The information compiled below was derived from multiple sources and some of the text is taken verbatim from these sources.


Church newsletters and church minutes.

### The Early Years

By 1831, Dr. William Samuel Emerson, his wife Olive, and their young son Lincoln, had moved to the rough and lawless Mississippi River town of Alton, Illinois where Dr. Emerson set up practice as the town’s first physician. The Emersons were from Kennebunk Maine. William was the second cousin of Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Olive was from a prominent shipbuilding family. Both were affiliated with the Unitarian church in Kennebunk. Life was much different in Alton than “back east,” and Dr. Emerson wanted to bring to Alton his family’s ethical religion – Unitarianism – to this turbulent town on the edge of the frontier. He perhaps had a more personal reason also. In 1832 Mrs. Emerson wrote in a letter to her brother back in Kennebunk, “I thank you for telling me so many hymns and tunes that your sing … I take my hymn book and find the hymns and then sing them … there is nothing that reminds me … of home as that. Oh how I long every Sunday morning to be in Kennebunk and go to my own meeting. It is so different here.”

Dr. Emerson attracted like-minded people and they gathered for worship services in his office. Occasionally the Rev. William Greenleaf Eliot would make the trip by steam boat up from the Unitarian Church in St. Louis to preach to the assembled congregation. By 1836 the congregation called their first minister, the Rev. Charles Andrew Farley, an 1832 graduate of Harvard, and he preached his first sermon on December 7, 1836. This is the date that is considered the founding of the Unitarian Church in Alton. Farley’s sermon was published and distributed widely throughout the town.

However, soon the congregation was faced with challenges. After an illness of some length, Dr. Emerson died on September 28, 1837, at the age of 36. Earlier that year the publisher, minister, and abolitionist Elijah P. Lovejoy had brought his abolitionist newspaper and free press views to Alton, arousing conflict and violence on both sides of the question and mob rule became the law.
Lovejoy was murdered on Nov. 7, 1837 and the social upheaval continued. Rev. Farley apparently tried to remain neutral. In a sermon he gave on December 31, 1837 he stated:

“… adherents of the conflicting parties are one-sided men. Each is about half right, and half wrong … With no sympathy for the agitators be their principles right or wrong, and claiming the privilege of holding and expressing my own principles in my own way, it seems an act of moral suicide, in the present state of things, to go all out with any party.” (Gill, p. 233, 1958).

Rev. Farley soon moved back east. The small congregation grew smaller as a result of these events and stopped holding regular meetings. But Rev. Eliot kept an eye on the Unitarians in Alton and would make an occasional visit to preach to them.

The Last Half of the 19th Century

By the early 1850s those interested in starting a Unitarian congregation had grown strong enough again to begin public worship and formed the First Congregational [Unitarian] Society in 1853. Their first minister, the Rev. William D’Arcy Haley, arrived in October of that year.

In 1854 the members bought a corner lot on a hill where the Catholic Church had burned on Feb. 18, 1854. They started construction, and by October, 1855 they dedicated their new sanctuary.

During Rev. Haley’s tenure with the church (1853-1856) the policy of “freedom of the pulpit” was instituted following a congregational upheaval related to Haley’s abolitionist stance and the complaint about his preaching “politics” from the pulpit. On July 13, 1856 he offered his resignation saying:

“… I denounce such enormous wrongs from root to branch … I am compelled to say, that if I cannot be an honest man, and be your pastor, I will at least remain honest; if I cannot preach the whole truth I will not preach at all.”

Following an initial vote to accept Haley’s resignation, a second motion was made and approved, asking him to remain. That motion said in part:

“… that however we may as individuals differ in opinions upon the numerous questions political and others constantly presented to us, yet as a Society we will never condemn a person for upholding the cause of Truth, Justice, and Morality … this Society … will uphold him [Haley] in his Christian ministry.”

Even after getting the support of the congregation Haley stayed only a few more months, leaving in October 1856.

Soon after Haley left they called another minister. Over the next five decades the congregation had nine ministers, some staying but a short time, others eight years or more. The first high school in Alton met in the church basement. During the Civil War the minister went to serve as a
chaplain in the Union Army, and no services were held from 1861–May, 1863. In 1878 a brick parsonage was built on the church grounds. By 1880 the congregation was active in community service – there was a committee that established the Free Library in Alton, and a committee for “Cooperation and City Works.”

In 1890 the name of the church was changed to the First Unitarian Society. In 1898 the women of the church formed a women’s group called the Anna D. Sparks Alliance after the first woman treasurer of the church, Anna Davenport Sparks. This group was formed to do “good works” in support the church and the community. The Anna Ds, as they are called, still meet today.

**The First Three Decades of the 20th Century**

By 1900 the church was free of debt and had about fifty-seven families with an active Sunday School. In 1903 the congregation voted to build a new church on its hill-top corner overlooking the Mississippi River. This is the same church the congregation meets in today. The new building was dedicated on October 29, 1905.

During this period the church had nine ministers. In 1913, the Rev. Dr. Curtis Reese (1913-1915), later a signer of the Humanist Manifesto, was head of the Alton Anti-Crime Syndicate and had his life threatened numerous times.

**1936 – 1946**

In 1936 the church celebrated its 100th anniversary with the compilation of a church history written by its minister, the Rev. Wallace W. Robbins (1934-1938).

Between 1936 and 1946 the church remained active in community life. Boy and Girl Scout troops, led by church members, met at the church; the Coast Guard met there during the war; donations were collected for the Alton Memorial Hospital Building Fund. By the early 1940s the congregation was growing and the Sunday School was very active. In 1944 the minister, the Rev. John Gill (1944-1950), was invited to join the Alton Ministerial Alliance and the church became a member of the Alton Council of Churches.

**1946 - 1956.**

By 1946 the church had over one-hundred members with fifty children in the Sunday School.

In the decade between 1946 and 1959 the church was very active. In 1951 the Anna Ds had 83 members and did much work for the community and church. The church sponsored movies for children, programs for parents, a philosophy group, art classes, and programs for teens. The Alton Art Guild and the Alton Civic Orchestra met at the church.

However the church also went through a difficult time in 1949-1950. The minister and many members of the congregation supported and worked for, school integration, and they received angry calls, threats, and criticisms from segregationists—and even from some of the church members themselves.
In 1951 the congregation called Rev. Zoltan Nagy (1951-1958), a displaced Unitarian minister from Hungary. He held fireside discussions about Unitarianism for all in the community who wished to attend. By 1953 the membership rose to 137, with 65 children registered in the Sunday School. The church ran a capital campaign amounting to $23,500 to purchase a new parsonage, and used the parsonage next to the church for the Sunday School classes.

**1956 - 1966**

Between 1956 and 1966 the church prospered. By the end of the decade there were 138 children in the church school, the church buildings were in good condition, and were used for church and community activities. In 1958 Rev. Nagy resigned and went to Austria to work with the Unitarian Universalist Service Committee (UUSC) in helping Hungarian refugees. Special donations were made by church members to support this work. In 1959 Rev. Hugh Kennedy (1959-1970) was called to the Alton ministry. Pledge drives began, new hymnals and a piano were purchased. The house purchased as a parsonage was sold and the money invested in the American Unitarian Association general fund. The church celebrated its 125th anniversary in 1961 with a gathering of 100 members. The Rev. Dana Greely, president of the American Unitarian Association (AUA) was the guest speaker.

**1966 - 1976**

The decade between 1966 and 1976 was a time of change and upheaval for the Alton church and the country. In Lottie Forcade’s history of the church written in 1986 she discussed the societal changes and the development of psychotherapy methods called Sensitivity Groups or Encounter Groups. In 1968 Rev. Kennedy visited the Esalen Institute in California and came back to Alton wanting to set up such groups in the congregation. These groups proved to be very controversial—some members found them helpful, others believed them harmful. However the groups, along with other experimental changes in the Sunday services, have been blamed for the departure of Rev. Kennedy in 1970 and the split that occurred in the congregation, with many members, especially those with children, leaving. Although the Encounter groups continued for two more years after Rev. Kennedy’s departure.

Grace Madison’s update to the church history written in 2009 postulates that another cause for the split may have had to do with finances. In 1967 the congregation had voted to proceed with the construction of a new Religious Education wing. A building drive fund which produced $55,000 plus endowment money provided total of $92,000. The costs of the new wing and renovations to the fellowship hall were estimated to be $130,000 and the Board did not feel that they had enough money pledged to go to a bank for a mortgage, so they took out an unsecured loan, assuming that the growth in membership would continue and that the loan could easily be paid back. However, this was not the case, and the church lost many members as mentioned above. Following Rev. Kennedy’s departure, the Unitarian Interdistrict Representative suggested that the congregation hire an interim minister before searching for another settled minister. However, the Board felt there was not money to take that step and gave some thought to becoming a “fellowship.” However the congregation decided they wanted a minister and in October, 1971 voted to call Rev. Kelley Wells, (1971-1972). However membership and pledges continued to
decline, and the only available funds were in the Building Fund. When in June 1972 the minister asked for an increase in salary he was refused because the Board did not want to use the Building Fund money for salary, so the minister left and the congregation was without a settled minister until 1979. Sunday services were conducted by church members, speakers from the community, part-time ministers, and ministerial students. UU ministers in the St. Louis area were contracted for weddings, funerals and pastoral counseling.

1976 - 1986

In 1976, with the receipt of a financial legacy, it was decided to establish a Ministerial Fund for the calling of a future minister. However, serious building maintenance problems required funds and members were invited to loan the church money for these purposes. Another split in the church came in 1977 when the Board proposed that the building loans (plus the loans taken for the needed repairs) be paid off with the legacy fund. This would have taken the entire amount of the legacy. The congregation over-rode the Board’s proposal and voted instead to set aside $14,500 in the Ministerial Fund, pay off the mortgage ($3,200) and put the remaining $3,500 towards the building maintenance repayment.

According to the UUA Active Congregation History Report, in 1976 there were 60 members on the rolls, down from 208 in 1971. A profile taken from a Long Range Planning report shows “…a small, ageing congregation scattered geographically, academically oriented due to the presence of local colleges, and financially unremarkable.”

In 1977 the church participated in a “Minister on Loan” program whereby another Unitarian Church would “loan” its minister for a six week period to provide an outsider’s view of the congregation and help them with future planning. At the end of the six weeks the congregation developed a list of “hopes and dreams” for a five year period, ending in December 1982. Some of the items on the wish list included: 150 members, 100 in church on Sunday morning, groups to fill people’s needs, an active Religious Education program, a settled minister, social action work within the community, and active involvement within the denomination.

By 1978 the church had the financial means to call the Rev. Sylvia Falconer, (1979-1983), who began her work with the church in January, 1979. Rev. Falconer brought new life, and her three children, to the church and to the community. She brought a new perspective to the pulpit, and revamped the worship service structure which had become lax and informal during the years without a minister. She included the children in the worship time. She provided counseling for women at the Oasis Women’s Shelter, worked for the passage of the Equal Rights Amendment in Illinois, and became president of the Alton Area Ministerial Alliance. By the time she submitted her resignation in December, 1982 and moved to a larger church in the spring of 1983, the congregation membership had grown to around 100 with 15 children in RE.

In September 1982, church member and sculptor Ned Giberson presented the church with a brass chalice that he designed and crafted. This is the chalice that we continue to light every Sunday.

Knowing it was important to keep the growth momentum, the church immediately appointed a Search Committee and the Dr. Rev. Jean Gilpatrick, (1983-1985), began her ministry in December, 1983. Several committees were active during this time. The Sunday morning Forum provided an avenue for discussions, the Anna Ds Women’s Alliance was thriving, and an additional Religious Education Classroom was needed. However, there was restlessness among the members—some complained that Rev. Gilpatrick’s sermons were too academic and that she
didn’t relate well to the children. Income was once again falling behind expenses, and for these and other personal reasons, Rev. Gilpatrick moved back to Virginia in 1985.

1986 – 1996

**UUA membership records for this decade show a high of 92 with a low of 76 and a spread in Religious Education (RE) attendance between 0 and 30. Average worship attendance was in the mid 40s.**

In September, 1986 the Alton church began sharing an Extension Minister, the Rev. Martha Newman, (1986-1993), with the newly formed Emerson Unitarian Universalist Chapel in West St. Louis County, Missouri. Although there were few children registered in Alton’s RE program, overall membership remained fairly constant in the low 90s with an average Sunday attendance in the 40s through the late 1980s. In 1990 Rev. Newman’s Extension Ministry tenure ended and Emerson Chapel was seeking a full-time minister. As Rev. Newman was nearing retirement she did not wish to have full-time work, so agreed to serve the Alton congregation on a two-thirds time basis.

By October 1991 there were twenty-five children registered in RE and a local Endowment Fund started to help provide for future needs. Rev. Newman retired in 1993 and a practicing Unitarian Universalist Buddhist, the Rev. Alex Holt, (1993-1994), was hired for a nine-month appointment. He was a popular leader and the congregation voted to extend his Interim Ministry for another year. However, then the furnace needed to be replaced, and a new copier was needed in the office, along with other unplanned for expenses. To finance large item expenditures the Board decided to initiate a Capital Fund campaign in addition to the regular budget. The Board explored the viability of obtaining a bank loan to pay for large ticket items as well as for the minister’s salary. Although the 1994 pledge drive saw a 10% increase in pledges, the church’s total income was projected to fall $13,000 short of the proposed budget. Rev. Holt indicated that due to his recent marriage he needed health insurance in his package, plus a twelve month contract, and he didn’t believe the church should borrow money to pay salaries. He resigned effective at the end of the 1994 church year and the church struggled with some members’ concerns regarding whether we had breached our contract with Rev. Holt and whether we needed to provide him additional severance pay.

In the “First Unitarian Church of Alton History Update 2009,” Grace Madison sums up the previous three decades by saying:

“… a recurring pattern emerged. 1) the congregation would be without a minister for a time during which money would be set aside in anticipation of hiring a minister; 2) because of our small congregation and budget, our search invariably resulted in hiring a very recent graduate of Seminary; 3) in a few years, our reserve fund would be exhausted, we would not have grown enough in members or money to maintain a ministerial presence and the process would start all over again. We had become a “boot camp” for new ministers. While this process had resulted in an interesting time of exposure to varied views and personalities, it meant a lack of continuity and a constant ‘reinventing of the wheel.’ It was decided to try more cautious alternative methods of leadership.”

In the fall of 1994, Dr. John Hoad, retired Leader Emeritus of the St. Louis Ethical Society, was hired to fill the pulpit two Sundays each month, with congregation and community members filling the other weeks. In addition, the Board contracted with Rev. Aline Russell, a local
Presbyterian Minister, to provide pastoral counseling services. These people, along with a part-time paid church administrator, a secretary, and an organist, helped to maintain the essentials of a functioning church. In addition, there was also an influx of members from the recently disbanded Thomas Jefferson Unitarian Fellowship on the Missouri side of the Mississippi River.

1996 – 2006

UUA membership figures for this decade show a high of 87 to a low of 60 with the average number of children in RE ranging from 30 to 16.

In 1996 the church developed a website, which in the coming years would be a vital tool for growth. At the congregation’s annual meeting in 1997 there was overwhelming support for more emphasis on Religious Education. The search began for a quarter-time Director of Religious Education (DRE). The second priority expressed at that meeting was for a half-time minister growing to full time.

In 1998, as a fundraiser, our church started participating in Alton’s Haunted History Tours. This participation continues. Alton is sometimes described as “one of the most haunted small towns in America” and the church is a popular stop on the tour. Tour Leaders (not associated with the church) indicate places in the church building where visitors might sense the presence of an apparition. Leaders speculate that “ghost” might be the Unitarian minister who hung himself in the building, the Rev. Phillip Mercer (1930-1934), or perhaps a Catholic priest whose body was left buried under the sanctuary after the 1854 fire.

At a weekend Board retreat in 1998 the Board developed a long-range plan, known as Focus on the Future. Under this plan old committees were restructured, new committees were organized, and committee responsibilities were defined.

In January of 1999 the Board announced that the church had $20,000 in the ministerial fund, and appointed a Ministerial Search Committee. Later that spring the Committee recommended that Carol Dole, the former DRE at First Unitarian Church, St. Louis, and graduate of Eden Seminary in St. Louis be called as our half-time minister. Continuing in the pulpit on the remaining Sundays would be Dr. Hoad and Dr. Ron Glossop, a church member and philosophy professor at nearby Southern Illinois University-Edwardsville. Carol was ordained at First Church St. Louis in July and installed at our church in October. She resumed using her maiden name of Wolff.

In 2000 a progress report on the Focus on the Future plan showed that a local endowment fund had been established, a different pledge drive approach brought positive results, and a new subcommittee—the Caring Committee—was formed under the Members Committee. An excellent office manager had been hired as well as a part-time DRE, and central air-conditioning was added to the entire church building.

In 2003, a Board and Committee Chair retreat developed new goals. They were: To have the membership grow to 100 members by 2008; to do needed maintenance to improve the aesthetics of the building; and to achieve greater consistency in Children and Youth Programming. Stated objectives, action steps and a timeline accompanied these goals.

In May 2004, Rev. Wolff submitted her resignation to take a full-time position at a Unitarian Church on the East Coast.
A Search Committee was formed to find another half-time minister, and arrangements were made for the pulpit to be filled by Dr. Hoad, Dr. Glossop, lay speakers, other UU ministers, and Khleber Van Zandt, a student at Eden Seminary. The congregation expressed the desire not to have another interim minister, but to have a permanent minister who would start at half-time and progress to full-time. A financial plan was in place to provide for a full-time minister within another year if growth progressed.

The Search Committee interviewed several candidates, including Khleber Van Zandt, who was preaching at the church on a regular basis and would graduate from Eden Theological Seminary in May 2005. The rules of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) state that if an individual has preached or provided ministerial services at a specific church, that individual may not be called as a minister there. However the UUA granted special permission to allow the congregation to formally call Mr. Van Zandt. At a special meeting in April 2005 the congregation voted unanimously to call him as our minister. Khleber served our church from 2005 to 2014. Although his ministry did not formally begin until July 1, he immediately started taking an active role by attending board meetings and becoming familiar with the people and activities of the church.

The congregation held Khleber’s Ordination and Installation service at our church on November 15, 2005.

**2006 – 2010**

**During these five years church membership grew from 61 in 2006 to 131 at the beginning of 2010. Enrollment in RE grew from 16 to 62.**

The congregation continued social service programs already in place, such as food donations to the Alton Crisis Food Pantry, financial and other support for the Oasis Women’s Center, and participation in Alton’s Annual Community Christmas toy and clothing drive.

New programs and activities were started during these years, some continuing to the present time. Other new programs were put in place to answer a specific need or were for a limited duration.

In 2006 the church began a year-long study program aimed at becoming a Welcoming Congregation, in support of GLBTQ individuals and their families. In May 2007 the congregation voted to become part of the UUA Welcoming Congregation program. Banners were hung on the fence in front of the church, one saying “Laws Don’t Make Families, LOVE makes Families and YOUR FAMILY IS WELCOME HERE”

In June 2007 church members participated in what would become an annual event, marching with our banner in the GLBTQ Pride Parade in St. Louis.

As part of its efforts to work on environmental issues, the church began working with the Missouri Adopt a Highway project, and church members regularly picked up trash along a stretch of Highway 367 leading from Missouri into Illinois. This effort continued for several years.
An interfaith discussion group called “All God’s People” was started and met monthly at the church for some time.

In January 2007 Rev. Van Zandt’s status was changed from half-time to full-time.

Covenant groups (aka chalice circles) were introduced, and 5 active groups were organized over the year, including a Pagan group and a Parents group. There are currently no “official” covenant groups, as over time most disbanded or became “interest groups,” no longer holding to the guidelines for chalice circles.

In February, seventeen people from the church, including Rev. Van Zandt and several children/young people, went to New Iberia Louisiana to help restore homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina. A team from our church went down to Louisiana the two following years to help fulfill the continued need for assistance.

In February the congregation offered the Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality education program for junior and senior high groups.

In the spring of 2007 the church became part of a social justice interfaith group--the Alton Area Cluster of the United Congregations of Metro East, a community organizing affiliate of the national Gamaliel Foundation. Work with the Cluster and UCM continues.

In August of 2007 the congregation started sharing the (non-pledge) Sunday collection twice a month through a program called the Community Outreach Offering. This program continued until April of 2013 when the church’s financial crisis made it necessary to retain the funds for normal operations.

In October 2008 a new social justice venture began—the 4th Saturday Lunch—providing A hot meal for local people struggling financially and for those living on the streets or in the several homeless shelters near the church. The distribution of personal care items was later added to this ongoing monthly activity. The attendance at these lunches averaged between 60 and 70 people.

2008 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-23-09: 117 members; 40 children enrolled in RE; 76 pledging units.

In February 2009 the church started an educational sponsorship of three Unitarian students in the Khasi Hills of India. This was a 3 – 5 year commitment.

In April 2009 the Confluence Covenant of UU Pagans initiated a monthly SpiralScouts program for children in the church and community. This program continued for several years.

In November 2009 a new Director of Religious Education was hired with increased hours and new RE programming began.
2009 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-25-10: 131 members; 62 children enrolled in RE; 93 pledging units.

In January 2010 the Board approved the recommendation by the Second Service Committee to start holding two services as of March 21, one at 9:30 and the other at 11 a.m. The two service Sundays continued through May and resumed on September 19. Having two services remains somewhat controversial yet today, with one of the two services having very small attendance.

In March 2010 the Social Justice Committee ran an eleven-week pilot program called KNOW (Kids Night Out Weekly) for children living at a nearby homeless shelter. A meal, social activities, and homework help were provided each Tuesday evening by church volunteers.

In April of 2010, a group of Unitarian-Universalist sexual orientation minorities and gender queers and their friends met at First UU in Alton to share a meal together, socialize, and plan for future activities. All four metro St. Louis UU congregations were represented: First Church in St. Louis, Eliot Chapel and Emerson members joined Alton’s sizable contingent. In addition to creating social opportunities within the UU LGBTQ community, attendees were interested in working with LGBTQ youth and elder organizations. Many members marched with their respective churches at St. Louis Pridefest over the summer.

In September 2010 the Board appointed a Capital Campaign Committee to investigate the possibilities of having a fund drive to support needed building maintenance and improvements which could not be paid for out of the annual budget.

2011 – 2017

2010 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-28-11: 129 members; 50 children enrolled in RE; 88 pledging units.

In January of 2011, a UUA Congregational Stewardship Consultant made a three-day “assessment visit” to the church. At her suggestion a committee was formed to develop a five year strategic plan to help us plan for the future and spur on the Capital Campaign.

In March the church started its ongoing participation in Alton’s community weekly Lenten Services and Lunches.

In 2010 it had been discovered that one of our members, a lawyer who was on the church Endowment Committee, had forged the name of one of our elderly congregants on a $130,000 inheritance check and had used the money for his own benefit. He was found guilty, and on the day of sentencing in July 2011 committed suicide. There was concern that the church’s endowment fund may have been compromised, but that was found not to be the case. There was also caring concern expressed for this man’s family, but they never returned to the church.

In late July, adults, children, and youth from our congregation participated in the first annual week-long outdoor Campfest at Pere Marquette State Park. Campfest happened for several more years.

Signs of potential future financial problems was noted by the Treasurer in his announcement to the Board of a deficit for FY’10-’11 of at least $6,800.
In September 2011 it was announced that our church was one of 18 across the nation that had been invited to join the UUA’s Leap of Faith” pilot program designed to help congregations learn how to grow. We were paired with a mentoring church—Bull Run UU in Manassas VA and our Leap of Faith Team participated in a startup workshop in Minneapolis, later making a weekend visit to Manassas to work directly with their Pastor and selected committee chairs. A video made in 2012 by Rev. Van Zandt about the Leap of Faith experience and its results is available on the UUA website http://www.uua.org/growth/leap/230837.shtml. Unfortunately our involvement with the Bull Run church ended when its Pastor moved to another church the following year.

In the fall of 2011 the church Board hired a Capital Campaign consultant to help design and oversee the fund-raising process.

On December 3 the church celebrated its 175th anniversary. A video prepared for that celebration is available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XpTJkrvu3Yo.

2012

2011 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-30-12: 126 members; 73 children enrolled in RE; 89 pledging units.

In January 2012 an Ad Hoc Architecture Committee developed priority projects to be funded by the Capital Campaign, and in late February the church kicked off a three year, (2012-2014), “Restoring the Future” Campaign. By May the Campaign had received pledges totally $254,000 from 46 pledging units.

At the May 2012 Annual Meeting the Congregation approved the following proposed projects: a new roof over the fellowship hall and RE wing; energy efficient windows and new façade on the RE wing; a remodeled kitchen and coffee center; handicapped accessible parking; a safe play area for young children; upgrade to the HVAC system.

In July the Board reviewed the $5,000 deficit incurred in the church year just ended and made decisions about dealing with the total deficit, now reaching $15,000.

In August the first Capital Campaign project was completed—the new roof over the Kate Wuerker Room (fellowship hall) and RE wing.

During the fall the Building Committee installed a new water fountain in the hallway, replacing one that had not worked for several years. They also installed a gas fireplace in the Kate Wuerker Room to replace the wood-burning one that had been unsafe to use for many years.

In December, the church president, elected the previous May, announced her resignation. The most recent past-president, stepped into the President position.

2013

2012 church statistical information submitted to UUA 2-01-13: 127 members; 80 children enrolled in RE; 64 pledging units.

By January 2013 new computerized financial accounting systems were being put in place.
In February the Board reported that the budget for FY ’12-’13 had projected an income of $10,000 from fundraising but as of January only $3,613 had been raised. In March the second Capital Campaign project was completed—the renovation of the kitchen and the installation of a coffee center in our fellowship hall, the Kate Wuerker Room.

In March a special congregational meeting was held to discuss the church’s almost $30,000 shortfall. To continue to pay church bills and staff salaries the Board used $45,000 from a $50,000 undesignated bequest, putting the remaining $5,000 into the Endowment Fund. An outside accountant was hired to establish and manage an online financial system using QuickBooks and Church Help Mate. After a careful review of financial statements the Board concluded that the problem was one of revenue rather than expenses. The Board asked the members to contribute to the “Over and Above” campaign, whereby members would commit to meeting their original pledges as well as paying an additional amount to help defray the shortfall.

Over the next few months the church also received donations totaling $14,819 from the three Unitarian Universalist churches in St. Louis.

It was decided to discontinue our Community Outreach Offering program due to the budget deficit.

The Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality education for junior and senior high was offered in the Spring of 2013.

In late May the raccoon that had been living in the ceiling of the Wuerker Room for six weeks and wreaking havoc throughout the building, was caught in a live trap and released across the river.

The church was unable to continue paying the salary of the Director of Religious Education, and he resigned as of July. A church member was hired to be a part-time Religious Education Coordinator.

In August a plan was put in place to “rebuild committees” through new policy governance. There were to be three program areas—Preaching/Teaching; Outreach; and In-reach. The minister was to be responsible for overall oversight, with each program area having a Chair, with relevant committees and task forces in each program area. This turned out to be only marginally successful. Difficulties arose in finding committee/task force chairs and volunteers.

2014

2013 church statistical information submitted to UUA 2-03-14: 108 members; 54 children enrolled in RE; 64 pledging units.

In April the third Capital Campaign project was completed—the installation of energy efficient windows in the RE wing.

In April, Rev. Khleber Van Zandt announced his resignation. He had accepted a call from the UU Congregation in Venice Florida. In May the Board began the search for an interim minister.

In July it was announced that the Board selected Rev. Sunshine Jeremiah Wolfe as interim minister. Pastor Wolfe began serving the church in August 2014. She self-identified as “genderqueer and transgender.”
On August 9, a young black man was killed by a white police officer in Ferguson, Missouri—a municipality not too far from Alton, and home to several church members. Pastor Wolfe and other members of the congregation, especially those living in Ferguson, became heavily involved with pro-community, “Black Lives Matter” activities in Ferguson.

As interim minister, Pastor Sunshine’s role was to prepare the congregation for the arrival of a new, settled minister, and as such, over time, she made several changes to elements of the worship service (e.g., announcements, joys/concerns), some of which were not well received by some members. Meetings were held to discuss the “whys” of the changes.

Pastor Sunshine also started offering “Inspire Programs.” These classes, held twice monthly on Sundays were added to the church’s Adult Religious Education Enrichment (ARE) program.

The OWL sexuality education for junior and senior high students was offered again during the 2014-2015 church year.

2015

2014 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-23-15: 107 members; 63 children enrolled in RE; 47 pledging units.

In March a new Worship Associates Program began with five members who would take turns assisting with the service on Sunday mornings during the regular church year. The Associates would also give the sermons during the summer.

In March a congregational covenant workshop was held and a new church covenant developed and approved at the annual meeting in May. With the acronym “HERE” the covenant reads—

To strengthen and nurture with love, compassion and respect we covenant together to:

- **Honor** and make space for our diversity; respect our volunteers, leaders and staff by supporting balance in their lives and in their personal and professional pursuits;
- **Encourage** each member to develop a personal spiritual practice that cultivates honesty and acceptance;
- **Remembering** our humanness, we acknowledge our imperfection and extend forgiveness to ourselves and others;
- **Engage** within our own and the larger community with integrity, by taking responsibility for our actions, facilitating right relationships, and living into the journey.

A different approach to the annual pledge drive—called Abundance Sunday—was kicked off in March with the minister from the First Unitarian Church in St. Louis advising.

In May a Ministerial Search Committee was nominated and approved at the Annual Meeting.

Also at that meeting the Board announced that due to budgetary restraints there would be no paid RE Coordinator for the 2015-2016 church year and no professionally staffed nursery. The Religious Education program would now be coordinated by a RE Council which was charged overseeing the Nursery, Spirit Play/Elementary, Youth Programs and Adult Programs.

By June the last pledge was paid on the Capital Campaign. The total donated to the Campaign from February 2012 through June 2015 was $244,609, and the project expenses totaled $234,219. Of the six projects proposed, four were completed—upgraded HVAC, new roof over the Kate
Wuerker Room and RE wing, renovated kitchen, energy efficient windows in the RE Wing. There were not enough funds to provide for a handicapped parking area, nor did the plan for an outdoor play area materialize. At the end of the Campaign $10,390 remained in the account. The Church Board was enabled to select appropriate smaller facility improvements to undertake with the remaining funds.

In June a new church structure for the 2015-2016 church year was announced. The responsibilities and accountabilities were divided among the Board of Trustees (representing the Congregation) and the Minister.

In August Unitarian Universalists from all St. Louis churches participated in rallies and marches on the one year anniversary of the death of Michael Brown. Some of our members provided home hospitality for participants coming from a distance.

In September a new church newsletter editor was appointed to replace the former editor who had served for 14 years. Also in September Pastor Sunshine reorganized the worship schedule to include a vespers service to be held at 4 p.m. on Saturdays, intergenerational worship would be at 10:15 a.m., and religious education classes for children and adults would follow the service at 11:30 a.m.

The fall months were filled with ministerial search activities. In August members were asked to fill out a survey about their ideas for ministry. In September a “Beyond Categorical Thinking” workshop regarding non-discrimination in hiring was held, conducted by a UUA consultant. In October a congregational mission/vision workshop was held. Search committee members assembled the online Congregational Record packet and in December activated the ministerial search website.

In September, due to water leakage from the roof, part of the ceiling in the east foyer came down, leaving a large hole. Karlas Construction, the company that had laid the roof in 2012 had gone out of business due to the death of the owner, so the warrantee given to the church was useless.

In October the Board decided to use the remaining funds from the Capital Campaign to repaint the sanctuary, choosing the Color Concepts company from the bids submitted.

The development of the church’s Policies and Procedures Manual was ongoing.

2016

2015 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-30-16: 96 members; 40 children enrolled in RE; 47 pledging units.

A new mission / vision statement was approved at the Semi-Annual meeting in January.

“Outward Reaching – Inward Seeking”
“We are creating and nurturing an intentional community that values acceptance, social justice, and the embodiment of Unitarian Universalist principles. Come, let us question together.”

The sanctuary painting was finished early in the year, except for the entry foyers, which would not be painted until the tower roof was repaired.
The treasurer reported in February that members were far behind in paying pledges. The church also did not pay anything to the UUA in 2015. If nothing is paid the church would not be eligible to have delegates at General Assembly in June. The Board voted to pay $100 to the UUA.

The church continued to participate in the Alton Community Lenten Services.

In April the RE schedule was changed back to having classes for children and youth at the same time as the worship service.

By May the Ministerial Search Committee announced it was unable to find a ministerial candidate to present to the congregation. There had been no responses in the 1st round of the search and there were only three responses in the 2nd round. The Committee eliminated one candidate outright. After extensive reviews of the other two candidates’ packets, phone interviews were conducted with both. The Committee learned that each candidate had already received offers from other congregations and that the Alton church’s financial package could not match those offers. The Committee was later informed by the Board that there was not enough money in the budget to even support the proposed financial package.

Another Search Committee had been formed in April to seek an interim minister in case no settled minister could be found.

A fund-raiser “History Extravaganza” Trivia Night was held in May.

At the Annual Congregational Meeting on June 5, members voted in favor of a shared ministry with Emerson Unitarian Chapel in West St. Louis County and approved the hiring of Rev. Dawn Fortune who was beginning their second year of interim ministry with Emerson.

Motions regarding by-law changes were approved with 26 votes in favor, 2 opposed, and 4 abstaining.

After serving the church for two years, Rev. Sunshine Wolfe’s last worship service was on June 19, although she would be available through early July. Rev. Sunshine accepted another Interim position in the east. Worship Associates conducted the remaining summer services. Rev. Dawn Fortune’s first worship service at the church was August 28.

Saturday lunches for those in need were cancelled for July and August due to vacation absences and lack of volunteers.

A “Healing Energy” group was organized and met twice a month at the church.

After investigating several options, the Board decided to move all accounts to Liberty Bank from US Bank due to complicated signing requirements and fees being added to some accounts.

In September Beale Roofing installed a new roof in each tower at a cost of $4599.

The leadership of the 4th Saturday lunch program decided not to resume serving hot lunches on as Morningstar MB Church two blocks away was also serving lunches on the 4th Saturday. Instead we emphasized and expanded our provision of personal care items donated by members and friends of the church. Such items tend to be expensive and are not included in the government SNAP program. Snacks and beverages are made available for those waiting to select their needed care items.
In November a Ministerial Search Committee was once again established to look for a half-time minister to start next August.

On December 4, in celebration of the church’s 180th year (marked as December 7, 1836, when Rev. Farley preached his first sermon in Alton) a special event in the Wuerker Room followed the worship service. A display of church-related documents, photographs, and items of historical interest were on display and a short account of their significance in the life of the church was given.

2017

2016 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-30-17: 96 members; 20 children enrolled in RE; 48 pledging units.

A ministerial search committee was formed in January to explore hiring a half-time minister to begin in August, as our interim minister, Rev. Dawn Fortune, could not serve another year.

Discussions continued about the need for better building accessibility, including the possible installation of an elevator, which currently is beyond what the church can afford.

The Board decided to purchase a monthly subscription to a Unitarian Universalist Association program called “Faith Rocket” which would provide complete worship services that could be conducted by the Worship Associates if there no minister or speaker were available.

The roof over the fellowship hall was repaired by Lakeside Roofing. A church member repaired the water damaged ceiling in the east entry foyer and repainted the foyer.

An average of 54 people each month came to church’s ongoing 4th Saturday community service program of providing personal care items to those in need. This effort is supported through contributions of products or money from church members and friends.

The park next to the Church, which had been leased to the Church by the City for decades, was turned over by the City to Simmons law firm which had purchased a building adjacent to the park and the church. Several large trees which had shaded the park for generations were cut down and part of the park bulldozed. Negotiations continue between the church and the law firm regarding lawn and sidewalk maintenance.

The congregation participated in a workshop to brainstorm about how to carry out the Church’s “Vision and Mission.”

In June the congregation approved a budget for the 2017-2018 church year of $140,000, which included the salary for a ¼ time Religious Education Coordinator and the hiring of an additional nursery attendant. To compensate for the pledge shortfall, the congregation approved the transfer of Reserve Fund and Endowment Fund monies into the operating budget up to a total of $37,000. No such transfer had been required as of the end of 2017, but without significant changes, transfers will be needed in 2018.

The Board announced that Ms. Amy Brooks had been hired to serve half-time as the church’s minister, starting in August. Pastor Brooks is finishing up her last year at Eden Theological Seminary in Webster Groves, Missouri.
In September, a church member volunteered to take on the task of preparing the documentation needed to apply for 501(c)(3) status with the IRS. This status would make the church eligible to receive corporate contributions for major church projects.

In November, long-time church member Audrey Wiseman died. She and her husband David (who survives her) were married in our church in 1954. Over the ensuing decades the Wisemans were active in many aspects of church life.

2018
2017 church statistical information submitted to UUA 1-29-18: 54 members (based on newly revised criteria for determining membership); 20 children enrolled in RE; 40 pledging units.