



## **The First Eight Years – An Early History of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Salina**

I (Dave Lewerenz) had been thinking about starting a Unitarian Universalist fellowship in Salina for several months, especially after reading Jack Mendohlson's *Why I am a Unitarian Universalist*. In the spring of 1993, while spending a few days in Topeka at a professional meeting, I decided to call the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship there to inquire about starting a congregation in Salina. A woman answered the phone; I believe it may have been Lisa Schwartz, who would later become a part-time minister for us. She told me how to contact the Prairie Star District office in Minneapolis. I called them while still in Topeka and they indicated a willingness to help me. Mary Handley, a friend of mine in Salina and a former member of two Unitarian Universalist congregations, was excited about my plans and assisted me in getting things started.

Within a few months, I had worked out a plan with Harry Green, the PSD executive. The District would finance an ad in the *Salina Journal*, and I would make arrangements for a public meeting in Salina to see if there was sufficient interest to start a fellowship here. Harry would attend the meeting and give a presentation about what Unitarian Universalism is about. The meeting was set for November 17, 1993. Besides Harry, twelve people attended, and nine indicated an interest in being informed about future meetings. They were: Linda Nelson, Mary Handley, Rebecca Lasseter, Wesley Koehler, Weeden Nichols, Karla Mickler, Doris Bedinger, and Dave Lewerenz. The meeting was held at the Friendship Center in Salina.

For the next four months, we got together occasionally and made plans for beginning to hold services. As a group we visited UU services in Manhattan and Wichita and I attended the small group in Hutchinson. Plans were made to hold the first service on March 13, 1994. Adrian Melott was recruited as the speaker. He is a former UU minister and astronomy professor at Kansas University and he spoke on "Where did it all come from and what are we doing here?" We were fortunate that the *Salina Journal* decided to do a prominent story about us that ran the morning of our first service. Thanks to the publicity, I later learned that I was personally prayed for in more than one church service in Salina that morning. When prayer for me was proposed in the Mennonite Church, Weeden Nichols was irate. Weeden was part of our efforts, but he was also a member of the Mennonite Church and was present that morning. He stood and defended me, saying that his ancestors were Unitarians and we were not in need of prayer.

We began by meeting two Sundays per month and used the Labor Building, 2055 South Ohio. We had good participation in two different groups who used *Our Chosen Faith* for a series of discussions about Unitarian Universalism in May, June and July. There were problems with the Labor Building, such as people not showing up to let us in, a score of ashtrays with their accompanying odor, etc. We used a shelter house at Sunset Park for June, July and August and began to meet at a basement room at the YWCA, 651 E. Prescott, in September, 1994. Through November of 1996 we continued to meet at the YWCA, but used the park during the summer.

In September of 1996, Lisa Schwartz began commuting from Topeka to lead a service and meet with our board once per month. Lisa had completed her requirements for ministry shortly before beginning to work with us. In October Lisa assisted us in writing our mission statement: "To provide a place for personal spiritual growth within an open and affirming community." It was also in the fall of this year that we began using Radio Kansas sponsorship to acquaint our fellowship with others in the area.

Some people wanted to have services weekly instead of twice per month, and we started doing that in October of 1996. Initially one or two services each month were unstructured "meditation" services. A move to our current home was made when we began to share the building owned by Unity Church at 901 Beatrice in December, 1996. This ended our tradition of meeting in the park during the summer.

In the summer of 1997 we began working on developing bylaws and an official board of directors. Until then, anyone who showed up for a board meeting was part of the decision making process. Kent Johnson did most of the work in writing our bylaws and Lisa Schwartz was helpful in guiding us through this time.

August 24 was “membership Sunday” when any who wanted could sign the register and be a charter member of the Fellowship. Following that service we had our first annual meeting in which we adopted and set in place the bylaws.

We have tried to attend area workshops when possible. A small group consisting of Mary Handley, Gary Swartzendruber and Dave Lewerenz from our congregation traveled to Ames Iowa to attend a leadership conference in October of 1994. We attended our first PSD Annual Meeting (in 1996 or 1997?) when Dave Lewerenz went to Kansas City. Gary Swartzendruber and Kent Johnson went to the one in Des Moines, Iowa in April of 1998. In November of 2000 we sent Sherry Perdreauxville, Lee Romaniszyn, Julie Fischer, Kent Johnson and Dave Lewerenz to the Planning for Growth Workshop for Small Congregations in Lincoln, NE.

Lisa Schwartz had other demands on her time and we contracted with Patt Herdklotz to lead a service and provide some professional leadership for us. Patt was the minister at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Wichita and had come to lead services for us on an occasional basis in the past. She began to come on a monthly basis in September of 1997 and continued until June of 1999.

We were awarded a Chalice Lighter grant 1998 that resulted in an influx on over \$5,700. We used the money to erect an outdoor sign, buy more hymnals, attract some special speakers, advertise, start a library/bookstore, develop a fellowship brochure and provide leadership training.

Our Internet site was launched in June of 1998 due to the efforts of Angie Paquette. It was also in June that we tried to have our first Peace Camp. A lot of effort was invested in planning and recruiting helpers, but it didn't come off because of a lack of children participating.

Two people outside the fellowship have been instrumental in our adult educational programs. Eugene Bales, a philosophy professor at Bethany College began to work with us on an evening series in October, 1998 and has been with us on several occasions. Lori Brack first led the short story series, “Paths Toward the Inaccessible” in October of 1999, which was extremely well attended. Lori has shared her gifts of literature discussion on other occasions since then.

We began to have regular religious education for children in May 2000. Our congregation has changed and grown in many ways as we have made children more a part of our program.

While we now have no ministers who visit us on a regular basis, we are thankful for the assistance of two retired UU ministers from Nebraska. Charles Stephen joined us for the first time in November 2000 and Ron Knapp in March 2001.

March 2001 Liz Franklin met with us for a meeting to get more organized and work more closely with the Unitarian Universalist Association and the Prairie Star District. Our Peace Camp was resurrected and successfully accomplished two months later.

We were welcomed as an official congregation in the UUA in the summer of 2001. Celebration of that event occurred on the weekend of October 5 and 6, with a special presentation by Liz Franklin representing the Prairie Star District and the UUA.

Dave Lewerenz, October 2001

## **More Recent Events at the Salina UU Fellowship**

Glen Lakes – SUUF Secretary

June, 2004	Members celebrated 10 years together and their new home which they had purchased from Unity Church. Adrian Melott, a former Unitarian minister and professor of astrophysics at the University of Kansas who gave the Fellowship's first service was the speaker.
January, 2005	Michael Nelson became the part-time minister at the UU Fellowship. SUUF shared Nelson with the Manhattan UU Fellowship. Nelson had been away from the ministry since 1987 when he was a minister in Oklahoma City. He had left the ministry to write poetry and open a bookstore in Lawrence.
March, 2005	SUUF sponsored a lecture to talk about the proposed marriage amendment to the Kansas Constitution. Also in March Steven Baines told about 60 people at a SUUF forum that "You don't have to be for same-sex marriage to be against a proposed constitutional amendment on marriage."
May, 2006	Donated organ appears as contribution to the music program.
May, 2006	SUUF sponsored a workshop, "Beyond Sustainability: The Marriage of Science and Religion, an Inspiring Vision of the Next 250 Years."
October 7, 2007	Reverend Michael Nelson resigned from his position as our part-time minister and shared with us a sermon titled, "Taking Good Care". "Self-love, my liege, is not so vile a sin as self-neglecting." These words by Shakespeare are as true today as they were five hundred years ago. In many religious traditions, self-sacrifice gets the gold star. You can't take good care of your family or your Fellowship, unless you tend yourself. To do so is not a sin, but an expansive blessing.
March 22, 2009	The congregation approved calling Thea Nietfeld as our minister.