

The ABD team shares their passion and commitment to the UUCA Community and why they so generously support this community.



How has UUCA impacted my life?

Cecilia Rawlins

Let me start with a brief story about how I came to UUCA. After having retired from WCPSS, I worked as a part-time consultant for a short time and then jumped back in as a principal at an independent school in Japan for 2 1/2 years. Upon my return to the US in Hot Springs, NC, I wanted to find a church family. My husband and I lived in our vacation home in Hot Springs. I'm still waiting for the Free Will Baptist Church folks who had a church that was less than a mile from our home to welcome us. I tend to think they're not coming!!! One Sunday I went to an Episcopal Church in Mars Hill with my friend and neighbor. It was too much like Catholicism, from which I was escaping. I will admit that there was a good message that morning – but it just was not the place for me. I returned home and during the week decided that there just had to be a welcoming non-denominational church in Asheville for me. On a particular Sunday, I headed into Asheville to the Unity Church. I had gone to it many years before and did not particularly like it. However, I thought I'd give it another shot. As I was driving into Asheville for the 11:00 service, I saw that I was going to be late. So since UUCA did not start until 11:15, I came here instead and have not left yet.

At UUCA, I have met various kindred souls. As a guest speaker once said, we have to accept the consequences of the decisions in our life. One of the consequences of my life decisions is that I will put my very limited treasure where my mouth is. I have more time, than treasure and have decided to live my life in such a way that I help my fellow citizens. We are currently living during a time of much turmoil in our country - many people are hurting. UUCA would be considered a safety net organization because we try to help those most in jeopardy. We are not an organization where there is mistrust because our leaders get large, outrageous salaries. As we all know, we are quite fortunate to have the leaders we have based on what our budget allow us to pay them. Join me now in thanking our church administrators.

We may feel that as individuals we cannot tackle large national problems. I do, however, feel that we can bring about healing and harmony in our small circle. Thanks to UUCA, I have met many people who have chosen to do that. As a result of my associations here, I have met people from whom I have learned much about helping my brothers and sisters. UUCA has opened many doors for me and has provided the opportunity to get further involved in social

justice issues that are near and dear to my heart. I actually enjoy trying to help others and have availed myself of those opportunities. One of the things I have chosen to do with my time is to be the co-chair of the ABD right here. Thank you to all who have supported me in that decision. Thank you to my co-chair and good friend Barbara Brownsmith Campbell. I urge you to look into your hearts and to think of how UUCA has impacted your life.

Look into your heart and try to see how we will continue to be a safety net non-profit for so many who are and will be hurting. I urge you to make a pledge that reflects those feelings.

What UUCA Means to Me

Barbara B. Campbell

You know the expression that life happens when you were making other plans. Well, that is true of my deep almost decade long connection with UUCA. That is when I attended a fall session of Building Bridges that was cohosted by UUCA and had Mark serving as one of the conveners. My first impression was of the sanctuary and of that sense of peace I had waiting there for the first large group session to start. Mark opened the meeting by talking personally about his dealing with race as a major topic of his life and the congregation's desire to be part of the solution to race relations.

I was feeling at home in this space with these words. Then the following week was the knock me for a loop moment. I was sitting in RE 4 waiting for the second small group meeting and while there I read the UU seven principles and was struck with a feeling that overwhelmed my Jewish-atheist-never been part of a congregation of any sort heart. This denomination was, through my Building Bridges experience, talking to me. At the conclusion of Building Bridges I asked my friend and work colleague Brenda Robinson, a long time UU, if I could accompany her to services and, if you know Brenda, she readily agreed to be my shepherd.

Since that auspicious beginning, I have found a spiritual home here at UUCA. It is a place where, when I am struggling with the too-muchness of the world and the fear that there are more steps going backward than forward, I am reminded that we can and must move forward in community with love always with love with people who are as or more dedicated to connection, justice, and action than I am. Given the state of the nation and world at this moment, I truly don't think that I could be functioning without the inspiring words of Mark and Lisa each and every week. It doesn't stop there....for me participating in groups, offering my services to the Welcome Team, and being part of a basic need of UUCA, fundraising....fills me, fuels me, and allows me to give back to our beloved community in some small way.

Fundraising, the Annual Budget Drive, why that you ask? UUCA as an entity with all it provides to us in faith development, support for social action, and building a deeper community aligned with our UU principles must have a source of funds. I want to be part of ensuring that we exist now and into the future! Annual Budget Drives are not sexy, they are sometimes wearying, and at the same time, they serve a critical dual purpose. Raising needed funds, Yes! But as important, it provides a venue and an opportunity to connect in a deeper way with members of our large community, we might not get to know any other way. I have a confession to make....this connection aspect is what powers me to keep going with the work of the ABD. My fabulous and hard-working partner and fellow retired but not really educator, Cecilia Rawlins, has made this whole collaborative enterprise fun (now don't tell too many people that or they will be fighting to co-chair the ABD next year.)

The final sharing of what UUCA means to me is personal. It was at UUCA I met and fell in love with the amazing, loving, and talented Dennis Campbell. I never thought that I would have the life experience of sharing development of faith and grow in love with a person whose values and actions were so in alignment with mine.

“What UUCA Means to Me”

Bob Lane

I had originally thought of UUCA mostly as a place to build friendships among like-minded folks. And as I have seen over our brief time here, we have ministers who are themselves and want UUCA to be actively engaged in social justice in our community; many members are very involved in social justice. And I am so proud of our welcoming congregation.

But there is more. Recently I had an illness that could have been very serious; we wouldn't know until after surgery (all indications are that the surgery took care of it). The outpouring of caring and concern from close friends and from people we'd just recently met was astounding—even though we've been members of UUCA less than three years. At 6 am on January 13 when I walked through the doors of UNC hospital in Chapel Hill for surgery, in addition to Eleanor as she held my hand, I had a surreal feeling of an army in lock step behind me, marching in support. The hair on the back of my neck stood up. I have never felt so enveloped in care in time of stress. That is when I learned what UUCA really means to me.

To describe my overall experience of UUCA I have to draw on the words of Jack Nicholson to Helen Hunt in “As Good as It Gets”: “You make me want to be a better man.”

What UUCA Means to Me
Eleanor Lane

UUCA has become integrated into my life in so many ways, I can't imagine life in Asheville without it. Even though I struggle with getting out of the house on Sunday mornings, the services have become a grounding for me as I start a new week. My most meaningful social-justice activities in the community have come through contacts that began in the congregation. I've felt inspired to be bolder, more daring, to speak out more consistently and become truly involved in Asheville's diverse community. And I have so much fun in the varied UU groups—eating together at Asheville's best and quirky restaurants and agreeing and disagreeing as we explore the latest films. And recently, thanks to the auction, I've found that I actually can learn a new instrument at my age, the mountain dulcimer. UUCA is a real home for me—a source of love and support and a place where I'm challenged to be better and more.

What UUCA Means To Me
Gina Phairas

Some of you may have discovered Unitarian Universalism the same way I did, by having a child. That's where it started for me, the day we brought our son, Nick, home from the hospital. He was asleep in his car seat and we walked into our tiny California apartment, set his seat in the middle of the coffee table, then my husband, Dan, and I looked at each other and at the same time asked, "What do we do with him now?"

We had no idea what we were doing. Should we put him in the cradle, his crib, leave him where he is until he wakes up? And how would we raise him to be a kind and compassionate person if we couldn't even figure out where to put him? Clearly we were going to need some help.

That brought us to the Unitarian Universalist Church of San Mateo where Dan and I started our UU journey. A few short years later we landed in Asheville and found UUCA. Here our kids have grown up in the RE program in classes from Pre-K to OWL and Dan and I have had a chance to learn and grow as well. Much of that growing has taken place in the RE classrooms and we feel blessed to be a part of such a loving community.

I wish I had eloquent words to describe what this congregation means to me, I don't, but perhaps I've spent enough time in RE that I can tell you with a story.

Just a couple of weeks ago Dan and I were with the kids in a bookstore and Nick was helping his sister, Mia, pick out a book. He picked up a picture book and after flipping through it said, "Mia, this is a good book, you'll like it **and** it's important."

It was a story told by 3 immigrant children who explain what it's like to go to school in a new place without being able to understand the language. All three kids are pretty scared at first. But when other kids and teachers share simple acts of kindness, like inviting them to play soccer or noticing their beautiful drawing, each feels safe and confident and more comfortable in their new school.

Mia and I read the story that night before bed and she asked if she could make a story basket about it. Story baskets are how we tell stories in RE. They are baskets filled with objects and characters the storyteller can use to show the story. Mia made a list of all the things she would need in her basket to tell the story. She knew just what she would need; a school, a desk, a soccer ball and she knew just how she would lay out each of those objects as she told the story.

You know how you get when you have a really good idea? How the excitement just sends energy shooting right through your finger tips. That's how excited she was about making a story basket and I asked her, "Why do you want to make *this* story into a story basket?"

And she wisely said, "Because we have lots of story baskets at church and they're all good stories and they teach you things, but I think the kids might need a **new** story."

For my family, UUCA is where we come to learn and to share important stories. Stories that remind us every person is important, and to take care of our world. It's where we learn how to build a more fair and peaceful world.

This church and these principles are part of our family's story now. And we are learning how to take these stories out into the world.

It's pledge time. A time to reflect on what UUCA means to us and how we intend to support this congregation in the coming year. I hope that as you consider your pledge, you will reflect on your own story and the role UUCA plays in that story.

Together we can share a story of love in the world but that work takes time, talent AND money. So let's work together to give generously to support this community.

What UUCA Means To Me Nora Carpenter

Four years ago, I took my first step through UUCA's doors. I remember enjoying the sermon, though looking back I couldn't tell you what it was about to save my life. But I do, to this day, still vividly remember this:

As soon as I stepped over the threshold, a woman greeted me with a huge smile. "Welcome," she said. "We're so glad you're here." What's more, unlike some other places I'd been, she seemed to truly mean it. I relaxed immediately.

A few services later, I brought my husband. Josh and I—like many of our generation—identify as "spiritual but not religious." What motivated us to finally find a spiritual home was becoming parents. We wanted our children to have a strong sense that they "belonged" in a community, while simultaneously having the freedom to explore and develop their own religious beliefs. I didn't want them to feel—as I often did growing up—like a spiritually homeless loner.

My oldest is 4 ½, but it's already clear he understands and intuits the principles of UUCA. A few weeks ago, our friends told us they were going to try the congregation for the first time. They have a two year old daughter, so we told Garek he needed to welcome her. "You can show her around," I said. "And tell her all about the church."

He nodded, an earnest look on his small face, and said, "Ohhh. Okay. That's easy. I'll tell her it's all about love."

And that, in essence, is what UUCA means to me and my family. It's a place of love, of acceptance, and spiritual exploration. A place where we feed our souls through the community we've found: in our parents covenant group, through social justice action, through empathy and understanding. It's a community I cherish, and in these dark political times, it's a bright light of hope that we must—all of us—keep burning.

Most of our donations to the church come through volunteering, but this year we increased our monetary pledge by 60%. I wish we could give more, but we found our

And growing up, I saw some of the negative effects of dogged adherence to religious doctrine, and it scared me. But in college especially always felt a little lost.

Neither one of us grew up in a “church family” and I confess that, because of the few, conservative options in my tiny rural WV town, I’m glad of that. But when I got to college, I had the sense that some part of me was missing. Not just a place where I could safely explore my own spirituality, but I realized I wanted a community similar to the one my best friend, a devoted Catholic, had. I just didn’t want the doctrine.

Josh and I had tried another UU congregation in the past, but it felt like something was missing. It was huge, and while it had a tremendous social justice emphasis, it didn’t seem to have any kind of spiritual vibe, which although UUs are special in that we have no creed or doctrine,

What UUCA Means to Us

Julie and John Stoffels

Julie: We watch the PBS NewsHour. This Friday a researcher at Harvard, Casper ter Kuile presented the “In My Humble Opinion” segment.

This is part of what he said: “Millennials are turning away from religion faster than any other age group. And according to the Pew Research Center, more than a third of Americans between 18 and 35 are now unaffiliated, meaning, when asked on a survey what religious identity they hold, they answer none of the above.”

John: He continues, “But what’s really interesting is that the overwhelming majority of us nones aren’t necessarily atheists. Two-thirds believe in God or a universal spirit, and one in five even pray every day.”

The key to what Casper was saying is this: “We aren’t young people who hate religion. It’s a growing group that feels like they have been left behind by religious institutions.”

Julie: As a result, he and his family and friends are creating new forms of spiritual communities that fulfill some of the same functions that religious groups do: being there when one is stressed or ill, nurturing fellowship, sharing meals with strangers after losing a loved one, like the organization The Dinner Party which has spread to 116 communities across the United States hosted by volunteers who create sacred spaces for their guests to cook, eat, and commune. But, like the Dinner Party, these communities tend to attach to some other function than that of a “church,” like exercise, or Yoga.

John: One of the challenges we face at UUCA is to connect to Millennials and others who seek the experience of being part of something bigger than themselves, while not restricting

involvement by imposing dogma and rituals that do not speak to them. Such a challenge is worth our efforts and within our capacity to meet.

One of the reasons we are active in UUCA is because this congregation already provides a culture that helps to “shape participants’ world views, ethics, and behaviors,” as Casper says he wants. We even meet the desire he mentions of “getting involved in struggles for more affordable housing.” We also have our own dinner party strategy, through Dinners for Eight and RestaurantTours groups. The RestaurantTours we were lucky enough to sign up for in 2005 starts its 13th year this month. We treasure the fellowship of that group.

Julie: We come to UUCA because it is a coming home to deep friendships, spiritual growth, and exploring with others solutions to societal problems and the human condition. It’s also a place for personal support.

In 2012 our then 8-year-old grandson, Casey, was diagnosed with cancer. He is healthy, I hasten to say, and next Sunday will celebrate his 14th birthday. But the outpouring of support and caring thoughts from members of this congregation held us through the year-long interferon treatments and many trips back and forth to Atlanta to be with him and our daughter, her husband, and our granddaughter. Many of you in this sanctuary helped us through.

John: Forty-some years ago UU became a haven for us from the oppressive quest for salvation imposed by our protestant heritage. We are enriched by knowing that becoming the best that we can be on--and for--this Earth and its people is the best pursuit of life here, for sure, and perhaps hereafter. We get it. Welcoming community outreach.

Julie: We get it. Social justice.

John: We get it. Family focus.

Julie: We get it. Small group ministry.

Both: We get it. We’re lifers!

John: While I probably can’t think like a millennial--and doubt that I could get my spiritual and community needs met as part of a Cross-Fit group--I can observe that what it seems that millennials want is what we have here at UUCA. At a time in history when more and more people are seeking a source of meaning and connection, we should be reaching out to them more actively. But our beacon of hope, while burning brightly, is under a bushel, to borrow loosely from the book of Matthew.

Julie: Our \$650,000 budget goal has the hope only of keeping us in steady state, not to grow our outreach to this new generation. And, as the budget drive concludes, we are not even

there yet. So, if you've already made your pledge, consider bumping it up a little. Barbara and Cecilia can help you do that after the service.

John: If you haven't yet pledged, please be even more generous than you thought you could. Help raise that bushel!

It's the millennials that are our future. You will find that we lifers, from the lost generation, are, for obvious reasons, a dwindling bunch.