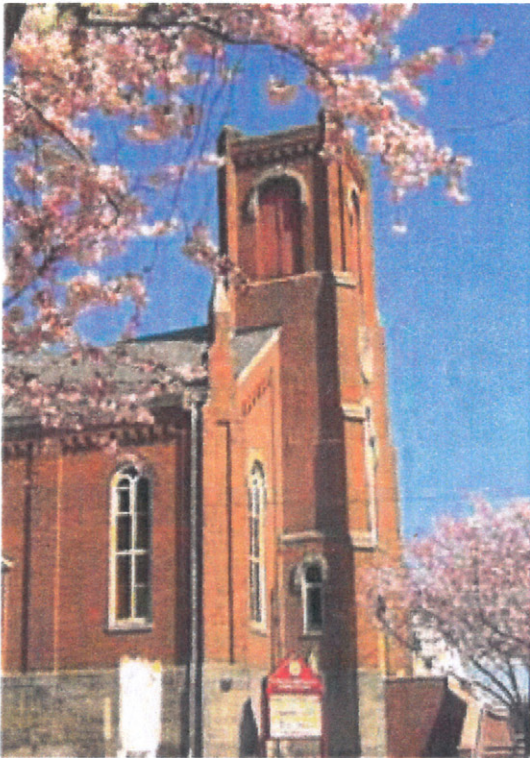


HERE WE HAVE GATHERED
Unitarian Universalist
Church of Kent



Volume 2, October 2012

*A collection of vignettes about the people, activities, and history of the
Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, Ohio.*

Here We Have Gathered

Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent

Volume 2, October 2012

*Here we have gathered, gathered side by side.
Circle of kinship come and step inside!
May all who seek here find a kindly word;
May all who speak here feel they have been heard.
Sing now together, this is our hearts' own song.*

Words: Alicia Carpenter, 1979

tune: Old 124th, Genevan Psalter, 1543

"Here We Have Gathered" is a collection of vignettes about the people, activities, and history of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, Ohio.

Organized in 1866 as a Universalist Church, and merged in the 1960s with the Unitarians, the UU Church of Kent has had extraordinary people working together from shared convictions doing extraordinary activities.

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OPENING PRAYER

Rev. Melissa Carvill-Ziemer, Minister, Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent

Breath of Life,
sustainer of us all,
we give thanks for the gift
of this day.

Another day which was not promised
and cannot be guaranteed;
may we recognize it for what it is,
pure grace.

Grace not just for us
but for all people in every land under the sun,
whether they wake now or sleep
or linger in the place between rest and choice.

This *is* the day
we have been given.
May all of our choices
reveal our gratitude.

ABOUT PRAYER

Robert Fildes' Editorial from UU Church newsletter, May 15, 1977:

I'll say at once that I don't need it and, in plain fact, think it's irrational and a little silly. But as a personal, private thing for those who do need it, I don't find it objectionable.

However, in recent months I have observed two examples of appeals for the exact opposite of private prayer: Mass intercessional prayer that appeals to God to directly intervene in human affairs. This would be merely ridiculous or pathetic if its purpose were to lift some common, natural scourge or to bring us all back into the paths of rectitude, but such was not the case in either instance. The first, which I happened to witness on a talk show, was voiced by the movie actor, Dean Jones, who was touring the country in aid of an effort to organize a national day of prayer to get us to get us out of our multitudinous moral and material difficulties; the second was initiated by Governor Rhodes, who wanted us to pray for warmer weather to rescue ourselves from the energy crisis of the past winter.

Both of these appeals were, to me, nauseating in the extreme because they represented a serious wish for a supernatural bail-out from the unpleasant consequences of having sidetracked our more-than-adequate intelligence (God-given, if you like) in order to give full play to our more natural tendencies to stupidity, short-sightedness, greed, gluttony, selfishness, self-indulgence and/or apathy.

Several years ago, the comic strip, *B.C.*, chronicled the joint efforts of the characters to trap a dinosaur by digging a huge pit. They dug deeper and deeper and deeper--- only to find themselves at the bottom with no way out. At last, one of the characters sarcastically suggested that they use the same mechanism to escape as they had used to become entrapped: Mass stupidity.

Frankly, I don't think this will get us out of our own pit; we keep employing it and the pit only gets steadily deeper. The *B.C.* characters eventually were rescued by a friendly, long-necked dinosaur, but we can't count on outside intervention to save us though we pray—and pray—and pray.

REMEMBERING GORDON VARS

Mary Ann Kasper

When I entered the UU Church of Kent for the first time in the winter of 1989, I was surprised to see Gordon Vars there to greet me. I knew Gordon and his wife Alice well – Gordon was my graduate school advisor, and I had spent two years working closely with him at Kent State in 1987-88.



Gordon and Alice Vars

After I finished graduate school and had brought my second baby, Evan, home from the hospital, Gordon and Alice came over immediately to meet him. Gordon was concerned that I would have to return to my teaching in two months and suggested that I just take the baby to my classroom when I went back.

I loved the fact that Gordon thought outside of the box. Besides asking why, Gordon also asked why not. I attended the UU Church because I wanted to make sure that my children received a liberal religious background. Seeing Gordon in the church, I knew immediately that I was in the right place.

Over the years, I was invited to attend several workshops given by Gordon and Alice. One interesting workshop was a toxic waste incinerating facility in Cleveland's industrial district. Gordon also took us through nature preserves and the Cuyahoga Valley.

He was always interested in students' thought processes and experiences. We were asked to keep a notebook that he collected regularly and made comments in. During our sessions, if students had questions we

placed them in a slotted shoebox. Gordon addressed every question thoroughly.

Some of his workshops were held in the schoolhouse behind Gordon's and Alice's main house. In that cozy space Gordon and Alice co-taught, and always made us consider things like what we would do with the information presented. I found that the visuals were impeccably drawn and complete.

My son, Nathan, remarked that Gordon's wealth of knowledge, energy, and positive outlook on life were inspiring to him during their time together on hikes throughout nearby parks and the local bog. Nathan told me about Gordon's secret love of sweets that he discovered in mentor meetings at Stahl's Bakery as the two of them indulged in chocolate chip cookies and raspberry pastries.

For years, rain or shine, Gordon walked to and from church with his cloth bag that contained items of importance to him. I spent many years sitting next to him at services in the second row on the left side of the sanctuary. Gordon kept a book in which he entered notes from the sermon, numbers of readings that spoke to him, and things that he wanted to remember to tell Alice upon returning home.

I studied Gordon at coffee hour as he roamed Fessenden Hall looking for sweets offered on Sundays. He would often eat a piece of cake and then would take a piece home to enjoy later.

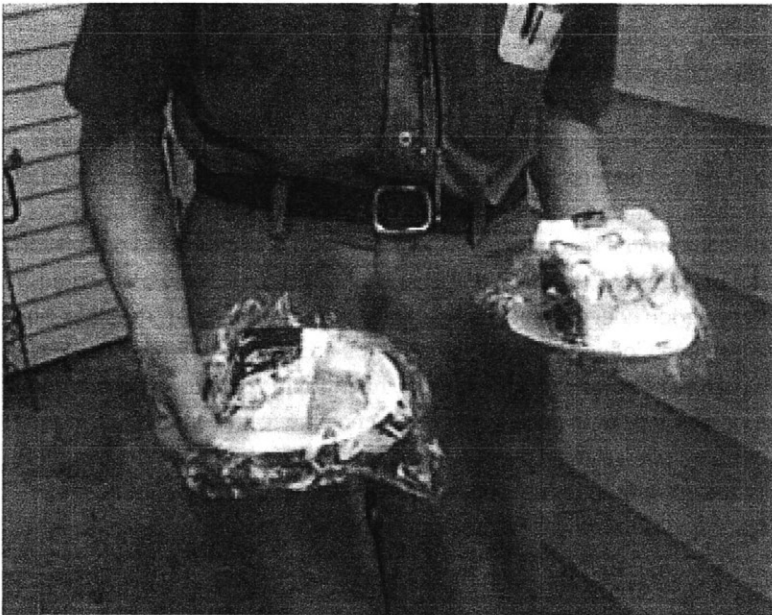
Gordon slowed down somewhat as he aged. He started to walk less so I often took him home after the service. We talked about the sermon, life, and memories of the academic world that we shared. As we conversed, I usually had a fairly good idea of what Gordon would be mentioning later to Alice at the dinner table.

I was privileged that he took me on a personal tour of the Kent Bog. He wore his official uniform, somewhat worn with age and use. He carried copied guides of the bog in his cloth bag to replenish the box at the entrance, and kept track of the number of guides used. I will never forget

Gordon's passion for the bog that he conveyed every time we sauntered through it together.

When I learned that Gordon was gone, I contacted Nathan who recalled a letter that Gordon had given him upon his graduation. He also remembered Gordon giving him reminders to "unplug" himself every once in a while to avoid losing sight of the fact that there is more to life than the bottom line. Nathan left work early that day and headed for a local park. He called me later and we chuckled about the fact that Gordon ate a large piece of cake the last time he was at our home, and took two pieces home to eat at a later time.

I miss driving home from church without taking Gordon home first. I often sit in the sanctuary at church and think of Gordon and what he would consider important enough to write into his notebook for later reflection. I think about what Gordon would share with Alice about the sermon or service. I just miss Gordon.



Gordon Vars leaving a party well provisioned.

RECOLLECTIONS OF VI KOCHENDOERFER: Minister of the
Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, 1972 - 1977

Presented as part of the program "Women Rising" on April 22, 2007

by Caroline Arnold

Bill Schulz, who saw us through the events of May 4, 1970, continued to serve as our minister until he graduated from Oberlin in June of 1971. A ministerial search committee was duly appointed, headed by Paul Cox, and I was on it. My father, Dwight Arnold, then 72 years old and retired from Kent State University – but ordained – agreed to serve as interim minister (at no pay), with the moderator and board running the church activities.

As a church we were small then, and poor. We had barely 70 members, and we couldn't offer more than \$10,000/year to a new minister. We joined forces with the Canton Fellowship to sweeten that offer a little, but it still was far short of what we knew we should pay – especially to a professional with a family. We also quickly learned that women ministers were again coming on the market (so to speak) and that they were cheaper than men.

Violet Annette Kochendoerfer, was born in 1912 in Winona MN and had had a chequered career. Her family was lower middle class and Lutheran. She had no intention of going to college, but her success in the "commercial" course in high school landed her a job as secretary to the president of Winona State Teachers College. Many people urged her to go to college, and she finally did, but not in her native state. She chose Reed College, Oregon (founded by a Unitarian, Simeon Reed) Vi ran out of money after two years, had to quit school and work again as a secretary to the college dean of men. She recalled that at the time her life goal was to get married and have children. When the dean left, Vi, disappointed in his successor, quit, taking a wartime job in 1941 with the Office of Price Administration in Oregon.

Starting at \$1,440/year, she rapidly moved up, becoming personnel director at \$7,500. Suddenly someone higher up decided they shouldn't

pay that much to a woman. She quit again, and enlisted in the WAACs. She was trained to be a Morse code operator, but when sent on assignment, learned that Army regulations didn't allow women to operate on the Army Airways Net.

By this time an accomplished quitter, she resigned and was hired by the American Red Cross as director of On-Base Military Service Clubs in Europe – after the Red Cross waived the college degree requirement for her. She served there 3 ½ years from 1944 to 1948, and then a short time at the Veterans Hospital in Dearborn, Michigan.

She soon realized this was not what she wanted to be doing, and resigned. For the next ten years she lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, where she was office manager for the Chamber of Commerce and secretary to an architect, and became a Unitarian. In 1959 she moved to Berkeley CA, where she failed to get job and enrolled for a summer course at Starr King School for the Ministry – a Unitarian theology school founded in 1904.

She loved the course, and applied for admission as a special student. She proved to be an outstanding student, and in June 1962 became the first woman to graduate from Starr King. Unfortunately, accreditation problems forced the school to give her a certificate, not a degree) Nevertheless, in December 1962, Vi Kochendoerfer, Unitarian, was called and ordained by the Universalist Church of the Redeemer of Provincetown, MA, at a salary of \$5000/yr. She was 50 years old; the new Unitarian Universalist Association was one year old.

A little background: Unitarians in the US started as splinters off Congregationalist churches. Unitarians gained control of the Harvard Divinity School in 1805, and in 1825 broke away completely from the Congregationalists and formed the American Unitarian Association. In 1920, the Universalists had 88 women ministers in the field. That same year, only 37 women had ever been ordained by the Unitarians. There was strong prejudice among Unitarians against women ministers. Samuel Adkins Eliot, who dominated the American Unitarian Association for over 50 years, believed that women were unsuited for profes-

sional life, that women's themes of caring, hospitality and community service were too small for an age of scientific and social progress, and that Unitarian ministers should be "manly" and speak with authority. It is generally agreed that he successfully kept women out of Unitarian ministry until after his death in 1950. Harvard Divinity School didn't admit women until 1955. Starr King had accepted women students before that time, but Vi became the first woman to graduate.

And so Vi came to Kent in 1972, after having served in churches in Provincetown, Massachusetts, Calgary, Canada, and Tallahassee, Florida and after finally, in 1971, being granted a Bachelor of Divinity by Starr King.

Her installation ceremony here was all home-grown. Church members spoke about our church or read her favorite poems, the recorder trio played; the choir sang the musical setting I had written for Max Ehrmann's "Desiderata" at her request; Rev. Bill Jacobs of the KSU United Christian Ministries welcomed her.

This church was not only somewhat rudderless and unfocused – and nearly penniless – it was, literally, physically, falling apart. Vi went quickly to work persuading people to contribute money to repair and restore the building. She raised over \$20,000 (\$18,000 from one donor) to renovate the kitchen and remodel the auditorium, and she raised awareness of the importance of long-range planning for capital improvements.

Vi mended the fence that had kept our ministers out of the Kent Ministerial Association, and became not only their first woman member, but also, she recalls, their token atheist. She also provided authoritative (if not "manly") leadership in our church and in the community on then important issues like death & dying, sexuality, and gay rights. She worked extensively with Rev. George Gaiser (Lutheran) and Rev. Don Shilling (Methodist) and taught in Experimental College at Kent State; She went to a seminar in Russia with KSU president Glenn Olds. She was appointed to the Human Subject Experiments Review Committee at NEOUCOM.

Vi was the first woman minister ever to preach at St. Patrick's Church in Kent; she studied and preached to this congregation on Islam and the Koran.

A few personal notes. I liked Vi and enjoyed arguing philosophy or theology with her in her apartment on Columbus Street. She was well-read and rigorous in argument, but always kind, with a sense of humor and a mischievous grin. She smoked cigarettes and drove a Karmann Ghia.

People have asked about her sexual orientation. I don't know. I do know she believed that people must be accepted simply as people, not as women, or gays, or atheists or any other category. Her 1996 autobiography "A Modern Pioneer: One Woman's Ministry" gives no hint. In it she writes about long-term friendships and close relations with both men and women. I never saw evidence of a "significant other" in her life, nor did I have any reason to think she was sexless or celibate. I suspect that sex simply wasn't a major driver of her life or her priorities.

Vi herself said "A minister is one of the last generalists in an era of specialization, and helps bring sanity to our fragmented lives."

Vi Kochendoerfer served this church well. She brought us out of the slump of the early 70s, and into the wider Kent and university communities. She made us see her as our minister, not as a woman minister. And she helped bring a little sanity into our lives.



Vi Kochendoerfer
by Mark Stephens

VIOLET KOCHENDOERFER

Read by Robert Fildes at a special church service, April 9, 2000.

I'm personifying only myself and, obviously, am no ghost. Nor yet is Violet Kochendoerfer, of whom I have agreed to speak. Nevertheless, she remained an honored presence in the church long after she physically departed although her chief legacy to us is not, perhaps, the one she might have preferred.

In the ten years before the beginning of Vi's ministry in 1972, the church had passed through two major disruptions: the merger of Universalism and Unitarianism, with which many of its Universalist members were uncomfortable, followed by the upheavals attendant to the ministry of Bill Schultz, which split the congregation over issues of appropriate social action and limits of civil protest. The unsurprising but almost disastrous results were confusion, division, and decline.

When I first came to this church, it had no minister. Bill Schultz had wrought his dubious legacy to us and gone to other opportunities; Vi had not yet arrived on the scene. The congregation was lively and the programs and activities were varied and interesting, but the ensemble struck me as unfocused and aimless.

Perhaps this was appropriate to the waning of the Age of Aquarius, but it was not promising for the future of the church. The membership was a mere 68 persons. As I recall, the annual church budget amounted to about the present poverty level income for a family of four. The building was in an extreme state of disrepair, unattractively shabby, and misused and abused on a weekly basis by individuals and groups to whom it was only the convenient means to mostly extramural ends.

The appearance of a female ministerial candidate in 1972 had the impact of a striking novelty, even to those familiar with the history of our church. The hiring of Vi ended a 64-year run of all male ministers which had begun with the close of Carlotta Crosley's pastorate in 1908. That we chose Vi testified to our poverty as well as our liberalism —

desirable male candidates simply were not available for what we could afford to pay — but it proved to be a supremely correct choice as far as the rescue of the building was concerned. What Vi brought to the church otherwise I can't say, because my own association with it then, as now, was mostly outside the mainstream of church activities. When she left in 1977, amid new controversy and bitterness, I scarcely noticed or understood what had happened.

This was partly because, by that time, I was immersed in the long and consuming restoration process made possible by what I and many others regard as Vi's major and most enduring legacy to the Kent church: The means to once more rescue and revitalize our building. Those of you who only know it in its present state, even with its patched entry steps, deteriorating roof, and now damaged guttering, will be unable to imagine its condition thirty years ago. As one of those who were here then and can remember, it requires considerable effort to recall just how dark, grim, musty, and depressing this structure actually was.

Vi was concerned about this from the beginning, and both encouraged and proposed many small improvements that seemed to lie within our means. It was at this time, for example, that the hanging behind me was created and that the quotations wall in the lounge was put up. But our means were truly meager. Our congregation was small and included a high proportion of students, which meant that it collectively lacked not only cash but also most of the skills which can substantially offset a shortage of cash. So most of what we were able to do was limited to cleaning, painting, and spot embellishment.

Vi changed all that by conducting a sort of solo capital campaign, determinedly buttonholing anyone who might be sympathetic or concerned enough to make a special contribution: Current members, former members who had become disaffected or just had drifted away, people she encountered in the Kent community-at-large. Her guiding principle in this must have been that the worst that could happen was that those she approached would say "no", which almost all of them apparently did.

But Vi's application of the slot machine principle produced a decisive payoff. One of the people Vi approached and cultivated was Carolyn Rowe, the former member who had provided funds in the 1950's to remodel the church kitchen and renovate the auditorium. Vi persuaded Mrs. Rowe to make a gift of \$3,000, ostensibly to repair the ugly and crumbling walls and floor of the fellowship hall. Apparently, our actual initial accomplishments with that money plus our plans for future work, of which Vi took great care to keep her informed, sufficiently impressed Mrs. Rowe that she gave us an additional \$15,000, to us at that time a staggering and blessed windfall.

This money literally galvanized us. Augmented along the way by a number of smaller donations, special gifts, and thousands of hours of volunteer labor, it carried us through an astonishing series of restorations and improvements before it was finally used up in 1988. The basement floor, walls, and ceiling were partially or entirely replaced, the whole lower level was rewired and extensively replumbed, the fellowship hall and kitchen were completely remodeled, the auditorium was painted and recarpeted, and selective lesser remodeling and redecorating were done throughout the rest of the building. In the process, an awareness and concern evolved which led to long-range facilities planning and to the generation of capital funds for restoring the brick and stonework and, now, for reopening of the front entrance, which is just barely under way.

Vi's memoir of her ministerial career, "A Modern Pioneer", was published in 1996. Curiously, in the portion which covers her Kent years, her only mention of having had any part in anything of which I have just told you is confined to the wall hanging and the lounge wall. It's as if, having provided us, to the best of her ability, with reasonable means for meeting the material needs of our building, she left them up to us and again refocused completely on the human issues which were most important to her and where she felt she made the greatest impact. And for a minister, those surely are the correct priorities.



Rally July 29, 2009 across the street from the church in support of SPAN-Ohio -- the Single Payer Action Network. This picture was taken the evening we left on the bus to go to Washington, DC for a rally during the health care reform debate of the summer of 2009

People, L to R: Jody Smith, Drew Smith Hellebrand, Deb Silverstein, Lee Brooker, Sally Burnell, Vivien & Ana Sandlund.

ABOUT OUR CHURCH

Paul Cox

In 1969, friends at KSU, perhaps tired of hearing me bellyache about the churches we had visited looking for “something for the kid(s),” suggested Susan and I visit the First Universalist Church. So we decided to give it try. Why not?

The first service we attended was a performance of the opera *The Great Flood*, by Caroline Arnold. It was good, ambitious, fun, and, for me at least, completely unexpected. It was an actual, original opera, with an excellent score, excellent libretto, excellent performance. We had never seen anything like that in a church, and quickly decided we ought to find out what they were going to do next week.

So we did, and heard a sermon from Caroline’s father Dwight Arnold, a retired professor who described himself as a “part-time interim lay” minister. He rummaged among the pages of a yellow legal pad and somehow extracted an interesting sermon. So we decided we ought to find out what they were going to do next week.

And so on, week after week, for over forty years now and in eight other UU churches.

I used to think that the variety of services was the theme of the ecclesiastical history of our family, but I’ve changed my mind. The real theme is that the UU Church of Kent changed our lives.

Ultimately, it was the people. They took us in, got us involved in an exciting music program (we even did improvisational choral singing), and soon became our best friends. We were challenged musically, intellectually, and socially, all in the security of good friendships.

As Thanksgiving approached that year, we thought we had a bit of a problem. Our families were far away, and our car wasn’t reliable enough for a long drive. So Susan cooked up some kind of casserole,

and we went to the church for Thanksgiving dinner.

It was tasty, loud, crowded, and fun. We relaxed, ate, talked with friends, dealt with kids, and were at ease. Our fall-back Thanksgiving option felt completely appropriate. We were in exactly the right place to observe a family-oriented tradition; to have gone anywhere else would have felt artificial. The realization hit me suddenly: this really had become our home.

There's much to tell about our years at the Kent church. There was a food co-op, Bill Schultz, The Equal Rights Amendment, another opera, a massacre, and perpetual financial crisis. Those experiences, and more, really shaped our lives, and made us, for better or for worse, what we are now. As we lived through them, the Kent church changed our lives by forming our lives.

That was long ago, and many congregations ago for us. As we matured as UU's, we have come to think of all of UU as a huge, warm, fun, welcoming, smart family—like the one in Kent, only bigger. All our UU churches, and principally the one in Kent, have shaped our lives and filled us with joy, purpose, and friendship, and kinship.



Ted and Swanny Voneida

WE RESPOND TO HORIZONTAL HYDROFRACKING

Paulette Thurman

In keeping with our long tradition of social and environmental justice activities, members of the UU Church of Kent found themselves drawn to the issue of horizontal hydrofracking for natural gas in 2012. New to this part of the country, 'fracking' was met with alarm on the part of many who studied the process and its many implications for the water, air, soil, and property values in this region.

Ted and Swanny Voneida are active in Faith Communities Together (FaCT), a consortium of twenty eight faith communities and eleven faith traditions, spread across eleven Ohio counties and three West Virginia counties. Consortium members coordinate and support each other's speaking events, rallies, protests, and all manner of education efforts. Ted has spoken to numerous business and civic groups and testified in Columbus in April 2011 against drilling in Ohio State Parks, which was subsequently approved in spite of his and many others' testimonies.

Jan and Harry Noden are active in northern Portage County, have joined the Shalersville group, and are doing research on drilling permits.

Brad Bolton is mapping drilling permit applications for both horizontal fracked well and injection wells into which toxic waste fluids from Ohio's as well as other states' fracking operations are forced into deep rock structures.

Our own Rev. Melissa led a presentation to Kent City Council on March 28, 2012 in which she spoke in support of the Concerned Citizens Ohio's ordinance establishing a Community Bill of Rights and a ban on fracking and all its related activities. She pointed out to Council how little fresh water exists on planet Earth and the importance of protecting that water.

Several other UU's spoke at that meeting. Caroline Arnold urged Council to consider the ordinance. She expressed confidence that Kent

residents would find ways to reclaim their right to self determination and to protect the air, soil, and water.

Ted Voneida spoke of the health problems that result from exposure to the chemicals used in the process and cited a study of fracking in seven states which documented the release of many toxic chemicals into the air and water and the effects on people.

Abby Greer spoke of the importance of community and the role of Council to protect all aspects of community life. She suggested that Council members take a day trip to Pennsylvania to see for themselves the devastation that's occurred there as a result of fracking, pointing out the moral imperative to challenge unjust law.

And Paulette Thurman told Council of gag orders recently enacted into law in Pennsylvania that forbid physicians from telling their patients the cause of their illnesses if the cause was exposure to fracking chemicals.

Then on April 4, 2012, another presentation was made to the Health & Safety Committee of City Council describing in great detail the potential for fracking's catastrophic impact on Kent and Portage County. Speaking at that meeting were Rev. Renee Ruchotzke, Jim Voneida, Saunis Parsons and Lee Brooker in addition to the ones mentioned above who spoke again at the second meeting. Both Council sessions drew overflow crowds of area residents, many of whom spoke with great passion and determination. It was decided in a subsequent meeting, April 18, 2012, to task the Sustainability Commission with scheduling a town forum in which all sides of the issue could be presented. After a period of delays, the Commission is studying the issue and it's too soon to know what the outcome will be.

Horizontal hydrofracking for oil and gas is driven by the most powerful industry on the planet. And also the wealthiest. If the arc of history truly does curve toward justice, then eventually fracking will be stopped. Hopefully that will happen before great swaths of Ohio are reduced to toxic waste lands. The challenge is enormous.

KENT AREA SANCTUARY GROUP

Dr. Theodore Voneida

With the adoption on February 12, 1984 of a Constitution and By-Laws on Consensual Principles, the Coalition for Sanctuary was formed at the Unitarian-Universalist Church of Kent. Edward B. Truitt Jr. was the Clerk pro tem; Jonathan Smuck, Secretary pro tem. Other members included Caroline Arnold, Deborah Elkinton, Olive Hobbs, Clara Jackson, and R. Thomas Myers.

The stated mission of the group was "-to educate its members and others about the economic, legal and moral consequences of the political involvement of the United States in Central America; -to affirm democratic and participatory processes in decision-making; -to challenge unjust laws and seek to define authority and responsibility for moral decisions; -to relieve the suffering of victims of ideological conflicts."

The group quickly became aware of the Sanctuary Movement in Brownsville, Texas, which had been organized there by a group of local clergy people, to assist Salvadoran refugees in their escape from that war-torn country. Most of these refugees were campesinos who were struggling to retain their farm lands, and thus considered Communists by the government. They were being systematically searched out and killed by the armed wing of the government, the Contras. Many, in order to survive, walked across Mexico to the U.S. Their destination was Brownsville, Texas, where they were welcomed by the Sanctuary Group there and assisted in finding locations in the U.S. where they might stay until such time that they could cross the border into Canada.

The U.S. would not accept them as permanent residents. Many members of the Brownsville Sanctuary Group were arrested for their participation in what came to be known as "The Overground Railroad", which successfully transported refugees to various locales in the U.S. where they might find temporary homes while awaiting their move to Canada. Sanctuary Groups began to spring up around the country. Among those was the UU Church of Kent Coalition for Sanctuary which had

been organized in 1983-84 to assist refugees passing through northern Ohio. Truitt and the Voneidas became members and began to be actively involved.

In the late 80s the group's the membership expanded. Among the new members were attorneys, Carol Crimi and Nancy Grim, who provided valuable assistance in dealing with the legalities of border crossing. Janet Lewis became Treasurer and Ted Voneida Chairman of what then came to be known as the Kent Area Sanctuary Group. Our first meetings (December, '83 through October, '84) were held at the UU Church, but since that time our meetings have been held on the second Thursday of each month at the United Church of Christ. These meetings continue to this day, with a small "core group" of eight to ten members, five of whom are members of the UU Church.

The original process involved a telephone call from Brownsville informing us that they had one or two individuals, sometimes an entire family, who needed assistance. If we were able to accept them, they were put on a Greyhound Bus and sent to either Cleveland or Akron, where we would meet them, bring them to Kent and find residence for them until we could arrange for a border crossing into Canada. The length of their stay here varied from several months to a year or longer. When we were informed by the Canadian Sanctuary Group that they were able to accept them, two of our members (usually Ed Truitt and one of our attorneys) drove them to the border and assisted them in crossing.

Sanctuary people in Canada met them and found homes for them there until they could find work and begin the process of establishing Canadian citizenship. We retained contact with most of them, and one family returned for a visit only a short time ago. Our group was honored for our efforts in 1997 by a peace award from the Presbyterian Church's Eastminster Presbytery.

When the war in El Salvador ended, we embarked upon a new series of activities, in which we began working with COCODA, (Companion Community Development Alternatives), a small group of highly dedicated young people in Indiana who were working in El Salvador to as-

sist refugees who had left the country during the war, most of whom had crossed into Honduras, to reestablish themselves in El Salvador.

Our relationship with COCODA has continued to this day, with a great deal of success. Recent projects, some of which have been done in cooperation with Rotary International, have included establishment of the Radio-Free Salvadoran Network, contributing to the building of pumping stations for water supply to several villages (before installation of the pumping stations, water was carried by hand over distances of several miles, most of which were uphill), providing financial assistance to students to enable them to finish high school. Upon graduation, several students attended college, again with our financial support, and are now working as teachers. Our relationship with COCODA helps to keep us informed of progress in these areas, and several members of our Sanctuary group have visited El Salvador a number of times.

In the early nineties, we were contacted by a Canadian Sanctuary group to inquire about whether we might be able to assist Mrs. Vessie Reyes, a Guatemalan woman and her three sons to find residence in the United States. Mrs. Reyes and her sons had entered Canada on work visas shortly after her husband was killed during the Central American conflicts. We met them at the border, assisted them in crossing, and were able to purchase a mobile home for them in Kent, where they remained for several years, during which time her sons finished high school. Since that time they have established permanent residence here, and we maintain close contact. Her sons have gone on to enter successful professions, and one serves as minister in a large Baptist Church in Chicago.

All are welcome to join our Sanctuary Group, and contribute to the important work that we do. Contact Ted and Swanny Voneida at 330 678 8486 for further information.

KENT HOGWARTS

Joe Kuemerle

KentHogwarts is a self-funded religious education outreach program that is affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent. The goal of KentHogwarts is to bring greater awareness of the 7 UU principles to both children of this congregation and other children in the community. By offering KentHogwarts to everyone we work to make families in the community more aware of the mission and values of our church.



Dobby the house elf
by Mark Stephens

KentHogwarts is a part of the church as an extension of the RE program and strives to ensure that the classes are not just fun but that they are relevant and teach UU concepts. Every class and activity we offer is reviewed by the DRE and we are lucky to count members of the RE and Safety committees in our group. Our professors and staff have a variety of backgrounds and our students get exposed to multiple viewpoints and a broad range of teaching styles.

KentHogwarts is not just evangelism to expose others in the world to our UU principles but is also a way to reinforce those principles and behaviors that we want to see in the children of our church community. Many of the children and youth at this church have participated in the KentHogwarts program and children from other UU congregations have been able to participate in Hogwarts sessions at Summer Institute.

At Summer Institute 2001 Becky Haines organized a Hogwarts themed activity for children with just a few helpers. After September 11, 2001 there were many children who were confused and hurting so Becky organized the first KentHogwarts session, still with just a handful of adults. The first KentHogwarts session was that January and the theme was "There Is Magic In Me."

The program has grown significantly over the years. Currently every session more than meets our maximum student capacity of 60. We accept any child between the ages of Kindergarten to 12 years old as students. While we do charge tuition to cover our costs we have a scholarship program and commit to never having to turn a child away because they could not pay.

At 13 years old children age out as students so they become Prefects. We normally have between 10 and 15 Prefects every session. Prefects are responsible for escorting groups of students to their classes, helping the younger children with their projects, some work in the kitchen and they all pitch in and help out with general tasks. After reaching the age of 16 Prefects then can become Assistant Professors and work in the classroom alongside the teachers to help prepare and give lessons.

From the age of 18 on are full Professors, all volunteers, who create and teach the lessons. KentHogwarts also includes a number of other volunteer positions that are critical to its success, from the Kitchen Witches



KentHogwarts Summer 2004 Class Photo

photo by Brad Bolton



KentHogwarts Winter 2011

photo by Brad Bolton

who prepare and serve the food to the hallway monitors that keep the classes on time to all of the behind the scenes work preparing all of the materials that are used to provide such a magical experience for our students.

In the classes students learn a variety of lessons that include mythology, overviews of various world religions and spiritual beliefs, history, care for the environment, social justice and equality and even a bit of chemistry and electronics. The classes are themed after the classes that Harry Potter and his friends take at Hogwarts. We usually offer a mixture of classes each session and they can include Defense Against the Dark Arts, Divination, Charms, Potions, Transfiguration, Care of Magical Creatures, Herbology, Astromancy and History of Magic.

KentHogwarts sessions are now given every winter and summer. Each session, for three full days we fill up the Kent Masonic Temple and also

spend half a day at the church. Every session includes 8 small group classes, a variety of large group activities, lunches for all the students and helpers and lots of excitement and fun.

Every KentHogwarts session has a theme and all individual classes and activities support that theme. Our themes tie together the lessons that the students learn and we work to weave that theme throughout the entire session including special lunches or snacks that support our lessons.

By using the books of Harry Potter, magic and Hogwarts we are able to engage the children immediately and by weaving the greater moral lessons into the Hogwarts themed lessons I feel that we make a lasting impression on our children.

If you are interested in learning more about what we do at KentHogwarts please feel free to approach any of those who participate in the group. We are active all year on an email list for planning and communication. Feel free to observe, comment, make suggestions or volunteer at any time.



Editorial Note: Additional photos of KentHogwarts are available from Brad Bolton at <http://proftalon.smugmug.com/Hogwarts>

photo by Brad Bolton
KentHogwarts Winter 2012

THE BENEFITS OF THE HOGWARTS PROGRAM TO THE CHILDREN AND FAMILIES OF THE UU CHURCH OF KENT

Karen Lapidus

That first session of the "Hogwarts School of Magic" took place at the church in January 2002. It was a small undertaking involving the children of the church, their parents and a few other adults who were caught up in the excitement of J.K. Rowling's amazing series of Harry Potter books. Over the years, it has grown to be a community outreach program which serves children and youth beyond our walls and now takes place, twice each year, in the perfectly suited Masonic Temple.

From the onset, the founding group aimed to use both the life lessons illustrated in Rowling's books and the values and principles of Unitarian Universalism to shape the program. For example, the "Defense Against the Dark Arts" classes align with the UU value of working against oppression and injustice. Sorting the children into houses, an activity that encourages identity and friendship, aligns with the Unitarian Universalist value of honoring the covenantal community. In this way, the Hogwarts program provides our children and youth with an opportunity to live our values outside of the Sunday morning program of Religious Education.

The long-term success of this program has served to create strong bonds between and among the adults, children and youth who participate. Many of our current youth who now serve as Prefects (classroom assistants), began the program as young children. Many of the current Assistant Professors (adult younger than 25), came to the program as young children as well. It has become a long-term community which, like families, watches its young ones blossom into young adults. Over the years, the church has gained many new members whose first introduction to Unitarian Universalism was through Hogwarts.

The most important benefit cannot be described in words. It is best experienced during the time that Hogwarts is in session. The benefits can be seen in the faces of the children who gather in wonder and excitement knowing they will be safe, cared for, delighted and taught by loving adults who seek to make the world a better place, one little wizard at a time.

From the Editorial Board:

We are very grateful that this second issue of "Here We Have Gathered" has been made possible by the Library Committee of our church, which has taken responsibility for its publication and distribution. Special thanks to Carol Gould for underwriting this year's issue. It is hoped that this publication may become a recurring feature of our congregational life, and we encourage those with stories to tell or talents to contribute to contact us about participating in future issues.

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Contributors

Caroline Arnold retired from the office of U.S. Senator John Glenn in 1997. A former teacher, school board member, musician and composer, she joined the church in 1968.

Paul Cox, who grew up thinking he was a Christian, discovered he wasn't at the UU church in Kent, where he and his wife, Susan, were active members. They are now retired in Pennsylvania as members of their 9th UU church.

Robert Fildes was active in the church from the early seventies to the late nineties. During that time he helped plan, direct, and implement extensive renovations to the building and was briefly editor of the church newsletter. He and his wife Janet Hill now live in Milford, DE.

Mary Ann Kasper loves to read, walk her dog, garden, travel, and do things for the community that will make a difference now and in the future. She was a teacher (Intervention Specialist) in Kent for 30 years and has been a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent since 1989.

Joe Kuemerle has been associated with the UU Church of Kent for over 11 years. He is the chairperson and Headmaster of KentHogwarts and is active in the RE program, Sunday Program Committee and the Service Auction Committee. Joe is the father of Justin, Kate and Connor and the husband of Beth Kuemerle.

Karen Lapidus has served the church as the Director of Religious Education from August 1995 until January 2002 and then from October 2009 until the present. She has been a professional religious educator for 26 years serving the Unitarian Universalist Church of Kent, the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Youngstown and the Ohio Meadville District of the UUA as Lifespan Faith Development Consultant.

Mark Stephens has been a member of the UU Church of Kent for 3 years and particularly enjoys sketch drawing.

Paulette Thurman has been a member of this church since 1999. She is a massage therapist, lives with two cats, spends too much time gardening, and is very glad her children have jobs.

Dr. Theodore Vöneida was founding Chair of Neurobiology at Northeastern Ohio Universities College of Medicine. Now retired, he remains active with Kent Area Sanctuary Group, Kent Environmental Council, and the UU Church Green Sanctuary project.



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