

## **How our history has shaped the UiF congregation of today Oct 20, 2018**

I was tasked with providing in 10 minutes 20 years of UiF history highlights. I decided to narrow it down a bit and talk about how our history has shaped the UiF congregation of today.

A recent book I was reading said it this way:

'Stories connect our histories and memories to our future.

They help us remember how we got to where we are.'

So here is our story....

In the early 1990s many congregations on the NW side realized they were into maintenance mode with no time, energy or money for mission. There was no critical mass of people in a church to move beyond this. Many of these churches had worked together over the years with joint programs and in some cases joint staff. In Nov 1995, recognizing a common thread among the churches, a Transition Team of representatives from the congregations was formed to explore options for a mission driven church. Forums and retreats were held for the exchange of information. As the possibility of one consolidated church started to emerge a vote was held in each church to determine their interest in continuing in the process. The 15 original churches participating dropped to 9. A Leadership Team replaced the Transition Team in May 1997 with 2 representatives from each of the 9 congregations. This team defined the proposal to consolidate, lead information sharing and discussion sessions, set Easter 1998 as the date for the consolidation. A binding vote was held in each congregation and 1 of the 9 churches dropped out. Although 8 churches voted to continue to the consolidation, for many it was with heavy hearts and with minds that acknowledged the necessity.

Lent 1998 became the time for letting go - letting go of pastors, staff and buildings and the churches that many had been baptized in, grown up in, married in. On Good Friday the 8 congregations were officially closed and on Easter Sunday a new congregation was born.

Then the real work started. Set up a structure with a council, a constitution, a pastor and staff, a mission statement, strategies and priorities, and ministries. Find a physical building to house our congregation. Do all this while the congregation was mourning their loss - loss of the former congregations, loss of trust, loss of knowing everything and everyone, loss of the way it was always done. It was an emotionally charged environment.

A Sacred Space team searched out properties for the new congregation and found the former Vail Printing shop - the building we are in today. It was well suited based on its location (visibility on a busy street and not tucked away as a church on the corner in a residential area), for the availability of parking and for its accessibility (being all on the ground level).

Members were invited to see the property being considered for purchase. It wasn't this beautiful renovated space we have today. It was cement floors, brick walls and the barrel truss ceiling. And the people loved it. Both young and old. They saw the potential, it was a contemporary space for a contemporary new church, and most importantly it would be UiF's own space. There was a near unanimous vote to purchase the buildings. To me this was the turning point for the congregation. Our building unified us.

In September 2000 calls were made to and accepted by Pastor Greg Moser and Pastor Dawn Mass Moser. In Nov 2000 the pastors were installed and the new building was dedicated.

Work turned to developing Vision and Values for the congregation.

***Our Vision became***

United in Faith is a community of united disciples  
offering gifts to the world that can be found no place else.

Pretty audacious, eh?

***Our Values became***

Weekly worship  
Children and Youth

Every person who walks through our doors  
The Gospel of Jesus  
Prayer  
Faith Development  
Caring for the Elderly  
Feeding the Hungry

A constitution was developed that included a separation of power between council and ministries. We became a 'permission giving' congregation. No longer would ministries have to get approvals from council. Council was responsible for governance issues only - such as hiring, property, finances - and ministries did ministry.

I'm going to stop here in the history story - you can find much more on our website - and now talk about how these early years have shaped who we are as a congregation today.

### **We are a welcoming church**

Visitors have told us many times we are a very welcoming congregation. Of course we are. Remember that value of 'every person who walks through our doors'. We have been there - we had lost everything and were strangers in our own congregation. We became a Reconciling in Christ congregation when we developed and accepted a Welcoming Statement. We welcome all. Period. No exceptions. We share God's gift of love, acceptance and grace.

### **We are a giving church**

Another of our values was 'feeding the hungry'. When St Cyprian's Food Pantry needed to find a new location they were invited to use our west building and they remain there today. The former congregations had supported St Cyprian's and that tradition was carried over. We remain a big supporter with funding, donations of food and gifts, and volunteers.

Our 20-4-20 activities highlighted our desire to reach out to the community and share our celebration and blessings with them. Our congregation has always answered the call to give generously.

## **We are a flexible and open church**

We had to give up many things upon consolidation as all of the congregations had their own traditions and ways of doing things. The new church formed new ways of doing things for the new church. It was difficult but we lived through it. Having gone through the changes of consolidation you find you accept change more easily. It opens your hearts and minds to new things, new ways of doing things. 'but that is the way we always have done it' does not live here.

Being a 'permission giving' congregation allows ministries to try new things without bureaucratic approval. Ministries consist of people with a passion for the ministry. Got an idea for a new ministry? Let's try it. Got an idea for a new way of doing something? Let's try it.

Perhaps on another note of flexibility and openness...with the consolidation none of the then current pastors of the former congregations were eligible for the pastoral role in the new church. We all lost our beloved spiritual leaders. Pastor Greg in addition to being our pastor was a chaplain in the Illinois National Guard. This necessitated being away for weekend meetings, summer camps and 2 - 1 year deployments. Despite his many absences we supported him in this role to share his gifts with a wider audience. Perhaps the act of losing all our pastors made us less possessive. We also openly welcomed the pastors who stepped in to fill the absences of Pastor Greg.

*(wrap up)*

So, that is our story for today. It is a story of great loss and of great gain that we celebrate today. I hope you have some insight into the making of UiF and will be a part of our journey, making history, for the next 20 years.