

FACT SHEET for the First Universalist Society of Wakefield (updated 10/6/08)
aka Wakefield Unitarian Universalist Church or Wakefield UU Church

326 Main St
Wakefield MA 01880
781-245-4632
Please see our website: www.wakefielduu.org

Number of adult members: 72

Children & youth enrollment: 20

Church Services: We hold Sunday Services from the Sunday after Labor Day through the 2nd Sunday in June.

During the summer, we have various formal and informal opportunities to stay in touch, including our 9:00 a.m. Sunday morning walk at Breakheart Reservation and the 10:30 a.m. breakfast at Brother's Restaurant.

Congregational Profile:

We are progressive, spiritually/theologically diverse, welcoming to all individuals and families regardless of sexual orientation or family structure. We are a small but active and engaging congregation. We have strong lay leadership, an excellent music program, and many members who are also very active in the larger community.

Congregational History:

How and when was the congregation founded?

On April 29, 1813, seven members of the First Parish Congregational Church decided to split off from that congregation and form the new "Universalist Society in South Reading". South Reading was the original name of Wakefield. We are now the sixth oldest Universalist church still in existence.

Note the three or four most important events in the congregation's history:

Historical Events:

The first pastor, Rev. John H. Newell, was settled in 1833. He had been a student of Hosea Ballou in Boston.

The church school was formed in 1837, and has been a vibrant and integral part of the church ever since.

On March 29, 1839, the society voted to build a meeting house. The church was completed later that year and dedicated at a service in November.

In 1859, the building was moved back about fifty feet and raised. The front portion of the building and the basement, our Social Hall, was built. Various renovations took place in the following years, including the removal of the original box pews and the installation of the current pews.

The bell was donated by Dr. Richardson and the clock was given by Cyrus Wakefield.

In July 1900, the church was badly damaged by a fire caused by burning embers flying from the old Rink Building, which was totally destroyed. The roof and steeple were considerably damaged and also suffered interior water damage.

There was another fire in 1939 which caused extensive damage.

In 1938, Carl Brown, one of our oldest living members until his passing in May 2008, published the first issue of "The Gleam" as a Youth Group project. The Gleam is our church newsletter, and to this day, is still published on a monthly basis.

By a vote of 18 to 17 with 1 abstention, the Society approved a merger with the Unitarians on April 8, 1959.

About 15 years ago, the congregation showed its tenacious and independent spirit by voting against a merger with several other small UU congregations in the area, including Saugus, Woburn and Stoneham.

The steeple has been struck by lightning three times: in 1917, 1997 and 1998.

"A History of the First Universalist Society of Wakefield" was issued on April 29, 2003 by Rev. Edmund Robinson in honor of the church's 190th anniversary.

Recent Events:

Becoming a Welcoming Congregation in 2004; sharing our space and services with the Saugus congregation during the 2007-2008 church year; voting, in January 2008, to keep rather than sell our historic building; voting in April 2008 to remove the spire for structural and financial reasons.

Congregational strengths:

Our congregation is an energetic, hard working, diverse group of people. We value many things in our church including RE, music and social events. . Perhaps most striking is the group's self confidence and tenacious independence. Consequently, there is strong leadership among lay participants as well as excellent community relations due, in part, to the high level of civic involvement by many of our members. Also among our strengths, we count our music program, our tolerance for ideological diversity, our ownership of a historical building on Main Street in the heart of downtown Wakefield that was built by our congregation in the 1800s, and our being know by many as "The Music Church," and, by a growing number of young people who present and attend fundraising concerts in our Social Hall, as the "rock 'n roll mecca" of Wakefield.

To what degree does the congregation possess a dominant theology?

To a small degree. We lean toward humanism but hold many varied beliefs. 2004 survey results representing 60% of the congregation showed that most respondents identified two affiliations. Approximately 50% are humanists. 20% acknowledged being non-theists and 20% naturalistic theists. Theists, atheists, open agnostics, skeptics, mystics, earth-centered spiritualists, or pantheists registered at 10-20% each. Approximately, 5% are feminine spiritualists. A current survey would most likely show similar results.

Describe the role of music and the arts in the life of the congregation:

Music is a big part of our identity. We have two choirs – one adult, and one for singers of all ages. We present special holiday events that feature a lot of music, such as our famous Winter Solstice Celebration and the Maypole Dance. We hold a number of music-based Sunday services each year, including a Fall Music Service, a December Holiday Music Service, and often, a service featuring Spirituals in February.

The service with the greatest amount of congregational participatory singing is also the most popular (attendance figures bear this out year after year): our Christmas Eve Candlelight Service. Most remarkable is that fully one fourth of the congregation spills out from their pews in a rush to the front to join the choir in singing the "Hallelujah Chorus". If this were just an average-attended service, the number of singers would easily outnumber those remaining in their seats.

The congregation so enjoys the music played by our pianist (Preludes and Postludes), that we created a regular spot in the service (following the sermon) each Sunday that also features her. Church people genuinely appreciate the volunteer choir, which sings at least two choral anthems every Sunday. The congregation is especially supportive of the young musicians who play frequently during the church year.

The arts are strongly featured in our RE programming, with the children making their own props and performing in plays and skits presented to the congregation throughout the year, as well as the use of drawing, working with clay, and other venues.

Our social hall is the home to a number of youth and adult dance and arts programs, and both the Social Hall and our Sanctuary are used for all kinds of concerts, including the Linden Tree Coffeehouse (in its 24th year) (www.lindentrecoffeehouse.org) high school student rock band fundraisers for Dafur, breast cancer research, and our local food pantry, and Classical recitals and fundraising events.