

Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria

Director of Lifespan of Religious Education

Peoria, Illinois | MidAmerica Region

About Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria

Contact Methods

Website: <http://www.peoriauuchurch.org>

Meeting Address

Same as mailing address

Mailing Address

3000 West Richwoods Boulevard

Peoria, IL 61604-1142

This Congregation does not have a 501(c)(3) status of its own.

Congregation Life

Describe your Congregation and its culture:

The Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria encourages and celebrates diversity. Everyone is welcome regardless of age, race, ethnicity, religious background, gender identity, sexual orientation, or socio-economic status. Our congregation spans all ages, income levels, and walks of life, including singles, couples, and families with children. A few congregants are lifelong Unitarian Universalists, but most are from other religious backgrounds and hold a wide variety of religious beliefs—theist, atheist, humanist, Christian, Jewish, Islamic, Buddhist, pagan, and others. There is no “right way” to act, dress, think, or believe to fit in. While the congregation is composed of individuals who are different in many ways, together we form a caring community of mutual acceptance and support as we learn, grow, work, play, and celebrate with one another.

Our church is a busy place. There are very few times during the day or night, including weekends, that there isn't at least one gathering, and more likely two or three. Some of these are “business” meetings dealing with church affairs. With over three dozen committees addressing topics such as aesthetics, land stewardship, and welcoming new members, committee meetings fill a significant portion of the calendar every month. Many other gatherings are educational, inspirational, or service-directed get-togethers for both members and nonmembers. At least one Adult Religious Education session occurs weekly. Several outside groups, such as ACLU and People's Action, use our facilities for their meetings and events.

Music is central to our worship experience and many of our events. The pandemic has been most painfully felt with the absence of singing in our sanctuary. As of this writing, the choir rehearses

briefly while masked and sings for a recording (while also masked) which is then used during the multi-platform Sunday worship. An accompanist is available each Sunday either in person or recorded.

In pre-pandemic times, the choir would sing two to three times a month except in the summer. For those Sundays when the choir isn't singing, other musicians are invited to perform. During the December holidays, choir members and other interested congregants had a tradition of caroling at nursing homes or residences for less mobile church members. Throughout the year, members of the Music Ministry Program would visit seriously ill congregants to provide music for them in their homes, at a hospital, or the Hospice Facility. Our sanctuary has excellent acoustics and has attracted a wide variety of soloists and ensembles for performances on numerous Sunday afternoons. We miss live music!

Over the past decade, the congregation has created three documents—a covenant, a mission statement, and vision statements—that are meant to help us embrace our diversity and guide our caring efforts for the good of our members and for the community at large. These statements promote our continuing endeavor to reach our highest aspirations.

The current vision statements and accompanying goals were adopted in 2017. They help us take the correct action at the appropriate time to meet the challenges facing our members and the larger community.

Our Vision and Goals Statement

VISION 1: We are a force for healing and social justice in our community.

Goal 1: Continue to be a center for education and dialogue on social justice.

Goal 2: Provide a direct impact on meeting community needs through strong social outreach programs.

Goal 3: Strengthen our commitment to social justice by publicly speaking and acting for justice causes that our congregation supports.

Goal 4: Improve communications with the congregation related to social impact issues and opportunities.

VISION 2: We invest in our continued growth because we believe the Unitarian Universalist message will bring people to our doors.

Goal 5: Actively encourage continued growth by increasing the church's visibility and inviting others to experience our church.

Goal 6: Develop the physical, organizational, and leadership capacity to serve 410 members.

Goal 7: Fully fund the annual operating budget, including our UUA/MidAmerica Region fair share, property reserve, and the expanding needs of our growing congregation.

VISION 3: We are a vibrant community where people of all ages and backgrounds feel connected and inspired.

Goal 8: Further enhance our youth program.

Goal 9: Continue to grow our young adult programs.

Goal 10: Enhance lay pastoral ministry programs and resources.

Goal 11: Increase opportunities for members and friends to develop deeper connections with one another.

Goal 12: Enhance opportunities for meaningful worship experiences.

Your Congregation's mission:

Our Mission

In 2010, the congregation formally adopted this mission statement, which reflects the UU Principles and serves as our own unique expression of what we aspire to be and do:

Embracing Freedom

Loving Inclusively

Growing Spiritually

Healing Our World

Embracing Freedom signifies that religious freedom is a foundation of our Unitarian heritage. We don't just acknowledge diversity of belief—we celebrate it. We support each person's search for truth, wherever it may lead.

Loving Inclusively reflects the Universalist side of our heritage. We believe that everyone is welcome, everyone has worth and dignity, and everyone deserves love.

Growing Spiritually reminds us that our church is a place to nurture our spirits. We strive to be a caring, supportive community and to help one another learn and grow.

Healing Our World expresses our desire to do all we can to make the world a better place. Respect for the environment, community outreach, and social justice work are some of the ways we engage in this part of our mission.

Our Covenant

The following covenant statement, adopted in 2008, describes the way we will journey together.

As a community of love and hope, we covenant together:

To welcome with open minds and hearts all who gather here—newcomers, members, and friends.

To nurture one another with caring words, kind actions, and compassionate concern.

To share ideas freely, listen willingly, disagree respectfully, and forgive easily.

To inspire one another, youngest to eldest, to thrive in body, mind, and spirit.

To work cooperatively toward our goals and openly appreciate each other's unique gifts.

To enrich our congregational life by participating, leading, pledging, and giving.

To celebrate life, and savor its diversity, beauty, and creativity.

Describe and provide examples of how your Congregation lives its values:

Outreach activities providing time, material, and monetary assistance:

Loaves and Fish

Loaves and Fish is a program offered by the First United Methodist Church of Peoria. Volunteers from various faith traditions serve a noon meal, distribute clothing, and assist with a basic medical clinic. Our church provides volunteers on the second Saturday of each month.

School Outreach Program

Our congregation has an ongoing and growing relationship with Pleasant Valley Middle School in Peoria. 98% of the students are at or below the poverty rate. Volunteers secure food and supplies from local agencies and individual donations. Every week the program provides 70 bags of food for 66 families. Volunteers also manage space at the school for items such as clothes, sanitary supplies, and underwear.

Share the Plate

Before the church stopped passing the plate during the pandemic, one half of the Sunday cash offerings were given to a charitable organization or service agency which is doing work in the larger community that aligns with our church's mission, vision, and goals. The groups must submit an application detailing the need for and the use of the funds collected by the church on their behalf. The Social Impact team expects to restart the Share the Plate program in 2022-2023.

Faith Coalition for Racial Equity

This coalition is a growing body of faith communities benefitting from white privilege who advocate dismantling institutional racism and are vocal and visible allies of Black Communities in Peoria through joint action. FCRE formed in 2020 after Black leaders in Peoria called for more action from predominantly white religious organizations. A longer explanation of FCRE is at the end of this congregational record under the description of the congregation's religious, political, and social context.

Community justice organizations for which the church provides space, facilitation, and monetary assistance:

Illinois People's Action

Advocated for the recently passed Illinois Future Energy and Jobs Act; holds public forums to promote solar energy and clean energy sector jobs; testifies at state and local commissions to oppose fracking licenses.

Central Illinois Healthy Community Alliance

Conducts educational events explaining air pollution from local coal-fired plants; holds public forums to promote solar energy and clean energy sector jobs; testifies at Illinois Pollution Control Board hearings to oppose relicensing of polluting power plants.

Peoria Healthcare Coalition

Sponsors events to highlight advantages and benefits of affordable healthcare for all.

Peoria Community Against Violence

Organizes "stand-downs" in Peoria after homicides.

UU Advocacy Network of Illinois

Works collectively with other congregations and partner organizations for meaningful social change and justice activities, including immigration reform, sanctuary, fair tax laws, and Muslim, LGBTQ, and racial justice issues.

Link to your Safe Congregation policy:

<http://drive.google.com/open?id=13wA-3783p2awXFd1YP-KmlSSBjsdeC9P>

Worship service schedule:

Sunday worship services begin at 10:30 a.m. and last for about an hour. We gather live in person, on Zoom, and on Facebook. Recordings of the services are available on YouTube. Recordings of

the sermons are available by podcast. During most of the year (from the first Sunday after Labor Day through the first or second Sunday in June), the minister preaches about three Sundays a month. The minister, a church member, or a guest speaker leads the service on the other Sundays. The regular services also include announcements, the chalice lighting, music by the choir or other performers, a “Story for All Ages” presented by our Director of Lifespan Religious Education, an offering, Joys and Sorrows, spoken and silent meditation, and hymns.

Sunday services are also held in the summer. They are similar to the regular services, but our minister is not scheduled to be in the pulpit during most of the summer. Rather, members and community leaders share topics that are of interest to the congregation. The “Story for All Ages” is omitted as well. The choir does not perform during the summer, but there is accompaniment for hymns.

The following special worship services have become a tradition in the church.

Water Service

The annual Water Service serves to reconnect us at the beginning of the new church year. Congregants are encouraged to bring a small amount of water from some meaningful experience they had during the summer.

Day of Remembrance

On the Sunday closest to November 1, the minister and the congregation create a Day of Remembrance service. The Day of Remembrance service is a departure from El Día de los Muertos (Day of the Dead) offered during the years of the previous settled minister. There was a great deal of love for this previous service as many felt a connection to honoring their deceased loved ones. The change was advocated by our assistant minister and supported by the interim minister in 2019. There was a great deal of discussion within the congregation after the change. This new form of the service is evolving. In 2020 and 2021, the Day of Remembrance drew from Universalist and Earth-Centered traditions, respectively.

Christmas Eve Service

Christmas Eve is a special time for candles, stories, and carols as we celebrate a traditional Christmas at this service. The congregation is encouraged to bring relatives, children, and friends, as well as cookie contributions for the jubilant reception that follows.

Jazz Sunday

Jazz Sunday is a long-standing tradition going back about 20 years. People come to be in the moment while enjoying the improvised tunes. Some may ponder whether Unitarian Universalism is perhaps an improvisational kind of religion.

Music Sunday

Music is one of the dimensions of life that has the power to heal us. At this annual service, our choir presents a program that includes some of the choral music the congregation has heard at our services, as well as new pieces. Together they provide a musical experience with spirituals, contemporary arrangements, traditional favorites, and classical songs.

Church Picnic

On the first or second Sunday in June, we celebrate the close of the traditional church year with a service at the beautiful country farm of one of our members. The morning begins with a potluck breakfast, followed by a brief worship service that includes hymns, the presentation of awards, and the minister's review of the significant events of the past year. After the service, attendees are welcome to stay and enjoy boating and fishing on a small lake, hiking in the surrounding woodlands, or relaxing with church friends and visitors.

Land Acknowledgement during Worship

In January 2011, the congregation passed a resolution to repudiate the 'Doctrine of Discovery' and Implement the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Our congregation was the first UU church in the nation to pass such a resolution. A year later, at the 2012 GA, a similar resolution supporting the rights of indigenous peoples was passed. A member visited the current Peoria people and asked how the congregation could offer its respect to their ancestors. At the request of the Peoria people, the church offers a land acknowledgement as a regular part of Sunday worship.

Worship and Music Committee

With the transition to online worship, the Worship and Music Committee undergoing its own changes. Currently, the minister coordinates and leads worship in collaboration with the director of lifespan religious education and other staff and volunteers. With the return to in person worship, the minister expects to rebuild this team in 2022-2023.

Expanding Our Capacity for Ministry: A/V Team and A/V System

We have a wonderful new Audio/Visual system based in our sanctuary. This system makes it possible for us to be online and in person for worship and for activities in the building. In 2019, the church received a generous bequest from the estate of a deceased member. A portion of these funds served as the seed money for raising a total of \$80,000. The sanctuary now has large screens, two cameras, and a booth for running the system. The A/V Tech team includes one paid staff and trained volunteers.

Congregation History

Provide your Congregation's founding history:

On the evening of Friday, May 5, 1843, a group gathered at the Peoria County Courthouse to hear Rev. Aaron Kinney, a Universalist minister. Originally from New York, Kinney had come

to Illinois in 1837 with his wife and at least one child. He started a Universalist society in Juliet (now Joliet), then moved to Farmington in 1841. He was a half-time minister for that town's Universalist society and spent most of the rest of his time as a traveling preacher.

Peoria, about thirty miles from Farmington, was a village of around 1,600 people, with dozens of businesses and regular steamboat service to St. Louis. Although we have no record of what Rev. Kinney said at the courthouse that night, his message inspired 37 people to organize the Universalist Society of Peoria. Kinney went back to Farmington and died about a year later. But the faith community that came together in Peoria in 1843 has been in continuous existence for nearly 177 years.

Date founded: 5/5/1843

Describe important events in your Congregation's history:

1843–1866: THE EARLY YEARS

The Universalist Society of Peoria was founded on May 5, 1843. By 1844, Rev. F. J. Briggs was preaching in Peoria every two weeks. He became Peoria's full-time minister in 1848 and served until 1850. Other ministers followed (see Minister History section). The Universalists continued to meet at the courthouse until 1857, when they purchased the former Presbyterian church on Fulton Street.

In 1858, the Universalist Society decided to form a separate church organization in order to become more closely affiliated with the national Universalist denomination. They adopted the name "Church of the Redeemer." It appears that many members belonged to both the society and the church. The two organizations coexisted until they were merged in 1907.

A separate Unitarian congregation was established in Peoria in 1855. It dissolved around 1860, after which many of the Unitarians became Universalists.

The Universalists sold the Fulton Street church building in 1863. For about a year, they rented the former Unitarian building. After the owner sold this building in 1864, the Universalists were without a home and met only occasionally.

In 1866 the Northwestern Conference of Universalists was held in Peoria. The Peoria congregation gained new members as a result, and enthusiasm grew for constructing a new building.

1867–1899: MAIN STREET CHURCH

In 1867 a new Universalist church building was completed on Main Street. It was reportedly the largest church building in Peoria at the time. Initially called "Church of the Messiah," it was later referred to as "Bradley Memorial First Universalist Church" in honor of Tobias Bradley, a prominent church member who was instrumental in getting the new church built but died shortly before it was completed.

Membership increased greatly in the 1870s. A group of Universalist women were very active in charitable projects that benefited the community. In 1884 the United States General Convention of Universalists was held in Peoria, bringing nationwide recognition.

Sometime in the next few years, the congregation faced a financial crisis. A member who had advanced money to fund construction of the Main Street church said that he needed to be repaid or he would be forced to sell the property. The Universalists tried to raise the money, but fell short. Tobias Bradley's widow, Lydia Moss Bradley—a Universalist, businesswoman, and philanthropist who later founded Bradley University—stepped forward and settled the debt. Her generosity is remembered to this day.

A few years later, excessive spending and reduced contributions led to more financial problems. In January 1893 the minister and several members left the Universalist church and formed a separate congregation called the People's Church. The fate of this congregation is unknown. The Universalists continued without a pastor for two months until they called a new minister.

As membership dropped, the Main Street church became too large and expensive to maintain. The congregation sold it in 1899 and held services in a rented room while deciding what to do next.

1900–1929: RAPID GROWTH

The Universalists decided to build a much smaller church on Hamilton Boulevard. Later nicknamed the “Little Gothic,” the building was dedicated in 1902. Around this time, the official name of the church was changed to the First Universalist Church of Peoria.

In 1907 the congregation called Barlow G. Carpenter to serve as their minister. At that time the church had 81 members. Carpenter, a popular speaker and an energetic evangelist for Universalism, drew many new members to the church. In 1910 the Little Gothic church was torn down to make way for larger building on same site. Just eight years later, the crowds were so large that side wings and a balcony were added to the sanctuary. By 1925 the church had over 800 resident members, making it the largest Universalist congregation in the country.

In addition to increasing membership, B. G. Carpenter launched a Sunday Evening Lecture series that attracted large crowds from the community. It began in 1910 and continued for over 25 years. At first Carpenter gave the lectures himself, but the program soon expanded to include local guest speakers, then out-of-town speakers. Eventually it featured well-known national and international speakers, including Clarence Darrow, Jane Addams, Alfred Adler, Will Durant, and Bertrand Russell.

In late 1929, B. G. Carpenter was called by a church in California. He had served in Peoria for 22 years—the second longest pastorate in our history.

1930–1967: NEW IDEAS

Clinton Lee Scott served as the Peoria church's minister from 1930 to 1939. One of the signers of the 1933 Humanist Manifesto, Dr. Scott introduced the philosophy of humanism to our church. Many members of the congregation accepted these new ideas, but others found them too different from the liberal Christian theology that Carpenter had preached. Adding to Scott's challenges, B. G. Carpenter moved back to Peoria in 1932. Scott wrote in his memoir that Carpenter's "meddling in parish affairs . . . was a continuing source of trouble for the loyal members and for me."

Scott and his wife, Mary Slaughter Scott, were champions of social activism. They established a birth control clinic in Peoria. To help community members weather the Depression, they operated a cooperative grocery in the church basement. Most significantly, Scott led a fight against the city's gambling syndicate and the widespread corruption that supported it. His opponents retaliated by burning a cross in front of his house and tying his young daughter to a tree. Scott later wrote that his ten years in Peoria were "the stormiest of my career."

During World War II, the women's groups in the church worked with the Red Cross on relief projects. In the 1950s, the church had a large and active youth group. The sanctuary was remodeled in 1955.

During the second half of the 1950s, the congregation went through a time when ministerial stability was lacking. The church had an interim minister for less than a year, a settled minister who stayed only one year, and another settled minister who stayed for two years and left under troubled circumstances.

The next settled minister, who arrived in 1960, helped revitalize the church. In 1961–62, the congregation raised funds and took out a mortgage to expand and improve the church building. In response to the merger of the national Universalist and Unitarian denominations, the congregation adopted the name "Universalist Unitarian Church of Peoria" in 1963. In 1968 the church held a dinner to celebrate its 125th anniversary. At the same event, the congregation celebrated the retirement of the mortgage for the building expansion, which was paid off three years ahead of schedule.

1968–1976: TURBULENT TIMES

Shortly after a new minister arrived in 1968—in the midst of the Vietnam War—a major dispute erupted in the church. The issue was whether an outside group should be allowed to conduct draft counseling sessions in the church building. The board approved the sessions, but the president, treasurer, and their spouses resigned in protest. Later, during a highly contentious congregational meeting, a motion to ban draft counseling in the church was introduced but defeated. Although the draft counselors eventually found a new location, church membership dropped due to this controversy. For many years afterward, the congregation was wary of taking on social justice projects as a church, although many individuals did so on their own.

From 1968 through the mid-1970s, the church struggled financially. Staff and services were cut, and church volunteers had to take on janitorial and building repair duties. In April 1975 the

board voted to borrow money to pay past due bills, including the minister's and secretary's salaries.

Meanwhile, according to several congregants from that time, there were clear signs that the minister had an alcohol addiction. Some say he pursued inappropriate relationships with female congregants.

A special congregational meeting was held in March 1975 to discuss the financial crisis and feelings about the minister. The congregation voted down a proposal to reduce the minister's salary and passed a motion to continue full-time ministry. The budget was balanced by adding projected income from fundraisers. A church member moved to hold a special meeting in thirty days "for the purpose of considering the minister's removal," but after discussion, no vote was taken. A few days later, on the advice of the Central Midwest District Ministerial Association, the board voted to establish a ministerial relations committee. The board took no action on the request for a congregational meeting to discuss removing the minister. On June 1, the minister announced that he would voluntarily resign in September.

In the 1975–76 church year, the congregation had no minister. A congregant was hired to serve as church coordinator. The financial situation was still precarious, but the church was able to make ends meet. The pledge drive for the 1976 budget focused on raising enough money to call a full-time minister. However, the amount budgeted was much lower than the average across the UUA.

1976–1990: UPS AND DOWNS

A new minister was called in 1976. Membership began to grow, and income began to rise. In the late 1970s, two capital campaigns raised funds to repair the stained glass windows and renovate the church building. The board and congregation established a trust fund in 1978.

During the renovation, a controversy arose over words that had been painted on the arch over the chancel when the building was constructed in 1911: "The Universal Fatherhood of God & The Universal Brotherhood of Man." Church members were divided over whether to restore those words, use different wording that was more inclusive, or leave the arch blank. Four congregational votes were taken over the next ten years before the original words were finally painted over. Until then, the words were retained mainly out of respect for the wishes of certain older members of the congregation.

The minister resigned in June 1981, citing unnamed personal reasons. For six months, the church had no minister. Committees handed out buttons saying "If I don't do it, it doesn't get done." For the rest of the decade, ministers came and went—two full-time, one part-time, and an intern.

Meanwhile, the economic recession of the early 1980s had a profound effect on the community. Many people were laid off, and many left town to seek jobs elsewhere. As a result, church membership and income dropped again. A Caring Committee was formed in 1987 to help provide care and nurturing to church members and friends.

1990–2004: STABILITY AND GROWTH

During the 1990-91 church year, the congregation was led by an interim minister. To aid the search for the next settled minister, the board increased the salary package in the 1991 annual budget. The minister search committee selected Rev. Michael Brown, and the congregation called him by a unanimous vote. He began his ministry in September 1991. Membership grew steadily during his pastorate, which eventually became the longest in our history (over 27 years).

To accommodate growth, the congregation purchased a small neighboring building in 1993. Volunteers renovated it to provide offices and a conference room. A committee began working on a Statement of Purpose and Covenant in 1994. After many discussions and revisions, it was finally approved by the congregation in 1997. Long-term goals were set in 1998.

In 2001, neighboring Methodist Medical Center expressed interest in purchasing the church's property. The church board appointed a Long Range Planning Committee to develop options for the congregation to choose from. After much research and congregational input, the committee proposed six options: three scenarios for remaining in the current building, and three locations for building a new church. On the evening of May 10, 2003, the congregation used a series of votes to eliminate options one by one. In the final vote, a large majority (142 to 11) affirmed the decision to sell the current building and construct a new one on Richwoods Boulevard.

2005–PRESENT: A NEW HOME

The new church building was dedicated on October 23, 2005. It was designed to include many features from the previous church building, such as the stained glass windows, pews, and a restored pipe organ. It also provided a larger sanctuary and a larger Fellowship Hall with a view of the surrounding woods. Providing more and better space for children's classrooms was a high priority.

The move to a new home energized the congregation, attracted new members, and led to further growth in programs. One significant outcome has been greater involvement in social action projects in the community.

A policy governance system was introduced on a trial basis in 2008. It created an Administrative Team that included the minister(s), the Director of Religious Education, the office manager, and two new part-time staff members: Membership Coordinator and Program Coordinator. The Administrative Team makes operational decisions and support church committees, allowing the board to focus on developing church policies. In 2009 the congregation voted to continue this governance system on a permanent basis.

A new Long Range Planning Committee was formed in 2008. Using input from the congregation, its members developed a new covenant, mission statement, six vision statements, and goals for each vision statement. The congregation adopted these between 2009 and 2012. Meanwhile, in 2011 the UUA designated our church as a Breakthrough Congregation for its significant and sustained numerical growth.

Several improvements to the building and grounds have been made. Volunteers erected a playground, created a walking path, maintain our woods, and added a labyrinth. A Memory Garden was completed in 2007 and a parking lot addition in 2014. Solar panels were installed in 2017.

Lynnda White, a member of the church and former board president, graduated from Meadville Lombard in 2013 and was ordained at our church in 2014. In April 2017 she became our part-time Assistant Minister. She concluded her ministry with the congregation in June 2020.

In the summer of 2018, Rev. Brown announced that he would retire at the end of the year. His departure after more than 27 years of service was a tremendous change for the congregation. During his final service, Michael was honored as a Minister Emeritus. He and his wife, Diane, were bid a fond farewell with many good wishes for their future.

Our current settled minister is Reverend Jennifer Innis. The Ministerial Search Committee completed the UUA settlement process in the early months of the pandemic. The congregation voted to call Reverend Jennifer in May 2020. She started her ministry with our congregation in August of 2020.

Ministerial History

Start	End	Position	Name	Job Title
2020		Called	Jennifer Innis	Minister
2019	2020	Interim	Dave Clements	Interim Minister
2017	2020	Contract	Lynnda White	Assistant Minister
1991	2018	Called	Michael W. Brown	Minister
2012	2013	Other	Erin Dajka	Intern
2009	2010	Affiliated	Linda Berez	Endorsed Community Minister
2009	2010	Other	Jim Parrish	Intern
2003	2005	Affiliated	Mary Moore	Endorsed Community Ministry
2004	2005	Other	Roger Mohr	Intern
1993	1995	Other	Sean Shanahan	Intern
1990	1991	Interim	Richard Hasty	Interim Minister
1988	1990	Called	Gwendolyn Howard	Minister
1987	1988	Called	Alan Egly	Part-Time Minister
1982	1987	Called	W. James Eller	Minister
1987	1987	Other	Randall Klett	Intern
1976	1981	Called	David Maynard	Minister
1968	1975	Called	James Wilkes	Minister
1960	1965	Called	Fred LeShane	Minister
1958	1960	Called	John Hawkins	Minister
1957	1958	Interim	Stanley Manning	Interim Minister

1956	1957	Called	E. H. Soderberg	Minister
1955	1956	Interim	Stanley Manning	Interim Minister
1951	1955	Called	Richard Knost	Minister
1940	1951	Called	William J. Arms	Minister
1930	1939	Called	Clinton Lee Scott	Minister
1907	1929	Called	Barlow G. Carpenter	Minister
1900	1906	Called	Thomas Baldwin Thayer Fisher	Minister
1893	1900	Called	Frank McAlpine	Minister
1891	1892	Called	Reginald B. Marsh	Minister
1885	1889	Called	George B. Stocking	Minister
1883	1884	Called	Walter Scott Ralph	Minister
1880	1882	Called	George W. Kent	Minister
1877	1880	Called	S. A. Gardner	Minister
1874	1875	Called	J. Murray Bailey	Minister
1871	1873	Called	H. B. Smith	Minister
1868	1871	Called	Royal Henry Pullman	Minister
1864	1865	Called	Holden R. Nye	Minister
1863	1863	Called	Daniel Mortimer Reed	Minister
1862	1863	Called	Augustus Tibbetts	Minister
1858	1862	Called	Daniel Mortimer Reed	Minister
1853	1858	Called	William Rounseville (or Rounesville or Rounsville)	Minister
1850	1853	Called	W. B. Linell	Minister
1843	1850	Called	F. J. Briggs	Minister
1843	1843	Other	Aaron Kinney	Traveling preacher

Ministers Emeritus/a

Name	Date Voted Emeritus/a	Year Deceased
Michael Brown	11/14/2018	

Additional ministerial history notes:

Rev. Clinton Lee Scott signed the Humanist Manifesto in 1933. He was the only Universalist clergy member to do so.

Describe any important Lay Leaders:

Paul Henniges—A congregant and ordained minister who was hired to serve as church coordinator during the 1975–76 church year when the congregation had no minister.

Membership & Finances

The data for the table below comes directly from the UUA's annual congregational certification.

Year	Total Pledge Income	Total Operating Expenses	Membership	Youth Enrollment	Avg. Attendance
2019*	\$326,267	\$420,038	388	116	167
2018	\$340,724	\$377,045	388	125	187
2017	\$314,369	\$362,340	384	137	195
2016	\$316,766	\$343,468	380	137	197
2015	\$308,587	\$364,322	377	133	196
2014	\$270,970	\$342,789	370	140	190
2013	\$270,764	\$333,065	368	120	197
2012	\$270,286	\$330,056	358	141	205
2011	\$263,797	\$326,833	351	150	205
2010	\$263,727	\$324,580	346	145	205

The following notes and/or explanations have been offered by the congregation:

Year Note/Explanation

2019 Revised

2019 Pledges Raised: \$443,686

Expenses: \$438,621

Demographics

Most of this information comes from the survey conducted for the ministerial search process in 2019. The staff and leadership information is current as of January 2022.

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as people of color?

5-9%

What percentage of members do you estimate identify as lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, or queer (LGBTQ)?

5-9%

Please describe the gender makeup of your congregation

2019 Survey:

110 (65%) Women

55 (32%) Men

4 (3%) Other

Estimate from congregational lists:

147 (38%) likely identify as male;

240 (62%) likely identify as female;

1 identifies as non-binary.

What number of staff (including full and part time) identify as people of color?

1

What number of people of color serve as leaders or chairs of your volunteer committees and program teams?

1

What number of your Board of Trustees identify as people of color?

2

What changes have you made in the last 3-5 years, if any, to include the racial and ethnic diversity of your congregational staff and volunteer leadership?

African American assistant minister served from 2017-2020. Participated in "Let's Talk" program with other churches and racial groups to increase/improve racial dialogue. Began using Beloved Conversations program in 2018 to increase congregational awareness of white privilege, and had a second Beloved Conversations in early 2020.

Accessibility

Is your Congregation's meeting space wheelchair accessible? Yes

Wheelchair accessibility details:

The full facility is at ground level. There are two steps to reach the pulpit area from the sanctuary floor. There is a permanent access ramp to the side of the pulpit area.

The building was completed in 2005 and meets the standards for accessibility, including a family/all-gender restroom and child sized restroom in pre-school area.

Does your Congregation provide assisted listening systems? Yes

Assisted listening system details:

Individual amplified listening devices are available. Also, sermons are available by podcast after they are recorded on a given Sunday.

Describe other ways your congregation has dealt with accessibility:

The sanctuary has two raised and padded chairs for those with mobility impairments. There are spaces for wheelchairs in the last row of pews.

Large print and braille hymnals are available.

Service dogs are welcome.

Resources & Programs

List the resources and programs your Congregation used or participated in during the past year:

Racial Justice Project

Welcoming Congregation

Beloved Conversations

Share the Plate

UUA RE curricula

Small Group Ministry and small group ministry guides

Our Whole Lives curricula and Our Whole Lives Facilitator Training

Describe your religious educational programs:

The church's religious education curricula include both children and adult programs. Our children's religious education program strives to provide children and youth with experiences and relationships that will help them journey through life with dignity, integrity, compassion, hope, and wonder.

Our Children's Religious Education Mission:

To provide unique experiences to help our children view the world in its broadest sense.

To introduce and investigate our UU heritage and principles.

To explore the religions of the world.

To stress and model the goal of ethical living.

To inspire the search for truth and meaning in every young mind.

To provide the intellectual and emotional tools children need to chart their own spiritual course.

To provide a safe haven for our children in which to share, question, wonder, and feel good about themselves.

Children's Religious Education Sunday Schedule

Each Sunday morning, our entire congregation meets together at 10:30 a.m. in the sanctuary for the first portion of our congregation's worship experience. Children are expected to sit with their families in the sanctuary. ("Busy Bags" containing quiet activities and toys are available at the entrance to the sanctuary. Since returning to in person worship, we have added a carpeted area with toys for our youngest children and their adults.)

During the "Story for All Ages," the DLRE or minister reads a story relating to the theme of the day's sermon to the entire congregation with the children called to the front. After the story, the children are dismissed to their own worship gathering in the Children's Chapel area of the religious education wing. This gathering includes a chalice lighting, children's offering, and a brief message from the DLRE. From there, the children go to their classes, which end at 11:45 a.m.

The curricula for 2019-2020 year's classes are described below. These programs are an example of what we offered before the pandemic. During the pandemic, we have had a combination of outdoors, online, and all ages classes and events. For 2021-2022, we resumed indoor classes whenever possible, including OWL for grades K-2 and 4-5, along with Chapel for children and youth and classes created by the DLRE with assistance from the RE Committee.

Nursery (six months up to three years)

This is a very important place, for it is here that our children have their first experiences within our church. It is carefully staffed and equipped to be a warm, welcoming, and secure place away from home.

Preschool

Using the curriculum "We are Many, We are One," children will be given the opportunity to learn about their UU religious tradition, as well as the freedom to discover and express their uniqueness. Each session is full of games, stories, and activities to stimulate their imaginations and introduce them to the ideals we UUs hold dear.

Kindergarten–Grade 1

The "Wonderful Welcome" curriculum engages and challenges leaders and children alike to explore how and why we are willing to welcome others into our lives. We welcome not only strangers, but family, our peers, our neighbors and even entities that are not people such as our animal friends and nature itself.

Grades 2–4

Every day our children go forth into a complex world where they are often faced with difficult decisions and situations. The "Moral Tales" curriculum attempts to provide children with the spiritual and ethical tools they will need to make choices and take actions reflective of their Unitarian Universalist beliefs and values.

Grades 5–8

The "Toolbox of Faith" curriculum invites participants to reflect on qualities of our Unitarian Universalist faith, such as integrity, courage, and love, as tools they can use in living and building their own faith. What tools does Unitarian Universalism offer for the challenges of life? Children discover what aspects of UU faith are helpful to them, developing a toolbox of faith.

Adult RE

Our adult religious education program is led by the adult RE committee chair. Working with the minister and the congregation's Credentialed Religious Educator, this person arranges for adult RE programs and discussions, usually held in two-hour sessions on Thursday nights. The topics include relevant book discussions and a series presented each year on Unitarian Universalist history, both of which are usually facilitated by the minister. Other adult RE topics have included movies related to spiritual or social issues, guest lecturers from the congregation or the larger community, and recorded lectures. In 2021, we collaborated with other UU congregations in the Central Illinois cluster to offer Commission on Institutional Change's study guide for Widening the Circle of Concern as an online class.

The adult RE program also includes interest groups that meet regularly for learning and discussion. Currently these include Conscious Aging and Humanist Perspectives. This congregation also hosts A Course in Miracles.

Describe your youth and campus ministry programs:

High School Youth Group

We make hundreds of decisions every day. Some are small. Some are life changing; although we may not know their significance when we make them. The "Virtue Ethics" curriculum's premise--in the words of the Buddha, recited in every workshop opening--is that "our thoughts and actions become habits and our habits shape our character." We have some control over our character. We can shape the person we want to be by making intentional, thoughtful decisions.

We do not currently have a campus ministry program.

Surrounding Community

Describe the character of the surrounding community, including population and demographics:

Peoria is located in Central Illinois, also known as “the Heart of Illinois”—the middle third of the state when dividing it north to south. The Greater Peoria area basically consists of three adjacent counties: Peoria, Tazewell, and Woodford. The City of Peoria is the metropolitan hub of the area with a population over 400,00. The estimated population of the city of Peoria is 111,388, making it the eighth largest city in Illinois, according to the most recent US Census data.

Downtown Peoria, on the northwest side of the Illinois River, has an urban feel with a skyline that surprises visitors. The rest of the city spreads out from the river, mainly to the north. Two smaller communities, Peoria Heights and West Peoria, are contiguous to the city of Peoria. Many of the neighborhoods in Peoria are tightly knit and have unique identities based on their age, architectural style, and residents. Peoria is surrounded by smaller communities that might be termed suburbs or “bedroom communities.” They include Dunlap to the north; East Peoria and Metamora on the east side of the river; and towns such as Washington and Morton further east.

HISTORY

The city is named after the Peoria Native American Nation that lived in this area at the time French explorers established a fort in what is now Peoria in 1691. The first permanent non-native settlers arrived in 1819. Peoria was incorporated as a village in 1835.

As Peoria grew in the nineteenth century, it was known for the many distilleries located along the river. The phrase “Will it play in Peoria?” originated during the vaudeville era. It has been used ever since as a figure of speech in which Peoria symbolizes mainstream America.

Peoria has been selected as an All-American City four times, most recently in 2013.

AN EASY PLACE TO LIVE

Most people describe Peoria as an easy place to live because it has many of the amenities of a larger city without the big city hassles. You can get anywhere you need to go in 10 to 15 minutes. We don’t know what a traffic jam is, something that certainly sets us apart from Chicago.

Peoria is one of the more underrated cities in the Midwest, which is slowly changing for the better as people recognize the quality of life and the affordability of living in the area. In 2019, Peoria was one of five Illinois cities that made Niche’s roundup of Best Places to Live. This is the full list of Illinois towns included in the rankings, where the top 185 were selected from thousands of towns rated:

Naperville (No. 6)

Chicago (No. 88)

Springfield (No. 119)

Peoria (No. 144)

Elgin (No. 158)

ETHNICITY DEMOGRAPHICS

Demographics of ethnicity of the city of Peoria are:

White—56%

Black—28%

Hispanic—6%

Asian—6%

Native American—0.5%

All others—3.5%

COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

In the last five years, Peoria has received national attention for being one of the worst cities for African-Americans to live. The magazine *Governing*, a Washington, DC–based publication that was once part of “Congressional Quarterly,” focused on Peoria following a six-month investigation of black-white segregation in downstate Illinois. “Our review of federal data found the Peoria metro area had the most segregated schools of any area nationally, regardless of size,” noted the report in January 2019. In addition, the report stated the Peoria area had the sixth-highest level of segregation measured between blacks and whites of any metro area in the country, based on U.S. Census data. Peoria also had one of the highest black poverty rates in the state, according to the report.

“In Peoria, the Illinois River is a 900-foot-wide chasm between poverty and prosperity,” the report stated. “On one bank is the city of East Peoria, which is 92 percent white, with big-box retail stores including Costco, Target and a Bass Pro Shop just a stone’s throw from the river. On the west bank is the city of Peoria itself, just 56 percent white and becoming less so every year.”

Peoria citizens are working to address this chasm, but the commitment to change needed from the surrounding communities, such as East Peoria, is lacking. Many UU church members are involved in efforts to change our segregated city, but they do not identify as a UU group effort. Based on survey results, this is an area of opportunity for our congregation to expand our ministry.

COST OF LIVING

Peoria is one of the most affordable places to live in the United States. The cost of living in Peoria is 20.7% lower than the U.S. average. The median home price in Peoria is \$87,000. For the larger Peoria metro area, the median home price is \$116,000. The median income for households in Peoria is \$47,697, while the mean household income is \$68,524.

PLACES TO WORK

Our city is perhaps best known as the home of the world headquarters of Caterpillar Inc. Caterpillar continues to be a major employer in the area, although they moved their corporate headquarters to a Chicago suburb in 2015. A Caterpillar competitor, Komatsu, also has a major presence of white and blue collar workers in the city.

The other major industry in the community is healthcare. We have three hospitals (OSF St. Francis, UnityPoint Methodist, and UnityPoint Proctor), the Children's Hospital of Illinois, and the University of Illinois College of Medicine.

In recent years, city leaders have focused on attracting innovation to the area. Peoria was recently ranked by online financial news company 24/7 Wall St. as the 22nd most innovative city in the United States. This ranking is based on data obtained from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office for the year 2015, the most recent year that data is available.

Learn more about some of the great innovation and startup activity happening in the region by searching Twitter for these hashtags: #gphomecoming #greaterpeoria #changethenarrative #thefutureishere #peoriamade.

PLACES TO PLAY

The Peoria Civic Center offers sporting events, meeting rooms, conventions, exhibitions, and live theatre and entertainment.

The Riverfront Museum has permanent and Smithsonian traveling exhibits, a big-screen theater, and a planetarium. The museum and the adjacent Caterpillar Visitors Center are both located on the riverfront.

We are a very green community, with 9,000 acres of parks and a wealth of mature trees lining city streets. The Peoria Park District is the oldest and largest park district in Illinois, offering many recreational opportunities through its parks and nature preserves, walking and hiking trails, and sports facilities.

Other recreational opportunities include professional minor league baseball and ice hockey teams, the Peoria Zoo, Wildlife Prairie Park, cruises on the Spirit of Peoria riverboat, the Par-A-Dice Casino, sailing and boating on the Illinois River, a variety of restaurants, and live entertainment at the riverfront and other locations.

Peoria supports the arts through an Art Guild, two symphony orchestras, a youth symphony, a Fine Arts Fair, and public art displays of sculptures and murals.

The Peoria Public Library system includes a main building downtown and four branch libraries, several of which were recently built or renovated.

SCHOOLS AND UNIVERSITIES

Peoria County has 18 public school districts with a current enrollment of more than 29,000. Our area boasts a graduation rate of 90.3%, 7% higher than the national average.

In November 2019, Newsweek magazine announced its ranking of the top 5,000 STEM high schools for the year. Peoria's Richwoods High School was named 2,968 on the overall list and 1,789 for public schools. Major local employer Caterpillar Inc. is a strong contributor and supporter to STEM initiatives in the community.

Bradley University and Illinois Central College offer excellent options for higher education, sports, cultural events, and continuing education.

Bradley University is an independent, privately owned school established in 1897 that has received nods from nationally recognized sources, including The Princeton Review and Forbes magazine. Most recently, U.S. News & World Report ranked it No. 6 among comprehensive universities in the Midwest, while also giving special notice to the department of industrial and manufacturing engineering and technology, named it No. 2 in the nation. The fully accredited university consists of five colleges with more than 100 programs combined and also offers 30 graduate programs, as well as the Academic Exploration Program for students undecided about their career path. What's more, the enrollment is small and selective: One-third of the incoming freshman in fall 2007 ranked in the top 10 percent of their class. This selectivity means that the average class at Bradley contains fewer than 23 students, giving them the opportunity to get the most from their teachers.

Illinois Central College is a community college started in 1966. Today the ICC district covers 2,322 square miles and serves 38 high schools. In any given semester, the college offers more than 1,900 classes. Since the beginning, ICC has touched more than half a million lives. One out of every four graduating high school students within the college's district comes to ICC. Every year the college awards approximately 1,800 certificates and degrees.

TRANSPORTATION

The Peoria area is generally speaking in the geographic center of the state of Illinois. Peoria sits on Interstate 74, linking to I-39, I-55 and I-80. It is an easy two and a half hour road trip to Chicago to the northeast and St. Louis to the southwest. Peoria is served by the Greater Peoria Mass Transit (CityLink) bus service and has regular charter bus service to the two Chicago airports and other area locations.

The General Wayne A. Downing International Airport in Peoria is the fourth busiest of the 12 commercial airports in Illinois. Peoria International Airport offers nonstop flights to 11 destinations and connection to cities around the world. The terminal includes a full-service

Customs and Border Protection facility and dual-purpose gates for domestic or international travel.

RELIGIOUS DEMOGRAPHICS

Religious membership in Peoria as of 2010:

Evangelical Protestant—30,685

Catholic—26,165

Mainline Protestant—18,343

Black Protestant—3,482

Orthodox (Christian)—396

Other—22,276

None—85,147

WE ARE URBAN...AND COUNTRY

The City of Peoria is the seat of Peoria County. Peoria County encompasses 629 square miles with a mixture of urban and rural areas. Approximately 200,000 acres in the county are used for farming, with corn and soybeans being the primary crop. Roughly 25,000 acres in the county is woodland. Most of the woodland is along major drainage ways, and some has been pastured to livestock.

This mixture of urban and rural is reflected in the diverse culture of the area. We have 4-H shows and county fairs ten minutes away from a thriving urban core that boasts a symphony and vibrant arts scene.

Describe how your Congregation is known/perceived by the larger community:

Peoria UUs are highly involved in the community. We are perceived as helpers and doers. We show up for social justice events. Two members of our congregation founded the local chapter of Indivisible, a grassroots movement promoting progressive political policies and candidates. Unfortunately, although many members of our congregation are visible in the community, they are not widely known to be UUs. This could be an area that a new minister helps us grow in.

The following is a letter from Dr. Robert Fuller, a Professor at Bradley University in Peoria.

September, 2018

Community Perceptions of Peoria's Universalist-Unitarian Church:

I have lived in Peoria for the last forty years. As one of the four full-time professors in Bradley University's Department of Religious Studies, I am in a fairly good position to assess the Peoria Universalist-Unitarian Church's social, cultural, and intellectual location in our local community of about 380,000 people. I might note that I have spoken during the Sunday service approximately twenty-five times over the past four decades and am very familiar with the church's membership (a fair number of them Bradley University employees) and religious-cultural outlook.

The Peoria U-U Church has sustained a healthy membership throughout my time in Peoria and evidence suggests it has grown slightly in the years since it moved from a small downtown location to a beautiful new building on a large, wooded lot. While the most respected mainline Protestant churches in Peoria have continued to decline, the U-U Church has slowly but steadily become the region's leading voice for reasoned spirituality. There is a need for a "liberal voice" in the Peoria community and the U-U Church is known and respected for its commitment to this vision.

The Peoria U-U Church has enjoyed more respect and better collegial relations with other area churches than is probably the case nationwide. The current U-U pastor has been an active member of the area's most active ecumenical or interfaith alliance. U-U members are among the region's leaders in education, law, medicine, and the media and thus the congregation is admired throughout the area.

My sense is that the Peoria U-U Church is slightly more religious/spiritual than many of its counterparts in other parts of the country where many members consider U-U a strictly humanist organization. While there is no real theological consensus among the members and there are many agnostics, most seem to look to our local U-U Church to guide their open-ended inquiry into the ultimate source of life and for insights into how we might live a meaningful life. Weekly services devote time and attention to covering many moral concerns of local, national, and planetary importance—but they also exude a certain serenity and reverence.

I would love to expand upon these comments and invite anyone to contact me directly.

Bob Fuller

Professor of Religious Studies

Bradley University

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Describe your Congregation's religious, political, and social context from a historical and current perspective.

During the past 30 years, our church has become widely known in the community as being present and active in religious, political, and social events. Many members are leaders or active participants in community organizations. Some have served in roles such as city council member, mayor, judge, arbitrator, state senator, and candidate for Member of Congress. Our last settled minister was instrumental in starting the local chapter of the Interfaith Alliance, and although members of the church were active leaders and participants in this group, it was disbanded at the end of 2019.

In 2011–12, a friendship began among a rabbi, an imam, and a preacher (known as the “Peoria Three”) that resulted in a Peace for Peoria event and the No Joke book and movie. Our church supported and was actively involved in this project and the events. All three members of the "Peoria Three" have spoken in our church on one or more occasions.

Our recently retired minister was frequently called upon to offer invocations at community events and has received awards and other honors from several community organizations. Members of our church routinely participate in the annual Martin Luther King march and luncheon, the NAACP banquet, and many other community and social impact events. (For a detailed list of current community and social involvement, see the narrative under Congregational Life: How does your Congregation live its values?)

In recent years, political activism has increased among members of the church. Our former assistant minister, Rev. Lynnda White, stood with the Water Protectors during the demonstrations in Standing Rock, North Dakota, to protest the building of the pipeline on sacred land and under the Cannonball River. In the summer of 2018, she attended a camp for Water Protector activists. Other church members are organizers of the local Indivisible chapter, leaders or members of the local League of Women Voters, marchers in national protest events, supporters of political candidates, precinct committee persons, and voter registrars.

Faith Coalition for Racial Equity

In 2020 following the murder of George Floyd, our Social Impact Committee formed a Racial Justice Project. The project is committed to promoting issues of racial justice both within our congregation and in the city of Peoria. The internal education working group created a reading resource list and articles. The external group reached out to several other Faith Communities and our project is part of a Faith Coalition for Racial Equity. Its mission: "We are a growing coalition of faith communities benefiting from white privilege who advocate dismantling institutional racism and are vocal and visible allies of Black communities in Peoria through joint action." We have adopted three goals:

1. "A public safety/policing culture and system that works for Black communities in Peoria". Meeting with the Peoria Police Chief, mental health and domestic violence providers, amongst others are held to eventually advocate for a comprehensive model of "public safety" vs the concept of policing.

2. "Make Peoria a better place for Black communities and thus for everyone else to live in." A Faith Coalition joint fundraising effort for the POTENT Gratitude Park creation across from Proctor Center is underway.

3. "Grow an interfaith coalition committed to listening and supporting Black faith communities through advocacy and service." We have a "who we are" document and a logo-- ready to reach out and expand to more like minded Faith Communities.

Our current Faith Coalition comprises our UU Peoria Church, St Paul's Episcopal Church, University United Methodist Church, Imago Dei Church and the Jewish Federation of Peoria. Individuals from other local faith communities also are active in this coalition.