Celebrating 150 Years of Liberal Religion in Delaware

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington Delaware

Annual report 2016
Benediction

For all who see God,
May God go with you
For all who embrace life,
May life return your affection.
For all who seek a right path
May a way be found
And the courage to take it,
Step by step.

—Reverend Dr. Robert Mabry Doss
“Bob Doss was a legend among Unitarian Universalists in the wider denomination and for 31 years was our spiritual leader. Bob ministered to us – inspiring, challenging, educating, loving us – leaving a legacy for all those who follow to enjoy and to continue to be inspired.”

—Helen Foss, First Unitarian Church member

“Our church – our congregation – is right at the growing edge of potential greatness. . . We could try to stay just as we are. If we do, we shall fail. Churches, like people, do not stay as they are. They deteriorate or they move to new levels of responsibility and achievement ... From here we note our present strength and may move on to new and more significant service and fulfillment. The choice belongs to all of us!”

—Reverend Dr. Robert Mabry Doss on the occasion of our 100th Anniversary

Reverend Dr. Robert Mabry Doss
September 12, 1927—February 12, 2016
Our Mission
First Unitarian Church of Wilmington is a beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving action.

Our Values
At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington we work to embody:

- Love and Compassion,
- Growth and Discovery,
- Freedom and Justice,
- Wonder and Joy.

Our Vision as Ends
At First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, people of all ages:

- Feel safe, accepted, and loved – and empowered to be our authentic selves.
- Gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual human beings.
- Act on our shared values and Unitarian Universalist identity to fight for a more just world.
- Experience wonder, inspiration, fulfillment, and joy.

“A Beloved Community is creative. It does not live in the past, it lives into the future. A Beloved Community is redemptive. It does not hold onto grudges, it engages in active and ongoing reconciliation both internally and externally. Read through the lens of an understanding of the true meaning of Beloved Community, the four phrases of your mission statement make perfect sense. Beloved Community. Nurturing mind and spirit. Fighting injustice. Transforming the world through love.”
—Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, First Unitarian Church Developmental Minister
Dear Friends,

First Unitarian Church of Wilmington is a beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving action.

These words are on every First UU order of service on Sunday mornings, our First UU web page and on the wall of room 25 where, on the third Monday of each month, your Board of Trustees convenes our monthly meetings. Our Mission is always front and center as we focus on our charge to serve the congregation via policy based governance, as Dan Hotchkiss says” to achieve both the outward results and inward quality of life to which it is called.”

These past twelve months have continued the journey of change which we’ve begun with Rev. Roberta Finkelstein’s first year of ministry. As trustees, we dedicated ourselves to spiritual practices of gratitude with our fellow parishioners, utilizing the simple practice of intentionally saying “Thank You”. More formally, we’ve held numerous town hall meetings and provided detailed communications to ensure the congregation is aware of the multitude of the Trustees’ activities from the five year strategic planning process to our rededication on social justice initiatives with the United Nations project and Black Lives Matters as just two examples.

Each trustee has personally selected projects or groups to engage as a volunteer to have a first-hand understanding of our church’s work and the aspirations of the congregation. They’ve ranged from stewardship, membership, leadership training, EDR, ILYA, CYRE, Jim Crow workshops, singing with the choir, working on the Andy Cope building team, building and grounds, climate change, potlucks, office volunteers, ushering, greeting, and denominational work with the JPD to name just a few.

The collaboration with Rev. Roberta and her team is an important key for all we’ve accomplished this year and for all that will come as we continue our journey to be the “beloved community.”

In Love and Peace,

Your 2015-2016 Board of Trustees
The following words were included in the brochure, “We Will Do It—Because It Must Be Done”, describing the need for a new church home in 1957 as over-capacity crowds and parking headaches plagued our congregation at 8th and West.

"Many of Delaware's forward steps in the last 92 years had either their origin or leadership in this church. Our courageous ministers have fought for human freedoms, with the backing of their congregation. Not all the battles were won. The whipping post remains. You can thank Unitarian leadership for gains that were ‘radical’ once, yet are taken for granted today.

These include the Family Court of New Castle County, Delaware’s present prison parole system, establishment of the Prisoners Aid Society, repeal of Sunday Blue Laws which harassed Delaware for 200 years – and many victories against forces which have tried to stifle the rights of man. Our church has never ignored a benevolent cause. Often we have taken the initiative. Events like these date back to the Chicago fire of 1871. It was a Unitarian minister, Rev. William H. Thorne, who alone rallied Wilmington to a town meeting that resulted in $7,500 cash relief for disaster victims and barrels of apparel and supplies sent to the fire-front by our Unitarian Women’s Alliance. The church was new then and theologies have changed. But Unitarian spirit was no different than it is now....Our founders committed ‘this much of life’* to the cause in which they believed. It is now our privilege to do the same."

These words still ring true today. Our members continued to be present in issues of the time—from civil rights, the Vietnam War, abortion rights, to today’s Black Lives Matter, environmental justice, support for young adults aging out of foster care, the Delaware Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow, the Movement for a Culture of Peace, among others.

"In 1956, I was invited to go to a service at the 8th and West Unitarian Church by the woman for whom our Memorial Garden is named. Rev. John MacKinnon was the marvelous minister, and I was so inspired that I felt that this was where I belonged. Over the next year or so I learned more about our religion, joined the congregation, and have been a dedicated member ever since. It’s been 58 years that our Church has been a beacon of light not only in my life, but also in the whole community of Wilmington. I say thanks every day, with gratitude."

—Sally Christian, First U member, 1958

*theme of Rev. MacKinnon’s sermon on the 85th Anniversary.
“I arrived in Wilmington late in 1945 and immediately began to attend the old church at 8th and West. The church was very dark, but the sermons were enlightening. Pat O’Brien was finishing his tenue, followed by John MacKinnon.

As a recent college graduate with a degree in Child Development, I volunteered in the nursery. Very quickly, I was put in charge of the Threes and Fours. I thought the Beacon Press curriculum (the Martin and Judy stories) were incredibly dull in spite of their noble content. I agreed to teach if I could use my own materials. Bill Davis, Kathie Thomas’s father, chaired the R. E. Committee and took my request to the Board. I was granted permission. That was my first church lesson in bringing about change rather than complaining.

... As a church family we have had our ups and downs, made our mistakes and had many shining moments. I have great affection and appreciation for this place, this history and the wonderful people who share, more or less, many of my values and concerns. I am grateful for the richness of the past and the vitality of this love filled place in which I can continue to learn, to grow, and to live my religion.”

—Marge Meyermann, First U member, 1947—excerpt from memories she shared on the occasion of her 50th anniversary in 1997

This year, we celebrate the 150th anniversary of the First Unitarian Society of Wilmington Delaware. An updated history has been completed, a historical building tour developed, special worship services honoring our legacy have been held and many celebratory events have taken place. This 150th Anniversary Annual Report, dedicated to Reverend Dr. Robert Mabry Doss, First Unitarian Minister Emeritus who passed away in February, includes a selection of memories from our members and ministers. The complete set of memories is available for all to peruse in our church office.
Four goals are articulated in the contract between our Developmental Minister, Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, and the Congregation:

1. Working together with lay leadership, transition from policy governance to policy-based governance to implement a shared ministry. We have made much progress together.

   Rev. Finkelstein used “meet the minister” meetings in late summer to explain shared ministry, as well as preaching on shared ministry in the early fall. She recruited and trained several small teams—story-tellers to share the Tales for All Ages, writers to create session plans for Connection Circles, and the first class of Worship Associates to co-lead worship with the minister and guests, as well as offer quarterly Vespers services, bring services to UU’s in nearby retirement communities, and create and lead Sunday worship during the summer and on the minister’s Sunday off.

   The Board and Rev. Finkelstein have worked to clarify the distinction between governance and ministry, streamlining reporting. There is additional lay leadership on the Executive Team, a new Adult Religious Exploration team and new volunteers in areas as varied as Stewardship, Safety and Security and celebrating our 150th birthday.

2. Lead the congregation in creating the means to function successfully as a single minister church.

3. As articulated in the strategic plan, lead First U in attracting new members and increasing member retention/engagement.

4. Lead First U in creating a culture of voluntarism and member engagement.

The focus of this first year of Developmental Ministry has been on stabilizing the core ministry functions: worship, religious growth and development, pastoral care, staff support and volunteer support. We are well on our way to meeting our goals!
“Practicing hospitality ... is an individual work of intentional action, action that creates the quality of relationships in our churches that will nourish newcomers and longtime members alike,” says David Rynick in the June 2007 issue of UU World, *The Spiritual Practice of Hospitality*. While we have many teams who focus on hospitality, we have seen a growing commitment on the part of our members to practice intentional welcoming on Sundays, a good sign that many have embraced hospitality as the role of all.

At First Unitarian we have continued to transform ourselves to be welcoming to all across the generations. Our team of greeters and ushers warmly welcomed all at the door on Sunday, helping people to find a seat as we begin our worship service.

There has been a family-friendly feeling to our Sunday services this year, offering more multigenerational services and inviting families to light the chalice each week, as well as both families and individuals to offer the Stewardship Moment. Our worship services have included *A Tale for All Ages*, delivered by a newly trained team of storytellers, providing a message to complement the sermon that all can enjoy. With the High School Youth moving their gatherings to Sunday evenings, we have seen several of them participating as volunteers in the Children’s Religious Exploration program, in the worship service, as well as attending the services for their own spiritual growth. Additionally, once again we have enjoyed hearing the voices of our children singing, doing skits, as well as hearing their instrumental music.

**Pastoral Care**—For those who are struggling, facing unusual stresses or changes in their lives, experiencing illness or a hospitalization, struggling with a recent loss, or just need someone who can listen, there is support for them at First Unitarian. Our ministers, along with a wonderful team of lay people trained in pastoral care provide confidential loving support to church members through visits, cards, meals, rides, and phone calls. Calls to elderly members who are shut-in helped to identify special needs. In addition, each week, time is set aside in the worship service to speak the names of those who need the warmth

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**Our vision**—People of all ages feel safe, accepted, and loved—and empowered to be our authentic selves.
and care of our congregation. There are several groups that function within the umbrella of Pastoral Care.

The **Knitting Ministry Team** members have delivered 20 caring cloaks, knitted by 6 church members, that show special loving care and concern for those going through difficult times. The final version of the knitted Comfort Cloak pattern is available on the church website.

**Living Well with Chronic Illness** (LWCI) and **Caregivers’ Groups** provide small group settings for pastoral care. The members of LWCI have much in common dealing with health issues and with people who don’t understand the ups and downs as well as the severity of having chronic illness. Before coming to the group, members had been dealing with health problems in isolation. Having a group that listens and deeply understands is an incredible gift. At meetings, members discuss how the recent month has gone. The group abides with a report of bad times and cheers the member for better times. Sometimes there are hugs and they are good too.

The **Caregivers’ Group** provides support to church members who are caring for their loved ones over an extended period of time, sometimes doing so from a distance.

Circumstances vary but all members value the sensitivity, encouragement and kindness of this support group.

For those who like to get physical, our **Buildings and Grounds** team serves to help our staff keep our facilities clean and safe for all who join us. Whether painting, changing light bulbs, shoveling snow, planting trees or pulling weeds, there is always someone to get to know better who shares your passion for our spiritual home.

“On our 2\(^{nd}\) or 3\(^{rd}\) visit to First U, we entered a raffle for a homemade pie. Naively, we only put our last name on the ticket. Unbeknownst to us, this last name was shared by others in the congregation. We heard our last name called as the winner only to sadly discover the pie had been awarded to others with the same last name.

Now comes the happy ending. We have since learned that the sharers of our last name disclosed they were NOT the winners since they had not even put their name into the raffle. The following Sunday, the baker presented us with a freshly baked pie. We knew at that moment that we had found our new church home.”

—Keith and Pam Weiss, First U Members, 2012
The Membership and Leadership Development teams were merged this year into one strategic effort focused on **Member Engagement and Development**. Engaging and supporting members from the first time they walk through our doors, as they develop themselves, their spiritual/religious lives and their relationships with each other, with First Unitarian and the Unitarian Universalist faith helps us create a culture of volunteerism and community participation.

We began several new practices on Sunday mornings to make the Sunday morning experience more accessible for visitors and inquirers. In addition to the Welcome Table where all visitors are invited to stop by to talk with friendly First Unitarian members, we have added volunteers to give building tours. Board members and program staff are also available for visitors who would like to meet with them personally.

**Multigenerational potluck dinners** were brought back this year, attended by 70 – 80 members and friends each month. Various teams throughout the church volunteered as hosts while a core team prepared fun, multigenerational activities that increased fellowship and friendship. These dinners have proven to be an entry way to First Unitarian for some new visitors. In addition to the fun had by all, the Potluck team designed activities that were impactful within our church and the broader community. In the fall, our program included awareness-raising of the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) as we kicked off the annual Guest at Your Table program. Christmas caroling in December brought joy to our Sharpley neighbors; at least one family told us we were the first group to come caroling in the many years they have lived there. Also in December, our children made cards for home-bound members to let them know we are thinking of them. In February, adults and children joined together to bake over 200 cookies which were served at Emmanuel Dining Room the next day. In April, we made apartment bags for graduates from our ILYA program – outreach to young adults aging out of foster care.

**Circle Suppers** were revived this year, as well, after a long time in hibernation. Circle Suppers are open to all members, and especially visitors and new members, as a means to get to know each other and become an integral part of our church community. Members and friends may sign up at any time to join us for the next months’ pot luck suppers in members’ homes. Over 50 people have participated, attending monthly dinners of 6 –
10 in each others’ homes. Participants have been enthusiastic about meeting new people who they now feel comfortable with on Sunday mornings and getting to know others much better than they could during a Sunday morning chat.

In the area of Leadership Development, we sponsored the participation of 16 lay leaders in Healthy Congregations training provided by the Joseph Priestley District on our premises in the first half of the year. These leaders devoted four full Saturdays of their time to the training which was led by Rev. Richard Speck. By fostering leadership development through this very special training, we have strengthened our congregation’s capacity to lead, manage and accept organizational change in a healthy way. Two additional half day leadership workshops are being planned for the fall.

Another component of the new Member Engagement and Development Team is to create greater awareness of the many volunteer opportunities available to our members and friends and to help each individual find her/his place to contribute, grow, and flourish here. Over the past year we began the process of compiling and publicizing volunteer opportunities and gathering information about individuals’ volunteer involvement in all aspects of church life. We also continue to invite members and friends to complete a Gifts and Talents Survey. The data gathered is helping us connect individuals with the opportunities of greatest interest and need.

“Small Group Ministry is intentional lay-led small groups that deepen and expand the ministry of a congregation. Small Group Ministry helps build community and provides opportunities for deeper relationships – intimacy -- and opportunity for deeper spiritual exploration and search for meaning – ultimacy.” (from the UU Small Group Ministry Network http://www.smallgroupministry.net/whoweare.html).

At First Unitarian, one of the ways we have implemented small group ministry is through our Connection Circles. This is an excellent way to connect with others, to form and deepen friendships, to explore meaningful topics that touch the mind and heart, and to grow as a person. This year, we

“In found something I’ve been missing all my life”
—Jon Claney, First U Member, 2015
have eight lay-led Connection Circles, including three new Circles: Open Women’s Circle, the Torah Study Group and the Circle at Cokesbury Village. The latter is our second Circle at local senior living communities, joining our Maris Grove Circle, in helping those who cannot get to church to continue to connect with others in meaningful ways. Other ongoing Circles include one focused on short stories, one on rituals, and three on our UU Principles and the congregation’s monthly themes, including one offered on-line through web-based technology. We recruited and trained a small team of writers who worked collaboratively to create Session Plans for monthly ministry themes.

Personal listening, sharing and ministering to one another are integral to these small groups.

Being in one of these Circles helps to create strong emotional bonds among the members, strengthening their engagement in the congregation.

Connection Circles are open to new members and meet, once or twice a month, usually from October through May. Organized registration periods are in September and January, but they are open for new members any time during the church year.

**GROWING OUR UU CONNECTIONS**

First Unitarian Church has valued growth in Unitarian Universalism, working to help establish new churches in the Joseph Priestley District over more than 60 years. As the denomination looks to reorganize from districts to regions, First Unitarian’s leadership in establishing a strong local Delmarva Cluster over the past several years has helped to build strong lateral relationships of mutual support and learning.

As an example, our First Unitarian fall retreat was transformed this year and sponsored by the Cluster. It was planned and led by members from our congregation with experience making the retreat the success it has been in the past collaborating with fellow UUs from Easton and Chester River, MD, Newark, DE, and District Executive Rev. David Pyle. Eight Unitarian Universalist congregations of the Delmarva Peninsula were included with ninety Unitarian Universalists from all over the peninsula being hosted at Camp Tockwogh.

Our plan was to keep the fun, inspiring and relaxing activities that have become our tradition - campfire sing-alongs and games, hikes along beaches and through the woods, group activities and of course worship - and add

“Being a part of a small group was one of our first experiences at First Unitarian. That group met for over 20 years – a venue for self-discovery, for clarifying what was important for us on each of our individual spiritual journeys, and for building life-long friendships.”
—Helen Foss, First U member, 1969
Unitarian recently shared our practice of having the Board approve public statements on issues such as gun violence, racism, and sustainability. The Cluster is also interested in the work currently being done on safety and security here at First Unitarian Church.

First Unitarian support of and participation in Delmarva Cluster activities draws in large part from the First Unitarian Church Denominational Growth Committee (DGC). The DGC exists to grow and strengthen Unitarian Universalism as we increase our presence on the Delmarva Peninsula and Southern New Jersey. This year, First Unitarian provided financial support through our Grants for Growth program, awarding grants to congregations of Easton and Central Delaware. Grants for growth are specific grants that promote growth of the congregation. Since its inception in 1997, First Unitarian has given $111,335 in grants for growing churches in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey.

The Denominational Growth Committee also champions the Chalice Lighter grant program in our congregation. This Joseph Priestley District program is instrumental in supporting Unitarian Universalist congregations to achieve a variety of goals which contribute to their growth. Our First

Unitarian Chalice Lighters Sunday included a slide show illustrating the success of previous grants and testimonials that invited more church members to become Chalice lighters.

“I loved the All Church Retreat! To be among children of all ages, (from 6 - 65+) with laughter, singing, dancing and games of all kinds made the dreary weather outside disappear. It was great to meet UUs from other Delmarva churches. We were a fun and loving community with more chocolate milk, cookies and coffee than we could possibly consume. There was even a cozy fire during the workshop led by David Pyle. The Planning Committee did a great job! “

—Suzanne Perry, First U member, 1982

programming in the form of a workshop on witnessing our faith and activities to help bring together members from different congregations. We did not plan for Mother Nature to take a swing at us in the form of torrential rains and flooding so severe on that first Friday in October that the other two Unitarian Universalist Cluster events that happened to be scheduled that same weekend were canceled. Tockwogh remained open, so we plunged in and the storm became part of our experience. We were awed by the way Tockwogh’s natural setting quickly incorporated the water and amazed that we were still able to have our campfires outside Saturday night! Apparently the plan worked. The retreat received high praise from the many congregations that joined us. Another retreat is being planned for October 7-9, 2016.

In other Cluster activities, First
Participating in worship, whether listening to the sermon or taking part in a ritual or engaging in silent reflection, is the primary way that most adult members grow spiritually. This year we have begun to make changes to the Sunday programs so that children and youth experience multigenerational worship as a place where perspectives are changed and challenged and all ages have the opportunity to grow their souls.

This year, Rev. Finkelstein focused on important aspects of our mission – Beloved Community, Nourishing Mind and Spirit, Fighting Injustice and Transforming the World through Loving Action – as well as five important themes – We, Journey/Stewardship, Beginning Again/Rebirth, Legacy, and Celebration – for our worship services and in some of our small group Connection Circles. Our children were welcomed in the Sunday services to hear stories on these themes, followed by rich programming in their religious exploration classes.

In January a training program was held for a group of Worship Associates who have begun to work regularly with the minister and program staff to plan the worship calendar and share the work of creating and presenting worship services. The Sunday morning Faithful Dialogues and Adult Forums are designed to provide new perspectives on issues like ethics, theology, world religions, and Unitarian Universalism. Other offerings focus on spiritual practices, fellowship and mutual support. Faithful Dialogues was conducted for the last time this year as plans to reinvigorate the Adult Religious Exploration (ARE) program have begun. From 2011 through 2015 Faithful Dialogues was an exciting place to be on Sunday mornings in Brunner Chapel.

Regular participants were treated to lively discussions with experts on a wide range of topics from both church and community members. A typical Sunday drew 10 – 12 participants, but once in a while we exceeded 20 who came out early on their Sunday morning to learn, support and participate. Members served as guest hosts frequently, donating their time and expertise on subjects such as poetry, dreams, science and medicine, philosophers such as Thomas Merton, butterflies, sacred dancing and Wiccan holidays. We also heard several On Being podcasts hosted by Krista Tippett, to supplement the variety of our own community over the years. In fall 2015, Faithful Dialogues expanded to include monthly Social Justice topics, in which

Our vision—People of all ages gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual beings
both Jeff Lott and Elizabeth Siftar kindly donated their time to bring in activists from social organizations throughout our area. These experts brought to an interested First Unitarian audience more in-depth knowledge as well as important ways to become more involved in these social issues.

In addition, Cindy Cohen shared her love of metaphysical and New Age topics by enlightening a group of regular attendees to her Spiritual Cinema series, presenting fascinating episodes from the archives of Gaia TV.

As Faithful Dialogues phases out, a new ARE Steering Committee is emerging and hopes to have a modest new ARE program soon. The program will be built on a model proposed by Rev. Marjorie Montgomery to include:

- **Threshold Courses** — an introduction to Unitarian Universalism, the church community, and the building of a personal belief system,

- **Deepening Courses** — Unitarian UU history and heritage, UU identity in community, and relational skills,

- **Epiphany Courses** — spiritual and personal growth and learning, and knowledge of other religious paths, and

- **Living One’s Beliefs Courses** — help us toward the integration of a life of integrity and beliefs with deeds.

"Doyle and I first came to First Unitarian Church in 1972 to attend its political forums and stayed because of Bob Doss’ inclusive, rather than sexist, language. This was the 1970s, when male pronouns ruled! I also appreciated the informed, thoughtful, provocative, creative sermons and the great music — from the choir and organ, to the hearty singing of the congregation. Impressive, as well, was how First U provided a place for our religious quest, a place for rigorous religious discussion where you didn’t park your brain at the door. Key, as well, was discovering UUSC, the UU organization working for human rights and social justice."

— Beverley Baxter, First U member, 1973

composition of the group has changed over time. During this past church year, the group has five writers who meet monthly. The group votes on the monthly themes they want to write about and have very lively conversations, cherishing the fact that one theme always gets five very different interpretations. The Write Group is an open group and welcomes newcomers.

By fostering a weekly meditation group and holding regular day-long retreats **The Open Heart Sangha** is directly involved in transforming lives by helping people to cultivate unconditional love and support that goes from one’s life experience out into everyday life.

For six years The Open Heart Sangha has been invested deeply in all of the church Ends. The sangha is a place of peace and non-judgment where members are free to literally just be together. In terms of growth as spiritual beings, the sangha goes beyond words and cultivates a practice that is proven to foster deeper empathy.

Our **John G. MacKinnon Memorial Library** is a welcoming space, open every Sunday for quiet reflection, with...
collections on religion and spirituality, life transitions and challenges, ethical concerns in our communities and world, and church organization. A special section on the history of our Library can be found later in this report.

Our Sunday morning **Book Corner** offers selections for children through adults to enhance their growth, as well. Additionally we partner with others through our website, Facebook, Twitter and YouTube sites to bring current events and perspectives to our on-line readers.

**Our Children**

Our Children and Youth Religious Exploration (CYRE) Team’s work focuses on advancing all of First Unitarian’s Ends with children and youth. After all, they are the future of the church.

With the Director of Religious Education, Catherine Williamson, the CYRE Team works directly with the children and youth in tailoring the curriculum to fit contemporary needs, as well as in guiding them through finding service projects which address First Unitarian’s Ends. This year, our focus was on the Unitarian Universalist Principles. As stated in the CYRE vision statement, “Our children and youth affirm their identity as members of the Unitarian Universalist faith community, embrace their evolving spirituality and practice Unitarian Universalist values in all facets of their lives.” This work would not be possible without the nearly 50 individuals volunteering with CYRE, making this the largest volunteer base.

“In 2001, I attended my first service at First Unitarian in Wilmington. It was prompted over a conversation with Dr. Rita Meek on Easter Sunday while we both reviewed slides in the microscope and shared the challenges of celebrating traditional holidays while holding non-traditional beliefs. The following week she brought me a copy of the Religious Education programming booklet from First Unitarian and I was intrigued. I had two young daughters that I wanted to expose to a religious community, but not the ones my husband, Steve, and I were raised in. I was searching. Then September 11, 2001 came to pass and I was committed to finding purpose and peace in the confusion and emerging hatred that followed. I have vivid memories of my first service (and the Order of Service). It was October 7, 2001. We sang Spirit of Life, did an “elevator” meditation together, enjoyed the Chamber Choir performing “Cantate Domino” and listened to the sermon “Being Peace - Finding Strength - Being Whole”... Every minute of the service felt right. I had spent almost 20 years resisting church. But this felt completely comfortable. I felt like I had been a native French speaker attending Italian services my entire life. But here, they spoke my language! It was emotional and life changing.”

—Liz Marek, First U member, 2001
within the church. Moreover, the twenty nine volunteers who have been working in the child and youth classrooms on Sunday mornings this year have not only been invaluable in our children’s lives, but have also experienced personally, wonder, inspiration, fulfillment, and joy.

Our infants and toddlers enjoyed Sunday mornings playing in the Nursery. Our skilled staff and volunteers created a warm and caring environment, providing age appropriate toys, crafts and stories. In this way, our youngest children gain a sense of belonging to their religious community as they begin to build friendships.

Our Rainbow Walkers, 4 – 7 year olds, used games, crafts, songs and stories to explore themes which illustrate Unitarian Universalist Principles and values. Our program helped these children to begin to name their own religious/spiritual experiences, providing them with stories and language that creates a framework on which to build their own belief system, and nurtures their ethical growth.

Our Seekers, 7 – 9 year olds, learned how to live our Unitarian Universalist faith through games, songs, crafts and justice projects. They explored stories of historic and contemporary Unitarian Universalists putting their faith into action and learned that our Principles are not a dogma, but a credo that individuals can affirm with many kinds of action.

Our Questers, 9 – 11 year olds, spent Sunday mornings on a Unitarian Universalist journey of discovery, taking part in the Mystery Quest, UU Quest, Inner Quest and Action Quest. This journey helps our fourth and fifth graders explore and discover answers to life’s big questions about human faith and the web of all existence.

Our Explorers, 11 – 13 year olds, focused on asking Big Questions: Is there a God? What happens after I die? Why do bad things happen? How should I live my life? This curriculum helps young people understand that our individual search for meaning in the universe is supported and strengthened when we come together as people of faith.

Coming of Age, for our 13 – 15 year olds, is a yearlong program focused on providing opportunities for youth to explore beliefs and values, as well as individual gifts,
“On behalf of the entire community and pupils of Abuenu D/A Primary and Junior High School we wish to express our heartfelt thanks and appreciation to you for setting up and stocking our library with wonderful and interesting reading materials. We must admit that the entire community and pupils have never seen a library set up before let alone library books. Interestingly, the pupils have shown great interest and pride to read these books over this short period these books have arrived….the only difference between dull and brilliant pupils is unavailability of reading materials. No child in this world is dull except he or she is denied access to materials African Library Project is making available to our communities.”

—As stated in a letter of appreciation from the contact at the Abuenu Primary and Junior High School in Ghana
Friends. This direct service work here at home, in combination with the African Library project, provides our youth with an understanding of the breadth and complexity of fighting for a more just world.

Our Youth

The Youth Group for 9th—12th graders provides a welcoming and engaging environment that supports teens in social, emotional, and spiritual growth. Youth programming focuses on group-building, worship, social action, leadership development, and building positive relationships with the adults of our congregation and the Unitarian Universalist community.

The Youth Group Planning Committee helps to create structure and support to make the Youth Group successful. They meet monthly at minimum and create agendas and action items so that there is routine, ritual and progress in the youth group meetings themselves, which are youth led, and supported by adult advisors. This year, the Youth have chosen to meet on Sunday evenings—a departure from the traditional Sunday morning meeting time. This opens up Sunday mornings for those Youth who want to participate in the life of the church in other ways, such as attending worship services or helping out as teachers in the younger grades.

This year’s Youth Group has been led with impressive commitment by youth leader, Dillon Dickerson. They have been supported by adult advisors, Jackson Salasky and Paul Jacobs who give the youth space to be themselves, member and parent, Laura Hanby, and Director of Religious Exploration, Catherine Williamson.

Catherine brings the Planning Committee together and helps with logistical details as well as suggestions for agendas and supportive materials, while listening and respecting the ideas of the youth.

In February, the Youth retreated to the Poconos to plan Youth Sunday, a favorite of many of our members. With Youth Sunday planned for later in May, the topic is top secret, but is not to be missed. Youth Sunday is always a highlight of the church year.

The Youth participated in a number of First Unitarian outreach programs this year, such as cooking and serving at Oursouth.

“Working with our high-school-age youth in our High-adventure Explorer Scout Post during the mid 1980s and 1990s was a highlight for me. What a joy it was to watch them grow and bond together as they planned and stretched their endurance and abilities!”

—Robert Foss, First U member, 1969
“Since joining First U many years ago, my mind has been opened to many new religious beliefs and ideas. I enjoy passing this information onto my own children, as well as the many youth that are part of our religious education programs. In addition, I feel it is important to bring a wealth of musical experiences to others in the congregation and I have enjoyed involving the youth in a variety of musical experiences that have helped to enhance the Sunday services. The Youth Group services and re-introducing the hand bells to a new generation of UU's has been a highpoint of my experience at First Unitarian.”

—Ned Gladfelter, First U member, 2006

Emmanuel Dining room. Along with the Coming of Agers, they prepared for and spent time at a work camp at Old First Reformed UCC Church in Philadelphia this spring to serve homeless individuals and families. In April, the Youth participated in First Unitarian's hosting for the Democracy Spring marchers who were walking from Philadelphia to Washington, DC where organizers hoped to have their voices heard by Congress. The Youth prepared and delivered the opening words before dinner on Sunday evening and mingled with the walkers to learn more about their effort.

"The Poconos trip really cemented our bonds as a youth group even though we've known each other for a long time."

—Charlotte Hanby, First U Youth Group
The Library has been part of our church since the congregation moved to our new Sharpley building in 1960, serving as a welcoming space and useful resource in our lives and in our understanding and practice of Unitarian Universalism. Collections, both non-fiction and fiction, are available for the use of adults, young people and families, members and newcomers, staff, teams and groups.

There may also have been a library at First Unitarian since its early years in downtown Wilmington. A 25th anniversary report (March 1893) noted that the Women’s Alliance paid expenses of the Sunday School, “including those of the Library” (First Unitarian Book of Gifts). Since the 1950s, the Library evolved from extensive RE Department resources and other holdings into its current form.

Emily Thorn (Director of Religious Education, 1955-1975) “created an atmosphere for learning” at First Unitarian and maintained a library for religious education materials in her office in the classroom wing here. Her office shifted into the main office section about 1984, after completion of an office addition, while the Library remained in its current space in the classroom wing.

The collection became the John G. MacKinnon Memorial Library in 1985, honoring Rev. MacKinnon (1903-1983), minister of First Unitarian from 1946-1959. An advisory committee was formed to revitalize the Library, and Glen Barbaras’s sculpture, “Y,” was commissioned, donated by Glen and installed for the Library’s rededication on May 5, 1991. The sculpture was moved to the main entrance foyer in 2008.

“This sculpture was not designed, it just emerged like renewed life, from this partially decayed cedar post. The shape seems appropriate for a Unitarian library. It is open, reaching, searching, asking why, in contrast to my impression of the wooden Christian symbol focused on death and suggesting a closed belief with every T crossed.”

—Glen Barbaras,
First U member, 1958
By 1993 the Board had determined to “maintain a centralized library to benefit the congregation, staff and teachers,” operated by an independent committee managing library operations with volunteers. At that time, the entire adult non-fiction collection was re-cataloged into the standard Dewey Decimal system, a significant advance over the previous curriculum-based coding. After 2000, children and youth books were also re-cataloged, a complete card catalog of library holdings was made available, and software upgraded to facilitate cataloging.

Bracket-and-board shelving was replaced in 2004 using wooden bookshelves salvaged from the old Concord Pike Library building prior to its demolition by First Unitarian. Tall units provide more space and protection for adult collections, and distinctive lower shelves hold children and youth books, along what had been a wall of windows before the 1997 classroom wing expansion.

Library holdings focus on Unitarian Universalism, comparative religion and spirituality; life transitions and challenges; ethical and social justice concerns in our communities and world; and church organization. Special collections include Marsha Sagar Memorial (children and youth books); Green Sanctuary (environment); and Delaware Dialogues on Science, Ethics and Religion (from a 2005-2008 lecture series). There are some periodicals, and some titles by First Unitarian member authors.

Leaders of the MacKinnon Library, with assistance from many others, have included Jeanette Weber, Mary Lou Ford, Virginia Simon, Phyllis Wynn, Teresa Green, and Judy Windle, who currently serves as committee chair and librarian. Everyone is encouraged to use the library, and new volunteers are always welcome.

“Knowledge of our own history and heritage is essential for the continuity of our free religious movement.”

—Robert West, Crisis and Change: My Years as President of the Unitarian Universalist Association, 1969-1977, p. 109
We believe that our vision of a just world is achieved, not by talking about our shared values, but by taking those values—

- Love and compassion,
- Growth and discovery,
- Freedom and justice,
- Wonder and joy

and our Unitarian Universalist Principles out into the world in acts of mercy and acts of justice. This means that we feed the hungry and minister to the marginalized. We also intentionally confront deeper systems of oppression that create an unjust world. We do so with both passion and compassion.

One of the ways our members learn about opportunities for service and advocacy is through the First Unitarian Social Justice Connector, which now has about 60 subscribers. The Connector is a blog written by Jeff Lott, which aims to provide news and commentary on all of the First Unitarian’s social justice work, including Independent Living for Young Adults (ILYA), Emmanuel Dining Room (EDR), Black Lives Matter, Climate Justice, and Interfaith Power and Light. Members and visitors can easily find it from our website or go directly to the site listed below.

Our Ministry of Caring Emmanuel Dining Room (EDR) efforts continue with a team of about 30 cooking/serving volunteers who rotate between months. On the 19th of the month we cook our Chicken Shepherd’s Pie casseroles that will feed about 225 men, women and children at EDR, and transport them to EDR along with applesauce. On the 20th of the month we serve the food, along with desserts donated to EDR from area bakeries. One month we also made cookies at our Potluck dinner!

It costs First Unitarian about $200/month, or $2,400/year to run the program; we are exploring a “Sponsor a Month” program to help defray these costs.

In addition to EDR, our children supported the Ministry of Caring this year by collecting Halloween costumes, ties, shirts, shoes and dress-up clothes to help fulfill a child’s wish list by creating a Dress Up Box. This would go a long way toward bringing smiles to children and allow them to explore the world through creativity and imagination.

“EDR is a great First U program that’s been helping serve our underserved in the city of Wilmington for over 30 years now/”

—Cindy Cohen, First U member, 1991

Independent Living for Young Adults (ILYA) is entering its second decade providing support for young adults when they age out of foster care at 18 years of age, working with social service agencies to fill
existing gaps in service, as well as advocating at the state level of legislature. By acknowledging the inherent worth and dignity of these young people and supporting some of their most basic needs, the team expresses our UU values clearly by facilitating the processes by which First Unitarian members can contribute. The following projects have been supported by ILYA this year:

- Regular college care packages to students
- Supportive grants for apartment and utility security deposits, college fees and books and emergency funds
- Donations of furniture and household items to help set up new apartments
- "New apartment kits", a new project this year
- Celebrations for the accomplishment of high school and college graduations and encouragement for continued education through graduation backpack gifts and a party
- Plans for the upcoming tutoring program
- Holiday gifts from congregation members to many young people, and their children, who would otherwise receive nothing at holiday time.

By learning more about the needs of the population we serve, the ILYA team has expanded our understanding of lives experienced very differently than our own and our children's lives. It is truly a spiritual journey to travel with these very deserving young people and support their efforts to build successful adult lives.

Our Green Sanctuary team is working to bring environmental justice to the actions listed in the Action of Immediate Witness on Climate Change 2015. The reach is broad, from congregational to local, state, national and global. The emphasis in all actions is on justice. Within this context, we are tasked to reach beyond our congregational walls. Environmental justice acknowledges that marginalized communities are often hit first and hardest by environmental crisis. Beyond this, it bases action on an assumption that oppression of the environment is intricately linked to oppression of different groups of people.

Doing environmental work guided by these elements shifts us beyond providing assistance, to thinking and working with negatively impacted communities.

Our works include:

**Legislative Environmental Justice:**

- witnessing for funding to clean up Delaware’s polluted waters in support of Clean Water Delaware
- Defending implementation of the Clean Power Plan in Delaware with emphasis on environmental justice in low-income neighborhoods

"The fact that we can perhaps improve their situation so that they actually thrive in that challenging situation, gives us all a joy that cannot be surpassed."

—Lois Morris, First U Member, 2007 and ILYA co-lead

"Through the program ILYA, First Unitarian church has helped me get groceries when I didn't have any, sent me college care packages that included books, school supplies, dishware, and always offered their support to let me know I wasn't alone when I thought I was... That has made all the difference in where I am today and how far I've come.”

—Empress Devone, ILYA participant
HB 202 – Reduction of Plastic Bags and Pollution – multiple activities supporting the moral responsibility to eliminate single-use plastic bags; the Wilmington City Council unanimously passed the resolution

Public Witness:
- Interfaith vigil in Wilmington in support of climate change as a moral issue
- Commit2Respond: Global advocacy with UUA Young Adults during COP21-Paris

Congregational Education and Advocacy
- Energy efficiency and climate change book group
- Promotion of energy efficiency for First UU members through Energize Delaware
- Support of solar array installation at First UU

Sustainability
- Direct support of local Urban Farm/post-foster care agricultural job training for young adults
- Climate Friendly Foods Potluck
- Vegan Dinner.

Community
- Participation on Delaware Interfaith Power and Light

Green Empowerment steering committee
- Promotion and participation in Energy Conference on March 9, 2016

Climate Month
From World Water Day, March 22, and continuing through Earth Day, April 24, 2016, various environmental justice events, advocacy, and community participation –

- Annual Clean Up with Partnership for Delaware Estuary
- Single-use plastic bag collection for recycling and advocacy to state legislature for HB 202
- Speakers
- Vegan coffee hour on April 17,
- Opportunities for writing Letters to the Editor in support of HB 202

“In 2009 I saw Chad Tolman’s photo in the News Journal along with an article about climate change. I remembered Chad as a student in my class at Osher Lifelong Learning. I called Chad and asked him what I could do about the severe problems that were developing due to climate change. He invited me to his group, which met at First Unitarian and was focused on this issue. I became its secretary and a few years later we became founding members of Delaware Interfaith Power and Light, which is part of a national organization working to slow down the disastrous effects of climate change. These actions express the 7th principle of our Unitarian Universalism, ‘Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.’"

—Donna Gonzalez, First U member, 2009
Chad Tolman and Mike Rominger of St. Paul’s United Methodist Church co-chair the New Castle County Congregations of Delaware Interfaith Power and Light (DeIPL), providing a faith response to climate change. First Unitarian is part of a 40-state IPL organization led by the Rev. Sally Bingham, an Episcopal priest in San Francisco. In recent months, in collaboration with Elizabeth Sifter of Green Sanctuary, we have:

- gathered signatures on a petition to Delaware and Pennsylvania senators to support the EPA’s Clean Power Plan (CPP) to reduce carbon emissions from electricity generation,
- co-sponsored an interfaith meeting of religious leaders in downtown Wilmington to support the Pope’s call for climate action and social justice,
- testified at a hearing on Delaware’s response to the CPP and provided written comments to DNREC, and
- led a book reading/discussion/action group. We have finished Cooler Smarter: Practical Steps for Low-Carbon Living by the Union of Concerned Scientists, and are starting The Sixth Extinction: An Unnatural History by Elizabeth Kolbert.”

For many years now, we have been selling House Pins at First Unitarian in support of the Home Life Management Center of the YWCA Delaware.

The Center provides much-needed transitional housing and training to homeless families, including women who have suffered from addiction or domestic violence. The goal of the Center is to provide safe housing while helping the families find permanent housing and permanent employment.

In response to the increased cost of House Pins we have begun to make bead bracelets and earrings, using donated materials. We donate the entire sale price of the bracelets and earrings to the YWCA.

In February 2016, First Unitarian donated $1,000 to the Home Life Management Center, bringing the total donated over the years to $22,500.

“YWCA Delaware has been the beneficiary over the years from the sale of popular House Pins. The imaginative and colorful pieces of jewelry represent the work of the YW to find safe and secure homes for the women and children who enter our Home Life Management program. Thanks to the hard work of Bev Bach, Ann Tolman, Christy Anne Mathews, the late Noreen Bayly, and the “Beading Babes” Eleanor Morrow, Carolyn Ray and Loretta Knight, the YW has been the recipient of close to $25,000. This money is used to further the mission of the YW -- eliminating racism, empowering women and enriching families throughout Delaware. Our thousands of successful clients as well as the staff and volunteers are grateful for this ongoing House Pin project organized by the women of First UU.”

—Pam Finkelman, YWCA Board and First UU member, 1984
For the past year our congregation has been actively exploring ways to be supportive of the **Black Lives Matter** movement. Inspired by the General Assembly Resolution ([http://www.uua.org/statements/support-black-lives-matter-movement](http://www.uua.org/statements/support-black-lives-matter-movement)) our Board passed their own resolution of support. Rev. Roberta offered a number of sermons and discussion about how we could be part of this important movement for civil rights. Many members were already familiar with the issues through their work with The Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow and other interfaith and community organizations. A four person teaching team (Rev. Roberta, Jeff Lott, Marie Oakburg and Judy Govatos) presented a work-shop series on “Being White in the Black Lives Matter Movement” that was created by UU Rev. Kate Lore. Between 25-30 people attended each of the four sessions. Rev. Roberta and Jeff Lott were interviewed about this work on Delaware Today. ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vd6KWSf6_aI&list=PL34rgsh013i8G0AD8KreLvo8C6LXj0BPs&index=2](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vd6KWSf6_aI&list=PL34rgsh013i8G0AD8KreLvo8C6LXj0BPs&index=2))

At the final session of the workshop, the group made the decision to install a banner on First U property affirming that “Black Lives Matter.” The group plans to work through the spring to educate the congregation, address potential safety and security concerns, identify the best location, and finally hold a public event to unveil the banner. Many of the congregations of all different faiths around the country that have put up such banners have experienced vandalism and other reactions. We want to be fully prepared to respond with conviction and with love.

“#BlackLivesMatter is working for a world where black lives are no longer systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. We affirm our contributions to this society, our humanity and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression. We have put our sweat equity and love for black people into creating a political project – taking the hashtag off of social media and into the streets. The call for black lives to matter is a rallying cry for all black lives striving for liberation.”

—Black Lives Matter
The Delaware Coalition to Dismantle The New Jim Crow, led by First Unitarian along with others from Mother African Union Church and other faith communities, sponsored the 2015 conference to address structural racism in Delaware and offer hope and opportunity. The conference was a huge success with over 350 people attending the event at the Chase Riverfront. The objective of this conference was to increase awareness and to develop actionable proposals and projects to drive change in policies, practices, and even laws to address the issue of discrimination and inequality in order to improve the opportunities and lives of minorities in the state.

Featured speakers included Dr. Jawanza Kunjufu, founder of African American Images, Governor Markell, and Senator Coons, Dr. Yasser Payne, University of Delaware Associate Professor of Black American Studies and Dr. Karl L. Alexander, Johns Hopkins University Research Professor of Sociology. Keith James and Corley Harris and son described growing up on the streets of Wilmington.

The conference reviewed patterns of racism and poverty in Delaware and workshops defined actions to address these issues. Active committees are now working on projects and plans to transform unjust systems that lead to disproportionate incarceration of poor and minority populations. One of the great strengths of the Coalition, which grew out of the Interfaith Coalition Building Blocks for Wilmington (ICBBW), is the variety of backgrounds and participation from a variety of faith communities.

The conference was funded by a grant from the Delaware Humanities Forum, DuPont, Speer Trust, United Way of Delaware, and a host of churches and individuals including generous members of First Unitarian Church of Wilmington.

Additionally, the second summer Freedom School was a great success with eighty scholars from Kindergarten through high school who learned about voting rights. They also heard from guest readers Rita Landgraf, Secretary of the Delaware Department of Health & Social Services, and Ernest Congo, Wilmington City Council member. The Freedom School is a program of the Children’s Defense Fund conducted by Coalition members from the Mother African Union Church. Another Freedom School will be held this summer.

More information on this important initiative is available by emailing endnewjimcrowde.org.
First Unitarian was a founding partner in August 2014 of the Movement for a Culture of Peace (MCP) in Wilmington. Judy Govatos, Jeff Lott and Marie Oakberg serve on the steering committee.

After a phalanx of yellow-shirted Love People participated in MCP’s second annual march in September, Unitarian Universalists have continued to further the mission of uniting the community against violence and oppression.

MCP sponsored Alternatives to Violence training sessions in November and February and organized a December community meeting to address the future of the Hicks Anderson Community Center in Wilmington.

At a January public forum, state officials responded to important reports on gun violence as a public health issue. The latter was moderated by Jeff Lott.

On Feb. 6, MCP invited dozens of nonprofit organizations, churches, and community groups to a first planning workshop, designed and led by Marie Oakberg, to create the first Delaware Peace Week, Sept. 18–25.

First Unitarian members are regular attendees at MCP events and the church maintains an account through which tax-deductible contributions may be passed through to the Movement.

Lessons Learned:
“The Movement for a Culture of Peace has connected us with many activists of other faiths and cultures, challenging us to work across difference. Successful social justice work requires us to cross these cultural boundaries with humility, accepting that UUs don’t have all the answers.”
—Jeff Lott, First U member 2003
First Unitarian Church has been an active participant with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) over many years.

During fiscal 2015-16, First Unitarian Church members and friends contributed more than $42,200 to UUSC from various promotional, events, collections, pledges, fund raising campaign, online giving, and value of stock gifts. This was an exceptional year of support as we, First Unitarian members, recognize that UUSC promotes our values and accomplishes social justice on our behalf around the world.

During the year, First Unitarian
- Supported the UUSC Coffee Project through the Fair Trade Equal Exchange/UUSC Coffee Project and its sale of products. With over $5,000 in sales, First Unitarian is in the top 5% of UU churches supporting this program;
- Participated in Guest At Your Table (GAYT), a UUSC Program for all ages, during the six weeks prior to Thanksgiving. Its two basic goals are to educate members about the world-wide UUSC programs and to promote giving to support these programs. The UUSC team worked with the Children’s and Youth RE team throughout the 6 weeks, including distributing GAYT boxes, providing stewardship reflections and stories during church services, providing information through a variety of church channels, helping with the “Setting of the Table” the Sunday before Thanksgiving, and selling 50 pounds of donated honey for over $400 to support UUSC. Nearly $6,000 were raised and donated to support UUSC programs.
- We observed Justice Sunday on April 10, 2016, including receiving a special offering to support the UUSC social justice work throughout the world.
- Humanitarian Crises are unscheduled, but when they happen, the UUSC team promotes support for those who are most marginalized in these through timely special giving to UUSC. Ebola relief, Somalia and East Africa Famine Relief, Syrian Refugee Relief, Central American Refugee Relief, and Haiti Earthquake Relief are a few examples.
- The Board of Trustees assigned the UUSC Team the task of managing public policy statements, which generally take the form of social justice resolutions, for the congregation. This assignment was made this year and three resolutions were approved and are being made public. They are:
  - The New Jim Crow Resolution
  - The Black Lives Matter Resolution
  - Environmental Justice and Climate Change Resolution

“UUSC has been the enduring draw for us at First U because of our lifelong interest in social justice. One of the extra highlights for me was being a member of an UUSC Just Journey in 2008 to Guatemala to help monitor their elections. It was a most unusual and fantastic experience, and certainly a variation on typical social justice work. Many Guatemalans expected violence to be part of their election, but it was kept under control, mainly because of the presence of many observers. Their election happened, and, the better of the two bad guys running for the Guatemalan Presidency won. It has always been fun to share that experience.”

—Doyle Dobbins, First U member, 1973
The UU-UNO, once an active group at First Unitarian, was rejuvenated at First Unitarian during the fall of 2015.

“The Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office promotes the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all, as reflected in the United Nations Charter. Through targeted education, advocacy, and outreach, we engage Unitarian Universalists in support of international cooperation and the work of the United Nations.”

In January, Bruce Knotts, Director of the UU-UNO since 2008, visited First Unitarian. Bruce founded faith-based advocacy for sexual orientation/gender identity human rights at the United Nations and he continues to advocate for the rights of women, indigenous peoples and for sustainable development in moral terms of faith and values. He spoke at a small gathering of church leaders and interested members and then was in our pulpit on Sunday morning to speak to the congregation about the work of the UU-UNO, “Equal Justice for All”. Sixty-five members were added to the email list for the UU-UNO that Sunday.

In April, two First Unitarian youth and one adult member attended the UU-UNO International Spring Seminar in New York City. The Seminar brings together world-class speakers and activists to address an issue of global concern. This year's seminar addressed income inequality from many different perspectives through expert-led panels, group discussions, interactive activities, and worship. Participants learned more about income inequality and how they can get involved and take action globally and in their local communities.

“One of my most treasured times was when I learned and did commit to UU-UNO (Unitarian Universalist United Nations Office). I had been a life time supporter of the United Nations. The years being a part of the UU-UNO Committee at First Unitarian Church were most rewarding. Our committee was full of ideas. We invited speakers. We committed to UNICEF (Halloween Children Ed and yearly cards and gifts sale after church). Our planning meetings were a getting-to-know-you moments. Longtime Friendships were formed. The ongoing support of Rev. Doss certainly made a difference.”

—Hetty Francke, First U member, 1979
We began the first year of developmental ministry with Reverend Roberta Finkelstein by dancing in the aisles—literally. She concluded her first sermon with us with these words: “So,” says my imaginary, blue suede shod God, “go for it with all your heart and soul! Make music! Be bold and creative! Be edgy! Bring the good news to as many people as will listen to you, using whatever medium is most likely to get their attention. Just... don’t... step on my blue suede shoes.”

We were invited to get up and dance to Blue Suede Shoes performed by Janina Williams, vocalist and on guitar, Martin Hargrove, vocalist and on bass, Barry Finkelstein on accordion and Aaron Walker on drums and dance we did. We knew we were in for a wonder-filled, inspiring and joyful year.

From worship, where many First Unitarian members and visitors gather each week, to our fun-filled potluck dinners we have been inspired to do the many works of our faith. The energy has been palpable on Sundays and throughout the week. Our inspiration is drawn from investing our time and talent in all areas of our vision.

We were welcomed to the church year at our Ingathering service in September, one of several multi-generational services this year. Music by the Harvey Price Quartet during the service and the Diamond State Concert Band at our picnic, complete with ice cream truck, pre-ordering from Johnnie's Dog House (with veggie options!) and an inflatable bounce house for the children made for a great day.

Along with the inspired justice activities of September, including the Interfaith Climate Vigil and the March for a Culture of Peace, Reverend Finkelstein and newly certified Professional Chaplain, our Honorary Minister of Music Scott Ward, conducted a wonderful Pet Blessing after services, attended by many members and their pets.

As we progress along the path of shared ministry, we also experienced more of what multigenerational church can be. The UUA states that multigenerational ministry is congregational life where all are welcomed, included, and encouraged to lead and participate at any age. We have
been inspired by our children and youth during the past year more than ever.

Kindergartner, Ian Jacobs, has been participating in grounds work for a couple of years now. He is quite the expert when it comes to mulching!

Grace Laster, currently in 10th grade, has organized and run fire circles at the all church retreat. She also created signs for a variety of Church events. Additionally, she aided in the planning and running of many social events over the years. She began participating in the life of the church in this way when she was in 6th grade.

Jake Gladfelter, a 12th grader, is serving in his second year as an assistant guide with the Seekers (2nd and 3rd graders). He also plays music in the worship service and at other church events.

Audrey Donohue (a third grader) has been a member of the Potluck Team! She is very excited to share her ideas and help in planning these multigenerational events.

“Recently, I have enjoyed helping to create more social events for the church, such as our monthly potlucks, so that we can build our community and continue to do even more good works for those struggling around us. I am proud to call the First U my home.”
—Debbi Zarek, First U member, 2011

On Sundays, our families have participated in the chalice lighting and we have again seen our children and youth as leaders in worship services. We heard our First U Singers from grade 3 to 9 at our Thanksgiving Service and heard from our Children’s Bell Choir at the Solstice in December.

We couldn’t help but be inspired by the talented group of performers at our Coffee House this winter. While the Explorers sold snacks to raise funds in honor of Leon Huhn, many of our members, youth, children and friends juggled, told riddles, played their instruments among other talents. We were thoroughly entertained!

We are also pleased to provide space for the UUpbeats Dixieland Band to practice as they bring pleasure and musical therapy to those who need it.

This was a year of celebration as we marked our 150th Anniversary of Unitarian Universalism in Wilmington, Delaware. We had several
unique fundraisers throughout the year at local restaurants in order to help offset the cost of our anniversary party in April.

We created a slideshow highlighting our members, ministers and staff through the years to accompany our updated history and member memory booklet. Our party in April was the culmination of 4 weeks of reflection on our journey, including guest speakers, Governor Jack Markell, Rev. Mary Katherine Morn from the UUA and Rev. Mary Higgins, ordained by First Unitarian in the 1990s, a personal video greeting from Rev. Peter Morales, UUA President, skits by our members and inspirational words from Rev. Finkelstein. We showed our gratitude for our founders and sustainers through our 150 Acts of Kindness project, brought in pennies to create a First U mosaic and raised funds as a birthday gift to renovate our Youth Center.

“I had been searching for a spiritual home that also recognized my relationship with my partner Pat—being a “gay” couple was not accepted by most churches in the area. While certainly not the most important reason for coming to this church, it was an amazing feeling to be welcomed by the members and accepted by all for who we were as individuals. But it was also clear the congregation was going through a growing & learning process to fully accept and be comfortable in accepting the label of “Welcoming Congregation”. After a series of workshops and a vote we embraced the Welcoming concept ---- The manifestation of taking that position included putting the words not just on church documents but also on a large sign on Route 202.

Members of First UU did not stop at that step, they ‘walked the talk’ and held meetings, attended conferences and testified in Dover at the Delaware Assembly on the necessity of approving marriage equality for all. It was a matter of pride to know my fellow church members fully supported marriage equality. Pat and I were married by Rev. Collins a few years ago (we've been together 28 years) and the ability to say with pride to all Delawareans my church helped make this possible is extraordinary. This First UU is a beloved community and I want the entire community to share in the love.”

—Marilyn Hyte, First U member, 1998
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE COMMUNITY AND THE WORLD

First Unitarian members, visitors and friends made the following contributions from May 2015—April 2016:

Bright Spot Ventures $2,138
Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow $1358
C YRE—African Library Project $430
Delaware Coalition against Domestic Violence $534
Emmanuel Dining Room Alliance Donation $1500
Emmanuel Dining Room (meal prepared and served for 200+, once a month) $2,204
First Universalist Church of Southold $1,059
Grants for Growth:
  UU Congregation of Central DE $2,000
  UU Fellowship at Easton $2,076
Independent Living for Young Adults:
  Backpacks $874
  Holiday project $493
  Support grants $3,924
Second Chances $531
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC):
  Guest at Your Table $698
  April special collection $1,048
UU House Outreach $737
YWCA—house pin sales $1,000
**Total donations through First Unitarian Society** $22,604

Direct contributions by First Unitarian Members:
EDR International Dinners (approximately 200 seats purchased) $5,000
UUSC: Ebola Relief, Somalia and East Africa Famine Relief, Syrian Refugee Relief, Central American Refugee Relief, Haiti Earthquake Relief, Justice Sunday, stocks, endowment, major gifts & other miscellaneous gifts $42,200
2015—2016 Financial Information
March 31, 2016

Your Dollars at Work

Investments and Fixed Assets

Net Assets (Unrestricted)
$270,057

Net Assets (Restricted)
$673,000

Capital Campaign Fund
$1,138,714

Total Net Assets:
$2,081,771

Sources of Revenue

Pledge income
67%
Rental income
16%
Investment income
5%
Non-pledged income
4%
Designated donations
3%
Special offerings
2%
Program fees
2%
Plate offering
1%

Your Dollars at Work

Worship and Music
35%
Lifespan Religious Education
13%
Outreach and Social Justice
13%
Fellowship and Pastoral Care
10%
Growth of UUism
29%

Inflows of Revenue

Pledge income
67%
Rental income
16%
Investment income
5%
Non-pledged income
4%
Designated donations
3%
Special offerings
2%
Program fees
2%
Plate offering
1%
Rev. Roberta Finkelstein, Developmental Minister

Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss, Minister Emeritus

Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music

Catherine Williamson, Director of Religious Education

Marina VanRenssen, Business Manager

Miesha Lowman, Accounting Assistant

Joseph Capano, Publications Assistant

Harold Cannon, Night Custodian

Sam Russell, Sunday Custodian

Sophia Gorowara, Grace Ruoff & Alicia Corrado—Childcare
Many thanks to the planners, designers, writers, reviewers, editors and photographers for our 2015-16 Annual Report and Memory Booklet, published separately:

Bev Bach
Glen Barbaras
Beverley Baxter
Gary Blegstad
Jenny Brown
Dee Burdash
Sally Christian
Jon Claney
Cindy Cohen
Steve Cohen
Lew Collat
Jim Davis
Empress Devone
Dillon Dickerson
Doyle Dobbins
Phil Dowd
Maggie Duffy
Holly Feldheim
Pam Finkelman
Rev. Roberta Finkelstein
Benjamin Fleury-Steiner
Helen Foss
Robert Foss
Hetty Francke
Ned Gladfelter
Donna Gonzalez
Judy Govatos
Vivian Gray
Charlotte Hanby
Laura Hanby
Bill Hardham
Edris Harrell
Beth Kingsley Hawkins
Marilyn Hyte
Lisa Jacobs
Paul Jacobs
Janet Jones
Phil Krape
Don Lemasters
Barbara Lenahan
Jeff Lott
Giovanni Maiorano
Liz Marek
Dale Megill
Burley Melton
Ruth Mette
Marge Meyermann
Lois Morris
Suzanne Perry
June Peterson
Nancy Pinson
Paul Pinson
Joan Priest
Miriam Priest-Benedict
Joel Pust
Elizabeth Siftar
Tracy Spinka-Doms
Marina VanRenssen
Ostin Warren
Lori Weddell
Betty Weir
Keith Weiss
Pam Weiss
Judy Windle
Debbi Zarek
OUR PRINCIPLES

Unitarian Universalists covenant with each other to affirm and promote:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person
- Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process
  Within our congregations and in society at large
- The goal of world community, with peace, liberty, and justice for all
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are part

My wife, Gerry, and I abandoned the conventional Protestant religions of our parents because we could not accept many of their beliefs. So we paid no attention to a conventional looking church which we often walked past adjacent to the campus of the University of Chicago (a Unitarian congregation served by Rev. Barbara Gadon more than 60 years later).

In 1950, as we prepared for the transfer by DuPont from their Cleveland laboratory to the just completed expansion of the Experimental Station in Wilmington, we received at our home address some literature and an invitation to visit the Unitarian church in Wilmington. Gerry filed it to consider when we had a family, which we did by 1957, to give our children some religious experience. We found that Rev. John MacKinnon was giving a series of philosophy lectures on Sunday evenings, a non-committed way to explore the thinking of the church leader. His liberal, humanist approach appealed to us and many scientists in the audience, one of whom shared a copy of some of the lectures which he had typed for further thought.

Unitarianism became a revelation to us so we began attending the church and joined in April 1958, beginning a family tradition of attending church and Sunday school every week, which I continue today. We were never able to identify the Unitarian angel who brought us the good tidings of great joy, but this became “our church”.

—Glen Barbaras, First U member, 1958
Our Sources

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. They include:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;

- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love;

- Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life; Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;

- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;

- Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

These principles and sources of faith are the backbone of our religious community.

I've been a member of First UU for 35 years. Our younger members may not see themselves here thirty or forty years from now, but I want to tell them that the years fly by! As I glance back over my life, I am struck by how this church has been an ever constant and treasured presence. I can't imagine not coming here, and even more importantly, not belonging here. All the worship services, the people I’ve met and worked with, all the many ways I've been involved over these 35 years, all the times I found healing and inspiration here, are like rain water filling and refilling an ever deepening stream. I am grateful for this source of meaning, hope, love and joy that has been flowing through my life for so many years. May this church continue to be a place of belonging and a source of inspiration for all our young members for decades to come!

—Suzanne Perry, First U member 1982