First Unitarian Church of Wilmington Delaware

A beloved community that nourishes minds and spirits, fights injustice, and transforms the world through loving action

2014—2015 Annual Report
Forward Through the Ages

From the founding of First Unitarian Society of Wilmington in 1866, three areas stand out as our constant focus.

Inspiring worship and music are at our core. Our services draw from many traditions as our ministers have challenged us to broaden our perspectives and deepen our spiritual maturity. From Bach to the Grateful Dead and Beatles, from the sound of drums to the voices of our choirs to the resounding of the organ, music has always been integral to our services, varied and reflective of our Unitarian Universalist prophetic message.

Religious education has been of greatest importance. The future of Unitarian Universalism depends on the encouragement of our children and youth as they seek to develop their own spiritual identities. Exploration continues into adulthood as the thirst for intellectual and spiritual stimulation is quenched with a variety of adult programs. From Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss’s “Journey in Meaning” in the 1970’s to today’s Adult Forum, Faithful Dialogues and Connection Circles, we have transformed with the times to meet the needs of our ever-changing congregation.

First Unitarian has been a congregation of caring and action. In the 1960’s, a decade of turmoil in civil rights, we were active in the struggle for racial equality. Today, we are still focused on the rights of all through our efforts against racial discrimination and gun violence in Wilmington, in support of youth aging out of foster care, of those needing meals in our city, and in important world issues through our work with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee. In addition, since the 1950’s, we have put our UU values to work in support of new and growing UU congregations.

As we approach our 150th anniversary, our stories and pictures speak volumes for the difference we make in the world, thanks to all who have devoted your talent and treasure.

“I call that mind free which has cast off all fear but that of wrong doing, And possesses itself though all else be lost.” - William Ellery Channing
THE DOSS TREE GROVE

“Trees, of course, long have been a metaphor for life: they grow, their limbs reach up to the sky ... they are resilient to the elements, they drop their seeds to propagate the next generation, and eventually they may fall to the ground covered in ice,” Dave Sheppard told us at the dedication of the Doss Tree Grove in October, 2014. Reverend Doss, Minister Emeritus and First Unitarian’s senior minister from 1963 to 1994, is a lover of trees and nature. Says Dave of their family hikes, “He has special hats for each season, custom made boots to carry him safely over rough terrain, and a variety of hand-carved hiking sticks to choose from the bin by the front door. Once on the trail Bob would fall into an easy, almost meditative rhythm ... take a step, swing the hiking stick, take a step, swing the hiking stick...”

When we lost the large tree that graced the front lawn of First Unitarian for many years, Barry Marrs led the project to replace the tree and recognize Reverend Doss’s contributions to our church at the same time. After consultation with the Doss family, our buildings and grounds team and with some of the congregation’s Master Gardeners, we decided to put in a native maple, leaving the choice between sugar and red maples to the many donors. When you visit you will see the three red maples and dedication plaque, along with special rocks from Reverend Doss’s yard.

“The responsibility is with us to stay vital and grow in wise being and action...Theologies come and go. Ideas change. Religious thought and feeling evolve into new expression. Through it all we strive for, and realize in part, an authentic human community.” Reverend Doss at our 100th Anniversary
A MESSAGE FROM THE BOARD
“NOTHING ENDURES BUT CHANGE”

We are long-term members and new members, single and married, straight and gay; raising our families here, praising and singing here, seeking and finding here -- the words, music, deeds and relationships that inspire us to live our lives according to the values we share and cherish in this beloved community.

We began this year focusing on the many strengths of this congregation. Among them – the UU seven principles, and our mission, vision and Ends -- profound words that continually nourish and inspire us and our collective work. Another strength we return to over and over again, perhaps even our greatest strength is YOU – the dedicated members of this congregation.

We are grateful for the opportunity to serve you at this pivotal time in our church community’s growth and development. Together, we have faced difficult decisions, creating the plans, energy and momentum needed to tackle the challenges before us. It is our hope that we have used our time well over the past year to strengthen our community to better serve our mission. Thank you for placing your trust in us. We have been humbled and honored to walk with you on this journey.

In the words of the Greek Philosopher Heraclitus, “nothing endures but change; everything flows, nothing stands still; the only constant is change.” You have done more than accept the inevitability of change. Through your gifts of talent and treasure, you have embraced the future and all that it may hold for us. May we continue to be together blessed in serving this great faith.

In Love and Peace,
Your 2014-2015 Board of Trustees

“Nothing endures but change; everything flows, nothing stands still; the only constant is change.” Heraclitus, Greek philosopher
What is the Executive Team? Many people have heard the term, but the answer might not be obvious. There is the most basic answer: the Executive Team is made up of Rev. Josh, as chair and Senior Minister, Rev. Michelle, as Assistant Minister, Marina, the Business Manager, and Dale Megill who is the at-large lay member of the Team. The extended Executive Team includes all volunteer teams that do the work of the church, from program implementation to building and grounds maintenance.

So what do we do? The Executive Team aims to achieve the Boards Ends while staying within its Limitations. The Board is entrusted by the members of the congregation to oversee and lead the church. However the work of the congregation is far too busy and complex for one Board to take on by itself. Therefore the Board delegates the day-to-day operations of the church to the Executive Team, thereby freeing itself up to work on the big picture of strategy, mission, and vision.

The Executive Team too is faced with a very busy church. The Executive Team coordinates the activities of all the programs and administrative procedures going on in the church. Each member of the Executive Team is a specialist in certain areas called portfolios and communicate with the staff and volunteers in their portfolio on a regular basis.
Our Values, Mission and Vision

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 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 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.

“If one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has imagined, he will meet with success unexpected in common hours.” —Henry David Thoreau
The spiritual practice of welcome is an important one at First Unitarian. “Being welcoming means striving for radical inclusion, and creating spaces that honor every part of our identities, backgrounds, and experiences.” After three years of study and intentional discussion, in 2000, First Unitarian members voted to become an official Welcoming Congregation. The Unitarian Universalist Welcoming Congregation program was designed to help us learn how to undo homophobia in our hearts and minds, our congregations, and our communities. This UUA-wide program was eventually expanded to address transphobia (prejudice against transgender people).

Today, 15 years later, all people arriving at First Unitarian on Sunday morning are greeted warmly at the door and helped to find a seat by our volunteer welcome team, our greeters and ushers. At the start of each worship service, we hear these words: “You are welcome here, regardless of your race, your creed, your political affiliation, your financial situation or whom you love—you are welcome here.” Visitors are invited to visit our welcome table, staffed by members who are happy to answer their questions and help them get connected with groups and activities that interest them.

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. New this year are the Yarn Creative Group’s caring cloaks that show special loving care for those going through difficult times. In addition, Living Well with Chronic Illness and Caregivers’ Groups provide small group settings for pastoral care, and each week, time is set aside in the worship service to speak the names of those who need the warmth and care of our congregation. Read on for three examples of our welcoming congregation.

* [http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program](http://www.uua.org/lgbtq/welcoming/program)
Belonging and Connection

Most people who come through our doors are seeking community open to their unique gifts, talents and beliefs. Our best advice to visitors and members, new and longtime, is to find that special group that feeds their souls. Connecting through small groups, getting to know people in deeper ways than a Sunday morning conversation can accomplish, is one of the best ways of feeling a sense of belonging. Our Leadership Development team has helped to make this happen by matching members’ skills, interests and talents with the many opportunities in church.

Our Connection Circles provide a variety of ways to connect in a small group setting, forming and deepening friendships while exploring topics that touch the mind and the heart. In these groups, you can be heard and accepted while having fun with fellow UU’s. While some focus on the monthly worship themes, others are specialized, such as a group that is reading and analyzing prize-winning short stories leading naturally into sharing the human experience with each other; this year they are reading the O’Henry Award winners for 2014. Other groups are working on Building Your Own Theology and Rituals of Our Times. We even have a Circle that meets over Skype!

There are several belief- or spiritually-focused groups, from Christian to Atheist. One such group, the Open Heart Zen Sangha, facilitated by Ben Fleury-Steiner, has created a “profoundly supportive, safe, and compassionate environment for meditation practice, group sharing, and dharma study.” Now in their sixth year, as a member organization of the Unitarian Universalist Buddhist Fellowship, members have a rewarding way to connect with other UU sanghas around the country. In Wilmington, our members are involved in hospice work, providing free Buddhist books via our membership with the Buddhist Association of the United States and helping the Wilmington homeless as a part of a weekly support community.

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.

“It is so meaningful to have a group where feelings can be expressed but judgments are not.”
— member of the First Unitarian Caregivers’ Group
RETREATING TOGETHER

“The All-Church Retreat is one of the best ways to bond with new people and to spend quality, unplugged time with both old friends and your family. There is something about being outdoors and just playing that is so good for the soul – and something we all desperately need.” – Church member, Melissa Sugzdinis

On a lovely, brisk weekend at the beginning of October, fifty-four First Unitarian members and friends attended the Church Retreat at Camp Tockwogh. As is our tradition, we had a campfire on Friday night, with songs, games, and of course s’mores. We also did fun activities as a group Saturday morning to get to know one another before going off and enjoying the outdoors at Tockwogh, where you can do as much or as little as you like. In the evening we gathered again for a sunset hike, folk dancing, and examining the moon with a telescope. On Sunday morning we had our worship service, complete with a chalice made of Legos and a Lego communion, before taking advantage of Tockwogh activities. Before leaving, we gathered one last time in a circle to say one or two words about what the weekend meant to us:

❤ Connections and new friends,
❤ Energy and getting to the top of the wall,
❤ Fair houses,
❤ Hidden lake and stars

We passed a squeeze around the circle before saying good-bye and heading off down the dusty road back to the hustle and bustle of life.

“After the retreat I really feel like a part of our church family. I am excited about attending again next year.” — Church member, Amy Richardson
While each of us has our own family traditions for remembering and celebrating those who have gone before us, it is very powerful to also remember together.

Once again this year, we remembered loved ones in our *Day of the Dead* service. This ritual led by Reverend Michelle Collins, was inspired by an annual service of remembrance held by the Cancer Center at Johns Hopkins Hospital, where all family members who had lost a loved one in the past year could remember that person specially at the service.

Working with church members, Suzie Cornell and Marian Sargeant, to create a service for First Unitarian, we opened up the memories beyond only the previous year, believing that while they are particularly tender in the first year, that losses are important to acknowledge and honor long beyond that. Photographs, objects, single names, and lists of names were all woven into our communal sculpture. People lingered around the sculpture long after they would have usually retired to coffee hour after the service.

“*As a community, we hold one another throughout the many times in our lives. Through the joyful times and the sorrowful times.*” — Reverend Michelle Collins
Our vision—People of all ages gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual beings.
**Our Growing Children and Youth**

Religious exploration is an important component of church life for all of our children and youth, from preschool through high school. We help them to learn about the Unitarian Universalist faith, as well as about other realms of religion and spirituality. During this year, we offered Age of Reason for our 2nd and 3rd graders, one of our Unitarian Universalist Rites of Passage. In this program, our young people learn about our seven principles and begin to develop their early beliefs as Unitarian Universalists.

We proudly offer Our Whole Lives, an age-appropriate sexuality education curriculum. This year, we completed the 5th/6th grade curriculum, with thanks to facilitators Tracy Spinka-Doms and Paul Pinson. We also completed the year-long 8th/9th grade curriculum, with thanks to Suzanne Shahan, Jane Cislo, Jackson Salasky and Dave Donohue.

Our children and youth have been very busy this year, supporting all areas of our First Unitarian vision. Our infants and toddlers enjoyed toys, crafts and stories, gaining a sense of belonging in their religious community. Our Rainbow Walkers (PreK-K) received their first introduction to Unitarian Universalism through new rituals and stories. Our Seekers (1st-3rd grade) explored myths and stories from our Unitarian Universalist sources, beginning to understand that religion helps people find answers to important life questions, and that some questions do not have answers. Our Questers (4th-5th grade) were introduced to Hebrew and Christian scriptures through best-known Bible stories in a fun atmosphere as they experienced the Bible as one of the many wonderful UU sources.

Our Explorers (6th-7th grade) explored social justice, presenting an intergenerational Winter Solstice Service and participating with the Seekers and Questers, helping to lead our Earth Day Service in April. Our 8th-10th graders participated in Building Bridges, a world religions program seeking to broaden their knowledge of humanity and embolden their spiritual search, including visiting other faith traditions. This year they visited Beth Emeth Synagogue, the Hockessin Hindu Temple, Brandywine Valley Baptist Church, and the 4th and West Quaker Meeting House. Our 11th through 12th graders participated in church life in many important ways, including teaching in the children’s programs, social justice outreach and attending worship services on Sunday.

*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.*

— First Unitarian Religious Exploration Mission
Hearts were warmed during the Winter Solstice Service held on December 21, 2014. The joyous event was capably performed by the 6th and 7th grade “Explorer” group. The music and script described traditions and stories from Solstice celebrations around the world. One of the highlights of the service was the reappearance of First Unitarian’s hand bells! The Explorer hand bell choir performed their versions of “Winter Solstice Chant” and “Deck the Halls.”

Creating the service was a collaborative effort by our Director of Religious Education, Catherine Williamson, Honorary Minister of Music, Scott Ward, and church members Ned and Wendy Gladfelter. Working with the hand bells was a unique opportunity, which provided the structure and focus necessary to allow our children to learn a new skill, work together on a shared goal and play music which touched the congregation. Working together on a shared goal helped to deepen our relationships. Sharing our strengths and talents to create something new for our Explorer group was a positive and rewarding experience.

Given the opportunity, and needed structure, our youth can produce wonderful works that highlight their talent. This service was a shining example of youth talent at First Unitarian. Providing the opportunity for our Explorers, and for all our children and youth, to show off their talent helps them to assimilate into our church and to know that their contributions are an integral and welcome part of church life. The positive comments received during the receiving line helped our children build confidence in their ability to participate in the worship service and to feel valued. This experience helps our church to meet our vision “people of all ages gain new perspectives and grow as informed, spiritual beings.”

“Working with our youth helped me to find balance, hope and joy during a difficult time in my life… Working with our youth who have exuberant energy, new ideas, and a thirst for exciting experiences created an opposing force—the feeling of possibility—which helped me remain hopeful.”

— Church member, Wendy Gladfelter
Faithful Dialogues is one of our Adult Education programs, meeting most Sunday mornings before church and discussing a variety of topics. During several sessions led by church member Barbara Lenahan, participants listened to Krista Tippett’s On Being radio podcasts, featuring interviews of thought and spiritual leaders. Other sessions were led by church members on a broad range of topics, including Butterflies, New Thinking on Cancer, History of Unitarian Universalist Hymns, Unitarian Universalist Association Regionalization, and Ostara: A Pagan Ritual for Spring, among others.

This year, for the first time, two Sundays each month had specific dedicated objectives:

- First Sundays for Social Justice were led by Jeff Lott and Elizabeth Siftar. These programs featured a variety of community groups addressing social justice initiatives of local interest. In addition to dialogue from our own First Unitarian program, Independent Living for Young Adults (ILYA), we had local guest leaders from Family Promise of Northern New Castle County (NCC), the Wilmington Peacekeepers, and Ending Hunger in the Delaware Valley.

- Spiritual Cinema was led by Cindy Cohen and focused on one or more television programs from GaiaTV.com, on a variety of metaphysical topics. These programs gained a steady audience of church members committed to metaphysical growth and spirituality.

Adult Forum, facilitated by Jim Davis, was also held on Sunday mornings. This year the forum completed several series: American Religious History, General Assembly 2010’s program “The Necessity of Virtue”, and started a “Luther” series.

This year, thirty-four new titles were added to the John G. MacKinnon Memorial Library where resources are available for the use of adults and young people, families, members and newcomers, staff, teams and groups, and are there to provide knowledge and encouragement in their lives and spiritual paths.

"Come, come, whoever you are, wanderer, worshipper, lover of leaving . . . Come, yet again, come, come." —13th century Sufi poet Jalaluddin Rumi
**A Congregation Acting on Shared Values**

At First Unitarian Church, inspired by our seven Unitarian Universalist Principles and many sources, we strive to take action around our shared values of love and compassion, growth and discovery, freedom and justice, wonder and joy. We do our best to confront injustice in all of its forms with passion and compassion, including the deeper systems of oppression that create an unjust world.

This has been a year of great involvement in social justice initiatives in our community and beyond as a part of our Ministry for Compassionate Action program. We have continued to support young adults coming out of foster care and to help feed the homeless people in the city of Wilmington. We have supported the YWCA mission of eliminating racism, empowering women and promoting peace, justice, freedom and dignity for all through our House Pin program and have supported many local and regional groups financially through our monthly *Share the Offering* program. Our anti-racism work was active through the Coalition to Dismantle the New Jim Crow program and Martin Luther King Jr. activities, and we entered into inspirational new partnerships this year to help bring life to Delaware’s Movement for a Culture of Peace.

We have also been active supporting Climate Change and Environmental Justice initiatives, led by our Green Sanctuary Team. From sharing a meal of climate-friendly foods and discussing our views on Climate Justice, to participating in the People’s Climate March in September in New York City and participating with the New Castle County Congregations (NC3) of Delaware Interfaith Power and Light (*DeIPL*), our members worked to improve understanding of climate justice and to learn new ways of responding to increasing evidence of climate change and the inevitable injustice resulting from those changes.

In the denomination, we generously supported the Unitarian Universalist Fair Trade Coffee Project. In addition, we continued our support of growth of Unitarian Universalism in our region through visits and exchanges with smaller Unitarian Universalist churches, our *Grant for Growth* program, and support of denominational programs, such as Chalice Lighters and participation in our annual District Assembly and Unitarian Universalist General Assembly.

Read more about just a few of these initiatives from this year.

*Our vision—People of all ages act on our shared values and Unitarian Universalist identity to fight for a more just world.*
Delaware’s Movement for a Culture of Peace—a broad coalition of individuals and organizations seeking to transform Wilmington’s culture of violence into a culture of peace—got its start in Room 25 of First Unitarian Church last summer.

The shooting of 43-year-old Crystal Brown, caught in a crossfire on Adams St. on July 8, galvanized a group of First Unitarian members, who attended a small march and rally the following Saturday. At the site of Brown’s shooting, they joined members of the Wilmington Peacekeepers to mourn her death. In the weeks that followed, we participated in a series of discussions among a diverse group of city and suburban residents deeply concerned about the escalating gun violence in Delaware’s largest city.

We soon conceived the idea of a March for a Culture of Peace in late September that would be part of a national week of action linked to Campaign Nonviolence. Church members and our ministers encouraged us as we sought and received support from more than fifty faith and community groups across Delaware. And in about six weeks, we made it happen.

On September 27, more than two dozen church members—many wearing distinctive Standing on the Side of Love shirts and carrying a Love banner—joined an estimated 400 marchers in Brandywine Park. The mile-long march on Wilmington’s East Side—one of the most violent neighborhoods in the city—ended in an inspiring rally at a city park.

The momentum generated by the unprecedented march has continued to influence the public conversation in Wilmington. The March for a Culture of Peace quickly morphed into the Movement for a Culture of Peace (MCP), with the same core group of activists meeting weekly to plan follow-up events. First Unitarian members remained among the most active, including Marie Oakberg, Judy Govatos, Jeff Lott, Lynn and Bob Ingersoll, Margaret Sheridan,

“JUSTICE is what Love looks like in public.” — Cornel West
Joan Priest, Janet Tillman, Richard Speck, and Paula Maiorano.

The movement now has a website and Facebook page; it counts more than 300 supporters on its email list—plus a growing number of public officials who are paying attention to our informative, thoughtful brand of social change through connection. Starting in November, the MCP sponsored monthly public forums that have focused on topics such as the impact of violence on youth in the community, law enforcement efforts, and the public health issues raised by gun violence. In April, we returned to the streets in support of a Good Friday march that began at a downtown community center and ended at the Episcopal Church of Saints Andrew and Matthew. In addition to churches, active supporters include Wilmington Peacekeepers, the Delaware Coalition Against Gun Violence, One Village Alliance, and Pacem in Terris.

The Movement for a Culture of Peace is unique in Delaware in that it does not seek to become a formal organization, but rather prefers to be seen as a movement that catalyzes the work of others, connects groups and individuals, and creates sustainable actions to achieve a culture of peace. We are consciously inclusive of city and suburban; black, white, and brown; and intentional welcome of all faith traditions. The MCP has connected us in ways that would be unimaginable without it—and we find that it sustains our individual passions for peace across a variety of actions and organizations. The Movement for a Culture of Peace looks to the community for what is needed and models in its own relationships and actions the peace we want to see realized in society. As such, it’s a perfect fit for Unitarian Universalists.

“We embraced the mission of “transforming Wilmington to a culture of peace” and we are fired by the collective notion that we can accomplish far more together than any individual, organization, or faith group can do on its own.”
— Church members, Jeff Lott and Marie Oakberg
Twenty-eight members of First Unitarian Church of Wilmington, including families with children and members over 80 years of age, boarded the bus to New York City on September 21 at 8 a.m. to participate in the People's Climate March to demand bold political action to address the climate crisis. First Unitarian members Elizabeth Siftar and Chad Tolman led our delegation, coordinating with the Sierra Club to make the trip.

We marched with other hardy agents of change to express our Unitarian Universalist Principles in support of changes to local and global environmental policies in response to climate change. We marched to express our connection to and love of Earth and all creation and to join nearly 400,000 others to unify in declaring to the governments of the Earth that it is time to make policies that will begin to mitigate climate change and the disasters it is causing people all over the world, especially those most affected: people of color, the marginalized, those who did the least to cause the problem and who will suffer first and more severely than those who caused the problem. We went to the March for the children, the elderly, Native People, people of color, for all religions and socio-economic levels, and as Unitarian Universalists.

“This march is an opportunity for Delawareans to stand up and show the world that we care about the future of our state, and about the kind of world our children and grandchildren will have to raise their families” — Church member, Chad Tolman
The children went to the march because they “get it.” One young person said, “The kids get it. We just don’t understand why nothing is being done about it.”

We brought signs, proudly wore our Standing on the Side of Love shirts, and walked with large numbers of other Unitarian Universalists from every state. We marched to make the statement that it is time to start reducing carbon, becoming energy efficient, restructuring economies, practicing true democracy, and changing systems of economic and environmental destruction. We marched because our Principles require it and because, as Unitarian Universalists, we act on the side of justice. We were inspired by the experience, in participating in something so important and focused on making the changes that are needed.

Chad Tolman writes that “September 21 was chosen because the next round of discussions at the UN on climate change will begin on September 23, looking forward to a significant climate agreement in Paris in 2015. This march is an opportunity for Delawareans to stand up and show the world that we care about the future of our state, and about the kind of world our children and grandchildren will have to raise their families.” Chad and other members represent our congregation in the New Castle County Congregations (NC3) of Delaware Interfaith Power and Light (DelPL), which has worked to involve people of good will from many faiths in the area. He writes a monthly blog called Climate Change News to keep readers up to date on energy and climate change science, public policy, public opinion, ethics and economics.

“We are diverse in spiritual belief, yet united in faith that a better world is possible and that our collective power can create change.” — Commit2Respond, a coalition of Unitarian Universalists and other people of faith and conscience working for climate justice.
Our Martin Luther King Day of Service was beautifully organized by our Children and Youth Religious Exploration Team (CYRE) and well attended. Our parish hall was filled with hands-on projects and the aroma of hot cookies and baked chicken wafted from the kitchen. We made graduation cards for ILYA youth and Valentine’s Day cards for members that are homebound. We also made food bags for the Ronald McDonald House, and blankets for sick children in the Alfred I. duPont Hospital. Coordinating with the Emmanuel Dining Room Team, the children made cookies for the next day’s lunch.

Independent Living for Young Adults (ILYA) provides 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. On-going projects include gifts at the holidays and high school graduation and care packages to young adults in postsecondary programs. To help young adults set up first apartments, ILYA has assisted with supportive grants (for emergency rent payments and security deposits), furniture through donations and its partnership with Catholic Charities Thrift Shop; and kitchenware collected with the help of First Unitarian members and friends participating in an Acme Supermarket promotion.

Inspired by Family Court Judge and First Unitarian member Barbara Crowell, several ILYA team members worked on the New Castle County Family Court mural to brighten the spaces most commonly seen by children and youth who come to the court for custody hearings, dependency and neglect hearings, and other proceedings relating to foster care placement. We joined with foster and aging out youth and a talented artist to create a huge bright inspirational mural. Joy!

“Life’s most persistent question is, what are you doing for others?”
— Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.
First Unitarian participates in the UUSC Coffee Project, offering products for purchase, thanks to our relationships with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee and the Fair Trade Equal Exchange Cooperative (FTEE). FTEE is an intentionally for-profit cooperative company that was started in the mid-1980’s to provide small farmers around the world a chance to move away from the established plantation system of growing food and to become more independent while also fostering a more sustainable business and environmental approach. One of the first fair trade companies, they helped small farmers form co-ops to strengthen supply lines, provide a long term business arrangement to guarantee a market for their products at a living wage and to teach organic, sustainable farming practices to improve not only the health and quality of life for the farmers, but also the environment.

The story of Don Mario Pérez illustrates how it works: Don Mario Pérez is a farmer in Honduras. Together with his wife, Joselinda Manueles, he grows organic coffee. They are members of Café Orgánico Marcala, a coffee-farm cooperative with more than 850 members. The purchases we make benefit FTEE partners like Don Mario. In 2013 alone, Unitarian Universalists purchased 77,200 pounds of fairly traded products through the UUSC Coffee Project. Many thanks to Steve Marek and family for managing this project on our behalf.

The Emmanuel Dining Room (EDR) team may be nourishing bellies more than minds and spirits, but in doing so we are fighting the injustice of poverty in our local community, and at the same time are transforming both the membership of First Unitarian Church and the Wilmington community through our loving actions. By serving a hot meal at EDR, our members are introduced to a faction of the inner city community they may not come in contact with in their daily lives, allowing them to gain new perspectives and grow as spiritual beings, and help fight for a more just world.

“I believe our church family is strengthened by this effort of working together to help others less fortunate.” — Church member Cindy Cohen
The African Library Project

The children in the Children and Youth Religious Exploration program at First Unitarian, led by member Holly Feldheim, are actively involved in collecting books to ship to Ghana and Sierra Leone as part of the African Library Project (ALP). Our original goal was one library, $500 and 1,000 books. However, because the members of our church have shown such passionate support in donating books, money, and booster cards for the purchase of books, we’ve already exceeded our original goal and we are now able to supply two libraries with the $1,500 that we’ve raised so far and the nearly 2,000 books collected.

We started the project with our ALP Kick off in September when Director of Religious Education, Catherine Williamson, read an African story during Time for All Ages, and Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music, played a drum from Sierra Leone. The students then attended a drumming session with members Ned and Wendy Gladfelter before breaking into groups to work on a variety of activities such as making book marks, working on a website, and making signs and posters for the project.

In addition to having children work on sorting books throughout the year, we had a special event during our Martin Luther King Jr. Day of Service where we focused on sorting and organizing our books. We had a fabulous turnout, an intergenerational mix of people who love books and are great at organizing, and they enjoyed getting to know each other. In March all were invited to our book packing and pizza party which helped us prepare to ship to Ghana in mid-April. We’ll plan to have a similar event toward the end of summer for our Sierra Leone shipment.

Our first library will go to Abenu, Ghana and our African Library partner is the Abenu

“Books are the key to increasing literacy, and literacy is the #1 tool out of poverty.”

— Church member Holly Feldheim
The African Library Project

Primary School. Abuenu is a farming community in the central region in Ghana. This library will be on the school property and is expected to immediately serve at least 600 people in the community. As we are the only book drive matched with this school, they are thrilled to have our support. According to Joseph Annan of Abuenu Primary School, “Most of the pupils go to farm after school hours because there is nothing in the community that will encourage them to study and therefore makes teaching and learning extremely difficult.”

Our second library will be going to Sierra Leone, though paperwork has not yet been finalized. The ALP has been delayed in Sierra Leone because they are having trouble with the distribution of materials due to the Ebola crisis. Librarian training workshops are on hold because public gatherings are prohibited. Our library is much needed as only about 2% of Sierra Leonean children have five or more books available in their home and only about 7% of the school have libraries. We are hoping to be able to ship the library in September.

The mission of the ALP aligns perfectly with the social justice mission of First Unitarian. While our children are being taught about justice, equality and compassion in human relations, they are experiencing it first hand through this project where they enjoy sharing their own beloved books, and watch the collection grow as they add the books to the bookshelf. Our church community has embraced the idea of sharing our resources with other communities in need especially ones that are eagerly anticipating the arrival of a library.

“Most of the pupils go to farm after school hours because there is nothing in the community that will encourage them to study and therefore makes teaching and learning extremely difficult.” — Joseph Annan, Abuenu Primary School
The Denominational Growth Committee exists to grow and strengthen Unitarian Universalism as we increase our presence on the Delmarva Peninsula and Southern New Jersey. This is accomplished by our support of and participation in Delmarva Cluster activities. This year, our activities included a presence at the Gay Pride Event, the Delmarva Cluster Celebration that gathered the congregations and reinforced Unitarian Universalist identity and a Chalice Lighter website grant that will bring most of the Delmarva Cluster congregation websites under one format. These activities increase our visibility to the general public and promote interaction and collaboration among congregations.

In addition, our financial support of other congregations for projects helps to increase their growth and appeal to visitors. This year the First Unitarian Grants for Growth Program contributed to the Unitarian Universalists of Southern Delaware New Sanctuary Capital Campaign and the sound system for the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship at Salisbury. Since its inception in 1997, First Unitarian has given $107,259 in grants for growing churches in Delaware, Maryland and New Jersey.

The Denominational Growth Committee 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.

“To commit to creating a prophetic congregation today is to grapple with what it means to take responsibility for co-creating the holy right here on earth.” —Meg Riley, UU clergy activist
Our Inspired Congregation

At First Unitarian Church, we hope for people to connect with feelings beyond themselves, bringing about a sense of awe, amazement and mystery. First Unitarian is a place where people can satisfy their spiritual hungers and experience personal growth that feeds their souls. Ultimately, we hope all who are touched by First Unitarian experience bringing joy to others, sharing in the joy of others and a sense of great happiness that is of spiritual value to them.

The worship experience is the central forum where most First Unitarian members and visitors gather each week. From the monthly themes to special services for holidays, our ministers hope to move people both intellectually and emotionally to make changes in their lives and in the world around them.

One of the ways that worship moves from being merely an intellectual experience to being more holistic is through music. Music at First Unitarian is varied and inspiring, with special events such as Big Music Sunday, the Wister Quartet performance, and the Martin Luther King concert with the DuPont Diversity Choir.

One of the primary roles that religion plays in our lives is in the rites of passage – child dedications, weddings, memorial services and special transitions in the lives of our youth as they grow and develop spiritually. As a Welcoming Congregation, First Unitarian Church ministers to all who wish to marry, no matter whom you love.

Our Connection Circles help people to integrate their life experiences into their spiritual understanding of themselves, including wonder, inspiration, fulfillment and joy. Likewise, other small groups – A Course in Miracles, Open Heart Zen Sangha, Men’s and Women’s Brown Bag Groups, First U Yoga Group to name just a few – provide opportunities for similar experiences. Social activities – the Coffee House, the church auction and all the amazing events that are offered through it, the All-Church Retreat, the UUpbeats band, and even our stewardship social events – bring joy to those who participate.

*Our vision—People of all ages experience wonder, inspiration, fulfillment, and joy*
"Music is often referred to as the universal language. Music works through and past preconceived ideas of what is good, and what is not, to the ultimate goal of universal acceptance. All are welcome in the world of music. The Music Program at First Unitarian strives to make everyone feel empowered to be who you are, feeling welcome to share your gifts, singing a hymn, joining the choir, playing an instrument, listening, or simply celebrating a song in your heart.” — Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music

Our music program greatly enhances our experience of wonder, inspiration, fulfillment and joy – on Sundays as well as at other times during the year. This year, support of the Counterpoint Society made it possible to bring in a wide variety of musical performances by talented musicians such as Bill Miller and Margaret Love, guest organists, and folk musician Andy Levin. Our guest teen-age fiddler, Alexander Weir, was a wonder and inspiration to us all. Our own “House Band” led us at three events. Singing hymns while clapping our hands, or raising our voices to great heights with organ accompaniment and descants, singing softly about “our not so little light” and “breathing in, breathing out” all brought inspiration and joy. Keeping beat in rhythm to the Diamond State Concert Band at Ingathering started our year with joy. The work that Wendy and Ned Gladfelter did with our Explorers “rang” out joy at the holiday and for Earth Day and our Coffee House was a wonder and inspiration with people of all generations sharing their talents with each other. Our devoted choir members

“Scott Ward, our Honorary Minister of Music, picks music that adds so much to the meaning of the service.” — Choir members Jim and Lori Weddell
Inspired By Our Music

share their gifts each year, always a blessing, giving their time and talents so that we all may become more whole.

Jim and Lori Weddell attest to the impact that music at First Unitarian has on them:

“As UUs, we like the words in a service to be intellectually honest, but the message has a stronger impact when it touches our hearts. We find music to be a major vehicle for reaching our hearts and emotions. Making music requires attention to details such as notes, rhythms, and text. But music can reach our emotion which adds more power to the message. Scott Ward, our Honorary Minister of Music, picks music that adds so much to the meaning of the service.”

Here are just a few examples of the impact music can have. “When the Song of the Angel is Stilled, the Work of Christmas Begins” speaks of compassion, social justice and peace. “If I Had a Hammer” and “One Breath” sung at our Big Music Sunday celebrating the UU Seven Principles and Chalice Lighter Sunday, help to show how we, acting through our UU faith, can work towards a more just world, with music, not violence. Being able to do this is both empowering and inspiring.

“Music is not ink on a page. Music is joy.”
—Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music, First Unitarian Church
Why Grow? From the UUA’s publication *Growth for Unitarian Universalism,* “Growth is inevitable in healthy congregations. To be a healthy congregation is to develop responses that are sound and reasonable. To be healthy is to be vigorous, to have strength, and to use these qualities in taking action. When a congregation sees clearly its place and possibilities and understands its mission and purpose, it will make decisions that serve itself and its community well. Such a congregation will continue growing because of its health. Such a congregation is ready to serve people who need Unitarian Universalism.”

In 2014, as a result of a year-long strategic planning effort, our number one First Unitarian strategy became to grow our membership. As our planners put it, “Growth is hard. Growth is challenging. Yet, if we don’t step up to do our part to bring UUism to a vast and hurting world, who will?” Growth comes in many forms—our numbers, our spiritual maturity, our organizational maturity, and our outreach into the community. We have made great strides this year in many ways, focusing on having the voice of our liberal faith be heard in our community.

In the 21st century, seekers come to our church already knowing they are in sync with our values. They have already done much research on the internet on Unitarian Universalism and other liberal faiths. Knowing that, we have focused on building a new website that is oriented towards the seeker and launched it in recent months. In addition, we have a growing effort to enhance our social media presence, starting with Facebook, and Twitter.

Once seekers have decided to try us out, we want to ensure they feel welcomed without overwhelming them—a fine line to walk. This year, we have updated

“We reach out because Unitarian Universalism is something that’s worth sharing.”
— Reverend Michelle Collins, Assistant Minister, First Unitarian Church
Growing our Membership

our Welcome Table which is staffed by volunteers to help visitors find their way. When a visitor fills out a simple form with contact information, if they would like a call, we call them that same week. In addition, they receive an “email-a-week” welcoming them and inviting them to engage in the many activities of our church. When they are ready, they are added to our weekly and monthly eNews and Quest, delivered via email and they are invited to join us for our 3-session Pathways to Membership program. These sessions, run like our small group Connection Circles, help our visitors and us to get to know each other better as they learn about Unitarian Universalism, our First Unitarian values, mission and vision, and about the benefits and responsibilities of membership. One of our favorite activities is exploring the meaning of Unitarian Universalism using *Simple Gifts, Too*, a painting by nationally renowned artist P. S. Gordon, commissioned by All Souls Unitarian Church in Tulsa, Oklahoma to represent the simple gifts at the heart of Unitarian Universalism.

At the conclusion of the series, all are invited to sign our membership book if they are ready to make that commitment.

The membership cycle has only begun when our new members sign. Helping members to find their way, connect with others, serve from their passions and feel cared for is ongoing work in First Unitarian. Come join us!

“We will make no assumptions about our commonalities, but instead every week speak to those ways in which we could be different. And every week we do not deny that those differences exist, but instead invite everyone to our welcome table because of, not in spite of, those differences.”  
— Reverend Joshua Snyder, Senior Minister, First Unitarian Church
Contributions to the Community and the World

First Unitarian members, visitors and friends made the following contributions from May 2014—April 2015:

Clara Barton Camp Juvenile Diabetes $926
CYRE projects:
  African Book Project—2000 books collected $1,500
  Coffee House—Homeless shelter donation $200
  Coffee House—School of Rock Students donation $250
Delaware Coalition Against Domestic Violence $1,301
Emmanuel Dining Room (meal prepared and served for 200+, once a month) $2,174
Grants for Growth:
  UUFS (Salisbury, MD) for audio system & hymnals $1,572
  UUSD (Lewes, DE) for Sanctuary Capital Campaign $1,480
Independent Living for Young Adults:
  Grant fund $1,648
  Holiday project $2,458
LCS Faith Center $700
Murray Grove $718.
Southhold Universalist Church $1000
Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC):
  Guest at Your Table $698
  April special collection $1,048
Wilmington Peacekeepers $2,631
YWCA—house pin sales $1,000
Total donations through First Unitarian Society $21,304

Direct contributions by First Unitarian Members:
EDR International Dinners (approximately 180 seats purchased/year) $4,500
UUSC: Ebola Relief, Justice Sunday, stocks, endowment, major gifts & other miscellaneous gifts $42,222
2014—2015 Financial Information
March 31, 2015

Sources of Revenue

Investments and Fixed Assets

Net Assets (Unrestricted): $200,538

Net Assets (Restricted) $782,115

Capital Campaign Fund $1,253,227

Total Net Assets: $2,235,880

Your Dollars At Work

Safe, Accepted and Loved 40%
Gain new Perspectives 15%
Act on Shared Values 19%
Wonder, Inspiration and Joy 7%
Operations 19%

Pledges 17%
Rentals 67%
Heritage Fund 1%
Other 4%
Designated Donations 2%
Events 2%
Special Offerings 5%
Program Fees 0%
Interest 2%

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2014—2015 Ministers & Staff

Rev. Dr. Joshua Snyder, Senior Minister
Rev. Michelle Collins, Assistant Minister
Rev. Dr. Robert M. Doss, Minister Emeritus
Scott Ward, Honorary Minister of Music
Catherine Williamson, Director of Religious Education
Brandi Chavis, Congregational Administrator
Kanchalee Reeves, Publications Assistant
Marina VanRenssen, Business Manager
Anthony Chase, Supervisor of Building & Grounds
Cornell Waters, Night Custodian
Julia Davidson, Meghan Ruoff, Sophia Gorwar,
Grace Ruoff & Alicia Corrado—Childcare
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Ned Gladfelter  
Wendy Gladfelter  
Donna Gonzalez  
Vivian Gray  
Bill Hardham  
Edris Harrell  
Paul Jacobs  
Barbara Lenahan  
Jeffrey Lott  
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Paul Pinson  
Jon Ripsom  
Dave Sheppard  
Elizabeth Siftar  
Rev. Dr. Joshua Snyder  
Dale Stratton  
Chad Tolman  
Marina VanRenssen  
Scott Ward  
Ostin Warren  
Jim Weddell  
Lori Weddell  
David Weiss  
Keith Weiss  
Betty Wier  
Catherine Williamson  
Judy Windle  
Debbie 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

**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.

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