From Salvation to Self-Determination: Unitarian Universalism on the Michigan Frontier

Lisa M.S. Friedman

Goals and Method

When I first began to inquire about sources for my topic, "Class and Classism in Unitarian Universalist History," the incredulous looks and few good chuckles I received confirmed my suspicion: there is precious little data to be found. There are some good reasons for this: in the 1800's and early 1900's we were not as sophisticated about demographic categories and data collecting as we are now, and the congregational survey for a ministerial search or building campaign is a fairly recent strategy, but the simplest, most regrettable reason is that we have not made an effort to preserve our history. Speaking with our researchers at the UUA, I argued that there must have been some social analysis of the UCA and AUA during the years of exploring merger. They agreed, said that the conversation was drawn out over many years and was not preserved in any lasting form. "We just don't have it," I was told. What, then, about our churches? I asked a Meadville Lombard faculty member. Surely in the depths of our basements or storage rooms there are registries, church histories, newsletter and newspaper articles about the members of the church in different eras. This would give us a picture, a glimpse, into who we have been over the years. "Oh, absolutely," came the response." The information is there, but it would be a dissertation project to dig it out. Besides, have you been in any church basements recently?"

When I volunteered for this assignment, I did so for two reasons. First, I have a deep love for history and a desire to see it discovered, shared, and preserved. Secondly, I am an institutionalist, and I believe that it is the people in the pews who shape the nature of our institutions in dialogue with their history and heritage. My immediate thoughts on the history of class in our movement conjured up images of proper Boston tea parties for the literary elite or Universalist revivals of mountain folk and farmers, with traveling preachers in their threadbare clothes. These are the images we teach through our history. But what about the people in the pews? Who were they, and what confirmations or challenges do they offer to our present day discussion of class issues in our midst? It is their history that I wanted to tell in this paper, and so I went to the church basements, knowing I would not find as much as I hoped. My goal was to include churches of both Unitarian and Universalist background in urban, rural and town settings, but several of the churches had no records that they could offer me. However two archivists did hear my call and were delighted that their work might be of use to someone. I have spent time in the "basements" of the First Unitarian Church of Detroit and the First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor and it is their stories, from the early-mid 1800's to the present, compared with some nation-wide research, that shape this paper.

There were three assumptions that I wanted to examine in light of the data of real people in our movement. In current discussions of classism, Unitarian Universalists often begin with the assumption that we are classist because of the socio-economic homogeneity of our congregations and that this homogeneity is due primarily to our economic status, our high education level, our style of worship and the nature of our theology, among others. Therefore I have organized my reflection on our history into three sections, each based on an assumption I want to consider. In this paper, we will consider the assumptions that we are the Privileged Few, that ours is a Non- Conformist's Religion, and that our theology presents a challenge - the Problem of God. An examination of these assumptions against our history suggests that the obstacles we face in developing a class diversity lie not so much in the number of degrees we have or the clothes we wear or our style of worship as in how we present our deepest values and faith.

The Privileged Few

When the Universalist circuit riders came to convert the Midwest frontier, they found sympathetic ears in Southeastern Michigan. In 1835, a small group of people in Ann Arbor wrote to the Reverend Nathaniel Stacy, asking if he would consider a rest from his traveling ministry, as they felt themselves in a position to support "sustained preaching." Stacy accepted, reflecting later in his memoirs, "I had been then four years and a half itinerating this wild and trackless country;... And considering my advanced years and increasing infirmities, I felt justified in changing my position, so that I might enjoy, at least, a temporary release from the extreme fatigues I had so long endured." [1] And so Universalism began to take root in Ann Arbor.

Ten years later, in 1846, a prominent Detroit merchant bought and donated a small church building to the Universalist cause, although the congregation proved too small to sustain it for long. In the same year, the New York Central Railroad established a Detroit office to help finish its line between Detroit and Chicago and to work with the local opposition, who feared the bad influences that would be brought to their communities. We can only speculate on the bad influences they had in mind, but as it happened, with the opening of the office came an influx of Boston Unitarians and their families. On October 6, 1850, the First Congregational Unitarian Society of Detroit was formed. Because almost half of its membership worked for the railroad, they became known in the city as the "Railroad Church." Information about the membership of the congregation in these early years is anecdotal, but it is noted that early members included some of the city's most distinguished families, including at least one governor, and they were eventually joined by lumber barons from Maine who came to establish the Michigan lumber industry.

By the time Unitarianism was established in Detroit, the Universalism in Ann Arbor was apparently fading. There is no mention of the church after 1852,

although there is evidence of a strong presence in nearby Ypsilanti. In the early 1860's the Unitarian Missionary Movement reached out to Michigan and found a receptive group in Ann Arbor. When the First Congregational Unitarian Society of Ann Arbor was founded in 1865 in the Court House where they were meeting, its founding members included three former members of the Universalist church, a secretary to the Board of Education, a prosperous farmer and civic leader, and other farmers, dealers and early citizens in whose honor many of the streets in Ann Arbor are named.

By 1879 a small group of Universalists who had been meeting in the Detroit Unitarian Church withdrew to establish in January of 1880 the First Universalist Society of Detroit. Their building, the Church of Our Father, soon became a cultural center, offering regular series of lectures, musicals, and art exhibits which were not often offered elsewhere in the city. Their free public reading room, stocked with current periodicals and books, was in full operation before the Detroit Public Library opened its first branch.

During this same period, the Ann Arbor Unitarians were also becoming known for valuing education. In 1866, the newly appointed Rev. Brigham wrote in a letter to his friends:

> Scores of students have expressed personally their interest, and I have been told by several that they have been saved from infidelity by hearing the Unitarian lectures. Of these I have given 16 ...They have been fully attended from the beginning and for the last half dozen evenings densely crowded ... Almost every prominent man and woman in town has attended.[2]

The Ann Arbor congregation actively targeted the University population, seeking to call ministers "of extraordinary power and personal charm.... who would be admired by the students and at the same time carry the Unitarian message to them." [3] This goal continued through a succession of ministers, perhaps reaching its height during the ministry of Rev. Jabez T. Sunderland and his wife, Eliza, from 1878 to 1898. On Sunday morning, Sunderland would preach a sermon designed to reach the townspeople and the faculty, teach a noon Bible class, then prepare an evening service for the students that aimed at education and moral guidance. The role of the Unitarian minister and congregation in reaching out and educating students in ethics and religion continued until the mid 1920's, when the University began to offer its own courses on religion and the Bible, and opened its own religious center.

As we enter into the early twentieth century, both church histories have little to share about the types of people who were filling their pews. [4] Although both congregations went through ebbs and flows of membership, they appear to have continued in these directions, with the Detroit congregation seeing itself as a cultural and intellectual center, and the Ann Arbor congregation serving the

University community. During periods of low membership, the Ann Arbor church even canceled services during exam week.

By the 1970's and 1980's we have more concrete data on the membership of both congregations. The 1972 ministry packet from First Church Detroit describes its membership as "made up of many different racial groups and spans a wide range of occupations and interests ... over 50% of the membership have members for 10 years or more."[5] The typical member profiled in the survey is a 51 year-old married woman with no children. By 1984 the typical member is a 48 year old woman, who has a 50-50 chance of being married or single and who works as a middle-income professional. Ten years later, the profile indicates a 56 year old married woman who is either a retiree, homemaker or educator. Through these years, the congregation no longer describes itself as a cultural center, but instead as located "on the University and Cultural Center of Wayne University." They are a "creative 'urban' congregation that enjoys diversity and city life. A fairly wide range of opinion, from conservative-liberal to radical liberal, still able to stay in the same room as each other." [6]

The recent profiles from the Ann Arbor congregation give a slightly different picture. The 1960 Pulpit Committee Questionnaire announces that "we have a youngish congregation, a majority of whom are under 40 and mainly in the thirties; almost half have pre-school children. Half have participated in the church less than five years."[7] The 1979 survey describes a congregation in their mid-forties, half of whom are married and who are likely to have 1.8 children. A third of the congregation works in teaching or the social sciences and 48% earn above $25,000. By 1994, the average age is 51, although a third of the congregation is in their forties. 75% of the congregation is married. With the exception of one respondent, everyone has some education beyond high school, and members are most likely to be involved in the teaching or health care professions. The focus of the congregation is less University-oriented than in earlier years, and fellowship, ethical concerns and religious education for children are of primary importance.

Walking into the fellowship halls of these two churches today, it is difficult to imagine the frontierspeople and transplanted New Englanders who established Unitarianism and Universalism in these cities. As the history shows, the members of these churches were often among the "privileged few" in their cities. The last 150 years, however, have witnessed several changes. The Detroit church began as a congregation of prominent businessmen and entrepreneurs, and over 150 years has developed into a congregation of educators and social activists. The Ann Arbor church was founded by civic leaders and prosperous farmers, but soon grew to be a University church. It remains a congregation of highly educated people, although its membership has diversified to the point where it need not close its doors for exam week.

How do we measure the history of class from the stories of the people in the pews? It is difficult to compare between anecdotal and sociological data over such a long time period, but I was struck by a comment made by Rev. Mel Hoover in a recent article in the World. In "A Conversation on Race and Class," he said that "one reason I'm in this denomination is that we do have power and privilege, and positions of power, and the capacity to influence. Otherwise I would've been wasting my time."[8] If we were to measure the privilege and power of these two congregations over history, we are faced with two very different pictures. In terms of education and income level, it seems quite possible that our current membership is in an equal or better position than the membership 150 years ago. However, in terms of positions of influence in their communities, as benefactors, civic leaders, or elected officials, my sense is that the earlier membership had more influence and prestige than we do now. Our membership is consistently in the social or service-oriented professions; the farmers, the CEO's, and the entrepreneurs are less and less to be seen. Throughout our history, we have been the privileged few, but we have been privileged in different ways at different times.

A Non-Conformist's Religion

A 1968 pamphlet from the Detroit church offers this commentary on the early Unitarians and Universalists that formed the church: "these two groups, in their separate but somewhat parallel development, each ran counter to majority acceptance. It speaks for our national commitment to freedom of religion that both flourished and were in time incorporated as denominations."[9] This description of our early forebears is typical of how we tell our history - "each ran counter to majority acceptance." We claim with pride our early development as a non-conformist's religion, but in recent years we have begun to ask ourselves whether or not this is a barrier to diversity. In the 1994 UUA attitude study, "More Racial Justice," 10% of the respondents believed that cultural diversity was not possible because "liberal beliefs are unattractive" to the wider population, while 37% worried that "our intellectual preaching style would not appeal to people from racially or culturally diverse backgrounds."[10] To what extent have we defined ourselves as set apart from the rest of society, and how has this influenced the membership of our churches? What values have we chosen to define us?

When the Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor first chartered, their statement of purpose was succinctly stated: "We the undersigned, desirous of securing to ourselves and our families the advantages of religious instruction and fellowship, do hereby associate ourselves together ... for the purpose of maintaining religious worship and conducting the temporal interests of a religious society."[11] Almost fifty years later, in 1914, a more specific charge was added to the purpose: "The Church is incorporated to carry on such religious, benevolent, and charitable work as shall promote Freedom, Fellowship, and Character in Religion and Ethics."[12] By 1960, it seems that it was impossible to winnow a new purpose

down to less than two paragraphs. This statement, while it reaffirms its faith "in the principles which, throughout history, have motivated the liberal church,"[13] describes a faith with a reverence for life, a respect for man and his truth, and the affirmation of universal brotherhood and fellowship. It calls for the awakening of social conscience and declares that:

> unfettered by dogma and unrestricted by formal creed, we honor the great in spirit coming to us from the past and present, representing the earth's rich diversity of faiths and cultures. Their wisdom, their rectitude, and their courage guide and inspire us in creating for all a life enlightened by knowledge and animated by good will.[14]

The 1990 addition shares much of the same sentiments, although its language reflects more the worth and dignity of humanity, rather than the truth of man, and affirms a universal understanding and acceptance of one another "unimpaired by divisions based on race, color, national origin, religion, gender, age, sexual orientation, enablement, socioeconomic status, or other factors."[15]

The purpose with which the original Unitarian and Universalist churches of Detroit chartered is not to be found, but at the time of their merger in 1934, they had come to an agreement of common purpose:

> the purpose of this church is to improve upon the quality of human life by maintaining a free church which seeks truth wherever it may be found; a church which strives for an interpretation of religion that shall be in harmony with modern knowledge, and that shall satisfy spiritual, emotional and intellectual needs and shall stress responsibility to the community of man. [This was later changed to world community.][16]

This purpose remained unchanged until the early 1990's, when it was shortened and made into an introduction to an affirmation of the Purposes and Principles.

The purposes of both churches over the course of their histories clearly reflects the changes that were occurring in Unitarianism and Universalism in this time, as they shifted from pure Christianity to a more humanistic faith. But the shifts in emphasis reveal a change in our non- conformity as well. Beginning as churches that provided religious instruction in radical theology, each grew into a church that promotes specific values in ethics and religion. From there they become churches whose religion is recognized by the social values they achieve in their communities and congregations, as well as the religious diversity and tolerance that they promote. Over the past 150 years these churches evolved from a radicalism defined by theological beliefs to a radicalism defined by social and theological values, from the unity of God and the love of God for all people to the inherent worth and dignity of all people and the right of conscience in the

democratic process. Along with the larger movement, they evolved from a movement based in a theological premise to a movement based in a theological process.

This shift is significant for our understanding of the dynamics of class within our movement's history, if we follow the studies of the lifestyles and values of Americans along class lines. The sociologist Melvin Kohn identifies two underlying patterns of self-direction and conformity. He observes, "the essence of the higher class position is the expectation that one's decisions and actions can be consequential; the essence of the lower class position is the belief that one is at the mercy of forces and people beyond one's control, often, beyond one's understanding."[17] This is a challenging proposition for us, if we wish to increase the socio-economic diversity in our congregations, considering that our religious emphasis has become more and more focused on the individual's right and responsibility to find their own religious path. As we consider the history of the values espoused by the Ann Arbor and Detroit congregations, what are the applications of Kohn's argument for understanding the class nature of our membership?

Our values are found not only in our statements of purpose, but also in our religious education goals. Over the past 150 years, from the early catechisms of the Universalist Church School to the ethical discussions of the life of Jesus in the Unitarian Sunday School, content and process have warred with one another in religious education. A study of Universalist Sunday School curricula from 1840-1870 reveals lessons that are adamantly concerned with teaching a correct and reasoned theology. In the words of St. John and St. Peter, printed on the title pages of two lesson books, the Universalists desired to "have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in the truth" and they wanted their children to "be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason for the hope that is in you."[18] Another curriculum author, Charles Hudson, sought to "give a new impulse to the study of the scriptures by our children and youth," but he also labored to "exhibit the character of God and his design in the kingdom of grace" and to "exhibit some of the evidence of divine revelation, that in this age of infidelity, the young mind might be furnished in some degree with an antidote against the poison of skepticism."[19] Hudson directly challenges his students: "Have you attended to all the foregoing lessons? ... Have you increased in virtue as well as in knowledge?"[20]

Almost one hundred years later, the newsletters from the Detroit Church in the mid-1940's reveal a more ethical, less theological approach to their Sunday School. Their worship and religious education express the character-building, rational Unitarianism of the day, with a strong focus on humanitarian service. Articles congratulate the Young Religious Liberals on their service projects, while Rev. Pullman addressed such themes from the pulpit as "What is the dynamic of natural religion? Its superiority." And "How can we learn to use our minds for straight-forward living?" And yet, the primary method for teaching the children

appears to have been through the experience of shared worship every Sunday, including their own children's choir. In an effort for recruitment, the following announcement appeared in the March 3, 1946 newsletter:

> Parents! Please read the Worship Services taken home by members of the upper school; then pass them on to friends and neighbors who may become interested in our school, and whose children attend no other school.[21]

Services were built around a particular theme for an entire semester, such as world religions or "Our Heritage of Freedom."

By the 1960's, 70's, and 80's most of our religious education programs had been converted to Sophia Lyon Fahs' philosophy of teaching through the religious experience of awe and wonder, drawing on religious and ethical insights through all the great religions of the world. Religion was to be handed down through experience. The 1989 packet from the Detroit church articulated its religious education goals as threefold: to cultivate Unitarian Universalist identity, to promote an understanding of culture, and to encourage the appreciation of religious differences. The 1994 packet emphasized keeping the children involved in Unitarian Universalism as they grow, helping them to choose moral and ethical values, and nurturing an active involvement in the learning process. In Ann Arbor, which was developing into a family church, the most important emphases for the church school in 1979 were moral and ethical questions, personal and psychological growth, and awareness of the social problems of the world. By 1994 Unitarian Universalist heritage and an identity with a religious community had become priorities alongside self-worth and social responsibility. The 1998 "Fulfilling the Promise" survey reveals that an overwhelming 53% of respondents believe that their child's religious development is best served by their congregation giving them "a sense of belonging, along with respect for difference."[22]

The trend from catechisms and proper Sunday worship services that mirrored the adult service, choir and all, to an emphasis on self-worth and personal spiritual development is thought-provoking in light of Kohn's study of parental values along class lines. In keeping with his distinction between self-direction and conformity, he observes:

> an emphasis on consideration of other people, curiosity, responsibility, and self-control increased at successively higher class levels, while emphasis on good manners, neatness, obedience, honesty, and being a good student increased at lower class levels.[23]

Upper class parents were more apt to value their child's happiness, while lower class parents placed more emphasis on honesty and obedience. Another way

that Kohn explains the difference is to describe the middle class as oriented to the child's *internal* dynamics while the working class is focused on *external* standards of behavior. Obviously, there are always exceptions to the rule, but it is interesting to note that our most recent emphasis in religious education favors the internal approach almost to the exclusion of external expectations.

Another way to consider this tension between internal dynamics and external standards is in the tension between individual and communal values. One example of this is the conflict between the Ann Arbor congregation and its ministers around campus outreach and educational programs. Dr. Sunderland, under whose ministry the student group flourished from 1878-1898, was not inspired by the Western Conference motto of "Freedom, Fellowship, and Character in Religion." He believed that it lacked "an historic connection with the past - with what was highest, sweetest, and most vital in Christianity"[24] and so he set out, like his predecessors, to bring a pure and reasoned Christianity to the students of his town. Two ministries later, the Rev. Henry Wilder Foote founded the Young People's Religion Union in the early 1900's with the purpose of stimulating "religious and ethical ideals and the promotion of social intercourse among young people of any or no church."[25] However, it is reported that his congregation enjoyed the traditional New England conservatism of his religious ideals more than the student body and faculty, whose attendance declined.

The opposite was true of his successor, Dr. Percy Dawson. Dr. Dawson found more sympathetic ears for his socialism among the students and professors, and shocked his new congregation by announcing that "the denomination had outlived its usefulness and was dead."[26] Long time members determined that they needed to save their church from this assault, while one of the professors in the congregation announced that "the purpose of the church was service to the community first and religious worship second."[27] Throughout the ministry of the Ann Arbor congregation, there existed a tension about the religious truth they were teaching. Was there a "pure Christianity" or "pure religion" to be taught? Or was the goal to teach the values of the free religious life: freedom, reason, and tolerance in the religious quest, wherever they might lead?

Reading through the history, it seems that we have always considered ourselves a non-conformist's religion. But at times we seen ourselves as a non-conformist community, rooted together in the same vision, and at other times we have expressed ourselves as a community of non-conformist individuals. The 1965 Centennial Program of the Ann Arbor Church looks back a hundred years and observes:

> It was the time ... of the dawn of liberal religion as we know it today. It evolved slowly, assailing every weak point in traditional dogma even though such opposition meant nearly complete ostracism. Those early liberal ministers hammered upon the barriers of

> superstition and narrowness with unquenchable courage and compelling persistence.[28]

These early churches were communities grounded in a common theological conviction, while they worked to bring the light of their reason to other individuals willing to listen. By the early twentieth century, they were sounding the call of freedom from dogma and the responsibility of the individual search, but were united in their commitment to serve their fellow men and women. Detroit minister Rev. Tracy Pullman wrote columns entitled "On the Side of the Masses," while he preached about the "10 Marks of An Educated Man." The 1942 celebration of Ann Arbor's 75th year carries these words of appreciation and warning from the Summer Daily News: "The church has embraced a wider scope of duty to the people, and only as long as it retains an interest in the common man will it cease to fade into disuse."[29]

By the time the 1967 Goals Report was published, the movement was struggling to articulate a communal vision that could bridge its individualism: "the maturing of modern men requires a very special community, a community in which the encounter between valuing and loving persons is known to be the real source of human good."[30] It pleads for the consideration and development of such a community, noting that the typical Unitarian Universalist in its survey is someone who is strongly individualistic, who has thought his/her way to the church, and looks to the church not to support his/her values, but for support in the quest for meaning.

This image of Unitarian Universalism which remains up to the present is one of a group of rugged individuals, who affirm a theological diversity and are united in the endeavor to be on the cutting edge of social change. The 1960 survey of the Ann Arbor congregation reflects that:

> Members of the church look to it to meet their needs for ethical guidance, intellectual stimulation, spiritual enrichment, and friendship with other members. In the years immediately ahead, they feel that the church should ... participate more actively in social issues effecting Ann Arbor and in the intellectual life of the community... As to qualities they want in a minister, ...they would prefer a humanist and a theological liberal; on the whole they would welcome a man with definite political opinions, preferably on the Democratic side.[31]

The 1989 packet from Detroit expresses puzzlement that "First Church has a fine civil rights record, but we have not been able to capitalize on that to attract social activists of any color."[32] In their ministerial profile, they envision a prestigious yet humble leader, "a minister who can go to breakfast with the mayor or lunch with the governor and still be not too proud to visit the sick and comfort the dying."[33]

It is only in very recent years that we have begun to ask the question of what communitarian values we might share as a movement. The 1998 "Fulfilling the Promise" survey indicates that a significant percentage of our membership believes that "'the ‘glue’ that binds us together is shared values and principles (52%)."[34] But as Kohn points out, those values can be expressed either internally and individualistically, or externally and communally. The ways in which we articulate our non-conformity and radicalism will affect the diversity that we find in our pews.

The Problem of God

Our discussion of class diversity often begins with the assumption that our theology is too abstract and our worship too intellectual to appeal to a wide range of people. We assume that we have never had an understanding of religious truth that would appeal to mainstream America. This was not always the case. In 1886, the Rev. Sunderland began a new periodical, The Unitarian. It was to be "a magazine that shall hold to our old freedom from dogmatic creeds and yet stand clearly for belief in God and worship and the spirit of Christ."[35] Sunderland was taking a clear stand in the debate between ethical religionists and Christian theists that was raging on the radical Midwest frontier, but if we look at the history of the Ann Arbor and Detroit churches, it was a stand that would eventually lose out in these congregations. According to the Ann Arbor history, as the ethical religionists won influence, some of the long time members left. We don't know who they were. Were they the farmers, the business people, and the non-University folk? Were they the old or young? The rich or the poor?

My point is not to compare numbers in a theological loyalty contest. Both theological stances had their appeal, and while there were a significant number who faded away, there is no question that the Detroit congregation thrived during the early half of this century as a flagship of the new faith. It even began to establish satellite congregations in the burgeoning suburbs, and the history glows with it:

> Thus, after a century of existence as one small isolated island of free religious thought in the great enveloping sea of orthodoxy that was always suspicious and often hostile, the parent institution gradually found itself surrounded by several others.[36]

They believed that this was the dawning of a new age for religious liberalism. For our purposes, it would be interesting to know if the liberal-conservative divide was drawn at all along class lines.

What is measurable is the shift in prevailing theologies, which moves along Kohn's lines from a more external to a more internal one. Note that Sunderland intended to promote freedom from "old dogmatic creeds," which is not the same as promoting freedom of belief. In 1930, in an effort to reach out to the

"unchurched," the Ann Arbor church changed its label to the "Fellowship of Liberal Religion," with the word Unitarian underneath. A year later, nineteen members of the church, representing almost as many departments of the University, released the following statement, which they entitled "A Reflection of the University Mind":

> That there is only one source of authority for any philosophy of life - validated human experience.
>
> That religion consists in the daily quest of the good life here and now, lived in the light of truth without equivocation, and in the effort to see life in its entirety.
>
> In the attempt to enrich and improve the life of all mankind, by the search for and application of the truths of human experience, wherever they might lead, even if this means rejection of established and time-honored concepts.
>
> In honoring all great teachers of truth and in promulgating great truths from whatever source derived, not in emphasizing the teaching of merely one sect or creed.
>
> In the continual readjustment of ideas to new truths in all fields of thought and in the necessity of struggling for the freedom of the human mind, for freedom of thought, freedom of speech and freedom of press at all times.
>
> **THEREFORE**
>
> Since the Unitarian Church is a creedless fellowship of liberal religion, free to change with increasing knowledge, we are happy to be a part of this group which looks always to the conquest of ignorance, evil and suffering, to the unfolding of the highest powers of mankind and to the banishment of false and obsolete creeds, practices and institutions.
>
> We are united in a quest for the good life, "a life inspired by love and guided by knowledge," and for the brotherhood of man in its highest sense.[37]

Unfortunately for the church, the rest of the town and community was not quite ready for the University mind. Five years later, Rev. Marley reflected that "thus, without particularly choosing to do so, the local church became the champion of a doctrine which was unpopular with other church-goers, but which had not yet permeated the thinking of the unchurched."[38]

Thus, within a fifty year time span, the Unitarian standard of belief had gone from one external standard, "the belief in God and worship and the spirit of Christ," to the internal dynamic of a religious life grounded in "validated human experience" and the "daily quest for the good life in the here and now." This is a theological story well-known to us, and one that remains a debate within our movement. However, as significant as the shift from Christianity to Humanism may seem, it is not as startling as the shift from Humanism to the Purposes and Principles in the fifty years which follow. The Detroit church mirrors this change, when it reduces its original Statement of Purpose to "a religion which is in harmony with modern knowledge" and simply lists the purposes they promote in accordance with membership in the Unitarian Universalist Association. This shift represents a change from a theological standard to the internal affirmation of a statement of values. It is a shift from an existentially-based world view to a series of ethical guides.

By 1967, the average Unitarian Universalist reported that the three most important aspects of attending church service were intellectual stimulation, personal reflection and fellowship. 43% defined themselves as Christian, while 89.5% did not have a place for immortality in their belief system. The largest percentage (44%) saw God as "a name for some natural processes within the universe, such as love or creation evolution"[39] and 52% hoped that the UUA would be closer to a distinctive, humanistic religion in ten years.

Twenty years later, some interesting changes had occurred. The three most important aspects of worship were intellectual stimulation, celebrating common values, and personal reflection. What is significant is that the percentage ranking of intellectual stimulation is virtually unchanged. The report observes that the number of people who saw both fellowship and the group experience of participation and worship as important increased by 20%, while the number of people who saw the celebration of common values doubled from 30% to 60%. There was a 10% increase in those who saw the concept of God as meaningful, while the two largest categories of religious identity were Humanist/Existentialist (55%) and Christian (15%).

The 1967 Goals Report, in describing the situation Unitarian Universalism faces in the latter half of the 1900's, explained the shift in these words:

> Perhaps the chief characteristic of today's religious liberalism is its radical pluralism and deliberate inclusiveness.... What makes this diversity of thought and expression possible, creative rather than disruptive, is a commitment to a certain style of life or set of operative values.[40]

If the report is accurate, then it should not be a surprise that we are now more likely to describe ourselves by the values that we hold, rather than the theological

views that we share. In the course of this century, diversity has not just become a value in our movement, but the primary theological value.

But the 1987 survey reflects some differences in response along class lines:

> The lower the income, the more often *comfort* is rated as very important and the less often it is rated as not important.... [and] fellowship is of significantly greater importance... People with the least amount of education also rate *understanding different religious views* as significantly more important.

These are important reminders that the people to whom we reach out may have a very different perspective on our shared faith than the majority of us. Although it is a study of a different diversity issue, the recent research on race in our movement raises some awareness. In its 1994 report the Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force observed that:

> European-Americans were more likely to express concern over our services and preaching style, while UUs of color were more concerned about whether we have adequately addressed our own prejudices, and about whether white UUs would be comfortable sharing power with people who are different.... European-American UUs may be mistaken when they see our UU beliefs or our Sunday morning experience as unattractive to people from diverse backgrounds... UUs of color are most likely to say they join our congregations because they appreciate our UU beliefs and they enjoy the Sunday morning experience. They also come in search of a congregation where they will feel welcome.[42]

Comfort, fellowship, right relations, common worship, and a warm welcome - these are communitarian values that have to do with how we are with one another, not with our diversity of belief. The aspects of our faith which we believe must change in order to promote more diversity in our ranks are not always the ones which those groups identify as most significant to them.

It is clear that the theological changes of the past 150 years have influenced our class status as a movement. With our move away from a "pure Christianity" we lost a certain amount of social prestige and some long-time loyal members. Ironically, this may have cemented our social status as the educated and upper-middle class elite, as we promoted more internal standards of faith, according to Kohn's model. Now that we have shifted again, defining our center as a set of values and a process of finding our unity within our diversity, we have become even more internally focused and articulated a faith based almost entirely on Kohn's category of self-determination. As the values of community, common worship experience, and fellowship grow among us, and as we begin to ask how we might reach out to those who are not represented in our congregations, we

are challenged once again to find our religious core. We must consider carefully the ways in which we define and present liberal religion, for by our definition we will either expand or narrow our appeal.

Conclusion

The history of the Ann Arbor and Detroit congregations began with Michigan frontierspeople, civic leaders, and successful business entrepreneurs, who came together to receive instruction in the Unitarian and Universalist gospels. They were among the leading families of their cities and helped to shape the public institutions in their communities. By the turn of this century, they had begun to embrace the radical liberal theology of the Western Unitarian Conference, moving toward an ethical religion which emphasized service to one's fellow citizen. Both congregations went through ups and downs in membership, especially Ann Arbor as it struggled with its dependency on the University population, but we do not have enough data to speculate how these events might have influenced the class make up of these congregations.

We do know that by the present day, the membership of both congregations has changed radically in some ways, and stayed very much the same in others. Today these congregations are still among the privileged few in terms of class status, although they do not have the same presence of civic and economic leadership and may in fact be less socio-economically diverse. They are educators, social workers, medical professionals, and other members of the helping professions. They have an extremely high educational level and an upper-middle class income. They embrace the opportunity to develop their own personal religion in the midst of a diversity of beliefs, and they come to church for intellectual stimulation and a community of people who share their values.

When we think of the class homogeneity of our movement, we tend to think of the material elements in our lives. While I do not dismiss this as a factor, I have tried to suggest through Kohn's theory of the different values of the upper and lower classes, that our presentation of our theology and values might have a subtle, but deep influence. Over the course of our history, as we have tried to understand our freedom from dogmatic religion in ever broader ways, we have emphasized self- determination and individual non-conformity over societal and communal standards of conformity. Our articulation of the religion that binds us together is expressed in less existential or theological terms and articulated more in personal or relational values. Our understanding of liberal religion has shifted from an external religion to an internal faith. Whether it is our class position that influences our faith of choice or our faith which confirms in part our class status is not clear. Our understanding of this possible connection would be better served if we had more demographic data from the era when Universalism and Unitarianism moved away from being a purely Christian faith.

There is not enough existing data to prove anything beyond a doubt. I have tried to use these two case studies, in dialogue with the history of our larger movement, to suggest trends, ask questions, and raise issues for our consideration. If we are serious about examining the role of class and classism in our history, then it is time to get into our basements. I wish that I had found more churches to include in this paper, especially churches with a Universalist, rural or small town history. If we are serious about becoming more diverse within our congregations, then I suspect we will need to find a way once again to express our faith in terms of the larger existential truths of Unitarian Universalism. We will need to lift up the eternal, and not just the internal good news that we have to offer. We will need to lift up the unity in our diversity and the communal message of our faith. It is not my intention to argue for a particular theological viewpoint to base that message in, but rather to recognize that we have different ways to articulate Unitarian Universalism and that those ways matter.

Bibliography

Austin, John M., *Sunday School Expositor,* Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1850.

Bartholomew, L.G., *The Sunday School Companion*, Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1862.

Church of Our Father, Unitarian-Universalist, Detroit, Michigan.

> *Bulletins,* September 10, 1994 - June 24, 1945. T. M. Pullman, Minister.
> *Bulletins,*September 9, 1945 - June 30, 1946. T. M. Pullman, Minister.
> *Bulletins,*September 8, 1946 - June 29, 1947. T. M. Pullman, Minister.
> *Bulletins,*September 11, 1949 - June 25, 1950. T. M. Pullman, Minister
> *Bulletins,*September 10, 1950 - March 4, 1951. T. M. Pullman, Minister.
> *Bulletins,*September 9, 1962 - December 22, 1963. T. M. Pullman, Minister.

First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

> *75th Anniversary Program of the Unitarian Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan: January 21, 1867 - January 21, 1942*, Ann Arbor, 1942.
> *"Comments On the Ann Arbor Questionnaire,"* Pulpit Committee, September 8, 1960. R. Bordin, Chair.
> *"Our Church and Its Future Minister: Results of the Pulpit*

Committee Questionnaire," October 20, 1960. R. Bordin, Chair.
1865-1965 *Centennial Program of the First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan,* 1965.
Congregational Survey Results, the Development Committee, April 1966.
Survey of First Unitarian Church, Fall, 1975. R. Liniger, Chair.
Ministerial Search Packet, September, 1979. M. Reade, Chair.

First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Ministerial Search Packet, February, 1994. S. Lewis, Chair.

First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, Michigan.

"Report of the Survey Committee to the Council of the First Unitarian Universalist Church," 1965. H. Hess, Chair.
Ministerial Search Packet, April, 1972.
Survey of Church/Fellowship Activity, First Draft Edition, 1973.
Ministerial Search Packet to Extension Ministers, January, 1985, J. Samples, Chair.
Ministerial Search Packet, November, 1989. Dr. J. A. Robinson, Chair.
Ministerial Search Packet, 1994. A. Acker, Chair.

Gilbert, Dennis and Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure: A New Synthesis Fourth Edition*, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1993.

Hudson, Charles, *Questions on Select Portions of Scripture Designed for the Higher Classes in Sabbath Schools,* Boston: B.B. Mussey & A. Tompkins, 1847.

Reade, Marjorie, *The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor: The Story of Our First One Hundred Years,* 1990.

Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal

"1987 Survey: The Quality of Religious Life in UU Congregations. Demographic Results." D. Sammons, Chair.
"The Quality of Religious Life in Unitarian Universalist Congregations," 1989.

Unitarian Universalist Association Committee on Goals, *"Report of the Committee on Goals,"* 1967. R. Tapp, Chair.

Unitarian Universalist Association Fulfilling the Promise Committee, *"Fulfilling the Promise"* General Assembly Report, June 1998. Rochester, New York. K. Aler-Maida, Chair.

Unitarian Universalist Association Media Feasibility Study Committee, *"Unitarian Universalists: A 1979 Study,"* 1980. B. Pinzka, Chair.

Unitarian Universalist Association Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force

General Assembly Delegate Handbook, *"Racial Justice: For Such A Time As This,"* June 28, 1993. Charlotte, North Carolina.
General Assembly Delegate Handbook, *"More Racial Justice: Facing Our New Frontiers,"* June 25, 1994. Fort Worth, Texas.
General Assembly Delegate Handbook, *"Racial Justice: A Community Celebration!,"* June 17, 1995. Spokane, Washington.
General Assembly Delegate Handbook, *"Racial Justice: The Future Is Now!,"* June 23, 1996. Indianapolis, Indiana.

Woodward, Kenneth L., "The Rites of Americans," *Newsweek*, November 29, 1993.

The World, Boston: Unitarian Universalist Association

"Reader Profile Survey," Readex, Inc., March 1992.
"A Conversation on Race and Class," September 1998, p. 22.

---

[1] Marjorie Reade, The First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor: The Story of Our First One Hundred Years, Ann Arbor: 1990 Committee, 1990, p.2.
[2] Reade, p.6-7.
[3] Reade, p.7.
[4] It is interesting to note that in Detroit, the Universalists and the Unitarians had a shared history. The Universalists invited the Unitarians to use their building when theirs became too small, and in 1934 the two congregations merged, with the Unitarian minister serving the new congregation.
[5] First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, Michigan, Ministerial Search Packet, April, 1972, opening letter from the Search Committee.
[6] First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, Michigan, Ministerial Search Packet to Extension Ministers, January, 1985, General Information, p. 2.
[7] First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, "Our Church and Its Future Minister: Results of the Pulpit Committee Questionnaire," October 20, 1960, p. 8.
[8] "A Conversation on Race and Class," *The World*, Boston: Unitarian Universalist n through the experience of shared w[9] Ruth L. Braun, *Liberal Religion in Detroit: The Story of This Church, First Unitarian- Universalist*, 1968.
[10] Unitarian Universalist Association Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force, General Assembly Delegate Handbook, "More Racial Justice: Facing Our New Frontiers," June 25, 1994. Fort Worth, Texas, Table 14.
[11] First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Ministerial Search

Packet, February, 1994, Adopted By-Laws of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, p. 1.
[12] Ibid.
[13] Ibid.
[14] Ibid.
[15] Ibid.
[16] First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, Michigan, Ministerial Search Packet, November 1989, Constitution of the First Unitarian-Universalist Church, Detroit, Michigan, Article IV, p.1.
[17] Gilbert, Dennis and Joseph A. Kahl, *The American Class Structure: A New Synthesis* Fourth Edition, Wadsworth Publishing Company 1993, p. 117.
[18] John M. Austin, *Sunday School Expositor*, Boston: Abel Tompkins, 1850 and L.G. Bartholomew, *The Sunday School Companion*, Boston: Universalist Publishing House, 1862.
[19] Charles Hudson, *Questions on Select Portions of Scripture Designed for the Higher Classes in Sabbath Schools*, Boston: B.B. Mussey & A. Tompkins, 1847, p. iii-iv.
[20] Hudson, p. 163.
[21] Church of Our Father, Unitarian-Universalist, Detroit, Michigan, Bulletins, September 9, 1945 - June 30, 1946, T. M. Pullman, Minister.
[22] Unitarian Universalist Association Fulfilling the Promise Committee, "Fulfilling the Promise" General Assembly Report, June 1998. Rochester, New York, p. 47.
[23] Gilbert, Dennis and Joseph A. Kahl, p. 115
[24] Reade, p. 9.
[25] Reade, p.20.
[26] Reade, p.20.
[27] Reade, p. 21.
[28] 865-1965 Centennial Program of the First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, Ann Arbor, 1965.
[29] 75th Anniversary Program of the Unitarian Church, Ann Arbor, Michigan: January 21, 1867 - January 21, 1942, Ann Arbor, 1942.
[30] Unitarian Universalist Association Committee on Goals, "Report of the Committee on Goals," 1967, p. 8.
[31] First Unitarian Church of Ann Arbor, Michigan, "Our Church and Its Future Minister: Results of the Pulpit Committee Questionnaire," October 20, 1960, p.2.
[32] First Unitarian-Universalist Church of Detroit, Michigan, Ministerial Search Packet, November 1989, opening letter from the moderator.
[33] Ibid., the ministerial profile, p.2.
[34] Unitarian Universalist Association Fulfilling the Promise Committee, "Fulfilling the Promise" General Assembly Report, June 1998. Rochester, New York, p. 46.
[35] Reade, p. 10.
[36] Braun.
[37] Reade, p. 27.
[38] Reade, p.28.
[39] Unitarian Universalist Association Committee on Goals, p. 24.
[40] Ibid., p. 7.

[41] Unitarian Universalist Association Commission on Appraisal, "The Quality of Religious Life in Unitarian Universalist Congregations," 1989, p. 20-23.
[42] Unitarian Universalist Association Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force, p. 5-6.