

Comments From Those at the Beginning...



Joanne Bateman:

One of the most joyful times in the life of our congregation was when we celebrated the official opening of our church building.

Prior to the completion of the building our congregation had been holding Sunday Worship Services in the temple about 1 mile up the road.

For the first church service in our new building our congregation held a joint "Kadima" march on County Road 101 starting at the temple with our Jewish brothers and sisters who blew their shofar horns in honor of this occasion. It was a bright, sunny day and to add to the beauty of our walk, several horses grazing in the pasture next to the road trotted along with us for a while.

Our Jewish friends continued the celebration with us in the narthex as we joyfully sang and clapped hands prior to our entrance into the sanctuary for the first time. It was so much fun and such an appropriate way to open our new church with our loving neighbors from the temple.



Beth Bell:

We moved to TV in July of 2003. Three days after we moved, I opened TV Daily Sun and read an article. It was an open invitation to attend a meeting to discuss building a UCC church in The Villages. I attended the meeting.



Anne Berg:

I am not actually a charter member. I did not move to Florida until January of 2011. I think my name appears on the "Building Our Future, Guided by Faith" document hanging in the narthex because I gave a donation to a special fund over and above my regular pledge. It was important to me to support the church even though I was not a charter member. I had decided even before I moved down that UCC at the Villages would be my church home because it was important to me to be part of a church that embraces diversity and inclusion. The statement that is read at the beginning of each worship service "No matter who you are, or where you are on life's journey, you are welcome here" says it all.



Becky Dunning:

Thank you Char for this opportunity to share memories of early days in our new church building. We (with Carol Correa) began attending UCC at The Villages several months before the actual move to our current building. We started attending because our golfing friends invited us. I loved that we were assigned a mentor when we considered becoming a member. It was someone to sit with, ask questions of and go out to lunch with. Prior to our commitment to join the UCC church community, we spent an entire day learning about UCC and this church. Fabulous experience! Then there was the Kadima – the walk from the temple to our new building for our first service with the members of the Jewish community. It felt so welcoming, so inclusive. It wasn't long until I became aware that this congregation wanted to feel a connection with each other, to be cared for in a compassionate manner. Thus became the first version of the shepherd program and later began the Parish nurse program. Those were my best years with this congregation. I still get people calling me Parish Nurse.



Glenn & Jane Foster:

Our first memories of attending church at UCCaTV was held in the narthex of Hope Lutheran Church. There were about twenty of us there. We had no access to an organ or piano, but still managed to sing praises to God! Many more memories followed after that. So grateful we have been part of this journey.



Phyllis Lachman:

When the Daily Sun had an advertisement asking if anyone would be interested in a UCC forming in the Villages and if so come to Hope Lutheran where a group was gathering. With the Rev Ben New, a retired UCC minister. My husband and I were snowbirds at that time and had bought a second home here in Villages....and I attended that first Sunday evening at 5pm. Mary Helen New, Ben's wife, took my name, gave me a temporary stick on name tag and asked "would you and your husband be interested in becoming a Charter Member" and I said, yes and signed up that first visit.

Because we were still in MA full time, and my husband had some serious health issues, we were not available to sign the official charter as others had done. Rev Bill Wealand and Rev Ben New came to our house to obtain our signatures as THE LAST CHARTER MEMBERS.

It's been a wonderful and blessed membership.



Maureen McCoy:

Congratulations on paying off the church mortgage! As a charter member, I have so many wonderful memories of our years together and working so hard to establish and build UCC at The Villages. Enjoy your celebration as we did in 2010!



Ann Monroe:

I knew Bill and his wife, Deanna very well in Ohio and came here soon after they came in 2004.

He was in the process of establishing the Church using his home along with few other homes. I helped with secretarial work along with being with his wife, Deanna, when she was unable to go with him. They were wonderful friends and I have missed them very much!



Ray Peidl:

Thank you so much for sending the good news concerning the mortgage of the church building being paid off. If you look closely at the mortgage contract, you will see my signature as Moderator (2004 till 2010) of UCCaTV. These were the "Pioneer" days of this Congregation! All of us were excited, buoyant, full of hope in the future and faith in our Lord, Jesus Christ as we bounced around from our services being conducted in living rooms, various church fellowship halls & sanctuaries and yes, even in a store front location. The idea of having a UCC progressive thinking church and church building as being part of The Villages setting was the energy that kept us moving forward!

CONGRATULATIONS to ALL of you at the United Church of Christ at The Villages!!! The faith and continued financial support of your past and present church leaders, members and friends of the Church has brought this wonderful event to become a reality.



Mabel Prescott:

When our church was started in late 2003, we were meeting at 5 PM in the social room at Hope Lutheran Church. It was the only space and time that we could find and we were lucky to have 30 people there for the service. One Sunday we did not yet have a regular pastor but a guest pastor from De Land was coming for the service. She got lost and it was time for the service. The pastor of Hope Lutheran happened to be in the building at the time and agreed to use the sermon that he had prepared and used for his church that morning. It was his custom to wear a particular robe when he was in the pulpit. As I recall it was a thin white robe with a decorative border and only reached to his knees. His golf shorts under the robe and his athletic shoes provided an unforgettable memory.. The guest pastor arrived before the end of the service and she took over after the sermon.

When Bill Wealand was our pastor, we had a guest, Fred Shaw. You can learn all about Fred on Google. Fred is an ordained Methodist pastor as well as a member of the Shawnee tribe. His family lived in Ohio and was well liked and respected by their neighbors so they were not relocated to the west on the "trail of tears" as many Shawnee were. I think the locals protected them. Fred and Bill had worked together on several summer church camps. One afternoon, we brought our chairs and met outside in a circle while Fred told us how many Shawnee customs related to Christianity; especially at harvest and Thanksgiving time. That evening we met in one of the Rec centers. Fred came in all of his native regalia, paint, etc. and performed Shawnee songs, dances, and told native legends. I think he still retained some sort of status in the Shawnee nation. I looked on Google and saw that he is no longer an active pastor but still active as a storyteller and involved in Native American work with the Methodist Church.



Gail & Jay Richards:

When we bought this property and graced it with a cross, our anticipation grew. And when we each dug a shovel full of dirt to break ground for this building the excitement increased exponentially. And now our dream is a fully owned reality! Our wish for the future is that we will continue to celebrate diversity, serve as the wonderful welcoming place that we are now and be a gift to our community for many years to come.



Jim & Judie Schnitker:

It was a great joy for us when we learned our mortgage was paid off. Jim and I were both very active in the building of the church. I worked on the Building Fund Committee. We were both on the Building Committee. Jim worked directly with the builder during construction. I was on the committee to select furnishings for the church. We were both on the Administration committee after the church opened and Jim was the head of the of the committee for one term. At that time we couldn't even think about when the mortgage would be paid off. It will be a real joy to see the mortgage burned.



Barbara Sullivan:

One spring as we were getting ready to head North for the summer, Cliff and I noticed an ad in The Sun. It was asking if any one was interested in starting a UCC church in the villages. We contacted Ben New for information and told him we would be returning in the Fall. We told him we were interested. When we returned, we met with others and called Bill Wealand to be our pastor. We met at Hope Lutheran at 5 pm. A bonus was a pot luck after the service. Many people helped and we were on our way to becoming the wonderful church we are today.