Union Church of Hinsdale
160th Anniversary Celebration
October 25, 2026
Presentation of Highlights of UCH History 1866 to Present
Rev. Dr. Robert Knuepfer

160 YEARS IN REVIEW IN 16 MINUTES[1]

THIS IS A BRIEF OVERVIEW OF THE HISTORY AND HIGHLIGHTS OF UNION CHURCH, FROM ITS FOUNDING 160 YEARS AGO, TO THE PRESENT DAY, WITH DATES OF SIGNIFICANT EVENTS. IT REPRESENTS SERVICE TO THIS COMMUNITY SPANNING 3 CENTURIES.

FIRST, HIGHLIGHTS OF THE 19TH CENTURY

JUNE 3, 1866 – A YEAR AFTER THE CIVIL WAR ENDED, A GROUP OF MEN MET IN THE RAILWAY DEPOT OF HINSDALE TO

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1 Adapted from various historical sources, including the History of Union Church, self-published by Union Church in 1991.

CONSIDER FORMING A NEW CHURCH. IT WAS CALLED THE "DEPOT CHURCH," BECAUSE IT MET IN THE TRAIN STATION, AND WAS NON-DENOMINATIONAL.

<u>AUGUST 12, 1866</u> – A CONSTITUTION, COVENANT, AND ARTICLES OF FAITH, WERE PRESENTED AND ADOPTED, AND THE CHURCH WAS FORMED WITH THE NAME "THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION CHURCH OF HINSDALE." THERE WERE 9 FOUNDING MEMBERS, INCLUDING WILLIAM AND MARIA ROBBINS, MEMBERS OF THE THIRD PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF CHICAGO, WHO WERE ALSO THE FOUNDERS OF THE VILLAGE OF HINSDALE. THE 7 OTHER UNION CHURCH FOUNDERS WERE MEMBERS OF CONGREGATIONAL CHURCHES IN THE AREA, INCLUDING DOWNERS GROVE, NAPERVILLE, AND LYONSVILLE. REVEREND C.M SANDERS, PASTOR OF

THE NEARY LYONSVILLE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, WAS CALLED TO BE THE FIRST PASTOR, WITH A SALARY OF $900 PER YEAR. HE SERVED BOTH CHURCHES AS PASTOR, CONDUCTING SERVICES AT LYONSVILLE IN THE MORNING AND SERVICES AT UNION IN THE AFTERNOON EACH SUNDAY. REV. SANDDERS SERVED FOR 3 YEARS, UNTIL 1869.

<u>OCTOBER 14, 1866</u> - THE CHURCH MOVED TO ACADEMY HALL, WHICH TODAY, IS THE HINSDALE MIDDLE SCHOOL, ACROSS THE STREET. IT WAS THE FIRST SCHOOL IN HINSDALE, AND WAS OWNED AND BUILT BY MR. ROBBINS. 16 NEW MEMBERS JOINED THE CHURCH BY 1867, ONE YEAR AFTER ITS FOUNDING.

<u>OCTOBER 1869</u> – WHEN REV. SANDERS LEFT, OUR SECOND PASTOR WAS CALLED,

REV. FLAVEL, WHO WAS EDUCATED AT YALE UNIVERSITY, WHICH WAS FOUNDED IN 1701, AS A CONGREGATIONAL SEMINARY. HARVARD WAS FOUNDED AS A CONGREGATIONAL SEMINARY IN 1635. FLAVEL WAS AN ARDENT ABOLITIONIST AND ADVOCATE FOR WOMEN'S RIGHTS.

<u>NOVEMBER 1872</u> – OUR THIRD PASTOR, J.W. HARTSHORN ARRIVED. THE POPULATION OF HINSDALE WAS 500 IN 1873, AND THE CHURCH HAD 43 MEMBERS (18 MEN AND 25 WOMEN), PLUS 9 INACTIVE MEMBERS, AND 30 CHILDREN IN SUNDAY SCHOOL. A NEW CHURCH BUILDING AT OUR CURRENT LOCATION, THIRD AND GARFIELD WAS STARTED. HOWEVER, THE FINANCIAL PANIC OF 1873 STALLED CONSTRUCTION, WITH ONLY THE BASEMENT COMPLETED. SO, A ROOF WAS PLACED OVER THE BASEMENT, AND SERVICES WERE HELD IN THE BASEMENT

FOR THE NEXT 8 YEARS, BUT AT LEAST IT WAS HEATED IN THE WINTER BY A WOOD STOVE!

AT THAT TIME, MR. ROBBINS GAVE THE LAND TO THE CHURCH, AS WELL AS ADJACENT LAND FOR A NEW EPISCOPAL CHURCH, WHO HAD BEEN USING OUR SPACE, AND ADDITIONAL LAND FOR A NEW BAPTIST CHURCH.

<u>APRIL 25, 1880</u> – REV. HARTSHORN RESIGNED, AND WAS REPLACED BY REV. JOHN ELLIS, WHO SERVED UNTIL 1883. CONSTRUCTION BEGAN AGAIN IN 1881, THEN WAS STALLED WHEN THE ROOF COLLAPSED, BUT THE BUILDING WAS FINALLY COMPLETED AND DEDICATED ON AUGUST 6, 1882. AND, IT WAS DEBT-FREE, THANKS TO GENEROUS DONATIONS FROM ITS MEMBERS.

<u>FEBRUARY 1882</u> – THE TRUSTEES OF THE NEWLY FORMED PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH OF HINSDALE PURCHASED THE PROPERTY AT THE SOUTHEAST CORNER OF FIRST AND GARFIELD FROM MR. ROBBINS. AND, IN JUNE 1883, THE NEW PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH BUILDING WAS DEDICATED.

<u>AUGUST 1883</u> – FROM AUGUST 1883 TO 1918, THE CONGREGATIONAL UNION CHURCH WAS SERVED BY 9 MINISTERS, EACH OF WHOM SERVED FOR NO MORE THAN 3 YEARS, EXCEPT 2, WHO SERVED FOR 7 ½ YEARS EACH.

<u>AUGUST 1884</u> – OUR DISTINCTIVE STONE CHURCH WAS INCORPORATED IN THE STATE OF ILLINOIS UNDER THE NEW RELIGIOUS CORPORATIONS ACT, AND

UNDER THE NAME OF THE "CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH OF HINSDALE."

1890 – MUSIC WAS ALWAYS AN IMPORTANT PART OF WORSHIP, AND IN 1890, THE CHURCH PURCHASED A PIPE ORGAN. THERE WERE OFTEN PAID VOCALISTS – AT THE PRINCELY SUM OF 75 CENTS PER SUNDAY! IN 1902, THE 9 BELL CHIMES WERE DONATED BY FRANK AND JULIUS BUTLER, IN HONOR OF THEIR PARENTS, WHICH RESULTED IN THE CONSTRUCTION OF OUR BELL TOWER.

THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY, MISSION WORK WAS ALWAYS A HALLMARK OF THE CHURCH, AND DURING THE END OF THE 19TH CENTURY AND BEGINNING OF THE 20TH CENTURY, WE SUPPORTED THE WORK OF MISSIONARIES IN INDIA, JAPAN, WEST AFRICA, SRI LANKA, AND TURKEY.

AND, THERE HAS ALWAYS BEEN A HISTORY OF INTER-DENOMINATIONAL COOPERATION AMONG THE CHURCHES IN THE HINSDALE AREA, SHARING BUILDINGS, CONDUCTING JOINT WORSHIP SERVICES, AND COLLABORATING ON SERVICE PROJECTS FOR THE COMMUNITY.

SECOND, THE 20TH CENTURY

OF COURSE, THE 20TH CENTURY WAS PLAGUED BY GLOBAL CONFLICT, INCLUDING 2 WORLD WARS, THE GREAT DEPRESSION, AND SOCIAL AND POLITICAL UNREST.

YET THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH PROSPERED DESPITE THESE CHALLENGES.

<u>SUMMER OF 1913</u> – THE CHURCH HAD GROWN TO 305 MEMBERS, AND THERE WAS A NEED TO EXPAND THE BUILDING. BY 1914, THE MEMBERSHIP HAD GROWN TO 392 MEMBERS. AT THE SAME TIME, THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH HAD GROWN TO 143 MEMBERS, WHICH INCREASED TO 226 MEMBERS BY 1916. REV. WILLIAM SPENCE WAS THE PASTOR OF THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH, AND REV. ERNEST JOHN HOUGHTON, TRAINED AT MCCORMICK SEMINARY IN CHICAGO, WAS THE PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH. BOTH CHURCHES EMBARKED ON BUILDING PROJECTS.

IN 1916, THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH SOLD THE PARSONAGE AT THE CORNER OF THIRD AND GARFIELD, AND DEMOLISHED THE "OLD STONE CHURCH," AND BEGAN CONSTRUCTION ON A NEW CHURCH BUILDING. DURING

CONSTRUCTION, WORSHIP SERVICES WERE HELD AT THE HINSDALE THEATER, SITE OF THE "EGG HARBOR" RESTAURANT IN DOWNTOWN HINSDALE TODAY.

<u>OCTOBER 17, 1917</u> – THE NEW CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH BUILDING, INCLUDING OUR PRESENT SANCTUARY AND ROWELL HALL, WAS DEDICATED.

AT THE SAME TIME, REV. HOUGHTON RESIGNED AS PASTOR OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH, TO SERVE THE SOLDIERS IN WORLD WAR I. DURING HIS ABSENCE, WE INVITED THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MEMBERS TO WORSHIP WITH US, AND OFFERED TO PROVIDE PASTORAL CARE AND OTHER SERVICES TO THEIR MEMBERS.

AT THE SAME TIME, CONVERSATIONS WERE HELD AMONG THE CONGREGATIONAL, PRESBYTERIAN,

EPISCOPAL, AND UNITARIAN CHURCHES IN HINSDALE, TO CONSIDER COOPERATING WITH EACH OTHER BEYOND THE USE OF SHARING THEIR BUILDINGS. ULTIMATELY, THE EPISCOPAL AND UNITARIAN CHURCHES DECIDED AGAINST A FORMAL ASSOCATION, BUT WELCOMED CONTINUED COOPERATION ON MATTERS OF COMMON INTEREST.

<u>APRIL 10, 1918</u> – THE CONGREGATIONAL CHURCH VOTED TO CHANGE ITS NAME TO "THE UNION CHURCH OF HINSDALE."

<u>MAY 1, 1918</u> – THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH VOTED TO DISSOLVE, AND TRANSFER ITS ASSETS AND LIABILITIES TO UNION CHURCH.

<u>JUNE 8, 1918</u> – THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH MEMBERS MARCHED UP THE

HILL FROM FIRST AND GARFIELD TO UNION CHURCH, SINGING "ONWARD CHRISTIAN SOLDIERS," AND FORMALLY JOINED THE UNION CHURCH OF HINSDALE. BOTH CONGREGATIONS ENTERED THE SANCTUARY TOGETHER, AND TOOK THEIR SEATS IN ALTERNATE PEWS, SIGNIFYING UNITY. AT THE END OF JUNE, PASTOR WILLIAM SPENCE RESIGNED, WHICH WAS EXPECTED, AND IN DECEMBER 1918, REV. WILLIAM ROWELL BECAME THE FIRST PASTOR OF UNION CHURCH, WITH AN ANNUAL SALARY OF $4,000, AND 6 WEEKS' VACATION. HE RESIGNED IN 1941, AFTER 23 YEARS OF SERVICE. MEMBERSHIP WHEN HE BEGAN IN 1919 WAS 562, AND IN 20 YEARS, MEMBERSHIP HAD TRIPLED, TO 1,598 MEMBERS.

<u>MAY 24, 1942</u> – DR. THEODORE VOGLER WAS CALLED AS PASTOR OF UNION

CHURCH, AND SERVED FOR 9 YEARS – TIME OF CHALLENGE, GIVEN THE SECOND WORLD WAR. YET AGAIN, THE CHURCH RESPONDED. DURING THIS TIME, THE CHAPEL AND CHURCH OFFICES WERE BUILT, AND THE SUNDAY SCHOOL CLASSROOMS WERE ADDED TO THE EAST. A NEW CHANCEL FOR THE SANCTUARY WAS ALSO CONSTRUCTED. PREVIOUSLY, THE PULPIT HAD BEEN IN THE CENTER OF THE SANCTUARY, AND THE CHOIR WAS SEATED BEHIND THE PULPIT, FACING THE CONGREGATION. THE NEW CHANCEL MOVED THE CHOIR PEWS TO FACE EACH OTHER FROM THE NORTH AND SOUTH, A NEW CENTER ALTAR WAS CONSTRUCTED, AND THE ORGAN WAS MOVED FROM THE SOUTH SIDE TO THE NORTH SIDE OF THE CHANCEL, WHERE IT IS TODAY. THE PULPIT WAS ALSO MOVED TO ITS PRESENT LOCATION, AND THE LECTERN WAS ADDED TO THE NORTH. THE CHURCH OFFICES WERE MOVED TO

THEIR PRESENT LOCATION IN THE LOWER LEVEL, FROM THE KITCHEN AREA IN ROWELL HALL.

WHEN DR. VOGLER ARRIVED, CHURCH MEMBERSHIP WAS 1,560. WHEN HE RETIRED IN 1951, MEMBERSHIP WAS 2,339.

<u>DECEMBER 2, 1951</u> – DR. VERNON A. LOESCHER WAS INSTALLED AS PASTOR OF UNION CHURCH. DURING HIS MINISTRY SERVICE TO THE CHURCH, MEMBERSHIP GREW FROM 1,600 MEMBERS, TO 3,120, WHICH WAS MORE THAN 20% OF THE POPULATION OF HINSDALE! CHURCH SCHOOL ENROLLMENT EXCEEDED 1,000 STUDENTS, AND LED TO THE CONSTRUCTION OF 5,000 SQUARE FEET OF NEW CLASSROOMS IN 1955 ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE CAMPUS, AS WELL AS ADDITIONAL CLASSROOMS ABOVE THE NORTH SIDE OF THE BUILDING.

<u>1955</u> - ALSO SAW THE BEGINNING OF OUR CHRISTIAN FAMILY WEEKDAY PROGRAM, WHICH BECAME AND REMAINS THE FIRST INTRODUCTION OF UNION CHURCH TO MANY HINSDALE AREA FAMILIES, AND OUR PRESCHOOL PROGRAM CONTINUES TODAY AS A NATIONALLY-RECOGNIZED, EARLY CHILDHOOD PROGRAM.

AND, IN ANOTHER FIRST, IN 1953, UNION CHURCH CALLED ITS FIRST FEMALE MINISTER, REV. BARBARA HOLLEROTH.

INTERESTINGLY, DR. LOESCHER PRESIDED AT THE MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND MOST CHURCH COMMITTEES. IT WAS NOT UNTIL 1967 THAT THE MODERATOR PRESIDED AT MEETINGS OF THE EXECUTIVE COUNCIL AND BUSINESS MEETINGS OF THE

CONGREGATION. DR. LOESCHER RESIGNED IN JUNE 1965, AFTER 14 YEARS OF SERVICE.

<u>1966</u> – REV. SIDNEY LOVETT WAS CALLED AS PASTOR, SERVING FOR 8 YEARS UNTIL 1974. THIS PERIOD WAS MARKED WITH SOCIAL UNREST AND POLITICAL TURMOIL, INCLUDING THE ASSASINATIONS OF MARTIN LUTHER KING ROBERT KENNEDY, THE VIET NAM WAR AND ANTI-WAR PROTESTS, AND WATERGATE. YET, UNION CHURCH AGAIN RESPONDED WITH MINISTRIES AND SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY, INCLUDING A NEW CHRISTIAN EDUCATION CURRICULUM, AN EXPANDED MUSIC PROGRAM, A NEW YOUTH MINISTRY, EXPANDED MISSION PROJECTS, AND OTHER OUTREACH PROGRAMS, SUPPORTED BY 4 MINISTERS AND A SIGNIFICANT OPERATING BUDGET.

<u>JUNE 30, 1974</u> – DR. HENRY RUST WAS CALLED AS PASTOR, AND SERVED FOR 10 YEARS. THE BUDGET INCREASED 74% DURING HIS TENURE. MISSION, STEWARDSHIP, PARISH LIFE, CHRISTIAN EDUCATION, ADMINISTRATIVE MANAGEMENT, AND OTHER PROGRAMS, SUCH AS THE MEN'S CLUB, WHICH HAD 125 MEMBERS, WERE HALLMARKS OF HIS TENURE.

<u>APRIL 15, 1985</u> – REV. DR. RICHARD E. NYE WAS CALLED TO SERVE AS PASTOR OF UNION CHURCH. AFTER A PERIOD OF MEMBERSHIP DECLINE, MEMBERSHIP GREW, FROM 1,539 TO 1,610 MEMBERS BY 1989, INCLUDING 471 NEW MEMBERS, PRIMARLY FAMILIES WITH YOUNG CHILDREN. THE OPERATING INCOME WAS OVER $1 MILLION DOLLARS, WITH 1/3 COMING FROM OUR PRESCHOOL PROGRAM. REV. NYE SERVED FOR 17

YEARS, AND PARISH LIFE AND MINISTRY WERE HALLMARKS OF HIS TENURE. AN $11 MILLION CAPITAL CAMPAIGN FUNDED THE CONSTRUCTION OF A NEW PRE-SCHOOL AND PLAYGROUND ON THE EAST SIDE OF THE CAMPUS, CONSTRUCTION OF THE GATHERING SPACE AND CHOIR ROOMS, AS WELL AS MUCH-NEEDED INFRASTRUCTURE IMPROVEMENTS TO THE BUILDING. OUR BELL CHOIR PERFORMED NATIONALLY AND INTERNATIONALLY, AND THIS STRONG MUSICAL TRADITION CONTINUES IN WORSHIP SERVICES TODAY.

THIRD, THE 21ST CENTURY.

2003 – THE THIRD CENTURY OF SERVICE BEGAN WITH THE INSTALLATION OF OUR FIRST FEMALE SENIOR MINISTER WITH REV. DR. VERLEE ANNA COPELAND, WHO SERVED FOR 7 YEARS. THE

CONSTRUCTION PROJECTS FUNDED BY THE CAPITAL CAMPAIGN WERE COMPLETED, AND THE MEMBERSHIP CONSIDERED BECOMING AN "OPEN AND AFFIRMING" CONGREGATION.

<u>2013</u> – REV. DR. MICHAEL SOLBERG WAS CALLED AS SENIOR MINISTER AND SERVED FOR 11 YEARS UNTIL 2024. THE ENDOWMENT GREW TO $18 MILLION AND EARLY CHILDHOOD EDUCATION BECAME OUR SIGNATURE MISSION PROJECT. OUR MEMBERS ALSO SUPPORTED MISSION WORK IN ANGOLA AND GUATEMALA, AS WELL AS ENGAGED IN WORK TOURS IN THE U.S. MUSIC IN WORSHIP WAS ALSO A HALLMARK OF THIS PERIOD.

2026 – WE ARE IN THE PROCESS OF CALLING A NEW SENIOR PASTOR, TO LEAD THE CONGREGATION IN ITS THIRD CENTURY OF SERVICE.

160 YEARS OF CHRISTIAN SERVICE TO THE COMMUNITY IS A REMARKABLE ACHIEVEMENT! MAY GOD CONTINUE TO BLESS THE UNION CHURCH OF HINSDALE!