

As I Remember....
By Betty Jacobs, 2009

The UCC was formed in 1957. It was a merger of the Congregational churches, the Evangelical and Reformed churches, and the Christian churches.

Each Congregational church was to study the pros and cons, and vote whether to join the UCC or remain a continuing Congregational church. Those who founded this church were members of the Redlands Congregational Church. Several weeks before the vote, we all received rather hurtful flyers in the mail. I received 3 obscene phone calls. The Redlands police told Rev. Bruce Van Blair, our minister, not to sit near his windows.

The big day of the vote came and there were people in church who hadn't been there for years, or only came at Christmas and Easter. Much to our surprise, our side narrowly lost the vote. We were stunned and a group of us just stayed sitting together in the pews. Soon Bruce came in and cheered us up slightly by saying, "Cheer up! God isn't dead."

The idea began to spread among us that we could leave there and start our own church. Bruce said he would promise to stay with us at least 5 years, if we could pledge enough money to go forward. The money came almost miraculously.

Rich Blakley was the Associate pastor. The Methodists offered use of their offices and their sanctuary following their service. Bruce and Rich kept up an ongoing chess game between their adjoining offices. We were there 6 or more years.

We then accepted an invitation from the 1st Baptist Church to use their Chapel facilities. We were there about 1 ½ years. We had our first Christmas "Feastings" dinner there.

A Pasadena foundation related to the UCC Conference offered us \$75,000 for land and building if we promised to use the land for a church. Later we were able to pay it back, even though we didn't have to. The church property on the hill facing Olive St. had an historic house where our offices were before it was burned down (in 1988). The labyrinth on the church property was built with the burnt house's foundation stones.

Finding Housing for RUCC
By Barbara Hauser

May 18, 1975

The Issue: Shall First Congregational Church of Redlands join the denomination of the United Church of Christ?

The vote taken on this day indicated that the majority who had voted did not wish to join the UCC but remain independent of any denomination.

The 100 plus members who were on the losing side of this issue felt very strongly that they preferred to join with other Congregational churches in the United States who had become part of the UCC. Feelings were so fervent that those in this group decided that the only choice would be for them to separate from First Congregational and form their own congregation. The minister, Bruce Van Blair, had said he could no longer minister to such a divided congregation. He was willing to stay and lead this new group provided certain standards of support were met. Thus, Redlands United Church of Christ was established.

The immediate problem was a place to meet. The very first Sunday worship service was in the spacious home of Curtiss and Phyllis Allen, now famous in Redlands as the Morey House. Numerous churches in the community were supportive of the infant UCC organization and offered to share facilities, equipment, and a place to meet. Presbyterians offered the use of their Addressograph machine, and various offers were made by other churches. The most practical solution to the housing problem was offered by the Methodist church across the street from the Congregational Church. On June 29, 1975 the newly formed congregation met in Week's Hall for an evening service of worship. Later a plan was worked out so we could share the use of their Sanctuary at a late Sunday morning time.

We continued to meet in the Methodist Church for over eight years. Then our organist, Rick England, found a small pipe organ that seemed appropriate for our future needs and arranged to buy it for us. There was no space for the organ at the Methodist facility, and it was decided to accept an offer from the Baptist Church (also on the same "Lord's Corner" of Cajon and Olive) to set up and use the organ in their Chapel. This arrangement was followed for the next one and a half years until we could move into our own building.

From earliest times, it had been the hope of RUCC to eventually have our own building. A building Committee chaired by Bill Dean had been working since before 1979. On March 11 of that year, the church voted to purchase a property at the corner of Olive Avenue and Bellevue. It consisted of approximately three and a half acres of land with a historic "Heritage House" and orange trees and four shares of water (for irrigating the grove). The price was \$105,000. Thanks in large measure to a gift from the UCC's

Plymouth Foundation of \$75,000, this property was paid for in two or three years. (Later the borrowed amount was repaid to the Plymouth Foundation by RUCC).

While we still did not have our own meeting place, this house at 1500 West Olive Avenue made a very serviceable place for offices and small group meetings. With some minor adaptations and redecorating, the place was ready for use by the ministers and staff. The acreage would provide the campus for our later buildings.



The "Church House" before the fire.

About Covenants By Gal Glanville

When Sharon asked me earlier in the week to talk about what my covenant meant to me I started to think about the whole covenant process and how it came to be. Then my Wanderings came and I read in there what Sharon had written about the pros and cons that she had heard. I was really surprised about the cons and then it occurred to me. "How could you know unless you had been with us at the time?" And I couldn't tell you what my covenant means to me unless you understood the history. So I will tell you what I remember about this process and all us charter members probably all remember things differently so I will tell you the story as I remember.

33 years ago all of us old timers, "charter members", were attending the Congregational Church down town. At that time all Congregational churches could vote to become a member of the U.C.C. or remain independent. The vote had come up before I started attending there and it had been voted down to join the U.C.C. I had come from a U.C.C. church, so I could not understand why anyone would not want to join.

At that time Bruce Van Blair was the senior Minister and Rich Blakley our Associate Pastor. Well somehow I don't think that the Congregational Church really understood what Bruce was like as a minister when they hired him. He had the most radical ideas about God's abundant love and what it meant to be a Christian, and whether they knew it or not he was preaching a UCC sermon without mentioning UCC as he had agreed not to do.

There was this whole group of us, mainly the workers, those in Sunday school, leaders of committees and committee members, and choir members that caught fire from his teachings. We wanted to be the kind of Christians that he talked about. Christians who were on a journey and had a thirst for learning more about how to share this abundant love. How to care for and listen to each other even though we disagreed. To seek peace and justice for all. A few months ago, Craig Wesson reminded me of a phrase it seemed like we all used in conversation "Where I am right now, this is what I think."

Bruce taught us about what our responsibilities were if we were going to call ourselves Christian. How our walk needed to be the same as our talk. He taught us about tithing, what the Biblical teachings were, and how important it was how we spent both our time and our treasure. I was scared to death, I was a new widow with 5 children who had only had a part time job while my husband was alive, and now the money coming into our household had dropped by about 75%. How would I ever do this? Then he went on to tell us the most amazing thing. He said that we would never miss the money. And he said that this was a promise. Then he challenged us. He said if we were too scared to start off with 10% of our salary to start with 3% or what ever % we felt comfortable with and he would show us that we would never miss that money. And also how to tithe our time. Well this little lady of very modest means put it to the test and it was true and I have been doing this for 33 years and I can honestly tell you that I have never missed the money. We had plenty of everything that we needed and more.

Well the time for the vote was coming up and we were sure it would pass this time. We were so sure that we had planned a victory party for that night. The day came and there were so many people in church that we had never seen before, and some that we had recognized that would come at Christmas and Easter, for there if you joined you were considered a member forever even if you had not attended in years... They all showed up courtesy of one woman who had called them and they were there to defeat us joining the U.CC. The vote was taken and we lost.

We sat in shock for a while not believing what had just happened. Did they not hear the same sermons that we did? In our wounded souls there was a need to lean on one another, to face what were we going to do now. Could we go back and be a church with people who had such a different vision from us? Could we do that dratted "Every member canvass"? So we decided to get together at our party as we had planned earlier. That is what we did, and while we sat around still numb from the shock because we had been so sure, I was even praying that we be kind and not arrogant to the people who did not want to be UCC.

Now I don't remember how the next part happened but it seems like someone said, why don't we start our own UCC church and said to Bruce what would it take to do that? We were off and running, and if we could do this how would we do it? Where would we go? And we started dreaming

what the Redlands UCC would be like. What were the things that were important to be a church? From the best of my recollection , this was the list we came up with,

1. A church that was much more than just a place where nice people gathered on Sunday mornings. We were on a Spiritual Journey and we hoped that the people that joined with us would be seekers with us and have as many questions as we had. A place where everyone was welcome no exceptions. A place that people came to because they loved God and wanted to be together with other Christians, to party often and learn more about the teachings of Jesus. Where our children could grow up, where there was a love of God philosophy instead of fear.
2. Never, never, never have an every member canvass, or be harangued about money from the pulpit. By this time most of us were tithers anyway, and if it stated in our covenant how much we intended to give, our budget would be made from that. We would have so many programs or areas such as Christian Education, Worship, Wider Ministries, and Group Life. You could choose how you wanted to tithe your time. Jobs would be filled without the shepherds having to find many people for these jobs and everybody would be working in the area that they wanted.
3. No fund raisers, we wanted to have 5 special offerings a year that we would account for in our covenants... We wanted to be a tithing church. One that gave away at least 10 % of its budget every year to help others. Not to say if some disaster happened or there was a real need then of course we would respond. In any way we could.

As far as I can recollect these were the main criteria

Bruce told us about a covenant with God and each other. One that would be written each year that would cover all of these things. No one but the senior minister would ever read them. He encouraged us to have a plan not to just want to grow spiritually but lay it out how we intended to accomplish this. And write that information in the covenant. Also where we wanted to work and if there was a reason your time was limited such as going back to school, and you couldn't work at all that would be honored. I

have never seen another person's covenant so I don't know how anyone else does it. But I imagine it is as diverse as we are because God created us this way. And since after all we are UCC people. With this plan we needed to write a new covenant each year. Or you will not be considered a member. Now if you did not want to write one you were welcome to still attend, but you were just not a member and therefore did not have the privilege of voting.

I start writing my covenant by reading over last years covenant. Am I where I set out to be? Have I grown spiritually? Has anything in my life changed that is beyond my control, ie; physical condition? Am I being a good steward over the gifts God has given to me? I usually focus on a piece of scripture that speaks to me or a song. I pray about it and think about what I really want for weeks and write it in my head before I go to the computer.

The day when we come forward and place our covenants on the altar is one of the most meaningful services in the year to me, and with the help of the loving, merciful God that we worship we will all strive to make our walk and our talk the same. And they will know we are Christians by our love. Yes they will know we are Christians by our love. Thank You!

I Remember Barnraisers...
By Sheldon Montgomery

I remember cooking grits for the first breakfast...Bruce gave the blessing, we ate (gingerly perhaps!), drank coffee, found out that God had already been there, and went to Gordon's groves for the first work project. After all, we were the BARNRAISERS...We picked oranges off the trees very carefully (with a twist!), and even more carefully picked Dale off the ground when he fell, unhurt, from a slippery branch.

Over the years, on the third Saturday of each month, we ate hot cakes, scrambled eggs, sausage and bacon, biscuits, and drank coffee, tea, milk- and searched for God's presence. We moved household goods (like Dora's and Bruce's), painted benches in the Redlands' Bowl, rooms in the Plymouth Village nursing home, and houses (Bruce's, the Church, and even part of Curtis' Morey Mansion). We spent a weekend at Loyd Hopper's place in Rosarita Beach in Christian fellowship, prayer, and, yes, cleaning and painting. We shoveled knee-deep mud from Judy's swimming pool...learned which end of a metal fence goes up at Richard's fields...picked fruit out of Wayne's orchards...cut Sheldon's recalcitrant pyracantha (wow, what BIG thorns!)...replaced the roof on the Church House (and repaired the hole in the living room ceiling from someone's, Fred's?, big foot)...shoveled rocks from Art's roof (that called for a cool brew afterwards)... even tried menudo when Al (and Dorothy) prepared a real Mexican breakfast...chased rattlesnakes (big, fat ones) from Joel Hauser's rocks. And through it all, I remember that God had always been there too.

From one who has walked the walk,
Sheldon



Joel Hauser

Bruce Van Blair



Kenyon, Carol, Bill Stanley at an early potluck

Some Stanley Memories....

By Carol and Bill Stanley

The First Congregational Church had called a Presbyterian minister to replace the esteemed Harry Suttner, but that minister turned us down; turns out he was bolting from the Presbyterians because of their support of Angela Davis, and he had decided to lead a breakaway group from his Orange County church. God saved us from ourselves. It was 1973 and First Congregational Church then called Bruce Van Blair as our pastor. Dick Oliver was the very gifted Chair and Bill the representative young person. Bruce was a great preacher but also Moderator of the Southern California Conference of the United Church of Christ. This brought the "fear of God" into many church members and we soon were called to vote on joining the UCC or not. The politics in a church are never pretty and these times weren't either. But the vote came. Literally three hospital beds were wheeled into the sanctuary the day of the vote.

Several of us young couples went to Ken & Janie Hurley's home to wait for the results of the vote. The phone call came. I remember Sandi Arth crying. We were stunned. The vote was against joining the UCC. Many of us had wanted to belong and claim membership in the Progressive church that led in the arena of Social Justice.

Small groups of us began to meet and talk. I know that Gordon and Polly Reynolds were talking with the Olivers and Hoppers. We talked with Rich & Kathie Blakley, Ken & Janie Hurley, Roy and Dottie Hargrave, Charlie and Mary Barnes, Glenn & Julie Choate and Rick & Valerie Naftzger, among others. It seemed to our young group that the

answer was starting a new church. This thought was not unique to us as other groups, “the real adults” were thinking along these lines too.

We “young couples” decided to take a weekend reflection retreat. We traveled to Tehachapi for a weekend of camping...and dreaming and planning.

Rich & Kathie designed a plan for our reflection and sharing. Bill brought his guitar and we sang. We planned our church that day. We sat alone in the woods, on hillsides, by a stream. We gathered together to share. We put on paper the programs we wanted and the dreams we had. We got excited and came home to Redlands full of hope and vision as well as energy to accomplish the task. Bruce and others quantified our goals (\$100,000 pledged and 75 pledging units etc.), but we were off on an adventure. This actually was the high point of Bill & Carol’s spiritual journey in the UCC. We felt the Holy Spirit alive and moving within us.

We can’t comment on that time without reflecting on the pain of the church split. Frank Moore of the Daily Facts wrote about the split being painful for Redlands, much like the divorce of good friends. It was hard for Bill’s parents, especially Brandon, to shift. He had been raised in that church and his Mom had been a mover and shaker there. Long-term friendships were affected and hurt. There was real pain then. The birth of anything involves pain, and our beloved RUCC was birthed, with some significant pain. But birthed it was!

Thanks be to God for this part of our faith formation.

The Labyrinth By Rich Blakley

After the fire on August 10, 1998 which destroyed the Church House at 1500 West Olive Avenue, many different church members envisioned ways of responding and creating something positive from the tragedy. One result was the decision to build a labyrinth on the site of the original Church House to create a physical representation of the spiritual journey.

The stones that still remained after the fire were used as a part of the labyrinth. The impetus for the building of the labyrinth came from the Monday Morning Prayer Group. Church member, Bonnie Parmenter, first proposed the idea of the labyrinth and it was picked up by this group who, with the support and approval of the larger church, planned and implemented it. For many months different church members worked on the site at all times and days- whenever they could find the time. The layout was done by Rich Blakley and Eric Naftzger. Helen and Steve Arth were dedicated and faithful rock movers.

There was a dedication service on June 6, 1999. The labyrinth was finally consecrated on Feb. 25, 2001, and it has formed an important part of the spiritual life of the church ever since.

(Pictured: Rev. Vuocolo, Rich Blakley, Eric Naftzger)

