

EARLY HISTORY OF UNITY ON THE BAY

Written by Andrew Melick, Historian / Writer

INTRODUCTION

Unity's Third Principle states, "We are co-creators with God, creating reality through thoughts held in mind." The evidence of this truth is a common thread that runs throughout the history of Unity on the Bay, the origin of which can be traced back to October 1926 and a thought held in mind by a 52-year-old widow in Cincinnati, Ohio.

It was national news that the fledgling city of Miami, Florida had been demolished by a devastating hurricane. Residents were fleeing in droves; in fact, a full third of the population eventually left town. The Miamians who remained were hurting, and Unity's message of God's healing light and love were words they desperately needed to hear. May Cornell Stoiber, the Cincinnati widow, said, "I felt it a call and sold what I had to begin a Unity Center there." Her thought became reality on New Year's Day 1927, when a Unity Center of Practical Christianity opened in downtown Miami.

At every subsequent turn in its history, it was again thoughts held in mind that led to the creation of what we know today as Unity on the Bay. Every story has a backstory, however, and in order to put Unity's establishment and growth in Miami in context, there are three other stories which must be told first: the emergence of the city of Miami; the concurrent emergence of the Unity movement; and the early life of May Cornell Stoiber.

EARLY MIAMI

Miami is still the youngest large city in America, a relative teenager in comparison to its middle-aged counterparts. Using the same analogy, Miami was barely a toddler when the Unity movement arrived. The city was born only 30 years earlier, prior to which Miami was just an outpost that differed little from the untouched, undeveloped, unknown place it had been for centuries. A handful of families lived on the banks of the mouth of the Miami River; a few others lived in the area which would eventually become Coconut Grove; and a few more lived to the north at Little River. Miami Beach was nothing but a jungle of mangroves and a failed coconut plantation. In total there were about 100 people living near the perimeter of Biscayne Bay, the same area which today is home to more than three million.

Then the extension of Henry Flagler's railroad from West Palm Beach to Miami in 1896 changed everything. The population exploded tenfold almost overnight, and the flood of new arrivals never let up. Between 1910 and 1920, Miami was the fastest-growing city in the nation.

Astoundingly, between 1920 and 1925, Miami grew twice as fast as it had during the previous decade. The population peaked at almost 200,000.

The primary impetus of this expansion was a speculative real estate boom, the magnitude of which Miami has never seen again, including the boom of the early 2000s. It was the Roaring Twenties, years of paper fortunes, and downtown streets were jammed with eager buyers and equally eager sellers “flipping” real estate for wild profits. Construction materials could not be brought in fast enough to keep up with all the new building. In a matter of only a few years, Miami gained a skyline that rivaled any city in the South.

Eventually, however, the euphoria of the boom began to wear off. In early 1925, property values started falling, and sales declined. A railroad embargo on construction materials added to the slowdown. The event which irrevocably turned boom to bust, however, was the accidental sinking of a large cargo ship in Miami Harbor in January 1926. The main shipping channel was blocked for six weeks, during which no cargo could be moved in or out, paralyzing the construction industry. High-rises under construction were abandoned; construction workers packed up and left. Miami was staggering under an unprecedented economic collapse.

Then came the hurricane. Miami had felt the brunt of major hurricanes in 1891 and again in 1906, but there were very few residents in 1926 who had lived through either of those earlier storms. Besides, their admonitions were mostly scoffed at, and as warning flags were raised, preparations were feeble to non-existent. It was a monstrous storm, with hurricane force winds lasting fourteen hours, including one hour when the eye of the storm passed directly over the city. It was immediately after that brief lull, as an unsuspecting population came outside to survey the damage, when most of the 114 fatalities occurred.

The wreckage of the aftermath was beyond belief. Of the 600 boats in the anchorages off Coconut Grove, not one was left floating. The same was true of all but one ship in the harbor. The 240 feet long, five-masted sailing ship *Rose Mahoney* was launched by the storm surge onto Biscayne Boulevard, from where it was not completely removed for two years. There was major flooding for 20 blocks inland, and the support pilings of many buildings were undermined. On Miami Beach, hotel lobbies were filled with mounds of sand, and almost every window and door was blown out.

All means of communication were cut off to the outside world, but word of the devastation somehow made it to news outlets a day later. People in every American city read unequivocal front page headlines like this: “MIAMI DESTROYED BY HURRICANE.” Although there were many houses of worship in the city to offer alms and prayers, there was still no Unity.

EARLY UNITY

In the spring of 1886, only a decade prior to the incorporation of the city of Miami, the seed of the Unity movement was planted as a thought held in mind by a 41-year-old woman in Kansas City, Missouri. Myrtle Fillmore attended a lecture by a student of New Thought, and she took away a simple but profound idea: "I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness." Myrtle and her husband Charles had both struggled with grave physical infirmities since their childhoods, but that thought held in mind became their reality. They both went on to live long and healthy lives.

The Fillmores never intended to start a metaphysical movement or a new faith of their own, however. Charles was a self-educated and determined entrepreneur who found success in various businesses in the expanding American West, eventually settling with his wife and sons in Kansas City. His formal religious background was minimal, but his reading in philosophy, religion, literature, and science was extensive. Myrtle, for her part, was raised in a strict Methodist Episcopal home, but her mind was also stimulated by eclectic ideas. They both yearned for the meaning of life, and they looked for it wherever they could find it.

They listened with open minds to the optimistic ideas of the successors of Phineas Quimby (widely regarded as the founder of New Thought in the early 19th century): Emma Curtis Hopkins, Mary Baker Eddy (the founder of Christian Science), and Malinda Cramer and Nona Brooks (the co-founders of Divine Science). These and other leaders of similar metaphysical movements (Transcendentalism, Theosophy, High Mysticism, Religious Science, Mystical Christianity) were rapidly gaining consideration in the late 19th century. Their ideas overlapped in many ways, but the one thing they all had in common was this: they healed people. As Joseph Faus wrote in the *Miami News* in 1951, "The wealthy and healthy laughed; people ill and poor listened and read." Other common characteristics of this new wave of spirituality were the conviction that God was omnipresent and all-loving; that Jesus was the great example of the Christ nature in all humanity; and that life's problems could only be solved on the plane of the Divine.

The Fillmores' search for Truth came to a crossroads when misfortune overtook them with the simultaneous deterioration of Myrtle's health and Charles' business. Every remedy for Myrtle's tuberculosis had failed, yet on the very night she heard and believed the Truth ("I am a child of God and therefore I do not inherit sickness") she began to get better. Was it a coincidence, a miracle, or a discovery? Myrtle knew it was the last. By her own positive words and thoughts, she had cooperated with God to make herself whole and well. The more Charles investigated the "mind-cure" ideas of the various New Thought practitioners, the more he agreed.

Charles gradually gave up his failing business interests, and instead followed the inspiration he gained from his wife's recovery. In April 1889, with no prior experience, he threw his energy into the publication of a small magazine called *Modern Thought*, the forerunner of today's *Unity* magazine and *Daily Word*. By this time, word had spread of Myrtle's return to health, and neighbors came to her for help with their own ailments. Many of them made miraculous recoveries. The Fillmores formed a prayer group called the "Society of Silent Help" in April 1890, which is the same 24-hour prayer ministry known today as Silent Unity. The name Unity was chosen for the Fillmore's work in 1891.

As the circulation of Unity publications expanded, and as the number of participants in the Society of Silent Help grew during the years around the turn of the 20th century, the combined entities became known as the Unity Society of Practical Christianity. Unity was not supposed to be a church, however. Rather, it was an organization--as Charles Fillmore expressed in 1903--"for scientific and educational purposes, viz: the study and demonstration of universal law." Although the Fillmores continued to study under and with the leading lights of New Thought, it became apparent to Charles that the New Thought movement, including the Unity movement, encompassed so many variations on Truth that the truth was hard to find. He decided to find it for himself and focused on the simple concept of a Unity School of Practical Christianity.

Unity has always been, in essence, a school. No one "joins" Unity, per se. As Lowell Fillmore, Charles' and Myrtle's eldest son, said in 1964, Unity's intent has always been "to help to show people, whatever their religion, a positive way to health, prosperity, and happiness through the Christ spirit." The Fillmores taught classes in Truth principles, prayer, and meditation from the earliest days of the movement, but as Unity flourished outside of Kansas City, a demand grew for instruction in other cities. In the summers of the early 1900s, the Fillmores offered classes in Colorado, as well as an Intensive Training School in Kansas City. In 1909 they opened the Unity Correspondence School, which by 1911 had an enrollment of over 2,000.

It was inevitable that the Fillmores would become teachers of teachers. Many of the Correspondence School students established Unity Centers in other cities, where they taught classes and conducted services of their own. One of these was a woman in New York City who would move to Cincinnati to lead a New Thought church there. The signature achievement of her life's work, however, was bringing Unity to Miami.

EARLY LIFE OF MAY CORNELL STOIBER

May Cornell was born in 1874 in New York City. Her father, John Cornell, whose lineage went back in American history to the early days of English settlers, was distantly related to Ezra Cornell, the founder of the Western Union Telegraph Company and co-founder of Cornell

University. May had one sister, and the girls were brought up simultaneously in the Quaker and the Episcopal churches. However, the minister at St. James Episcopal Church in New York was apparently of little help to May after her mother, Adelaide Fuchs Cornell, died when May was fourteen. As she experienced--as she put it--"problems that beset me on life," May began to surreptitiously consult with spiritualists and even committed the heresy of attending Catholic Mass. She was found out and forbidden to go again, but it was too late. She had already become an avid and unstoppable seeker of Truth.

During her middle teens, May went to healing services every afternoon on her way home from school. Through her college years and beyond, she went to evangelical meetings, attended missionary society meetings, and joined the Ethical Culture Society. Yet it was not until the age of 26 that she had what she felt was her first awakening upon reading *God is Love* by New Thought writer Ursula Gesterfield. A few years later May read *Lessons in Truth* by Emily Cady. Cady was a practicing physician in New York and, coincidentally, a friend of May's grandmother. *Lessons in Truth* was a work commissioned by the Fillmores in 1894 and remains the most popular book ever published by Unity. The inspiration May gained from the book was profound and would eventually guide her to Unity as her ultimate source of Truth.

Before that would happen, however, May became an active leader the New Thought movement in New York City. In 1907 she was minister of the Brooklyn branch of the Church and School of the New Civilization. This organization and many other New Thought groups were loosely federated under an umbrella organization called the "League for the Larger Life," which often hosted lectures by leaders of the individual groups, including May.

Additionally, in 1914 she started serving with Reverend Dr. John Murray, the founder of the Church of the Healing Christ, the largest New Thought church in the city. In 1917 the church was renamed the First Divine Science Church of New York when Murray aligned with Nona Brooks' branch of Divine Science. Sunday services were held in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel, where Dr. Murray spoke to capacity crowds. During this period May wrote regularly for Dr. Murray's publication *The Gleaner*, and for two years she also published and edited a church pamphlet called *Right Thinking*.

With Dr. Murray's encouragement, May moved to Cincinnati in 1918 to become leader of the New Thought Temple there. She returned frequently to New York, however, as a guest speaker at various venues: the League for the Larger Life's hall on West 72nd Street; the Waldorf-Astoria, addressing Dr. Murray's congregation; and the Hotel Astor. The topics of her talks included "The New Idea of Spiritualism," "Business of Life," "The Five Told Men," "Man's Answer to God," "The Perfect Law," "Emanative Consciousness," and "What Shall We Do With Christ?"

The storyline of May Cornell's personal life is unfortunately somewhat sketchy, but it is known that she went to Hunter College (now part of the City University of New York) and later graduated from the National Conservatory of Dramatic Art. There is no record of her work as a professional actress, but in her 20s she was employed in the New York public schools as a drama and speech teacher. At some point near the turn of the 20th century she married Mortimer Lawrence Aitken, a fellow New Yorker 13 years her senior. The couple had two children: a daughter Adelaide Augusta Aitken and a son Jeremiah Bennett Aitken. In 1909, sadly, Mortimer died, leaving May a widow and the children fatherless. Mrs. Mortimer Aitken remarried, becoming Mrs. Herbert Stoiber, but after losing her son Jeremiah in 1917 when he was killed on the battlefields of France in World War One, her second husband also passed away.

Thus for a woman only in her forties, May Cornell Stoiber had experienced more than her share of immediate family member's deaths: a mother, two husbands, and a son. What effect these deeply personal losses ultimately had on her spiritual convictions is unknown, but something she wrote a decade later is indicative. In an article called "What is Heaven," published in the newsletter *Weekly Unity* in 1929, Mrs. Stoiber starts off by listing various people's conception of heaven. The final entry reads as follows: "A mother was sitting in a dining room; she looked up and there in the doorway stood her son who had just returned from war; that was heaven to her." May Stoiber also had a sense of humor, however, because another part of the article states, "I asked a widow, 'What is heaven?' She said, 'A good husband and a Rolls Royce.'"

In 1924 May left her post at the New Thought Temple in Cincinnati. She and Dr. Murray decided, as May recollected in 1949, "it was best for both of us to unite with Unity, for in Truth it would become the World Religion. His [Dr. Murray's] intention was to amalgamate 'the Church of the Healing Christ' which Dr. Emmet Fox now has, into Unity." She spent the next two years traveling and lecturing "in churches, colleges, schools, Rotaries, Kiwanis, Lions, Optimists and in Women's Clubs on the subject 'Christ in Business'." There is no indication that she ever visited Miami, however, until she made up her mind to go there for good because, as she said, "I found there was no Unity...and a great storm had brought much disaster."

THE EARLY YEARS OF UNITY IN MIAMI

Within three months of her arrival, May Cornell Stoiber officially opened the first Unity Center in Miami, as already mentioned, on January 1, 1927. The Unity Center of Practical Christianity, as it was known formally, was located in a private home at 275 NE 1st Street, only one block from Biscayne Boulevard and the newly opened Bayfront Park. (Bayfront Park was built in 1924 on landfill extending from the natural shoreline eastward into the bay. Prior to that time, Biscayne Boulevard ran along the edge of Biscayne Bay, which is why it is the only non-rectilinear downtown street.)

It is unknown how and to what extent Mrs. Stoiber publicized Miami's newest spiritual enterprise, but she started to gain a following among locals who had so recently experienced the trauma of the economic bust and the Great Hurricane of 1926 and who were still suffering the consequences. As she recalled years later, she succeeded in bringing many of them great physical relief. She wrote, "Healings were so many, it is difficult to remember. Blindness, cancer, tuberculosis, injured skull given up by all the doctors (it was a child run over by an automobile), paralysis." One of Mrs. Stoiber's early healing successes was a woman named Nell Revell, whose life was extended from 2 months to 47 years. Mrs. Revell became a Unity teacher herself in 1932, and she remained a pillar of the Unity Center in Miami for the rest of her life.

At first, May Stoiber conducted classes and healing services at the First Street location, as well as in a space above the Woolworth's Building on Flagler Street. Of course the spiritual needs of the neighborhood were also served by much larger houses of worship. In Miami in 1927 there were numerous well-established religious denominations which had, until 1926, enjoyed generous financing that went along with Miami's population explosion and booming economy. Many of them had erected substantial churches downtown.

The oldest of these was the Presbyterian Church on Flagler Street and SE Third Avenue, built in 1900 by—who else?—Henry Flagler, himself a Presbyterian. (The steeple of this structure was blown away in the hurricane, however, and never replaced.) Other nearby churches included White Temple Methodist Episcopal on 4th Street and Trinity Methodist Episcopal on 5th Street, erected in 1913 and 1915 respectively. The Beth David congregation built a synagogue downtown in 1920. In 1925, only a year before the hurricane, three cathedrals were dedicated, all of which still stand: Gesu (Catholic) on Second Street and NE First Avenue; Central Baptist on Fifth Street and NE First Avenue; and Trinity Episcopal on Fifteenth Street and Bayshore Drive.

The institution which would have been the closest thing to Unity was the First Church of Christ Scientist, which was organized in Miami in 1916. Prior to that time, starting in 1898, Christian Science followers met in the Housekeepers' Club in Coconut Grove. In 1925, the Christian Scientists moved to their current location, the magnificent structure on Biscayne Boulevard and 18th Street, only a few blocks from the present—or, at that time, the future—Edgewater site of Unity on the Bay.

None of this information is meant to imply, of course, that the new Unity Center of Practical Christianity was in any way competing with Miami's already established religious institutions. Like the Fillmores, May Stoiber's intention was to "merely do what we regard as important supplementary work. However, the only religion or creed that will succeed is going to include all peoples. They must be able to find a common denominator and be able to use it in any church."

As Unity started to gain traction in Miami, Mrs. Stoiber held Sunday services in rented spaces: the Ritz Hotel, the Roberts Hotel, and the Elk's Club. On December 22, 1928, she spoke to a women's Bible class on "The Birth of Jesus" in the Fairfax Theater. Around 1930 a larger venue was rented in the Rex (later renamed the Florida) Theater, a location used for Unity services until at least 1939.

Classes and prayer circles, however, were held at the Unity Center itself, which by 1931, according to the City Directory of that year, had relocated to 236 NE Fifth Street. This was another private residence on the corner of Biscayne Boulevard. It is possible that both the First Street and Fifth Street Centers were also where Mrs. Stoiber lived, because such was the case in 1934 when Unity moved to its third site in Miami, 128 SE Third Street. The Unity Center was downstairs; May Cornell Stoiber lived upstairs.

THE THIRD STREET CENTER

The Third Street Unity Center was in Dallas Park, a neighborhood whose name derived from its earlier incarnation, Fort Dallas. (During the Second and Third Seminole Indian Wars of the mid-1800s, the U.S. Army maintained a small fort slightly inland on the north bank of the Miami River.) The fort and 640 acres of surrounding land were purchased in 1891 by Julia Tuttle, the "Mother of Miami," who subsequently gave the eastern portion of the property to Henry Flagler in hopes he would extend his railroad to Miami and build a grand hotel at the terminus. Needless to say, Flagler followed through, and in 1897 the Royal Palm Hotel opened at the mouth of the Miami River.

By any standard, the Royal Palm Hotel was a marvel of opulence: 450 guest rooms, a top floor salon, electric elevators, multiple dining rooms, sweeping ornate grounds, and Miami's first swimming pool. Only a block away on SE Third Street, a square, cream colored, stucco block building was erected in 1900. By the time May Stoiber and the Unity Center occupied this humble edifice, however, the neighboring Royal Palm Hotel was gone. One of the many casualties of the Great Hurricane of 1926, the hotel was uninhabitable afterward owing to water damage and termite infestation. In 1930 it was condemned and torn down.

Another large hotel, however, the Dallas Park Hotel, was next door to the Unity Center, and eventually Mrs. Stoiber moved in there, keeping her in close proximity. The Unity Center was open daily from 10 am to 4 pm and offered services on Thursday evenings, in addition to Sunday services at the other locations already mentioned.

The primary activities at the Center were prayer and meditation. In imitation of what was—and still is—done at Silent Unity, a dedicated group of Truth students kept regular prayer vigils for anyone who requested prayer. This contingent became known as the High Watch. There were twelve of them, and they were given the twelve disciples' names. Prayer requests were

categorized and split up between William van Aiken, Virgil Ector, Nora Campbell, Dr. George Ehrline, Geraldine Wallace, Mittie Jackson, Pearl Wilson, Elsie Letts, Frieda Robertson, Cora Johns, Ethel Smith, and Jessie Singleton. Several of these folks became Unity teachers themselves and conducted classes in private homes in Hialeah, Coral Gables, and Miami Beach during the 1930s and 1940s.

Other prominent figures in the initial history of Miami's Unity Center of Practical Christianity, which was incorporated in March 1929, were the early trustees: Mrs. T. T. Stevens, Dr. Lydia Devilbiss, Harriet Christenson, Julius Kaiser, and William Revell (husband of Nell Revell). The specific contributions of these individuals are beyond the scope of this history, but it is clear that Mrs. Stoiber had a great deal of local support as the enterprise grew.

Unity's growth in Miami was certainly not without its challenges, but it is interesting to note that the onset of the Great Depression in 1929 did not impact Miami's collective psyche, including that of the new Unity Center, as severely as most of the rest of the nation. Miami was still reeling from its own pre-Depression economic troubles, and the Miamians who remained after the calamities of 1926 were inured to hard times and already in a reconstruction mindset. Besides, in spite of the beleaguered national economy, there were still Northerners who could afford a vacation in the Florida sunshine, and winter Caribbean cruises remained popular. In fact, the tourist economy and the population of Miami Beach grew steadily through the 1930s.

An indication that things were not all gloom and doom in Miami during the Depression is actually provided by accounts of May Stoiber herself. Her name was frequently in the society pages of the local newspapers as a guest at card parties, bon voyages, charity events, etc. In April 1929 she reprised the stagecraft of her youth in a Shakespeare recital at a private oceanfront home on Miami Beach. Although she was never a person of means, she made it a point to get to know Miamians who were, campaigning diligently among them to raise funds for the Unity Center. In March 1938 Mrs. Stoiber and a group of Unity followers were reported in the *Miami News* making an evening cruise aboard millionaire William Magraw's yacht *Cherie*.

Mrs. Stoiber wove herself into Miami's social fabric in other ways as well. She served a term as president of the Miami Penwomen. She joined the Everglades Chapter of the Daughters of the American Revolution. She was an active member of the Miami Soroptimist Club, the Miami Bookfellows, and the Miami Chapter of American Gold Star Mothers (mothers who had lost sons in World War One).

Her endeavors on behalf of Unity were not limited to Miami, either. In June 1933 she left on a three-month speaking tour to New York, Chicago, and Kansas City. Although she had completed the Unity correspondence course, the main purpose of the visit to Kansas City was to attend the Unity Training School, which by this time had developed a code of guidelines for

what could and could not be taught. The school had also created a program for ordaining ministers to serve the growing number of Unity Centers around the country. Ministerial candidates were Unity teachers who wanted to give up their former religion.

After several summers of classwork at the Unity School in Kansas City, May Cornell Stoiber was ordained in 1937, an event she regarded as the greatest in her life. As Reverend Stoiber, she went back to Kansas City in the summers of 1938 and 1939 and taught speech to the teachers-in-training. In July 1940 she spoke at a Unity Center in Wisconsin, but not all of her travels were devoted to Unity. She would also spend time in the summers visiting her daughter (Mrs. Ivan Case) and grandchildren in Ohio.

Thus in little more than a decade, Unity had gained a strong foothold in Miami. Both the teachers and students who comprised Miami's Unity Center of Practical Christianity had once again proven that reality is created by thoughts held in mind. By 1939 attendance was in the hundreds at the Sunday morning service at the Rex Theater, and a second service was offered Sunday evenings at the Third Street Center. Reverend Stoiber summed up Unity's place in the community like this: "Success and happiness in life is [sic] much easier to attain than failure and misery. In Miami are thousands of people groping desperately for the good and abundant life, striving frantically for freedom from grief and care. Let them say and pray and believe these positive affirmations of faith, which will in time make them the true success that Christ was and is."

THE FOURTH STREET CENTER and DR. JOHN LEE BAUGHMAN

By 1940, Unity's success in Miami was readily apparent, but that fact quickly faded in the shadow of world events. The early years of the 1940s were marked primarily by the Second World War throughout the United States. The war's impact on Miami, however, was greater than average. German U-boats began prowling the Florida Straits early in 1942, and the threat to civilian targets, let alone merchant ships, was real. The Biltmore Hotel was fully converted to a hospital in 1943 to treat the many casualties among seamen from torpedoed ships along the Florida coast. Tens of thousands of servicemen descended on Miami and Miami Beach for training. Miami's airports, seaport, shipyards, and manufacturing facilities changed over almost entirely from commercial to military applications.

There is no telling what sentiments regarding the war were held by Mrs. Stoiber or, for that matter, any of her followers. However, it is clear that conflict of any kind is incongruent with Unity's First Principle, which states that there is only one presence and one power, God the good. This must have been a dilemma for students of Truth, but at the same time the nation was galvanized by a common purpose unlike any in its history. Suffice it to say there were

many prayers for peace that emanated from the hearts and minds of Unity's adherents in Miami.

When the war was over, Unity's growth in Miami had been significant enough to warrant relocating the Center from SE Third Street to a larger site. Requirements for a new Unity Center included accommodations for a caretaker, since Mrs. Stoiber was going to keep her apartment at the Dallas Park Hotel. A gentleman known only as "Mr. Haines" would fill this role. After a lengthy search, a building at 158 NE Fourth Street was purchased in May 1949 for \$40,000. The Fourth Street Center was still not large enough to hold the more popular classes, but it did provide space for a bookstore and prayer sanctuary.*

By the time the Fourth Street Center was fully functional, May Cornell Stoiber was nearing 80 years old. She did not want to retire, but in 1953 she invited Dr. John Lee Baughman, minister of Unity Church of Boston, to relieve her for a one-year sabbatical in order to spend more time with her daughter's family in Ohio. Reverend Baughman and his wife Ardis arrived to find a thriving spiritual community. Lessons were now given at the Central Auditorium on NW 3rd Street, and student numbers ranged from 100-800 seasonally.

One of Dr. Baughman's early decisions was to move the Thursday night service to Ada Merritt Junior High School, several blocks west of the Miami River. This marked the first time a Unity service in Miami was held anywhere other than downtown. The city of Miami was spreading out, and many congregants lived in subdivisions on the outskirts. The Sunday service was likewise moved to the enormous auditorium of Miami Senior High School, the iconic structure which remains a landmark to this day and occupies the entire 2400 block of West Flagler Street.

Dr. Baughman also had the honor to preside over what, at the time, was one of the greatest milestones in Unity's history in Miami: the spiritual baptism of 425 members on May 16, 1954. Nonetheless this did not prove to be his greatest contribution. When Mrs. Stoiber returned to Miami, she decided to retire to "Founder, Minister Emeritus, and Teacher." She handed the leadership over to Dr. Baughman on a permanent basis, and that is the point at which, once again, a thought held in mind began to become reality. Dr. Baughman and hundreds of Unity students envisioned a bona fide Unity sanctuary in Miami, a structure large enough to hold the entire congregation. Today the home we call Unity on the Bay is a testament to the power of that thought.

*All four of Unity's downtown premises are long gone. The First Street residence was razed and replaced by the Union Bus Station, which was subsequently replaced by commercial office buildings. Now the address is a collection of retail shops. The Fifth Street location is currently a parking lot owned by Miami-Dade College. Not only have the Third Street and Fourth Street Centers disappeared, but so have the very streets themselves, at least the segments on which

the Unity Centers stood. What used to be the 100 block of SE Third Street was removed to make way for the I-95 ramp from SE Second Avenue, whereas the 100 block of NE Fourth Street is now a pedestrian-only portion of the Wolfson Campus of Miami-Dade College.