A Social History of the Unitarian Church of Jamestown
1966 to 2003

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What has Changed and What has Persisted?

I. The Psychological Character of The Sixties

1. Change was everywhere: in race relations; in male-female relations and sexual relationships; in popular music & in the fine arts; and even in religious expression.
2. Idealism & concern about social injustices & hope for a better future
3. Much argument over issues, sometimes heated conflicts
4. Great anger and fear among traditionalistic & conservative people
5. Dramatic events week after week causing worry and hopefulness
6. It was a time of great creativity and innovation; as well as a time of weird, eccentric fads.

II. Changes in the Local Community

A. Major Changes in the Economy of the Area.

1. The area has experienced rapid economic decline.
   a) Major manufacturers have moved or gone bankrupt.
   b) Well-paid blue-collar jobs have evaporated.
   c) The bulk of the population has changed from prosperous working class and lower-middle class people to poor blue-collar and just plain poor people.

B. Less Obvious Socio-Cultural Changes Since the Sixties.

1. The area has become more cosmopolitan and less provincial.
2. There is much greater ethnic diversity now than 30 years ago.
   a) People are less public in expressing racism and expressing derogatory ethnic jokes.
   b) Homophobia has become less common and more hidden.
   c) The artistic & cultural life of the area has become enriched by theatres, art galleries & even foreign movies.
3. Christian fundamentalists are much more numerous in the Jamestown area now.
   a) Thirty years ago, they organized to oppose people who criticized the war in Vietnam, who they labeled Communists. Today, they organize to oppose abortion and to support patriotism.

III The Jamestown Unitarian Church in 1966

A. Some Easily Visible Differences from the Church Today

1. People came to church in their “Sunday best” clothes.
2. National symbols were apparent: an American Flag in front of the sanctuary
3. The service was always organized and structured like a traditional Protestant church. Music from a huge organ was a central part of the experience.
4. There were very few young adults in the congregation.
5. There were no more people *active* in the church than there are today.

B. **The Psychological Character of the Congregation.**

1. The members were religious freethinkers and civil libertarians.
2. They were religious individualists, who had liberated their thinking from the oppressive conformity and fear of gossip of the 1950s era --- which in Jamestown, had lasted well into the Sixties.
3. They were personally concerned with issues of social justice.
4. However, most were still culturally Christian in tradition, if not believers in the doctrine; and mildly nationalistic Americans in spirit, rather than internationalist in outlook on the world.

IV. What has Changed

1. Congregation is now much better organized, because we have paid church administrator, newsletter writer and cleaning person. In the past, the church was often disorganized and dirty.
2. The culture of the church is less Christian Protestant; but still struggling to create something new, yet still feeling comfortably familiar.
3. The members are less nationalistic and more genuinely cosmopolitan.
4. The members are almost uniformly politically liberal reformists. Yet, paradoxically, many younger members have less interest in affairs of the public life, than do members of the aging "Sixties" generation.
5. Many younger members seek "spiritual" experience in church services. There is internal tension over the relative emphasis upon spiritual experience and concerns for social justice issues.

B. What has persisted?

The current members are very similar to those in the past, in the sense that they hold the same religious values as those who were members in 1966.

1. They are religious freethinkers and non-conformists, in an era with great pressure to conform to traditional, Bible-based religion.
2. They are more concerned about social justice issues, than the average citizen of the area. They are also much more politically liberal than the average person in the larger community.
3. The current members share the same Unitarian values of ethnic and racial tolerance, appreciation of cultural diversity, reverence for individuality, enjoyment of creative expression, and aspiration for international peace.