrumental music performed by a volunteer in-house ensemble.

Eric Shank served as pianist for years, and Susan Spangler took on the job for many years after that, playing every Sunday and on special occasions. She was followed by Sangeet and then by our current pianist, Dennis Graue, a professional musician who has introduced innovative electronic elements to the Sunday programs.

### **The Building and Grounds**

The C. M. Cooke house, which became the present home of The First Unitarian Church of Honolulu, was acquired in February 1962 from the Bishop Trust Company for \$100,000 for the house and adjacent frontal property used for parking. The building was selected for several reasons. It provided ample space for church services, a study for the minister, a church office, a kitchen and food serving space and a second floor for a fully operating Sunday school. The building's location was readily reached by the principle island road systems. In addition, the site is located along "Church Row," so named because of the concentration of churches along the Nuuanu-Pali Highway. The site also is located adjacent to Temple Emanu-El, with which the congregation has had a long and mutually satisfying relationship.

The first history of our church, entitled: "After 25 Years, Silver Anniversary, Recollections and Observations, February 1953-February 1978," notes a birthday party fund raised to be used mainly to maintain the church home in sound condition. The amount of the fund is not given, but at the building's approximately sixty eighth year, its age was undoubtedly beginning to show.

Hawaii's strong UV, tradewind-blown rain and Pali Highway-generated dust take a toll on our building's exterior and furniture scuffs the limed koa walls. Years ago, the Building and Grounds Committee acknowledged the need to repaint the exterior and relime the koa walls, which was done by in-house volunteers. The building's exterior was last painted in July of 1995, that time professionally. Since then, some interior walls and ceilings have been painted both in-house and professionally.

The evolution of our sanctuary space undoubtedly started with the relocation of the bookcase from what was the Cooke family living room to their billiards room, now the Fred Harper Room. The removal of the pocketed door behind the bookcase opened the living room to the sun room.

Other pocketed sliding doors between the foyer and both the living room and sun room allowed the space to flow through all three. It was during Rev. Fraser's tenure that he arrived at a demolition party with a sledge hammer which he used to demolish the pocket wall between the foyer and the sun room.

The orientation of the seating then became toward the mauka-Diamond Head corner with a curved face lectern on a curved edge dais. The reorientation to today's seating happened after the mauka window wall was moved out and shortened above a ventilating sill.

Through the years, many improvements to the building have been made, some major and many minor. Some noteworthy ones in more or less chronological order are:

A third fire escape from Meeting Room#3 was removed and the door accessing it sealed in 1996.

The sign facing the Pali Highway was fabricated in house and installed in October 1996. More recently, in April 2006, the ceramic tile rainbow array was added below. This followed the UUA-prescribed workshop sessions led by Judy Hepfer and

others, and the congregation then voting to become a Welcoming Congregation.

Dan Carpenter provided the chilled water drinking fountain in the kitchen in December of 1999.

For many years, wheelchair access was via a narrow wooden ramp from the entrance driveway to the Gallery on the Pali exterior door. It was removed after the new ADA-complying concrete ramp was constructed by in-house labor. Dan Carpenter provided and fabricated the pipe handrails. Dedication was in March of 2000. The foyer powder room had previously had the door widened for wheelchair access.

The cracked and broken vinyl-asbestos floor tile in both kitchens and back room were removed and replaced with linoleum tile using in house labor in March of 2001.

A badly needed upgrade of the building's complete electrical system was done in May 2002.

What were two RE classrooms (4 and 5) were made one with the removal of the wall and door between them in July of 2005.

After promoting fellowship by washing and drying dishes by hand through the years, a commercial dishwasher using 185° water for a two minute cycle was installed in June of 2007.

Termites, both ground and dry wood, have for many years been our building's nemesis. So that we would be proactive in detection, a Sentricon system of in-the-ground bait cylinders was installed in May of 1998 and has been monitored periodically since. Ridding the building of any of the active dry wood variety requires that it be tented and fumigated. The last time this was done was January 2011.

## **The Men's Group**

The Men's Group began fifteen or eighteen years ago. They meet on the first and third Tuesdays to discuss personal issues and support the others in the group. In the past, they helped dying members. In small groups, they visited the sick.

There were fifteen when they started and membership wasn't restricted to church members. Their highest membership was twenty members. Sometimes they had as few as five. Ages ranged from men in their twenties to those in their eighties. They discussed a pre-selected topic with a leader to keep them on topic. Lately, they just discuss mutual concerns and interest as they come up. They would like to have new, younger members.

## **Honolulu Unitarian Universalist Woman's Federation (HUUWF)**

The mission of HUUWF is to enable Unitarian Universalist women to join together for mutual support, personal growth and spiritual enrichment, and through their combined strength and vision to work toward a future where all women will be empowered to live their lives with a sense of wholeness and integrity in a society that recognizes the worth and dignity of each individual.

The HUUWF is the local unit of the international organization UUWF. The group meets the 4<sup>th</sup> Sunday of each month. All women are welcome. We have presented the feminist theological curricula, *Cakes for the Queen of Heaven* and *Rise Up and Call Her Name*.

We have held a spiritual retreat every January for the last 14 years. We sponsor a feminist theology study group at the church. We hold a clothing exchange each year – all items 50 cents. And...we donate the proceeds to community organizations. For the past several years we have been

helping, through Youth Outreach, homeless adolescents in Waikiki.

Each March, to celebrate Women's History Month, we have presented a Sunday Service for the congregation. The programs consisted of historical readings and plays and discussions with our elder sisters about their accomplishments.

### **The Gallery on the Pali**

It did not always have that name. When started in the 1950's by Vera Elliot, it was known simply as the Unitarian Gallery. After many years, as the gallery acquired longevity, the need was felt for it to have a more fitting name, hence the change. As there were few commercial galleries in the early years, ours had the opportunity to feature some of the most prestigious names in Honolulu's art world. As the number of galleries increased, ours opted to feature little known artists and those whose art may have had a political message, by which perhaps, it acquired the nickname: "Gallery with a Conscience". One example of such was an exhibit by mentally handicapped artists.

After numerous Art Committee chairs, ending with Gerry Murphy, Norma Nichols became Gallery Director in 1987 and remained so until June 2011, at which time David Friedman became director.

The Gallery on the Pali is guided by the Art Directors and Art Associates who currently are: Joan Schumacher, Kay Armstrong, Betsy Brandt, Dan Carpenter, Janice Davis, Lorraine Fay, Judy Hepfer, Helen Slaughter and Laurel Zeri.

As David Friedman has summarized: "From emerging to veteran artist, solo or organization, The Gallery on the Pali continues to provide an opportunity for artists to share their creativity and imagination with the community while we enjoy their gifted efforts that grace our walls. Its continued prestige emanates from worldwide programs and political issues such as

ecology, family, health, homelessness, sovereignty, women's issues and spiritual awareness.”

## **The Time Capsule**

In 1978, a time capsule was interred to be opened twenty five years later. The site is adjacent to the later-constructed-handicapped access ramp. It had on the surface a bronze plaque with instructions on when to open it.

At the 2003 opening ceremony, it was found that the seal had not been perfect and that moisture had rendered the BETA video mostly unrecoverable. Rev. Mike Young recalls that "personal notes to the future, of which there were many, both typed and written with pen, were mostly ruined by the moisture. Those that survived the best were in pencil on 3"X5" cards".

To preclude the previous moisture problem, the contents of a new capsule were triple sealed in a section of PVC pipe. It contains lots of audio recordings, both messages and recordings of the previous celebration, complete with a CD player and power supply, as it was assumed that there will likely not be such a device when it is opened in 2028.



# Stories from the Past

## The Bo Tree

At one time, there was a large Bo or Bodhi tree (Ficus Religiosa) a little makai and Diamond Head of the porte cochère. It was said to be a descendant of the Foster Garden Bo tree which was known to be a descendant of the one under which The Buddha achieved enlightenment. It was big enough to contain a tree house which some younger members loved.

Because of its root's impact on the porte cochère and the neighbor's house, Mabel Babcock, who was our source of the tree's heredity, finally agreed to its removal. Mabel presided over the farewell ceremony.

In the years prior to that, the tree had dropped its berries which had been allowed to accumulate below. In their decayed state they would surely make good fertilizer. For one annual bazaar, Mabel Babcock and Al Rowland got the idea of bagging it and selling it in the foyer under the label: BODOO. The placard hype about this product said that food grown with its help would provide enlightenment.

## The Mysterious Piano

One morning years ago, church staff discovered an upright piano in the Art Room (now called The Gallery on the Pali) where there had been no piano the day before. Building security was not strict in those days, and the outside door had probably been left unlocked. Inquiries among the congregation and other users of the building did not help identify the unknown donor. The piano was not a bad musical instrument, although it did lack a leg. Eventually Dan Carpenter put a new leg on it, and it was hauled upstairs where it served as a practice piano for the choir for years. When it was no longer useable it was dismantled and removed, and we never knew where it came from.

## A True Potluck

Lois Allen remembers a potluck supper which, as usual, was unplanned, trusting to the "luck O' the pot". In most cases, this produces a more-or-less balanced meal. This time everyone seemed to be reacting to the hot, muggy weather and prepared a hot casserole thinking no one else would want to cook. At last Dorothea Throp showed up with a pie for dessert, and it was eagerly cut into about twenty pieces.

## The Ancient Refrigerator

For many years the refrigerator in the back kitchen was an old appliance with a cylindrical element on top, looking like something out of the 1920's. One Sunday morning, (thankfully after most of the congregation had gone home) our custodian, Merle Goodell, discovered the refrigerator was leaking a noxious gas, filling the back of the building at an alarming rate. The odor was unbearable. The Honolulu Fire Department was called and the building evacuated. Most of the gas had dissipated by the time the "HazMat" team arrived, but it was determined the refrigerator should be removed from the building. It took four sturdy firefighters in full regalia to get the very heavy relic out the back door and down the steps where it attracted the attention of antique hunters.

## A Gregarious Cat

There have been several resident cats at the church; usually they have been unobtrusive and were useful in keeping down the rodent population. One cat, however, seemed attracted by the Sunday morning service and was known to wander into the sanctuary through an open door and tour the room before going upstairs where she slept. On one memorable morning in the middle of the service the cat came in with a live mouse in her mouth. She headed straight for the chair of a member of the congregation who hated cats and feared mice.

The cat crouched under the chair to play with her mouse, to the ongoing screams of the chair's occupant who had drawn her feet up on the chair and was petrified. Eventually another member picked up the cat and took her upstairs, while the dropped mouse ran away, and the service continued.

### A Unique Individual

Bill Perry, a long-time member of the church also known as "The Parking Czar" due to his long stint as overseer of the parking lot, was approaching his 100th birthday when he decided he wanted to attend and participate in his own memorial service. With the help of Sue Yamane-Carpenter, Bill organized a dinner and a truly remarkable memorial service, complete with dramatic skit. The star of the show, of course, was Bill himself, speaking his lines from an open casket. Bill's 100th birthday arrived a year or so later, to be celebrated with another big party. Bill also wanted to see his own memorial plaque in place in the Memorial Garden, so at his insistence the plaque was fabricated and mounted on the wall in the garden, using Bill's choice of the date of his death. Thankfully Bill lives on in 2013, although now, in California.