



A Brief History of Emerson Unitarian Universalist Chapel

At a St. Louis Area Unitarian Universalist Council meeting on February 19, 1984 the first meeting was held to discuss the creation of a new Society in West County. Both major UU churches in the St. Louis area - First Unitarian Church in the city and Eliot Chapel in Kirkwood - were reaching capacity. Emerson Chapel held its first service September 9, 1984. The Chapel began with \$50,000 donated by First Unitarian Church and Eliot Chapel. On February 24, 1985, Charter Sunday, eighteen people signed the Membership Book.

Our Founding Members

Barbara A. Baker	John W. Leet	Cindy Holten	Carol Hutchison
Pat Baker	Jayne Bury Leet	James C. Holten	Dean Petersen
Dewalt Fowler	Barbara Jensen	Kristen Lassen Hunt	Roland Promisy
Janie Fowler	William Jensen	Bruce Hunt	Jerald vanNatta

The ministers of First Unitarian Church, Rev. Earl K. Holt and Eliot Chapel, Rev. John Robinson, preached alternating months the first year to ensure a speaker for each Sunday. Services were held at 9:30 a.m. so that each minister could return to his own church for his 11:00 a.m. service. Emerson Chapel held its first canvass in March, 1985.

September 7, 1986 Emerson members called our first half-time minister, Martha S. Newman. She served Emerson for three years (she retired to ME). In 1990, the first full-time minister, Leonetta Bugleisi was called.

In 1992, after four rented spaces, Emerson Chapel purchased this permanent sacred space on 3.5 acres in Ellisville, MO. Emerson has had two intern ministers, Alicia Grace and Susan Heller. The Rev. Danny R. Reed was our half-time minister for 2000-2001. Rev. Ruth Gnagey served as our half-time minister from 2003-2005.

During the course of our first 15 years, Emerson grew from those 18 Founding Members to more than 60 members, greatly expanded their programs, hired a part time Religious Education Director and a part time Chapel Administrator. With the explosive growth in West County, we found ourselves on the verge of expanding our physical facilities to meet the needs of our growing membership. The process of expanding the Chapel facilities began when the *Long Range Planning Committee* identified both ministerial and facility expansion goals for the congregation. In 1998, the *Bricklayers Committee* began looking into the details of the building expansion and produced a **Program Statement**, a guiding architectural document that identified the essential elements for our new, expanded facilities. The Emerson congregation approved the **Program Statement** in February by a unanimous vote and authorized the hiring of an architect to turn our statement of ideas and goals into a real architectural design.

By 1999, we had plans which supported the needs of a 300-member congregation with a full-time minister. They included adequate office and administrative space, RE classrooms, parking and sanctuary seating for 150 - all of which was to be handicap accessible - and to allow for further expansion in the years to come. In short, they were the plans to guide Emerson Chapel's growth toward a full-service church. All we needed to fulfill this dream, which was really just the culmination of the dream started 15 years before, was money - and so was born our Capital Campaign with its goal of \$350,000. We arrived at our present design, by architect Robert Acree, in the fall of 2000. We then spent the next several months finding our contractor, Tom Copeland, acquiring a loan commitment from Bank of America and establishing a budget which the congregation approved on August 29, 2001. We were on our way. We broke ground on October 14, 2001 and held our first official service in the new Sanctuary for **Homecoming** on September 8, 2002.

At the May 2005 congregational meeting, we called our new minister, the Reverend Krista Taves. We hired our new Director of Religious Education, Lauren Lyerla January 2006. Shortly after this, our new office manager, Beth Harmon joined our staff the spring of 2006.

We look forward to the new faces who will come through our doors and stay in this welcoming place. There is much to be done in the future but we are happy to have come this far. As Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The reward of a thing well done is to have done it." And, so we have!