

History of Unity of Bellevue

Unity of Bellevue began in 1959 as an outreach program of Unity of Seattle, thanks to the energy and efforts of Dorothy and Phil Pierson, ministers of that congregation and leaders in the national Unity movement. Prior to that date, Dorothy established and provided leadership for an Eastside Unity study group for several years. Phil conducted the first Sunday service in the Chapel of Flowers, then located at the edge of Bellevue Square.

Only a few months later, in January 1960, Unity of Bellevue selected Dan Perin as the first full-time minister with an initial salary consisting of little more than cabbages and other produce. Times have indeed changed! But the limited size of the group was no reflection on the quality of the services. The first soloist, for instance, was later named the official soloist for the 1961 World's Fair in Seattle. Another human touch to which we can all relate, was the flooding that was a frequent problem, and Dan spent many soggy hours cleaning up the basement which doubled as a Sunday school. It comes as no surprise, then, that the congregation soon moved to an old bank building on the corner of Main and 102nd - with the pulpit located directly in front of the old vault.

The members of the church began to look for a permanent site and purchased the present property in 1962. The three lots, including a house purchased from the Steadman family were valued at \$16,000. You might imagine the many cycles of energy and commitment required to turn the property into land on which a building could be built: clearing the property, planting tree seedlings around the periphery, providing lumber on a love offering basis, and with Easter egg hunts conducted where the parking lots and the sanctuary are now.

It was in 1967 that twenty-two families pledged \$2,500 each to obtain a loan from First Mutual Bank to build a church of their own. (To honor these individuals Unity of Bellevue inscribed their names onto the tiles inside the front entrance in 2004) Two years later, on June 8th, the first service was conducted with Kay Arndt as Minister: a dream had become a reality! But have we finished the story? Hardly. Every homeowner knows the building is just the beginning. Plant after plant and hour after hour were donated in this labor of love, and the beautiful fruits of that labor remain with us today.

The Friendship Room, an expansion of the sanctuary, new offices, the YOU room, the Rainbow Room, and the new kitchen constituted the next major additions. In 1977 Kay Arndt suggested that the congregation borrow \$2,000 in silver dollars from the bank and put ten dollars in each of 200 bags. The idea was for an individual to use the ten dollars as seed money and think of ways to expand it to \$100. The idea worked, as it had in the past, and the resulting \$20,000 was used as the down payment for the addition. Two years later the construction was completed with a \$70,000 loan, which was paid off in 1992.

In 1981, Max and Vickie Lafser were hired as Minister and Church Administrator. As the church grew in numbers (Sunday attendance in 1983 was around 600) the congregation agreed to purchase the Boyd property, the second lot to the west of the original purchase. A fund raising drive provided \$50,000 and the remaining \$54,000 note was paid mostly by renting the house on the property for approximately the contract cost.

As we might suspect, the congregation was interested in the remaining Steadman property. Having that lot would create a contiguous 4.5-acre site suitable for church needs for decades to come. We were given the opportunity to purchase the property and John Baker acted as our attorney on a volunteer basis to complete all the legalities.

In 1986 Rev. Dick Everts (then serving as Associate Minister) launched the Lay Ministry program. Thirty candidates began the training which resulted in the graduation of 20 confirmed Lay Ministers nine months later. The Lay Ministry program has been an active part of Unity of Bellevue ever since.

Both Max Lafser and Dick Everts left Unity of Bellevue in the Fall of 1986. The position of Senior Minister was filled by Rev. Michael Murphy who served the Church in that position until early 1988.

Linda Spencer became the new Senior Minister in the fall of 1988. Linda was assisted through much of her term at Unity of Bellevue by the Rev. Joanne Stanley who served as Pastoral Care minister. By late 1989 we were again bursting at the seams in the Sunday School and in the Sanctuary. This time the Board selected an architectural firm to prepare a master plan for expansion of our facilities. Their report in June 1990 summarized the options and costs. The reality of building a new facility with costs between \$2.5 and \$4.0 million was sobering. The expense was believed to be too great for the benefits.

In 1993 Rabbi Ted Falcon formed Bet Alef Meditative Synagogue which teaches a Kabbalistic approach to Judaism. Bet Alef was looking for a location and found Unity of Bellevue to be a compatible home. (Unity and Kabbalah both share a mystical approach to spirituality.) Except for a brief period during our renovation upheaval, Bet Alef has continued to share our facilities with us and has become part of our spiritual family.

Unity of Bellevue continued to rent the two adjacent properties as rental homes until 1995 when the Waldorf School came to our attention as a potential tenant of the Steadman home. Vic Bishop led the effort to obtain a "conditional use permit" from the City of Bellevue to allow the change of activity on the property. This permit process took from April 1995 until February 1996 and the school occupied the house in October of 1996. The property continues in its capacity as a private preschool to this day.

Linda Iverson, as chair of the expansion committee that had looked at a possible new building, and Dave Browning, who was also on that committee, created the concept of Bandwagon in 1993. The question at hand was how to use the existing building as a base of expansion and still meet the congregation's needs.

Along with these considerations were questions about how Unity of Bellevue wanted to demonstrate its ministry. The vision and importance of serving the entire family was manifested by a renewed commitment to the youth in our community. Thus the primary goal was to provide additional space and services for youth education. The energetic work of everyone involved in Bandwagon created funds for the expanded education wing. Rex Allen served voluntarily as the primary architect for the project which was dedicated and placed in service in the fall of 1995. Marelu Marson was a major contributor to the youth program materials developed at Unity Village. She became the Director of Youth Education for Unity of Bellevue.

Also, from the Bandwagon series of small meetings throughout our community, Linda Spencer was able to demonstrate the need for people to meet in small groups on an ongoing basis. Thus was born the extended ministry of Life Change Circles. These groups began meeting in the spring of 1994 and were a continuing example of spiritual inspiration and deep family connection reminiscent of that original Eastside study group which is often not possible in larger group gatherings. Linda served as spiritual leader for 10 years and departed Unity of Bellevue in the midst of the most ambitious fund raising campaign of its history.

Project Renewal raised over \$800,000 to renovate the Sanctuary and Atrium area, and to provide much-needed maintenance and upgrades to the bathrooms, bookstore and other facilities. Vic Bishop championed the renovation project by persuading the Board to hire a professional fundraiser, and chaired the renovation project. Reminiscent of leaders from the original Eastside study group, he had a vision.

During this active period the Lay Ministry attended a Retreat where they were introduced to the profound experience of walking a Labyrinth. After returning from the Retreat the Lay Ministers decided to create a Labyrinth at Unity of Bellevue to serve the Church and local community. The Labyrinth was quickly designed and constructed through dedicated volunteer labor and donated funds. It was dedicated on December 1, 1996.

It was also in 1996 that Patty Becker became a member of Unity of Bellevue (having been a member of Unity of Tacoma since 1988). Patty was in the process of finishing her studies to become a Licensed Unity Teacher but soon decided to pursue a Divinity Degree. She attended seminary and became an Interfaith Minister and also undertook Practitioner Studies with the Church of Religious Science.

Nathaniel (Nat) Carter became Senior Minister in October of 1998 Rev. Carter initiated a number of study programs, the Quest, Unity Facts and FAQ's (frequently asked questions) and was a part of keeping the

Renovation project on target towards completion. Rev. Carter was with us for two years and touched many members lives.

In 2000, Rev. Patty Becker was hired to fill the position of Pastoral Care Minister and Director of the Lay Ministry, a role that was soon expanded to that of full Associate Minister. In 2001 Rev. Patty founded our Chaplains Ministry.

In 2001, after an extensive nation-wide search, Rev. Max Lafser was again hired as the new spiritual leader at Unity of Bellevue. Rev. Max and his wife Rama Vernon were thrilled to return to the northwest after serving for five years at Unity Center of Walnut Creek in California. During his tenure Max blessed Unity of Bellevue with his unique gift of developing and empowering individuals to realize their full potential and fill roles of leadership and individual ministry. Max served as our Senior Minister until he stepped down in the Spring of 2005. He and Rama continue to be of service to the Unity movement and the World Community as teachers of Peace Work.

Rev. Patty Becker served as Acting Minister, and with the support of Business/Music Director, Beverly Daugherty, the church continued to flourish.

In March of 2006, following an exhaustive nation-wide search, the Board of Directors hired Rev. John McLean to serve as Senior Minister. Reverend McLean was currently serving as Associate Minister of First Church Unity in Nashville, Tennessee - which he joined immediately after his ordination from Unity School in August 2003.

He began his spiritual journey at the Los Angeles Church of Religious Science where he was a licensed practitioner and a board member. He came to Unity when he moved to New York City and experienced the late Eric Butterworth at the Unity Center for Practical Christianity.

Rev. McLean spent all of his prior work-life involved in the creative arts in one form or another. Immediately after graduation from college, he worked at the National Endowment for the Arts, Washington, DC. After moving to southern California, he eventually worked in the television industry as a staff producer on a prime-time television series and later as a network, prime-time programming executive. Just prior to entering Unity School, he also worked in the arts at the local level when he was involved in all areas of community outreach and programming for a large museum and performing arts center in rural Wisconsin.

He has a B.A. in Art History from George Washington University, Washington, DC and an MA in Creation Spirituality from Naropa University/University of Creation Spirituality, Oakland, California.

Unity of Bellevue looks forward to experiencing our unfolding Spiritual development under the leadership of Rev. John.