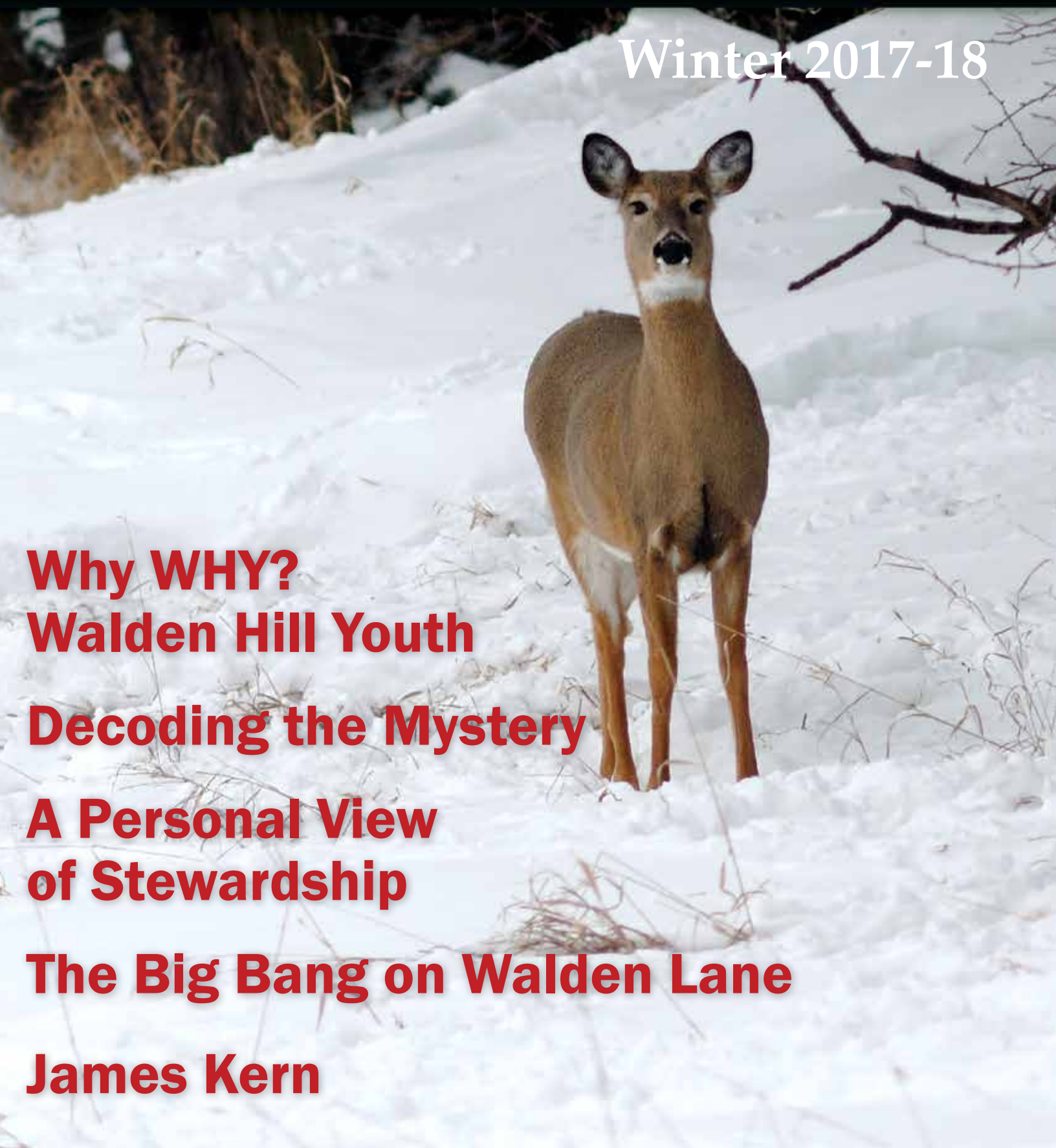




# UU REVUE

Winter 2017-18

A photograph of a deer standing in a snowy field. The deer is brown with a white patch on its throat and chest. It is looking directly at the camera. The background is a snowy landscape with some dry grass and a bare tree branch visible on the right.

**Why WHY?**  
**Walden Hill Youth**  
**Decoding the Mystery**  
**A Personal View**  
**of Stewardship**  
**The Big Bang on Walden Lane**  
**James Kern**



## **First Unitarian Universalist Church**

1727 Walden Lane SW  
Rochester, Minnesota 55902  
507-282-5209  
uurochmn.org

### **Communications Committee**

Paulette DeMers  
Kathy Brutinel  
Shelly Maciujec  
Sue Wheeler  
Jody Tharp

### **Contributors**

Kathy Brutinel, writer  
Paulette DeMers, design  
Angie Joyce, photography  
Robin Taylor, writer  
Phil Wheeler, writer  
Sue Wheeler, writer

### **Staff**

Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer  
Minister  
Joyce Rood  
Director of Religious Education  
Melissa Egger  
Coordinator of Congregational Life  
Jody Tharp  
Congregational Co-Administrator  
Connie Schuelka  
Congregational Co-Administrator &  
Co-Director of Music  
Joe Mish  
Co-Director of Music  
Derik Robertson  
Youth Program Coordinator  
Tom Rud  
Custodian

# Inside this Issue

- 2** Why WHY? Walden Hill Youth
- 6** Decoding the Mystery
- 13** A Personal View of Stewardship
- 16** The Big Bang on Walden Lane
- 20** James Kern

## 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.

# Why WHY?

## Walden Hill Youth

By Sue Wheeler

A church group that meets for two hours every single week? That's a huge commitment! Yet if you show up at the First UU Church of Rochester at 6:30 p.m. on most Wednesdays and head upstairs to the Murray Room, you will find some committed folks: a group of 14 or more people, 7th-12th graders, busily talking and snacking while waiting for the meeting to convene. "These are a lot of people I grew up with and have known forever, but I've only seen them on Sunday. Youth group is a way to get to know them better," explained a 9th grader who regularly attends the Wednesday night meeting of Walden Hill Youth (WHY). It's true. There is plenty of time for getting better acquainted, but that's not all WHY does.

The three goals of this year's WHY are Fun, Service, and Relationships. To achieve these goals, they have set up three working committees: Fellowship, Finance, and Worship. A 7th grader explained, "We have different committees and we talk about what we want to do and should



*WHY Bell Ringing for the Salvation Army - Adult "Helpers": Erika Beetcher, Natasha Vermilyea, Jason Hayes, Derik Robertson*

do as a group—instead of adults telling us or planning what we will do." Committees meet as part of the Wednesday meeting to discuss and make decisions about activities.

WHY has been quite active so far this year. On one Wednesday night, church member and yoga instructor Gen Hulsing led the group in yoga. "They were so receptive," Gen said when asked about that evening. "They listened, and at the end one girl said she felt so relaxed, which is exactly what a yoga teacher wants to hear!"

Other activities included a game night and a movie night. The day after Halloween the youth had a party with decorations, leftover Halloween candy, and a somewhat gross (they are teenagers after all!) arrangement of potato chips and dip. One Wednesday the activity was simply homework: a place to study and work on end-of-quarter projects. "We actually help each other with our homework," remarked an 11th grade WHY member.

The service projects have included work in both the community and the church. Gathering with other Rochester youth at Bethel



*Twelve teenagers met for Homework Night at a November WHY meeting*



*Clearing buckthorn at Chester Woods Park*

Lutheran Church on a Saturday in September, they helped package over 120,000 bags of oatmeal and rice for Food for Kidz, a nonprofit organization that distributes meals to hungry children all over the world. On October 22 they created and led a children's chapel service based on the monthly theme of Forgiveness. At the end of the month they jumped at the chance to cut buckthorn at Chester Woods Park with church member Phil Wheeler. They also contributed an item for the annual church service auction in November: "2 hours of service for any project that might need done around a house, yard, garden, street, park, etc." This item raised \$220 for the church. In addition, they volunteered to ring bells on the day before Thanksgiving to raise money for the Salvation Army.

The youth also raise money for WHY expenses. Their first fundraiser of the year, harvesting grapes at a winery, was canceled because of bad weather. The next one was a Children's Pancake and Pajama Party on December 9, when the WHY group welcomed children to an evening of pancakes, games, movies, and crafts while their parents (for a suggested donation) enjoyed a night of relaxing, dining, or holiday shopping. Fundraising is essential to the group's goals that include attending Cons (regional youth gatherings) and a Heritage Trip to Boston in 2019, much like the 2013 WHY trip led by then Director of Religious Education Ryan Shriver.

Watch for more fundraising events sponsored by this group of enthusiastic and active teenagers.

According to Derik Robertson, our new Youth Program Coordinator, "My job is to be the grand facilitator. I'm in it for the long haul, trying to build a program that is beneficial and sustainable and gets kids excited to be involved in the church." With the help of Youth Advisors Erika Beetcher, Jason Hayes, and Kim Edson, WHY and Derik are off to a good start this year.

### *Derik Robertson*

Derik and his family are fairly new to Rochester and to the church. He and his wife, Morgan, and their three children began attending on and off in 2015 and joined in 2016. Even before he applied for the youth position, he volunteered to teach a youth class (grades 9-12) during this past summer. Not seeing much offered by the church for that age group, he started thinking about what exactly a good youth program would look like.



*Derik setting up a Buster Keaton video on Movie Night*

And is he ever accustomed to thinking! Derik has a doctorate in English with a specialty in existential literature and theories of education with a focus on the American Renaissance (Whew!), specifically early American literary giant and pacifist Nathaniel Hawthorne. Just ask him about Hawthorne's essay "Chiefly about War Matters by a Peaceable Man" written for the *Atlantic Monthly* in 1862. It embodies Derik's ideas about teaching and learning. Hawthorne struggled with answering his own questions and continued to be uncomfortable with his

answers. He had a humility and an openness to the world around him—a critical thinker to Derik’s mind.

Derik applied for the Coordinator position for several reasons. He was a teacher for 8 years—middle school, high school, and college—but 2 years ago he left that career to become a technical writer for a large financial institution. Still, he couldn’t quite let go of that side of himself, and he saw the 10-hour-a-week Coordinator position as a way to continue teaching, a job he looks forward to. Through an active and relevant WHY program, he feels he can build something meaningful, so teenagers don’t feel forgotten or ignored and so he can in some way help strengthen the community that he and his family have found in our church. As he says, “Kids want to contribute, but many times they don’t know how. We all need to invite and honor the contributions of youth.”

**The Youth Coordinator position also includes “maintaining an active educational role in Sunday morning Religious Education programming.” Derik does this by teaching the Seekers class for 9-12 graders at 10 a.m. on most Sundays. It is a traditional RE class that uses a UUA curriculum as a springboard. It explores ways UU values intersect with other faiths using poetry, prayers, and scripture. One week the class examined Principal 7, the interdependent web of all existence, through the poetry of a 20th century Lakota holy man and a 19th century Hasidic Jew. “They represent incredibly different faith traditions and times, yet manifest our own respect and reverence for our world.” Derik says usually 5-7 kids attend the class each week, and he admits there was some initial pushback about “having” to read poetry. He also encourages them to attend regular Sunday services, which they can do before or after the Seekers class.**

## A Little History

Though it has been called by different names, a youth group has been around in our church almost since the beginning. The *Rochester Record & Union* newspaper contains an article about our church youth group dated February 9, 1894. In our church archives, minutes of the April 1923 youth group reported on a successful carnival—“Waffles, side shows, Egyptian dances, and dance music were combined into one effective program by members of the Y.P.C.U. (Young People’s Christian Union) of the First Universalist Church. The carnival took in about \$130 and netted us about \$74.” It’s not clear how they used the money, which would be equivalent to about \$1,060 in 2017 dollars.

The present youth group continues a long tradition in our church. The young people of the church have worshipped, camped, baked, meditated, played, traveled, created, grieved, organized, served, and learned together for generations. According to the proverb, “youth must be served.” Our young folks agree that it goes both ways.



*In 1989 the Youth Group gathered in the Podulke Studio to create a stained glass window as a memorial to one of their members. It was installed in the Children’s Chapel.*



*In 1990 the youth group cleverly baked pretzels during the Sunday services so the smell of baking bread would entice people to buy. It was a successful fundraiser; the pretzels sold like "hotcakes."*



*In 2013 12 WHY members and 3 chaperones embarked on a 7-day Boston Heritage Trip which included a stop at First Parish in Concord, est. 1636. Fundraisers for trip expenses included babysitting service, coffee house, books sales, bake sales, t-shirt sales, and stock sales. The present Walden Hill Youth hope to take a similar trip in 2019.*



*In October 2011 WHY members stayed overnight in boxes in a "Box City," a fundraiser for Interfaith Hospitality Network, now called Family Promise.*



*On the Boston Heritage Trip in 2013 Walden Hill Youth stopped by Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts, and autographed the beach there.*

*Sue Wheeler joined the church in 1983. She enjoys learning about activities in the church and then connecting them to its history—including in the early 1990s when she served as a youth group advisor.*

# Decoding the Mystery: Why UU Women's Retreats Are So Powerful

By Robin Taylor



Of the 35 women who signed up to attend the First UU Women's Retreat in Whalan, Minnesota, on the last weekend of October, Pat Wimmer was probably the only one who flew on a plane to get there. Pat, a church member since 1987 and a veteran of three women's retreats, moved to Michigan in August. "I just wanted to connect with my UU sisters," she says.

That deep need to spend time with other women is what motivated Melissa Egger, Coordinator of Congregational Life, to volunteer her time to chair the 2017 Women's Retreat planning committee.

"A group of women together is . . . miraculous," she affirms. "It is magical and healing." Melissa (a member since 2010) has been to countless women's retreats unrelated to the church and has helped to plan the last three for First UU.



Nicci Sylvester and Melissa Egger

The 2017 retreat, billed as "Nourish, Nurture, Renew," was held at the beautiful Cedar Valley Resort in Whalan with stunning views of Bluff Country, less than an hour from Rochester. Most of the women shared rooms in the log-sided Big Timber Cabin, which served as retreat headquarters, with its eight bedrooms, six bathrooms, two kitchens, and two carpeted Great Rooms, complete with cozy fireplaces. The rest stayed a short walk away in the Northwoods Retreat Cabin, which had equally lovely bedrooms and communal spaces.

The retreat promised food by Nicci Sylvester (creator of Tonic Local Kitchen and Juice Bar in Rochester), a variety of breakout sessions and activities, and the temptation of the Root River Trail outside the front door.

However, it was the lure of building community that enticed most of the participants, many of whom had never been to a women's retreat.

"One of the big reasons we joined the church was for fellowship and community," says Sarah Hayes, who started attending First UU in February of 2017. "I wanted to build and strengthen these relationships." For this reason, Sarah liked mealtimes best. "I sat next to a different person at every meal and tried to get to know someone new."

First-time attendee Janine van Ree (a member since 2005), whose youngest son is a senior this year, came because she is already planning for her empty nest. "I feel like I have to settle myself in new ways and connect more outside of my son's school. I was able to meet lots of new people and feel a different type of connection, so when I saw them at the auction I had something to say."



*Alter at our opening circle*

### *Creating a safe space for exploration*

The retreat officially began after dinner on Friday night with an opening ritual and drumming circle created by Stephanie Podulke (a member since 1979), who has years of experience using drumming as a healing tool

“I wanted to create a safe, sacred space for people,” she says. “There has to be a feeling of being enclosed.” She outlined the space downstairs with glowing candles and set up an altar of sorts in the middle with a bowl of ritual water and some large sprigs of rosemary. As people descended into the lower level for the ceremony, they had to be “smudged” by Patty Trnka (a member since 1983) with smoke from a bundle of burning sage, a traditional Native American ceremony designed to clear negativity.

“I think the whole idea of the Four Directions and the Medicine Wheel was novel to most people,” says Stephanie of her opening ceremony. She brought a basket of stones that she has collected from beaches and riverbeds all over the world,

on which she had painted a spiral—the symbol for spiritual journey. She asked people to think of an intention—something they wanted to gain or get rid of—and choose a stone to focus their intention on. “That way they could carry it with them and check back with it,” she says.



*Smudging*



*Bonnie Rivera*

"That ceremony meant a lot to me," recalls Pat. "It made me feel very connected to the group, but also to the earth."

Afterward, people were invited to choose a drum from Stephanie's vast collection and drum with abandon.

"I wasn't able to participate in the drumming because my hands were hurting so badly," says Bonnie Rivera (a member since 2013), whose pain is a side effect of her chemotherapy treatments. "But when the women came around me and drummed for me—it was a visceral feeling. It was so powerful it brought me to tears. It was so unexpected and hard to put into words—I felt warm and loved."

"When you are drumming, your soul and your hands are engaged," explains Stephanie. "Sometimes people feel they have been purged of what they need healing from."

### *So many choices to make or not make*

Saturday's program included a choice of several breakout activities. Or not. Janine expected to be doing a lot of writing and reflecting at the retreat, but "I felt like all the activities were so good, I chose to do them instead."

Retreat planners strived for a balance of contemplation, movement, and art activities. Options included yoga and meditation, needle felting, a Chalice Circle, photography, an introduction to reiki, an essential oils class, Tae Kwon Do, a

nature hike, "Color Personality Testing," belly dancing, and a keynote presentation by friend of the congregation Julie Brock on "Living Your Intention."

"We pull mostly from the congregation for our presenters," says Melissa. The non-church member presenters donated their time in exchange for staying for part of the retreat.

For first-time attendee Angie Joyce (a member since 2007), the schedule seemed overwhelming at first. "Then I realized that I didn't have to do everything—I could fashion the retreat the way I wanted, in true UU style."

Angie was recruited to offer a photography breakout session, but only one person signed up. Instead of being disappointed, Angie was thrilled. It enabled the two of them to get to know each other as they strolled, chatted, and snapped pictures. "It was perfect for a shy person like me," says Angie.

Individualizing the experience is of utmost importance, agrees Marie Davidiak, who has attended all seven retreats offered since she joined the church in 2004. This year Marie led a Chalice Circle as a breakout session, which gave people the opportunity to explore the topic of spirituality and community. "And I slept. And I thought, I figured some things out for myself. I went on a walk with other people, and had time to sit and meet people on a deeper level. I felt like I got what I was looking for out of the weekend."



*Needle felting with Amarama*

## *Good food nourishes body and soul*

Although many religious retreats demand reflection, meditation, and prayer, any outsider looking into our fall women's retreat might conclude that UUs require conversation, hilarity, and gourmet food. At any time of day (and well into the night), clusters of women could be found huddled around dining room tables or sunken into overstuffed chairs and couches—talking earnestly, laughing loudly, or snacking on delicious treats.

"The food was amazing!" (says practically everybody) and the snack bar was "pretty awesome," adds Sarah.

"I felt so pampered all weekend," says Janine. Each participant had to sign up to help out with meal prep or clean-up only once during the weekend. Nicci (a church member since 2013) made all the food, which added to the feeling of being nurtured during the retreat. Years ago, participants planned the meals and cooked together, but Nicci has made almost all the food herself for the past two retreats. "This is what I do!" she kept telling people as she shooed them out of the kitchen.

Cooking is Nicci's creative outlet. "I don't crochet," she explains with a laugh. She worked hard to put together a menu that was mostly organic, with lots of vegetarian options that took into consideration everyone's dietary needs. "If you don't eat well, you won't feel well," she says. Her reward was savoring everyone's smiles and enjoyment.



*Head chef and star of the show  
Nicci Sylvester*

Melissa and Nicci vetted the location for the fall retreat to make sure the kitchen would work. For years, the two friends used to attend (and eventually do programming for) a Women's Wellness Retreat at the Audubon Center on Grindstone Lake in Northern Minnesota. But with a change of directorship at that program, they decided to put their energies into helping create a retreat at their own church. They were both on the planning teams for the past three First UU Women's Retreats.



*Mealtime*

## *Women's retreats at First UU are a beloved tradition*

The history of women's retreats at First UU can be traced back to Elizabeth Katzmann (a member since 1981). Elizabeth used to serve on the women's retreat planning board of the former Prairie Star District (PSD), which held annual women's retreats hosted by different congregations all over the district's eight states. With Elizabeth on the steering committee, First UU hosted a successful PSD Women's Retreat at Good Earth Village in Spring Valley in October of 1989.

"Not long after that, we began hosting retreats just for ourselves, which were always great fun," recalls Jean Hanson, who grew up at First UU. "I guess we decided that we liked ourselves better," she jokes.

In 1991, a group was created at First UU called "Women Gathering." Sally Starz (who joined in 1984) proclaimed in the 1991 Annual Report, "The highlight of the (next) year will be the campout at Whitewater State Park...We will hike, walk, sing, talk, eat, build a campfire and sustain the bond of our friendships while creating new ones."

Then there were no women's retreats for almost 15 years as church leaders pursued other explorations. Some went to Women's Spirituality Conferences in Mankato or got involved in drumming circles or journeyed on other paths to self-discovery and connection. The Whitewater campouts became whole church events for many years before they disappeared as well.



*Jean Hanson, Jan Karlson, and Joyce Wood, 1991*

Finally, Kate Zabertini, a former DRE, revived the sporadic tradition in 2006 with a small women's retreat at the Anderson Center near Red Wing. A larger one followed in the same location the following November, with some women having to stay off-site.



*1991 Drumming Circle*



*2010 Retreat*



*Anita DeAngelis meditating in the snow, 2010*

In January 2010, the group traveled 130 miles to the ARC Retreat Center in Cambridge, Minnesota, where participants enjoyed shamanic drumming and cross-country skiing. When they returned to ARC in April of 2011, they found the creek had flooded almost up to the retreat center. “We were able to canoe through the trees and right up to the lake that still had ice on it,” reminisces Jen Bjorgum (a member since 2000) who has attended every women’s retreat since then.

In March of 2012, the UU women gathered at Villa Maria Retreat Center in Frontenac, but the nuns who ran the center required that patrons use their rather uninspired food service. In pursuit of good food, the UU women went to the beautiful Holy Spirit Retreat Center in Janesville, Minnesota, in January of 2013 and 2014, where Cynthia Daube made the food for the first one, and Nicci for the second.

“Never doing a retreat in January again!” says Melissa with a shudder. “The blizzard was so bad we had to call it on Saturday night—two years in a row!” She spent a long time looking for a venue that was available in the fall (after the 150th anniversary, of course). Bonita Underbakke told her about Cedar Valley Resort, where she had once worked. The quality of the space impressed everyone.

## *Gifts of the women’s retreat*

“The last retreat was the best retreat ever,” says Jen Bjorgum. “But I may have said that after every one.”

For shy Angie, it was a safe place to reveal something of herself and it felt good to let people get to know her a little better.

“I think there were things about the retreat that changed me,” muses her wife, Kim Edson (a member since 1999), who had never attended before. “There was a lot of food for thought. I had some insights into myself. Angie and I talked about it for a week afterward and appreciated the deeper conversation.” Kim also enjoyed the opportunity to share her passion for essential oils in a breakout session, which gave people the opportunity to create fragrant sprays and balms for themselves.

Participants also had a chance to write brief notes or affirmations to everyone and place them in bags that they decorated on Friday night. “The Affirmation Bags were a special treat,” says everyone’s new role model, the unstoppable 89-year-old Penny Jacobsen, who only recently completed our “Pathways to Membership” class. Understandably, she got lots of fan mail!

After trying out new activities at the retreat, Rachel Froud (a member since 2004) was inspired to look into a belly dancing class, and



*Janine van Ree and Rachel Froud*

Janine intends to take Tae Kwon Do sometime in the future. “And I think felting might become my little hobby,” admits Pat Wimmer.

Pat flew home to Michigan loaded with gifts. She gave away the essential oil spray and the felted acorn she created, and she even felt compelled to give her special rock to a friend. But she had a bag full of lovely affirmations to read and her connections to her UU family were fully restored--she was nourished, nurtured, and renewed.



*Closing night with keynote speaker, Julie Brock*



*View out the window of our lodge.*

*Robin Taylor has been a member of First UU since 1992. This was her first retreat but it won't be her last.*

*Photos from the 2017 retreat by Angie Joyce and Melissa Egglar. Photos from the 2010 retreat by Carolynne White.*

# A Personal View of Stewardship

By Kathy Brutinel

Over the past 30 years, both Jerry Katzmann and Phil Wheeler have told me the following story several times. Before we installed air conditioning, we had no ability to control the humidity in the sanctuary, which caused numerous problems every summer. A couple years after Phil became a member, he noticed several people nailing down the parquet flooring that had buckled on the chancel and said to Jerry, who was Board President at the time, “You have a lot of valuable instruments up here. You people should do something about the humidity.” And Jerry looked at him and said, “Not you people; we people.”

They keep telling this story because it’s important. An intentional community such as our church congregation exists only because each new member becomes a steward of its future. For a church to thrive, the act of becoming a member must lead to a change in perspective. There’s no THEY when it comes to envisioning the future of our church, doing the work that brings our visions to fruition, paying the bills, or coming together to create a learning and supportive community. It’s all WE.

A theme used during our annual stewardship campaign several times in the past 30 years sums it up: “I belong to the church and the church belongs to me.”

This symbiosis is a bit counter cultural, as it implies a mutual connectedness that goes against the grain of the increasingly individualistic

happiness movement in our culture. A recent opinion piece by Ruth Whippman in *The New York Times* (Oct. 27, 2017) explores the current spirit of the times. She writes:

*Spiritual and religious practice is slowly shifting from a community-based endeavor to a private one, with silent meditation retreats, mindfulness apps and yoga classes replacing church socials and collective worship. The self-help industry — with its guiding principle that the search for happiness should be an individual, self-focused enterprise — is booming, with Americans spending more than \$1 billion on self-help books a year to help guide them on their inner journeys.*

Whippman notes, however, that “...far from confirming our insistence that ‘happiness comes from within,’ a wide body of research tells us almost the exact opposite.” She explains:

*Study after study shows that good social relationships are the strongest, most consistent predictor there is of a happy life, even going so far as to call them a “necessary condition for happiness,” meaning that humans can’t actually be happy without them. This is a finding that cuts across race, age, gender, income and social class so overwhelmingly that it dwarfs any other factor.*

While “happiness” is not precisely the goal of a church, the communal practices of our liberal faith provide the ground on which meaning,

purpose, and connection can be built above the shifting sands of a culture that tends to segregate people as market shares or production units. Our church thrives when people participate in worship, attend classes to learn and share experience, participate in the committees and teams that bring the spirit of the church to life, and generously support it with their financial contributions. Those same activities enrich the lives of the participants by building wisdom, exploring values, and strengthening social connections.

Perhaps some religious institutions have become meaningless because they refuse to evolve or “re-form.” (See Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer’s sermon of November 5, 2017, for a new understanding of the Reformation and its connection to Unitarian Universalism.) But in liberal religion, the value of the institution

is to provide the tradition and the venue; the congregants are responsible for transforming the congregational culture and mission to keep it relevant in a changing world. A UU church re-forms each time a new person joins, and it re-forms every time new and old members decide how we want to participate and how much of ourselves we want to invest. We are stewards of the congregation when we show up, participate, and pitch in.

One Sunday morning during coffee hour I talked to several people about stewardship. Some have been allied with the church for many years; some came only recently. Some have been involved in many areas of church life; some have concentrated on one thing. But all agreed on what has become something of a volunteer cliché: “I get more out of it than I put in.” And they all tended to have similar reasons why: “I get to know people in a deeper way—it’s led to decades of friendship.” “Coffee hour

just doesn’t provide community like working together does.” “I want to be part of the solution, and I get to work with people whose selflessness is amazing.” “I want this church to thrive and I know this work needs to be done.” “I love sharing my passions with others.”

It’s clear that stewardship—in the sense of volunteering one’s time and talent—nurtures both the church as an institution and us as individuals in the sense that it enables us to deepen our connectedness and act on our values.



Stewardship in the financial sense is a more complicated issue in our congregation, just as money is a fraught issue in our culture. When I moved my Sunday morning conversation topic from giving time to giving money, I felt a palpable change in the air. People get anxious when asked to talk about

the church and money, a situation that has vexed me for years. I would like to re-form our approach to money and financial stewardship.

- Let us resist judging ourselves or others by our financial means. In the November 5 sermon referred to previously, Rev. Stevens-Royer spoke of Grace: “The radical reformation rebuttal to the selling of indulgences was the idea of Grace ... that you can’t buy or earn your worth, your dignity – you are beloved, as you are, imperfect and fallible and human – that your worth and your dignity is inherent, intrinsic – you can’t earn it – you’re born with it.”

In other words, a person’s worth and dignity as a member of our congregation is not determined by how much money he or she has. Our culture gives money outsized power by valuing people based on their income and their assets; we need to resist that way of thinking. Our policies and attitudes need to convey that

everyone is valued for their presence without regard for their ability to give. When we are valued for who we are, we can consider more easily these questions: “How important is the church in my life? How does my giving at church relate to my spending in other areas of my life? Does my contribution reflect my values?”

- Let us resist the mindset of consumerism, which leads to questions like, “What services does the church provide for me? How is it going to entertain me? What percentage of the time do I attend?” These questions lead to a mentality of merely paying for services rendered.

Instead we need to foster a mentality of mutualism. The questions should be, “How do we come together to welcome the stranger, care for each other, grow our spirits, nurture our children, and make a difference in the world? Am I giving the church an amount that reflects its value? How important is it that this congregation exists for people who need hope?”

- Let us allow our religion to be something that makes a difference in our lives. Do we live our lives and spend our money any differently than our neighbors who do not belong to a church community with a values-based mission? Our beliefs should challenge us to live our lives as if our choices, including financial choices, make a difference.

Tom Schade, a retired UU minister, writes a blog entitled *The Lively Tradition*. A few years ago he wrote frequently about UU virtues. From “The Mission of Liberal Religion,” 2013:

“The virtues of liberal religion are reverence, self-possession, the gemini twins of gratitude and generosity, honesty, humility, solidarity, and openness. The well-being of the planet and all who live on it depends on each of us making these values the cornerstones of our lives. These virtues are the ethical implications of the way we religious liberals understand the world. Our mission is to embody these virtues, persuade others of their necessity, and convert the world to living in accordance with them.”

Generosity, including generosity in your financial support of our church, makes a difference. Not generosity that you can’t afford, not generosity that will make you resentful, but a generosity that makes you feel you have made a difference in the life of the church, and a generosity that has made a difference in your life.

The UUA Commission on Appraisal, in its publication entitled *Belonging: The Meaning of Membership*, makes the following statement: “The local congregation can be envisioned as a laboratory where people bring their life experiences, responses, feelings, hopes, and dreams. The great experiment is to put all of that together in a form that creates meaning, gives definition to each person, and allows each person to expand his/her perspective and to continually seek and occasionally find transformation” (2001, p. 12).

Our stewardship—time, talent, and financial support— is what gives this vision life.

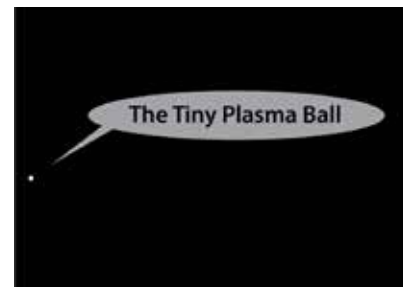
*Kathy Brutinel is a former treasurer, Finance Committee member, pledge campaign chair, new member visitor, and canvasser, with lots of opinions on the subject of stewardship.*

# The Big Bang On Walden Lane

By Phil Wheeler

Our church property has an interesting mix of native plants. There are cottonwoods and cedar trees within twenty feet of each other for example, which is odd because cedars are usually found in dry upland environments and cottonwoods are usually found in wet flood plain environments. Why are they so close together on the same property, you wonder?

It all started roughly 13.8 billion years ago with an incredibly dense, hot, plasma ball smaller than a pinhead. It is difficult to identify exactly where our church property was in this dense speck of proto-matter, but the illustration gives a rough approximation.



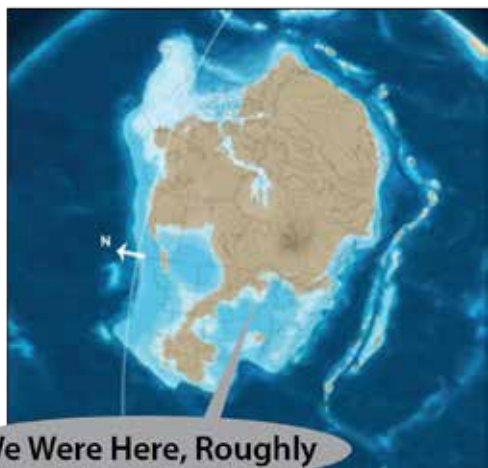
Within nanoseconds, our church site's location shifted radically. A great deal is unknown about our site during this phase of its history.

An old galaxy, the Milky Way formed soon afterwards, around 13.7 billion years ago. Our church property is way out on one of its spiral arms in one of its smaller star systems. The ball of gas and dust that became our planet coalesced about 4.5 billion years ago, with a thin, mobile crust overlying a turbulent molten core.



This was followed by roughly 700 million years of lifelessness and another 2.6 billion years of simple organisms reproducing asexually. (Together these form a relatively listless period referred to ecclesiastically as the "era of low attendance.") After roughly 800 million years of the evolution of multi-celled creatures with calcium carbonate shells and tectonic plate movement,

our part of Minnesota (note the faint outlines of states and provinces; also the north arrow) ended up under shallow equatorial seas at the west end of a continent called Laurentia. Our bedrock layers of shale, limestone from all those shells, and sandstone from the beaches are the result. As the map shows, northern Minnesota is part of the core of the continent, called the Laurentian Shield. Parts of it have never been covered over by younger rocks. Some bedrock types on the Laurentian Shield (northern Minnesota) are 2.5 to 3 billion years old, whereas bedrocks in Olmsted County are all less than 500 million years old.



Spending that much time by the tropical beach under the equatorial seas has made all the difference. The sinkholes, caves, springs, and seeps in our part of Minnesota are here because of millions of years of rain percolating through and dissolving the limestone laid down by the shells of those seas.

Eventually, the continent that became known as North America migrated from south of the equator to its current position much closer to the North Pole. This exposed our property to the impacts of several ice ages. As they advanced and retreated, ice sheets reshaped the landscape, bringing deposits of clay, boulders, and cobbles (and anything else in their way) from up north to down here. These deposits, known as glacial till, filled in the old valley of the Zumbro River during the most recent glacier to cover part of Olmsted County, perhaps 250,000 years ago. As the glaciers melted they generated huge amounts of water, carving a new valley for the Zumbro and reconfiguring its tributaries. Because of all of this erosion (and human excavation), we can see those layers of rock behind our church to the northeast.

Glaciers are also responsible for our richest soils. As glaciers retreated from the northern plains, the bare soil left behind was exposed to dry conditions and wind storms. Dust storms carried silt, which settled here (it's called "loess") and now covers most of Olmsted County, except the steep bluffs and knobs and the areas below them, and flood plains. The northwest part of the church property was a ravine ages ago. It is now buried in at least six feet deep of wind-deposited silt forming the basis of its soil and subsoil.



*The limestone we see on our property is part of the Platteville limestone, found in a sequence of formations that includes the Decorah and Glenwood shale layers (note: shale is impermeable to water). The cedar is at the back—the one with green “leaves,” the cottonwood is the trunk to the far left.*

Except for giving us loess, the last glacier, the Des Moines lobe, missed Olmsted County entirely, which is why we are part of the so-called “driftless area.” However, it cooled our climate quite a bit, changing our vegetation so much that there are still close relatives of tundra plants clinging to cliffs in Olmsted County. Where there was tundra, there were woolly mammoths. And where there were mammoths, there were early Native American mammoth hunters. Property once owned by church members Don and Phyllis Layton, in northeast Rochester, has a cave in the depths of which are rock carvings by early Native Americans. We think they were mammoth hunters because of other findings elsewhere, and because southeast of that cave near church members Rick and Betty Devine’s house there was found a 12,000 year old cache of stone spear points, the oldest yet discovered in Minnesota. They are the type of spear points used to hunt woolly mammoths.

Given the geology of the area and the other factors affecting soils (topography, the direction the slopes are facing, climate, and so on), the vegetation map below shows the types of vegetation that produced the types of soils our church neighborhood developed. Over the 10,000 or so years since the last glaciers retreated, our property was in the middle of a mixture of plant communities. On our property we had forest in the northwest loess area; mixed flood plain vegetation along a drainage-way near where Walden Lane is now; and (in the northeast part of our property, with shallow soil above limestone) mixed brush and trees. Nearby there were more forests, prairies, bluff prairies, and savannas.



*On our property (white square above), the soil in the green “upland forest” area is deep loess. The soil with the “upland mixed” label is shallow with limestone fragments. Roads are shown for ease of reference; they were not there when the soils were formed.*

We can verify some of this with historical records. At the time of the original public land survey in 1854, the church property was in an area characterized by the surveyors as “brushy with scattering timber.” To our north along where 2nd Street is now (west of US 52) was prairie; there was also prairie in what is now Apache Mall. There was “forest timber” at the entrance of Saint Marys Hospital. The rest of the area was also “brushy with scattering timber,” which may indicate savanna transitioning to woodland.

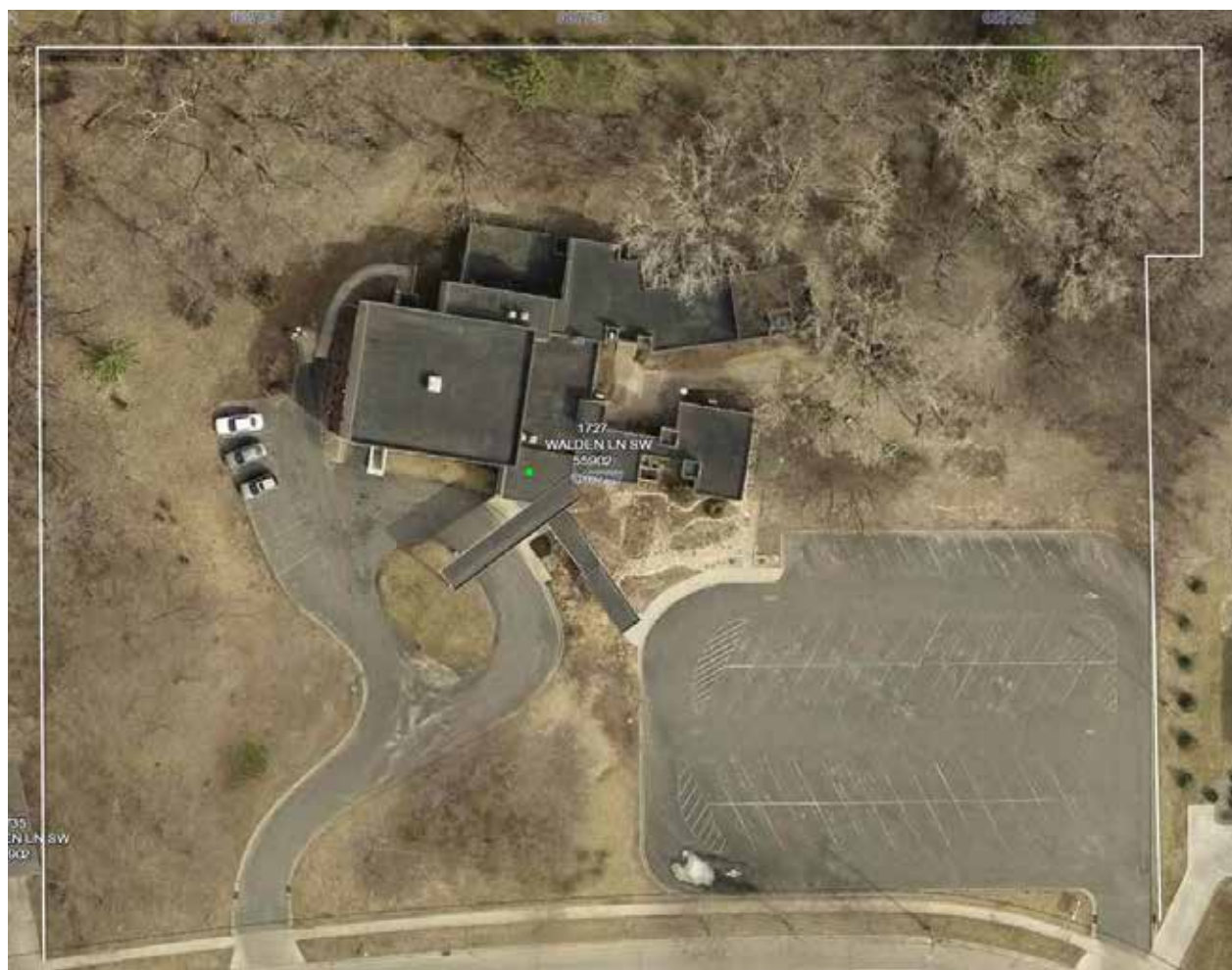
The surveyors used the nearest trees to mark where section corners were located. In the area around Section 3 of Rochester Township (we are just about at the center of that Section), the trees included eleven bur oaks, six black oaks, and six white oaks. Bur oaks are characteristic of savannas because, with their thick bark, they are able to withstand prairie fires. White oaks and black oaks are more shade tolerant and less fire resistant and are characteristic of areas with a longer interval between fires.

Much more of Olmsted County was prairie or savanna at the time of the original survey than would be indicated by soils. This is because Native Americans managed the local landscape with fire to increase the areas of grassland for buffalo and other grazing animals. The wooded areas of Olmsted County were in areas like our property: lower in elevation, either flood plains or with rough terrain.

So what about the cottonwoods and cedars? Here is the answer: if a raindrop falls on the relatively undisturbed areas of our property, then it may fall in the loess part or the limestone and shale parts. Rainwater can percolate into and through loess, sand, and limestone, but shale is impermeable to water (remember?). Where water encounters shale, it flows along the top of the shale layer until it reaches a hillside, where it comes to or near the surface in a spring or seep. This is just what cottonwoods need. On the other hand, if it soaks in, and the soil is thin, the site is dry, which is what cedars like.

The original plans for the church had the parts with basements (the Commons and the storage areas under the administrative wing) located to the east where there is limestone close to the surface. To reduce the expense of excavation, the church plan was flipped. This is why the Commons is located toward the area of deep loess soils, the northwest part of the property.

Dr. Layton (the cave man, remember?) had a lot to do with selecting this site for our church back in the 1960's. Perhaps our mix of soils, geology, and vegetation was just what the doctor ordered.

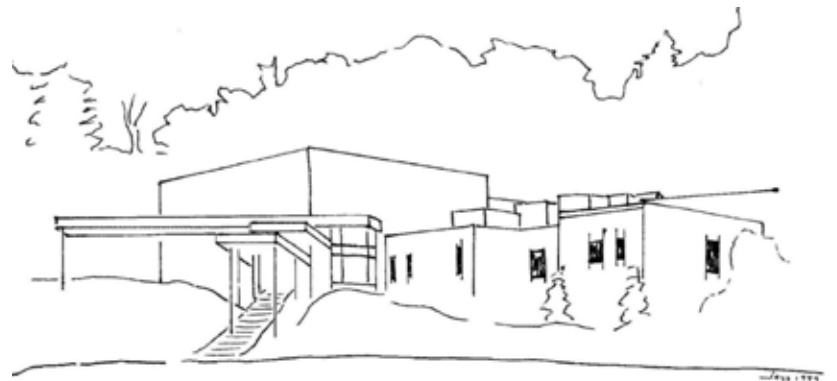


*Aerial view of our property*

*Thanks to Jeff Green, with the Minnesota DNR, for reviewing this article and to Terry Lee, with Olmsted County Environmental Services, for the image of Laurentia. Phil Wheeler has been a member of the church since 1983. In his career at the planning department, he had the privilege of receiving the tutelage of naturalists and geologists, too numerous to mention without slighting many. Any mistakes in this article, though, are Phil's fault*

# James Kern

James Kern was a member of our church who passed away in 2006. He left a prolific body of work enjoyed by many in the congregation.



## *My Neoplastic Paintings and Reliefs*

'Jaya' James Kern

I remember the occasion when, at the age of four, I asked my grandmother how to draw the letter 'J'. In response, she drew a right angle like an 'L' backwards, which I at first accepted. This experience I regard as the first among those that were to influence me toward an art career in which I was preoccupied with nonfigurative artworks. It was in 1964, while I attended an art course at the University of Minnesota, that I saw for the first time a reproduction of Mondrian's painting 'Broadway Boogie Woogie'. The picture shown as a slide projection proved to be not only a moving experience for me but also a powerfully influential one. It gave me a feeling of optimism to continue as an artist and it had a marked influence on the style of my later artworks. In 1965 I saw an exhibition of Charles Biederman's constructionist or structurist reliefs at the Walker Art Center, Minneapolis, Minnesota. On casual observation, they seemed simple in execution. But on closer examination, I saw that they were made of carefully machined painted aluminum parts. The precision of the application of paint and of the machine work impressed me. Earlier, in my studio-art studies at the University I had been taught painting by abstract expressionist and by hard-edge painters, but Biederman's structures suggested to me a direction to explore. I wrote to Biederman telling him of my interest in his work and was invited to visit him at his studio in Red Wing, Minnesota, where I observed his way of making them. Beginning in 1969 I worked for five years under his guidance in Milwaukee, Wisconsin; I settled in Rochester, Minnesota, in 1970. During this period I made painted reliefs in wood and in Plexiglas.

*Leonardo, Vol. 13, pp. 216- 218 Pergamon Press 1980. Printed in Great Britain*



# 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



1727 Walden Lane SW, Rochester, Minnesota 55902  
507-282-5209    [uurochmn.org](http://uurochmn.org)