



# UU REVUE

Summer 2016

*Hawthorne  
Helps  
The  
Parsonages  
Memorial  
Garden  
Nodding  
Wild Onions  
Eco-Snatchers*





*Photo by Ron Chrisope*

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## UU Revue

The *UU Revue* is produced quarterly by the First Unitarian Universalist Communications Committee.

Articles in *UU Revue* focus on the positive work done by First UU members and friends, demonstrating our congregation's commitment to the Seven Principles.

Much of the volunteering by our members is behind the scenes and, unless you are closely involved with these efforts, you may not be aware of the time and dedication, the challenges, or the joy experienced by those involved – not to mention the impact on those who benefit from their work.

By telling the stories of our wonderful members, we hope to inspire others to volunteer, become active, and find the reward of working with the church.

## Our Mission

To create a compassionate, welcoming community that nurtures spiritual growth and practices justice



# Hawthorne Helps

*“Where does this come from?”*

*“Why do you do this?”*

By Kathy Brutinel

As our church's partnership with the Willow Creek Middle School backpack program was winding down, Sandy MacLaughlin and Sandy Ramage put their heads together. For some time Sandy MacLaughlin—urged on by UU Julie LarsonKeller, an Early Childhood Family Education teacher at the Hawthorne Education Center—had been hoping to start a food shelf at the Center, where about 500 adults learn English, gain literacy, work toward adult diplomas or GEDs, learn how to support the success of their children, prepare for citizenship, and bridge to a career or college. While they are in the process of upgrading their skills, about 95% live at or below the poverty level; about 90% are immigrants or refugees.

Arrangements for food distribution were not working out, however, so Sandy Ramage suggested that our church could supply items that cannot be purchased with Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program (SNAP) benefits, such as toiletries, cleaning products, and paper goods. Sandy and Sandy approached the Hawthorne administration with this new idea and were

given enthusiastic approval and a small space for storage in the gym.

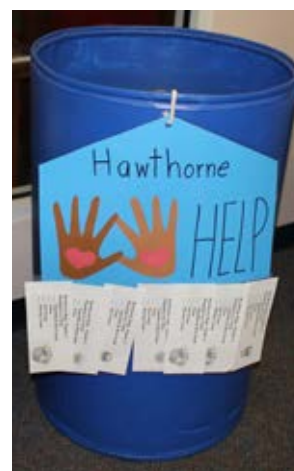
With seed money from unused Willow Creek backpack funds and an allocation from the Social Justice Council budget, the store opened in April 2015. It began as a trial project during the last two months of the 2014-15 school year, coordinated by Sandy MacLaughlin, Sandy Ramage, and, for the first several months, Aleta Borrud.

The week before it opened, Sandy and Sandy personally visited most of the classrooms to describe the project and encourage students to stop by and select two items at no cost. The fact that 12-20 people showed up each day encouraged the coordinators to continue into the summer sessions. During the summer, store use increased to 45-50 shoppers each day.

When the store re-opened in the fall, nearly 200 people showed up. By the end of September 350 people had “shopped” at the store. Sandy and Sandy knew they had identified a basic need and our church could play an important part in filling it.

## Inventory

The first thing a store needs is inventory. To partially fill this need, the Hawthorne Helps barrel in the coat room was born. Each month members of our congregation are invited to contribute items for the store. Sandy MacLaughlin keeps the creative juices flowing by matching the items to the season, when she can. In February the list included throat lozenges, hand soap, and hand lotion to combat coughs, germs, and dry skin. The March list focused on vegetable and herb seeds, facial tissue, and sun screen. Non-seasonal combos often include cleaning supplies (dish soap, laundry soap, and cleanser), personal care products (toothpaste/brushes, floss, shampoo, hand sanitizer,



*Pathfinders class helps sort the donations*



deodorant, and shaving cream), and paper products (facial tissue, toilet paper, and paper towels).

During an RE Social Justice Sunday in September, Sandy MacLaughlin talked with our children about families who come to Rochester to live in a safer place and how hard the parents work to learn English, get an education, and become citizens. Sandy explained that they often do not have enough money to purchase necessities for their families, so our congregation started a mini-store where they can pick up things like toilet paper, toothpaste, and soap. It didn't take the RE students long to realize how they would feel if they didn't have those necessities. They took what they learned home with them and donations to the Hawthorne Helps barrel increased.

Although the focus of the store is not on food, donations of fresh produce are welcome during the summer months. Last summer the Northwest Farmer's Market donated excess produce from May to September and has committed to continue this summer. Their donation is particularly convenient since the market is on Tuesday, so the produce requires only overnight storage. UUs are also encouraged to plant an extra row for the students. If you might have fresh produce or flowers to donate, contact Sandy Ramage to work out the logistics.

## Volunteers

Hawthorne Helps also needs a staff—UU volunteers. One way to volunteer is to help at the store, which is open on the second and fourth Wednesdays of every month from 9:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. and 3:00 to 6:00 p.m.. Trained church members use SignUp Genius to sign up for shifts of varying lengths.



## What can YOU do to sustain Hawthorne Helps?

- ♦ Use your public speaking skills to recruit community partners.
- ♦ Use your creativity to invent and organize FUNdraisers.
- ♦ Use your math skills to help the RE students sort and tally the coat room barrel donations.
- ♦ Use your shopping skills to find bargains and pick up supplies.
- ♦ Use your organizational skills to coordinate the supplies and volunteers for one Wednesday store each month.
- ♦ Use your people skills to help students shop and make them feel like valued members of our community.
- ♦ Use your literary skills to find (or write) affirmations about the value of study and learning.
- ♦ Use your green thumb to grow vegetables, fruits, and flowers to donate.
- ♦ Use your generosity to donate items to the Hawthorne Helps barrel in the coat room.

Each Wednesday a volunteer coordinator takes responsibility for setting up the tables, organizing the products on tables, and signing in the shoppers. No registration is necessary, but the sign-in procedure keeps track of the number of people who are using the store. The remaining volunteers answer questions about the products and write down what is taken for inventory purposes. As of April, 30 UU volunteers had been screened and trained. This process includes a background check, training on confidentiality and boundaries, and information about the program procedures.

Other UUs can volunteer for jobs that are not dictated by the Hawthorne schedule. See the box above to learn how YOU can help.

## Money

And the store needs money. Sandy MacLaughlin estimates that the annual budget is 3600 donated items and \$3,600.00. Our church has been generous in this latter regard also. Support has come from the September 2015 Share the Plate, a Clara Barton Guild



*Nancy Harrell and Lyn Smith*

donation, a Christmas collection on December 20, and direct member donations.

Recognizing that UUs alone cannot sustain the cost long term, however, Sandy MacLaughlin reached out to potential faith, business, and community supporters. Church by church and organization by organization, Sandy – with her generous and indefatigable spirit – has begun to build a network of support.

Bethel Lutheran Church is a neighbor of Hawthorne Education Center, and it was the first and, so far, most generous partner. The church held a family sock hop on Halloween (collecting 141 items and \$16 cash), wrote a grant for a \$250 VISA card from Thrivent Financial, donated \$200 from Bethel Children's Ministry Team and Bethel Quilters, purchased 62 toothbrushes and 84 tubes of toothpaste, and provided knitted hats. And the best thing is that they have expressed a commitment to continuing the partnership.

Other partners include the Christ United Methodist Church Inquiring Spirits Adult Education Class, the First Presbyterian Women's Ruth and Priscilla Circles, Peace United Church of Christ, the Seventh Day Adventist Church, St. Luke's Episcopal Church, the Congregational Church UCC, and the Kiwanis Day Makers. Sandy plans to approach other faith communities and organizations in the coming year, with the hope that many of them will commit to support over the long term.

Sandy also arranged to be part of the "wooden nickel" program at People's Co-op. Since every plastic bag costs the Co-op 5 cents, they provide a 5-cent bag

credit in the form of a wooden nickel if you bring your own re-usable bag. In February and March UUs and other Co-op shoppers were able to donate their nickels to the Hawthorne Helps jar.

## Love

The final thing that the program needs – and has in abundance as far as I observed one Wednesday afternoon – is love.

Receiving 4 items each month doesn't seem like much (though one certainly might disagree if having to choose between food and toilet paper), but the Hawthorne Helps students receive far more than that. Sandy Ramage says that students are amazed that complete strangers care about them. According to Sandy, they often ask "Where does this come from? Why do you do this?"

Sandy Ramage does it because she wants to create a welcome and supportive home to people who are working really hard to fit into a new community. She wants to provide a boost to people who are isolated by language, transportation, and cultural differences. Sandy likes the quieter afternoon hours when she has more opportunity to get to know some of the students. When Sandy shared her shaky Russian with an Eastern European woman, the woman became less embarrassed by her shaky English. By sharing recipes with a woman from Sudan, Sandy showed respect for the woman's knowledge and gained a great new way to cook.

Sue Wheeler does it because she knows the power of a smile. Sue usually works the busy morning shift,

*Sandy MacLaughlin*





so has little time for chit chat, but she can still offer the shoppers an open face and a welcoming smile. “I figure they don’t get a lot of friendly smiles in Rochester, so it’s the least I can do,” says Sue. The staff at Hawthorne agrees. Sandy Ramage reports they have told her that the students are often on edge. According to staff members, people look at the immigrants and refugees as terrorists and the students are sometimes afraid they’re going to be sent home. “You’re not only providing stuff, but a warm smile.”

For Sandy MacLaughlin, Hawthorne Helps is a “labor of love.” On the afternoon I visited Hawthorne Helps, Sandy arrived about 4:00 p.m., having dashed over from Riverside Elementary, where she had just finished up her day as a substitute teacher. Her husband John, a self-described “fill-in guy,” had, indeed, been filling in in her absence. Sandy immediately began checking the inventory, while simultaneously greeting the Hawthorne students who are drawn to her familiar friendly smile.

Sandy brought the news that the Rochester School Board had just decided to remodel the Hawthorne gym in order to add 3 early childhood classrooms and a Certified Nursing Assistant classroom – great news for students, but bad news for our storage area. Nonetheless, Julie Nigon, Manager of Outreach & Accountability at Hawthorne, has assured Sandy that new space will be found. Hawthorne Helps, which celebrated its first anniversary in April, has become a valued partner at the Education Center, and Julie knows that the Sandys and their UU troops will find a way to continue their success.



“Hawthorne Helps strives to provide support that affirms personal dignity, welcomes newcomers to our community and encourages all students’ educational success.”

*Kathy Brutinel is an English major who finally figured out she should have studied accounting instead but, nonetheless, loves to play with words.*

*John MacLaughlin and Sandy Ramage*



# Memorial Garden



By Mary Amundsen

The idea of developing a memorial garden had been discussed for many years following the opening of the new UU church building on Walden Lane in 1968. Members of the congregation Erv and Marie Miller, Milton and Charlotte Anderson, Joe and Becky Brown, Jan Karlson, and others pursued the idea. A committee was formed in 1993 with Erv Miller and Maggie Scanlon spearheading it. Maggie said Erv was insistent that we have a memorial garden. She loves gardening and calls herself “arty,” so helping to design it appealed to her.

Selecting a spot and leveling a space on a wooded hillside was a challenge for the committee. A quiet spot with places for ashes, easy accessibility, lighting, benches and attractive plantings were some of the criteria as they explored the hillside. The logical choice was the area east of the courtyard and adjacent to it. There was a stone wall which had

been built by the previous owners of the property and the committee wanted it to be part of the garden.

Don Layton was on the committee that purchased the property in 1964, and although he didn’t know the origin of the stone wall, he was sure the owner had been a relative of John Kruesel. After several phone calls, I connected with the daughter of the owners who gave some history of the property. Her parents, Fred and Clara Maass, bought it in 1935 with the idea of building a house, swimming pool, tennis court, and farm buildings. Due to World War II, materials were not available although the Maasses had begun some foundations and fencing. Their daughter does not know the purpose of the stone wall in the memorial garden but hopes to come to the church this year.

*“A sacred place.”*



*“We gave funding for lighting in memory of our son.”*





The summer of 1993 was busy with Dave Edmonson, Bill Thompson, and Gary Donovan driving a Bobcat® to level the area. Dave said he really enjoyed driving it, and Maggie was able to entice her teenage son to come see the “bobcat” (although he wondered how they had caught one). The brush was ground for mulch and twenty-four cubic yards of dirt were brought in. Workers planted trees, shrubs, and flowers without realizing they were creating a smorgasbord for the deer and rabbits. Another wall slightly below the existing wall was built by Gary Donovan and daughter Moira with Erv sitting on the upper wall to supervise. This area between the walls would be the place for ashes and flowers. Dave and others uncovered the previous lighting wires and cables and were able to reestablish lighting for the new garden area.

Another challenge for the committee was finding funding for the plants, a brochure, equipment rental, benches, lighting, and a plaque for names. Generous donations from church members covered the cost of the initial work. The committee also developed procedures for burying ashes and described them and the cost of interment in a brochure which is revised periodically.

Mary Margaret Hill Dushane

Robert E. Yoss, M.D., Ph.D.

Joe R. Brown

Rebecca F. Brown

Alfred Gustav Karlson, D.V.M., Ph.D.

Janice Ruth Stillians Karlson

Dr. Malcolm I. Lindsay

Rev. Dr. Gordon B. McKeeman

Hugh Frisbee Brown

Steven Birger Rolstad

Erv Miller

Martha Lee Varner

Malcolm E. Varner

Dr. Milton W. Anderson

Charlotte Ann Miller Anderson

William F. Bateman

Walter L. Bateman

Sue Sturm Bateman

Leo J. Whelan

Mary Joyce Eeten

Marlys Lillian Campbell

*“It is comforting to be there and remember my family members who are gone. I feel closer to them then.”*



Within two years of the initial work, the garden was ready to be dedicated. In the fall of 1995 Rev. Dillman Baker Sorrells dedicated the garden and the first ashes, were interred that summer. Rev. Sorrells made some cloth bags for ashes as it was decided to use biodegradable materials rather than urns. A map of interments has been kept in the office since 1995, and a panel of names of those interred was placed in the church lobby. Many of those names are the persons who brought forth the idea of the memorial garden and watched it become a place they knew would be important for future generations.

It has been twenty-one years since the garden was dedicated, with many more interments so important for the families. Gardens require maintenance, which includes replacing plants our animal residents enjoy with less delicious bushes and flowers. Phyllis Beery, a master gardener, helped, as she and Ronice Donovan chaired the committee. They found a red granite stone marker which they placed at the entrance of the garden and now defines the area. New lighting was installed, as well as a permanent panel of names in the garden, rather than inside the church. The committee gained new members, and Margaret Brandl has been the chair for several years. They are dedicated to maintaining and improving the garden so that it continues to be the sacred space so many have come to love.

Explore the garden yourself. Read the panel of names and remember love and contribution to our church of the souls who rest there. Take a brochure. Appreciate the work and dedication of committee members and donors, past and present. And soak in the inspiration that this garden is for us.

*“It is important for us now and in the future to honor and remember our church family.”*



*"I like to go there  
in the early morning  
when it is quiet  
and meditate."*



*"Rituals and markings are important as is our  
All Souls' service in October."*



*Mary Amundsen has been a lifelong UU (Universalist before the merger) and wants our denomination to stay healthy and strong. She believes knowing our history, living our values, and staying connected is vital to our future.*



# From Bad to Good:

*From Founder's Humble Origins with "Bad Music,"  
Nodding Wild Onions Serves the Greater Good*

By Robin Taylor, with photos by Angie Joyce



*The Nodding Wild Onions plays at Squash Blossom Farm in Douglas, Minn.*



*Phil Wheeler (founder, singer/  
songwriter, guitar and mandolin  
player) mugs for the camera*

Some people seem to think the Nodding Wild Onions (NWO) is the “house band” for the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester, since they perform at so many services and church functions—and half of its members belong to the congregation.

“I’ve never really thought of us as a ‘church band,’” says founding member Phil Wheeler. “But it sure works out for us, because (with up to 11 members) we need a big place to rehearse.”

For Phil, “The church has been a huge creative outlet.” His growth as a musician owes a lot to several members of the congregation, which in turn has led directly and indirectly to the formation of the band.

Although he used to “fool around on an old guitar,” Phil didn’t get serious about music until his wife, Sue, gave him a nice guitar for his 50th birthday. Then in 2001, the Rev. LoraKim Joyner, the ministerial intern at First UU, invited a few church members together to play “Bad Music.” Inspired by the freedom to play badly and the fun of jamming with others, Phil took eight weeks of lessons from professional musician and fellow congregant (the late) Cam Waters in 2002. Cam taught him to read tablature, opening up a whole new world beyond playing by ear.

On Cam’s advice, Phil also joined the choir. “Joe Mish is just great,” Phil extols. “Every rehearsal is well-structured and well-run. And fun! I learn new stuff!”



Through the choir, Phil learned to read music, began to understand musical keys and harmonies, and—more importantly—addressed his stage fright in the company of friends.

Around that time, Phil started playing occasionally with Roger Nelson, a local architect and singer/songwriter/guitarist. Phil suggested to Lynn Wong, who owns Dunn Brothers, that she hire Roger for one of her evening gigs. Instead, Lynn insisted that Phil perform. “I was terrified,” Phil remembers. “I didn’t play and sing at the same time!” Former First UU music director Laurie Helmers came to the rescue, by volunteering to sing with him. “If it went well, it is because Laurie is a huge talent,” says Phil.

Phil’s next public gig wasn’t until the church youth group was sponsoring a coffee house, and his mentee, Lee McKeeman, suggested they play a duet at open mike. Phil did not have the courage to say no, but he cleverly recruited the talented Roger Nelson to perform three songs with them. It wasn’t until the night of the performance that they discovered Lee could only play one of the songs in D, and Roger could only sing it comfortably in C, and Phil had no idea how to transpose them, even with a capo. “I air-guitarred it that night, and didn’t tell Roger until last year,” he confesses.

In 2008, Terry Lee asked Phil to perform at the Green Expo. Realizing there was no way he would perform alone, he recruited church members John Berquist (mandolin/accordion), Joe Mish (bass), and Laurel Phelps-Bowman (vocals) to play with him. Terry insisted that they needed a name for the band. Phil came up with “Nodding Wild Onions,” the common name for *Allium cernuum*, the once-threatened prairie woodland species that was going to be wiped out by the flooding of Chester Woods. (The flood control project was temporarily halted, much to Phil’s delight, while the plants were dug up and moved to Quarry Hill, where they continue to flourish today.) As the NWO website states, “Like its namesake, the band is both rare and



tenacious, hanging on in spite of limited exposure, disappearing habitat, and widespread indifference.”

Although Laurel had a family emergency on the day of the performance, the NWO debut was successful enough that, “We decided to start a band.” Phil enlisted church members Mike McMullin (trumpet, harmonica, guitar) and Laurel Podulke (vocals). Everything seemed set for their first gig at RNeighbors, except that John dropped out, and Laurel and Mike had conflicts on the day of the performance. So Phil recruited Roger Nelson and Laurie Helmers again, and the quartet (with Joe Mish still on bass) was a hit.

Phil decided at that point that he needed a bigger band, so that they would always have enough members to pull off a gig. Three more UUs joined the band: Randy Crawford (vocals and guitar); Beth Atkinson (fiddle and mandolin); and Stephanie Podulke (washboard/occasional vocals). Two non-UUs joined as well: Marv “Mitch” Mitchell (bass/vocals), and Julio Vega (percussion/vocals), whom Mike “discovered” at the Mayo Clinic Optometry department, when he went to pick up his glasses one day. Darin Smith (banjo) joined the band in 2012, “based on merit,” says Phil, “but coincidentally sometime after he started dating Laurel (now Podulke-Smith).”

*NWO performing at the Rochester International Film Festival*



The fledgling band was told they needed a genre. “We couldn’t just call it ‘blues,’ because that would carry all sorts of expectations,” says Phil. By team effort, they decided to call their music “Crossover Blues.” “Nobody knows what that is, so we can play whatever we want.”

This ambiguity enables the band to play many of Phil’s original tunes, such as “Comb-Over Intervention,” “Micro-Surgical Vasectomy Reversal,” and “Blue Water Blues” (which Phil likes to say is about the second-worst drinking water quality problem in recent Olmsted County history). Roger also contributes original songs, such as “Bad Hair Day,” “Chuck Dickens,” and “Tall Drink of Water.” When John Berquist rejoined the band in 2015, “adding considerable talent and panache,” according to Phil, he wrote a special song just for Stephanie, entitled “Queen of Kutzky Washboard.”

Phil has always loved writing song parodies, and not just for pledge drives. He penned the NWO’s popular “Lesbian Chickens” (to the tune of “Rosin the Beau”), about an actual call received by County Commissioner Stephanie Podulke in protest of the regulation that allowed hens in residential areas, but not roosters. (The caller actually asked what Stephanie was going to do about those “lesbian chickens.” What she did was to challenge Phil to write a song about the call.)



*Roger Nelson  
singer/songwriter, guitarist*



*Mike McMullin  
trumpet, harmonica, vocals*



*Laurel Podulke-Smith  
vocals*



*Randy Crawford  
vocals, guitar*



*“What could be better than playing outdoors in a beautiful setting with chickens and roosters and dogs and children running around at Squash Blossom Farm-- it’s the best!!!!” says Stephanie.*

By the way, Phil’s wife, Sue, plays a vital role: that of editor. “She lets me know when the lyrics are over the line or cheap. She has standards,” says Phil. While Phil and Roger enjoy dabbling in song-writing, other members are more interested in having a musical outlet. For NWO member Randy Crawford, “Being in a band is a dream come true. I tell people all the time that I’m the luckiest man alive. That statement covers my entire life, including my family, the band, the church, my work, etc.”

Stephanie Podulke is equally rhapsodic: “Making music is a joy which engages many parts of my brain. It gives me a feeling of connection to be in sync with other musicians.” Her daughter Laurel adds, “The best part of playing with the NWO is the joy and delight our music brings...seeing smiling, happy faces in the audience.”

Beth Atkinson was asked to join the band at a time when a shoulder injury sidelined her from playing the violin. Phil lent her a mandolin and invited her to try it. “The NWO supported me as I learned to play and grew as a musician,” says Beth. “It has allowed me to push myself and to develop this network of friends that I didn’t have before. I’ve also gotten to interact more with the (church) youth.” More than that, she says, “It has become a part of who I am.”

*Robin Taylor is a former journalist who loves writing about interesting people and places. She has been a member of First UU since 1992.*





*Beth Atkinson*  
fiddle, mandolin



*Darin Podulke-Smith*  
banjo, vocals



*Stephanie Podulke*  
washboard, vocals



*Marv "Mitch" Mitchell*  
bass, vocals



*Julio Vega*  
percussion, vocals

The band members agree that an important part of their mission is serving the community. "The events we have played at that parallel the vision of the church are some of the highlights for me," says Randy. He lists playing at a rally for the Marriage Amendment, and then being able to play at one of the first legal gay weddings in Rochester, as two of his favorite gigs.

The NWO has played for church services, parties, weddings, memorials, auction dinners, and other church-related gigs. "Dick Rundle asked us to play for an Endowment Committee function," adds Phil. "He requested anything 'death-related,' which was great fun."

Most gigs are performed pro bono, such as the Marriage Amendment rally, several Quarry Hill benefits, an appearance by Joe Biden, a benefit for a child with cancer, and one for the Choral Arts Ensemble. But the band has been paid for performing at the County Fair, Farmer's Market, Thursdays on First, Charter House, several weddings, and the Township Officers Association. "I'm still waiting for the Choral Arts Ensemble to do a benefit for us," jokes Phil.

The band appears semi-regularly at Squash Blossom Farm, where Roger and his wife, Susan Waughtal, host "Summer Sundays" with music and wood-fired pizza from 4-6 p.m. For the past several years, the NWO has appeared at the Annual Cow Puja and Farm Fair, which has inspired several Phil Wheeler numbers, like "Cowlelujah"—"a crowd favorite," claims Phil.

For Phil, the UU church and the NWO provide more than a creative outlet and a means of interacting with people of talent. "It is also a way to organize for social justice. And that is a spiritual practice," he says.

## In Memoriam

John Berquist, one of the original Nodding Wild Onions, died May 12, 2016, after a year of living with pancreatic cancer and its treatments. John played mandolin and accordion at the group's first gig at the 2008 Green Expo at the Rochester Civic Center, and rejoined the band during the last year. He had an astounding talent for playing music, singing exuberantly, and conveying his enthusiasm for music and life to fellow musicians and audiences. We all learned a lot from John, whose boundless gusto persisted even as his energy waned. We will miss him.

*(Wild Nodding Onions website)*



*Photo courtesy of Bemidji Pioneer*

# The Parsonages

## *“A Home for Our Minister at All Times”*

August 31, 1906, Board Meeting Minutes

By Sue Wheeler



*211 3rd Street SW – Parsonage 1906-1916,  
Rear of Hilton Building, north side of 3rd Street.  
Grace church was a block away at 2nd Street and  
2nd Avenue.*



*214 3rd Street SW – Parsonage 1916-1940  
South side of 3rd Street, looking toward the rear  
of the Hilton Building. First Universalist Church  
was next door to the west.*

The manse, a farmhouse, a milk house, “my world,” a mansion—these are the words used to describe the parsonages where members of our church community have lived. A more general and less interesting description is a single-family house owned by a church and occupied by its minister and his or her family. Fifty years ago they were quite common, but we no longer have a parsonage associated with our church these days, and for good reasons. The congregation and Board don’t need the house repairs to worry about and pay for, and the minister and family can live where they want in a house that suits them and that will provide equity when they move on or retire.

Even so, most people I talked to were grateful to live in a parsonage when they did. Lisa Talcott, a minister’s wife, said their “manse” was a nice house built in 1911 that had been pretty well kept up. They had an allowance for utilities, and

the congregation stepped up to help when things needed to be fixed. She remembers fondly a time when she and her husband were out of town for a mission trip and the women’s group surprised them with new kitchen flooring and counters, painted cupboards, and updated appliances. Lisa says she had a wonderful feeling of being cared for.

One of the parsonages Paul Anderson, a minister’s son, lived in while growing up was a “classic square two-story farmhouse.” The front half of the 3-4 acre property contained the church, parsonage, and parking lot; the back half was planted in corn every year by farmers in the congregation to help support the church. “My mother was given permission to garden part of the field,” where she grew vegetables for the family. Since there was no office in the church, his father converted the parsonage living room into an office and added



French doors for privacy. Paul didn't find growing up in a parsonage "to be particularly limiting," and he enjoyed the small-town church with friends nearby and easy access to the church on Sunday morning.

Rev. Fritz Hudson lived in only one parsonage during his career as a minister—a repurposed milk house. The congregation had bought 10 acres that included a dairy barn (the sanctuary), a farm house (RE classrooms), and a milk house (the parsonage). It was small, but since he was single, it was quite comfortable with very thick milk-house walls and only 20 feet from the church. He says he was never late for a meeting.

Randy McKeeman, son of UU minister Rev. Gordon and Phyllis McKeeman, lived in a parsonage until he was six years old. It stood on one corner of a city block. "The other buildings on the block were the church and the fellowship hall. It was my one block world!" He says it was like living in a fishbowl, but the upsides were that the commute was short and forgetting something at home was not a big deal.

"It's a mansion," said six-year-old Justin Lapoint, when he saw the 8th Avenue parsonage of the First Universalist Church of Rochester. Justin is the son of our minister Rev. George Lapoint who served the church from 1949-1959. Justin continues, "There was a side porch on the first floor and a back porch on the second floor. It was a Tudor style house. My older brother and I pretended that the two porches were actually pirate ships." He remembers when he got in trouble for drawing a mural on the parsonage stair wall. His mother (Regina Lapoint) scolded him and said, "This house does not belong to us!" That is something he hadn't realized before.

That "mansion" at 844 8th Avenue SW in Rochester was the last of the parsonages mentioned specifically in First Unitarian Universalist Church documents. Our church owned at least four parsonages in its 150 years, and a search through our parsonage history shows both positives and negatives for ministers and the congregation.

Parsonages are referred to in Board of Trustee meeting minutes before 1906, but with no specific addresses or information about purchasing or



*211 West 3rd Street (now 211 3rd Street SW)*

selling. However, in 1906, the church bought a house for Rev. Patterson at 211 West 3rd Street (now 211 3rd Street SW), only a block away from Grace Universalist Church. The parish house, as it was called, had been built in 1904 and was purchased for \$3,450. The August 31, 1906, minutes record pride of ownership: a house "of which we may well be proud, not only because it is pleasant and comfortable, but because we have a home for our minister at all times." The day after the November 8, 1906, open house, the *Olmsted County Democrat* reported that the "capable" Rev. Patterson and his "charming wife" lived in the house which had "eight spacious rooms... and every detail of the building...was thoroughly modern and arranged for the greatest possible convenience."

Patterson's salary at the time was \$1,000 per year plus the rent-free parsonage. In 1909 the church extended a call to Rev. Van Tassel for \$1,000 per year, parsonage, and \$100 moving expenses. In 1912 Rev. Spicer was hired for \$1,100 per year, the parsonage, and \$50 moving expenses. And in 1912, the church took out a mortgage on the parsonage and used the money for repairs of the church and parsonage. At this point, house ownership by the church seemed to be a win-win situation for minister and congregation. The minister's low salary and frequent mobility were compensated for by having a rent-free house upon arriving in Rochester. The parsonage was an asset for the church to raise money even though the cost of repairs and updates (electric light fixtures were



*214 3rd Street SW*

installed in October 1906) and yearly taxes on the property had to be paid.

In July 1915 the church was sold for \$50,000, and the congregation purchased land for a new church and parsonage for \$11,000. The old parsonage was sold a year later to Roland Perry for \$7,000. Ellerbe, the architect who built the new church, made plans for a parsonage next to it and “arrange[d] a driveway between the house and the church” according to the June 3, 1916, Board meeting minutes. This 1916 parsonage at 214 W 3rd Street (now 214 3rd Street SW) shared sewer and water lines with the church. According to city directories our ministers Spicer, Bisbee, Smith, Eames, and Gleason lived at 214 from 1916 to 1936.

However, the win-win situation mentioned above didn’t continue with this parsonage. One minister asked the Board to arrange for the walls in the house to be tinted; no action was taken. When another minister left in 1921, “necessary repairs” had to be made and the locks had to be changed. Constant repairs were a drain on the church budget—the screens, the furnace(s), the chimney, the downspouts, and the taxes.

But the headaches were more than just repairs and upkeep. Rev. Smith resigned effective August 31, 1924, but apparently didn’t move out of the parsonage. At the October 20 Board meeting, one

trustee asked, “Does Rev. Smith need assistance to move to a new location?” In April 1927 the Board decided to rent out the parsonage since we were without a minister. Rev. Gleason was called by the congregation in September of that same year at \$2,000 per year, plus moving expenses, plus the parsonage. The only problem was, the parsonage was being rented by Mrs. William Trusty! In October the Board notified Mrs. Trusty to vacate the property before November 30, 1927. She finally moved out in April 1928. The house was again rented in 1937, and apparently wanting to stop being a rental agent, the congregation sold it in 1940 to Mr. William Witzke for \$7,500 with \$500 down and \$70 per month at 6% interest. The headaches didn’t end there, however. In 1950 the church Board was still trying to get Mr. Witzke to disconnect from the church’s sewer and water lines.

Nevertheless, when Rev. Horton Colbert was called to be our minister in 1940, he evidently wanted to live in a parsonage. By November of 1942 the church had bought the Blethen property at 514 7th Avenue SW for \$3,750 plus \$488.31 for the cost of redecorating, installing a new hot water heater, and repairing the furnace (of course). Unlike the former two parsonages, this building was several blocks from the church, perhaps affording more privacy for the minister’s family. Rev. Colbert, in his December report to the Board, thanked the church

*514 7th Ave SW (as it looks today)*







*Elwyn Lapoint with Justin's Teddy Bear,  
514 7 th Ave SW, front porch  
(Courtesy of Rev. Justin Lapoint)*



*844 8th Ave SW*

“for providing a home for the minister’s family. All were so gracious in allowing us to have a full share in the project, making all things within reason accord with our wishes, that words of appreciation fail of expression.” The Colberts had a New Year’s Day open house every year, inviting the entire congregation to the parsonage.

The congregation called Rev. Lapoint in October 1948, offering \$4,200 per year and a parsonage; the question of utilities was left suspended at that time, though it’s obvious from the treasurer’s reports that the church always paid the utilities. There were once again problems with the parsonage heating plant, and before the Lapoint family moved in, the building was “gone over from top to bottom” as reported at the 1949 annual meeting: decorated completely inside, new furnace (\$1,000), plumbing replaced, bathroom tiled, kitchen remodeled, chimney fixed.

Rev. Justin Lapoint remembers living in this house, and he’s not sure why the church sold this one and bought the fourth and final parsonage in 1953. However, based on an inspection report submitted by The Kruse Company, the Board recommended that, because of “the alterations and radical repairs [needed] to the present parsonage over the next twelve to eighteen months,” the congregation should sell it and buy another. In March 1953 the congregation voted to sell the 7th Avenue house to Edward L. and Mary E. Tarara for \$10,000 cash. The new parsonage at 844 8th Avenue SW cost \$17,400, and the minister, Board of Trustees, and spouses hosted a celebration open house in June.

In June 1967 the congregation voted to sell this parsonage and loan a portion of the money from the sale to the minister, Rev. Vernon Curry, for a down payment on a new house for him and his family.

And with that, the First Unitarian Universalist Church got out of the parsonage business. The thinking behind the vote was “it would be to everyone’s benefit to get out of this business, to offer the minister a parsonage allowance in lieu of a parsonage and let the minister go out and buy his own home....The present minister and his family would find this plan much to their liking.”

Fifty years ago most every church owned a parsonage where the minister lived. Today there are only two single-family, church-owned houses in all of Olmsted County, according to property records. Although our church no longer owns a parsonage and the minister is free to buy or rent a house as she/he pleases, we still carry on a tradition left from the parsonage days. Churches continue to offer ministers a housing allowance (“sometimes called a parsonage allowance,” according to the IRS), and when we select a new settled minister next year, part of his/her salary package will include a tax-free parsonage allowance. It’s a curious vestige of the past.

*Sue Wheeler has been a church member since 1983, is a member of the History Committee, and loves to dig through all the church archives.*

# Invasion of the Eco-Snatchers

By Phil Wheeler

There's a war going on in our backyard. A vigorous volunteer force under the direction of the Property Committee (and other brigades such as the Butterfly Flight Crew) has been waging a long and strenuous campaign against an invading army of exotic plants, also made up of vigorous volunteers. At this point in the conflict, the outcome is uncertain.

This war started the way most wars start, perhaps, as the result of ignorance, arrogance, carelessness, and misguided policy. It was carelessness that brought Canada thistle here (misnamed; it comes from Eurasia), as seed mixed in with cereal grains. It was arrogance and misguided policy that introduced Siberian elm, reed canary grass, bird's



*"Who Ya Gonna Call?"*

*Don Hanson, John Trnka, George Huston, Greg Turosak*

*Beth Atkinson and Dawn Littleton*



foot trefoil, and crown vetch. They were widely promoted by federal and state agencies for windbreaks, erosion control, and pasture improvement, first in ignorance of and then in indifference to their invasive characteristics. Buckthorn, honeysuckle, creeping bellflower, silver grass, dame's rocket, and Queen Anne's lace were brought to our shores to brighten our gardens and lawns as ornamentals. We are now seeing their dark sides. Two of our church property invasives were brought to America to be eaten by humans. They are wild parsnip, which has an edible root, and garlic mustard, a mustard species that tastes like (you guessed it) garlic. Sweet clover and the pasture plants mentioned above were brought here in part as forage for livestock.

What are invasive exotic plants? By "exotic" we mean "not native to America." (Some apply the term to any plant not native to southeastern Minnesota.





*Anna Lovrien and Ann Lien*



*Rick Devine*

Not us.) “Invasive” plants behave like weeds. “Weeds” are usually plants that propagate in disturbed habitats, such as plowed fields, lawns, and roadsides. Under natural conditions, native weed-like species, such as box elder and fireweed, give way to other species. Taking account of things like fire, tornados, volcanoes, and so on, the natural condition is a progression from disturbed habitats to climax habitats. Climax habitats are characterized by a diverse mix of species and can be stable for centuries.

Invasive exotic species disrupt this progression. Invasive exotic plants spread like weeds, but they also have the ability to invade relatively undisturbed habitats and compete with climax species. Unchecked, some of them can replace climax communities with long-lasting monocultures. Invasive exotic plant species concern us not only because they reduce the diversity of plants on our property, but also because as long as our property is a seedbed for exotic invasives, we contribute to the deterioration of native habitat wherever it occurs throughout our area.

To be fair, not all exotic plants are invasive. Lilacs, tulips, zinnias, wheat, oats, broccoli, peas, and many others are not native to our shores. However, while they are exotic, they are not invasive because they do not spread willingly. In fact, they have to be encouraged to spread at all.

*Bill Thompson*







Above is a “before” picture of our northwest hillside, covered with garlic mustard (*Alliaria petiolate*). Native to Eurasia, it was brought here as an edible herb. It spreads quickly, replacing native plants and diminishing diversity. To control it, volunteers pull it out by hand before it sets seed and bag the plants to be burned. In the next photo are two volunteers, Megan and Evan, with one of several bags of garlic mustard they pulled out during a property workday last spring. At right is a close-up of the dreaded plant.



To the right is the grass we used to have in the butterfly prairie and are getting rid of on the west hillside. We have referred to it as “pampas grass,” but it is actually Amur silver grass (*Miscanthus sacchariflorus*), an ornamental grass still sold in nurseries. (In fact, if you Google® “invasive ornamental grasses,” you get helpful tips on where to shop for them.) This grass forms large, single-species stands and is difficult to eradicate. The butterfly brigade used tarps, herbicides, and arduous hand digging.



Buckthorn (*Rhamnus cathartica*) is one of our biggest challenges. Until recently sold as an ornamental hedge, its dense shade crowds out grasses and forest floor plants, increasing erosion and preventing forest regeneration. The seeds are spread by birds, so that any seed-bearing tree on our property has the potential to infect properties miles away. We are controlling it by pulling smaller trees with a tool (the Weed Wrench®) and by cutting larger trees and applying herbicide to the stumps. Both approaches are labor-intensive.



Pictured at right is wild parsnip (*Pastinaca sativa*), a root vegetable brought here from Europe. In addition to being invasive, it is toxic, so that exposure to the skin and sunlight causes a reaction ranging from something like sunburn to blistering (called phytophotodermatitis). It can be controlled by hand pulling; since it is a biennial, it is also possible to control it over a period of several years by cutting, bagging, and destroying the flower heads before they seed. Either way, long sleeves, long pants, and gloves are necessary precautions.



### Other Exotic Invasives on Church Property

COMMON NAME	SPECIES NAME	WHY/HOW INTRODUCED	ISSUES	CONTROL REQUIRED
<b>Birds-foot trefoil</b>	<i>Lotus conficulatus</i>	Erosion control, forage	Forms dense mats choking and shading most other vegetation	Hand pulling
<b>Canada thistle</b>	<i>Cirsium arvense</i>	containment in cereal grain seeds	Spreads quickly replacing native plants, diminishing diversity	Hand pulling
<b>Creeping bellflower</b>	<i>Campanula rapunculoides</i>	Flower garden	Crowds out other garden plants, difficult to eradicate	Hand pulling
<b>Crown vetch</b>	<i>Coronilla varia</i>	Erosion control	Forms dense mats choking and shading out most other vegetation	Hand pulling
<b>Exotic honeysuckles</b>	<i>Lonicera tatarica</i> <i>L. morrowill</i> , etc.	Ornamental	Not as bad as buckthorn, but similar impact	Cutting and pulling w/ Weed Wrench®
<b>Queen Anne's lace</b>	<i>Aucus carota</i>	Flower garden	Spreads quickly replacing native plants, diminishing diversity	Hand pulling
<b>Reed canary grass</b>	<i>Phalaris arundinacea</i>	Erosion control, forage	Forms large, single-species stands, difficult to eradicate	Tarps, herbicides, digging
<b>Siberian elm</b>	<i>Ulmus pumila</i>	Farm windbreaks	Can invade and dominate disturbed prairies in just a few years	Pulling w/ Weed Wrench®
<b>White/yellow sweet clover</b>	<i>Melilotus alba</i> , <i>M. officinalis</i>	Forage	Spreads quickly replacing native plants, diminishing diversity	Hand pulling
<b>Wild parsnip</b>	<i>Pastinaca sativa</i>	Root vegetable	Phytophotodermatitis	Hand pulling

*Article by Phil Wheeler with botanical advice from Patty Trnka, Dawn Littleton, Bill Thompson, Linda Thompson, and Sue Wheeler, who edited. Photos by church members and from the Minnesota or Wisconsin DNR Internet sites.*

# The Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism

We covenant to **affirm** and **promote** ...

The inherent **worth** and **dignity** of every person

**Justice, equity** and **compassion**  
in human relations

**Acceptance** of one another and encouragement  
to **spiritual growth** in our congregations

A free and responsible search for **truth** and **meaning**

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 a part



## First Unitarian Universalist Church

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