

## **A History of Early Religious Education at CUUC** (Dec. 2023)

We are rebuilding the great tradition this church has accomplished in educating children in religion the Unitarian Universalist way. Here is our history as told by founding member Nancy Barlow, our first volunteer RE Director, and our first employed RE Director, Anne Smith.

The early history of Religious Education at UU Fellowship North is a story of commitment and perseverance beginning in early 1975 when a group of members at Richardson UU Church left to found a new congregation. Joe and Nancy Barlow, with three young children, were part of that group. Organizational meetings took place at the home of Jim and Sue Collins. Jim Collins took responsibility of organizing an RE component, identifying a UUA curriculum that was suitable for our mostly young children. At the start, Nancy, Suzie Nicholson, and others served as teachers. Within a few months Nancy became the RE Director and a board member. During the next few years, the Barlow's station wagon served as portable RE supply storage. We first met in rooms at the Marriott Hotel at Coit and LBJ. From the hotel, we moved into the Student Union building on the property of the bankrupt University of Plano. The Congregation bought a part of the property, but not the building where we were meeting. We were evicted. So, we moved again. We taught classes in the cafeteria at Aldridge Elementary School on Custer with the promise we would leave in a year or two. Needing a permanent location, the congregation chose to begin building our church home. There may have been another upheaval or so before completion and settlement, but through all those years many, many innovators and people dedicated to religious education for our children, formed fond friendships and became the foundation of the community that followed.

In 1980, Nancy joyfully passed the RE responsibility to Anne Smith. Chet and Anne Smith joined CUUC, then called UUFN (Unitarian Universalist Fellowship North), in the winter of 1978. They had known many of the congregation through summer camps and cluster acquaintances. In 1980 Anne agreed to be an Interim Director of Religious Education. This role involved directing the church school program, maintaining curriculum, supervising volunteer teachers, and coordinating events with other church staff. She also maintained records both registration and financial, communicated with church members and friends and served on the Religious Education Board. In 1983 Anne was selected to be the part-time paid RE Director. In 1991 she left this position but later returned to co-direct the program with several different people including Courtney Holland and Robin Gary. She left this position in 2005 after many wonderful years. One memory that stands out to her is the largest number of children and youth in our RE program was 120 back in the former church building on Custer Road (half our current square footage). We look forward to larger numbers of children and youth in our future.