

Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation

We are a small but energetic community located in Fremont, California, part of the “Silicon Valley” of the San Francisco Bay area. Our congregation is eager to make bonds with each other and commonality holds us together. Our members have a variety of spiritual beliefs. Among us are theists, atheists, agnostics, Christians, Jews, and Buddhists, among others. No matter what our personal avowal, we are brought together in our wish to improve ourselves and the world around us. We subscribe to the seven principles of morality endorsed by the Unitarian Universalist Association. We have an active Children's Religious Education program, and many of our members joined because of their wish to provide a liberal religious education for their children. We have a very strong lay leadership and worship program, with vital lay participation in services. Our members are active and involved, and many devote much time and energy to our congregation. We are very musical, and it is an important part of our culture. We have many technical people in our congregation and tend to embrace innovation. We also lean toward logical solutions to problems. While we enjoy debate, we are less comfortable with conflict. We believe we are called to add to the hope and joy in the world and alleviate suffering. We embrace and support people who are battling mental health and other issues, largely because of the teaching and leadership of our community minister, Rev. Barbara Meyers. Our congregants tend to be active, committed and very busy with demanding careers, multiple activities, and very full lives. We like coming together for Sunday services and other times to enjoy reflection, inspiration, community, laughter, and a chance to reinforce and act on our values. We are excited and optimistic about the future of Mission Peak UUC and its development.



The Congregation's mission

The foundation of Mission Peak is love. We are a spiritual community of open minds, nurturing growth and healing in ourselves and all people. Together we strive to live compassionately and courageously as we work for a nonviolent, just, and sustainable world. We embrace and give life to this mission statement by:

Offering each other love, trust, respect, and support in times of joy and need.

Creating worship services and encouraging spiritual exploration and personal growth.

Providing educational experiences for all ages that encourage a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and an acceptance of religious and social diversity.

Serving the community in accordance with our social conscience and our Unitarian Universalist principles.

Welcoming membership to every person who shares these values.

Congregational History

The following is excerpted from *Birth of a Church: Our First 16 Years*, by Barbara Meyers, a founding member, 2010. Updated January 2020.

1992

Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation began in the spring of 1992 when Joel Miller, a newly graduated UU minister who had not yet been called to a church, attended an organized play group with his two-year-old son, Eric, at a Fremont park. There he met several mothers with children in the play group: Tracy Barnett, Linda Sheehan, and Denise Whitney. One of them, Tracy, had been raised Unitarian, and the subject of religion came up. She, Joel and some other mothers decided to see whether it would be possible to organize a new UU church in Fremont. Denise Whitney, Barbara Meyers, and Kathy Wallcave were instrumental in this effort. They contacted the Pacific Central District, the regional organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association. Their first meeting was in a living room with a few participants and their families. Subsequent monthly meetings took place that spring and summer.

In September 1992, we started holding worship services on Sunday evenings twice a month in the Centerville Community Center in Fremont. Shortly after, we formed our first mission statement.



Coffee hour at Mission Peak after a service, 2018.



**Before there was a Mission Peak:
Barbara Meyers attending the Unitarian Universalist congregation in Hayward, ca. 1990.**

"There had been a Unitarian Fellowship in Fremont that disbanded in the late 1960's, so I am told. But by the time I discovered the Unitarian Universalist faith, it was long gone, so I traveled to Hayward every Sunday to attend the nearest services.

I felt that the Unitarian-Universalist movement had such an important message to the world. When I heard that there was a possibility that a new congregation would be forming in Fremont, I embraced the idea of helping found it, because it simply had to be done, and I was in a position to help."

1993

Rev. Joel was called to become an extension minister at a new UU church near Denver, Colorado. We were sad to see him go, but happy for him and his new opportunity. At this point, our energy was at its lowest. Attendance at worship services was about ten, with a high of about 20 and a low of two. The turning-point was in May 1993, when several of us attended a UUA-sponsored New Congregation Training session in Boston. We met others who were also trying to start churches. And we came home with the following: (1) regained confidence that this would work, and (2) a timeline we created with specific tasks and goals for forming the church. In our case, the timeline stressed community outreach to enlarge our membership, and community building activities to create an extended family feeling. We formed links with three other covenanting UU congregations—Hayward, Palo Alto, and San Jose—to give us advice, support, and funding. And we stopped having worship services for the time being.

Pivotal was the hiring of Ben Meyers (no relation to Barbara or her husband, Tom) as a quarter-time consultant. Ben was in his last year at Starr King School for the Ministry in Berkeley.

Our first publicly advertised meeting was in September 1993 at the Tri-Cities Children's Center. We modeled this meeting after one described at our New Congregation Training. Much planning and publicity prior to the meeting helped make it a great success. About 60 people attended, many of whom signed up to be on the committees we were forming.

Our first worship service led by Ben Meyers was on Thanksgiving 1993. The next service was on Christmas.

Steve and Kathy
Wallcave

Nelson and Denise
Whitney

Janet and Drew
Wilson

Valerie
Stewart

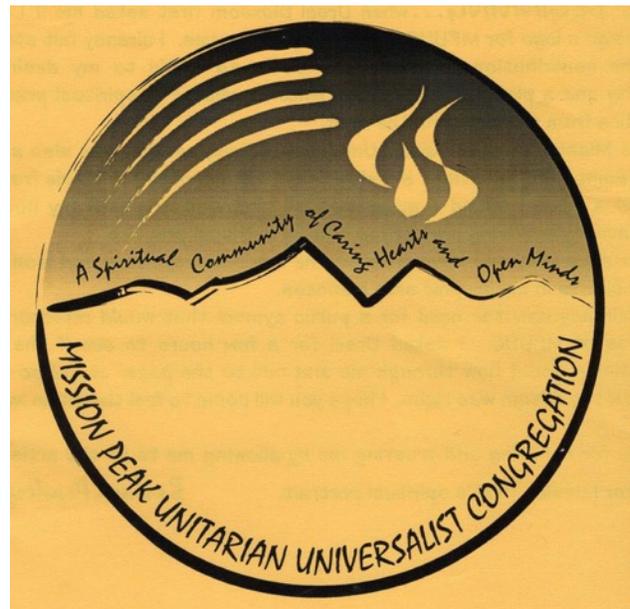


Circa 1993 photo.

↑
Rev. Ben Meyers

1994 The Congregation Receives its Charter

We began regular Sunday morning services in January 1994. Our Charter Sunday was May 1, 1994. About 50 people signed the membership book with much fanfare in front of a crowd of 100 or so from our covenanting churches and the community at large. Shortly after this, we became an official member congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Association. We chose the name "Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation" because we wanted to stress we were serving all of the communities looked over by Mission Peak in the southeast Bay Area, not just Fremont. We wanted to be called a "congregation" because many members had Jewish backgrounds and didn't feel comfortable being part of a "church."



An early version of the congregation's logo.



Mission Peak marks the eastern boundary of Fremont, California. It's elevation is 2520 ft. The mountain is a product of natural uplift, sculpted by erosion. It is not of volcanic origin.

This photo dates to 1994, the year Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation received its charter from the UUA.



Ursel Blossom Alan Davis Holly Ito Nelson Whitney Sharon Davis ↑
Rev. Ben Meyers Steve Wallcave Drew Wilson

1995–1997

Our acceptance into the UU extension program in mid-1995 meant we could afford to hire Ben Meyers as a full-time minister starting July 1995 (he had been our contract minister since 1993).

In 1997, Julia Kocs, who was a Unitarian minister from Transylvania, came to our congregation as an intern for a year. She brought a strong pastoral presence to the congregation and the community at large with her volunteer work at a local homeless shelter.



The blessing of the animals, 1995. That's Barbara Meyers with "Rocky" the hamster.



**Jean
Brown**

**Julia
Kocs**

**Graham Bell
and Douglas**

**Ursel
Bloxsom**

Throughout our history, we demonstrated an important commitment to our children by hiring a part time Director of Religious Education (DRE). Our first DRE was Kate Walker, a seminarian at Starr King School for the Ministry. After three years, she was followed by Jenny Johnston, the wife of a seminarian, and then a year later by Sally White, another seminarian with a strong background in religious education in a number of church settings. Sally was followed after several years by the Rev. Lynn Ungar, by Carolyn Steinhaus, and then Sally Ahnger.



Kate Walker, our first Director of Religious Education, circa 1995.



Rev. Ben Meyers directs the children's choir. DRE Sally White is on the right. Circa 1997.

1998–1999

The years 1998–1999 were difficult for us. Rev. Ben Meyers announced that he and his wife Patti were divorcing, and Patti was leaving the church. Both the church members and Ben had a difficult time adjusting to this situation. Ben resigned in May of 1999, an event that was painful for all of us. We got an interim minister, Rev. Howard Dana, who had just graduated from Starr King School for the Ministry, and began a search for a new permanent minister. Howard kept a steady hand on the helm, at one point offering a ceremony of healing, so we could move beyond our difficult time.

Howard Dana, interim minister

1999 photo



Mike Jones
Jordan and Bruno
Jessica

Nina Davis
Sara Wallcave
Sarah Milar
Lisa Jones

2000–2008

Our ministerial search ended successfully in September 2000, when we voted unanimously to call the Rev. Dr. Chris Schriener, who had been associate minister at Laguna Beach in Southern California, to be our minister. He served us in this position through August 2008. Chris' ministry stabilized our congregation. We developed adult religious education programs to add to our children's and youth programs, created a choir called "The Peak Performers," a lay Pastoral Associates program, participated in the UUA's "Building the World We Dream About" program for racial and ethnic diversity, and conducted yearly all-church spiritual retreats.



Rev. Chris Schriener, ca. 2001.



Rev. Chris Schriener and his wife, Joann. 2005 photo.

We went through the process of becoming an official UUA Welcoming Congregation, educating ourselves on how to be friendly towards members of the gay, lesbian and transgender communities, and received an award from PFLAG for this work. PFLAG is the United States' first and largest organization uniting parents, families, and allies with people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer. PFLAG was founded in 1973.

(Additional information provided in 2019 by DeAnna Alm):

In 2005, Barbara Meyers, who graduated from Starr King School for the Ministry in 2004, was endorsed by the congregation as our first Community Minister. Her ministry focuses on mental health issues, and she works part time at a local mental health center. She has developed a mental health curriculum and a local access TV program, “Mental Health Matters,” that creates a new show each month.



Barbara Frances Meyers' service of ordination to the ministry, Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation, March 13, 2005.

A major change came when our landlord, now called Kidango, decided that they needed the space we were renting for worship for other purposes. After an extensive search, we were offered a space to rent on Sundays on the campus of the First United Methodist Church of Fremont. We moved in the summer of 2007, and soon we were able to also rent an office next to our worship space—our first full-time home!

When, in 2008, Rev. Chris Schriener announced that he would retire, the congregation unanimously voted to grant him emeritus status. He and his wife, Joann, are still members of Mission Peak. When Chris left, we had 114 members.

2008–2010

Our interim minister Rev. Joy Atkinson's time with us was a period of trying new things, discovering who we were and what we wanted to be, and setting the stage for a new minister. A search committee was elected and worked very hard to present our congregation to prospective candidates and find someone who would be a good match.

2010–2017

Our search committee chose Rev. Jeremy Nickel, a recent graduate from Pacific School of Religion, a young man for whom this would be his first church. The congregation met Jeremy and to a person were most impressed with his enthusiasm, presence and vision, and voted unanimously to call him as our new minister.



**Rev. Joy Atkinson,
interim minister, 2008.**



Rev. Jeremy Nickel as Kathy Wallcave conducts the Story for All Ages, ca. 2010.

Rev. Jeremy provided a boost of energy and commitment for our congregation, and we added a number of new members, though this growth was offset by losses of members who left the area for places with lower cost of living and for other reasons.



Jeremy Nickel and wife Nicole, expecting.



Nicole and Eliza Nickel.



A Sunday morning service in 2011.



Our 2011 congregational portrait.



The choir in 2012, with Pat Rodgers directing.



During Rev. Nickel's tenure, which lasted for seven years, we had a part time paid pianist, the incredibly talented Eric Niessner. He provided the musical accompaniment for two services per month, rather than us relying solely on the musical talents of our members. Another great idea that Pastor Nickel had was to form a congregational rock group, "Peak Rocks." There have been some changes in musicians over the years, but the group rocks on.



**Peak Rocks performs at service, ca. 2012.
David Lefkort, Cara Madden and Paul Kwinn.**

We studied and discussed the possibility of moving to two services on Sundays, but there was general agreement that we did not yet have the necessary willpower, volunteers and money to make that successful. We were thrilled when marriage equality became the law of the land on June 28, 2013, and celebrated by holding the marriage ceremony for two of our members that very day. We hosted a ministerial intern, Dawn Fortune, who was warmly welcomed and is still missed by many.



**Ministerial intern Dawn Fortune,
ca. 2015.**

We joined the Leap of Faith program in 2013, where a group of our members visited another, larger congregation and came back refreshed with ideas of how to improve our own home. These insights included working to improve our process for greeting newcomers, doing some organizing and redecorating in our rented space, and starting a multi-year process to examine and alter our governance structure. The congregation voted to accept the proposed changes to our governance structure in 2016. It is still a work in progress, and we are reviewing and attempting to improve how it works.

In 2013, our community minister, Barbara Meyers, led us in founding a mental health clinic, the Connections Counseling Center, that had psychiatrists and mental health workers of different faiths, bringing a spiritual dimension to the traditional treatment. Connections was not successful in the long run, but is an effort we are pleased to recall.



Handwoven mural in the lobby of the Connections Counseling Center, Fremont. Rev. Barbara Meyers, the director of Connections, did the weaving in 2013.

Around the same time, our congregation came together to cooperate with Local Ecology And Agriculture Fremont (LEAF), founded by one of our members, Bruce Cates. After much hard work, we helped establish the Stone Community Garden, which has continued to provide thousands of pounds of fresh produce to our local food bank and homeless shelters. This remains one of our proudest accomplishments, and featured in our being named the “Breakthrough Congregation” of 2016. (See article in *UU World Magazine* <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/making-stuff-together>).



Bruce Cates and Lorna Jaymes, ca. 2013.

2013 also saw the launch of our “Sandwich Squad,” organized by Jen King to give our young people a fun entry point in social justice work. Each month, the group provides sandwiches and snacks to local counseling centers and shelters. Today, both adults and youth meet for the Squad in our church kitchen.



“The congregation’s “Sandwich Squad” has made literally thousands of sandwiches and delivered them to counseling centers and shelters locally.

Around 2015, we established the tradition of a joint Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. Day service with our landlords, the First United Methodists. This was met with acclaim and enjoyment by both congregations, and has expanded to include a joint summer service followed by a two-church potluck.

Also around 2015, we were able to host the Our Whole Lives (OWL) program on our campus, rather than traveling to the San Jose UU church for it. We also opened OWL to teens from the community who were not affiliated with any UU church. OWL is a series of comprehensive sexuality curricula for children, teenagers, young adults and adults published by the Unitarian Universalist Association and the United Church of Christ. The first group of teens from MPUUC formed strong bonds in OWL that continue to hold years later. In 2019, we had fewer teens of the right age in our congregation, and so did not host Our Whole Lives, but were participating in it with the San Jose UU church.

2017–2020

Rev. Jeremy Nickel left Mission Peak UU in 2017 not long after his sabbatical in order to work with the Church of the Larger Fellowship.



Saying goodbye to Rev. Jeremy, 2017. Every person in that circle gave a tribute as the bottle was passed around like a microphone.

In 2017, we also lost our Director of Religious Education, Shawn Snaveley. We hired Rev. Jade (J.D.) Benson as our interim minister and JeKaren Olaoya as our DRE a few months later. After a year it was mutually decided that Rev. Benson would not renew her contract, and MPUUC voted to enter into a renewed two-year search process. JeKaren Olaoya also decided to leave at this time. She had been a fantastic DRE, but needed a job with more hours. Rev. Jo Green joined us as interim minister in August 2018, replacing Rev. Benson.



**Shawn Snavley,
Director of Religious Education.**



Interim minister J.D. "Jade" Benson, 2017.

Rev. Jo's tenure has seen the return of a number of congregants who had reduced their attendance during the previous interim period. Much of her first year was focused on helping MPUUC recover from its time of loss, uncertainty and conflict, and she has succeeded wonderfully in doing so. While we have not yet found a new settled DRE, Shawn Snavley returned to serve as interim DRE and was enthusiastically welcomed back. We have returned to an attitude of hopeful optimism for the future of our religious home.



**Rev. Jo Green became our interim minister
in 2018.**

Also in 2018, our community minister, Barbara Meyers, founded the Fremont chapter of Sidewalk Talk, a movement that seeks to build a sense of empathy and belonging in local communities. Chairs are set up at “listening posts” in public spaces, where passersby are invited to sit and talk about anything that’s on their mind. The listeners are trained by the parent organization, Sidewalk Talk, a nonprofit founded in 2015 and now in 50 cities in 12 countries. There are over 1700 Sidewalk Talk therapists and volunteers.



Our community minister, Barbara Meyers, at a Sidewalk Talk “listening post” in 2018.

In 2019, we began exploring the possibility of sponsoring an asylum seeker and our board voted in October to support the effort. We are early in the process, but if we succeed, it would be an important piece of social action. As of January 2020, eight members of our congregation have been trained to be part of an accompaniment team for an asylum seeker and family, freeing them from ICE custody while they present their case for legal admission to our country.



Allie King is leading the work on accompanying an asylum seeker. She became a member in 2018.



Steve Wallcave and Don Ramie at the congregation’s Black & White Auction, November 2018. Steve is one of the founding members of Mission Peak; in 1999, he was elected president of the board. Don joined in 2014.

In January 2020, Rev. Jo began a three-part seminar on “White fragility,” showing how White people can learn to interrupt the racism with which they have been socialized. Almost a quarter of Mission Peak’s membership signed up.

As we entered 2020, we continued to have members of various spiritual leanings, including a number of birthright Unitarian Universalists, and tend to be a little more theist than many other Bay Area UU congregations.

Our politics reflect the area around us— generally on the liberal/progressive side. We see each other as members of the same family, and value increasing joys and decreasing sorrows by sharing them, whatever they may be. Our Mission Peak Unitarian Universalist Congregation is looking forward to finding a settled minister who can help us keep our flame of enthusiasm burning brightly.



Ministerial History

Name	Start	End	Position	Job Title
Rev. Jo Green	2018		Interim	Interim Minister
Rev. Andrew Mertz	2017		Affiliated	Affiliated Community Minister
Rev. Barbara Meyers	2005		Affiliated	Mental Health Community Minister
Rev. Jade (JD) Benson	2017	2018	Interim	Interim Minister
Rev. Jeremy Nickel	2010	2017	Called	Minister
Rev. Joy Atkinson	2008	2010	Interim	Interim Minister
Rev. R. Christian Schriener	2000	2008	Called	Minister
Rev. Howard Dana	1999	2000	Interim	Interim Minister
Rev. Ben Meyers	1995	1999	Called	Minister
Rev. Ben Meyers	1993	1995	Contract	Consulting Minister



November 2019 About half of our 104 members



Our youth group, 2018.



A reunion of an earlier Mission Peak UU Youth Group.