

## **Report On Name Change Discussion**

Prepared by Board Member Emily Ranken

1-29-00

The purpose of this document is to summarize the process, discussion, and information gathered to date on a request submitted to the board to have the congregation consider a name change. The decision on this matter will be made at the Spring congregational meeting, most likely in the form of a vote on an amendment to the by-laws for the new name proposed. The new name submitted for consideration was "The Unitarian Universalist Church of Lincoln, Nebraska." The current name is "The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska". An amendment to the by-laws requires a quorum of 20% of the members present at the meeting, with at least 2/3 of those present in favor of the amendment.

Board members Jeff Dean and Emily Ranken volunteered to organize and lead the process for considering a name change. The process began with an opinion survey conducted in early October. 29 responses to the survey were received. Some represented more than one person, but it was not always clear how many they did represent. The purpose of the survey was to collect opinions, not to get a count. The majority submitted did favor adding Universalist to the name, but a significant minority did favor keeping the name the same. On November 7, the matter was presented and discussed at a Sunday Forum. On November 14, the matter was presented and discussed at a Town Hall Meeting after church. Initially, the target date for a vote on this matter was set for the Winter Congregational Meeting. However, it was decided at the November board meeting that the congregation should have more time to discuss and reflect on the concept of a name change, and the vote was postponed until the Spring Congregational meeting.

**Background information.** At the time our by-laws were changed in the spring of 1998, the by-law drafts discussed by the congregation contained a change in the name. It became clear during the discussion of these drafts that it would be best to address the matter of a name change separately, and so the name was not changed at that time. However, it was understood by the board at that time that the name change was to be considered by the congregation in near future. A member of the board at that time requested the current board address this matter.

**Brief history.** In the community of Lincoln, Nebraska, ties between the Unitarians and Universalists date back to the late 1800's. The Universalists of Lincoln disbanded in the 1890's for financial reasons (the depression of the 1890's), after building a church. The Unitarian roots in our community date back to 1891, but the Unitarian church was firmly established by 96 charter members in 1898, when they bought the Universalists building, and hired a minister. It was called the All Souls Unitarian Church. Some of the charter members had been part of the Universalist Church. In 1951, the name of our church was changed to The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska. In 1961, the Unitarians and Universalists merged at the national level and became the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Churches that are members of the UUA have names with Unitarian only, Universalist only, both, and neither.

2

**Information on costs.** One of the concerns expressed at the discussions is the cost of a name change. If we change our name, the big expenses will be associated with changing the sign in front of our building and the metal lettering on our building. New lettering will cost approximately \$630.00. The cost of a sign will depend on the type of sign we want. We could get a new sign for as little as \$215.00 plus labor for installation. This sign would be an aluminum sign provided by a sign company. For a more substantial sign made of wood or stone, costs could be considerably more. Filing fees to change the name legally are nominal. These fees are \$5.00 plus \$5.00 per page submitted. Costs for new stationary would be insignificant. The office staff does not maintain a large surplus of stationary, and would probably use up old stationary. To summarize, the minimal cost for a name change would be around \$1,000 dollars, with most of this cost going to changing metal letters on the building and to obtaining a new sign. However, depending on the type of sign we want, costs will probably be more.

Below is a synopsis of reasons presented for keeping the name The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska.

- It is elegant. It is tradition.
- Unitarian Universalist is a complicated name and it sounds elitist.
- People in the community identify with the name "Unitarian Church". Our name has a historic tie to the community.
- The name "Unitarian Church" is much easier to say in conversation and to use when answering the phone.
- A shorter name is better for marketing.
- Changing our name will involve some cost.
- A small majority of churches of a similar size to our church who are part of the UUA are Unitarian Churches, not Unitarian Universalist Churches. Some of the churches are Universalist only. It is not necessary to have both names to be a part of the UUA.
- A church, like a person, ought to have a very compelling reason to change its name. "If it ain't broke, don't fix it."
- "I have been a Unitarian for many years but have no Universalist history." (A survey response.)

Below is a synopsis of reasons presented for changing the name to the Unitarian Universalist Church of Lincoln, Nebraska.

- The Universalist part has more meaning to some than the Unitarian part of our name.
- The name Unitarian Universalists best represents beliefs for many survey respondents. Many survey respondents expressed that they are not just Unitarian.
- We should announce to the community the Universalist aspect of our denomination. The name Unitarian Universalist "more nearly reflects our diversity" and who we are.
- Historically, in Lincoln, there have been strong ties to the Universalists; and it is time that our name reflect that history. In fact our association with the Universalists pre-dates the national merger in 1961 by many years.
- The national association is UUA so our name should be that as well.
- We owe at least as much of our religious heritage to the Universalists as we do to the Unitarians, and we should recognize this in our name.

- Historically, Unitarian represents those who are elitist in the denomination, and Universalist represents those who are from more humble backgrounds. The term Universalist is inclusive.
- "We are Unitarian Universalists." (A survey response.)

In the discussion of this matter, some other thoughts and ideas regarding our name have surfaced, and these are summarized below.

- The word "church" in our name is difficult for people who grew up with a Jewish perspective. Imagine if we called the place a UU synagogue or mosque how that would feel.
- In response to the above comment, some expressed that the word "church" is important in our name. It gives us a certain status and affiliation with other "churches" in this community full of "churches". Not having church in our name might alienate those who come out of other churches from joining our church.
- A compromise to not change the name of our church, but to list us on the sign and in the phone book as "The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska. Member of the Unitarian Universalist Association."
- A suggestion has been made that we not have either name, but call ourselves something like "The People's Church", and then to denote ourselves as members of the UUA.
- One person commented about including the state, Nebraska, in our name, and suggested we leave that out.
- One couple stated they were neutral on the issue. They stated "We like the brevity of Unitarian. We like the inclusiveness of Unitarian Universalist. Neither word (especially in their literal meanings) really describes either of our (differing) religious views. Maybe a creative new name should be considered.
- Some other ideas have been suggested to replace the word church. They include Society, Association, Fellowship, and Congregation. At the forum, where this discussion was held, general consensus of the group was expressed for the term "congregation."

I want to thank all the individuals who responded to the survey, and/or who attended one or more of the meetings. I hope I have adequately represented the views of those who have participated in this discussion. I want to encourage those of you who have not fully considered this matter to do so and to participate in future opportunities that the board will arrange for this discussion. If you have any questions concerning this information or comments you wish to make on this matter, I encourage you to get in touch with Jeff Dean at 484-5272, or me (Emily Ranken) at 467-5518. You can call any of the other board members as well.

Both meetings concluded with the observation that there are some strong feelings regarding this matter. The hope was expressed that we remember who we are as a religious community, and that no matter the outcome of the decision regarding our name, that we stay united as a religious community.

4

Unitarian Church of Lincoln  
Minutes of the Congregational Meeting  
May 6, 2001  
by Kathy Johnson, president

Last Sunday, May 6, nearly a hundred of us gathered for the spring congregational meeting directly after the shortened service. A process of discussion and thoughtful debate that stretched over two years culminated in the congregational vote on whether to change the name of the church. The ballot offered two paired options: Unitarian or Unitarian Universalist; Church or Congregation. In order to make a change, two-thirds of those present and voting had to agree.

The vote tallies were: Unitarian 47; Unitarian Universalist 51; Abstain 2; and Church 60; Congregation 38; Abstain 2. Neither "Unitarian Universalist" nor "Congregation" carried by a two-thirds majority. Therefore, the name of the church remains "The Unitarian Church of Lincoln, Nebraska."

We are all indebted to the Name Change Committee who oversaw the process of discussion and communication leading up to this vote. Chaired by Jeff Dean, the other members were Amy Birky, Earl Dyer, Barbara Kuhn, and Orvis Wall.

At the meeting, several people were recognized for their contributions to the church. Last spring, we voted to accept a gift from anonymous donors to be used toward creating a columbarium on the church grounds. This year we recognized the family of Earl and Betty Dyer for their generous contribution. Thank you!

The Unsung Unitarian this year is a couple: Karen and Harry Heafer. In her nomination, Beryl Aschenberg wrote that "Karen and Harry have been ambassadors of goodwill in this community for many years." She noted their extensive volunteer work, Karen especially with activities for children and families and Harry with building and grounds projects as well as with children. "They are great people, great volunteers, and the epitome of unsung efforts." Congratulations, Karen and Harry.

Outgoing Board member Mary Grabowski was recognized for her long service to the church, not only for three years on the Board of Trustees, but also for her earlier work on the Leadership and Organizational Structure Committee and on the Bylaws.

The Board presented Roger Day with an engraved glass flame in recognition of his three and a half years as Operations Councils Coordinator. He dedicated countless hours to this volunteer position, working with councils, committees, and sometimes individuals, as well as meeting with Fritz and the Program Councils Coordinator. For work well done, thank you, Roger.

We elected four new members to the Board of Trustees. Karen Dienstbier, Kathy Disney, and Barbara Kimberly were elected to three year terms and Linda Hellerich was elected to a one year term. Later this week, the new Board of Trustees will meet to set goals and select a new president. Best wishes to our new Board of Trustees.