PEOPLE ARE OUR BUILDING BLOCKS

A History of the
Unitarian Universalist Church
of Bloomington, Indiana

Given by Mrs. William Lynch
On the morning of our
building dedication
October 17, 1965

last 70's - added new bldg
mid 80's Two bldgs connected with same
expansion of space

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When I told a friend that David Johnson had asked me to review the history of our Fellowship this Sunday, she said "What you again?" Yes, I'm afraid so. Some of you will remember that I had the same assignment last year at our pledge campaign dinner. I don't know whether David is trying to type cast me in the role of antiquarian, whether he wasn't paying attention on the other occasion or whether he is giving me a chance to redeem myself, but after making the usual protestations and point blank refusals, here I am.

Truly I am quite pleased to follow with you some of the stepping stones from ground zero to our position here on this hillside.

I think if I had been asked to give a title for this little history it would have been "Our People are Our Building Blocks." For though we are overtly devoting today to the dedication of this new building, just as twice before we dedicated more time-worn structures to our use -- We are in truth not dedicating buildings but rededicating ourselves. Our goals and aspirations cannot be bound by walls and roof beams, they reach to the horizons of our lives and the zenith of our sky.

We are a young group by Bloomington standards and many of us are new to liberal religion, but ... we weren't "Born Yesterday." This church sprouted its present growth of roots almost twenty-five years ago when a group of Unitarians gathered in one anothers

homes to discuss matters of concern to religious liberals. This arrangement was formalized in 1948 when 18 families formed the Bloomington Unitarian Fellowship and were officially accepted into the American Unitarian Association. But Unitarians don't spend all their time in discussion groups and consequently there developed a need for a Sunday School. One was started in 1949 with 14 children divided into two classes. This arrangement sounds delightfully intimate compared to the numbers who crowd these buildings from attic to scullery studying the Beacon Press books about the "Beginnings of Life and Death" and "Jesus, the Carpenter's Son."

In 1951 the Fellowship published the first edition of the Newsletter with items concerning the President Ralph Fuchs, an appeal by the Treasurer, Lloyd Keisler for the munificent budget of $700, all under the editorship of Dorothy Vitaliano. Today, 14 years later, Lloyd as Building Chairman, can bask in the glory of a job well done. At least we'll let him bask for a few minutes before starting on the second phase of the program.

In 1953, the group incorporated as a non-profit organization with a State Charter and by-laws.

The problem of finding suitable quarters, not on University property, has been with us from the beginning. The very first Newsletter spoke of "the urgent need for a quarters of our own." And a building fund was started in 1951. For those who have lived through the ups and downs that characterized our search for shelter the following excerpt from an article in the Oct. 1951 Newsletter will have a bitter-sweet quality. "Our building Committee has been gathering facts and figures on construction costs for a concrete block building

and found them surprisingly reasonable, in fact, so unbelievable that they want to investigate further before getting our hopes up." Well our hopes were never raised on the basis of this report and we were forced to realize that our only way of escaping from the Union building was into a rented house. Those of you who were not with us in those days can perhaps savor some of the experiences we had by driving past the gloomy exterior of the house at 509 E. 4th. However you can never imagine it as Elaine Leininger, Friedel Schweitzer, Ray Murray, Lenora Turner and others of us found it. Trying to convert that former student rooming house into a meeting place and Sunday School, in the cold of winter with no heat and only cold water was reminiscent of the labors in the Stygian Stables. Perhaps you will be unable to understand the deep sense of pride that all members felt when the Rev. Arnold Westwood came from Urbana Champaign to dedicate the building in 1954. During this period the High School group was formed and the Channing Club for University students and the First Forum series was held.

Remember this whole organization was manned and womanned by lay volunteers. It wasn't unusual to have several responsibilities. Teach Sunday School in the morning and prepare coffee for the evening meeting, and perhaps do the mailing of the Newsletter. This problem and the continued need for space were always with us. Our group though small wanted to perform a variety of functions not just for the group but in the community. As chairman I estimated that it took 20 hours a week just to do the essential work of holding

the line. It was obvious to all that we needed some sort of professional help and a better structure.

The courage needed to purchase the property at 419 N. Indiana for that group was of the same scope as the courage needed to embark on this building. That goal was reached and we did acquire the house. And our dear friend and advisor the Rev. Jack Mendelsohn who was then pastor of All Souls brought his blessing of friendship for our dedication just as he had done so many times in moments of decision for this Fellowship. And before him the Rev. E. Burdette Bachus had given his affectionate support. We speak of buildings and organizations but it is the people of this church and those of a larger fellowship who have supported and sustained us.

How did we solve the second problem that of finding professional help so that we might grow in numbers and usefulness? Just as the national organization had helped us with finances it now permitted Bloomington to participate in the 'minister-at-large' program. The American Unitarian Association sent the Rev. Grant Butler and his wife to us with the purpose of increasing our numbers so that we might become a church and call a minister. I hate to say this with clergy present but our idea of hiring an Executive Secretary proved unworkable as they are more expensive than ministerial help. Rev. Butler's stay achieved its goal and we were able to apply for church status in the organization and to assume the great responsibility of bringing the Rev. Paul Killinger and his lovely wife Loretta to our new church. In 1958, the then Unitarian Fellowship, a church which shared the Marquee's billing at the Von Lee Theatre with Brigitte Bardot, and which didn't even call itself a church was born.

What are a few of the things that the people

of this group have done? In spite of a struggle to grow this group through the years did engage in various forms of service and social action. There were relief programs for American Indians, Hungarian Refugees, participation in UNICEF and help for the Christian Center. Members and friends of this church have worked in a variety of ways to help equalize opportunities for all. The climax of this work was this Spring when our minister and his wife and various members and friends participated in events at Selma. Some members of this group started the Bloomington Memorial Society. The Women's Alliance produces an annual labor of love known as the Holiday Bazaar which has contributed to the feeling of fellowship as well as to the material well being of this church.

In 1962 the Building Committee stood on this two acre site and looked out on the wide horizon. And the members came to look and decided that truly -- This is the place ... Today you see the cumulative work of so many people. Of Lloyd Keisler and the building committee, the Talent of our Architect, Ewing Miller and his staff, the good craftsmanship of our builders, the back breaking labor of Brayton Person and all those who wielded paint brushes. These descendents of that hardy breed who have wielded mops and paint brushes in four different Unitarian structures, though never with such pride as now.

In 1963, Paul Killinger was called to California and the members under the leadership of Annetta Fuchs went back to their old roles of carrying on while the search for a new minister continued. In 1964, we gladly welcomed David and Sherry Johnson and their son Kirk.

As we think of our past we cannot fail to remember those who have been members of this group and moved out to carry something of this group with them. We hope they will hear about the accomplishments of this day and share the happiness. There are those who are no longer able to share this happy moment but we can share with them in our remembrance of such good friends as Helen Waggoner, Frank Horack, Jr., Lorrie Murray, Wallace Wright, Marshman Watson, The Daly's and Mary Orvis.

I would like to ask those members of the original group who are still associated with us and present to stand and remain standing. Annetta and Ralph Fuchs, Louise and Stith Thompson, Mary and Howard Mann, and Leonard Lundin. Now as I call on you will the others join this group of Founders.

Those who joined while we were in the Union Building, 409 E. 4th, 419 N. Indiana and Von Lee, Fee Lane House, New structure.

If there are any who have been planning to join us and wish to now.

All others who are friends of this church.