UUFP HISTORY

Charter:
In October of 1957 a group of seven Peninsula residents and the minister of the Unitarian Church of Norfolk first approached the American Unitarian Association for advice on the formation of a fellowship on the Peninsula. After two public meetings at the Syms Eaton Community Center about 40 members accepted the by-laws on the first of December 1957. The purpose of the group was to “foster liberal religious attitudes and living through group study, worship, service, work and recreation”.

The first officers of the new Fellowship of the Peninsula elected at the December meeting were: President, James Cherry, Daily Press staff; Vice president, William Moses, Hampton Institute; Secretary, Mrs. Leonard Roberts; and Members of the Board of Directors, W. Hale Thompson, Hampton Lawyer; David M. Cooper, architect, and Edwin O. Meyer.

In May 1958 the Fellowship received its charter as a member of the American Unitarian Association, now the Unitarian Universalist Association.

UUFP Homes:
For the first year the group had no home, spending a few weeks meeting at the Nationwide Insurance Company and several months at Sugden School. In the winter of 1959 the Unitarians bought the building at 16 Eaton Street from the B’nai Israel Jewish Congregation. Al Smith, a black lawyer, took mostly white teenagers down the street to his law office for RE lessons.

The first meeting and housewarming were held on February 8, 1959. Dedication of the building took place on April 12, 1959 when, with considerable celebration and pride, the fellowship hosted the Third Annual Virginia Conference of Unitarian Churches and Fellowships, a weekend-long conference involving about 100 people. The Dedication ceremony, the concluding event of the conference, included an address by the minister of the Mount Vernon Unitarian Church in Alexandria and music by the Crusaders Chorus.
The Unitarian Fellowship remained in the Eaton Street building until January of 1969 when the Hampton Redevelopment Corporation bought the property. The Fellowship then purchased a church building on Briarfield Road in Newport News. This building served as its home until May 7, 1979 when a fire, apparently started by an electrical spark in the ceiling, destroyed the building. Nearly everything the Fellowship owned was lost.

Three historic items survived:
- The original membership book was protected from the flames when a bookcase fell across it.
- The brass chalice was found under the overturned podium. This chalice was a gift from Keith Dixon, one of our teenagers. When his family moved away he gave the chalice to the Fellowship and asked that we remember him. He is since deceased.
- The original charter from the American Unitarian Association was shielded from the flames by another fallen bookcase.
After the fire the Fellowship continued to meet on a regular basis at the Jewish Community Center where we learned to keep a kosher kitchen.

In February of 1980, the group purchased a one-acre lot on Young’s Mill Lane in Newport News as the site for its new home.

**Unitarian Fellowship launches construction of new home**

NEWPORT NEWS — The Unitarian Fellowship of the Peninsula will hold a groundbreaking ceremony at 11 a.m. Sunday for its new building on a one-acre lot on Young's Mill Lane. Following the service, lunch will be served at the home of Nina Frink, a member.

Weather permitting, local contractor David Hertater will begin work on the building by March 1. The group plans to occupy the new facility by early summer.

Roger S. Germano of Williamsburg is the architect. The design is of simple modern form — a one-story shelter under a single roof.

Operating economy will be achieved through the energy conservation measures employed in the design, including sixteen wall insulation, thermal sheathing, heavy ceiling insulation and resist-sun window units to cover the windows when the building is empty.

The building will contain a meeting hall, social area, offices and three rooms for religious education. Budgeted cost is $94,000 for building and site work. Furnishings will cost around $10,000.

The 3,000-square-foot floor plan responds to the need for multiple use of space. It is hoped that the building will see use throughout the week by fellowship groups as well as community groups. The classroom area can be used independently, as can two other areas.

The Unitarian Fellowship of the Peninsula was founded in 1958 by a group of local residents who were looking for an alternative to traditional churches and religious organizations. The Fellowship was chartered by the American Unitarian Association (now the Unitarian Universalist Association).

The group originally met in a borrowed room. In 1959 it purchased a former Jewish Synagogue on Eaton Street in Hampton. Several years later, urban renewal forced another move. In 1968, the former Brethren Church, at the corner of Anamoke Avenue and Britfield Road, Newport News, became the fellowship meeting place, but it burned May 7, 1976. Since then, the Fellowship has been meeting in the Jewish Community Center on Spring Road, Newport News, each Sunday at 10 a.m.

The **UU World** wasn’t clear on where we were...
But the Daily Press had no such problems!

The building was dedicated October 1980 and expanded under the leadership of Margaret Caum in 1990. This expansion included an extra room for a new kitchen, a meeting room (The Caum Room), enlargement of the sanctuary, and central air conditioning.

In January, 2010 UUFP purchased adjoining land consisting of two parcels on Warwick Boulevard which included a 1950's style ranch house which had served as a former real estate office. This purchase gives UUFP some much needed “green space” for our use along with space for staff offices, Adult RE classes, meeting space plus visibility on a major road.

**Religious Leadership:**

In the early years ministers from other Unitarian churches were invited to and members arranged the remaining programs. Programs often used the talents of local professors and other experts on areas of interest to the group. For short periods there have been ministers more closely involved in the life of the Fellowship. Ministers who spoke regularly included Arthur Graham of
Norfolk, David Bumbaugh of Mt.Vernon, David McPherson of Richmond, Terry Sweetser of Charlottesville, Rev. Bill Gold of Richmond, and Rev. Joseph Buchanan, a retired Episcopal minister. Contracted ministers included:

1958-1959 - Major Mary C. Lane, a lay minister affiliated with the Unitarian Church of Norfolk
1965-1966 - Rev. James Curtis of the Norfolk church, part time to UUFP
Early 80’s - Gary Gallun was shared with Norfolk for 3 years for ¼ time
Mid 80’s - Peter Scott, Norfolk minister, ¼ time at UUFP
1994-1996 - Kerry Muller, ¼ time
1996 - Ed Piper, ½ time for 4 months before accepting a full time position,
1997-1999 - Alane Cameron Miles, ministerial student, ½ time
2009-2010 - Rev. Donald E. Garrett, Interim Minister.
2010-NOW - Rev. Andrew Clive Millard, called Full-Time Minister.

Social issues and community programs over the years:
In the early days the Fellowship’s programs reflected its close association with Hampton Institute (now Hampton University), which included an emphasis on art, music and literature. In the sixties, The Fellowship offered the use of its building to several groups when they couldn’t find other accepting venues. Through the years the Fellowship has also been involved in many areas of Social Action:

1967-68 - the Black Boys’ Club Choir.
Mid 1960’s - Poor Peoples' March Committee for its organizational meetings and a 3-day workshop on non-violence for marshals,
Late 1960’s - A weekend work camp modeled on the American Friends Service Work Camp and planned by the Fellowship's active teen organization, the Liberal Religious Youth. They used the building as a base while the young people repaired and painted some older houses in the neighborhood.
Early 1970’s - The Fellowship was involved in Civil Rights and Anti War issues, including a march on the Pentagon, both of which caused tension in the group.
Mid 70’s - Fellowship members helped Leonard Matlovich in his battle with the Air Force over the issue of his homosexuality.
1972-1977 Support of the Peninsula Free Clinic
1989 - 1st Earth Rising Festival (1st public pagan festival in Virginia?)
1990 - support for LINK, homeless shelters and food pantries, Habitat for Humanity, support groups for biracial families, AIDS and PFLAG.
1991 - Another march on Washington; this time opposing the war in Iraq.
1993 - Homophobia Conference at UUFP (with TV coverage), Earth Rising starts (CUUPS).
1993 - Another march on Washington; this time for Women’s Rights,

1993 to 2020 - Marching again for BGLT and Women's Rights in Washington, Sharing tables with the Norfolk and Williamsburg UU’s at local PRIDE Festivals, LINK’S PORT (winter shelter program), Peninsula Peace Project and local peace vigils, several trips to the Gulf Coast after Hurricane Katrina, The “Lost Boys of Sudan”, 4th Sunday films/discussions, Smithfield “Salon”, Crop Walk, Books for Prisoners, organized “English as a Second Language” tutor program, the Welcoming Congregation (UUA based program on LGTB concerns - approved by UUFP May 2008), ridesharing through NuRide.com, the Peacemaking initiative of the General Assembly of the UUA, Heath Care reform education including public demonstrations in Hilton Village, “350” along with “10-10-10”, the Green Sanctuary (UUA) program, the Lubuto Library Project, “Clean the Bay with the Navigators”, and our own “Share the Basket” program.
Recent and current initiatives of the Social and Environmental Justice Steering Committee

Members participated in the program that explored the Report of the UUA Commission on Institutional Change called Widening the Circle of Concern which focused on dismantling racism in our congregational structures.

UUFP’s Social and Environmental Justice Steering Committee was instrumental in expanding the efforts of the Legislative Collaborative Table of Hampton Roads to this side of the peninsula. The Legislative Collaborative Table is an ad hoc collaboration of non-partisan non-profits that advocate for a joint Virginia legislative agenda of social justice issues. They offer an annual Social Justice University which is an action focused educational briefing of current issues in our state.

THE HAMPTON ROADS LEGISLATIVE COLLABORATIVE TABLE (2020-21)

- AARP
- Abu Unity Foundation
- Chesapeake Climate Action Network
- Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc.
- Greater Hilton for Social Justice
- Hampton Roads Pride
- HOPE (Healing of People Everywhere)
- The Interfaith Alliance at the Beach
- The Interspiritual Empowerment Project
- The League of Women Voters
- Let’s Make a Difference Foundation
- Mothers Out Front
- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness)
- Norfolk GAINS
- OneVirginia2021
- PFLAG
- Poor Peoples Campaign
- Sierra Club
- Tidewater Sowers of Justice
- Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Committees (UUFP, CVUU, WUU)
- The Urban League
- Virginia Center for Public Safety
- VACOLAO (The Virginia Coalition of Latino Organizations)
- VICPP (Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy)
- VAIPL (Virginia Interfaith Power and Light)
- Virginia Organizing
- Virginians for Alternatives to the Death Penalty

The UUFP Social and Environmental Justice Steering Committee partners with Williamsburg Unitarian Universalist’s Social Justice Committee to support their Journey to Asylum program to house and provide education and legal help to immigrant families seeking asylum.

Members of the S&EJ Committee organized campaigns with UU the Vote. UU the Vote was imagined as an “all hands on deck” project to articulate UU values in the public square and activate and organize Unitarian Universalists on a mass scale. It was motivated by two primary objectives:

- Responding to the moral call to combat the rise of white supremacy and fascism and imagine a just society where all have inherent worth and dignity, where our communities are governed democratically, and where we live sustainably.
- The opportunity to move Unitarian Universalists to embody our values by centering the marginalized and building organizing infrastructure across the UU ecosystem.
We also support the Virginia Interfaith Center for Public Policy VICPP and many members attend the yearly Days for All People in Richmond.

Members of our Fellowship continue their support of PORT People Offering Resources Together an emergency homeless shelter held during winter months.

We have held weekly Moral Mondays Vigils for Black Lives Matter every week since George Floyd’s death in May of 2020.

In addition, we offer financial support to Black Lives of Unitarian Universalism BLUU. Our music committee sends monies of reparation to BLUU when we use Spirituals in our Sunday Services.
BLUU Harnesses Love's Power to Combat Oppression and Foster Healing as a Spiritual and Political Imperative. We know the Power of Love to be Life-Changing, Inclusive, Relational, Uncomfortable, Unconditional And Without End.