



Wildflower Church: A Brief History 1998 –2006

1998 Memorable Events

- In late 1998, Carol Knight, a member of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Austin, wrote a letter to the Board of Trustees and the Long Range Planning Committee suggesting that First Church sponsor a new church in south Austin, an area underserved by existing UU churches. Greta Fryxell, a member of the Board, and Paul Fryxell, a member of the Long Range Planning Committee, responded positively. Carol started discussing the idea with several people, including the Fryxells, Martin Bryant and Mary K. Isaacs, and others.

1999 Memorable Events

- In April 1999, Carol met with the Board of Trustees and asked for their blessing to explore the idea of forming a UU church in south Austin. The Board responded by unanimously approving the formation of a Planning and Feasibility Task Force to explore the idea, with Carol serving as Chair. She recruited Greta Fryxell, Toby Heidel, Drew Bridges, and Gayle Hudgins to serve on the Task Force.
- In October 1999, the Task Force presented its final report to the Board. The report concluded that a UU church in south Austin was feasible and recommended six actions, all of which were unanimously approved by the Board. The recommendations included budgeting \$9,500 to fund a project, *UUs of South Austin*, to determine the level of interest in forming a UU church in south Austin, and to take steps toward forming one if indicated.
- In December 1999, the congregation of First Church approved \$9,500 for the *UUs of South Austin* project.

2000 Memorable Events

- In February 2000, a Steering Committee formed to direct the *UUs of South Austin* project. Jenny Benedict served as Chair, with Kim Flannery, Gerry King, Carol Knight, Kelly Ramsey, Dawn Spinale, Larry Strassner, and Lisa Sutton serving as members. The Rev. Bob Hill, District Executive of the SWUUC and the Rev. Jonalu Johnstone, Growth Consultant for the SWUUC were involved, along with the Rev. Clyde Grubbs and the Rev. Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley, Interim Co-ministers at First Church.
- The Steering Committee sponsored organizing meetings, workshops, and social events, and published a periodic newsletter edited first by Paul Fryxell, then by Jenny Benedict. Based on recommendations from the District Executive, the Steering Committee attempted to establish a new church by forming covenant groups and sponsoring monthly rallies instead of holding weekly worship services.
- In July 2000, the Committee submitted an application to the SWUUC for a Chalice Lighter Grant to help compensate a half-time mentoring minister for the *UUs of South Austin* for a period of one year. The SWUUC Board approved the application.

- In November 2000, the *UUs of South Austin* received a \$9,800+ Chalice Lighter Grant to hire a minister.
- By late August, life events and increasing frustration with trying to start a church by forming covenant groups instead of offering weekly worship services contributed to several resignations from the Steering Committee.
- In November 2000, the remaining three members of the Steering Committee—Gerry King, Kelly Ramsey, and Carol Knight—sponsored a dinner to recruit members for an Organizing Committee, with the goal of forming a church in south Austin. Soon after the dinner, eighteen people joined the Committee: Carol Knight, acting president, John Beeler, Karen Beeler, Charles Bisantz, Mark Briody, Susan Briody, Martin Bryant, Barbara Dickens, Carol Fisher, Paul Fryxell, Harold Gilbert, Gerry King, Peter Knight, Gloria Obregon, Gay Patterson, Pat Pore, Kelly Ramsey, and Kellis Richter.

2001 Memorable Events

- The *UUs of South Austin* held their first Sunday morning worship service on February 4, 2001, as recommended by Martin Bryant.
- In April Pat Pore and Carol Knight attended the five-day UUA New Congregation Development Training in Boston, Massachusetts
- Throughout the year, the congregation met for weekly services in the gymnasium at Sunset Valley Elementary School, where basket ball hoops and climbing ropes decorated the sanctuary. The Religious Education classes meet in hallways because the congregation was not allowed to use the school's classrooms.
- The church incorporated, received non-profit status, and approved bylaws, all under the leadership of Karen Beeler.
- The congregation had fun choosing the name, *Wildflower Church*, using a multi-stage process developed by Paul and Greta Fryxell.
- Jim Patterson designed a logo for the church incorporating three wildflowers chosen by Paul Fryxell, a botanist. The flowers are St. John's Wort, native to eastern Europe where modern Unitarianism began; an aster, native to Massachusetts where UU "landed" in the U.S., and a Mexican Hat, native to south Austin, where the *UUs of South Austin* were taking root.
- Despite the fact that the church was not yet chartered and had no official members, the congregation elected its first slate of officers: Carol Knight, President; Kellis Richter, Vice-President; Charles Bisantz, Treasurer; and Pat Pore, Secretary.
- The congregation advertised Wildflower Church by placing an ongoing weekly notice in the Oak Hill Gazette, arranged by Martin Bryant, and by participating in an ongoing weekly notice in the Saturday edition of the Austin Statesman newspaper publicizing all Austin area UU societies. First UU Church sponsored Wildflower's participation during the first year the notice ran in the paper.

- The church continued its advertising efforts through a web site, constructed and maintained by Peter Knight, a member of the church, who also purchased a domain name for the church. The web address continues to be www.wildflowerchurch.org
- The church started publishing a monthly newsletter edited first by Gay Patterson, then by Carol Knight.
- On September 9 Wildflower Church called a part-time minister, the Rev. Peter Morrison, who lived in Houston. Difficulties with the long-distance ministry and the minister's role in the church led to Rev. Morrison's resignation. After this experience, the congregation was reluctant to call another minister for about two years.
- The church formed several committees to better serve its members and the larger community: Worship, Finance, Religious Education, Communications, Facilities, Caring, Canvass, Membership, Childcare, and Social Action.
- The Social Action Committee provided leadership for church involvement in several projects, including Hands on Housing, the Capital Area Food Bank, and the Adopt-a-Highway Program.
- The church inaugurated a Children's Religious Education program in September, under the leadership of Kathy Wells.
- The church formed three Covenant Groups: Music, facilitated by Greta Fryxell, Elders, facilitated by Richard Pruitt, and Spiritual Pilgrims, facilitated by Mike Wilkes.
- The Music Covenant Group formed a 12-person church choir under the leadership of Greta Fryxell.
- Alex Nelson and Laurie Willis, Wildflower congregants, were the first members to marry. Their ceremony was held in September at First UU Church.
- The church held its first canvass in September, resulting in 54 pledges totaling \$53,000. Karen Beeler and Charles Bisantz co-chaired the canvass, which kicked off with a catered barbeque dinner held at the Shady Hollow Community Center.
- In December 2001, Sunset Valley School notified the congregation that it could no longer meet at the school for Sunday services.
- During the church's third Congregational Meeting, held in December, the Organizing Committee presented, and the congregation approved, the church's first bylaws, a 2002 budget of \$71,016, and a slate of candidates for the Nominating Committee whose charge was to recruit a slate of nominees for the first official Board of Trustees.
- Throughout the year, the number of people attending services grew steadily from 25 to over 50 with an average of 44 people attending Sunday morning services.

2002 Memorable Events

- During 2002, Wildflower Church held Sunday worship services in three locations. On January 1, 2002, the congregation cleaned and moved into an old medical clinic, located at 425 Woodward Street, which was being used as a volleyball storage

facility. It probably qualified as the ugliest UU facility in the country. Later in the year, the facility flooded and the congregation met for Sunday services in the lovely Maloney Room, located on the third floor of the Main Building at St. Edward's University. Soon thereafter the room was closed for remodeling. At Harold Gilbert's suggestion, the church rented the South Austin Senior Activity Center for Sunday morning worship services and children's religious education programs.

- A Committee Council was formed in January to enhance communication and coordination among committees. Karen Beeler, vice-president of the Board, chaired the Council.
- A program for youth, *The Talk A-Lots*, started under the leadership of Dana McBride and Alex Nelson, church members. Several youth attended.
- Kellis Richter, president of the Board, and Karen Beeler, vice-president, purchased a Membership Book for the church, complete with a wood cover incised with the church's logo.
- On April 28th Wildflower Church held its first Membership Signing Ceremony, coordinated by Pat Pore, chair of Membership. Sixty-four people were eligible for membership, including eleven founding members, most of whom were present to sign the membership book. On that day Wildflower became an official congregation with official members. By the end of the year, 73 people had joined the church.
- By May, several more covenant groups were meeting, including Spiritual Pilgrims, Soul Salon, and the Elders.
- The church contracted with a UUA consultant, Dave Rickard, to help the congregation plan its annual canvass, develop Vision and Mission Statements, and develop a Five Year Long Range Plan. Pat Pore, chair of the Long Range Planning Team, led the entire effort.
- The church convened an Adult Education Programming Committee, under the leadership of Carol Knight. The committee developed a curriculum and recruited teachers for programs offered during five terms: Winter, spring, summer, fall, and Holiday.
- In September-October, the church held its second three-week, all-member canvass, resulting in 54 pledges totaling \$59,270.
- At the December Semi-Annual Meeting, the congregation adopted its first 5-Year Strategic Plan, which called for hiring a part-time organizing minister in the Fall of 2003, hiring a part-time Director of Religious Education in 2004, and moving to our own location in 2004.
- Kenneth Richardson died in December. He was the first member of the church to die.
- In 2002, the average attendance at Sunday worship services was 67 people.

2003 Memorable Events

- In January, a child, Josephine, was born to Lynn Jocelyn and Chuck Bisantz, the first Wildflower members to have a baby.

- The *Wildflower Peace Train Band* formed under the leadership of Martin Bryant and Patterson Barrett and continues to periodically “rock the house” during worship services.
- In April the church held its first Celebration Dinner, a formal affair, complete with candles, flowers, and a catered entrée, in the main room at the South Austin Senior Activity Center. Pat Pore coordinated the event.
- The Membership Committee, under the leadership of Pat Pore, initiated *Connections Classes* to give newcomers an opportunity to meet one another, tell their stories, and learn about the church. The classes were, and continue to be, very successful.
- In September the church held its third three-week canvass, chaired by Carol Knight, which raised more than \$68,000. On successive Sundays during the canvass, Gary Lichtenstein and the church’s children wore hard hats and “built” a church made of large decorated cardboard boxes to demonstrate the theme, ““Building Blocks for Our Future.” In October the church celebrated its successful canvass with an outdoor “Block Party.
- The Social Action Team, with George Neff serving as chair, provided leadership for the church’s participation in several ongoing social action projects: Capital Area Food Bank, the Austin Area Homeless Project, Project Transitions, Inside Books, UNICEF, and Adopt-a-Family.
- A Ministerial Search Team, chaired by Betty McCreary, convened to write a job description for a part-time organizing minister and to search for a candidate with experience in growing churches.
- In October, the church held its first annual weekend Women’s Retreat, chaired by Dianne Purcell. Twenty-four women spent a wonderful weekend at Cedar Lodge on Lake Buchanan.
- The church grew to 89 members, then lost four (three due to divorce and one because the church wasn’t meeting the needs of young, single adults).
- An average of 70 adults and 14 children attended Sunday morning services.

2004 Memorable Events

- On January 1 the Board of Trustees hired the Rev. Douglas M. Strong for a period of one year to serve as a part-time organizing minister.
- On April 3 Rev. Strong presided over the church’s second Celebration Dinner, held in the auditorium at El Buen Samaritano. Several members of the church, all gourmet cooks, provided a delicious, candle-lit, Mediterranean meal. The tables were decorated with elaborate and sometimes bizarre center pieces created by church members.
- Adult Programming included *Articulating Your UU Faith*, *UU 101: Who and What Are We?* *Evensong*, *Estate and Retirement Planning*, and *Cooking X3*.
- On May 1 the church held its first all day spiritual retreat, facilitated by Rev. Strong.
- On May 4 the church received word that Rev. Strong had been incarcerated and subsequently received a sentence to serve a term of six months. After much

discussion, the Board provided Rev. Strong with a two-month severance package. The entire experience was deeply troubling for the congregation, and, in response, Sara Barker and Eileen Baker coordinated a Saturday morning Healing Circle, led by two professional facilitators from Seton Cove. The Circle was held in the Maloney Room at St. Edwards with approximately 30 people attending.

- Social Action projects included Food Packets for the Homeless, coordinated by leadership of Bill Walker with help from the Youth Group, the Capital Area Food Bank coordinated by George Neff, chair of Social Action, Second Offering, held once a month to support a non-profit organization, and Adopt-a-Family for Christmas.
- In August, the 100th person joined Wildflower Church!
- Fun and Fellowship events included a family picnic at Dick Nichols Park, *Pizza/Video Nights* in members' homes on the second Saturday of the month, *Moveable Feast* potluck dinners held in members' homes on the third Saturday of the month, and *7@7* potluck dinners held in members' home.
- Kelly Ramsey coordinated the first "New Member Get-Together."
- The church's fourth three-week canvass, chaired by Betty McCreary, raised \$78,000.
- The second annual Women's Retreat, again chaired by Dianne Purcell, was held at Cedar Lodge at Lake Buchanan, with approximately 24 women attending.
- The church held its first very successful Christmas Bazaar on November 7th under the leadership of Kathy Davidson.
- A new sound system, provided and operated by church member, Alex Nelson, greatly improved amplification of the Sunday service.
- By the end of the year, the church had a fund balance of \$87,024.32 in various accounts.

2005 Memorable Events

- As of January 31 the church had accumulated a fund balance of \$101,183.36 in various accounts.
- On March 6, Wildflower held its Charter Sunday, an event featuring seven members of the clergy who brought words of praise, encouragement, inspiration, and wisdom. Participating were: Rev. Peter Morales from a UU Church, in Golden, Colorado, Rev. Davidson Loehr from First UU Church, Rev Chuck Freeman from Live Oak UU Church, Rev. Timothy Tutt from United Christian Church, Rabbi Samuel Barth from Temple Agudas Achem, Rev. Rabia Clark from the Sufi society, Rev. Barbara Coeyman, a newly ordained UU minister, and Hannah Wells, a UU ministerial intern, along with Joe Sullivan, president of the SWUUC. One hundred and six (106) adult members were eligible to sign the charter. The congregation's children signed a Children's Charter.
- Wildflower Church was recognized as a newly affiliated UU congregation at the annual UU General Assembly, held in Ft. Worth, Texas on June 23-27, 2005. It was a very proud moment when Kellis Richter, past president of Wildflower Church, carried the Wildflower Church banner in the opening parade. Twenty-four Wildflower congregants attended GA.

- In March, six covenant groups were meeting regularly: *Living with Spirit*, *Hibiscus* and *Bluebonnet* (two Elder Covenant Groups), *Men's Covenant Group*, *Spiritual Pilgrims*, and a *Facilitators Covenant Group*. The Elder Covenant Groups celebrated their fifth anniversary.
- Fun and Fellowship events included Heritage Club, a monthly book discussion group, monthly Video and Dessert Nights, and End-of-the-Month parties.
- The Social Action and Children's Religious Education Committees co-sponsored a new program, *The Children's Collection*, to provide needed items for non-profit organizations such as SafePlace and the City of Austin Animal Shelter.
- Social Action projects included the Children's Collection on the second Sunday of the month, Second Offering on the third Sunday of the month, Food Packets for the Homeless, Battery Recycling, and Hands on Housing.
- Wildflower hired its first Director of Religious Education, Penny Burnette, a member of the church, who began her 15-hour a week job on June 1st.
- Under the leadership of Penny Burnette, DRE, the Religious Education Program provided the following curricula for children: *Stories about God* for grades 1-3 and *God Images* for grades 4-6. Youth in grades 7-12 grade watched and discussed *Our American Roots*, a ten-part video series on UU history, and participated in Evensong, a Spiritual Cinema Circle, and social action projects.
- In May Wildflower held its first annual SWAP, a silent auction and wine party, in the Maloney Room at St. Edward's University. Under the leadership of Dianne Purcell, the SWAP netted about \$4,000.
- In July Pat Pore, Membership Team chair for two years, stepped down and Alice Sessions took over the Team as the new chair.
- As of July 31, the church had \$120,702 in cash and securities, of which \$92,942 was reserved for general operating expenses.
- Wildflower's third annual Women's Retreat, chaired by Pat Laird and attended by 39 wild women, was held October 7-9 at the Port Royal Ocean Resort.
- The three-week fall Canvass for 2006 raised \$87,024.32, contributed by 118 pledge units.
- With leadership from George Neff, chair of Social Action, and Judy Morgan, Wildflower Church joined Texas Impact and the Texas Freedom Network. After three years as chair of Social Action, George Neff handed over leadership to Judy Morgan and Bill Walker, the new co-chairs of Social Action.
- The Wildflower Church congregation voted unanimously to publicly oppose a proposed state constitutional amendment that prohibited same sex marriage and civil unions. The congregation participated in marches and co-sponsored a half-page ad in the Austin Statesman.
- The church leased a small office space at 4422 Packsaddle Pass in October.
- During a special offering, Wildflower Church raised \$2,700 for victims of Hurricane Katrina.

- At the Winter Semi-Annual Meeting, the congregation elected a three-member Endowment Committee to manage the church's Endowment Fund. Gary Lichtenstein, leader of the effort, served as chair with Dan McCreary and Paul Fryxell serving as members. When Paul moved to California, Nancy York was appointed to fill his term.
- At the end of the year, the church had a fund balance of \$118,818.72 in various accounts.

2006 Memorable Events

- During the January New Member Signing Ceremony, eleven people joined the church, for a total of 124 members.
- In February the average attendance at worship services was 122 adults and children. In February 2005, the average attendance at worship services had been 101 adults and children.
- By February 28, the church had accumulated \$128,075.71 in various funds, including \$15,910.29 in the Endowment Fund.
- A new covenant group, *Parent Covenant Group*, was formed under the leadership of Liz Hiles-Fisher.
- In March, seventeen Wildflower congregants marched in Austin's "Stop the War" protest, part of a world-wide protest against the war in Iraq.
- Zach Carter volunteered to moderate Wildflower's informal email list, set up by Peter Knight.
- Ten Wildflower congregants attended an Interfaith Care Alliance conference to train teams to assist people with AIDS or cancer. Mike Wilkes and Kathy Murphy led the effort.
- A Youth Group was re-formed with the intent of offering more programming for youth and recruiting youth advisors.
- In April, Dagmar Grieder hosted an elegant brunch in her lovely home to raise funds for the Building Fund.
- In May the congregation adopted a Three-Five Year Strategic Plan with three goals: 1) call a minister by October 2007, 2) purchase a facility in 2008 or 2009, and 3) hire part-time office staff after the minister starts. The plan also called for transferring \$25,000 from the operating fund to a ministerial fund and \$50,000 from the operating fund to the building fund. The Long Range Planning Committee, co-chaired by Jane Wilson and Carol Knight, led the effort.
- A Ministerial Search Committee was formed, chaired by Kathy Murphy, with Jan Austin, David Burnette, Tom Moran, and Alice Sessions serving as members. Tom Moran, Dagmar Grieder, and Bill Phillips were appointed to serve on the Negotiating Team.
- The Membership Committee, chaired by Alice Sessions, sponsored a picnic for newcomers on July 2 at Garrison Park, and more than 20 people attended.

- Penny Burnette, DRE, coordinated a summer curriculum for children's religious education classes, *UU World Travelers*, during which Wildflower congregants introduced children to places they'd visited, focusing on cultural traditions, food, and craft projects.
- Hugh Nations volunteered to serve on the newsletter editor team, joining Holly Cooper and long-time editors Sheila Jennings and Peter Knight.
- The UUA recognized Wildflower Church as a Welcoming Congregation, committed to being inclusive and expressive of the concerns of bisexual, gay, lesbian, and transgender persons. Sara Barker, Bill Walker, and Barbara Carrington coordinated Wildflower's journey to becoming a Welcoming Congregation.
- Wildflower Church sponsored a booth at Austin's Pridefest for the second year.
- In July Dagmar Grieder and Gay Phillips coordinated the second annual SWAP, held in Dagmar's beautiful home, to raise funds for the Capital Fund.
- By July 31, the church had accumulated \$145,726.48 in various accounts.
- The Social Action Committee continued to sponsor ongoing social action projects and initiated new projects, including a monthly forum following the worship service on the third Sunday of the month and a quarterly street clean-up project. The Committee also coordinated Wildflower's participation in the Austin Area Interreligious Ministries Voter Registration Project.
- In August, attendance at worship services averaged 117 children and adults. In August 2005 the average attendance was 111 children and adults.
- Adult Programming included Unplugging the Christmas Machine, Playing with Your Digital Camera, UUA-UNO, Spiritual Practices, the Artist's Way, and Evolutionary Spirituality.
- Under the direction of Penny Burnette, DRE, the RE program offered the following Bible based curricula: *Super Heroes* for K-2nd grade and *Jesus and His Kingdom of Equals* for grades 3-5 and grades 6-8. The Youth Group undertook a multi-media project that involved interviewing church elders.
- When the RE program outgrew the available space at SASAC the Board approved renting classrooms in near-by Starbright Preschool. Lynn Jocelyn led the effort.
- The Fun and Fellowship Committee initiated quarterly after-church potlucks under the leadership of Ellen Atha, chair.
- The church's sixth annual three-week canvass, chaired by Dianne Purcell with help from committee members Gay and Jim Patterson, Gary and Ginger Lichtenstein, and Jan Austin, tried a new approach gathering pledges with Neighborhood Dessert Parties, which raised approximately \$88,000. The committee selected the theme, "Make a Joyful Noise," and provided noisemakers so the entire congregation could make lots of joyful noise during the two Sunday services of the canvass.
- The fourth annual Wildflower Women's Retreat was held at Roddy Tree Ranch in Hunt, Texas on October 20-22, with 50 women registered to attend!

1999 PLANNING AND FEASIBILITY TASK FORCE

Chair: Carol Knight

Members: Drew Bridges, Greta Fryxell, Toby Heidel, and Gayle Hudgins.

2000 STEERING COMMITTEE: UUS OF SOUTH AUSTIN

Chair: Jenny Benedict

Members: Kim Flannery, Gerry King, Carol Knight, Kelly Ramsey, Dawn Spinale, Larry Strassner, and Lisa Sutton

2000 ORGANIZING COMMITTEE

Acting President: Carol Knight

Members: John Beeler, Karen Beeler, Charles Bisantz, Mark Briody, Susan Briody, Martin Bryant, Barbara Dickens, Carol Fisher, Paul Fryxell, Harold Gilbert, Gerry King, Peter Knight, Gloria Obregon, Gay Patterson, Pat Pore, Kelly Ramsey, and Kellis Richter.

2001-2002 WILDFLOWER OFFICIERS

President - Carol Knight, Vice-President - Kellis Richter, Treasurer - Charles Bisantz, Secretary - Pat Pore

WILDFLOWER CHURCH BOARDS OF TRUSTEES

2002-2003

Officers:

Kellis Richter, president, Karen Beeler, Vice-President, Roger Stricklin, Treasurer, Eva Andries, Secretary

Members:

Susan Briody, David Burnette, Mary Cullinane, Tom Moran, Pat Pore

2003-2004

Officers:

Kellis Richter, president, Tom Moran, treasurer, Mary Cullinane, secretary, Eva Andries, treasurer

Members:

David Burnette, Rosemary Maclsaacs, Betty McCreary, Sheila Rae, Bill Walker

2004-2005

Officers:

Betty McCreary, president, Sheila Rae, vice-president (replaced by Bill Walker), Lois Brown, secretary, Eva Andries, Treasurer

Members:

Rosemary Maclsaacs, Jean McDermott, Dianne Purcell, Shirley Viola

2005-2006Officers:

Tom Moran, president, Sara Barker, vice-president, Lois Brown, secretary, Eva Andries, treasurer

Members: Ellen Atha (replaced by Dagmar Grieder), Jeff Hampton, Jean McDermott, Dianne Purcell, Karen Schrupp

2006-2007Officers:

Carol Knight, president, Sara Barker, vice-president, Gay Phillips, secretary, Jan Austin, treasurer

Members:

Jeff Hampton, Dagmar Grieder, Tom Moran, Karen Schrupp, Nancy York