

Union
Congregational Church
100th Anniversary
1883-1983



UNION
CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH
FOUNDED 1883
100th ANNIVERSARY 1983
ALLIS BRADSHAW

UNION CONGREGATIONAL
CHURCH
100th Anniversary
1883-1983

3700 ALABAMA AVENUE • ST. LOUIS PARK, MINNESOTA

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**UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
OF MINNEAPOLIS**

Minneapolis Township,

Minnesota

1883

Membership 17

**UNION CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH
of the UNITED CHURCH OF CHRIST**

3700 Alabama Avenue

St. Louis Park, Minnesota

1983

Membership 604

How did we get from there to here -- from then to now?

This is a story of individuals and organizations; of bricks and mortar; of programs and celebrations; of devotion, sacrifice, determination and hard work; and of the Christian conviction which bound all of these together in creating the church which we love and whose Centennial we observe this year.

It is dedicated to all the good people, both the heralded and the unsung, whose contributions to Union Church over the years have earned them countless "stars in their crowns."

Written by Joyce Hildebrand

Historical materials were sorted and filed
by Dorothy Aarness and Janet Midtbo

MINISTERS OF THE CHURCH

Rev. B. F. Stuart	1881-1882	Rev. R. D. Orton	1920-1921
Rev. H. F. Tyler	1883-1884	Rev. Frank L. Erlougher	1921-1923
Rev. George A. Hood	1884-1886	Rev. Paul Bremicker	1923-1926
Rev. William M. Jones	1886-1891	Rev. Warren L. Bungler	1926-1929
Rev. J. W. Ferner	1891-1892	Rev. Charles D. Moore	1929
Rev. J. Lee Nott	1894-1895	Rev. R. L. Cramer	1929-1931
Rev. William Hardcastle	1896-1897	Rev. T. B. Madsen	1931-1945
Rev. Danniell D. Davis	1897-1899	Rev. Einar M. Martinson ¹	1946-1958
Rev. George F. Swinnerton	1902-1905	Rev. William M. Hull	1958-1959
Rev. Rowland S. Cross	1905-1910	(Interim)	
Rev. L. F. McDonald	1911-1912	Rev. Ellis Graber	1959-1974
Rev. William J. Warner	1913-1916	Rev. L. Edward Wollenweber	1974-1975
Rev. William C. A. Wallar	1917-1918	(Interim)	
Rev. Earle A. Munger	1919-1920	Rev. Lawrence J. Dunnewold	1975-

ASSOCIATE MINISTERS, ASSISTANT MINISTERS, MINISTERS OF CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

George Robinson, Minister of Christian Education	1952-1954
Walter Bishop, Assistant Minister ²	1954-1957
W. Brewster Willcox, Associate Minister ³	1961-1963
Robert Spalding, Minister of Youth and Christian Education ⁴	1965-1966
Roger Pohl, Associate Minister ⁵	1969-1974
Richard A. Wierwille, Minister of Christian Education	1974-1977
Richard Stenzel, Associate Minister	1978
Susan Adams, Associate Minister	1978-

1. Ordained in our church November 17, 1947
2. Ordained in our church, 1954
3. Ordained in our church, 1961
4. Ordained in his home church in Waseca, MN with our Moderator and Minister participating, 1966
5. Ordained in our church, 1970

EARLY DAYS, 1870-1893

The village of St. Louis Park had not yet been incorporated nor named when Union Congregational Church was founded. The area, informally called Elmwood, consisted of scattered farms in Minneapolis Township.

In 1870 a Mr. Hartwell of Minneapolis suggested to his pastor, Dr. H. A. Stimson of Plymouth Church, Minneapolis, that this neighborhood offered a fine field for missionary work, as it was entirely without religious services. The suggestion was acted upon promptly, and Sunday afternoon services were begun at once, held in Pratt School, on the corner of what is now Excelsior Blvd. and Wooddale Avenue. Dr. Stimson preached once a month and Mr. Hartwell read sermons on the other Sundays. A Sunday School was soon organized, at first conducted and staffed by volunteers from Plymouth Church.

In 1878 a chapel was built at a cost of \$500 across the road from the schoolhouse, on a lot at the southwest corner donated by Mrs. Margaret Scott. It was called Clarke Chapel in honor of Mr. Edward Clarke, a beloved former Sunday School worker.

On Wednesday, March 14, 1883, a council was convened at the Chapel and Union Congregational Church of Minneapolis was officially organized. Clarke Chapel became Union Church. There were seventeen charter members, eight coming by letter from Plymouth Church, three from other churches, and six on confession of faith. They were:

John J. Baston	Anna C. Hanke Patch
Dora Baston	Benjamin F. Bonney
Sarah E. Baston Waddell	Leonard C. Newcome
Emily Baston Rixon	Sarah E. Newcome
Andrew A. Craik	Richard S. Settle
Flora A. Craik	Robert S. Settle
John H. Craik	Ahrmon L. Lucas
Charles H. Hanke	Parmelia Lucas
Lorena E. Newell	

In 1885 a parsonage costing \$2500 was built on property south of the church donated by Christopher Hanke and C. G. Goodrich. It was used by our pastors through 1916 and then rented out.

A Manual of Union Congregational Church of Minneapolis, written in 1892 and quoted in a "History of Minneapolis and Hennepin County, Minnesota" edited by Colonel John H. Stevens, reports:

"The entire Church property is worth \$8,000. The Church has had three branch Sunday Schools; one in West Minneapolis, which has developed into the Mizpah Congregational Church; another School is at Edina and is in a prosperous condition. Recently a third Sunday School was organized across the Marsh among the factories. Union Church has a large active Ladies' Missionary and Aid Society, a prosperous Y.P.S.C.E. and a Mission Band. The Church is out of debt and contributes over \$300 annually to benevolences." The "School at Edina" developed into Edina-Morningside Community Church.

Union Church was the first church in the area. Its early membership included many of the forward-looking pioneer residents, among them two who were instrumental in incorporating the village of St. Louis Park in 1886, Joseph Hamilton and O. K. Earle. By 1890 membership had grown from 17 to 123 and its official name had been changed to Union Congregational Church of St. Louis Park, Minnesota.



The congregation at the Fiftieth Anniversary Celebration, March 19, 1933.

THE OLD CHURCH IN A NEW LOCATION, 1893-1941

As St. Louis Park began to take shape under the guiding hand of ambitious lumber baron T. B. Walker, the planned city centered around today's Wooddale Ave. and the Minneapolis and St. Louis tracks. Joseph Hamilton, at that time a deacon of Union Church, owned a large farm in that vicinity. He donated part of it to the church and in 1893 the original Union Church building, the old Clarke Chapel, was dismantled, moved, and reassembled with a partial basement at the corner of what is now Oxford and Alabama, our present location. (The story goes that Mrs. Emily Rixon, a lady to be reckoned with, did not want the church to be moved, as it was near her home, but while she was attending the World's Fair in Chicago the other faction just up and moved it.)

There is a big gap in our official records from 1893 to 1926. What we know about those years comes chiefly from reminiscences written for the 1941 Dedication booklet and from Howard Williams and other long time members. Howard is truly a wellspring of church lore. His memories of the church go back to 1905 when he started Sunday School as a very small boy.



We do know from blueprints located in 1939 that the plan had been to enlarge the church considerably after moving it, but because of the depression of 1893 that never came about. The church was virtually just a one room building. It had no running water, only a pump alongside the kitchen which frequently froze up in the winter. The furnace room was pressed into service for a Young Men's Bible Class. The members provided two long sheds along the alley to protect their horses from the north wind.

This little frame church served an ever-growing congregation and the community until 1941. It had movable pews which could be pushed around to form Sunday School class areas, or for games or square dances. Some of those old pews are now in use up in our balcony. At one time the 4th and 5th grade classes from Lincoln School across the street met in the church. The village Memorial Day services were always held there. Each year the Sunday School had its Christmas party and program there, with a big tree lit by candles -- fortunately there was never a fire.

When a small Methodist church in the area burned down its members joined us and the church was called Community Church of St. Louis Park from about 1927 to 1941, although its legal name always remained Union Congregational Church.

The oldest official Church Record which we have covers the years 1926-1945. The church had only part-time ministers, the Rev. T. B. Madsen serving much the longest term, 1931-1945. He was the church's spiritual leader and teacher; the impetus for the week-to-week operation of the church came from the members themselves, who were as dedicated and hard-working a group as could ever be found. For years the organization was simple: 4 Trustees, 2 Deacons, a Church Clerk, a Treasurer, a Chorister, a Sunday School Superintendent, all elected annually. The president of the Trustees presided at meetings of the congregation.

It is dangerous to single out individuals for their contributions -- so many did so much -- but here are some names which appear over and over again in the minutes, as members served in changing capacities: Gast, Rixon, Baston, Hamilton, Carleton, Whitfield, Bates, Downing, Simonson, Williams, Applequist, Ainsworth, Shinn, Liljenfors, Justad, Wentworth, Anderson, Ames, -- many others. Apparently none of them ever "grew weary in well-doing."



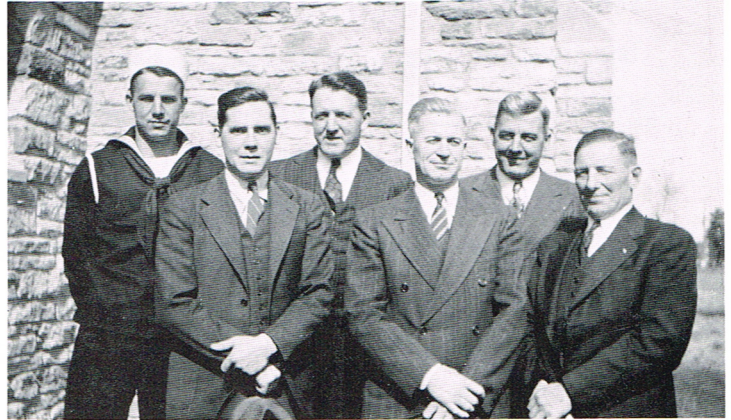
Reverend and Mrs. T.B. Madsen,
Robert and Paul.



Sunday School Class, 1924.



50th Anniversary Choir.



The six men most responsible for the building of the sanctuary.



The Sunday School, massed in the sanctuary, 1941.

Finances were always a problem, though the budget by today's standards seems unbelievably small. Even as late as 1937, for example, the Treasurer reported receipts of \$1788 for the year and disbursements of \$1760. The minister was paid \$842, the chorister \$250. (This budget did not include the Building Fund finances nor the separate improvements bought and paid for by the Ladies' Aid, the Choir, the Sunday School, etc. -- more about these organizations later.) These were years hit hard by the Depression. Frequently some of the more prosperous members dipped into their own pockets to pay the minister or the tax on the old parsonage. What the members couldn't give in cash or materials they gave in labor. There was no janitor hired for years. The members took care of the church themselves. They kept it painted. They put in lights and carpeting. They enlarged and improved the basement in 1932 (to 47' by 12'!) so that Sunday School classes and dinners could be held there. Most of these improvements were paid for by the Ladies Aid and later a group of younger women, the Junior Club. A description of the various money-making projects would fill a book.

All this while they discussed the need for a new church. As early as 1930 they had drawn up firm plans for one and started a Building Fund. The Annual Meeting minutes reveal that the members, as befits good Congregationalists, did not always see eye-to-eye. There was much disagreement on whether a new church should be built, and if so, where -- whether on the same location, or "farther away from the noise of the trains," on Goodrich and Jackson (now Goodrich and Alabama) or on some other property which had been offered. The members voted to stay on the same corner. Unfortunately all of these plans had to be shelved for a few years as the Depression of the 30's worsened.

During this period there was a full range of church services and activities, even in the limited space -- an active Sunday School; Senior and Junior Christian Endeavor; a strong choir; a Scout troop; women's groups. Benevolences were not neglected, nor participation in the Congregational Conference and the Congregational Union, although we often could not make the suggested apportionment.

From 1930 to 1936 we staffed and conducted a branch Sunday School at Oak Hill, meeting in Oak Hill School, and for a time conducted Sunday

afternoon worship there. This was our chief mission project of the period, continuing the outreach that began almost as early as our church itself.

The 50th Anniversary was celebrated with a Jubilee Dinner, March 16, 1933 and a Worship Service March 19. Two charter members, Mrs. Emily Rixon and Mrs. Sarah Waddell were present, still members, still living in The Park -- and still working in the kitchen with the rest of the Ladies Aid preparing the dinner! Former members and pastors came from long distances. The minutes read: "...a wonderful renewing of acquaintance of former years took place and all were happy."

The women's work was impressive; the choir was a vital contributor; the Sunday School thrived, even as crowded facilities made teaching difficult. As one of the older members later wrote, recalling the final service in the old church: "Many present had here been brought for baptism; the youth had been instructed, and the life covenant solemnized. From this room many had been brought to the last resting place. The old structure had to many symbolized the highest and the best in life, and many sacrifices had been made to retain it as such. It had been My Church."

THE NEW CHURCH, PLANNED, BUILT AND PAID FOR, 1937-1945

By 1937 the old building was in desperate shape. Plans were completed for a new building on the same site.

The parsonage property which the church still owned on Wooddale Ave. was sold in 1937 for \$3200. This became "seed money" for the new Building Fund. It was decided to wait until the Fund reached \$5000 before going ahead. On Mother's Day, 1939, Mrs. Emily Rixon, a charter member, Mr. Earl Ainsworth, Superintendent of the Sunday School, and Mr. Erik Liljenfors, Chairman of the Building Committee, broke ground for the present sanctuary.

The old church ran east to west and was about where our big sign is now. It overlapped the site of the new basement, so it was necessary to cut off some 20 feet at the west end and board it up. For one winter the only way the choir could get from the basement to the front of the church was to go outdoors through a basement door and come back in again through the main entrance. The choir was large, and a lot of cold air came in with them.

The basement was finished and capped by the end of the winter, 1939-1940, and services were held there for about a year. Because the economic situation was still so bad many people felt that this was the end of the line -- that we would never complete the church -- but Earl Ainsworth promoted a big church dinner in April of 1940, with Judge Luther Youngdahl as speaker, and stirred up enough enthusiasm so that the money started to come in. Some members even borrowed on their life insurance so as to contribute. Loans and grants were obtained and we were finally on our way toward completion.

The men of the church donated their time and did a great deal of the work themselves - there were many "church widows" from 1940 to 1941. Frank Bye, one of the Trustees, was in charge of all the stone and cement work. He saved and used the stone from the foundation of the old church; it now makes up the lower half of the tower. Matching stone, enough for all the rest of the church, was donated, coming from an old Pillsbury flour mill. We had electricians and painters and roofers who gave their time, and plenty of amateur help. Elvin Shinn and Kurt Scheibe gained fame by being the only ones willing to climb way up to the top of the sanctuary to stain the highest beams. One member said, "The church was built with blood, sweat -- but no tears." The cost was about \$25,000; its value, including donated labor and furnishings, was about \$35,000.

Not only much of the labor but many of the furnishings were donated by members, individually or in groups. Pews, pulpit, lectern, reredos, altar, font, church bell, stained glass windows, and practical items such as lights and a furnace were contributed, many of them as memorials. The lovely Rosette Window was a gift from the officers and children of the Sunday School.

On September 14, 1941, the new church was dedicated. Representatives came from the community, from other churches in the Park and in the Twin Cities, from the Congregational Conference, and just about everyone from our own church -- the roster of the faithful. The cornerstone, placed by Mrs. Ora Baston, and cemented in by Mrs. Harriet Gast and Frank Bye, Chief Mason, has three dates on it -- 1870 and 1883 on the south face and 1941 on the east face, marking the first mission church, the first official Union Congregational Church, and the laying of the cornerstone.

At the end of the old, the beginning of the new era, the membership was 209.

The Building Committee

N. W. Joubert, Attorney
 Erik Liljenfors, Chairman
 Edythe E. Applequist, Secretary

A. D. Harrington, Contractor
 Howard J. Williams, Financial Sec.
 Arthur W. Anderson, Treasurer

Earl Ames	Mrs. Herbert Carleton	Howard Perkins
Earl Ainsworth	Harry Carpenter	Arthur Rogers
George Andrus	Amos Gast	Elvin O. Shinn
Herbert Applequist	Harold Hofstrand	Mrs. E. O. Shinn
Mrs. Ora Baston	Willard G. Williams	Mrs. Harriet Simonson
Miss Bertha Bates	Joseph Justad	F. J. Whitfield
Mrs. Eleanor Black	Ernest Lewis	George C. Williams
Fred Borne	Rev. T. B. Madsen	George M. Williams
Frank Bye	Mrs. J. J. O'Bert	Mrs. Howard Williams

Officers of the Church — 1941

PASTOR

Rev. T. B. Madsen

CHOIR DIRECTOR AND ORGANIST

Mrs. Gordon H. Griebenow

BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Elvin O. Shinn, President
 A. T. Wentworth, Secretary
 Frank Bye
 Erik Liljenfors
 Arthur N. Rogers

SUNDAY SCHOOL SUPT.

Mr. S. E. Ainsworth

DEACONS

Joseph Justad
 Arthur W. Anderson

CHURCH CLERK

Mrs. S. E. Ainsworth

CHURCH TREASURERS

Mrs. Harriet Simonson
 Miss Frances Conner

DIR. OF RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Mrs. Eleanor Black



Breaking the ground for building of the new Community Congregational Church to be located at Alabama and Oxford Street, St. Louis Park, are left to right, Eric Liljenfors, chairman of the building committee; Mrs. Emily Rixon, 82, a charter member of Union Congregational Church, and Earl Ainsworth.

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In the new building the church activities were continued with thankfulness and enthusiasm, tempered by World War II and the leaving of many of our young men to serve in the Armed Forces. Finishing touches were put on the building; the Women's Club bought carpeting; equipment was completed; landscaping was done; signs were put on the main access streets. The first organ was purchased in 1943 at a cost of \$1795. The number of Trustees and Deacons was increased to take care of the needs of our growing membership - 294 in 1944.

In the fall of 1945 on the first of two 75th Anniversary observances (one in 1945 and one in 1958) we had a "Burn the Mortgage" Celebration. All members and organizations had been contributing and our new church was paid for in full. An entry in the ledger dated September 6, 1945, says simply:

"Board of Home Missions, balance on church, \$801.74"

Fittingly enough, the last entry in our oldest Church Record book tells of the 1945 unanimous choice of Einar M. Martinson to be the new pastor of Union Church following Rev. Madsen's resignation, and the decision to provide a parsonage for him and his family. A house at 3270 Webster Ave. was purchased but sold after a short time and the one at 6013 Goodrich Ave. bought.

THE MARTINSON YEARS, 1946-1958

1946 marked the beginning of a tremendous change in Union Church. Einar Martinson was our first full time minister. His wife, Edith, was an active church worker, being a member of the choir, and a Sunday School teacher as well as a gracious hostess opening the parsonage for dinners for board members, choir parties and committee meetings. He was young and energetic and full of new ideas; he felt that growth in membership was imperative. He knew The Park, having once been a teacher at Fern Hill School. He came at a time when St. Louis Park was burgeoning. World War II had just ended and hundreds of veterans, newly married and with G.I. bills in their pockets, headed for The Park. In 1940 there were 7,737 people living in The Park. By 1955, 30,000 more had joined them.

This sudden influx changed the well-established social and political patterns that had been formed over the years in the small community, and it changed the character of Union Church as well. The church received more than 100 new members in 1947 alone, and by 1948 the membership had jumped to 600. With the change in size came a change in tempo and in emphasis. A few families who had been stalwart supporters left the church, finding the changes too drastic. Many more came. In 1948 the Sunday

School enrollment was 455, evidence of the increase of young families. Pilgrim Fellowship, Pastor's Confirmation Class, a Boy Scout troop and a Cub Pack, Girl Scouts and Brownies, Church League Athletic teams, all provided interests for the younger population. At the same time Women's Fellowship was growing and there was a going Men's Club.

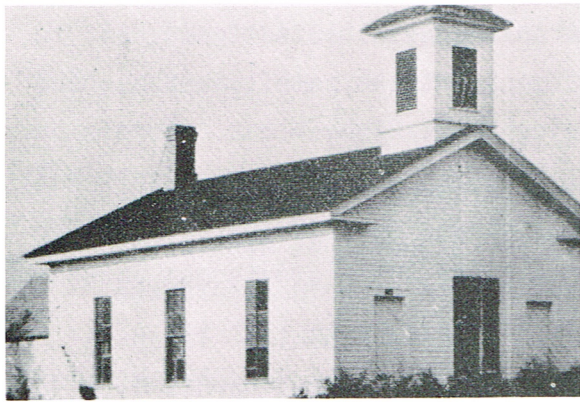
The new church rapidly found itself overcrowded. There were not enough evenings in the week to accommodate the groups that wanted to use the church basement. On Sunday classes had to be held across the street in the Village Hall (formerly the old Lincoln School). Teaching had been difficult in the crowded church building -- it was hardly less so in the Village Hall. Teachers had to keep an eagle eye on youngsters who liked the blueprints and drafting instruments, the rubber stamps and the record books. Some rooms were declared off limits and classes had to meet in the halls, and even in the parsonage. It was not an atmosphere conducive to worshipping and learning. The need for more office space, a larger general meeting room and an adequate kitchen was also evident.

By 1949 the congregation at its Annual Meeting recognized the need for larger facilities. A General Building Committee was appointed and went to work. Architects were chosen; plans were drawn up, revised, reworked and presented to the congregation at the Annual Meeting in January 1950 and it was voted to proceed. At the time of that meeting the Women's Club had given \$1000 to add to a previous Building Fund of \$363. The architects had been paid \$900. We had a grand total of \$463 left to work with. But we had faith, and good people. During the following months colony meetings were held so that all members could study the plans and make pledges. Special meetings were called to authorize obtaining loans. Once again we were on our way. While not as many people had a hand in the actual construction as they did in the building of the sanctuary, the cooperative venture was no less prodigious. Over 225 people participated in one way or another by the time the building was completed, not counting those who simply pledged.

Many of the names of the Executive Building Committee have a familiar ring:

O. B. Erickson, Chairman	C. E. Sandvig, Financial Sec.
Otto Domian, Vice Chairman	Harry Carpenter, Treasurer
C. Carlberg, Recording Sec.	

James Ash	Herbert Davis	Willard Keller
S. Earl Ainsworth	Herbert Lefler	Mrs. Dena Liljenfors
Elvin Christman	George Jaros	Howard Lunan
		Mrs. C. E. Sandvig



Pratt School — first Sunday School meeting place.



1949 — first graders, Lincoln School Sunday School.



Groundbreaking for Education Building, 1950. Einar Martinson, Minister — shovel in hand.



Children and Youth Choirs, 1949. L. Hyatt — Director; E. Griebenow — Organist.



A Women's Fellowship Circle doing "hand-work" in the 1950s.



Boy Scouts



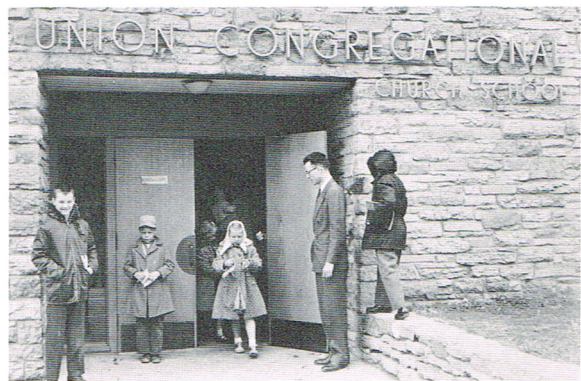
Senior Pilgrim Fellowship — 1952.



Laying of the cornerstone for the Education Building, 1951.



Church Reception.



Leaving Sunday School, Walter Bishop, Associate Minister on right.

The original contract for the building was about \$180,000, not including equipment. The money was raised by a mortgage on the church property, grants and loans from the Board of Home Missions, by heroic money-making efforts of church organizations, and by payment of members on their three-year pledges.

On a miserable, cold, rainy, joyous Sunday morning, April 8, 1951, ground was broken for the new building. A Cornerstone Laying Service was held Sunday, May 27, 1951 with the Rev. Thomas Goodwin, Executive Secretary and Minister of the Congregational Conference of Minnesota preaching. The Union Congregational Church School was dedicated on Sunday, February 24, 1952 and in a series of services throughout the following week.

We moved into the new building an inch at a time. As soon as each room was ready it was put to use. Women's Fellowship had its first meeting there in December 1951, and a number of classes were being held there well before the actual Dedication. It has proved to be a worthy and versatile building, the home of many spiritual and social activities for the church itself and for the community. Since 1952 the only major changes have been (1) complete remodeling of the kitchen in 1960 to comply with a new City Health Code, the cost borne by the Women's Fellowship; (2) gradual conversion of the parlor into a Parlor-Library beginning in 1963, resulting in a fine Library under a fine Library Committee; (3) remodeling the office space for greater efficiency and attractiveness; (4) remodeling and redecorating the church basement in 1970-71. Repairs and maintenance of church and parsonage are, of course, always with us.

Over a period of years we bought up the old residences west of the Church School Building on West 37th Street to protect us from industrial encroachment and to keep open the possibility of expanding. Just recently, however, the last of these houses was torn down and the space converted to a parking lot, available for our use, in a mutually beneficial deal with Color-Ad Corporation, a company located across West 37th Street from the church.

Our only present debt is a low-interest loan to pay for the new roof put on the Church School Building (which we now usually call the Christian Education Building) in 1976.

Much has been written here about the history of our building. It is far easier to research and record facts and figures and dates -- the tangibles -- than it is to convey the spiritual needs and aspirations which have directed our members. But the building is only a means to an end -- service to God and to our fellowmen -- and that should never be forgotten.

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During the Fifties, under Einar Martinson's tireless leadership, there were some "firsts" and some "peaks."

...the first joint Thanksgiving service with Aldersgate Methodist Church was held in 1950. It has been an annual event since.

...two identical worship services each Sunday were begun, with two separate Senior Choirs.

...Women's Fellowship reached an active membership of 171 with 11 Circles.

...there was a full complement of young people's Confirmation Classes and three Pilgrim Fellowship groups.

...a Couples Club flourished; there was also a Uniters Club, a younger group, of 40 couples, both social/service groups.

...a Men's Club was renewed, after several abortive attempts to start one.

...by 1957 the membership had grown to 1148 and Church School enrollment to 653. However, though the listed membership was high there were many "on paper" members, totally inactive. In fact, at one Annual Meeting, with important business to be transacted, there was not a quorum present. Determined members got on the phones, and went out and rang doorbells at the homes of nearby members. To fill in the time some of the ladies made coffee, thawed out some Christmas cookies, and served refreshments. Finally enough people showed up so the meeting could go on.

...a good, workable revision of an old patchwork Constitution was adopted. (Among other things, deaconesses were granted equal status with deacons!)

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On October 1, 1958 Einar Martinson resigned to become minister of a suburban Chicago church. His resignation was accepted with deep regret and appreciation for all he had done for Union Church in its "growing up" years.

On February 22, 1959 the Rev. Ellis Graber was issued a letter of call. The Trustees were authorized to sell the parsonage at 6013 Goodrich Ave. and to purchase a new one at 3880 Brookview Drive at a cost of \$30,000. On June 25, Ellis Graber and his family -- and his hives of bees -- arrived. He was installed as minister of Union Congregational Church on December 6, 1959.

Thus the breath-taking era of the Fifties in Union Church neared its end. It was apparent that growth had tapered off and a different future lay ahead.



Einar Martinson.



Pilgrim Fellowship Choir, 1953.



Sunday School worship. Note all those benches.



Board Meeting, 1950s.

THE GRABER YEARS, 1959-1974

Ellis Graber and his wife, Delpha, came to us from a Mennonite church in Souderton, Pennsylvania. They were natives of South Dakota and Kansas who had deep roots in the Midwest. Rev. Graber was a superb pulpit man and an efficient organizer. Financially he steered us out of the red and into the black. The pace of the Fifties had left our records in something of a shambles and he got them straightened out. He had lofty goals for Union Church; he demanded much of his congregation, but he demanded even more of himself. Delpha Graber, a musician of almost professional caliber, was an invaluable partner to her husband, directing several choirs, serving as a soloist in the Senior Choir, adopting the Ladies' Aid, and capably turning her hand to anything needed.

1960 was a shakedown year, with a complete turnover in staff. Lay people filled in nobly, no activity suffered, and by the end of the year reorganization was complete. The membership dropped, largely because of a weeding out of inactive members.

1961 was significant. At a special meeting of the congregation on May 7, 1961, we voted to become a member of the United Church of Christ. U.C.C. had been born in 1957, a merger of the Congregational Christian Churches and the Evangelical and Reformed Churches. Our church had vacillated, approving the merger in principle as far back as 1948 when it was being discussed and then rescinding our approval in 1956 because



Youth Dinner, 1960s.



Ellis Graber.



Congregational Meeting.

...in 1966, Howard and Dora Williams and Dena Liljenfors for their work in Union Church over many years. Howard served on the Board of Trustees continuously from 1929-1945 and in many other capacities later. Dena was a Sunday School teacher par excellence, among her other talents. (Just one of the things Howard and Dora had done was to run off the bulletins every Saturday on an ancient mimeograph machine in their home.)

...Bob Emeott came to us in 1971 to help with "Amahl and the Night Visitors" and remained as unofficial "artist-in-residence," keeping the church beautiful with banners and decorations and directing some memorable productions.

Practically, much was accomplished:

...in 1962 the sanctuary was completely redecorated, floor to ceiling.

...in 1966 the exterior trim of the entire church was painted by volunteers -- about 500 hours of volunteer labor. Many "Work Days" have been held since, of immeasurable benefit to the church.

...in 1967 the sanctuary was air-conditioned, thanks to a gift from an anonymous donor.

A special anniversary was noted:

...in 1968 Union Church celebrated its 85th Anniversary. Einar Martinson returned to fill the pulpit on March 17, and also participated in a Mortgage Burning, retiring all indebtedness on our church building.

To our traditional special observances at Christmas and Easter was added a beautiful Maundy Thursday Upper Room Service.

Annual Meeting, January 1967: "Record Snow Storm -- 20 degrees below zero -- 150 present" says something about loyalty.

And yet by 1971 all was not well. Membership and attendance dropped. Adults were not responding to the adult education offerings. Young people were losing interest. This was not just a local situation -- it was happening everywhere. We were troubled, and our worries exacerbated some internal differences of opinion. In their report for the year 1973 the Diaconate put it well: "We have tried to be both the conscience of the congregation and the enablers of change."

In 1974 our whole staff -- Ellis Graber, Roger Pohl, the Church Secretary, and Vivian Timmerman, Director of Christian Education -- resigned, effective in August and September. Our laity responded to this crisis in their usual splendid fashion and tided us over until Rev. Edward Wollenweber came for a year as Interim Minister and Richard Wierwille as Minister of Christian Education.



Ainsworths and Shinns receive special recognition.



Joyce Hildebrand, Uniter Editor.



Roger Pohl, Associate Minister.



Annual Meeting, 1964.

MODERN HISTORY, 1975 —

On June 10, 1975 members of Union Church voted to issue a call to the Reverend Lawrence J. Dunnewold. He accepted, and became our senior minister on September 1, 1975. Very quickly he became "Larry" to everyone, an indication of the trend toward informality that was to come. The people of Union Church soon recognized their good fortune -- they had "called" one person but two had answered! Elinor Dunnewold has been an active and enthusiastic partner with Larry in every aspect of church life.

Larry has made a determined effort to find out what our members want to establish as goals -- what kind of a program we want or don't want -- what kind of a schedule we prefer. His first Annual Report stated: "everybody will be in on the planning. It doesn't have to be done Larry Dunnewold's way." To that end some form of survey has been made each year. Listening Calls, a Day of Dialogue, "I Wish" sessions, have all elicited ideas, opinions and suggestions around which the Boards could shape their plans.

...It became evident that no single type of worship service is right for all of our members. We are far less homogeneous than in former years, when we were strictly a family-oriented church. We have many new young adult members, some with children and some not; singles of all ages; older members, married or widowed. Trial and error resulted in the present revised schedule with an informal service at 9:00 A.M. and a more conventional service at 10:30, with classes for all ages regularly at 10:30 A.M. and occasional special ones at 9:00 A.M. Some innovations have made our services a bit more relaxed, less stereotyped, with a feeling of celebration -- consider, for example, Larry's carrying a baby up and down the aisle to introduce it to the congregation before baptism. Joyful.

...In 1973 Susan Adams came to us as Associate Minister, the first woman so to serve in Union Church. As an individual and as a staff member she has added a valuable new dimension to the leadership of Union Church. Fully as many women as men are now serving on our Boards and in other capacities (Treasurer, for example) -- a far cry from 25 years ago when

the deaconesses were first "granted equal status with the deacons." Every effort is being made to use inclusive language, as encouraged by the last Synod.

...The Stewardship schedule has been changed, with the adoption of the budget and the stewardship drive coming near the end of the year rather than in January. If necessary a revised budget may then be voted on at the Annual Meeting.

...There has been much opportunity to "break bread together" at breakfast worships, potluck luncheons, Lenten dinners, etc.

...An "Over 60's" program, started in 1978, has been tremendously successful, and there is also a Retired Men's breakfast group, meeting the needs of our older members.

...A major change was made in the handling of our benevolences. Until 1976 the Benevolence Board was invariably the last to receive its budgeted amount and was at the mercy of year-end giving, often falling short. That meant that the recipients of our Benevolence funds in turn could not count on funds on time or in full. In 1976 we voted to allocate at least 18% of all contributions given as budget pledge income to the Board of Benevolence on a monthly basis for its budget commitments, even if we had to borrow money to meet Current Expense in case of a deficit. The policy has continued, with the percentage increasing to 21% for 1982. Meanwhile our response to special requests -- Neighbors in Need, One Great Hour of Sharing and Harvest Home, has steadily increased. We are "The Church that Cares."

...Adult education is finally coming into its own. Adult retreats are increasingly well attended. Groups are getting together for study on week nights as well as Sundays.

...We have an active Social Ministries Committee and are more concerned about social issues than ever before. The Nestle boycott and the Nuclear Freeze discussions are examples. On very short notice we sponsored a Southeast Asian family, the Praks, in conjunction with Lutheran Social Services.

...We have entered the computer age, thereby streamlining many of our office and financial procedures.

...We do not stand alone. Both before and after the merger our ministers and laymen have been active in the local and state organizations of the church, but just now we are especially well represented. Roger Knight, of the United Church of Christ Office for Church Life and Leadership, is a member of Union Church -- and what assets he and his wife, Beth, are to us. Lou Flagg, who has been a tower of strength to Union Church since 1951, is Moderator of the Minnesota Conference. Larry and Sue have just finished important assignments. In 1979 Reformation Sunday was celebrated by 2000 U.C.C. members at the St. Paul Cathedral (a first for any Protestant group). Our choir, our banners by Bob Emeott, and 200 of our members made a big contribution.

ORGANIZATIONS THROUGH THE YEARS

Over the years we have tried to utilize our fine building through the week to meet the needs of many groups in the church and the community. On occasion we have rented to outside groups, for example (1) to our Jewish neighbors for a once-a-week service while their synagogue was being built; (2) to the St. Louis Park Women's Club until they had a permanent place; (3) to Montessori schools from 1965-1976; (4) at present to a variety of AA sponsored support groups several times a week.

We sponsored a self-supporting, licensed Nursery School from 1953-1976. As needs changed it was phased out and replaced with a Day Care Center for infants.

Many groups, social or service or a combination, have met in Fellowship Hall at one time or another -- Couples Clubs, a Singles Club, Men's Club, Square Dancers, Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts. At present we have a bridge group; Over-60's; a Retired Men's Group. Choirs and Youth Groups are here weekly. Organizations have come and gone, but there are three components of the life of Union Church which have been continuous since our very origin and which are deserving of special mention: The Church School; the Choir; the women's groups.

The Church School

Sunday School services began almost simultaneously with church services in the mission church in 1870. Mr. Conant of Plymouth Church was in charge, with volunteers from Plymouth serving as teachers. Gradually our own people took over the teaching. Howard Williams can testify that

the Sunday School was going strong in 1905 when he first attended it in the old church at our present location. There was much emphasis on the Sunday School, the statement being reiterated: "If we take care of the Sunday School we need not fear for the future of our church."

Until 1940 the Sunday School Superintendent was the only designated leader of Christian Education. Earl Ainsworth and Joe Justad served for many years. That year, with the Sunday School enrollment up to 166, Mrs. Eleanor Black became our first Director of Religious Education. Under her direction a Vacation Church School was started, running for two weeks during the summer. In 1976 seven churches in St. Louis Park combined forces to conduct a Community Vacation Church School, but this was short-lived.



Vacation Bible School, 1950s.



Youth Breakfast, 1960s.



Vacation Bible School, 1968.



Adult Bible Study.



"The Boy" at Sunday School.



Sunday School Class 1950s.

Church School (as we now call it) enrollment grew so fast in the early 50's that there had to be a full schedule of classes at both 9:30 and 11:00 A.M. Mrs. Lorinda Christman ("Rindy") who had been Church School Superintendent became Director of Religious Education from 1957-1960 and did outstanding work. There was a hiatus until 1967 during which many people shared the responsibility, then Mrs. Vivian Timmerman came to us as D. R. E. and served until 1974. She was most effective and much loved.

In the 70's there was a distressing decrease in Church School enrollment and interest by young people. Adult education classes were added to our program but the response there was also slow. As has been indicated, the latter seems definitely to be picking up. Church School enrollment is still low, partly because of the aging of that same St. Louis Park population which caused such a boom in the 50's. In spite of the reduced numbers our Church School has much to offer to the children and to the church. It remains to be seen whether the pendulum will swing back again as the "empty nesters" in the Park make way for a new group of young families -- but we will be ready.

At present we have a wonderful Youth Group which has become very service-oriented and has been a tremendous help to other organizations who appreciate their willingness and energy. Retreats, canoe trips and other experiences have enriched their program. Their Easter breakfasts and their Youth Sunday are special features.

The Board of Christian Education also sponsors participation in the Church League athletics. The first team we have on record was a basketball

team in 1941. No report on the standings that year, but we have many trophies on display now.

Choirs

What would a church be without its music? Although a connected history of our choirs is not available we know the founders recognized the importance of music -- in the very first Constitution a Chorister was one of the elected officers of the church. We have little written information about the early directors (except that one of them sued the church for non-payment of her \$200 a year salary!) until the arrival in 1932 of Edna Michaelson, whom some present members will remember. In 1936 she was succeeded by Elizabeth Cruzen, who was to be with us for 34 years, most of the time as Mrs. Gordon Griebenow. (Russell Rude joined the choir that same year and is still going strong in the tenor section.) Elizabeth served as organist, Senior Choir director, and director of whatever youth choir needed her. She brought a musicianship, enthusiasm and rapport with the choir members that made her very difficult to replace.

Several people served for short periods until Don Salisbury came in 1976. Meanwhile Peggy Johnson, our present organist, had joined us in 1974 and has done noble duty directing all the choirs for awhile, and generally holding the pieces together.

The choir in the old frame church was far more than a singing group. It was a real driving force in the life of the church; it sponsored programs and money-raising projects; it contributed to the Building Fund; it was self-supporting, buying its own robes and music. The story goes that occasionally, when there weren't enough men in the congregation to pass the offering plates, men from the choir would come down and do it. It was also a big part of the social life of the church, holding steak fries and corn roasts and other parties. Anyone who could sing at all wanted to belong to the choir.

When we moved to the new sanctuary the choir loft was one of the few disappointments, proving to be an acoustical disaster which we are still trying to overcome.

In 1951 the choir was challenged by the beginning of two identical Sunday worship services, with a separate choir at each. Members all practiced together but, in theory at least, divided into two choirs on Sunday. (Some members did double duty, departing discreetly after the anthem at the

second service.) On special Sundays the two choirs combined and sang twice. Now that the character of the two services is quite different the present single choir sings regularly only at the second service. It is always an important part of Christmas and Easter celebrations. Some outstanding special programs have been presented. There is a remarkable esprit de corps; Larry Dunnewold has said that the choir is the best public relations group in the church -- many new members of the church have come in via the choir.

Youth choirs have been intermittent, there having been at least one as far back as 1927. Their number reached a peak in 1953 when we had well over 100 members in three choirs. Under the direction of Leon Hyatt they sang at regular intervals for worship services, and at special programs and Easter.

At present we have no youth choirs but we do have three excellent and popular Bell Choirs, covering all age groups, with Peggy Johnson directing. They play frequently as a prelude to the morning service.

Women's Groups

The third unbroken thread that ties us to that little church of a century ago is our Ladies Aid. The Ladies Aid, organized in 1885 as the Women's Missionary and Aid Society of the Union Congregational Church, is the oldest uninterrupted organization of our church and, indeed, of St. Louis Park. Until 1935 they were the only women's group in church. At that time a group of younger women who were employed in the daytime and wanted to meet in the evening formed a Junior Club, a sort of younger sisterhood to "The Aid." The Junior Club evolved into our Women's Fellowship, dividing into Circles in 1946 under the leadership of Jean Sandvig and Georgia Reed when the group became cumbersome. Our present Women's Fellowship consists of all the women of the church. Within this encompassing membership are several Circles, each with a different slant or project. The Ladies Aid has preserved its identity, its name and its spirit, although the members are no longer able to be very active..

The accomplishments of the women of the church have been awesome. In the very early days the social life of the community revolved around their weekly meetings. They supported missions; they pledged \$20 per month to the church, back when \$20 was a lot of money; they earned money to maintain and improve the old church and to help pay for the new; they prepared endless dinners. They worked and they gave unstintingly.



Larry Dunnewold.



Preparing a delicious dinner.



An adult Bell Choir.



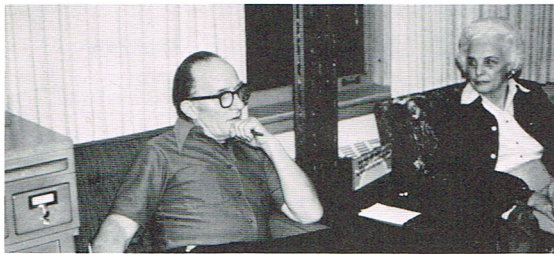
A rummage sale.



We celebrated our country's Bicentennial.



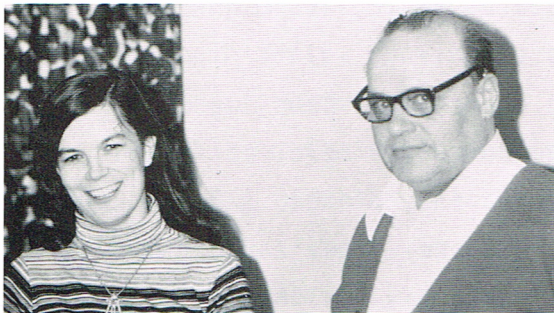
Youth Group.



Arnolde Peterson; Artist, Bob Emeott.



Softball players.



Margaret Johnson, Organist; Don Salisbury.



Sue Adams.

After we moved into the new church there continued to be, of necessity, much emphasis on raising money to pay for the building and its equipment. However, this was by no means the only function of the Women's Fellowship even at that time. Through its Volunteer and its Friendly Service wings it has dispensed much material help to needy organizations -- cash, clothing, food, household items, health kits, school kits, etc. -- as well as taking care of all sorts of chores for our own church. All credit goes to Dorothy Aarness for rounding up this effort for many years. An added service recently has been participating in Dinner At Your Door, the delivery of hot meals to shut-ins, with Darlene Malmstedt representing us. Four special events each year in our own church offer all the women of the church a chance to come together. Circles meet monthly, carrying out their own projects which are all related in one way or another to the aims of the Fellowship.

We can't ignore money-raising entirely. Rummage sales, a plant sale and a recently revived Holiday Fair have been profitable and have involved many new people. As for the spending of these profits, Women's Fellowship is pleased to report that although among other things, it takes care of the considerable expense of maintaining and improving our church kitchen, its budget "For Others" now equals or exceeds its budget "For Ourselves."

As has been true from the beginning, the activities of the women of Union Church bring their own rewards in friendships made, in social fellowship, in the inspiration of devotions and special retreats, and in the satisfaction that comes from doing a good job together for a good cause.

AND WHAT OF THE FUTURE?

We are not standing still. Our leadership will not permit it, and that is good, for we must look ahead and be the kind of church which reaches out to the people of the future and draws them in. We are aware that great challenges lie ahead for all churches, but with a solid one hundred years behind us we are not afraid to look to the future.

The builders of God's Kingdom on earth serve their hour here and then pass on their tools, their faith, their dreams. It is our privilege to be true to a great heritage.