

Unity Church of Truth - The 1970s History

In 1970, Grover Thornsberry started his third year as Seattle Unity's minister. On September 13, the tenth anniversary of the church building was celebrated. The year also saw the expansion of the weekly radio program on station KXA to thirty minutes; it included music, a sermonette and meditation by Rev. Thornsberry, poetry and inspirational readings.

The church included separate groups for singles, couples, youth (Youth of Unity), Young Marrieds, men (Men of Unity), and women (Unity Women's League). Many classes were offered, both day and evening.

The prayer ministry was significantly expanded in 1973. It was staffed to ensure someone would be on duty to take prayer requests by phone from 9:00 AM to 11:00 PM daily. Originally called Dial-a-Prayer, it was eventually renamed Prayerline and by January of 1974 it was taking over 600 calls each month.

As of June 30, 1970 the church indebtedness included bonds worth \$7700 (retired by the end of the year) and the church mortgage was \$134,000. In October 1972, indebtedness stood at \$91,300 for the church mortgage and \$70,613 for costs associated with establishing parking.

Even though the church building was relatively new, various repairs and improvements were carried out during the 70's, including a new sound system, improved restroom facilities, repairs to the sprinkler system, new carpeting, painting, and sidewalk repairs. Three pieces of property at 8th N. and Thomas were purchased in 1972 for parking and rental income.

An assistant minister, Michael Murphy, was hired in 1971. He remained until mid-1972, when he became minister of Unity Church at Burien. He was succeeded by Ernest Milleur, who remained until mid-1973 when he became minister of the Unity Church of Fresno. The next associate minister was Max Lafser, who started in July of 1973. He remained until the middle of the decade and went on to become minister at the Unity church in Vancouver, BC. The next associate minister was Susan Colombero. She departed in May of 1977 to establish a new ministry on the island of Maui. In August of that year, Mary Stovin of the Tacoma Unity Church was brought in as interim minister during Grover Thornsberry's illness. In November 1978 Bob Barth became associate minister.

Attendance at Sunday services in 1972 was reportedly averaging 600-700. By the end of the decade it had dropped to around 350. In late 1979 a committee was appointed to study the causes of declining attendance and recommend actions for improvement. It appears one of the recommendations was to hire a new minister: R. Scott Sherman was selected in March of 1980 to be co-minister with Grover Thornsberry.

Activities....winter cruise to Puerto Vallarta, Acapulco, and Mazatlan in February 1973 ... Catherine Ponder presented a prosperity seminar at Seattle Unity in 1973...“The Fillmore Lectures” held in Seattle in 1975: two days of talks on the theme The Human Potential for Healing - speakers included James Dillet Freeman and Phil Pierson, former Seattle Unity minister ... Retreat to Maui in April 1976 ...Autumn retreat at Unity Village in 1976 ... various retreats at Seabeck ...

In late 1977, the church was the beneficiary of a large estate from the will of Belle Blackmer. The will was contested by Ms. Blackmer's family and the church retained an attorney to

defend its interests. It appears that Ms. Blackmer changed her will in 1975 and had made Rev. Thornsberry her executor. The church's attorney recommended an out of court settlement, indicating a likely result in the range of \$40,000-\$70,000. The board accepted the recommendation and an out of court settlement was negotiated.

Controversy...

At a board meeting in June 1978, a board member indicated "an increasing demand by several in the congregation" for stronger church leadership. After considerable discussion, the board decided to seek a new full-time minister and offer the position of associate minister to Grover Thornsberry (the incumbent minister). Evidently, this decision was extremely controversial. A special meeting of all church members was held in July 1978, at which the board was accused of violating a number of rules:

- the board had held several secret meetings without the knowledge of the minister
- no minutes of these secret meetings had been kept
- actions taken by the board indicated it was not following Unity teachings
- the board failed to work with the minister

A motion was made to fire the board, a vote was taken, and the motion carried by a vote of 191 - 66.

1970s History was reconstructed by Guy Goldsworth, August 2005