

UUCP Ministers



Lon Ray Call Organizing minister 1946 to 1947

Lon Ray Call was our organizing minister. He was the American Unitarian Association's minister-at-large. Born in Advance, North Carolina, Call trained as a Baptist, entered the Unitarian ministry in 1923 and served churches in Louisville, Kentucky; New York City, and Braintree, Massachusetts before entering denominational work in 1933 and becoming minister-at-large in 1941. During the decade he served in that position, he personally founded thirteen churches. The fellowship program he conceived and initiated in 1947 resulted in the formation of 216 lay-led religious societies in its first decade. The First Unitarian Church of Phoenix arose out a relationship between Rev. Call and a woman he had first met when both lived in the Midwest, Isabelle Johnson.



Laurence Plank Sept 1947 to Aug 1949

The Rev. Laurence Plank was called to be the first settled minister of the new church in March 1947. He was born in Sauk Center, Minnesota, attended Minnesota and North Dakota universities and received a masters degree from Columbia University in New York. He had served churches in Duluth, Minnesota; Dayton, Ohio, Rochester, New York, Omaha, Nebraska and St. Louis. He was an eloquent speaker and attracted many people to the church. He was instrumental in establishing a Sunday evening inter-racial discussion group at the YWCA that may have influenced the Arizona legislature by constitutional amendment to desegregate Arizona Schools. He was a Theist but left the ministry in 1949 to write and to marry the former pianist at the church.



John K. Findley Sept 1949 to Aug 1951

In the fall of 1949, Mr. John Findly was called as minister. He had attended the Crane Theological School of Tufts College and served churches in Carlisle, Massachusetts and Bangor Maine, but before coming to Phoenix had been Assistant Director of the Unitarian Service Committee. In theology and social philosophy, Rev. Findly's liberal humanism presented a contrast to Lawrence Plank's theistic conservatism. He spoke often on social issues of the day and at first the church grew under his leadership meeting at Kenilworth School. When the school board denied permission to use the building services were held at the Valley Garden

Center at Encanto Park then the YWCA until both of those organizations denied them access. The church decided in 1950 to build their own facility on land donated by members. Findly and members built the building that was dedicated in the spring of 1951. Because Findly, along with other Unitarians, signed a letter to President Truman in 1950 protesting US intervention in Korea he became a victim of the Red Scare and the church was accused of being a 'communist front organization.' In spite of Mr. Findly's dedication and effort, by the late summer of 1951 the members were forced, ostensibly for financial reasons to accept his resignation. The real reasons may have been his Humanism and unsupported accusations of Communist leanings. The membership carried on for the next year as a lay church providing its own programming.



Charles C. Donelson, Jr Sep 1952 to Jun 1954

In the fall of 1952, the church called another minister: the Reverend Charles Cooper Donelson, Jr. Nicknamed Don, he had had an interesting background, having served as a student minister at West Bethel Chapel in West Bethel Maine and as minister at the Bell Street Chapel in Providence, Rhode Island and the First Church Unitarian in Athol, Massachusetts where he and his wife had adopted a Latvian boy. Donelson had also been a math teacher and worked in the newspaper business. After a tour of the prison in Florence, he criticized it as un-Christian. He also complained that the Arizona Council of Churches didn't admit Unitarian ministers or Jewish rabbis. He encouraged the city leaders to provide justice regardless of race, color or creed. In a follow-up letter, he spoke out against the racism in the city. He received phone threats for his progressive views. France Bishop said he was 'not happy in this pioneer atmosphere.' It appears the pioneer atmosphere was racist. Other records indicated there was a lack of enthusiasm in the membership for his ministry, that many thought he didn't have the personality or skills to be an effective minister. He resigned and took a position in Massachusetts. Lay leadership ran the Phoenix church until the new minister arrived in the fall.



Dr. E. Burdette Backus Interim minister Oct 1954 to Apr 1955

There was a desire on the part of the church membership to have a minister big enough for them. Their wish was fulfilled in the person of Dr. E. Burdette Backus. In 1933, he was an original signer of the Humanist Manifesto and founder of the First Humanist Society of Chicago. From 1938 to 1948, he was the much revered Minister of All Souls Unitarian Church of Indianapolis. Dr. Backus was living in retirement in San Diego when the AUA asked him to take an interim appointment in Phoenix. Many members had read Dr. Backus' articles in the Christian Register, forerunner of the Unitarian Universalist World. The matter of Theism vs. Humanism was still a point of considerable controversy within the church and those who wanted Dr. Backus because of his outstanding background as a minister carefully soft-pedaled his humanist interests. He accepted the appointment, came to the church in October 1954 and proved to be a great preacher and spiritual leader, uniting the church. Bill Bishop said, "Dr. and Mrs. Backus arrived in Phoenix and plunged into the tasks of their new parish with all the ardor of a young couple serving their first church. Early in his

Phoenix ministry Dr. Backus saw the possibilities of a great Unitarian Church for Phoenix, and his leadership roused his congregation from the depths of discouragement of earlier failures and frustrations.” He served as interim minister from October 1954 to April 1955 when he had to resign because of illness. Sadly, he died from cancer on July 7, 1955. Again lay leadership ran the church until the fall.



Dr. Edwin C. Broome Sep 1955 to Sep 1956

In the fall of 1955 the members called Dr. Edwin Broome to be their minister. He had a PhD in Biblical Literature and the History of Religion from Brown University. He had served churches in Dighton, Massachusetts; Pawtucket, Rhode Island and Belmont, Massachusetts before taking a break from ministry in 1949 to be the Chief of Student Exchange and Religious Affairs in the Office of Military Government of the US, Berlin Sector and active duty as a Major in the US Air Force . He returned to the ministry when he accepted the call to Phoenix.. In an autobiographical summary he submitted to the AUA, he said, “In 1955, I received a call from the Unitarian Church of Phoenix, Unfortunately, it was immediately apparent upon my arrival in Phoenix that it had been a mistake to go to the particular church, due to the extreme humanism and ultra-social radicalism which represented the ruling spirit of the organization. ”He notified the FBI when a group of church members had started a chapter of the American Humanist Association. There was clearly dissension in the church membership with Broome accusing a group of wanting to keep the church a small social club and the other side accusing him of Gestapo tactics and of turning the church into a monument to McCarthyism. He resigned in the summer of 1956, preaching his final sermon on September 23, and took a position with the Near East Foundation. Frances Bishop said ”The church was still struggling to find its way.”



Charles Wing Interim minister Sep 1956 to Jun 1957

Frances Bishop said in her history, “Again, distress signals went out to the American Unitarian Association in Boston. They sent us Mr. Charles Wing, another retired minister who was serving churches on an interim basis. Mr. Wing stayed one year while our pulpit committee was engaged in trying to find a permanent minister.” Charles A. Wing was born in 1883 in Montpelier, Vermont, He attended Dartmouth, Meadville Theological School and spent one year on a Crufts Fellowship at the University of London. He had served churches in New Hampshire, Maryland, Massachusetts, Missouri and Colorado. He served as a Minister-at-Large for the AUA from 1955 to 1958. He preached his first sermon in Phoenix on November 11, 1956. In his history sermon Fritz Hudson said “With Edwin Broome and Charles Wing, we simply survived. By the time we arrived at our 10th anniversary, we had managed to grow by fits and starts to 176 members but we showed the deep scars of our struggles. And we were looking again for a minister.”



Arthur W. Olsen Sep 1957 to Jan 1963

Arthur W. Olsen was born in Gloucester, Massachusetts in 1903. He was active in Unitarian youth groups and decided he wanted to be a Unitarian minister. Having had to drop out of school in the 9th grade to help support his family after the death of his father, he enrolled as a special student at Tufts University's Crane Theological School. He served churches in Lincoln, Billerica and Melrose, Massachusetts before going to Toledo, Ohio and serving in that church from 1942 to 1957. Having been in a large church for so many years, he and his wife, Catherine decided they wanted the challenge of building up a small congregation. Even though there was controversy about his being an avowed Humanist, he became the minister of the Phoenix church in September 1957. By October the Sunday morning congregation outgrew the hand-built church on Pasadena and began meeting at the Jewish Community Center. In two and a half years, by May of 1960, active membership had doubled to 369 and Olsen challenged the congregation to build a large church on 10 acres on Lincoln Drive. The new building opened in March 1961, the year of the Unitarian-Universalist merger. By the fall of 1962, active membership had grown to almost 600 adults. But after just 5 and a half years of ministry, and still five and a half years from the expected retirement age of 65, he resigned to become the District Executive of the Pacific Southwest District of the UU Association. Once again, lay leadership ran the church from Jan 1963 to Sep 1963.



Raymond G. Manker Sep 1963 to 1990

Ray Manker was ordained in 1948 and served churches in Wayland, Massachusetts and Riverside, California before becoming the Executive Secretary of the Pacific Southwest District from 1958 to 1963 when he accepted a call to become the minister for the UU Church of Phoenix. Ray was told that his first big job would be to help spin off a new church in Tempe which he did, serving both churches until the new congregation could hire its own minister. He also oversaw the building of new classroom space at the Phoenix church. Adult programming grew as well as did the commitment to civil rights. In the spring of 1965, Ray answered the UU Association's call to join Martin Luther King's March from Selma to Montgomery, Alabama. In 1968, Ray Manker reported, "We enter our 21st year strong and mature. Our Adult Programs are blazing new trails in church programming, . Experiments with our Sunday morning services and our children's programs indicated an open mindedness essential to growth and change." Sadly, by the late 70s there was a controversy over the acquisition of land for a retreat center, now called SAWUURA, and in 1985 a group of members started a separate church, the Desert Unitarian Universalist Society of Phoenix which was dissolved in 1992. The Phoenix church continued to grow and be involved in issues of the day such as promoting democracy in Central America, fighting for nuclear disarmament and equal rights for women. Ray retired in 1990, after 27 years of ministry at the church, having become well-known in the Valley for his social and political activism.



Bettye A Doty Interim Minister 1990

Bettye Doty was born in 1921 in Indiana. She was raised and had lived the “country club social scene” in Southern California, active in little theater and political volunteer work. She was president of the Young Republican Women and on the Republican coordinating council in Glendale. Then she moved to Marin County, California and found the Unitarian Church there. She was the executive secretary to the minister then became assistant minister. She had always done a lot of counseling. She graduated from Starr King and was ordained as the associate minister of the Marin Fellowship of Unitarians in San Rafael in 1972. She served churches in Marin County and Columbus and Cleveland Ohio and UU Societies in Rockland and Westchester, New York and was the vice president of the Northern Metropolitan District. She had had a connection to 1st Church before becoming its interim. She did her internship in the Phoenix church. In 1977 she had participated with Ray Manker and Alice Patterson in a service there focused on social revolution. In her interim minister’s report in the 1991 Annual Report, Bettye said her job was to find out what needed fixing and with the cooperation of the board, staff and committees, see that it got fixed before the new minister arrived.



Fritz Hudson 1991 to 1998

Fritz was born Frederick G. Hudson in Evanston, Indiana in 1949. He was reared an Episcopalian in Chicago but pursued the Unitarian ministry in college. He received his BA at Cornell College in Mt. Vernon, Iowa in 1971, his Master of Divinity at Harvard Divinity School in 1976, after a two year stint in the Peace Corps in North Africa, and his Juris Doctor at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill in 1981. He had been an educator and community organizer from 1972 to 1979, served as a minister at the UU Fellowship in Wilmington, NC, the UU Churches of the North Hills and South Hills, Pittsburgh, PA and the UU Society of Iowa City from 1976 to 1984. After those ministries he worked as an attorney from 1985 to 1989. In 1990 he did ministerial internship supervisor training at Meadville-Lombard. An article on his arrival in Phoenix stated, “The Arizona church liked his preaching and Hudson liked its history of social action.” In 1997, the church celebrated its Golden Anniversary, changed its name to the UU Congregation of Phoenix and a congregational survey turned up a great deal of dissatisfaction with the congregation’s ministry and minister. This led to a congregational meeting to determine the future. The congregation decided to retain the minister on probationary status. Shortly thereafter Fritz decided to take a position with a congregation in Lincoln, Nebraska and UUCP began seeking an interim minister.



Linda Bunyard Interim Minister 1998 to 2000

Linda K. Bunyard was chosen to be Interim in 1998 and served until 2000. She had earned a BA at the University of Colorado in 1974 and a Master of Divinity at Starr King School for the Ministry and was ordained in 1991. Before UUCP she had served as Interim or Minister at the UU Church of Joliet, Illinois, the UU Congregation in Eau Claire, Wisconsin and the UU Fellowship of Laramie, Wyoming. Under her guidance, the congregation adopted the Mission Statement and the Shared Ministry Covenant, which reflected not only our dreams for the ministry of our congregation but also our commitment to being an integral part of that ministry. A Ministerial Search Committee was formed in the spring. Also in 1999 the front of the sanctuary was remodeled as a memorial to Audrey Engelen.



John E. Burciaga 2000 to 2005

John Edward Burciaga earned a BA at Southeast Missouri State University in 1958 and his MDiv, Midwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. In 1961. He was ordained as a Baptist minister in 1962. He received certification at, Meadville Lombard Theological School in 1965. He served UU churches in Bethlehem, PA, Sandy Springs, GA, Clearwater, FL and was interim minister at Bethesda, MD and Adlphi, MD before becoming the Acting District Executive of the Joseph Priestly District in Wilmington, DE. He became the settled and first Latino minister at UUCP in 2000. His overview: “An important component of ministry during my tenure were initiatives on behalf of migrants. On many occasions they were part of our church services and other on-site special events. We were also leaders of an ecumenical program through the AZ Attorney General's office to protect migrants as well as the elderly in the Phoenix area. I was privileged to receive a special award from the Mexican Consul's office, presented by the Consul himself for thee efforts. Also of significance was renewing and strengthening UUCP's Partner Church program, with special help from Linda Lu Burciaga, leading not only to re-connection with our sister congregation in Transylvanian but hosting a meeting of national PC leaders.”



Jean Wahlstrom Interim Minister 2005 to 2006

Jean L. Wahlstrom earned a BA from Colby College in 1974 and an Mdiv from Harvard Divinity School in 1992. She was ordained in 1993 and served as Associate Minister in Burlington, IA, Interim Minister in Clarklake, ME, Minister at Portland, ME and Interim at Flint, MI before coming as Interim to UUCP in 2005. She worked with the staff, board and committees to deal with the controversies over the building renovation project and the change to our accounting system. She left to take a position in Syracuse, NY.



Roberta Haskin Interim Minister 2007

Roberta M. Haskin earned a BA from Edgewood College in 1969 and a Mdiv from the United Theological Seminary in 1997. She was ordained in 1997 and served as Chaplain in hospitals in Robinsdale, Edina and Minneapolis, MN. She served as Consuling or Interim Minister in Menomonie and Madison, WI, Marysville, WA, Kitchener, ON Canada, Las Vegas, NV before coming to UUCP in 2007. In her interim minister's annual report in 2008 she said, "I have led Sunday services, rites of passage, and covenant group facilitators. I have preached, pledged, offered pastoral care, supervised professional staff, and attended Board and committee meetings. I helped to hire a volunteer and membership coordinator. New committees have been formed, notably Green Sanctuary, and Publicity and Membership have been re-formed.." As a trained interim she said when she came that it was her role to either rock the boat or calm the waters, whichever was most needed. After leaving UUCP in 2008 she served churches in Santa Monica, CA and Amado, AZ and retired in 2010.



Susan Frederick-Gray 2008-2017

Susan Frederick-Gray earned a Bachelor of Science in Molecular Biology at the University of Wisconsin in 1997 and worked briefly in the field of genetic research in St. Louis, MO and Cambridge, MA. She earned

an Mdiv from the Harvard Divinity School in 2001. She was ordained in 2002 and served as minister at the First UU Church of Youngstown, OH from 2003 to 2008. In April 2008 she was called to be our first settled woman minister. From her campaign website: “She serves as the spiritual and executive leader of a congregation of over 400 adults, 90 children and youth During the eight years of her ministry, the congregation has grown by over 36% in both membership and financial operations. She has also led two successful capital campaigns. Organizing for justice has always been central to Susan’s ministry. Because of her strong relationships and partnerships with community-based organizations in Phoenix, in 2011, current UUA President Peter Morales hired Susan to lead the Arizona Immigration Ministry. In this role, she was central to the planning and implementation of the 2012 Justice General Assembly in Phoenix. Susan was responsible for key political relationships with grassroots migrant rights groups and their connection to the UUA. She was described as “the face, voice and power” behind Justice GA which culminated in a 2000+ person candlelight vigil outside of Tent City Jail.” In 2016 she was invited by the UUA Presidential Search Committee to run for UUA President and won in June 2017, leaving UUCP to take up her new duties.



Margret A. O’Neall Interim Minister 2017-2019

Margret A. O’Neall is a Unitarian Universalist Accredited Interim Minister, and a Professional Transition Specialist with the Interim Ministry Network. Margret entered intentional interim ministry following a 35-year career in areas including organizational analysis; facilitating discernment, strategy and vision development; leadership and management systems; conflict mediation; and development of community collaboration. Margret has served interim ministries in Sarasota, FL, Buffalo, NY, Schenectady, NY, and currently serves in Phoenix, AZ.

Margret holds Master's degrees in Sociology (Michigan State University) and Community Development (University of Missouri), a PhD in Organizational Sociology (University of Michigan) and a Master of Divinity (Meadville-Lombard Theological School). She holds a certificate in management from the International City Management Association (ICMA). She is certified in Appreciative Inquiry (including as a trainer for the Appreciative Leadership Development Program) with the Corporation for Positive Change, and has completed Church Consultant/Facilitator training with the Center for Congregational Health. She has been a member of IMN since 2007, and is a member of the Transitional Ministers Chapter of the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association. Her commitment to transitional work in congregations grows out of her love for the deep and compelling work of organizational transformation: defining and centering on mission, creating healthy relational patterns, building leadership competence, developing ever greater power to transform both the people inside the walls and the world outside.