



UU REVUE

Summer 2018

Let's Start at the Very Beginning with
Connie Schuelka

Aging: The Journey

Thank You Miss Sloan

Supporting (All) Children

Riverside Reading Program

Summer Fellowship



First Unitarian Universalist Church

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

Communications Committee

Paulette DeMers
Kathy Brutinel
Shelly Maciujec
Jay Smith
Sue Wheeler
Jody Tharp

Contributors

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

Staff

Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer
Minister

Joyce Rood
Director of Religious Education

Melissa Egglar
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

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Childcare Coordinator

Tom Rud
Custodian

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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.

Let's Start at the Very Beginning With Connie Schuelka

by Robin Taylor



You never know when a little event or a tiny decision is going to lead to a really big, life-changing journey, and that is certainly true for Connie Schuelka, our Congregational Co-Administrator and Co-Director of Music at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester.

If it hadn't been for a little gig she got accompanying a violinist at First UU over 30 years ago, she might never have stumbled into this faith. And if she hadn't taken an Italian class in college, she might have gone into politics instead of music. And if the trombone players hadn't sat behind the French horn section in her high school band class, a certain young man wouldn't have been able to get her attention by stretching his trombone into the back of her long blonde hair, and maybe she wouldn't be married to Dave Schuelka today.

But let's start at the very beginning, as Julie Andrews would say.

Connie LaGrange was born in Vinton, Iowa, a small town on the Cedar River about 30 miles south of Waterloo where her great-great-grandparents farmed in the 1800s. Her great-grandfather started the town pharmacy where her nephew continues today as the fifth generation of LaGrange pharmacists, a track Connie was only too happy to leave to her brother.

She followed more in the footsteps of her mother, a political science major who stayed active in local politics and gave piano lessons at home. "My brothers and I all took piano lessons, but I was the only one who stuck with it," she says.

Connie started taking lessons at about age six from a neighbor. She then spent many years studying with another teacher who finally said, “You’re as good as me now,” and passed her off to a piano instructor at Coe College for her last two years of high school.

Connie played piano for all the high school musicals and for the children’s choir at the Methodist Church. One summer, the church organist fancied taking the summer off, so “she showed me what to do,” says Connie. “I never had a lesson. I had to figure it out on my own.” Perhaps having taught herself to play it is why the organ is Connie’s first love, “followed by piano, vocal music, and then harpsichord.”



Connie with her mother, Jane LaGrange

When it came time to choose a college, Connie followed that cute trombone player to Iowa State in Ames. “Oh, it was the *stupidest* reason to choose a college,” she says looking back, even though it seems to have worked out very well for both of them.

Like her mom, she also chose political science as a major. “I had been a big fish in a very small high school. I just didn’t have the confidence in my musical abilities to major in music,” says Connie. But she continued to use the music rooms on campus to practice for fun, and so she could keep that summer job playing the organ when she came home from college. She also played the organ for a Lutheran church in Ames. And when her choirmaster in college found out that she played the piano, she was invited to leave the choir and become the accompanist instead. (“That has happened for every choir I’ve ever sung with—high school, college, and the Walden Hill Vocal Ensemble!” she says. The only time she got to be a singer was for the eight years she spent with the Choral Arts Ensemble here in Rochester.)



Early piano recital

One day during her sophomore year, she schlepped her stack of music books to her Italian class, where they caught the eye of a music professor who was auditing the class before heading to Italy on his sabbatical. Impressed with her selections, he offered to arrange an audition for Connie. At the end of her sophomore year, she changed her major to music.

“I was happier, but it was a much more stressful major,” she says. Because of the lost time, Connie had to work extra hard to complete her BM in vocal music education with piano performance. Connie and Dave got married after their sophomore years in college and after he graduated in June of 1977, Dave moved to Rochester to begin a job with IBM. Connie stayed behind to complete some coursework and perform her senior recital, a dazzling program that included Schumann’s *Davidstbündlertänze*, Prokofieff’s *Sonata No. 5 in C Major*, and Ravel’s *Sonatine*.

Once she settled in Rochester, Connie began teaching piano lessons and doing some accompanying. In 1978 she got a gig playing with a violinist for a couple of services at First UU. "I'd never heard of the Unitarian Universalists." She couldn't believe that 'a place like this' existed. "I remember coming home and telling Dave that if we ever wanted to join a church, we should check out this one." Although Connie had warm feelings for the Methodist church where she had played piano, she did not grow up in a religious family. Her parents used to drop the kids off for Sunday School at the Methodist church but never attended themselves, so it took a while before she felt the need for a church community.

Connie began teaching at Bodine's studio, and soon found herself doing the bookkeeping for them, a job she had done in the summers for an auto dealership back in Iowa. "Music and bookkeeping have always gone hand in hand for me," says Connie, who next did both jobs at Hoffman Music Studio as well. After her son, Matt, was born, the Schuelkas moved to England from 1982-84 for Dave's job with IBM.

In the fall of 1985, when Matt was three and old enough to start the RE program, they began attending First UU with some regularity. The following May, Connie's daughter, Laura, was stillborn, and they found themselves supported through the tragedy by the whole congregation, even though they weren't yet members. The Rev. Fred Campbell did Laura's memorial service and "he did a beautiful job." The Schuelkas joined soon afterwards.

In 1987, Connie joined the church choir, but director Kevin Dobbe soon found out she played the piano and within the year asked if she would take over the role of accompanist. "I enjoy accompanying, so I was happy to give up singing."



Connie with her son, Matt Schuelka



With daughter, Amanda Schuelka

Fast forward to 1993 when daughter Amanda was two and Connie had been home with her children for a few years. She noticed a tiny ad for a church bookkeeper in the Venture as the church was computerizing their records.

"At first it wasn't much, and I could do it at home. But then [Rev.] Dillman [Baker Sorrells] wanted me to come to staff meetings, so Amanda would come and sit on the floor and play with her toys. The job grew with Amanda. When she started school, I'd drop her off at kindergarten and come to work until I had to pick her up." As Connie's responsibilities increased, her title changed from Bookkeeper to Administrative Assistant, then Records Administrator, and now Congregational Co-Administrator.

Along the way, she also picked up more responsibility as a Co-Director of Music, a job she has shared with Joe Mish since 2004. In addition to being the church accompanist and organist, Connie is in charge of making sure there is music

every Sunday, which can mean hiring outside musicians or having members volunteer their talents. (By contrast, her co-director is in charge of all choirs and ensembles.) She tries to choose a variety of musical styles and instruments, always trying to think what might go best with a particular service.

"It is not just about what I like. I aim for variety. And we are going for a flow. I love it when at the end of the service, you go, 'That worked!' Because sometimes it doesn't."

For example, this winter she put together a special Baroque music program for a service Rev. Luke was planning. She had arranged for the musicians and gotten the harpsichord tuned, when...an opportunity suddenly came up to have a speaker from MUUSJA talk about social justice instead. It was too late to change the music, "which was beautiful!" remembers Connie. "But I thought Handel was a little bit jarring, given the context."

If there is one thing Connie would like readers to know, it is that she does NOT pick the hymns for a Sunday service.

"The ministers pick out the hymns!" she insists. "Some more collaboratively, and some less. I get to pick the rest of the music." That includes the prelude, the postlude, the offertory music—and usually one or two pieces of music that serve to support the theme of the service or provide a pause for reflection.

"I've worked with a number of ministers over the years with a variety of musical skills, from very little to a lot," says Connie. Some ministers are only comfortable choosing the handful of hymns they are familiar with each week. Others don't quite understand the limitations of what is possible to pull off, musically. "I love the collaborative process of working with a really good musician to put together a service," she says, counting the Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer in that category. "Luke knows choral music very well."



Since Rev. Luke started, “Joe Mish and I have had to step up our game to try to do what we think will enhance the service,” explains Connie. “When we use the teal hymnal, often the melody is not in the accompaniment, so I have to put it in, otherwise the congregation would never be able to follow me.”

Rev. Luke has also asked Connie to provide a 30-second interlude between the readings and the sermon—“a little pause,” she explains. This is challenging for a musician like Connie because, “There are the people who play by ear and improvise—and people like me, who can sight read music pretty well, but can’t improvise to save our lives.” Connie prefers to adapt.

Rev. Fritz Hudson once famously asked her to listen to a piece of music on YouTube and learn it for a church service. “I do NOT learn by ear,” says Connie, so that wasn’t going to work.

The biggest challenge for a church musician is having to learn music very quickly. She usually finds out the hymns by Tuesday or Wednesday, but ministers have been known to change their minds. And she has occasionally been asked to accompany a guest musician on a piece that is much too difficult to learn in a couple of days. “I just have to say no if it isn’t going to work.”

For Connie, one of the ultimate joys of her job (other than playing the organ!) is accompanying large choral works by contemporary composers like Rene Clausen, Morton Lauridson, or Stephen Paulus. And she loves collaborating with—as opposed to accompanying—really good classical musicians. For Rev. Luke’s candidating week, she put together an ensemble of church members: Allen Bishop on oboe, Dave Townsend on clarinet, John Vettel on viola, and Joe Mish on bass. “Turns out that Dave Townsend



Connie with her husband, Dave

is a font of knowledge and he came up with music for this funny combination of instruments. That was a really fun service!”

Much as Connie enjoys her job, she hints that one day she will have to retire. “I’m so tied down on weekends,” she admits. But until then, we can all be thankful for that Italian class that led her to a career in music; that violinist who led her to this church; and that cute trombone player who led her out of Vinton, Iowa in the first place.



With grandson, Will

Robin Taylor tried to learn piano as a child, but only succeeded in playing a stereo. She has been a member of First UU Church since 1992.

AGING: *The Journey*

By Pat Calvert

One Sunday morning in November 2017, over cups of coffee in the Commons, two longtime Unitarian Universalists observed the TV monitor across the room. It scrolled through a variety of programs and interest groups that were available at our church.

"Amazing," they agreed complacently.

There was much to admire: childcare for little ones age 6 months to 3 years; Coming of Age (COA), Our Whole Lives (OWL) for preteens and teens; and Walden Hill Youth (WHY) for grades 9-12; Seekers for high schoolers. There were Chalice Camps for kids and Chalice Circles for adults; a choir for adults, one for children.

Additional opportunities for adult fellowship were available via a UU book club, movie nights, soup suppers, a group for bridge players and one for Mah Jongg enthusiasts. Caring Crafters gathered knitters, weavers, and quilters together; the Clara Barton Guild was famous for its annual rummage sale; the scroll went on...and on.

But...GASP! Where was a group specifically for, umm, o-l-d-e-r adults?

Complacency vanished for the coffee quaffers. They recognized a call to action when they heard it. "I bet there are at least six other UUs who'd help us start one!" Darrel Waters calculated. His fellow UU (the writer of this article) raised a brow.



Author, Pat Calvert



First meeting of Aging: The Journey

The following week, Darrel met with Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer about a lack that somehow had gone unnoticed. I consulted Melissa Egger, Coordinator of Congregational Life, about a situation that had escaped everyone's attention—apparently including elders themselves.

To borrow a line from Star Wars, the force was with us. Our new minister, Rev. Luke (whose installation at First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester

had occurred only a month earlier, October 15, 2017) had worked with senior groups in congregations he'd served previously. He was eager to help us get launched, and Melissa posted a notice in the *Venture* and online:

Are you at least 70? A little younger? A little older? Are you beginning to think about or are you concerned about aging? What challenges do you face? What concerns do you have? Join us as we discuss the formation of a monthly Elders Discussion Group, at which we'll discuss topics that concern us. This group will focus on the thoughts, emotions, and feelings that we encounter as we realize we have--surprise!--become elders..

Joyce Rood, Director of Religious Education, stepped up with a selection of books for our church library: *The Seasoned Soul: Reflections on Growing Older* (Eliza Blanchard, 2012); *Creative Aging* (Marjory Zoet Bankson, 2011); *I'm New at Being Old* (Lucy Rose Fischer, 2010).

Darrel Waters' prediction that six other church members might be interested in forming a group proved to be modest: at our first meeting 24 UUs (!) gathered in the Hearth Room. Rev. Luke briefed us on his experience with groups like ours including how often they met, what they discussed, and offered ongoing assistance as we got organized.

Our first decision was an obvious one: what to call ourselves? A lively discussion ensued, including "Aging (Dis)Gracefully," a tongue-in-cheek reference to the popular admonition to older adults to be graceful about their place on life's timeline.

We soon realized that—very much like the youth in the Coming of Age program—we too were in the process of becoming persons we'd never been before. Our younger counterparts were traveling an unfamiliar path; so were we. It was a Goldilocks moment: when Judy Jensen suggested "Aging: the Journey," the metaphor seemed to fit us "just right."

We agreed to meet the third Wednesday each month—no summer vacation for us—from 12 to 1:30 p.m. with sack lunches and beverages; then we'd talk...but...what should be our first topic?

Rev. Luke had already announced the themes he'd address from the pulpit for the church year, themes intended, in his words, to "help nurture lives of meaning and purpose." The first three in 2018 had particular resonance for us:

Revelation (we're surprised that we are, indeed, elders)

Courage (we're all aware we'll need it)

Mortality (we're ever mindful of our finiteness)

In several sermons, Rev. Luke also alluded to the value of telling our stories. When the idea was floated to invite one member at each meeting to tell his or hers, there were three volunteers.



Darrel Waters reminisced about growing up the youngest of four on an Iowa farm. He knew early in life—without understanding exactly why—that he was different from his two older brothers. He left the farm, graduated from the University of Minnesota, served in the Air Force during the Korean War, and pursued a long career as an industrial engineer at IBM. After coming out as gay in midlife, he founded the GLBT Youth Community Services in Rochester to help young people deal more openly with gender issues rather than struggle silently as he had. In 2006, Darrel received a Mayor's Medal of Honor from Ardell Brede in recognition of his work.

Glenn Van Laningham grew up in Des Moines, Iowa, the younger of two sons of a bakery salesman. Money was tight during the Depression; coming up with the rent was a challenge that sometimes meant moving to a cheaper house. After college, Glenn served in the Army in Alaska, where he was assigned to help fellow servicemen handle personal issues. It sparked an interest in social work, and after earning an MSW at the University of Minnesota—where he met Ella at a party when he helped her to her feet after she sat on a coffee table and broke it!—Glenn became the first administrator of Family Service Rochester. He reflected movingly on the death of his and Ella's 24-year-old son, a graduate of MIT, in 1986.



Don Layton acknowledged how much good fortune he's enjoyed throughout a life of more than 90 years: born to loving parents, a chance to pursue a distinguished career in neurology, a 67-year marriage to his beloved Phyllis, and children who dote on him now. He especially relished the memory of golf tournaments he entered with his kids—and won! As lucky as he's always been, Don mused candidly about anxiety that has been a frequent companion. When asked if he'd ever told his story before, he paused. "No," he confessed, "but it's been such a great joy to be able recall my life." The gratitude packed into "joy" made clear to listeners that sharing it with others was special.

"Being in this group is a chance for me to sit down with a group of peers to share those elements of our lives that are age-specific," Sue Anderson said, adding that "special gifts come with getting older."

Ella Van Laningham summed up the importance of the new group for many of us. "Because we are experiencing similar concerns and conditions, we take time to discuss issues that are raised. It gives us a chance to support each other when the need comes up." That need arose sooner than we expected when one of our members, Marie Wynn Miller, took a tumble in April and broke a hip.

What began as a discovery by two longtime UUs over coffee in the Commons has evolved into an opportunity for those of us who are older to grow and change. Our shared values allow us to fully appreciate where we are on life's continuum...and the journey continues.

Pat Calvert (with the able assistance of Darrel Waters, Judy Jensen, and others traveling the same path)

Thank you, Miss Sloan!

By Sue Wheeler

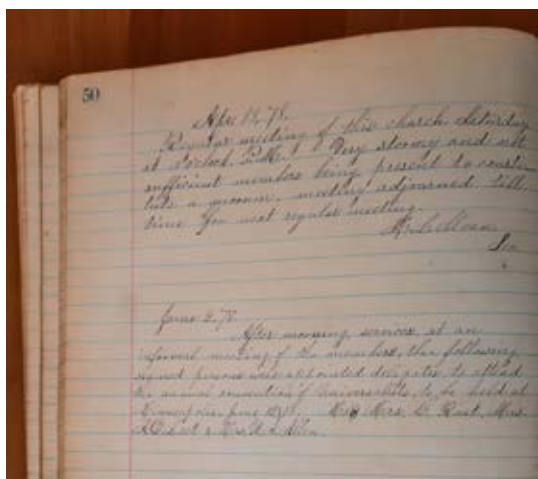
She was born in Hardwick, Massachusetts, in 1846; moved to Rochester, Minnesota, in 1856; became a teacher in 1861; joined the Universalist Society of Rochester in 1866; and died in 1942.

Those are the basic facts of Miss Marion Louisa Sloan's long life, but as with all of us, there is a much longer and more interesting story to tell. Descriptions of parts of her life are spread out in the archives of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Rochester, the Olmsted County History Center, the Minnesota History Center, and, of course, the Internet.

Miss Sloan joined our church when she was 20 years old. She claims she was a charter member, but technically she wasn't, as she was not one of the 30 or so people who signed the charter on March 12, 1866. Our records indicate she joined on June 10, 1866—close enough! Her mother, Alma Webb Sloan, and sisters were members also, but her father Willard Sloan, a farmer and carpenter, appears only in one church record—her history of the early church. Board minutes show that she was baptized by Rev. H. S. Hayward on April 11, 1869. Starting that same year at age 23 she gave 10 cents per quarter as her “subscription” to the church.



Marian Sloan, age 90



Miss Sloan's handwritten minutes

Miss Sloan's name appears throughout church board meeting minutes until she died. In 1877 she was elected clerk of the Board for a couple of years, which meant she kept the church records. Her precise and colorful accounts of Sunday services remind us of the life of the church in the late 1800s and reveal a bit of her personality. (Check out the flowery description of the June 23, 1878, Children's Sunday in our church archives.) She is also listed at various times on the following committees: Benevolence, Sunday School and Missions (and Sunday School superintendent for a year or two), Visitation of the Sick, and a Special Committee to look after Destitute Children (1883) appointed by Rev. Payson. She was the Board's Corresponding Secretary for at least 20 years.

The Ladies Aid, later the Association of Universalist Women, was the church organization where she concentrated her efforts, and she held an AUW office from 1902 until well into the 1930s. From her reports at annual church meetings, we can infer that she thought highly



Miss Sloan, age 30

of the women of the church for their hard work and support of all aspects of the ministry, board, congregation, and community.

Perhaps her most important contribution to our church has been her prolific writing. She wrote “Brief History of the Universalist Church, Rochester, Minnesota,” copies of which are not only in our church archives, but also carefully preserved at the Olmsted County History Center and the Minnesota History Center. Every “history of the church” document and sermon that I could find from Rev. Colbert (1941-49) to Rev. Hudson (2015-2017) has quoted Miss Sloan’s history. Although it has no date, she most likely wrote it for the church’s 50th Anniversary Celebration and Church Dedication in 1916, since Rev. Spicer is the last minister she mentions.

She and her family must have attended the services beginning in 1861, as she describes the arrival of Rev. Isaac Westfall (see Spring 2015 *UU Revue*)—“a great event to the few Universalists then living here in this new town scarcely more than five years old, who had heard little preaching except the fiery exhortations of the western revivalists....Mr. Westfall was a fluent speaker, he

preached many doctrinal sermons and had the pleasing custom of closing the services with a hymn or anthem that emphasized the thought of the sermon.”

Miss Sloan was aware of the attitude that other religious denominations had toward Universalists. “The young people who had the courage of their convictions and remained loyal to the church were somewhat ostracized, but having a pleasant little society of their own, did not mind, but kept the even tenor of their ways.” In an early draft of “Brief History” she wrote, “We were often made the subject of special prayer and argument by our neighbors and friends. At one time when attending a Methodist revival, one of the Elders with fervent zeal prayed for our benefit – ‘O Lord, get hold of the Universalists and shake them over hell.’”

In the church archives and at the Olmsted History Center is a handwritten speech with no author or date cited, but it begins with “I am to occupy a few minutes in speaking of women’s work for the church from the standpoint of a Universalist,” so it is obviously part of our history, but who wrote it and when?

While searching for Miss Sloan in the newspapers of her time, I found a brief article in the *Rochester Post*, January 29, 1909, titled “Miss Sloan Emphatic,” and it describes a speech she gave at the Church of the Redeemer (now First Universalist Church of Minneapolis) at the annual meeting of the Liberal Union of Minnesota Women. It quoted her as stating, “Men have as much leisure time for religious duties as women. If it is right for women to attend church it is right for men, and they must not be crowded out.” The handwritten mystery speech contains similar words: “Perhaps we have usurped too much of the church work so that they [men] feel crowded out....If it is right for women to attend services, it is right for men.” Mystery solved! Miss Sloan wrote the speech and gave it in January of 1909 to a gathering of women of many liberal faiths at a Universalist church in Minneapolis.

However, there is another mystery that remains unsolved: Why, in a church that elected only men



Grace Universalist Church picnic, Rochester, circa 1913

as trustees and used only men as ushers, decision makers, and ministers (with one exception, of course), did she feel that women had “usurped” men in the church? You can check out her entire speech from the church archives to see if you can answer that question.

In that same speech describing Universalism, she explained that “in nearly all towns where there is a Universalist church there is a good public library.” Miss Sloan, along with fellow church members, helped establish the library in Rochester according to History of Olmsted County (1910). “In 1875 the Ladies of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (yes, she was an active member) took charge of the failing subscription library, and in 1883 it was reorganized as the Free Library and Reading Room Association.” Marion Sloan was prominent in its management, one of

the signers of the Library Association’s Constitution in 1891, and part of the library board until resigning in 1894.

Besides being a devout and proud Universalist, Marion Sloan was also part of the growing community of Rochester and the territory of Minnesota, moving here at age 10 with her mother and sisters to join her father. According to a 1937 interview of Miss Sloan by Zalia Ratcliff, their first Rochester house was a log cabin owned by Nelson Sherman, father of George Sherman who was later a prominent member of our church and the Rochester community. It was about “a half mile from town where St. Marys hospital is now.” That summer her father “built one of the first framed houses in town on 3rd Avenue NW just north of Center Street.” Her older sister, Melissa Sloan Brown, opened the first private school in Rochester

“I was only a little girl of 13 when [Clara Barton] came to stay at our house, but I remember her very well.... She was a small person with a very bright face and at times, very serious. Often she was gay too. She stayed with us a little more than a month. During that time we came to know her very well.

“How I happened to wear her shoes was that my sister was asked by a young man to go to a dance, but she refused to go unless I, too, was allowed to come. I said that was impossible because I had just walked in from the farm and had on a pair of heavy walking shoes. Miss Barton heard me say that I couldn’t go because of my shoes and she insisted that I wear hers. I did, and went to the dance. They fitted pretty well, too, except that Miss Barton had a very high instep and they were a little loose there.”

—In 1937 Zalia Ratcliff, a worker on the Minnesota historical record survey, interviewed Marion Sloan about her life. Her interview included this story. You can find the full text of the interview at both the Minnesota and Olmsted County History Centers.

in that house during the winters of 1856 and 1857. Two years later when her parents moved to a farm in Cascade Township, Marion and her sisters remained in the Rochester house, but spent summers with their parents. When Marion was 13 in 1859, she wore Clara Barton's shoes to a dance. (See the side bar below for a complete explanation of this famous incident.)

At age 15 she was "examined by a member of the school committee as to my capabilities as teacher" and hired to teach school during the summer term. She taught several more terms and then enrolled in Pike's Normal School in Rochester for two terms in 1866. The *Rochester Post* on May 30, 1868, reported that "Miss M. L. Sloan of this city, from some time a member of Pike's Normal School, is the teacher in the Fifth Primary, which convenes in the northwest corner room, second floor [of the new Central School]. This room is literally crowded with bright-eyed hopefuls, there being 62 in all, 26 boys and 36 girls." The next year a *Rochester Post* article detailed a teacher training institute in the village of High Forest where Miss Sloan gave lessons in arithmetic to hopeful teachers.

By May 1869 she may have needed a break from teaching, judging by the *Rochester Post* advertisement for a Milliners and Dressmaker shop with

Mrs. M. H. Brown and Miss M. L. Sloan as proprietors. Their shop was the sole agency for the Singer Sewing Machine and was above the Union Drug Store.

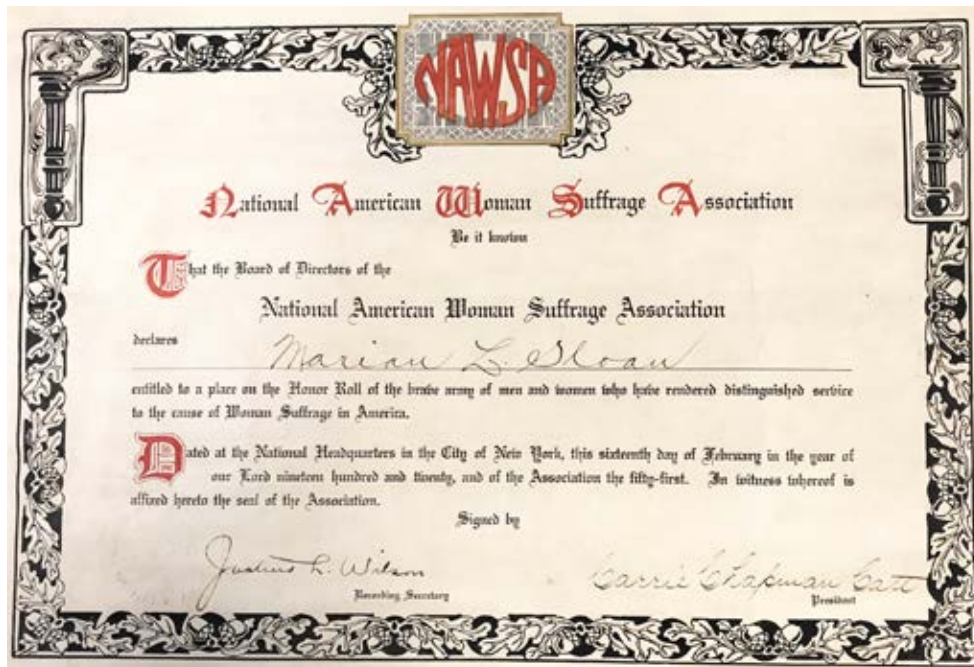
Another break from teaching came in 1893, when Mrs. A. T. Stebbins of Rochester, a member of the Minnesota Women's Auxiliary Board of the World's Fair, asked her to take an exhibit to the Columbian Exposition in Chicago. The exhibit was ready about June 1 and she stayed through November. "This was a notable year in my life! Of course I stayed with my exhibit most of the time, but found opportunities to see many interesting things." Her exhibit explained how to have a Turkish bath in your own home. "It attracted quite a lot of attention," said Miss Sloan.

She taught off and on throughout the surrounding area for many years, including at Farm Hill School, located on the property in Farmington Township where church members Dave and Shelly Maciujec now live! (The Maciujecs live in the 1920 school-house that replaced the original where Miss Sloan taught.)

At some point she moved north and taught in Washington County Public Schools, where she also served as a principal according to a biographical sketch in *Who's Who Among Minnesota Women* published in 1924. She wrote an article in 1889 for the periodical *School Education* entitled "Teaching What is Not in the Book."

The *Rochester Record and Union* printed one short article in 1894 saying Miss Sloan had returned from teaching in Thayer, Missouri, during winter and spring. That was apparently her final year of teaching.

When she retired from teaching, she continued to be active in the community and state. She believed that women should have the right to vote and worked for that vote much of her adult life. Her journal,



written when she was in her twenties and quoted in an August 5, 1983 *Post-Bulletin* article, indicates that she was already exasperated with her lack of the vote. "The woman of the future--Will she vote? Doubtless she will, for the nation cannot afford to lose so much of intellect."

In an article in the November 18, 1904, *Olmsted County Democrat*, she reported on a meeting in Minneapolis of the Minnesota Woman Suffrage Association of which she was vice president in 1905-06 and on the executive board in 1907. In the 1937 Ratcliff interview, Miss Sloan explained that she marched in protests with the suffrage clubs, but she did not condone the violence used by some suffragists. She was rightly proud of the recognition she received in February 1920 from the National American Woman Suffrage Association in honor of her "brave service to the cause of woman suffrage in America." Nine months later she cast her first vote. Since she was chair of the first Republican women's organization in Olmsted County, we can assume she voted for Warren G. Harding. She was 74 years old.

When she died at age 95, the Rochester Association of Universalist Women wrote the following tribute:

By her death we have lost a valuable member whose whole life was devoted to our church. Throughout the many years of her life her high standard of love and loyalty, her sincere belief in unselfish service affected everyone privileged to work with her. To the members of our church, we express a great sense of loss and express the belief that an influence so benign and far reaching can never die.

And indeed, Marion Sloan and our church live on through her reminiscences and writing. Because she wrote extensively about her life and the wider community of her time, we can assume that she valued history for its own sake and the sake of posterity. She cautioned us: "It is well to look at the past, for from its efforts we have attained our present, but there is more to be done that hasn't been done." Well said, Miss Sloan!



Miss Sloan erected a monument in Oakwood Cemetery to her parents in 1898. She and two of her sisters are also buried there.

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

Supporting (All) Children Riverside Reading Program

By Kathy Brutinel



Ray and student practicing sight words written on tongue depressors

Church member Ray Phelps-Bowman would love to live in a world where everyone has the liberty and responsibility to succeed or fail, based on their own choices and efforts. He knows, however, that such an expectation is not fair when children do not have the same opportunities for a solid foundation because of their skin color, ethnicity, or economic class. He's frustrated that "every year we turn out a group of kids who are not well educated. That screws up their entire life." So Ray decided to see what he could do.

He began by re-joining the Executive Committee of the NAACP and became co-chair of the Education Committee, along with retired attorney

Mark Stephenson. They spent two years gathering data and visiting schools in Minnesota.

They found that a 2001 study funded by the Annie E. Casey Foundation reported that reading proficiency by the end of third grade was a reliable predictor of how likely a child was to succeed academically and graduate from high school. The study also found that kids living in poverty were much less likely to achieve such proficiency. And 2016 statistics from the Children's Defense Fund show that Black children are four times more likely and Hispanic children two times more likely to live in poverty than White children. It's not hard to see why the racial achievement gap begins as an opportunity gap—the opportunity to grow up in an environment that has the luxury of supporting learning readiness and academic mastery.

With this data in mind, Ray and Mark toured several sites in Minnesota that had achieved success in reading proficiency for all students to figure out what factors led to successful reading outcomes and to bring their findings to bear in Rochester. Their first inclination was to set up a program to give kids

extra help outside of the school day, but the logistical difficulties of such a plan were significant.

Then they learned that the Rochester School District had implemented a program, Action 100, with the specific goal of increasing reading proficiency. It had 3 main elements: 1) structured progression, 2) frequent evaluation, and 3) interventions to help kids move to the next level. One of the interventions involves more reading practice, so Ray and Mark decided to support that effort by galvanizing volunteers to complement the District's efforts. They focused on Riverside Central Elementary School, a designated "community" school that encourages community participation in order to enrich the experiences of children who live in its highly-diverse, high-poverty neighborhood.

Classrooms at the lower elementary level at Riverside are amazing places. They contain newcomers who are still learning English and children who have had no books at home, as well as kids who have mastered the building blocks that lead to reading and those who can already read. The challenge for a teacher in such a classroom is to conduct group learning at grade level, while supporting every child at their individual reading level.



Thank you note for Joe' Lobls appreciated efforts

Supporting all children at their reading level is where Action 100 comes in. Its creator, The American Reading Company, divides books into reading levels that begin with learning to recognize letters and their sounds and then incrementally build a child's capacity to recognize or sound out words of increasing difficulty. The program encourages 1 hour of reading each day at the student's level of ability, preferably 30 minutes in the classroom and 30 minutes at home with a parent.

This one hour of reading is the challenging part. In school it's hard for one teacher to support 20 students who would benefit from one-on-one attention to focus on a reading task, and the at-home time is often difficult also. Due to job demands or other constraints, one-on-one time with a parent or guardian can be limited or impossible. Filling these two gaps is where community volunteers come in. Ray and Mark recruited volunteers from the NAACP, but they also brought this opportunity for hands-on action to the Racial Justice Task Group and 10 or so members responded.

Ray has found reading to kids at Riverside to be one of his favorite volunteer jobs ever. “They have no filters and are a joy to be around.” He makes a particular effort to make sure that the kids know he wants to help them and values his time with them. One day he and his student were talking about the student’s “old” grandparents who had just turned 70. Ray said, “You know, I’m 73,” and the child responded with concern. “You’re going to die!”

When Joe Lobl heard about the opportunity to volunteer, he remembered what he had read in *UU World* about the Ware Lecture at General Assembly in New Orleans in 2017. Bryan Stevenson, author of *Just Mercy* (UU “Common Read” for 2015-16), said we must do four essential things to create a more just and equal world: “Get proximate to the poor, the excluded, neglected, and abused; change the narratives that underlie racism and other inequalities; stay hopeful about creating justice; and be willing to do uncomfortable things.”

Joe saw the reading program as his way to “get proximate” to the students at Riverside. He also thought it might be an “uncomfortable thing” for him, but found just the opposite. He loves it and he’s crazy about his



Joe with one of his students

first graders. Each time he volunteers for an hour, he spends 15 minutes with 4 different students and gets to know them over the course of the year.

Sue Wheeler, a former teacher, high school writing paraprofessional, and receptionist in the office of the superintendent of schools prior to her retirement in 2009, saw this volunteer opportunity as a way to continue to make a difference for students without having to be in charge. “We don’t have to teach them anything; we just reinforce what they are learning in the classroom.” Sue, who works with both a regular kindergarten class and the newcomer’s class, says she finds herself wondering in October how students who don’t even know the alphabet are ever going to learn to read, but by the end of the year they know their letters and sounds and are beginning to sound out words. She finds it very gratifying to be a part of their progress.



Sue showing flash cards to her student



Shared reading: Bob reads a page, then the student reads the page.

She also knows the students value their time with her. The volunteers and their students meet in hallways, and sometimes conditions are a bit chaotic. One day Sue was working with a student while other students and teachers were making noise in the hall. Her kindergartener piped up to say, “Hey! We’re trying to read here!”

Bob Beery comes to this work from a different perspective, having worked as curriculum director for the Rochester Public Schools just prior to his retirement. Since he retired in 1996, he’s been on the lookout for interesting volunteer opportunities and generally switches them up every couple years. Many of his activities have involved education. He has helped kids having trouble with math at Elton Hills Elementary School and worked on literacy

with Harriet Bishop Elementary School students and Federal Medical Center inmates.

Bob has been a member of the Racial Justice Task Group for several years, but has become discouraged by the intractability of racial injustice. “I have thought several times that we were on our way to solving racial problems, but it turns out they only take a different form,” says Bob. He knows that our educational institutions have not been very successful helping children who live in poverty overcome skills deficits they bring to school. He doesn’t claim to have the answers, but he was intrigued by the opportunity at Riverside. He thinks volunteers help in two ways: first, by supporting students during their practice time and, second, by creating relationships with them and demonstrating that adults in the wider community care about them enough to show up every week to help them learn.

Bob is actually quite surprised by what he finds at Riverside, given the negative publicity received by schools that perform below average on the Minnesota Comprehensive Assessments and the common mantra, “schools aren’t as good as they used to be.” What he sees is a staff of enthusiastic teachers—a “can-do” group of people. He is impressed by how they integrate academic learning, such as math, into social activities, such as exercise class. The children mirror the enthusiasm of the teachers and are very engaged in learning.



Shelly surrounded by library books

Shelly Maciujec was involved in the volunteer reading program at Riverside even before the Racial Justice Task Group began recruiting volunteers. Shelly has always been a proponent of reading—when she was still in high school she was the children’s librarian assistant at the Carnegie Library in Zumbrota and her first job in college was in the university library. So when her sister Raquel, a Riverside teacher in the Newcomer’s class, told her about the opportunity to read to her students, Shelly jumped at the chance. She loves the one-on-one time she gets with the kids and they seem to appreciate it, too. They love showing her what they can do. They also love playing with the buttons on her wheel chair.

*Shelly’s sister Raquel
in her Newcomers’ classroom*



Jody Peterson, one of the warmest and most optimistic people I have ever met, is Volunteer Coordinator at Riverside. She trains and coordinates the reading volunteers, while juggling many other responsibilities. She is very positive about the reading program and how it contributes to student success, not only in terms of reading support, but also in broadening the horizons of the children. Says Jody, “Kids meet people they would otherwise not meet and get connections they may not otherwise have. A safe network of adults who care about them builds resiliency in kids.”

Jody also emphasizes that the opportunity to be involved with the students at Riverside is good for the community. “Sometimes people have misconceptions about students and schools in a high-poverty area. It’s important for community members to actually see that our kids are hungry to learn, they are polite, and they are working hard,” says Jody. “Volunteers can also see how dedicated our teachers are, both in meeting academic challenges and nurturing the whole child.”

There are many ways to support children at Riverside. The Racial Justice Task Group chose to focus on reading in grades K-2 because of the importance of attaining grade level proficiency in those grades—and perhaps so the material wouldn’t be too challenging. Math in 4th or 5th grade can be daunting, as Bob Beery found out at Elton Hills, much to his dismay. However, if a Lego robotics league, soccer, or an activity for the Afterschool Academy appeals to you more, such opportunities abound. You can contact Jody Peterson directly at jopeterson@rochester.k12.mn.us.

But if you want to find joy helping K-2 students learn to read, contact Ray Phelps-Bowman and he will help you connect with Jody next fall. You will receive a short introduction to logistics and safety at Riverside, training on the methodology of Action 100, and fun connections to great kids you might otherwise never have the chance to meet.



Jody in the library at Riverside

Kathy Brutinel mastered the parking lot at Riverside while taking photos for this article. She will help you do the same if you decide to volunteer.

Summertime Fellowship

JUNE

Starting **Saturday, June 2** - Summer Saturdays UU Playgroup for families with children from birth through elementary age, **9:30-11 am** at parks around town. Contact Joyce Rood, DRE, to find out where each week, or sign up in the Commons.

Sunday, June 3, 3 p.m. - If the weather is fine, meet Robin Taylor & Joe Lobl at the start of the Douglas Trail on Valleyhigh Drive NW to bike ride for an hour, eventually heading to Squash Blossom Farm for woodfired pizza (at your own expense) and music by Large Mouth Brass. (Or drive there instead and meet at 4 p.m.) Call/text Robin to sign up at 507-254-1963.

Tuesday, June 5, 7:30 p.m. - Join Rev. Luke and friends in their 20s-40s for "Good Cheers!" in the library at Forager Brewery to discuss the church's theme of the month. (Usually meets the first Wednesday of the month, but June and July will be different.) Drinks at your own expense, some snacks provided. Contact Rev. Luke at revluke@uurochmn.org to sign up.

Wednesday, June 13, 6-7:30 p.m. Ice Cream Social in the church courtyard, with bubbles and chalk. Bring your favorite topping, we'll provide the ice cream! Hosted by Robin Taylor & Lyn Smith. No signup necessary.

Sunday, June 24, 3 p.m. - Hike at Chester Woods followed by optional stop for ice cream at Dairy Queen with Anna Lovrien. Email Anna to sign up at annalovrien@gmail.com or call/text 507-202-0388.

JULY

Saturday, July 7, 9:30-11 a.m. - Summer Saturdays UU Playgroup

Sunday, July 8, 6 p.m. The Gin Blossoms perform a free outdoor concert at Down By the Riverside, (Mayo Park) hosted by Sarah and Jason Hayes. Bring your own picnic and beverages and come hang out for fellowship before the concert starts at 7 p.m. Questions? Call Sarah at 302-465-6712.

Sunday, July 15, 3 p.m. - Wildflower Hike at Cascade Meadow Wetlands and Environmental Science Center, followed by optional outing for ice cream at Flapdoodles North, hosted by Anna Lovrien. Email Anna to sign up at annalovrien@gmail.com or call/text 507-202-0388.

Sunday, July 22, 11 a.m. Pridefest Potluck Brunch after the service, co-hosted by Robin Taylor and the Welcoming Congregation.

Sunday, July 29, 1 p.m. - Take Me Out to the Ball Game: Honkers Game against the Wilmer Stingers. Tickets, \$8 at the gate. Hosted by Leslie Kummer & family (401-464-1697 or email lesliekummer@icloud.com).

AUGUST

Wednesday, August 1, 7:30 p.m. - Join Rev. Luke and friends in their 20s-40s for "Good Cheers!" in the library at Forager Brewery to discuss the church's theme of the month. Meets the first Wednesday of the month. Drinks at your own expense, some snacks provided. Contact Rev. Luke at revluke@uurochmn.org to sign up.

Saturday, August 4, 9:30-11 a.m. - Summer Saturdays UU Playgroup

Sunday, August 5, 4-6 p.m. - Nodding Wild Onions perform at Squash Blossom Farm. Come for music and fellowship. BYOB or picnic. Woodfired pizza available for purchase. Questions? Contact Robin Taylor, 254-1963.

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