

FIFTY YEARS OF THE
(WOMEN'S) ALLIANCE

Tennessee Valley Unitarian Universalist Church

2931 Kingston Pike, Knoxville, Tennessee

March, 2001

Preface

Prior to the fall of 1997, TVUUC's records were kept in the history room (in file cabinets) and in two closets (in dusty boxes stacked floor to ceiling) in the buildings at 3219 Kingston Pike. Although the church historians had organized and labeled the materials in the file cabinets, little attempt had ever been made to reduce the contents of the closets; they still contained all the canceled checks, two or more financial statements for every month of the church's 48 years, multiple copies of Sunday orders of worship and newsletters, and up to four copies of the minutes of board of trustees meetings. They also had some items that had not been seen for years and were assumed lost, such as the Alliance minutes for the years 1949-1982.

Anticipating the move to the new building, we began sorting through this accumulation of records, throwing away the duplicate copies, bringing together different bundles of board minutes and annual reports, arranging chronologically the contents of the various categories, and in general, making the records more usable for someone looking for information.

Benefitting from the organization of all these materials, I have consulted 30 years of Newsletters, 33 years of minutes of Alliance meetings, all of the annual reports, and some other miscellaneous materials in compiling this history of the Alliance. The main problem was the great quantity of interesting material. TVUUC's history is a treasure trove of struggles, outstanding personalities, successes and failures. In researching the Alliance, I kept finding so much material about other fascinating people and events that it was difficult to keep my nose to the grind.

Karen Yarbro, August 1998

FIFTY YEARS OF THE
(WOMEN'S) ALLIANCE
AT THE
TENNESSEE VALLEY
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

The Women's Alliance will be organized in Knoxville on Wednesday, March 16 [1949] at 2 p.m. in the lounge of the YWCA. All women interested in liberal religious work, whether members of the church or not, are welcome. We have been looking forward to this important step in the development of our church life. Remember the date. Bring your friends. The organization meeting will be followed by refreshments and an opportunity to get acquainted.

Five weeks after the charter members organized the Tennessee Valley Unitarian Church, a group of women, led by Lucy Call, wife of the acting minister, met to form the Women's Alliance. Ruth Westergaard was elected president; Edith Voorhees, vice-president; Marion Wood, treasurer, and Jeanne Reeve, secretary. Dues were set at \$2 annually. The objective was to bring the members into association for the purposes of "quickening their religious life, strengthening their church, increasing their effectiveness in the community, and furthering the purposes of the Unitarian Fellowship.

For the first two years the Alliance met in members' homes, holding first a business meeting and then listening to a speaker, sometimes from within the church membership, often from without. Refreshments provided by the hostess invariably followed.

In May of 1950 the Newsletter carried what would eventually develop into the annual report. The paragraph on the Alliance read:

Alliance activities during the past year included the following services to the church: arranging flowers at services, maintaining the literature table and lending library, greeting visitors and providing coffee hours at services, sponsoring a parish dinner at the YWCA, and planning a picnic and square dance in May.

Because of its restriction to "services to the church," this review is notable for the activities it omits. The great bulk of the time and work of the early Alliance was for people or institutions outside of the church. In the spring of that first year the group collected and mended 342 pounds of used clothing before sending it to the Unitarian Service Committee in Boston. They continued doing this for a number of years, the clothes eventually going to displaced persons or European, Hungarian, or Korean relief, wherever the Service Committee wanted to send them.

Although the members of the Alliance met once a month for a program, they gathered twice or three times a month for sewing. Announcements urged them to bring their own sewing implements (and portable machines if they owned them), and they raised \$50 to buy a machine for their own use. They met to sew at 9:30, stopped for a sandwich around noon, and then continued sewing until they had to go home. They provided clothes for the Knoxville Family Bureau, the Red Cross, and the Unitarian Service Committee, one time using six sewing days for just one project. Various organizations would supply cloth. In the fall of 1949 they made six dresses, eleven slips, and two

aprons for girls six and eight years old; a little later, they completed 48 garments for babies and children, and in 1953, a total of 92 pairs of slippers. In Knoxville they visited several hospitals and rest homes, taking magazines, comic books, and snacks.

Originally, their efforts to make money were hampered by the congregation's having no permanent property: everything had to be carted in and out of the Sunday meeting place. They sold Christmas cards, held a parish dinner (70 people were served at the YWCA for \$1.25 each for adults), and sold tickets to a Knoxville Symphony Orchestra pops concert (receiving a healthy commission). But after the acquisition of Unitarian House in the fall of 1950 gave them a permanent site in which to keep things and to hold programs, fund raising projects increased.

So much for groups which meet at most

Just once a week--no more.

We turn now to the distaff side:

A very hardy corps!

The Alliance has a project for

Each morn, each noon, each night.

Their group is small but never un-

Der-estimate their might.

Each week they read; sometimes they feed,

Discuss and study--sew,

And when the pinch is put on them,

Those ladies raised the dough!

(from the 5th Anniversary Celebration)

There were several methods used regularly over the next ten years to raise money. The sale of food topped the list. Bake sales (at which items were requested from all church women, not just Alliance members) occurred regularly; the one in April of 1951 offered, among other items, apple and pecan pies, home-fried doughnuts, and sour cream spice cake. Church dinners were scheduled several times a year. They also sold plants, once in the fall for shrubs, house plants, and perennials (people thinning out their gardens would package their offerings for sale, often filling specific orders) and at least once again in the spring. The bake sales usually netted around \$25, the church dinners \$50 to \$100, and the plant sales \$25 to \$50.

More valuable for raising money were the rummage sales. Possibly the first was held in March, 1954. Clothing and household items were collected at Unitarian House and then transferred down town to a building at the corner of Jackson and Central streets. This sale netted \$190. Rummage sales were usually held twice a year until 1958, when the Reeves offered the location at 802 State Street to be used on a "weekly basis" (Saturday mornings?); later the rummage ran continually, necessitating many Newsletter requests for "more rummage."

But it was the bazaars which required special efforts of the Alliance members and which made the bulk of their money. They were held in the fall so that people could use them for their Christmas shopping. At the first one in 1951 there were twelve Horsman dolls along with wardrobes sewn by Alliance members, wool ties from New Mexico and silk ones from New Jersey on consignment, aprons, fresh baked goods, white elephants, candy, and a hot dog and baked bean supper (\$.50 for adults). This particular bazaar cleared over \$440.

In 1952 the bazaar added a used books table, a display of Beacon Press books and titles, and a clothing exchange; in 1953, an auction and entertainment ("Custer's Last Sit" acted by the high school youth under the direction of Edith Voorhees); in 1954, straw dolls and broomstick horses.

Perhaps all that effort at one time was too much. In 1955 the bazaar was broken up into sections. A dinner was combined with a white elephant and plant sale. Later, members of the Alliance met to make fruit cakes; these were sold with jams, jellies, Christmas decorations and calendars. This system continued for several years.

The bazaars were a project of the Alliance, but other members of the congregation (particularly women) helped in many of their endeavors, in the case of the bazaars by providing items to sell. It should also be mentioned that not all Alliance members worked equally hard; as in any volunteer organization, a dedicated core carried the main burden. The rummage sales, for instance, depended very heavily on Jeanne Reeve and Jeanne Williams.

The Alliance women worked hard and made money, but the organization never had a lot of money in its treasury. Here is a partial list of where it went in the first ten years:

For Unitarian House: kitchen curtains, refrigerator, hot water heater, double kitchen sink, \$500 on the principle of Unitarian House building debt.

For the church office: addressing machine, Norelco dictating equipment, mimeograph machine.

For the new church building (3219 Kingston Pike): \$2,000 worth of kitchen equipment, slip cover and drapery fabrics, water fountain.

The list above illustrates how involved Alliance members were in the church. They cooked and cleaned in Unitarian House, so they would be among the first to note a particular need in the building. They also helped with secretarial duties, especially in the production of the weekly Newsletter, so they knew of office needs.

Very early in its existence, the Alliance had affiliated with the Unitarian General Women's Alliance (forerunner of the Unitarian Universalist Women's Federation). Little more than two months after its formation, the Alliance elected Ruth Westergaard to be its delegate to the General Alliance Annual Meeting to be held in Boston during the week of May 22, 1949. In the following years, TVUC's Alliance always chose a delegate, allotted funds to help cover the delegate's expenses, and considered carefully the resolutions to be discussed at the Annual Meeting.

The tie between the Alliance and the UUWF was quite strong in the years 1975 to 1977 when Shirley Brooks was an official member of the UUWF Board. But later, realizing that sending annual dues to the UUWF never brought any benefits to the TVUC Alliance (program ideas from the UUWF never seemed to fit), the women voted to sever the connection.

In 1953 the Alliance sponsored the establishing of a hostel at Unitarian House, using 40 cots donated by the American Friends' Service Committee. Here, groups such as students or foreign visitors to TVA (often inter-racial groups) needing overnight lodging, could be accommodated. And along these same lines, the Alliance and other church members served 90 students in 1952, when the University of Tennessee invited the Ohio State University Symphonic Choir to give a concert on the campus but refused them permission to eat in the campus cafeteria because several of the choir members were black.

Most of the activities of the Alliance were meant to help people less fortunate than they or to provide needed services to the new congregation or to buy things needed for the new

church building. But the Alliance monthly programs were for the members themselves. In the early years programs tended to be concerned with various social agencies, like the Knoxville Children's Bureau, Fellowship House, or the welfare resources of the community. There were programs on various aspects of Unitarianism and Universalism, school integration, food poisoning, mental health, bird migration, literature of the New Testament, the League of Women Voters, East Tennessee Labor News (by Lucille Thornburgh, church charter member and News editor), Knoxville College (by President James Colston). There were book reviews by Ruth Graf, travelogues, musical performances, talks by university faculty members and the minister, and combined meetings with the sisterhoods of the two Jewish congregations in Knoxville and with the Women's Alliance of the Oak Ridge Unitarian Church.

As plans for the new building progressed, the Alliance took an active part. They examined the "pre-preliminary" sketches of Hubert Bebb, the architect; they visited other churches to inspect their kitchens; and they started bridge luncheons where anyone attending paid \$1 to play bridge, canasta, or Scrabble, the money being set aside to purchase furnishings for the new building. They supervised the all-church potluck supper in February 1957, before the congregational meeting authorizing the awarding of the building contract. That fall they inspected the new building, especially the kitchen, and in January they had a work party to pack the dishes and kitchen equipment for the move. They bought fabric for draperies for the lounge, which member Janet Porter made. They used the ninth anniversary of TVUC's founding as an excuse for a celebration dinner after the service, with the proceeds to help pay for the kitchen cabinets and equipment.

The tenth anniversary was a significant milestone for TVUC. Not only had the church survived in spite of many obstacles, it had owned one building and built another. The tenth anniversary also signified the end of the American Unitarian Association's help with the minister's salary:

All's well that ends well, so they say.

In ten years' time we've grown

To such an independent state

That now we're on our own.

The AUA that nurtured us

Through ten tumultuous years

Now shoves us from the nest and says,

"You're on your own, my dears."

So this is Independence Day;

Today we graduate.

Congrats to all TVUC

On this historic date!

(Probably by Billie DeGrand)

For the celebration the Alliance served a turkey dinner. With dishes to serve only 100 people, the church had to buy \$400 worth of additional equipment. Serving the previous dinner in the new building had not run smoothly, so Ruth Buckley, cafeteria manager on campus, was consulted as to menus and ways to increase the efficiency of the new kitchen. Tickets to the dinner were sold in advance; children were not welcome. An Alliance work party met to clean and prepare the building, and by the end of the celebration, the Alliance treasury was \$200 richer.

Plant sales and bake sales continued. The big rummage sales were still run from the location downtown, but choice items were brought to the room above the minister's office (the choir loft after 1976) for congregation members to examine and try on for size.

The bazaars in the early 1960s were large affairs again. An art auction was added, with artists in the congregation providing the works to be sold. The November 16 Newsletter carried the following advertisement for the sale in 1961:

There was a young couple from Frim

With a budget decidedly slim,

“I’ve got it,” said she, “the Bazaar at TVUC

Will make Christmas giving less grim.”

So imagine their pleasure

At finding holiday treasure,

Goodies and gifts, glowing and gleaming,

A down-to-earth start for Christmas dreaming!

Ethereal trees of nylon net,

Frosted candles . . . the prettiest yet.

Hand made gifts that mean so much,

Aprons and trays with the Alliance touch.

Pinafores and bibs in the smallest sizes,

Animals and bean bags for junior surprises,

Fruit cakes and cookies, even beans in a jar

Made from our own recipes on Mary Starr.

Portraits in charcoal with real personality,

A Bazaar to be sure with verve and vitality.

Charles Counts' pottery . . . an original oil

Seasonally tuned for giving royal.

Please join our young couple, browse awhile;

Stay for supper too, served cafeteria style.

That's November thirtieth at TVUC,

Ends at nine--begins at three.

For several years, members of the Alliance appeared on the Mary Starr Show (a locally produced cooking show on WATE-TV, Channel 6) before the bazaar, showing some of the items to be offered and even demonstrating how to bake some of the desserts.

In 1965 members of the Alliance started preparing in May for a "bigger and better Alliance Bazaar" to raise money to help furnish the new addition to the church; all women in the church were asked to contribute. The October Newsletter announced that "Every lady in the church has been named to a Bazaar Committee. You may expect a call from your Committee chairman soon." It was the first Family Bazaar, with baby sitting, activities for older children, and separate eating arrangements during the supper hour (adults in one place, children in another). There were 14 committees with a total of 134 people assigned them, and it made a new record profit of \$1008.27.

One job the Alliance continued doing for many years was a periodic cleaning of the church, usually before the resumption of services in the fall, and again before Easter. The kitchen was also their responsibility. But these tasks, especially the constant need for cleaning the kitchen, wore their patience thin. Edith Voorhees penned the following for the May 20, 1969, Newsletter:

Someone's in the Kitchen with Dinah. Actually, Something's in the kitchen with Dinah, and it is deep sinks full of dirty dishes, pitchers, pans, cutlery and ashtrays left by other persons. Hapless Dinah--it could be you--has to ready the church kitchen for some upcoming event, and she is no less hurried than those who shirked their responsibilities earlier! Get the picture??? This is your kitchen. Keep it clean. Keep it orderly. . . You are your kitchen's keeper: Share the care!

If this reminder brought about an improvement, it didn't last. The minutes of every Alliance meeting in 1977-78 include some mention of the mess in the kitchen.

The year 1969 must have been a kind of watershed. In September that year, the board president asked the Alliance to work with the house committee in organizing a work party to clean the church. Perhaps this was the straw that broke the camel's back. The Alliance agreed to help, "but henceforth money must be set aside in the budget for more adequate janitorial services." Occasional cleaning parties still formed after this, but they were drawn from the congregation rather than just the Alliance.

Late in the 1960s the Alliance took on a new task: providing birthday parties for the patients in Peterson Hall at Eastern State Psychiatric Hospital. In 1969 this meant taking birthday cakes and candles, tablecloths and napkins, flowers, Bingo, prizes, and a gift for each of the 18 honorees. The hospital supplied the punch.

The Alliance could afford to add a new activity at this time because most of its former endeavors had been taken over by other church groups. A social committee sponsored most evening potlucks. Various youth groups were conducting bake sales after services. Paid secretaries were doing the clerical work and Newsletter preparation (although in the 1990s help came again from Alliance members in the mailing preparation). Caterers were handling wedding receptions. Various other people were decorating the church for Christmas. The general budget included an amount for the minister's discretionary fund (provided by the Alliance at \$260 a year in the 1960s). Books, new and used, for sale or loan, were handled by the bookshop committee (until that committee expired and the Alliance again started having book sales in the 1990s). Sales of Unitarian Universalist Service Committee Christmas cards and, later, cards of Alvaro Morales were outside the Alliance's hands. Fellowship dinners came to be served in restaurants or by the high school youth or caterers; reservations were handled by the hostess committee or the canvass committee or the church office.

As the original group of women in the Alliance got older and their number smaller, the future of the organization began to look doubtful. In 1978 there were 13 members present in September, 12 in November, and only nine in January. New members in the church had little interest or time to become involved in the Alliance (although retired new-comers to the church did find it a congenial group and became active). It seemed that the best the Alliance could do was to try to maintain a viable group, to continue running the rummage sales, and to fund a few special projects, particularly supporting Libba Keenan in her work with three different Vietnamese refugee families.

Then, later in the 1980s the Alliance bounced back. Men were now welcome, and their numbers increased over the next 15 years. Larger numbers of the congregation were retiring and joining the Alliance. Many of these members were heavily involved in other church activities, such as Fish, the caring committee, the forums committee, selling Kroger certificates, and readying the Newsletter for mailing. In the past these activities operated under the Alliance's supervision; now they were divided up among other church groups, but Alliance members still provided much of the loyal, sustained effort.

Several members of the Alliance also helped Betty Schilling study the needs of the new kitchen and make the hard decisions as to how the limited money would be spent. In this regard, a few pieces of equipment such as the stainless steel kitchen cart, the plate caddy, and additional china were purchased second hand while other items were acquired new. Some attempts at improving the kitchen efficiency met with only limited success; bundles of the old coffee mugs removed from the kitchen and given to the rummage sale, kept reappearing back in the kitchen!

Another more recent contribution of the Alliance arose from the fact that many of its members have been with the church such a long time. The group thus serves as a source of continuity and experience, even of wisdom, according to Lynn Strauss, the present minister; this can be of great value to the church staff and officers. And having such a close, long-term relationship with the congregation, members of the Alliance are

also uniquely equipped to help keep things going in the summer, when some of the staff are away.

And so, as we approach the millennium, the Alliance continues to be a strong, active group in the congregation. Surely the loyalty and concern for the church, held by its members, and the flexibility and good will of the group as a whole, will assure its vital existence for another 50 years.

Alliance Leaders

1949-1999

Ruth Westergaard Carol Redmon (Krauss)

Anne Kennedy Shirley Brooks

Lois Ellen Southworth Nancy Hook

Edith Voorhees Judy Heidel

Virginia Kurko Chris Benson

Janet Porter Karen Yarbrow

Libba Keenan Deb Mitchell

Peggy Sood Marian Witmer

Frani Jones Kathleen Joyner

Jimmie Benedict Evelyn and Torsti Salo

Becky Chaffin (Till) Betty and Chuck Schilling

Elizabeth Freeman Margaret and Henry Krogh

Janice Clarke