

Covenant for Freedom

A History of the First Unitarian Congregational Society of Rochester, New York 1829-1975

By Nancy J. Salzer

This History Is Dedicated to Margaret Phinney,
Whose Hope It Was That This Project Be Undertaken

No historian writes alone. I have built upon the work of earlier chroniclers of our church's past: Newton Mann, William Channing Gannett, Harold W. Sanford, Frances Keef, and Joyce Morrison.

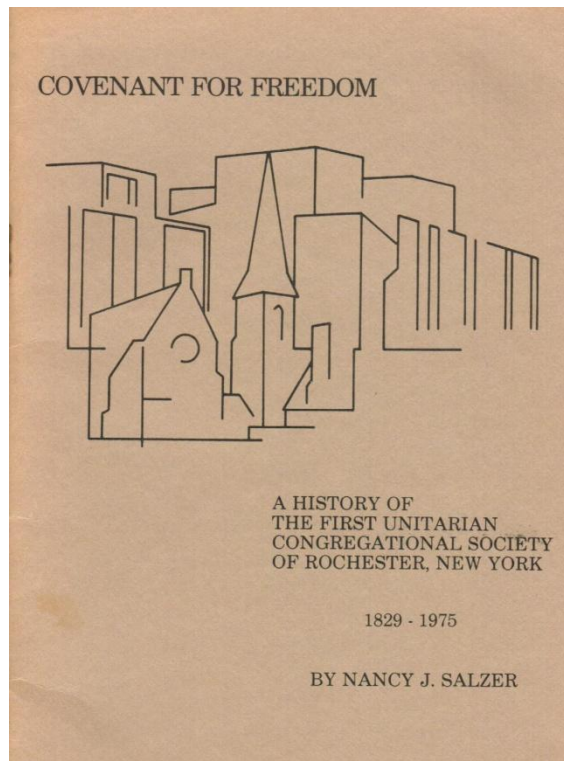
Many members of the congregation assisted by giving information and reminiscences about the past thirty years, and by reading the manuscript in its various stages and making editorial suggestions. I owe particular thanks to Roger and Ruth Coakley, William Klein, Jane Stevenson, Nancy Simonetti, Gretchen Stewart, Edward and Mary Barnitz, Edward and Gladys Pickard, Charles Wahl, Donald Wilder, William Trow, and the Rev. Richard S. Gilbert.

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COVENANT FOR FREEDOM

Unitarian Universalists in the 1970s tend to look forward, not back. Busy with today and tomorrow, frequently desiring to shake off past religious associations in an effort to find a meaningful new faith, we are prone to ignore the history of Unitarian Universalist beliefs and institutions. This is a mistake; we need our roots. We need to know whence we came, so that we can draw strength and purpose from our predecessors.

We ought to take our cue from James Martineau, the English Unitarian who wrote one hundred years ago:

The really progressive minds, that appear to run furthest from the past, are the most conscious of their debt to it, most tinctured by its inner life, and most love its venerable names.

BEGINNINGS

The First Unitarian Congregational Society of Rochester, New York was founded on March 16, 1829. It called as its minister the Rev. James D. Green, who had come to Rochester in January.

The previous December the Rev. William Ware, one of the pioneers in spreading Boston Unitarianism, had come to Rochester and delivered four sermons. One of our early church historians and ministers, the Rev. Newton Mann, called Ware's visit "a kind of ecclesiastical reconnaissance." At this time Rochester was a village of ten thousand inhabitants, and already it had seven churches. The decade of the 1820s was a period of religious revivalism in western New York. It was a time when a new preacher might be listened to, and it was a time when Unitarianism was becoming better known.

The congregation ran into problems immediately after its formal creation. It had been founded in a burst of enthusiasm after preaching by Ware and by James Green. But Green declined the congregation's call and continued on his preaching tour. Nevertheless, the society attempted to go on. It met first in the Court House, and then purchased a wood frame structure being vacated by an Episcopalian group that was building a new church. It was not long before the society found itself in debt, and the building was sold in 1831.

During the 1830s Rochester Unitarianism was kept alive by lay people. Leading among them was Myron Holley, who made his home in Rochester after retiring from his position as Commissioner of the Erie Canal. Holley, a man apparently far ahead of his time in his religious liberalism, held Sunday meetings in an old country school house. He had only a small following, but he sustained the liberal spirit.

Myron Holley's group was probably no more than what we today would call a fellowship, but it did keep Unitarianism alive in Rochester. Noteworthy was Holley's practice of accepting into his little flock the social outcasts of his day. Poor day-laborers and even "drunkards" were made to feel welcome. Holley's daughter wrote that he was often approached by "families too degraded by intemperance and vice to venture to ask a clergyman," and asked to conduct funeral services for their loved ones. Holley admirably anticipated the philosophy that has been embodied in the motto of our church: "Here be no man a stranger."

One of Holley's other activities was the anti-slavery movement. He was one of the founders of the Liberty Party, one of the first entries of Northern abolitionists into politics. It was founded in Warsaw, New York in 1839, and although it was very small, it became significant in the political balance of power in presidential elections in the 1840s. The Liberty Party was made up of moderate abolitionists who sought to end slavery without dissolving the Union.

Holley died in 1841, and it is unclear now what happened to his small group of Unitarians. In 1840, however, eight men signed an agreement to reorganize the Society under its original name. Through 1840 and 1841 several Unitarian ministers visited Rochester and preached to the new society, which was meeting in the Court House and in the members' homes. Newton Mann in his 1881 history asserts that the men and women who organized this group were not aware of the previous establishment in 1829.

THE CHURCH IS ESTABLISHED

Early in 1842 the Rev. Rufus Ellis became minister. He has been called the real establisher of our church. Unlike the previous ministers, he remained in the city long enough to get the congregation rather firmly established. Under his leadership the society built a church on North Fitzhugh Street, which was dedicated on March 9, 1843.

Newton Mann reports that after 1842 the society became more businesslike in its record keeping, and held regular trustee meetings. This new maturity is confirmed by the fact that the group was able to raise six thousand dollars to build the new church.

In 1843 Rufus Ellis returned to his parish in Northhampton, Massachusetts, in accord with his earlier agreement to remain in Rochester for only one year. His successor, Frederick Holland, stayed with us from 1843 to 1847 — the longest ministry up to that time. Holland was to return to serve our congregation in 1865-1868, and again for two months in 1870.

Holland made a point of insisting upon complete freedom of the pulpit. In response, the Board of Trustees passed this significant resolution:

Resolved, that in inviting him to take charge of our pulpit and become the leader of this Society, we would place him at an altar undesecrated by party prejudice, and as a Christian minister leave him unfettered and unpledged in the performance of his duty, amenable only to his conscience and his God.

An interesting accompaniment to this is a covenant that Rufus Ellis had prepared, to which new members assented:

You do, in this solemn presence, give yourself up to the true God, in Jesus Christ, and to His Church also, according to the will of God, promising to walk with God and with this Church of His in all His holy ordinances, and to yield obedience to every truth of His which has been or shall be made known to you as your duty, the Lord assisting you by His spirit and grace.

Frederick Holland was an enthusiastic leader who built the congregation. Mann wrote of him: "He set the Society on its feet and kept it stirring." Unfortunately for our church, Holland resigned in January of 1848 to become General Secretary of the American Unitarian Association, and our church had another series of short ministries.

TWELVE YEARS OF TROUBLE AND DISCORD

Holland's departure in 1848 marked the beginning of a period that later minister and historian William Channing Gannett called our "twelve years of trouble and discord." Rufus Bacon, the first of the half-dozen men to fill our pulpit in that period, was ordained with great fanfare, and lasted only seven months. The history of the period leaves one feeling that the pulpit had a revolving door; through it swirled not only dissension over internal problems, but also the great social questions of the day: Woman suffrage and slavery.

Rufus Bacon was our minister when a significant event occurred. On July 19, 1848 the first women's rights convention was held in Seneca Falls; on July 30 it adjourned to reconvene at the Rochester Unitarian Church on August 2. Susan B. Anthony, the great suffragette whom we proudly and justly claim as our own, did not attend this meeting. Not yet active in the movement, she was teaching at that

time in Canajoharie. However, her father, mother and sister Mary were there and signed the Declaration of Sentiments for women's rights. In the Williams Gallery of our church today is a bronze plaque dedicated to Susan and Mary Anthony, suffrage leaders and members of our church for over fifty years. Quite a large number of our congregation supported the woman suffrage movement through to the ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920.

We continued into the 1850s with a succession of ministers and of problems. Part of the cause was that the congregation kept selecting preachers who caused factional dissension. Also, the society had financial difficulty and was at times unable to pay the salary of its ministers. One of our ministers, in fact, resigned over a salary dispute that nearly led to a law suit.

Newton Mann believed that much of our difficulty in the late 1840s and the 1850s was due to the slavery question. The congregation by now "counted a goodly number of able and active men and women . . . of extreme and pronounced opinions." Slavery was the prime issue of controversy; most members were abolitionists. It is believed that the homes of two or three members were stations on the Underground Railway. It was difficult to find a clergyman who could successfully lead a congregation so vehement in opinion.

A brief oasis of apparent calm in the midst of all this was the 1853- 1854 ministry of William Henry Channing, a nationally known Unitarian. Even this leader found a larger following in lecture audiences than he did in the church itself. He accepted a call to another church in 1854, and the squabbling began again.

The society continued its decline into financial difficulty and internal dissension, and in November of 1859 the church building was destroyed by a fire believed to have been caused by arson. Newton Mann thought that under more favorable circumstances the fire might not have been such a total disaster, but as it was there was too little interest in rebuilding. The land was sold, and our society ceased to worship together.

POST-CIVIL WAR REVIVAL

After the Civil War there was a revival of Unitarianism on a nationwide basis, and the movement came to life again in Rochester. In February of 1865 Frederick Holland contacted his old Unitarian friends here and offered his services for a short time, free of charge. Holland's preaching in Corinthian Hall sparked a renewal of interest. Unitarians banded together again, and under his leadership funds were raised to build a new church. Thanks to Holland's hard work and the generous donations of some Rochesterians who were not even Unitarians, twelve thousand dollars was raised, and the new church, on the corner of Fitzhugh and Church Streets, was dedicated on January 24, 1866.

Holland left in 1868, and two other ministers came for one year each; apparently the comings and goings were more peaceful than in antebellum days. Clay McCauley was well liked but preferred to move to New England. E.H. Danforth also was well liked, but in failing health he had to retire after only six months. In 1870 Frederick Holland returned for two months while we sought still another pastor. The man finally chosen was Newton Mann, who stayed with us for eighteen years.

STABILITY AND PROGRESS

In 1881 Mann wrote in his church history that he had been invited to Rochester in 1868, but had declined. He was interested, however, and when asked again in 1870 he accepted. He noted with disappointment that in the intervening two years there had been a "noticeable decrease in the congregation."

William Channing Gannett wrote of Mann's eighteen-year ministry:

For the first time, the Church had a chance to establish itself firmly in the city's intellectual and moral life, and it did so, harmonious within and respected outside, though never at all a popular church. Dr. Mann preached a highly rationalized, scientific type of Unitarianism, welcoming progressive ideas and rather combative of orthodoxy.

Dr. Mann is acknowledged as the first American clergyman to accept and to proclaim from his pulpit the doctrine of evolution. Today we have a bronze plaque in the Williams Gallery honoring Mann's distinction in this area, and also memorializing him as a poet, scientist and scholar. Among his contributions to our church was his comprehensive "Historical Sketch" of our congregation, written in 1881.

In 1883 the United States government offered our congregation twenty thousand dollars for our property, which it wanted as a site for a new post office. At the same time, the Third Presbyterian Church wished to move to a new location on East Avenue. Dr. Gannett wrote in 1906 that the Presbyterians had been "seized with ambition to be out on the Avenue!"

The Presbyterians made us a flat offer: We were to give them the twenty thousand dollars we had received from the government, and they would give us their two buildings "in an out-of-the-way nook" on Temple and Cortland Streets. At a hurried meeting, our trustees accepted the deal, not realizing until the following morning that they had purchased a chapel as well as the church itself — the chapel or parish house we came to know as Gannett House. Our society occupied the church at Temple and Cortland from 1883 until 1959.

In 1874 our congregation undertook a venture into ecumenism. Newton Mann was ill for several weeks and unable to preach. For seven Sundays Rabbi Landsberg of the Jewish Temple, a "liberal congregation," occupied our pulpit. Everyone was quite pleased with this, and Mann began the practice of holding joint Thanksgiving services with the Universalist Church, the Plymouth Congregational Church, and the Jewish Temple. In 1909 the temple was destroyed by fire, and that congregation used our church for a time. At some point the Thanksgiving services were discontinued, but in 1928 they resumed with the Unitarians, Universalists and Jews participating. These Union Thanksgiving Services continue to this day, including Unitarians, Universalists, and members of Temples B'rith Kodesh, Beth El, Sinai, and Emanu-El.

By the time Newton Mann resigned in 1888, our church was on a fairly sound financial footing, and the congregation was no longer engaging in internal battles. In fact, in 1881 Mann expressed his opinion that things had become too placid! He said, "We have been, perhaps, even too much of one mind for our spiritual health."

It appears that William Channing Gannett had the same concern about our congregation when he and his wife, Mary T.L. Gannett, came here in response to our call in 1889. He wrote to friends that the

Unitarian Church was "a very 'respectable' looking people, many gray heads among them," and that the church school was "small and sleepy and not in good condition."

If we were sleepy and overly respectable, the Gannetts were soon to awaken us. William Channing Gannett came to Rochester with an idea, and that idea was what is called the institutional church. The time of his active ministry here, the two decades between 1890 and 1910, was the heyday of the Social Gospel. For the Protestant clergymen who believed in the Social Gospel, religion was not only a personal concern but also a social concern. Gannett's philosophy was well embodied in the Bond of Union which our trustees adopted shortly after his arrival.

In the Freedom of Truth, and in the spirit of Human Brotherhood, and to the end that the best meaning of these words may open in our hearts, and fill our lives, and make us strong to bear a helpful part in our community, we who here subscribe our names do by this act enter into a covenant of Love and Service and Right Endeavor with each other.

The Gannetts plunged themselves and their parishioners into community work. Dr. Gannett pointed out to the congregation that the church was located in one of the less "desirable" sections of Rochester. It was Gannett's view that our church had a duty to get to know and to help the people in its neighborhood.

The most well-known of the Gannett projects was the Boys' Evening Home, opened in January, 1890. On evenings, local boys could come to the parish house. Games, magazines, refreshments, and "wholesome" companionship were available — and the boys were thus removed from the streets of this rough neighborhood. Over the years, the Home expanded to provide schooling and workshops for arts and handcrafts, and the boys even put out their own little newspaper.

The boys of the Evening Home were predominantly of Jewish families, children of Polish and Russian immigrants. The Home was an evening school and a social center, not a missionary effort. One of its graduates once said that the boys had often been called "Jew-natarians," but since Dr. Gannett had been their real inspiration, they preferred to be called "Gannettarians." Four of the "Gannettarians" went on to become rabbis, and one other became an economist and United States Congressman.

As time went on, not only did the Boys' Home expand, but another program called the Neighborhood Friendly for Girls was begun, with Saturday morning activities.

Eventually, organizations such as the Boy Scouts, the Y.M.C.A., and the J .Y.M.A. were created, taking over many of its functions, and the Boys' Evening Home closed shortly before Gannett's retirement in 1908.

William Channing Gannett was one of the towering figures in the ministry of our church. His wife Mary was very nearly his co-pastor. She pumped life into the newly founded Women's Alliance, which began its long career of service to the church and to the community. The Gannett activities were seemingly endless. The church bustled with cultural and social-betterment projects, and the Gannetts themselves were personally active in the major social causes of the day, such as woman suffrage and the opening of the University of Rochester to coeducation.

Dr. Gannett, whose hearing was failing, retired in 1908, remaining as our minister emeritus until his death in 1923. Mary T.L. Gannett remained in Rochester and was named honorary minister in 1939; she died in 1952.

INTO THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Gannett was succeeded in 1908 by Edwin Rumball, who continued the tradition of social service. Under his leadership, money was raised to enlarge and remodel the parish house, which was dedicated as the Gannett House in 1910. Rumball was very much interested in the health and welfare of the people of the neighborhood in which our church was located. In 1911 he and four others made a pioneering attempt at surveying housing and other social conditions in the neighborhood. The resulting Fourth Ward Survey led to the construction of a playground at School Number 12. The church also paid one year's salary for a visiting nurse for that school. All this was done at a time when the importance of recreational facilities and nurses in schools was just being recognized.

Edwin Rumball left our church in 1915. Between his resignation and the coming of David Rhys Williams in 1928, we had four ministers: Troward Marshall, 1916-1917, active in the World War I preparedness program; Ludwell Denny, 1917-1921; Frank Doan, 1922-1925, a leader in the rising humanist movement; and Lawrence Plank, 1925-1928. One of the major events of this period was the opening of Gannett House as an emergency hospital during the 1918- 1919 influenza epidemic. This epidemic was so extensive that city hospitals could not handle all the patients. Ludwell Denny and the women of the congregation aided in their care.

THE WILLIAMS ERA

In 1928 David Rhys Williams left the Third Unitarian Church of Chicago to answer the call of our church. His thirty-year ministry was the longest in our history. He retired in 1958, but served as minister emeritus until his death in 1970. David Williams' ministry here spanned three tumultuous decades of American history — economic depression, world war, cold war, and internal suspicions. Through it all, he was steadfast in his principles, and our church grew under his leadership.

The first major event of Williams' ministry was the church's centennial, which was celebrated in March, 1929. American Unitarian Association President Lewis C. Cornish came to Rochester and preached the centennial sermon: "A Century of Increasing Liberalism." Community religious leaders of all faiths extended greetings to the Unitarian Church, and the centennial was widely publicized in the local press. News stories emphasized the historical importance of our church — its connections with abolitionism and woman suffrage, and its pioneering social service involvement. Among the community dignitaries who paid tribute to the church was Dr. Meyer Jacobstein, a former United States Congressman who represented Temple B'rith Kodesh at the celebration. In his childhood, Dr. Jacobstein had attended the Boys' Evening Home.

When David Williams was called by our church, he told the trustees: "If there is anything you don't want me to talk about in the pulpit, let me know about it now, so I can decline the call of this church." He was not restricted, and he did not hesitate to put into action as our minister his deep belief that social questions were truly religious questions. He once said that a vital function of religion is to "challenge the complacency and inertia of the rest of mankind."

He had not been in Rochester long before he plunged into controversy. In 1932 he protested from his pulpit the arrest in Rochester of several women who had been distributing pacifist literature. In the same year he protested when the city council, citing depression-related financial problems, cut back on appropriations for libraries, schools and museums.

In 1934 Gannett House became the temporary home of the Mothers' Consultation Center (later a branch of Planned Parenthood). Many objections were raised, both inside and outside of our congregation, to the rental of our church property to a group advocating planned parenthood, which was an extremely controversial subject at that time. David Williams supported the concept of planned parenthood and suggested that our congregation vote on the use of Gannett House by this group. The vote was overwhelmingly in favor of allowing the Mothers' Consultation Center to move into Gannett House. The Center remained there until it moved to larger quarters in 1937. Our church gave planned parenthood its first home in Rochester, and David Williams was the first local clergyman to support planned parenthood publicly. Among the other groups which used Gannett House as headquarters was the Rochester Better Housing Council, which operated there in the mid-1940s.

David Williams was twice the target of right-wingers seeking to brand him a Communist. In 1938 he was labeled a Communist by a small group of Rochesterians calling themselves the Rochester Social Justice Club. In this period Williams had been criticizing Father Charles Coughlin's profascist, anti-Semitic radio talks. Williams answered the charge with a sermon outlining his belief in democracy, parliamentary government, minority rights, and civil liberties.

During the McCarthy period (the late 1940s and early 1950s), Williams again came under fire. In 1953 the House Un-American Activities Committee called his brother Albert Rhys Williams an "outstanding clergyman" who had "actively supported the Communist Party from 1919 to 1929." Albert Williams had been not only a clergyman, but also a reporter and author, and he had lived in Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution. He spoke at our church in 1942.

David Williams issued a public statement defending his brother and attacking the H.U.A.C. He accused the committee of being more interested in intimidating and silencing the Protestant and Jewish clergymen who criticized its methods than in really uncovering Communist conspirators.

Around this time, thirteen members of the church accused Williams of being "soft on Communism," and sought to oust him from our pulpit. Beyond the political issue, there were factors of just plain church politics involved. This faction attempted to sway the opinions of others in the congregation, but when the affair was brought to a vote in a congregational meeting, only the original thirteen voted against Williams. The thirteen subsequently left the church. This incident could have become very difficult, but during that period the board of trustees had excellent leadership which worked hard to maintain church unity.

In addition, there were present in our congregation several prominent Rochester civic leaders who were a strong force against those who tried to drive David Williams from the pulpit. The major figures were women: Mary T.L. Gannett, widow of the Rev. William Channing Gannett; Emma B. Sweet, secretary to Susan B. Anthony and still an energetic worker for the church; and Edwina Danforth, former president of the Rochester Board of Education, whose family founded the Danforth Center for the elderly. Another church member who supported Williams in this incident was newspaper publisher Frank Gannett.

As often as he found himself under attack, David Williams was also highly respected in the city. In 1945 he was invited by the Rochester Ordnance District to conduct a military memorial service for President Franklin D. Roosevelt, in spite of the fact that he had been a registered pacifist since 1917. In 1952 he received the Champion of the Oppressed award from the Unitarian Fellowship for Social Justice. For Williams, personal liberty stood above any other consideration.

During the 1940s and 1950s, two church organizations which were very active were the Women's Alliance and the Laymen's League. The Alliance held dinners, invited guest speakers to its meetings, and gave book reviews. Its six chapters worked together to put on the annual all-church bazaar. Through the bazaar and other activities, such as catering weddings and receptions and putting on all-church lunches, the Alliance raised money for church improvements, a scholarship fund for ministers, and contributions to the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Susan B. Anthony House. This work still goes on, the Alliance's latest project being the recovering of the chairs and sofas in the auditorium, lounges and gallery.

With many women going to work and becoming involved in other activities, the general Alliance meetings are no longer held, although several of the chapters have continued. Some functions of the Alliance are now being met in other ways, such as the Book Discussion Group which meets monthly in the lounge, followed by fireside luncheons for both men and women, and the Over 50's group which plans activities for older members.

The Laymen's League also invited guest speakers to monthly meetings, serving an educational and social purpose not only for the male members of the congregation, but for the city at large. The general decline of men's clubs and the competition of television and the City Club caused the League to suspend operations.

In 1951 a group of church members, encouraged by David Williams, started the "Rochester Unitarian." This first version of our newsletter contained not only church announcements, but a weekly column by Williams and a column open to church members to air their views on a variety of subjects.

In 1954 our congregation celebrated its 125th anniversary. A special celebration service was held. Among the participants was Dr. I Frederick May Eliot, president of the American Unitarian Association. During an afternoon service, Rochester City Historian Blake McKelvey gave an address: "The First Unitarian Church - Rochester's Alert Conscience and Hospitable Roof." Many leading Rochester clergymen joined in the celebration.

Our church moved into the decade of the 1950s with booming growth. Between 1952 and 1956 the number of families on our mailing list doubled to 423. Not only had there been growth, but there had been a change in the character of the membership. Many of the new members were young couples with children. By 1955 plans to enlarge our building were being discussed.

In August of 1955 David Rhys Williams suffered a serious heart attack. He was hospitalized for a month and spent the autumn recuperating. At Christmas he was back in the pulpit, and by February, 1956 he was carrying his full preaching load and launching a new series of sermons. The board of trustees decided to seek an assistant minister, however, to take some of the burden off Dr. Williams. In September of 1956 we welcomed the Rev. Frank A. Wahlstrom as assistant minister.

Late in 1956 some members suggested the creation of a Social Action Committee, but there was little interest at the time in such an effort to focus attention on social problems. We were, however, still a concerned church. Gannett House was being used as the Marshall-Court Center, a part of the Montgomery Neighborhood Center. Gannett House was thus serving youth as a neighborhood center as it had in the days of the Boys' Evening Home.

In 1957 several members organized the Rochester Memorial Society, advocating simple, dignified memorial services rather than the traditional elaborate and ostentatious funeral practices. The Society has grown to a membership of over a thousand families, now a majority from outside our congregation. Our church serves as the Society's mailing address, and members of the church still provide much of the leadership of the Society.

At Sunday services on January 5, 1958 David Williams announced his planned November retirement. He made the announcement far in advance in order to give the congregation ample time for the selection of a new minister and for a smooth and orderly transition. Williams paid tribute to his wife Lucy and her work for the church, saying that she had been virtually his co-pastor for thirty years. He remarked upon something for which he was grateful:

It seems to me that during this turbulent period, when so many have been tempted to conform or to conceal their real convictions, that our congregation has survived without glaring compromises with its own basic traditions or ideals.

While our congregation was in the midst of selecting candidates for our pulpit, we were struck by another crisis: In April we were approached by planners of the proposed Midtown Plaza Project with an offer to purchase our church property. While the Pulpit Committee deliberated over ministerial candidates, another major committee had to be chosen to consider this offer. One element that had to enter into the decision was the fact that we did need more space.

David Williams was especially opposed to selling our buildings. His reasoning sums up the feelings of those who opposed a move. The buildings themselves were important architectural works, and they were important in the history of the city of Rochester. Williams pointed out that at least a dozen institutions or organizations then serving the whole community had been launched under our shelter. He argued against moving from the central city, believing that our location had "obliged us to grapple with civic and social problems at our own doorstep." He expressed the hope that space could be found in the Plaza Project itself for the church.

A great deal of time and thought were given to this difficult decision. Committees were formed, neighborhood discussions held. Analyses were made: Were we growing? How were we growing — older people, young couples, families with young children? Would the growth continue? In what geographical area was our membership concentrated? If we stayed in the city, could we expand our facilities to meet the growth? The trustees concluded that we had four alternatives:

- (1) "Stay put" — in a situation where our parish house facilities were inadequate.
- (2) Sell Gannett House and buy another site on Cortland Street; build a new parish house there and renovate the church building itself.
- (3) Move to some other existing downtown site, such as the old Temple B'rith Kodesh.
- (4) Buy a new site and build a totally new structure.

Those who advocated moving to a new site and building anew urged members to look upon the situation as an opportunity. We had delayed decisions about Gannett House and renovating our church; the Plaza Project would give us enough money to make new action possible.

During the ensuing year the congregation considered the problem. In January of 1959 the difficult decision was finally made: We would abandon to the wrecking crew the parish house and sanctuary where our congregation had worshipped since 1883.

A TIME OF TRANSITION

At the same time as the church property question we had another decision — to find a new minister. One witty reply to a New Minister Questionnaire sent out by the Pulpit Committee aptly indicates the difficulty of finding a successor to Dr. Williams: "Your task is easy: reincarnate Dr. Williams and we'll back you all the way."

It took much longer than Williams apparently had anticipated to find a candidate. After a long search, the Pulpit Committee recommended calling the Rev. Irving Murray of Pittsburgh. The congregation issued the call on November 22, only to have it rejected. Murray said that his duties did not permit him to leave Pittsburgh. The congregation was shocked, and the Pulpit Committee began its search again. Fortunately, they soon learned that William P. Jenkins of the Unitarian Church of Toronto was available and interested in Rochester, and after he candidated here in January of 1959, he accepted our call. He began his ministry in Rochester in May.

David Williams retired on November 2, 1958. A special service was held that Sunday. Among those participating in it were his son, his son-in-law, and his nephew, all Unitarian ministers. Dana McLean Greeley, president of the American Unitarian Association, attended the reception that evening. Williams was presented with two thick notebooks filled with letters of tribute from his many friends, and the congregation gave him and his wife Lucy a gift of money for a European trip.

During the five months before William Jenkins could come to Rochester, Assistant Minister Frank Wahlstrom and guest speakers filled our pulpit. It was a turbulent time. In February, 1959 we turned Gannett House over to the Plaza Project. Church school classes were moved to a vacated funeral home on the corner of Chestnut and Court Streets a block away. In June Frank Wahlstrom resigned to move on to another church. In the same month the congregation approved the selection of the Winton Road site for the new church and hired the internationally known Louis Kahn of Philadelphia as architect. In September we formally installed William Jenkins as our minister.

A new problem soon arose. Our church building was becoming physically unsafe, shaken by the construction work going on all around it. The contractors offered us an additional sum of money if we would vacate immediately. We had expected to be able to continue in the church until July, 1961, but we accepted the proposition, and on September 27, 1959 our members worshipped at Temple and Cortland Streets for the last time. A week later, the historic church was torn down.

There was controversy right to the end, however. Many Unitarians and other Rochesterians felt that the building ought to be saved, even though our congregation had decided that our own needs were best met by selling the property and building a new church. Dr. Williams was especially upset by the need to vacate the building so abruptly. He wrote to a local newspaper that the congregation was being "literally blasted out of its house of worship before the date agreed upon." He blamed the city for bad planning in

telling us that we could remain in the church, and then weakening it structurally by the surrounding excavations. There were counterarguments, of course: The building was old and had been in need of repair even before all this happened.

Dr. Williams urged that demolition be delayed and a careful examination be made to see if the building could be preserved as an urban interfaith Susan B. Anthony Memorial Chapel. On October 1, 1959, as workers removed furnishings and prepared for the demolition, David Williams prayed in the Galilee Porch that had been added to the church only fifteen years before. Through this vigil (which he called a prayer strike) he sought to focus attention on his hope that this landmark would not be destroyed. He spent the day and evening there, and left only at midnight, when the church building legally became the property of the construction company. His vigil got wide newspaper coverage, and the Democrat and Chronicle published a dramatic photograph of "our David" praying in a rather darkened room, with a shaft of sunlight streaming in upon him and his church. He had said on September 27, "To me, this church is no dead pile of stone and timber — but a living thing filled with the voices and the faces of those who have worshipped here over the years."

On October 4 the church steeple was felled and the rest of the demolition proceeded. We had to move on.

We rented Hutchison House on East Avenue from the University of Rochester to house our church school and offices, and we began to hold Sunday services in the nearby Dryden Theater. The move forced us to end the joint church school we had been conducting with the Universalist Church for a number of years.

During the whole of 1960, 1961, and most of 1962, our church community was upset by the enforced move to temporary quarters. It was a difficult period, for we could not function smoothly with a sense of continuity, but our church continued.

In March of 1960 our congregation voted overwhelmingly to approve the Unitarian-Universalist denominational merger; we had a long history of cooperation with the Universalists in Rochester.

In October we ordained the Rev. Kenneth Mochel as our minister of education.

The Social Action Committee (later renamed the Social Responsibility Committee) was founded in May, 1961. Through the years, this committee has served as a vehicle for education of the congregation about the great social issues of the day, and for action by church members on these issues. The committee's goal was to study social and world problems, propose action on them, arrange for congregational consideration of these proposals, and supervise social action projects. One of the first goals the S.A.C. set for itself was the abolition of capital punishment in New York State. Through the early 1960s the S.A.C. focused the spotlight of concern upon such local problems as racial discrimination in housing and employment, police brutality, and the plight of migrant laborers. One of the issues it was involved in locally was the 1962 Rufus Fairwell case, which brought the question of police brutality to the public's attention and led to demands for the creation of a Police Advisory Board to investigate accusations of the use of excessive force by police.

William Jenkins became involved, as have all our ministers, in local and national social and political problems. He worked for planned parenthood, and was one of the founders of Audiences Unlimited, a "freedom to read" organization created to fight censorship. Jenkins was also intensely involved in the

disarmament movement of the early 1960s. Along with several church members, he was a member of Rochester Action for Peace. He participated in a peace rally here in January of 1962. One of our members was part of a delegation of American women who went to Switzerland in the spring of that year to express their support for the disarmament conferences in Geneva. Mr. Jenkins was also active in denominational affairs, serving as president of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers' Association.

In July, 1961 our congregation had held the groundbreaking ceremony at its new Winton Road church site, but after that festive occasion, we spent a year in some tension and turmoil, ending with the resignation of William Jenkins.

There was some dissatisfaction with Jenkins leadership during 1960 and 1961, but that had seemed to calm down. The congregation began to grow again. During the 1961-1962 church year, however, dissatisfaction arose again. Some church members did not like the way Jenkins was conducting his pastorate. Part of the problem can be traced back to David Rhys Williams' ministry. Williams had been considered by some to have been a poor administrator: Lines of control and authority between him and the board of trustees were never really clear. When the Pulpit Committee conducted a parish poll during the search for a successor to Williams, one of the characteristics that many said they sought in a new minister was that he have "good administrative ability." William Jenkins apparently interpreted this to mean that he should assume control of operating the church. Many lay leaders began to feel that he was usurping some of their prerogatives, and the trustees felt that they were not being consulted as much as they should be.

The matter came to a head in late May, 1962, when a number of church members persuaded the board of trustees to reconsider Jenkins' contract. In response, Jenkins said that he would not subject himself to any ultimatum. Acknowledging that there was an organized opposition to him, he submitted his resignation on June 2, to be effective on November 14.

When this resignation appeared in the church newsletter, many members sprang to the defense of Mr. Jenkins. They accused other members of secretly plotting against him, and pointed out the great difficulties he had faced in our church. He had the double burden of having to follow the thirty-year ministry of the popular David Williams, and also of carrying the congregation through a difficult period of upset and readjustment as we operated in temporary quarters for two years.

Jenkins himself, in a sermon on the whole situation, pointed out that his view of his duties was at variance with the views of some of the members. He was criticized, he said, for his outspokenness; he answered that the minister must help the congregation see and deal with the problems of the time. In answer to the question of pastoral duties, such as house calling, he said that he felt he should not visit unless asked. He accused some members of the congregation of wanting to live in the past.

A congregational meeting was held at the Universalist Church to consider the resignation. Fifty-nine percent of the voting members of the congregation attended. David Williams spoke on Jenkins' behalf, pointing out all the difficulties that Jenkins and the whole congregation had been going through, and urging the members to keep Jenkins. By a vote of 157 to 110, the meeting accepted the board of trustees' recommendation that Mr. Jenkins' resignation not be accepted. The board did not, however, withdraw its earlier recommendation that Jenkins' contract be reconsidered in the future.

The whole unfortunate episode boiled over into the city newspapers, which carried articles about Jenkins' resignation and answers to his critics, and sent reporters to cover the congregational meeting.

After that meeting the crisis appeared to be over, but during his summer vacation in Canada, Mr. Jenkins was approached and called by the Unitarian Church of Hamilton, Ontario. Although by this time the bitterness of the controversy seemed to have eased, he found the Hamilton offer very attractive and submitted his resignation that September, to be effective on January 1, 1963.

In November of 1962 we moved into our building on Winton Road, holding dedication services on November 18 and on December 2. Architect Louis Kahn commented that his design of the building began with a question mark drawn inside a square. "I realized that the form aspect, the form realization of Unitarian activity centers on that which is question, question eternal; Why anything?" Kahn's task as he saw it was to determine "what order of spaces were expressive of the question."

Combining Unitarianism's emphasis on religious education with Unitarianism's eternal questioning, Kahn put the sanctuary, the place where the "question eternal" is pondered, in the heart of the building, and surrounded it with the classrooms of our church school.

At the end of December, 1962 William Jenkins left Rochester. Minister of Education Kenneth Mochel had left in June, to a pastorate of his own, and we were without a minister. When Mr. Jenkins left, we were still in the process of considering candidates. It was not until April, 1963 that Robert N. West, then of Knoxville, Tennessee, candidated here and was called by the congregation.

NEW BEGINNINGS

We began the 1963-1964 church year settled in our new building with a new minister. Robert West arrived in Rochester in August of 1963. His first sermon dealt with the civil rights march on Washington in which he had participated, as had David Williams and several of our church members.

Throughout 1963 and 1964 our Social Action Committee was concerned with racial problems. Our congregation passed resolutions in the summer of 1963 advocating open housing, unsegregated education and equal employment opportunity. Seeking to go beyond passing resolutions, church members made efforts to improve racial relations in the community. The S.A.C. and the Women's Alliance sought personal contacts with black Rochesterians. During a local controversy in February, 1964 over an open enrollment plan to desegregate Rochester's schools, Robert West said that Northerners cover their prejudices with "sugared words and pious professions," but the prejudice is there nonetheless. He said that Northerners had to admit to themselves that racism existed here as well as in the South, that blacks were being discriminated against in Rochester.

Our early concern over racism in the North proved to be well-founded. In the early summer of 1964 there was violence in the black community of Rochester. Early in 1965 the Rochester Area Council of Churches invited Saul Alinsky of Chicago and his Industrial Areas Foundation to come to Rochester to organize the black community. Alinsky's intention was to develop indigenous leadership. The Council's invitation was very controversial. Another group of Rochesterians wanted to establish a chapter of the Urban League here. Robert West said that the two organizations were not mutually exclusive, and he supported both.

Our congregation was not a member of the Council of Churches, but in May, 1965 we passed a resolution supporting the Alinsky invitation and extending a welcome to the Industrial Areas Foundation. We also expressed support for the Urban League chapter.

Through the efforts of the I.A.F., the FIGHT organization was created. One of the first major actions of FIGHT was a campaign to force the Eastman Kodak Company to adopt hiring practices more favorable to blacks. A number of our members were Kodak employees and stockholders, and the FIGHT-Kodak controversy presented some difficulties. Some of those who had links with Kodak strongly supported Kodak's position, but others still supported FIGHT's efforts.

The tragedy of racial hatred struck again in March, 1965 when Unitarian minister James Reeb was murdered in Selma, Alabama after he had participated in a voting rights march. Robert West went to the memorial service and march in Selma, while six hundred Rochesterians attended a memorial service for Reeb at Temple Beth El.

The year 1965 saw the deepening military commitment of the United States in the war in Indochina. As early as September of 1963 the S.A.C. had been discussing questions about American involvement in Vietnam: Were we really fighting for freedom there? Some of our church members were involved in the anti-war movement in the spring of 1965, and at that time Mr. West preached a sermon on his views about Vietnam. He declared, "I would agree with those who say that militarily, diplomatically, and morally our nation is committed to a grievously mistaken course in Vietnam." He asserted that the United States should pursue a negotiated cease fire and settlement, and not intensify its military commitment.

Our congregation was growing rapidly; some Sundays as many as three hundred people attended services. In September, 1964 we went into double sessions, holding two Sunday worship services and two church school sessions. We even had a weekly radio program on a local station broadcasting Mr. West's sermons. It is difficult to explain precisely the causes of the growth. Certainly our attractive new building and its convenient location, as well as a popular new minister, had an impact. Our image had changed. In our old downtown location we were an establishment church. Liberal though the church might be theologically, still it had held the old-line city leaders like Frank Gannett. It had even been called elitist in that earlier period. Now it was attracting new young people.

As further evidence of this growth, the Winton Road Nursery School was founded at this time as a semi-cooperative, interracial, nonprofit, nonsectarian school for three- and four-year-olds. The parents, partly from outside the congregation, become a corporation which administers the school through an elected board of directors. In consideration for partial scholarships offered by the school to low-income families, the church provides three classrooms and the playground for nominal rent. Begun as a summer pilot program, the school is now accredited by the State of New York and employs two certified teachers and a third group teacher.

Another activity was started in 1965 when the Women's Alliance sponsored the Dance Group, which has afforded women of the church an hour a week of creative dance. Members of this interest group have given demonstrations, participated in worship services, and become teachers themselves. Children's classes at the church have been staffed by this group. For two summers (1970 and 1971) the group, in cooperation with the Universalist Church, instituted a Summer Workshop in the Arts for forty to fifty inner-city and suburban children.

In January of 1965 the rapid growth of the congregation and the problems that resulted led Mr. West to devote a sermon to the situation. He reported that our adult membership had reached 700, with a church school enrollment of 625. He felt that one minister could not adequately serve more than 450

people. Basic decisions had to be made quickly on whether to build more church school space, whether to try to establish another congregation, and whether to hire an associate minister, all of which West wanted.

A Long Range Planning Committee and neighborhood discussion groups were also studying the problem of overcrowding. One immediate measure was to seek an associate minister. David Sammons was ordained and installed in that post in May. In the same month we voted to expand our building, hiring Louis Kahn again as architect. It was nearly four years before the new education wing was ready, however, and meanwhile we used stopgap measures. Parts of the church school were temporarily relocated (grades seven and above were housed for a time at the Harley School). Experimenting with the formation of a new congregation, Unitarians in the southeastern part of the county formed the Free Union Fellowship, and for several years held their own services. David Sammons worked with this group. Interest died out, however, and the Fellowship folded in 1968.

At the end of the 1966-1967 church year, Associate Minister David Sammons resigned to accept a call from St. John's Unitarian Church of Cincinnati, Ohio. That fall, Joel Baehr was ordained and installed as our new associate minister.

Social problems were again a deep concern of our congregation in the spring and early summer of 1968. At the May annual meeting, following the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, the congregation overwhelmingly passed a resolution of the Social Responsibility Committee (formerly the S.A.C.) which provided for the use of three acres of our church property as a site for racially integrated multiple-family housing for low- and moderate-income families.

After a year-long study, the Housing Committee presented its Hillside Houses of Rochester proposal to the congregation. It provided for a project of thirty-six units, twenty-seven to be condominiums, and nine to be rented, with possible rent-supplement payments to permit low-income tenants. It would be managed by a Hillside Houses of Rochester Corporation, control of which would remain with the church. The congregation approved the plan, but because it involved contiguous housing units, not separate single family dwellings, a zoning variance had to be obtained.

The plan caused a furor in the church neighborhood. Neighbors formed organizations and circulated petitions for and against the plan. Most opposition was based upon the argument that the apartment complex would drastically change the character of this residential neighborhood. There were some racist undertones in the opposition, however, with fears being expressed that the apartments would somehow turn a prestigious neighborhood into an instant slum.

The opposition of twenty percent of the adjoining property owners made it necessary for the City Council to approve the zoning change by a three-fourths majority vote. Some Council members appeared to buckle under pressure, and at the September 14, 1971 Council meeting the proposal was sent to committee; it was believed that it would not have passed.

After unsuccessful efforts at compromise with our neighbors, the Housing Committee resubmitted the proposal to City Council in late 1972, but it was again turned down. Late in 1973 the Housing Committee was finally dissolved.

In June of 1968, with the question of the morality of American involvement in the war in Indochina increasingly at issue, the board of trustees (backed by Mr. West) submitted to a special congregational

meeting a resolution to allow draft resisters to take symbolic sanctuary in our church. During the Middle Ages, a person could take sanctuary from secular authorities in a Roman Catholic Church. In symbolic sanctuary, a man resisting the military draft would come to a church as a public act of protest. The church would have no legal status as sanctuary, but the man would have the moral force of the religious institution on his side. He would, of course, still be liable to arrest under the draft laws.

The Arlington Street Unitarian Universalist Church in Boston had earlier provided symbolic sanctuary for two resisters. After a few days the resisters were arrested by federal officers, but there were some injuries when local police moved to disperse their supporters outside the church.

Our church received reports that two men wanted symbolic sanctuary, and the trustees put the question forward to at least promote discussion. On June 20 a special congregational meeting was held on the matter. In three hours of heated discussion there were several who threatened to leave the church if such a resolution were passed. Those who supported the resolution pointed to the traditional Unitarian Universalist support of the sanctity of the individual conscience. Those who opposed it argued that we should not allow the church to be used to encourage lawbreakers. The resolution finally passed by a vote of seventy-nine to fifty-five. It stated:

Committed to the supreme worth of human personality and the ultimate sanctity of individual conscience, the congregation of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, New York, hereby approves the use of its church building as a symbolic sanctuary for men who face arrest for non-violent resistance to the draft or military service on the basis of conscience and moral belief.

In order to prevent incidents such as had occurred in the Boston church, the resolution set guidelines for the numbers and conduct of , supporters of those in sanctuary, and required prior written approval by the minister or associate minister before anyone could take sanctuary.

Six persons were so vehemently opposed to this decision by the congregation that they resigned from the church. In the ensuing months, no one sought permission to use our church for sanctuary. In December, after reports of violence during the arrest of persons taking symbolic sanctuary in a Unitarian Universalist church in Buffalo, opponents of the resolution tried to have it rescinded. The December 3, 1968 congregational meeting on the subject was amicable. By a vote of 104 to 67 it reaffirmed the June resolution, with some clarification of rules of conduct for those taking sanctuary. Again, no one sought sanctuary, but the congregation of our church had taken a stand on a serious political and moral question of the day.

When the church year of 1968-1969 opened, the new addition to our building was nearly ready for occupancy. The church school classrooms were put into use immediately, but the new wing was not dedicated until May of 1969. The following October, the central main floor room was named the David Rhys Williams Gallery in honor of our minister emeritus. A portrait of Dr. Williams by John Menihan now hangs over the fireplace in that room. The Williams Gallery has become known as an exhibit hall for local artists.

During the summer of 1969 several bronze plaques from our old church were mounted at the south entrance of the Williams Gallery. They are tributes to suffragettes Susan B. and Mary Anthony; former minister Newton Mann; Mary Brooks Gannett, an abolitionist who attended our church from 1918 to her death in 1925; Leroy Snyder, newspaper editor, civic leader and outstanding church member; and

Benjamin and Eliza P. Crossman, for their generosity to the church. These plaques are tangible links with our congregational past.

In September, 1968 Robert West announced his candidacy for the presidency of the Unitarian Universalist Association. During the ensuing year he was often away from Rochester, traveling and campaigning, and thus was not as available to church members as before. Associate Minister Joel Baehr took up much of the burden and was well liked by the members of our congregation. West was elected U.U.A. President and on July 16, 1969 he resigned as our minister. When he was installed as U.U.A. President in September, he chose to hold the ceremony in the Rochester church, for he considered it his church. Many U.U.A. dignitaries came for the ceremony.

With Robert West gone, Joel Baehr remained as our minister, but he made it clear to the church trustees that he was only our interim minister, to remain until we had found a permanent replacement. During and prior to his year as interim minister, Baehr was active in the peace movement, in draft counseling, and in pregnancy counseling and work for abortion reform. He was a member of the Clergy Consultation Service on Problem Pregnancies, an organization of clergymen who counseled and advised women with unwanted pregnancies.

Early in 1970 the candlelight dinners program was established to bring new and older members together. These informal monthly dinners held in members' homes have enabled our scattered membership to become better acquainted and have in some cases become the basis for continuing discussion groups.

On March 28, 1970 Minister Emeritus David Rhys Williams died at the age of eighty. There was a kind of irony in the fact that he died on Easter weekend. A signer of the original Humanist Manifesto in 1933, Williams had moved in a different direction in some theological areas in the intervening years. He was interested in studies of the new field of parapsychology, and he held to a belief in an afterlife.

John Brigham, minister of the First Universalist Church of Rochester, wrote a tribute to Williams in that church's newsletter. Brigham pointed out that at the beginning of Williams' ministerial career he had registered as a conscientious objector to military service in World War I. And on the Monday of the week he died, he had spent the morning counseling a young man concerning conscientious objection to the Vietnam War. "So," Brigham wrote, "in 1970 as in 1917, David was at work, still firm, still convinced, still filled with the righteousness of faith."

As minister emeritus, Williams had confined himself to speaking out only on matters that would, as one church member has put it, "rally the entire congregation to some 'holy' cause." He supported the black empowerment movement at the 1968 Unitarian Universalist Association General Assembly. Casting his vote in favor of appropriating U.U.A. funds for the Black Affairs Council, he boomed, "I don't want to sleep through a revolution!"

In any consideration of David Rhys Williams, one is struck by his tremendous capacity to care for a cause. Once convinced of its righteousness, he gave it his all. Civil libertarian, fighter to maintain church-state separation, crusader for social justice and peace, enthusiastic and effective preacher, man of independent mind — all these describe the man many called "our David," our minister longer than any other in our congregation's history.

During the 1969-1970 church year a pulpit committee searched for a new minister. Joel Baehr resigned in June and accepted the call of the Unitarian Universalist Society of Stamford, Connecticut. In the spring of 1970 we called to our pulpit the Rev. Richard S. Gilbert, minister of the Unitarian Church of Ithaca, New York, and a chaplain at Cornell University. Gilbert was installed as our minister in October, 1970.

The board of trustees approved a proposal in the summer of 1970 to make space in our building available to The Atkinson School, an experimental, nonstructured primary school that sought to have a good racial and economic mix in its student body. The Atkinson School is still housed upstairs in our new addition.

Like many of our previous ministers, Richard Gilbert has been active in social causes. He has journeyed to Washington, D.C. a number of times in support of the anti-war movement, lobbying with area congressmen and participating in demonstrations against American involvement in Indochina. He has worked for unconditional amnesty for draft resisters. Following the September, 1971 uprising at the state prison at Attica and its suppression by the state police, Mr. Gilbert became active in efforts to obtain fair trials for all those involved. He is a member of the Judicial Process Commission of the Genesee Ecumenical Ministries, which works for reforms in our judicial system, and was its chairperson in 1974. He helped fight for our church's Hillside Houses project, speaking before the City Council in support of the plan.

In addition to his social activism, Richard Gilbert's preaching has earned him distinction. While a chaplain at Cornell University, he met Fathers Daniel and Philip Berrigan; Dan Berrigan was on the Cornell faculty at the time. In 1972 Gilbert combined this personal association with his concern over the Vietnam War in a sermon: "Prophets of the Human Spirit: The Brothers Berrigan." This sermon won the Unitarian Universalist Association's Clarence Skinner Award in 1972 for the best sermon on a topic of social concern. In 1973 he won his second Skinner Award for his sermon on draft resistance: "Amnesty; For Whom? For What?"

During the late 1960s and early 1970s many in our congregation who were concerned about the war in Indochina participated in protests, both locally and in Washington, D.C., opposing American actions in that conflict.

The congregation has not always supported institutional protest. Mr. Gilbert and several other church members withheld the federal excise tax on their telephone bills, asserting that this was a war tax instituted specifically to finance our military operations in Indochina. In 1972 we held a congregational meeting to consider the question of whether the church itself ought to withhold the federal tax on the church telephone bill as a war protest. This resolution was defeated.

Our congregation has been involved in social action in other fields. In the early 1970s, the Social Responsibility Committee has concerned itself with such issues as the Rochester school desegregation plan, ecology, draft education, and prison reform.

We have had guest speakers for whom the social problems of the day were real, immediate and personal concerns. Two former inmates of Attica prison discussed the 1971 Attica rebellion and described prison conditions; two men facing indictment for draft evasion spoke to us about the draft; a member of the Flower City Conspiracy, who was subsequently convicted of destroying draft records in Rochester in 1970, described the feelings of those involved in anti-war "resistance."

In recent years, efforts have been made to bring our 800-member congregation closer together. The ministerial associates program was established in 1971. A dozen church members took on some of the work of calling on, counseling, and giving assistance to church members, under the guidance of Mr. Gilbert.

The ministerial associates are less active now, but another project may revive the goal of one-to-one friendship and assistance; zip groups. This is an effort to organize the membership informally on the basis of geographical location (according to postal zip code zones), for various purposes. In addition, the candlelight dinners continue.

Another active church group is the Adult Program Committee, which involves a large portion of the congregation in seminars on religion, social responsibility, marriage, personal growth, recreational activities and a variety of other events.

A congregation of our size needs an associate or assistant minister, but we have not been able to afford two ministers since West's time. Several steps have been taken in order to take some of the burden off the minister. The ministerial associates program was one effort. Another was the hiring of an administrative assistant for Mr. Gilbert. Between 1973 and 1975 we had two ministerial interns, students from Colgate Rochester/Bexley Hall/Crozer Divinity Schools. They led worship services occasionally, performed weddings, led discussion groups, and otherwise assisted the minister. Robert Staley focused on social responsibility while Mark Robinson concentrated on the family cluster and adult education. A committee of interested church members has held church lunches and plans other activities to raise money for the Ministerial Intern Fund so that a divinity student can be hired for next year.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Throughout our history, religious education for our children has been part of our total church program. As early as 1843, when our congregation built the first church of its own on North Fitzhugh Street, space was set aside in the new building for a church school. As we have seen, William Channing Gannett was concerned about the state of our church school when he came to Rochester in 1889. He said it was "small and sleepy and not in good condition." Gannett subsequently wrote a new church school curriculum that was used by Unitarian churches west of Albany for thirty years.

We continued to have a church school program, but it was reinvigorated in the mid-1940s by parents and other lay members of the congregation. David Williams, like his predecessors, did not consider the church school to be his primary concern as minister. Church had always been considered an adult activity. Williams himself believed that children could not be indoctrinated in religious matters, that individuals had to find their own way to Unitarianism. However, when the parents began to build the church school program, he was willing to assist. Credit must go to the parents themselves for the church school work of the 1940s and 1950s.

Frances Towne was director of religious education from the mid-1940s until 1950. During her leadership, the New Beacon Curriculum was incorporated into our church school program. Mrs. Towne also encouraged the use of the religious education ideas of Sophia Lyons Fahs.

Mrs. Towne's successor was Marian Seemann, who sought in particular to give adults in the church an understanding of what was going on in the church school. During most of the 1950s Margaret Phinney

was director. She was a capable administrator who recruited good teachers. As a tribute to her ability, she was accepted as a member of the Liberal Religious Education Directors Association without having the normally-required academic qualifications.

It was with the coming of William Jenkins and later Robert West that a change took place in the religious education program. These two ministers both were enthusiastic about the church school program. During their ministries, religious education became almost the major activity of the church. So important was the church school that when Mrs. Phinney retired as director in 1960, we chose to hire a minister of education. The Rev. Kenneth Mochel served in that position for two years.

After Mochel's departure in 1962, Ruth Coakley and later Jan Rugh were our directors of religious education. Both took training in the field and were certified by the L.R.E.D.A. Jan Rugh left the directorship in 1973 to become a consultant in religious education for the St. Lawrence Unitarian Universalist District. Gaylene Morrill has served since then as director.

Richard Gilbert's seminary major was religious education, and he has been particularly interested in our church school program and has encouraged the Liberal Religious Youth Group. Believing that religious education involves all members of the church community, he has endeavored to bring an intergenerational focus to religious education. With Jan Rugh he established the family cluster program, about which he has presented programs at denominational conferences. The family cluster is a group of about twenty persons of all ages and family situations who meet once a week for a ten-week period. They eat, play, sing and engage in educational activities together.

Mr. Gilbert has instituted family services at which parents and children can participate in a religious service together before going their separate ways to adult services and church school. He also emphasizes that religious education is for all age groups — we all ought to learn and grow.

CELEBRATION

It is difficult to describe the religious and spiritual life of a congregation such as ours. Cataloguing its record of social action is easier. But our social action and our religious philosophy are closely linked. As Robert West once said: "Every question which relates to the welfare of mankind is a religious question."

The Unitarian Church was comparatively traditionalist in its near-Christian beliefs in the beginning of the twentieth century. But we have changed. The ministry of David Rhys Williams was a period of moderate change. The humanist-theist controversy arose within Unitarianism during his ministry here, and he was among the signers of the 1933 Humanist Manifesto. Williams became a bit more conservative in later life, but by the standards of our more recent ministers his views were always relatively conservative. Our services during his ministry were rather traditional. The congregation generally accepted Williams' monotheism and his "hope for immortality."

After David Williams' retirement, the congregation moved leftward theologically. It has been said that for thirty years our identity was grounded in the fact that we were "David Williams' Church." Now we proceeded to find our own identity. William Jenkins was a humanist, and he brought that view to the pulpit. Robert West brought existentialism into his sermons. It was during his ministry that the Creative Worship Committee was founded. Previously, the only changes in our services were occasional guest speakers; now there were actual changes in form and content, and some services were conducted entirely by lay members, integrating choral and instrumental music, dance, drama, and decor.

Joel Baehr added the Concerns portion of the service, during which congregation members can make brief statements on topics of personal concern and social significance.

Reared a Universalist, Richard Gilbert has stressed the Universalist view of accepting the existence of transcending humanistic values. In 1974 he signed Humanist Manifesto II. Robert West's sermons were of an intellectual tone, expositions upon the history, meaning and philosophy of liberal religion. Gilbert, while not ignoring the intellectual, has emphasized celebration. His first sermon in our pulpit was "Celebration as a Life Style." Both of these modes, the intellectual and the celebrative, are essential to Unitarian Universalism.

Under Richard Gilbert's leadership, there has been a great deal of variety in the form and content of our worship services. The Worship Committee conducts a number of services each year, and there is much lay participation in all services. Our Unitarian Universalist fondness for discussion has led to sermon talk-back sessions. After services on most Sundays, interested persons discuss the morning's sermon with Mr. Gilbert. During the 1940s there was a similar after- service discussion period led by lay persons.

Our congregation adopted this bond of union in 1892:

In the Freedom of Truth, and in the Spirit of Human Brotherhood, and to the end that the best meaning of these words may open our minds, and fill our lives, and make us strong to bear a helpful part in our community, we who here subscribe our names do by this act enter into a Covenant of Love and Service and Right Endeavor with each other.

Our doctrinal beliefs we hold always open to restatement, as growing thought and purer life reveal new truth. We welcome to membership all who wish to join us in following after Righteousness and Love.

In recent years we have read in unison this congregational affirmation:

Love is the doctrine of this church,
The quest of truth is its sacrament,
And service is its prayer.
To dwell together in peace,
To seek knowledge in freedom,
To serve humanity in fellowship,
To the end that all souls shall grow into harmony with the Divine —
Thus do we covenant with one another.

Regardless of the changes in the form and the content of our worship over the years, we may find in these two affirmations, separated by eighty years, common threads: Devotion to freedom of belief and the search for truth wherever that search may lead, desire to help one's fellow human beings, and a covenant for a common endeavor for peace and a better world for all.

A CHRONOLOGY OF SIGNIFICANT DATES, ADAPTED FROM THE PREVIOUS CHURCH HISTORIES OF WILLIAM CHANNING GANNETT, HAROLD SANFORD, AND FRANCES A. KEEF, WITH ADDITIONS TO 1975

- December 1828 Unitarian leader William Ware preached in Rochester.
- January 1829 James Green preached in Rochester.
- March 16, 1829 The Unitarian Congregational Society of Rochester was organized. James Green refused the Society's call to be its pastor. Small church on West Main Street purchased.
- 1831 The church building was sold.
- 1830s Lay people led by Myron Holley kept Unitarianism alive in Rochester.
- August 1841 Another group of Rochesterians re-incorporated the Unitarian Congregational Society.
- 1842 — 1843 Ministry of Rufus Ellis.
- 1843 Church built on North Fitzhugh Street.
- 1843 - 1847 Ministry of Frederick Holland.
- 1848 Ministry of Rufus Bacon.
- August 1848 Final session of Women's Rights Convention, begun at Seneca Falls, held at our church.
- 1850 — 1852 Ministry of W.H. Doherty.
- 1853 - 1854 Ministry of William Henry Channing.
- 1856 Ministry of James Hyer, who resigned when the society could not raise money for his salary.
- 1857 — 1858 Ministry of James Richardson.
- 1859 Ministry of James K. Hosmer.
- November 1859 Church destroyed by fire, lot sold, worship ceased.
- 1865 - 1868 Church was revived under leadership of Frederick Holland.
- 1866 New church on Fitzhugh Street dedicated.
- 1868 - 1869 Ministry of Clay McCauley.
- 1869 - 1870 Ministry of E.H. Danforth.
- 1870 Frederick Holland served us for two months.
- 1870 - 1888 Ministry of Newton Mann.
- 1874 Beginning of Union Thanksgiving Services with Jews and Universalists.
- 1883 Church building sold; Third Presbyterian Church buildings at Temple and Cortland purchased.
- 1889 - 1908 Ministry of William Channing Gannett.
- 1890 - 1908 Boys' Evening Home.
- 1908 - 1915 Ministry of Edwin A. Rumball.
- 1910 Enlargement and dedication of the parish house, Gannett House.
- 1916 - 1917 Ministry of Troward Marshall.
- 1917 - 1921 Ministry of Ludwell Denny.
- 1922 - 1925 Ministry of Frank Doan.
- 1925 - 1928 Ministry of Laurence Plank.
- 1928 - 1958 Ministry of David Rhys Williams.
- 1929 Church centennial celebration.
- 1934 - 1937 Mothers' Consultation Center (later known as Planned Parenthood) housed at Gannett House.
- 1944 - 1948 Rochester Better Housing Council had its head-quarters in Gannett House.
- 1945 David Rhys Williams, a pacifist, was invited to conduct the Official Military Memorial Service of the Rochester Ordnance District for President Franklin D. Roosevelt.

1954 Church celebrated 125th anniversary.
 1956 - 1958 Frank Wahlstrom served as assistant minister.
 1957 Rochester Memorial Society founded.
 April 1958 Midtown Plaza Project offered to purchase our church property.
 November 1958 David Rhys Williams retired.
 January 1959 Congregation voted to sell church and parish house to Midtown Plaza Project.
 1959 — 1963 Ministry of William Jenkins.
 October 1959 Church building demolished; David Rhys Williams' protest vigil.
 1959 — 1963 Worship at Hutchison House and Dryden Theater.
 March 1960 Congregation approved Unitarian-Universalist denominational merger.
 1960 --1962 Kenneth Mochel served as minister of education.
 May 1961 Social Action Committee founded; later renamed the Social Responsibility Committee.
 December 1962 Dedication of new church building on Winton Road, designed by Louis Kahn.
 1963 - 1969 Ministry of Robert West.
 1964 Winton Road Nursery School founded.
 1965 Congregation voted to build an addition to church building to house church school.
 1965 - 1967 David Sammons served as associate minister.
 1967 - 1970 Joel Baehr served as associate minister and later as interim minister.
 1968 - 1973 Effort by congregation to get approval to build Hillside Houses project.
 June 1968 Congregation voted to permit symbolic sanctuary for draft resisters.
 July 1969 Robert West elected president of Unitarian Universalist Association.
 1969 - 1970 Joel Baehr served as interim minister.
 October 1969 Formal opening of new education wing; dedication of its David Rhys Williams Gallery
 October 1970 Installation of Richard Gilbert as minister.
 1970 Atkinson School began renting upstairs of new addition.
 1973 - 1975 Mark Robinson and Robert Staley serve as ministerial interns.