

Date: Sept. 4, 2008

For release: Immediate

Contact: Judy Goldsmith, Open Circle board president

Phone: (920) 922-3258

Public invited to tour new church, attend Sept. 21 building dedication

A vacant downtown business has been recycled into a new church home by a growing Fond du Lac faith community committed to social activism. Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship will dedicate its new worship space at 19 E. Third St. on Sunday, Sept. 21, at 3:30 p.m. The community is invited to attend the dedication and an open house and tour of the new facility prior to the service, 1:30-3 p.m.

“We chose this building specifically because of its downtown location,” said Open Circle Board President Judy Goldsmith, noting the church’s activism includes groups devoted to diversity, eco-food, and highway clean-up. “It reflects the diversity of our background. And being at ground level will allow us to interact with and be part of the community around us. We are looking forward to how this new space will enable us to grow and to be a positive spiritual home for many in Fond du Lac.”

The Rev. Scott Gerard Prinster will lead the fellowship’s dedication service. He will address “Our Walls Speak the Shape of History, ” noting, “Throughout humanity's history, we have sought places that we can call home, and the homes we create for our spiritual communities have been an expression about our vision of the future. Join us as we celebrate and dedicate a new home for this community, and share our hopes for what it will tell the world about us.”

Prinster, a frequent guest celebrant at Open Circle, was associate minister of First Unitarian Society in Madison, and is currently pursuing his doctorate in the connection between religion and science. He is a former physicist with the space program, an English teacher at the Unitarian seminary in Transylvania, and has served as a Unitarian Universalist minister for 13 years.

Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship has outgrown several rental meeting spaces since its September 2004 founding; most recently, services were held on the fourth floor of the Combined Building. The church grew out of a December 2003 meeting in which 25 people gathered to explore the possibility of forming a new Fond du Lac faith community that embraced

a commitment to social justice, including welcoming and affirming people of all sexual orientations. Interest among the group in learning more about Unitarian Universalism included a series of programs on UU offered in spring 2004 at Marian College. Visits to Unitarian Universalist congregations in Ripon and Appleton affirmed the UU genuine respect for all people and fueled the desire to create such a community locally. Open Circle currently is lay-led, with scheduled service leadership provided by student ministers from the Meadville Lombard Seminary in Chicago. Services are held the first, third and fifth Sundays of the month at 10 a.m.

Unitarian Universalism is a liberal religion with Jewish-Christian roots that developed in the Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. It has no creed; rather, it draws from many sources and teachers in world religions, and is based on individual freedom of belief and encouragement of all members to pursue their own religious and spiritual journeys while supporting others.

Church members unite around the UU Seven Principles:

- The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
- Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
- Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
- A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
- The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
- The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;
- Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Unitarianism and Universalism were two separate movements within the Reformation. The term “Unitarian” originally meant “non-trinitarian,” reflecting a belief in one unified God rather than a three-part entity. Universalism refers to the teaching that every person would be saved (universal salvation) and the belief that all souls would eventually be reconciled to a loving God. Both groups took root in America in the late 18th century, flourishing in New England as liberal spin offs from the Congregational Church. During the 19th century, Unitarianism spread west and many churches were organized in California. Several Wisconsin UU congregations date back to the 1800s, including the First Unitarian Society of Milwaukee and Olympia Brown Unitarian Universalist Church in Racine, each of which was founded in 1842. The Racine church was renamed for its minister, Brown, whose 1863 ordination made her the first woman in the United States ordained by an established denomination. Prominent early American Unitarians and Universalists included Presidents John Adams and John Quincy Adams, Thomas Jefferson, Benjamin Franklin, Paul Revere, Louisa May Alcott, Clara Barton, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Horace Mann, Henry David Thoreau, Daniel Webster and Julia Ward Howe.

By mid 20th century, the differences between the two movements had narrowed and the two groups ultimately merged and formed the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) in 1961. Today, the words “Unitarian and Universalist” take on additional meanings reflecting the richness of the sources of this religion. The term Unitarian affirms that the belief in unity in all of life, what the UUA Principles and Purposes calls “the interdependent web of all existence.” The term Universalism indicates universality of religion itself. Other well-known Unitarian Universalists include William Carlos Williams, Frank Lloyd Wright, Adlai Stevenson, Paul Newman, NAACP Founder Mary White Ovington, NPR commentator Margot Adler, and recently deceased Carnegie Mellon professor and *The Last Lecture* author Randy Pausch.

“For more than four centuries, Unitarian Universalists and our forebears have promoted the religious values of freedom of belief, the use of reason in our search for truth and meaning, and tolerance of others' perspectives,” Rev. Prinster said. “The Open Circle UU Fellowship stands in a long tradition of living out these values of freedom, reason and tolerance at a time when our world is so much in need of them.”

Additional information about the Unitarian Universalist Association is available at www.uua.org. More information about Open Circle Unitarian Universalist Fellowship is online at www.uuuuf.org. -30-