

Fall 2002

# The Magi Star

Proclaiming new churches & transformed lives

## Time to Refocus

### Organizational Changes; New Giving Levels; Newsletter Re-launch

The mission of the Magi Network is to ensure that everyone whose life would benefit from the practice of Unitarian Christianity has access to and room in

a nearby congregation that meets their needs (by-laws, Section 1.1).

In our last two meetings we on the Magi board have refocused on our purpose, and we did so in response to two new realities:

1. After years of waiting, we now have not one but *three* people wanting to start new UU Christian churches: board members seminarian Derek Parker and recently-ordained Ron Robinson, and the Reverend Dee Graham in Florida.
2. A review of our income and spending for the last four years has led to a decision to spend less on administration and more on church growth.

In the light of this we have decided to set as our goal

keeping our costs for phone meetings, mailings and checking account fees to ten percent of our budget. To that end, we will hold only four conference calls per year. We will use email more and meet more frequently in a chat room. We have cancelled our bulk permit mailing order and our American Express card.

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As part of our refocusing, we have renamed the newsletter *The Magi Star*, will reduce mailings to twice a year and print in black and white. *The Magi Star's* mission is to inform members about our church starts and progress with Epiphany Church in Fenton. Its motto says it all:

*Proclaiming new churches & transformed lives.*

Finally, as we have reorganized on the board, we are asking our members to recommit to the effort of planting new UU Christian churches. We have set new giving levels for support of church starts:

Frankincense - \$25-99

Myrrh - \$100-499

Gold - \$500-999

Pilgrim - \$1000-2499

Angel - \$2500-9999

Star - \$10,000+

Look for a mailing soon in which you will be asked to choose a giving level, using the new model.

There's no doubt that there is a great thirst among some UUs (and many who don't yet know of us) for the kind of hope which Christian faith can bring and we are energized by the interest of these church planters as well as by the ongoing life of Epiphany.

May God bless us in our new direction.

*Carl Scovel, Board Member*

# The Miracles Continue

## Update on Epiphany Community Church

It has been nearly ten years since planning first began on what would become the first intentionally Christian Unitarian Universalist church to be chartered with the UUA since the merger – Epiphany Community Church. Those of us on the organizing committee had only a vague idea of what we wanted to accomplish, and little or no idea of the challenges we needed to overcome. Yet ten years later, a UU Christian congregation is firmly established here in Fenton, Michigan.

Over the years, we have met and overcome problems that most new UU congregations face. We found a place to worship, in the fine Community Center in the center of Fenton. We eventually created a suitable office and activity center by converting an old pizza place into a useable space. We grew from a handful of people to nearly 70 members today. We found, and lost, and are again looking for a full-time, settled minister. We acquired those things that a church needs, like hymnals, office equipment and the like. We built up, tore down and re-did the church organization until we

got to one that functions as the servant to our ministries, and not a straightjacket that prevents ministries.

We also faced and overcame challenges related to our unique status. Being the first congregation to be born as Christian, Unitarian and Universalist, we needed to articulate a coherent, meaningful and honest belief system that brought together these three elements into one (without using the word “Trinity,” of course). We were blessed with ministers up to the challenge, and have a message that speaks to many in our community. As a UU Christian congregation, we were challenged to find our place in two different worlds that were sometimes hostile: the world of Unitarian Universalism and the “Body of Christ.” Finally, we had to find a voice in our local community that said who we were, and why all were welcome to worship with us.

In trying to find words to describe where we are today, this phrase of Dickens comes to mind: “It was the best of times. It was the worst of times.” In many ways, Epiphany has never been stronger. Our solid core of members is dedicated to Epiphany’s mission and stubbornly insistent that we will grow and prosper. Our organization is functioning as it should, and largely staffed. Our finances are

solid, and we are putting money aside to help pay the settled minister when he or she arrives. In spite of ministerial problems (we do not have an interim minister yet this year), the worship committee has put together our usual high-quality worship services each Sunday. We launched a capital campaign, which has raised \$40,000 in just three months, and we are searching for a building.

This is not to say there are not problems. We were left suddenly without an interim minister when the person we were considering turned out not to be a suitable match. We currently have guest ministers doing Sunday services, and lay members are doing many of the other administrative functions of the minister. We are also dealing with growth-related difficulties. We had just grown from a family-sized to a pastoral-sized congregation when we lost our settled minister, and have had to deal with this transition on our own. We are currently working with the book, *Behavioral Cove-*

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## Publishing Information

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nants from the Alban Institute, and will have a congregational retreat in January to help us deal with some of the interpersonal strains that growth brings.

Our Pulpit Committee is actively seeking a settled minister, and whoever is found will arrive to become the spiritual leader of a congregation excited and ready for new things. While the last four months without a minister have seemed a bit like wandering in

the wilderness, new talents and strengths have been discovered. We are seeing new visitors, and are expecting to add several new members on November 10th. We are primed, poised and ready for great things. We await the spiritual leader that God will lead to Fenton when the time is right. Then, in the words of that great Universalist hymn, what “wonders still the world shall witness?”

*Dean Drake, Board Member*

churches here are mostly orthodox and creedal and dogmatic in their understanding of God and Christ. At the same time, many of the growing churches here, like elsewhere, are revolutionary and progressive in their understanding of Church and outreach and meeting the culture where it is in order to transform it. I want to help shape the new church to be fully progressive in its theology and in how that theology is lived out in the life of a religious community and the lives of those touched by the community. Too often our more liberal Christian churches are stuck in modes that worked well for them in the 1950s when they were dominant in society.

MAGI: But what will that break from the 1950's be like? What will this new church be like?

RON: Who knows for sure what it will be like? I like the old saying that the way to make God laugh is to tell God your plans. But, the Vision includes reaching out to meet people where they are. It is an ancient way to carry forth this ancient faith into new days and new ways people experience life. And today people don't experience life as one-size-fits-all. Difference and not sameness is the norm. That is why, unlike 50 years ago, there are 50 kinds of cheese in your store; 50 movie screens at the

## Minister Wanted!

The Pulpit Committee of Epiphany Community Church is looking for a Christian minister interested in continuing Jesus' ministry into the 21<sup>st</sup> century. We are an intentionally Christian UU congregation, looking for a spiritual leader grounded in Christianity but able to bring into Christian worship lessons from other religions and the secular.

If interested, check out our congregational profile on the UUA Settlement Office Web site, or write:

Heather Kirkpatrick, Pulpit Committee Chair  
Epiphany Community Church  
137 South Leroy Street  
Fenton, MI 48430

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the new dynamics of church life, people will drive up to 30 minutes to go to a church where they can be transformed by a connection with God. Within 30 minutes of Owasso, there are 790,000 people. It is also an area very close to the town of Turley where I grew up and where my family has been since around the first world war.

MAGI: Why try to plant a new UU Christian church in Owasso?

RON: Because there isn't one. Some of the more liberal Christian churches in other denominations that are often found in communities aren't found here--that provides an opening for our distinctive heritage. Theologically, the

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theater; 50 different models of phones and televisions (not to mention 500 different television channels); 50 different kinds of what used to be called simply "sneakers." Worship needs to reach out in the same way. This may mean having a very traditional introspective high liturgy eucharist (that many teens might actually like!) as well as having a higher-stimulus worship with video images, MTV-type music, lots of participation and testimonies about how God has moved in someone's life (as opposed to terminally long list of church announcements that are only there for insiders!). The formats will be varied and flexible as part of their DNA so as the generations change the church can change to continue changing them with the everlasting good news of the gospel of Jesus. As Theodore Parker wrote in "the transient and permanent in Christianity" back in 1841, the church that would do for the first century didn't do for the fifth century, and the church of the fifth century didn't do for the 15th century, and the church of the 15th century didn't do for the 19th century. In our day when change itself has changed, by becoming revolutionary instead of evolutionary, the church that did for 1991, for example, won't do for 2003.

MAGI: We've heard that as far as religious education is concerned, you'll be using some of the new Montessori RE programs, like those used in the UUA by Epiphany Community Church in Fenton, MI. Why run in that direction?



RON: For the same reasons as above, when it comes to education people are now getting used to it being structured to take into account the multiple learning styles and different gifts we have, and for it to be participative and interactive and based on story. I don't think this is only true of school-aged children either. It is one of the reasons the traditional "Sunday school" won't work anymore and is being replaced by small group ministry that has its "curriculum" emerge from people's lives instead of being handed-down by denominational officials. Building families of faith is the best way to raise our children and so helping adults grow in spirit and wisdom will be a primary focus, and building intergenerational commu-

nity in a place with little sense of connection and "sense of place." Churches that have embraced Montessori-style programs like Godly Play, and those who are using the "workshop rotation" model (see [www.rotation.org](http://www.rotation.org)) are our starting points to do this, but we strive not to be caught in any box. Education, like worship, is a means to an end--imitating and initiating the "kin-dom of God."

MAGI: Does your new church plant have a name yet?

RON: Yes. Epiphany. Period. Epiphany stands for a sense of illumination, of discovery, a Damascus Road and Emmaus Road experience. An experience that moves you into a new way of life, that sends you out on a new journey to follow God. As it relates to the holiday of Epiphany when the Magi discover the baby Jesus, it means an experience that sends you on a journey to find God and serve the spirit of Jesus in places where you and the world least expect it. This kind of "turnaround" experience, this "Owasso" experience will be foremost so we don't want to have a name that seems to focus on maintaining an institution as much as it does focus on mission. We say we are "A New Movement of God's Spirit for a New Millennium, a Free Christian Church in the historic Unitarian and Universalist tradi-

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# Will you bring your gift and join the Magi Network today?

If you are interested in becoming a member of the Magi Network, or would like additional information, please fill out this form and mail it to **P.O. Box 468, Fenton, MI 48430-0468** or email the same information to **magi@universalistchurch.org**.

## Annual Giving Level:

- Frankincense (\$25-99) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Myrrh (\$100-499) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Gold (\$500-999) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Pilgrim (\$1000-2499) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Angel (\$2500-9999) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- Star (\$10,000+) \$ \_\_\_\_\_
- I'm not ready to join yet. **Please contact me** to answer my questions by (circle one:) phone, email, post.

## Contact Information:

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Address (or  Use Address on Label on Reverse) \_\_\_\_\_

Phone and/or Email \_\_\_\_\_

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tions." Here church is meant in its original intention of a people of God who are called out by the Spirit of Freedom to change the world.

**MAGI:** When it is all said and done, what is your hope as a pastor for those who come to Epiphany of Owasso, OK?

**RON:** In short--Christ, the Spirit of Freedom. What I mean by Christ is the liberating loving Spirit of God experienced through Jesus' gospel of inclusion and transformation. Christ was the title used as the human response to Jesus. It was created by the community which itself was formed in response to the life-affirming story of his ministry, death, and resurrection. As there were always a variety of understandings about that story, so it is today. So, as a free church, our commu-

nity will be open to, and blessed by, people with a variety of preferred terms for the Spirit of the Holy. I think, in the spirit of Jesus, we must be open to meeting people where they are. You don't have to consider yourself a Christian to be part of our mission. For those wishing to find a way to connect with the Holy, and to deepen that connection, we will provide a place to be in authentic community, a community that has the "spirit of Jesus" in its heart even as it upholds and intersects with the "light of truth" as found in personal experience. Using the gospel as our jumping off point, we will focus on Celebrating God, Connecting with Others, and Changing the World--to me that is what it means to be "in Christ."

*To be a part of this historic move within Unitarian Universalism, extra Magi Network contributions can be made to*

*benefit our new church in Owasso, OK.*

*Checks can be made out to the **Magi Network for Epiphany of Owasso** and sent to the Magi address.*

*For more information, the full Vision Plan and for updates, you can email Ron at [RevRonRobinson@aol.com](mailto:RevRonRobinson@aol.com).*

## Spread the word about the Magi Network!

- There is lots of information on the Web at [www.magi.uni.cc](http://www.magi.uni.cc) -- including our pamphlet.
- Contact us at P.O. Box 486, Fenton, MI 48430-0468 or [magi@universalistchurch.org](mailto:magi@universalistchurch.org).
- Use the form above.



**Contributing to the Renaissance of  
Unitarian Universalist Christianity**

Fall 2002

## **UU Christian Church Start in Owasso, Oklahoma**

### **Interview with founding minister Ron Robinson**

*At a recent meeting of the Magi Network board, the Rev. Ron Robinson was commissioned for church planting work in Oklahoma. Ron is a recent graduate of The Phillips Divinity School in Tulsa, OK and was recently ordained by All Souls Church in the same city. In order to introduce Ron and his commission to Magi Network members, an interview was conducted on October 10, 2002.*

**MAGI:** You've received a call to plant a new UU Christian church in Owasso, OK. However, we've heard that

this is not the first church plant you've ever been involved with. What can you tell us about your first attempt at church planting?

**RON:** In 1991 my wife and I organized the UU Congregation in Tahlequah, OK. We used the grassroots model of the old Universalists on the frontier. We spread the word and began holding meetings and grew the church. A lot of people in other UU churches thought we were crazy. It was a town of 11,000 and the seventh poorest county in a generally poor state. According to old formula of there being one likely UU for every 100 people with a college degree, we should have had at most a church of 11 people. Our first meeting we had 35.

**MAGI:** And what can you tell us about Owasso, OK where you plan to plant your next church?

**RON:** Owasso, which is a word that means "turnaround" in Cherokee, is a growing town north of Tulsa. It is now a suburb overlaid on a town that was formed a little more than 100 years ago. In the past decade it grew by some 68 percent and was the fastest growing community in Oklahoma. It is made up largely of skilled laborers and business professionals and their families. They are mostly Baby Boomers with teenage children. Overall, our recent demographics research calls them "Middle American families." More conservative than the national average on politics, with an independent streak. Faith and family very important. Still, some 40 percent are not strongly or even somewhat involved in their faith. In Owasso and the surrounding communities that are the primary service area for the new church there are some 110,000 people. Of course, in

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