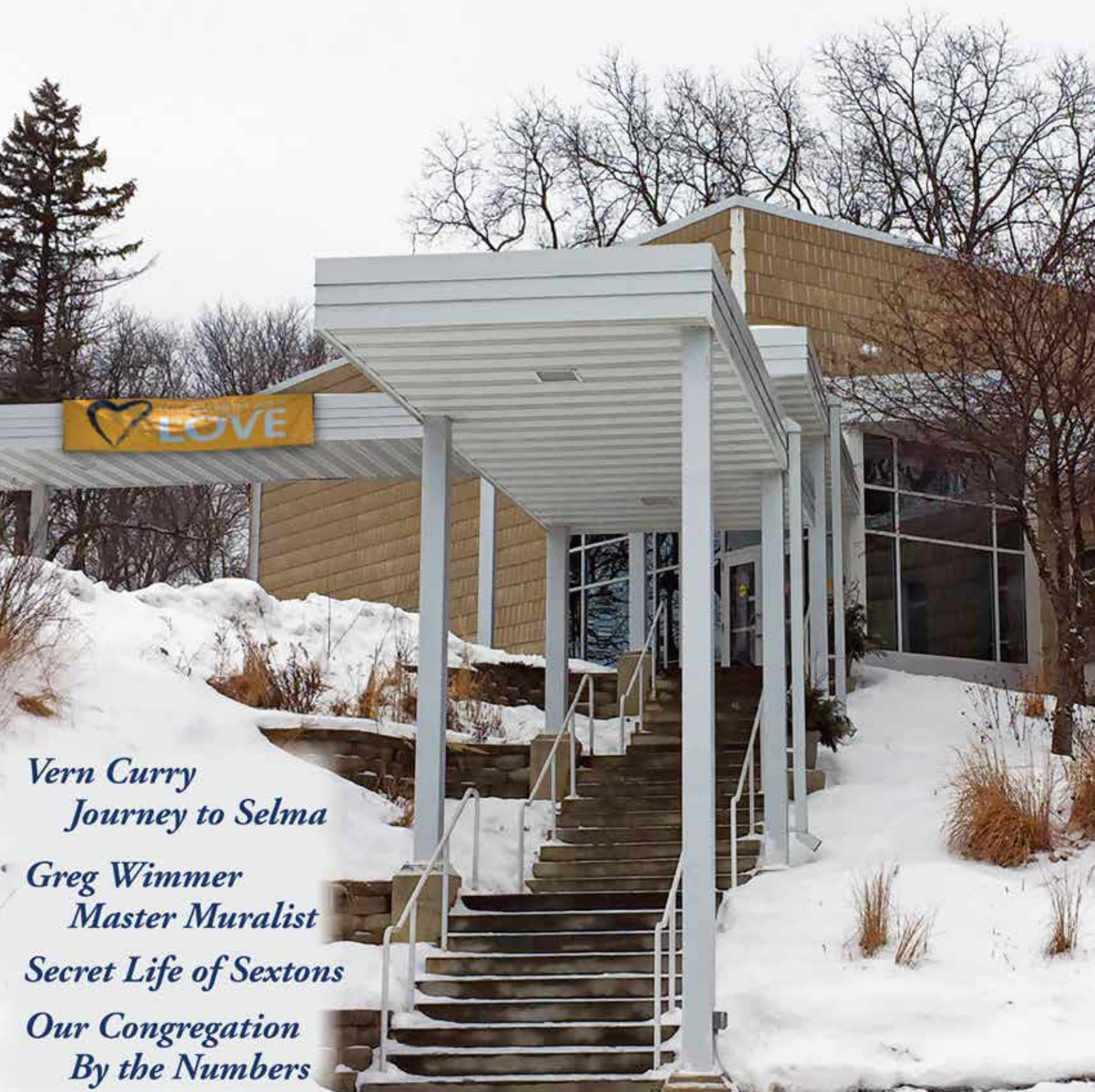




UU REVUE

Winter 2016



Vern Curry
Journey to Selma

Greg Wimmer
Master Muralist

Secret Life of Sextons

Our Congregation
By the Numbers



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Church Mission

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

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.

Vern Curry's Journey to Selma

By Kathy Brutinel

In the 1960's, Unitarian Universalism had a complicated relationship with race and racism in the United States. Although Universalists had long preached universal salvation and Unitarians believed in salvation by character, which led individuals in both denominations to be prominent leaders in many social causes, the denomination did not define itself in terms of social activism. This appears to have been true in our local church also. When the Reverend Vernon L. Curry was called to our pulpit in 1959, "intellectual stimulation" was the rule of the day.

And in this sense Rev. Curry appeared to be the perfect minister for us. In a self-published manuscript entitled "Speaking of Religion" (1971), Rev. Curry outlines his journey, "an evolution which began in orthodoxy or religious fundamentalism and has led to religious liberalism." A quick scan through this manuscript makes it clear that Rev. Curry was well-read and articulate and very adept at "thinking and philosophizing." His essays grapple with the application of reason to traditional religious myths and rituals.

Rev. Curry was baptized a Lutheran, but participation in a Methodist Boy Scout troop in Erie, Pennsylvania, led him to Methodism, the old-time Methodism of summer camp meetings, Biblical literalism, sin, hell, and an all-seeing

and judging God – a religion that ruled every moment of one's life. "Would Jesus do it?" was the young Vern's touchstone. Since Jesus would not have danced, gone to the movies, or read the comics on Sunday, he didn't either. This world view created "a certain seriousness about life that would stay with me to the present."

At age 17 Rev. Curry went to Eastern Nazarene College in Quincy, Massachusetts, with the intention of becoming a minister. In this larger milieu he began to discover contradictions to his world view. The more he read and studied, the more he realized that he could not reconcile his fundamentalist beliefs with the new conclusions he was drawing about reality. His intellectual exploration took him to Boston University to study philosophy, and he received a theological degree from Boston University in 1953. By the time his degree was conferred, he was serving as assistant minister at the First Methodist Church (now Christ United Methodist) of Rochester, Minnesota.

While he was at the Methodist Church, the visiting speaker program at the First Universalist Church caught Rev. Curry's attention. Long-time member Don Layton remembers that he was particularly interested in a lecture by astronomer and educator Harlow Shapley, whose greatest single contribution to science, according to his obituary in *Nature* (1972), was "the discovery of the dimensions of our Galaxy, and of the location of its centre." Rev. Curry also had a keen interest in astronomy and even constructed his own telescope from a furnace pipe and mirrors he shaped himself.

Rev. Curry's interest in Universalism grew, and eventually he found it to be "a home for mavericks like myself." He returned to Massachusetts to study at the University of Massachusetts and was accepted into Universalist ministry. He

then served Universalist churches in Monson and Abington, Massachusetts, for two years each. In 1959 he was called to our church.



Five months after his arrival in Rochester, Rev. Curry wrote in the 1959 annual report that the Board of Trustees had defined his major areas of focus as “Sermonizing, in the best sense of the word; Educational; Administration;

and Public Relations.” Being an activist or supporting social justice issues or movements did not make the list. Nonetheless, the congregation would find that Rev. Curry had far-ranging interests.

In 1961 the breakdown of arms control negotiations with Russia and the ever-present danger of nuclear war had created a time of high anxiety in the United States. Church member Pat Calvert and her husband George first came to the Universalist church late in 1961 after reading about Rev. Curry’s involvement in the “ban the bomb” movement and his opposition to knee-jerk anti-Communism. With Rev. Curry, Pat and George found support for their concerns.

Rev. Curry was not afraid to let his views be known in the wider community. In 1961 he wrote a bold letter to the editor on the subject of the House Un-American Activities Committee.

...I am disturbed about...the committee’s easy assumption that any opposition to its existence is bonifide (sic) proof of obvious Un-Americanism.... We now have a body whose pledged task is to protect us from subversion, and which defines subversion as any opposition to the committee itself.... As you may guess I am opposed to the continued existence of this committee.

He also took on the “better dead than Red” slogan in another 1961 letter to the editor, which was written in response to an attack on a Unitarian minister in a previous day’s editorial column by George Sokolsky, a right-wing supporter of Senator Joseph McCarthy.

I join my Unitarian brother along with Schweitzer, Gandhi, Jesus, Buddha, and several other noteworthies among Christians, Hindus, Jews and Buddhists, in the abhorrence of both violence and tyranny.... Only those who are ignorant of the facts or afraid of them are too blind to see the untried alternatives to nuclear war.... I am certain that we shall [have to die] if we do not begin now to do those things that will prove to the rest of the world that freedom is the issue and not a certain economic way of life; that one world is better than none.... Instead of being eager to die and drag the world into the grave with us, or to entomb ourselves in a hole in the ground, why don’t we rally to the support of the President’s proposals and give his alternatives a try....

From the church archives it is impossible to determine the extent of Rev. Curry’s or the congregation’s concern about civil rights prior to 1965. Annual reports in those years are regrettably brief, and very few sermons were preserved. However, from a September 1961 sermon series entitled “What Are We Doing Here,” we have the third sermon, which was entitled “Action.” Rev. Curry’s focus is on nonviolent resistance in the face of Russian aggression, but he does cite the civil rights movement.

At no time in history [has]... social change been produced so rapidly and wisely as in our own South – non-violently. Yes, there has been some violence, but not on the part of those resisting evil laws. This is where the element of courage comes in. There is no more courageous posture one can assume than this....

It would be surprising if civil rights had been an issue that our very white congregation in our

very white town felt called to address. As Mark Morrison-Reed points out in his 2014 book, *The Selma Awakening*,

Prior to the 1960's most members of both denominations had little contact with African Americans as equals, knew nothing substantive about their culture, and the awareness that they should be concerned with racial injustice and inequality was only slowly dawning (p. 64).

He also asserts that,

The public declarations made by Unitarians and Universalist about equal opportunity, integration, and racial justice sharpened during the two decades leading to Selma. However, when we pinpoint the [actions of congregations], we see clearly that the espoused values of Universalists, Unitarians, and Unitarian Universalists were rarely matched by their values in practice (pp. 21-22).

The 1960's saw the beginning of change. About 1600 UUs participated in the August 1963 March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom, many lobbied for the Civil Rights Act of 1964, and dozens were involved in the Mississippi Summer Project to register voters. In addition, Rev. Morrison-Reed states, "...since the 1940s theological education had emphasized the centrality of social engagement to ministry" and "in nine of the ten years leading up to Selma, the AUA and, later, UUA General Assembly had passed one or more resolutions supporting desegregation, civil rights, integration, and African independence..." (p. 193). To UU ministers, not acting was looking more and more like hypocrisy.

On January 2, 1965, Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., kicked off a voting rights project in Selma, Alabama. Months of rallies, marches, and attempts to register to vote followed and were routinely met with violence and arrests. When the March 7 march from Selma to Montgomery was turned back at the Edmund Pettus Bridge with horses, clubs, and tear gas, Dr. King sent a telegram calling "on clergy of all faiths to join

me in Selma."

James Reeb, an alumnus of St. Olaf College in Northfield, Minnesota, was one of the UU ministers who answered the call, together with about 45 other UU ministers and 15 laypeople (p. 101). On March 9 the marchers, bolstered by scores of clergy from many denominations, set out again but, confronted by the prospect of 500 Alabama state troopers blocking the highway, Dr. King decided to turn back.

That evening, while walking from a restaurant back to the organizational hub, Brown Chapel AME, Rev. Reeb and two colleagues were attacked by 4 or 5 white men with bats or pipes. Following a long delay, complicated by the danger of dark roads in the south at night, Reeb made it to a hospital in Birmingham, but died two days later.



Rev. James Reeb

Rev. Reeb's death riveted the nation and galvanized the UU ministerial community. In Rochester, Minnesota, Rev. Curry felt compelled to respond.

On March 14 Rev. Curry told the congregation during the Sunday service that he was planning to go to Selma for James Reeb's funeral and memorial march. The only record of what he said comes from the March 15, 1965, *Post-Bulletin*:

"No one engages in social action without a loss to himself and his church." Any choice excludes other possible means of action – but refraining from decision is, in itself, a kind of choice.

"To exist can never be to make no choice. To exist is to choose and to act. There is no resolution of this dilemma, because the dilemma is life. I go not to defy good laws, but I believe in civil disobedience against unjust laws.

"I go to help prevent the danger of violence, by lending moral support to the non-violent approach advocated by Dr. Martin Luther King." Dr. King is constantly surrounded by those who would pressure him into abandoning non-violence, Mr. Curry said.

And finally, he told the 120 persons sitting silent in the pews, "I go, too, to learn."

When asked after the service if he was afraid, Mr. Curry said "I think anyone would be a fool not to be," considering recent events in Selma.

On Sunday afternoon Rev. Curry joined several clergy from the Twin Cities to fly to Selma for the Monday funeral. His original intent was to return home on Wednesday, but he decided to return on Tuesday. As reported by the March 16 *Post-Bulletin*, he explained, "Since so many other ministers are still coming, many of us feel we are free to return home to our work."

Upon his return, he was again interviewed by the *Post-Bulletin*. Here are some excerpts from the March 18, 1965, article:

"I never felt more useful in my life by doing nothing – just standing there. We were standing between violence and the people of Selma, Alabama.

"I've never been at the same time so proud and so scared to be a part of anything. The minute we arrived, we started to get instructions as to what to do in case we were attacked or beaten. It's very clear that if you're not able to take what's there to be given, you'd better go back.

"I was tremendously impressed by the discipline shown by the Negro people and the civil rights workers in Selma. I never heard any derogatory statement hurled from our side of the line."

In Selma, he continued, the Negro area – the "compound" – consists of about 12 square blocks. It was surrounded by police cars, bumper to bumper, with confederate flags instead of license plates in the front. The troopers manning them had confederate flags on their helmets.

"It's not too reassuring to be in a strange state and a strange town, far from home, where you can't call for help or police protection. You have no recourse, unless you could manage to get through to the Federal Bureau of Investigation or something.

"I had never been south before and had assumed that many of the things said about the southern Negro were true. I found I have been lied to all my life."

The people are poverty-stricken and poorly educated, but "are moral giants that would make the rest of us look like pygmies," he said.



Rev. Curry preparing for his departure to Selma

According to Rev. Morrison-Reed, Rev. Curry's reactions were not uncommon. He writes that, "Most of the middle-class Unitarian Universalists who went to Selma had never witnessed such poverty and prejudice, nor experienced such hardships and discomfort, nor faced such hostility, nor known fear so intensely, nor suffered loss so acutely. The Unitarian Universalists who were led to Selma by moral reasoning were wedded to the cause of racial justice by suffering and comradeship" (p.212-213).

Rev. Morrison-Reed also reflects on how difficult it was for ministers who had this profoundly

emotional and transformative experience to build social justice ministry in their congregations. “How could those who went to Selma take an experience that stood so far outside the norms of their liberal religious communities, and that ran counter to the rampant individualism in Unitarian Universalism, and offer it to their congregations without putting their ministries at risk” (p. 213)?

Pat Calvert recalls that on the Sunday following his return, Rev. Curry pulled up a chair in the sanctuary and talked about his experiences in Selma. Although when he left for Selma he was aware that “all may not agree with the course of action” (*Post-Bulletin*, March 15, 1965), it appears that most of the congregation valued his involvement. The March 1965 *Venture* reported that sufficient money was raised to both pay for his trip and make a contribution to the Reeb family.

The trip to Selma certainly affected Rev. Curry’s personal priorities. The October 1965 *Venture* reported that Rev. Curry was elected President of the Citizens for Equal Opportunity. The group was formed to deal “with local problems in discriminatory practices on a local level,” according to the September 23, 1965, *Post-Bulletin*. “In addition to trying to mediate problems locally, without going to state or federal authorities, the new organization will conduct educational campaigns in human understanding....” Rev. Curry also continued his letters to the editor, stating on July 26, 1966,

There have been, over the past couple of years, I know, personally, of a half dozen individuals who were subjected to numerous instances of humiliation and rejection because of the color of their skin. I’m sure we all possess sufficient imagination to know what this would mean to us if we were one of those six..... I urge you and your readers to reconsider this notion that [an anti-discrimination ordinance] isn’t needed yet.... We have nearly 100 Negroes living in Rochester today. I don’t think we need to wait until there are 200 or 2,000 to suffer humiliation in order to conclude there is a need.

Despite Rev. Curry’s continuing commitment to civil rights advocacy, it is impossible to determine from our archives what effect his involvement had on the congregation. Five of the sermons he delivered in 1965 and 1966 after going to Selma have been preserved; none mention civil rights or social activism. Neither does his 1971 manuscript. Annual reports in the late 60’s do not include committee reports or even a minister’s report, so there is no written record of congregational activity.

In the Winter 2016 issue of *UU World*, former UUA President Bill Sinkford writes that he was present at the May 1966 UUA General Assembly in Hollywood, Florida, when Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., gave the Ware lecture. Rev. Sinkford reports that when Dr. King ended with his vision – free at last, free at last, thank God almighty we are free at last – “thousands of Unitarian Universalists, many like me with tears streaming down their faces, rose in thunderous applause. We were ready to redeem the American dream, ready to take our place in the revolution.”

**Books in our church library
about the Unitarian Universalist
response to Selma:**

No Greater Love: The James Reeb Story by Duncan Howlett. Boston, Skinner House Books, 1993.

Call to Selma: Eighteen Days of Witness by Richard D. Leonard. Boston, Skinner House Books, 2002.

The Selma Awakening: How the Civil Rights Movement Tested and Changed Unitarian Universalism by Mark D. Morrison-Reed. Boston, Skinner House Books, 2014.

Call number: 305.8

But then he adds: "Fifty years ago. So many dreams deferred and dreams denied." And asks: "How did we get from 'I Have a Dream' to the New Jim Crow?"

Rev. Sinkford concludes that "we pulled back as a faith community when it became clear that the passage of a few laws was not going to save us....when it got too hard and painful for our congregations to stay involved.... We didn't 'stay woke.'"

But he leaves us with another thought:

What I know is this: We are being given another chance. This racial justice and just-plain justice Black Lives Matter movement that emerged out of the tragedies of the streets of Ferguson and Cleveland and Baltimore...that movement is offering us the chance to claim a fuller and ultimately a more hopeful dream.

Are we willing to live as if the Beloved Community is not just an idle dream? Are we willing to love this faith and love ourselves enough not to settle for the world as it is, but to build and inhabit the world we dream about? Will we trust this faith, this faith that does believe in the power of love, trust this faith enough to help us find a new way – a way out of no way? Because it is only together that we can find the will not to look away this time.

If we do not look away this time, we will honor the determination and courage of Vern Curry.

*Selma to Montgomery
March 1965*

Photo courtesy Alabama State University



Black Lives Matter

Minneapolis, November 2015

Photo courtesy Chicago Tribune



Kathy Brutinel is a regular contributor to the UU Revue and is an active member of our congregation.



Greg Wimmer Master Muralist

By Pat Calvert



As a kid growing up in Manitowoc, Wisconsin, Greg Wimmer says he doesn't remember dreaming about a life spent doing art...much less the kind of art that would earn him the title "Master Muralist" from a Rochester, Minnesota, newspaper. However, he'd always enjoyed drawing, liked to pour over the illustrations in magazines at the home of his grandparents who lived nearby, and was a big fan of *Mad Magazine* (and still subscribes).



Albert Lea Middle School

When he was fifteen, Greg's family moved to Michigan, and he discovered in his high school art classes that he had a knack for creating the kinds of illustrations he'd liked when he was younger. He also became familiar with painters of an earlier era whom he greatly admired—Winslow Homer and Edward Hopper, in particular.

Greg's own focus, however, was not fine art, but graphic design. After graduating from The Grand Rapids School of Art and Design, he headed west to Minneapolis where he freelanced, doing magazine ads, brochures, and book covers, as well as commercial displays for businesses like IBM.

His introduction to mural art came about accidentally. He'd always been—and still is—an outdoor kind of guy, and soon after moving to Minneapolis, he developed friendships with members of the Minnesota Department of Natural Resources, who shared interests similar to his. The DNR had hired an artist to

*Mural at top of page
Madonna Towers, Rochester*

do a mural in the visitor's center at Upper Sioux Agency State Park in Granite Falls, only to have him unexpectedly drop the project. They asked Greg to take over. It was a unique challenge; it involved the outdoor world he loved; it was easy to say yes.

Later, the DNR wanted a mural for Blue Mound State Park, which was followed by others. When funding for murals tapered off, Greg moved into the DNR's Region 5 office in Rochester, then eventually settled into a 15-year-long career with an ad agency.

In 1999, when the chance came along to do a mural on the side of the KROC building on the corner of 1st Avenue & 4th Street in southwest Rochester, Greg realized he was eager to get back to the kind of painting he'd enjoyed years before. Some of us recall the experience of seeing a giant radio slowly appear on the east-facing wall of that building—a radio whose sound this writer swore she could hear as she walked to work each morning.

In the summer of 2004, Greg completed his largest-ever project: a mural celebrating the South Dakota State Fair that covers the side of a three-story building in downtown Huron, South Dakota.

When asked where he goes for inspiration as he takes on a new assignment, Greg says he doesn't go anywhere. Rather, he listens. Carefully. Not to his favorite music, but to his clients as they describe what they hope to accomplish with the project, the audience they want to reach, the message they'd like to deliver. Then, Greg says, all the "pieces and parts begin to come together in my mind," and he's able to move on to the next phase.

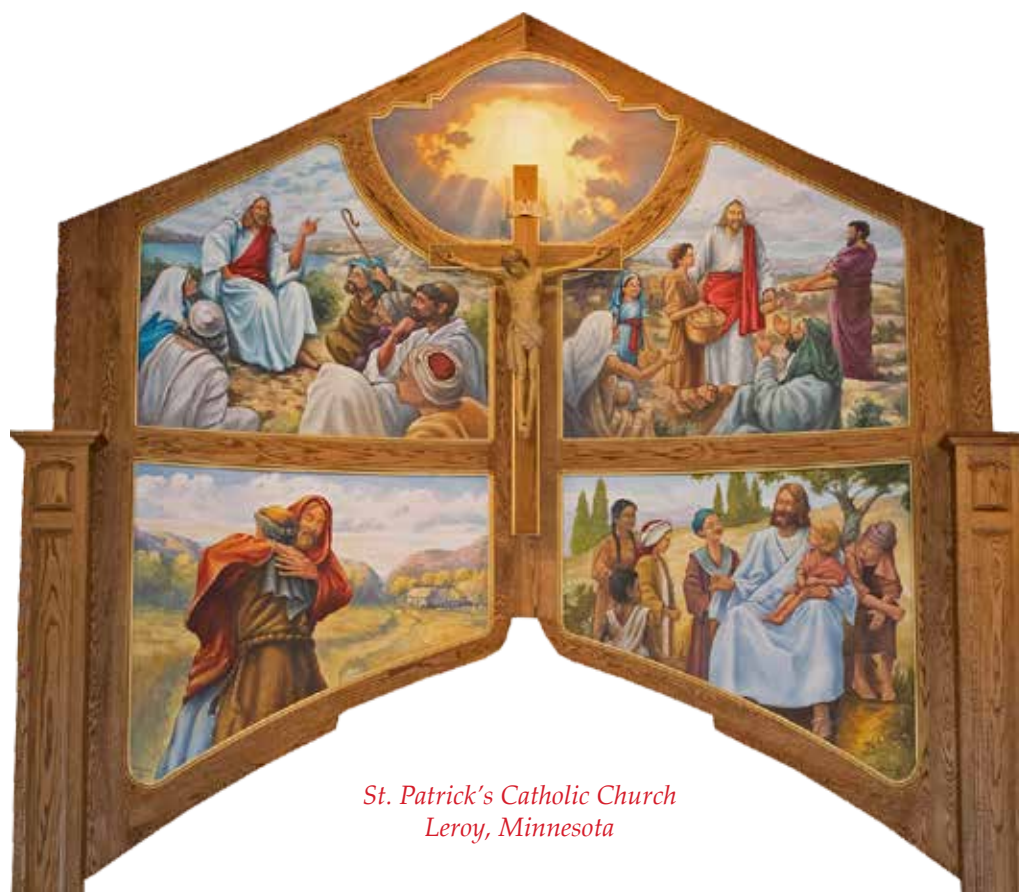
After he takes measurements of a site, Greg spends several days in his studio making pencil sketches, which then become black-and-white drawings. A computer program is used to plot the design on a grid and then he chooses a palette of colors and the type of paint to be used. Greg often picks a high-quality Sherwin-Williams latex gloss or sometimes Valspar—the same long-wearing exterior paint used to mark



*State Fair
Huron, South Dakota*

lanes on highways and city streets. He also considers which side of the building is to be painted. A north-facing wall is ideal, next best is east. South- and west-facing surfaces usually have to endure harsher climate conditions.

Studio artists—portrait or still-life painters, for instance—traditionally work in the relative solitude of a studio. Performance artists—dancers, actors, musicians—create their work in front of an audience. When a mural gets



*St. Patrick's Catholic Church
Leroy, Minnesota*

underway, it falls into the second category: it becomes performance art, too. As soon as scaffolding is erected or ladders are put in place and Greg begins to paint, passersby stop, observe, and then go on their way having experienced an artist as he practices his craft.

Sometimes Greg's art requires not his own performance, but the hands-on participation with a neighborhood, which thereby gives the community pride of ownership. In 2003, when a mural was created on the east side of the Rochester Fire Extinguisher Company on the corner of 4th Street & 8th Avenue. SE, Greg supervised adult volunteers and local children as they did the actual painting according to a design he created. Hotdogs and pop were provided during what turned out to be a 12-hour day for Greg. Although he admits he didn't do much of the painting himself, he adds that he never worked harder in his life.

Greg's most familiar Rochester mural is probably the one on the north-facing wall of the former

CJ's Midtown Lounge, for which he received the CUDE award (Committee on Urban Design and Environment) in 2013. It combines all the best elements of mural art: color, movement, drama. A viewer can almost hear the sound of the yellow-haired jazz singer's voice as she's accompanied by piano, horns, and bass, can almost feel the drum's beat. This mural will soon become the victim of a wrecking ball as downtown redevelopment proceeds. Until that happens, however, Greg believes the mural continues to do the job it was intended to do: celebrate and communicate.

Not all of Greg's work is done on the outside of buildings. Frequently it appears in a private home, a church, a school, or a library. A new mural at Madonna Towers graces the residents' dining hall (shown at beginning of article). Students who use the library at Bonner Elementary School in Stewartville are greeted by characters from Dr. Seuss; Clifford, the Big Red Dog; and Frog and Toad. A mural in the entryway of Resurrection Lutheran School gives

a warm welcome to students and teachers. A mural in the entrance to the Head Start program in Rochester's "The Place" greets children and adults with a reassuring emphasis on inclusion and ethnic unity.

In 2013, when Rochester's Allegro School of Dance presented "Marushka," a ballet based on the Russian tale of an orphan girl and a princess who each learn the value of kindness and generosity, Greg designed the sets for the performance. He didn't stop with designing and painting: he took a non-dancing role, too.

Greg points out that whatever kind of work artists do, they usually become closely involved with artists in other fields. The result is that writers, actors, painters, and musicians often develop a second skill. For instance, musicians frequently take up painting—think here John Lennon, Paul McCartney, and Bob Dylan.

For Greg, that second skill turned out to be dancing—clog dancing, no less—as he accompanies his steps playing a washboard. (Greg, we thought we knew ye!) He sometimes performs at Rochester's Downtown Farmers Market with his guitar-playing brother Gerard's band, the Young and Old Timers.

Greg, who grew up Catholic, has been an active member of our church since February 1987. He has served on the membership committee, worked with youth religious education, and participated in Chalice Camp. For the past five years he's been a worship associate, sometimes appearing in the pulpit as a guest speaker. He's the father of two daughters: Madeline, soon to graduate with a master's degree in horticulture from UW/Madison, and Mona, in Portland,



Cedars Living Center, Austin

Oregon, married and the mother of an adopted son.

Greg pauses to reflect—eloquently—on his career as a muralist. "For me, art has been a vehicle," he says. "It has taken me places I'd otherwise never have gone, and I've met people I'd otherwise never have known."

Art, by its very nature, is about informing the human spirit, which is exactly what Greg Wimmer says he values most about his relationship with a UU faith community.

Readers can view many of Greg's murals and his other work on his website, gregsgraphicart.com. Take a look!

Patricia Calvert is the author of many books, a life-long humanist, and longtime member of First UU.

Blue Sky Dental Building, Rochester



Revealed:

The Secret Life of Church Sextons!

By Sue Wheeler

When Bruce Jordan recruited volunteers for the job of sexton at our church in 2003, two things impressed us: first, he said we should always keep the Kleenex “perked” (see photo), and second, he told us the legend of Linda Horton, dedicated Property Chair. One Sunday morning, Linda discovered the kitchen and closet were flooded. The floor had to be mopped up for coffee hour. Linda was wearing light-colored slacks, so she waited until the service had started, took off her slacks, and crawled around in her underwear trying to get things cleaned up enough to have coffee hour. Fortunately, any latecomers went right upstairs into the service, so she didn’t get caught.

For the past 13 years, sextons have been looking after the church in the dedicated footsteps of Linda (although we keep our clothes on!) and



Bruce. You’ve seen our names in weekly Sunday bulletins and in the *Weekly eNews* or perhaps you’ve seen the sexton logo at the bottom of our nametags.

But what do you really know about us? At last, all will be revealed!

By 2006 the sexton corps had increased to seven women: Anita Feucker, Aleta Borrud, Barb Foss, Jamie Crawford, Kathy Lohr, Patty Trnka, Robin Taylor, and Sue Wheeler. Jennifer Harveland joined for a year or two, and as others moved away or opted out, we added people: Jim and Judy Jensen, Frank Druktainis, Randy Crawford, Nathan Harff, and George Huston. Darrel Waters has been a valuable mentor and helper throughout the years. At this time our church is also lucky to have a very capable and helpful custodian, Tom Rud.

In the early years, we were responsible for opening the front doors on Sunday morning, “crawling on our bellies through pine needles to water Christmas trees” (as Jamie described



2007 Sexton Party – seated: Jim, Judy, Robin, Jamie;
standing: Sue, Bruce, Barb, Kathy

it), emptying dehumidifiers daily, and meeting renters to make sure all was well. "I felt like an errant schoolchild being scolded," Jennifer reported when the outside steps to the Commons weren't shoveled to a renter's satisfaction. The church now has programmed, automatic doors; artificial trees; pumping dehumidifiers; and reliable snow plowing. Still there are plenty of things to look after in our multi-story, well-used building.

At present there are seven sextons and one sexton couple, and each is assigned a week during which to visit the church anywhere from 4-7 times. As you might imagine, the busiest day is Sunday, and that day culminates the week-long monitoring period.



Frank turning off lobby automatic door

Sunday Morning The Sexton's Big Day

Our job on Sunday morning is to arrive at church around 8 a.m. (9 a.m. in the summer), check the grounds for general readiness, unlock doors, open the nametag cupboards, tidy the coat room, and turn on the lights in the entryway, lobby, and hearth room/hearth room display case. We check the restrooms (more on that later), and head up to the sanctuary to make sure the lights are on, the heat or air conditioning is working, and the piano is uncovered and opened. We also find out if the service coordinator and minister need anything. Sometimes we help the ushers with distributing the hymnals, straighten the chairs, fill in for a sick usher, or help guest musicians.

Next we tour the Religious Education wing to verify that the boiler is heating the rooms,

open classroom doors, turn on lights, and check RE rest rooms for cleanliness, paper towels, and toilet paper. Once we are assured that all is well, we might stay for the service and the coffee hour to help with any issues that come up.

The New Sextons

*On Monday to church we set out.
With these keys we know we have clout.
We check temps and the air
Down the hall up the stair
Wondering what is this job all about?*

*We patrol the halls, me and my spouse.
We are lord and lady of the house.
We check all the doors
On miscellaneous floors
And pray we don't meet with a mouse!*

*We are proud to be "in the loop"
Of a brave company, a valorous troupe.
So raise a glass high
Each lady and guy
To UU sextons, an awesome group!*

Judy and Jim Jensen, 2007

We return later on Sunday to make sure doors and windows are closed and locked, rest rooms are in good shape, lights are off, classroom doors are closed (per the Fire Marshal), and to pick up books, choir folders, dirty cups and glasses, abandoned clothing, food, stray bulletins, and miscellaneous clutter throughout the building. We water the vase of flowers, and if it is still in the sanctuary, we move it to the lobby. Next we check the kitchen where we sometimes find stove burners on, the refrigerator door open, and booster and dishwasher set to "On." That's the end of the sexton on-duty week.

Daily (Or Almost Daily) Walk Through

On Monday, the first day of our week, we look at the weekly church schedule so we know when to set the sanctuary thermostat for events. To ensure a comfortable space, we set the thermostat to heat a couple of hours before the event since the furnaces “super heat” the space as they try to warm it from the setback temperature of 64 degrees to 70 degrees.

We make sure the sanctuary is tidy in case there are any weekday events and always push on the north outside door to assure it is locked. The rest of the walk through is fairly easy, just looking for items that don’t belong, checking restrooms and mousetraps, and making sure electrical appliances are turned off, windows are closed, and automatic doors are set.

After Monday, the walk through doesn’t take long—maybe 20 minutes—unless we find something that needs attention caused by a meeting or other activity from the day before. We each decide during our week which days and what times we go to the church. At the end of the week, we usually email our fellow sextons to let them know of any issues.

Would you enjoy being a sexton?

Do you like to set your own schedule and operate independently? Are you looking for an opportunity to serve the church in a flexible and rewarding manner? Would you like to join a friendly and fun-loving group? If you’ve answered “yes” to any of these questions, then the role of sexton is for you. We are always looking for a few good women and men!

So, what do sextons deal with?

Mice!

Trapping mice became part of the sexton job by 2006. If you’ve been in the church kitchen, you’ve seen the set mousetraps on the floor in various corners. Robin reported in April 2006: “Boy, I really hope the renters didn’t see the dead mice in the kitchen traps last night, but they were so stiff this morning that I bet they did! YUCK.” Shortly after this, Barb wrote the following announcement for the *Venture*: “MICE!! In the church! There are mice in the church and they are having a feast. Please, do not leave any food outside a sturdy container, in the kitchen or elsewhere in the building.” So sextons added a new item to check on our daily rounds of the church—make sure there is no food left out in the building. As Barb told us, “If it doesn’t fit in the fridge, throw it away!”



That same fall Kathy asked her fellow sextons: “Can anyone beat Darrel’s record for trapping mice (5+) in a 24-hour period? Darrel has been nice enough to set and empty traps in the kitchen every day. No doubt you are welcome to do the same if you so desire. Hopefully we can stay on top of this as there seems to be an abundance of them this fall. Any thoughts about a cat?”

Four years later Sue reported, “Although it was a quiet week, it was one of personal growth for me. I ‘handled’ three trapped and dead mice, one each on Tuesday, Friday, and Sunday. I have never had to do that before, but I just bit the bullet and did it—with gloves of course.”

Our church custodian Tom has mostly taken care of dealing with “full” mouse traps over

the past few years, so sextons are thankful we aren't as busy with that aspect of the job these days. **Don't leave food items out at church where mice will be tempted.**

Heat



Randy troubleshooting sanctuary thermostat

The bane of a sexton's existence has always been getting (or not getting) the sanctuary temperature right—the difficulty mostly has to do with “super heating” which blasts heat into the room until it reaches the set temperature and then runs only when the room cools down below that temperature. Thus, in the winter the space is very warm for an hour and then gets cooler as the service or activity starts. This from Aleta, December 24, 2003: “No one was pleased as usual with the temperature. I had set heat for the agreed-upon 71° to come on 3 hours early to try and heat up the cement blocks. One congregant had the outside door wide open to cool down the sanctuary while I was trying to heat it up, saying, ‘You don't know anything about these furnaces.’ I relented, turned down the heat and everyone froze during the service. Oh well!”

In December 2015 Randy reported to the rest of us after getting a complaint from a renter that the temperature was 90 degrees: “The sanctuary thermostat was set to 70°. I set it to come on at 11:00 a.m. I went to the church at around 11:20 or so, the heat was blowing but it had obviously just started to heat up. The sanctuary was NOT 90°.”

Restrooms

This is not a pretty topic. Even though our custodian does the regular cleaning of the rest rooms, our walk-throughs often include flushing toilets which haven't been flushed by those who use them. Following are just a few descriptions of what we find. Barb, December 2009 - “What I'll call ‘GUS’ (gross urinal situation) following Sunday's activities and before the recital. Who does that?” Barb again, December 2010 - “the middle toilet in ladies room was plugged after Sunday services (plungered and seemed to be working okay so just be aware there may still be something stuck in there), water left running in men's room sink.” Sue, December 2014 - “I had to use the plunger in the men's bathroom and flush residue in two of the women's stalls on Saturday ... and earlier in the week the urinal in the RE wing bathroom hadn't been flushed—what is going on with people? Are they too busy during this holiday season to flush?”

Please, please make sure you flush properly!

In the winter, wear layers in the sanctuary, as Bill Thompson does.



Sunday Morning Sextoning

*T'was early on Sunday morning
One hour before church
And the sexton was furiously
Engaged in the search*

*For things that were dirty
Or out of their place
To make the church comfortable
--a sacred space.*

*The doors were unlocked,
And the nametags in view.
The classrooms were tidy,
And the lights were on, too.*

*The temperatures perfect,
The carpets pristine,
The windows all sparkling.
Things seemed really clean.*

*The bathrooms were last
On this long Sunday list,
And the sexton was hoping
To find nothing amiss.*

*But the futile hope vanished
In the push of the door
As the whiff of an odor
Hinted at something more.*

*Every sexton nerve stood
At attention just then,
And the search was on
For whatever offends.*

*"Not again," cried the sexton.
"Oh how can it be?
In a church of the civilized
What irony!"*

*The disgust and the loathing
Welled up in a rush.
"Why can't these congregants
Learn how to flush?"*

Sue Wheeler, 2007

Automatic Doors

A new sexton duty has popped up in the last few years since the installation of automatic doors inside the building. When people are using the building, they tend to prop open those doors—it's easier to get around without having to open doors wherever they go. However, that is a problem. The doors are battery powered, so when they are propped open, the mechanism must be turned off or it could be damaged. Sextons know the switches need to be turned to off, but sextons can't be everywhere!



Nate turning off automatic door to RE wing

Before you prop open an automatic door, turn the switch to "Off" then remember to turn it back to "On" when you leave.

Sextons enjoy the chance to serve our fellow congregants by providing a regular presence at the church, correcting anything that is amiss, and communicating any issues to the Property Committee, the staff, and other church contacts. However, the church depends on those who use it, whether for meetings or activities, to make sure when they leave that the space is clean, windows and doors are locked, and lights are turned off. It works best when everyone in the congregation takes responsibility for the cleanliness and security of the building. **In reality we are all sextons!**

Sue Wheeler has been a church member since 1983 and a sexton since 2003. She thinks it's the best volunteer job in the church.



Sue sextoning on December 4, 2016

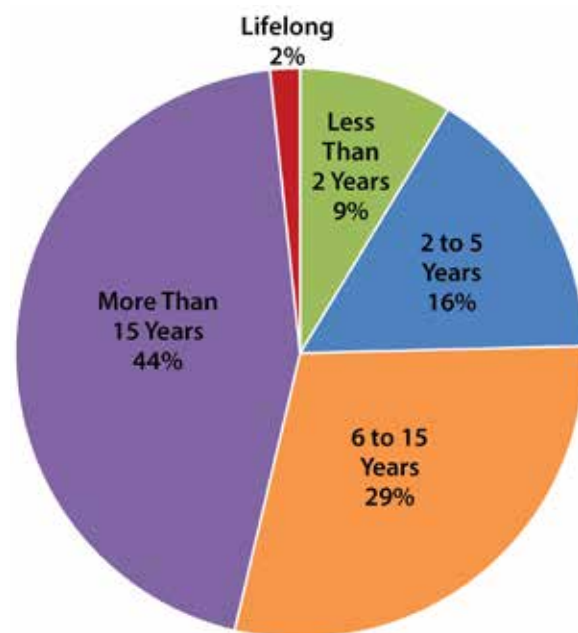
Our Congregation ... By the Numbers

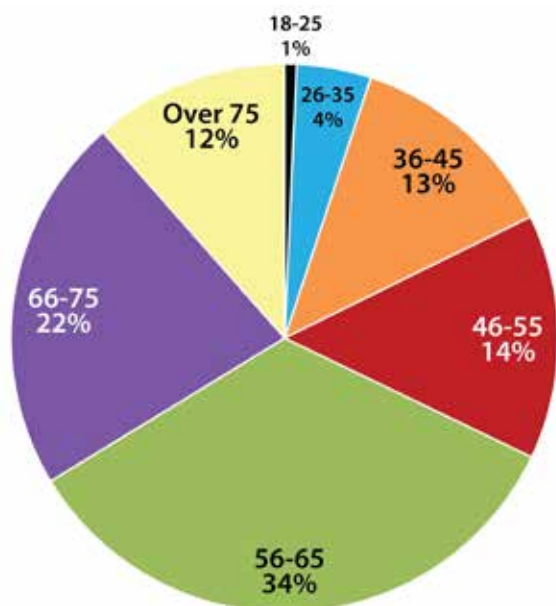
Since June, our Ministerial Search Committee has been hard at work learning about our congregation so their findings can be shared with potential ministerial candidates. They have met with congregants in "Cottage Meetings," held a "Beyond Categorical Thinking" workshop, and conducted a member survey. Of 306 members who could have taken the survey, 244 members responded (a response rate of 80%); 45 friends of the congregation also responded.

Following are results you may find interesting...

How Long Have You Been Involved at First UU?

Almost half of our members have belonged to the church for more than 15 years (with nearly 80% attending for six or more years). Five members have been involved at First UU all of their lives.



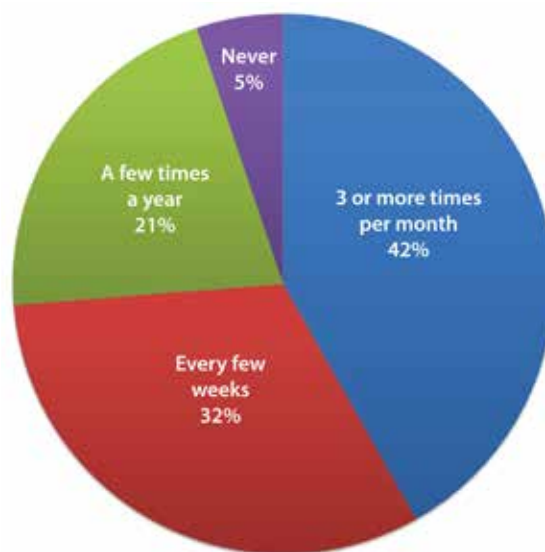


What is Your Age?

Our members tend to be older; two-thirds of our members are over 55 years old.

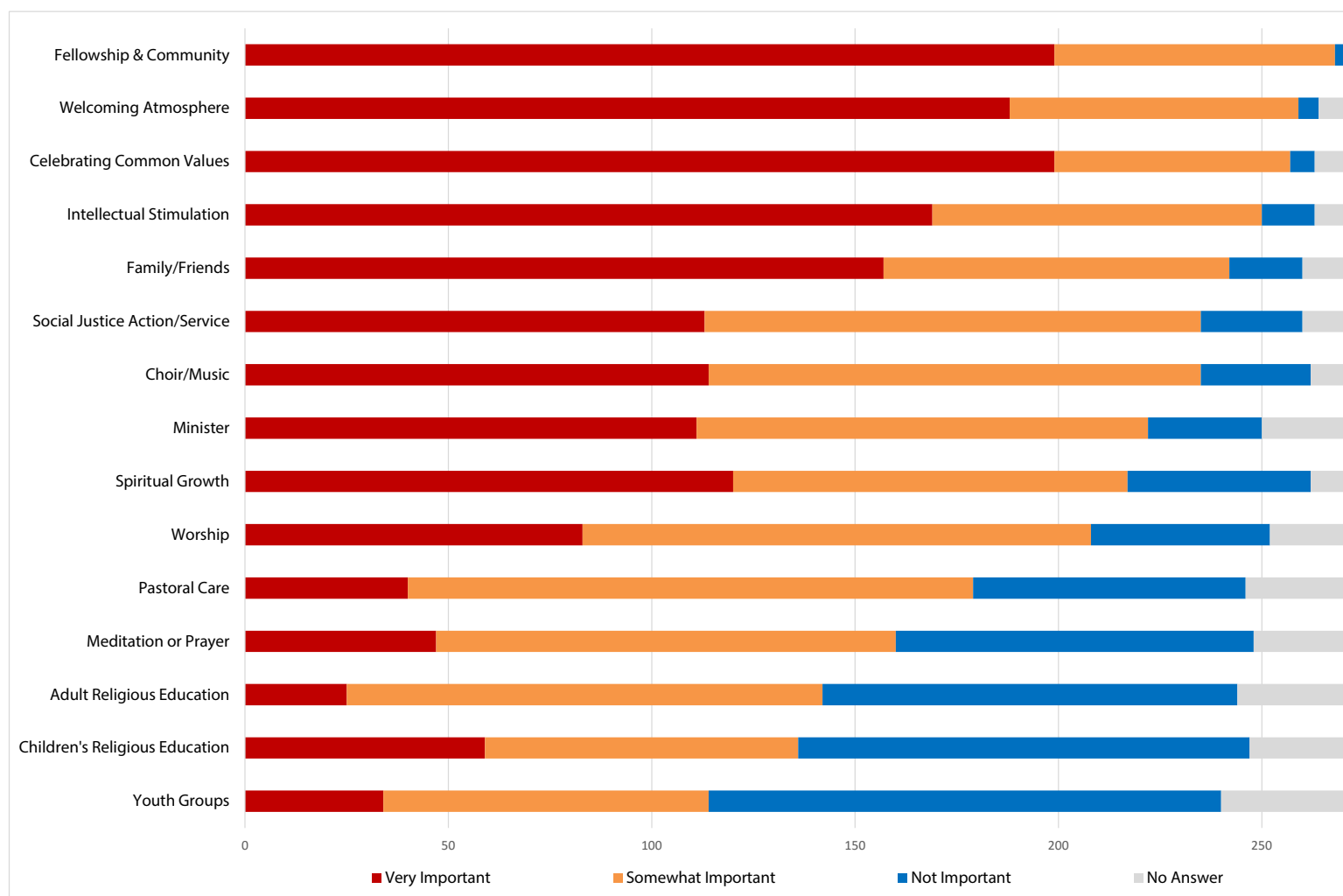
How Often Do You Attend?

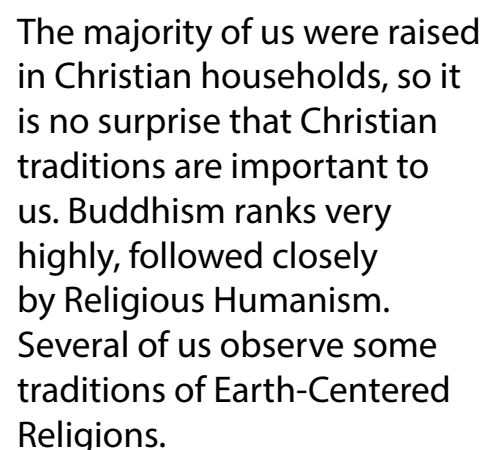
Most of our members attend services regularly. At least 42% of members and friends consistently attend three or more times a month.



What draws you to First UU?

People are drawn to our church for a message that resonates with our shared values and challenges our thinking. Many people also come because they have children and want to give them their children a religious education that respects world religions and the UU Principles. We stay because we find fellowship and a welcoming community of like-minded people who support each other and the social justice causes we value.





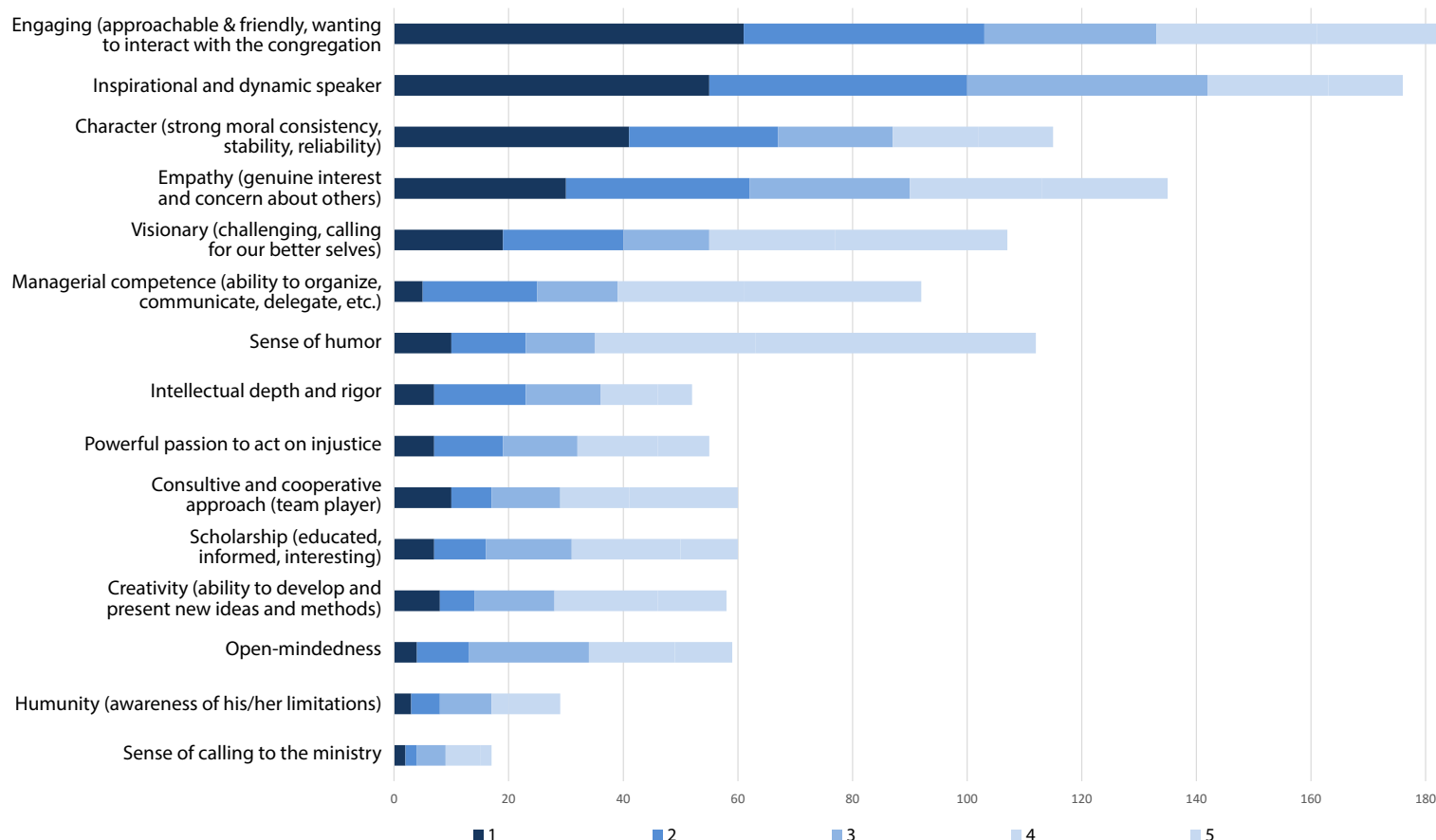
Of the 232 people who answered this question, 21 marked that none of these traditions were important to them, and 20 checked several boxes. This may reflect our openness and recognition that there are many paths to our personal spirituality.

It was clear through the responses to this question that we reflect our mission statement: "to be a compassionate, welcoming community that nurtures spiritual growth and practices justice." We are supportive, tolerant, involved, open, friendly, committed, and willing to take a public stand on important issues of social justice.



Which of the following qualities do we feel are most important for our congregation's new settled minister?

Members and friends were asked to rank their top five choices.



Our Minister's Role

The congregation as a whole seeks a minister to stimulate us intellectually and lead us in our spiritual practice and growth. Older and longer-term members also acknowledge the important roles of a minister in encouraging and supporting lay leaders and effectively coordinating the work of the staff. Younger members hope our minister will help build a stronger, more vibrant congregation.



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



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