

MODERN HISTORY OF UNITY ON THE BAY

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INTRODUCTION

In 1954, Reverend Dr. Baughman and his Unity followers in Miami had a choice. Would they build a Unity Temple at the Fourth Street Center, which was the plan when the Fourth Street property was purchased, or would they seek another site with more room for expansion? Considering the expectations engendered by Unity's remarkable growth in Miami at the time, and the fact that the Fourth Street property was already woefully too small, it was not a difficult decision.

But the next question for Unity congregants--"Where should we go?"--was not so simple. Like most urban areas in the United States in the decade after World War Two, the city of Miami was sprawling in every direction with new subdivisions. Downtown was still the shopping and commercial hub of the city, but more and more residents lived a distance from downtown. It was inevitable that community services, including houses of worship, would follow. In the early 1950s, aggregate participation in Miami's Unity Center of Practical Christianity had grown to over a thousand people, and the majority of them lived in the suburbs.

Consideration of this factor must have played a role in the congregation's decision, but apparently it was not the determining factor. Nor was it, in retrospect, a decision that took long to make. Although there is no record of how many other sites were visited, the Board members and Reverend Dr. Baughman looked at a property in Edgewater on September 20, 1954. Two weeks later a membership meeting held at the same location (412 NE 22nd Street) resulted in unanimous approval of its purchase.

Edgewater is a neighborhood in Miami immediately north of what we refer to today as the Omni Area, the northern part of downtown. The Omni/Edgewater boundary coincides with NE 21st Street; hence the choice for Unity's new location was still quite close to downtown. The property consisted of two lots in Edgewater's southeastern corner and came with a lavish home, a carriage house, and a water tower.

The establishment of Unity at this new and permanent location marks the beginning of the modern history of Unity on the Bay. This portion of the story begins at the most auspicious moment the movement in Miami had ever known, and it continues through a decade of halcyon days during which hundreds of Unity congregants basked in their sparkling new sanctuary. This golden era did not last, however, and a much longer period of slow decline

ensued. Membership numbers dwindled as ministers came and went. The buildings fell into disrepair, and the consensus was that the property would have to be sold.

Yet that is not what happened. Unity on the Bay experienced a resurrection in the 1990s that even the most optimistic personalities in the movement could not have foreseen. Like the Phoenix—for that matter, like the city of Miami after the Great Hurricane of 1926—Unity on the Bay rose from the ashes and once again became a dynamic, thriving home to thousands of seekers of Truth. That story would not be complete, however, without a history of the ground on which the church stands today.

THE EASTWOOD/URSINE MANSION

The subdivision of Edgewater was first platted in March 1912 by developer M.P. Freeman. Back then, NE 22nd Street was called Colorado Avenue. Biscayne Boulevard was only paved as far north as NE 14th Street, and its unpaved northern extension was called Rand Street. At that time Miami was growing by leaps and bounds, and over the next few years, lots in Edgewater were sold and resold at a frantic pace. Between 1913 and 1917, parts of the future site of UOTB changed hands, at least on paper, eight times. In April 1917, however, the two lots were bought by John Henry Eastwood, who was the first owner to build on the property and actually live there.

Mr. Eastwood was owner of the largest wire manufacturing plant in the world, a business founded by his father. Eastwood Wire and Eastwood Chemical (another family-owned business) were located in Belleville, New Jersey, where Mr. Eastwood lived with his wife Margaret Spence Eastwood. The Eastwoods owned a second home in Bayshore (Long Island), New York, as well as a suite in the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City. (One wonders if either of them ever attended a Sunday morning talk at the Waldorf by May Cornell Stoiber?)

In the early decades of the 1900s, Miami became a very trendy place for wealthy Northeasterners to vacation in the winter. The Eastwoods were among the wealthiest, and they built a U-shaped mansion with the bottom of the U facing Biscayne Bay, less than 100 feet from the water's edge. The central section of the house featured a grand reception hall with a carved twelve foot high ceiling. The side wings included five bedrooms that opened onto a courtyard at the center of which was a tiled reflection pool. The area on the north side of the house was landscaped as a sunken garden.

John Henry Eastwood only lived to enjoy his winter home in Miami for a few years; he died in January 1921, leaving an estate worth, in total, as much as eight million dollars. Mrs. Eastwood inherited the Miami home, but it is uncertain whether or not she ever again spent much time

there, because property records show the title going back and forth among several entities for more than a decade. Mrs. Eastwood must have in fact retained ownership, however, because it was she who sold the house to its second occupant, Bjarne Ursine, in March 1935.

Mr. Ursine was originally from Norway, but according to an article in the *Miami Daily News* in May 1926, he came to Miami from Chicago, where his primary occupation appears to have been the leadership of the local ski-jumping club. Since he wouldn't be skiing in Miami, he joined the Royal Palm Club instead. (The Royal Palm Club was a remnant of the Royal Palm Hotel when the hotel was torn down in 1930. One wonders if Mr. Ursine ever stopped by the Unity Center on SE Third Street, only a block away?)

Eventually Mr. Ursine became Honorary Consul of Norway and served as such at the Norwegian Consulate in Boston. In Massachusetts Mr. Ursine was a benefactor of Phillips Academy and Harvard University, and his son graduated from MIT in 1957. It is unknown if he got the job in Boston before or after he bought the Eastwood mansion, but he and his family continued to winter in Miami until they sold the property to the Unity Center of Practical Christianity.

One other aspect of Mr. Ursine's ownership of the Edgewater property regards a tantalizing but dubious story about the mansion, worth mentioning if only to refute it. A rumor spread over the years that Mr. Ursine installed clandestine submarine tunnels from the house out into Biscayne Bay. The story's circulation likely owes to the combination of several coincidences: Mr. Ursine's nationality; Norway's subjugation to the Nazis in World War Two; Miami's experience with German U-boats; and the fact that Mr. Ursine did indeed secure submerged property rights to 3.7 acres of bay bottom in front of the house in 1945.

The rumor starts to fall apart upon closer examination, however, starting with the fact that in 1945 the war was over. Additionally, Biscayne Bay is barely deep enough for conventional boats, let alone submarines. And, finally, there is a much more credible explanation for Mr. Ursine's desire to own underwater property.

Starting with Bayfront Park in 1924 and proceeding northward, the shoreline of Biscayne Bay was filled in many areas to create more land and dockage for watercraft. This was true for almost all of the more than 20 blocks of shoreline between the Venetian Causeway and the Julia Tuttle Causeway, which includes all of Edgewater. As the owner of bayfront property, Mr. Ursine would have had first option to create land in front of his house. He obtained a dredging permit from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers in 1948, and he contracted to have the area filled between 1948 and 1951. This is the land on which the condominium building immediately east of Unity on the Bay ("21 Biscayne") is located today, where no one has ever reported the discovery of submarine tunnels.

Mr. Ursine sold most of his property in Edgewater to the Unity Center of Miami for \$81,000. Shortly thereafter the Center bought another parcel (100' x 125') on the northeastern side of the main parcel for an additional \$10,000, to be used for parking. Mr. Ursine kept a western portion of one of the original lots, but he sold that to a developer in January 1960. The same is true of the rest of his filled land to the east.

Thus the Unity Center of Miami was moving into the home of millionaires. Prosperity was the watchword of the day, and there was every indication that only good times lie ahead.

A NEW AND PERMANENT HOME

Unity's Fourth Street property was sold in 1955 for \$40,500, while another portion of the funds needed to purchase the Ursine property came from the sale of two other properties which had been bequeathed to the Unity Center around the same time. The balance of the purchase price was secured with a loan.

When the Unity Center officially moved to Edgewater in 1955, the mansion was utilized for classes, offices, and social gatherings. Caroline Fay was installed as resident secretary, while Mr. Haines stayed on as resident caretaker. The carriage house became the Sunday school. The plan for the water tower was to convert it into a prayer tower, in imitation of the prayer tower at Unity Village in Missouri.

The question of a sanctuary, however, remained. Ever-growing attendance at the main services still required rented auditoriums. The thought of building an actual church in Edgewater, a single home for all aspects of Unity, must have seemed beyond the realm of possibility to some, especially those who associated Unity with its humble and nomadic beginnings in Miami. Yet there must have been many more who knew that nothing is impossible for God; that by holding in mind the thought of a Unity sanctuary in Edgewater, God would co-create it.

Creating a new sanctuary was not the only thing happening at Unity in Edgewater at this time, however. Setting up the new facility also coincided with the creation of a Miami chapter of Youth of Unity. Y.O.U. is an international youth group for teens ages 14-18, providing them with the opportunity to explore Unity's principles and apply them in their daily lives. The program started in 1936 in Kansas City, and when the Miami chapter formed 20 years later, there were 70 members present.

At almost the same time, in September 1956, the loan on the Edgewater property was paid in full, and immediately a building committee was formed to explore the construction of a Unity sanctuary on site. Committee members included Thomas Duff, Edna Stevens, Ethel Smith (one of May Stoiber's first truth students in Miami), Violet Partridge, and Thomas Lipe. A mailing that announced the formation of the building committee was sent to 2500 people.

The architect Robert Fitch Smith got to work designing a building that would seat over 800, with space for a future balcony which would increase capacity to over 1,000. The scale of this undertaking is a testament not only to Unity's growing popularity in Miami, but also to its finances. It had taken over twenty years for Miami's Unity movement to acquire the means to own its first home (the Fourth Street Center). Yet only seven years later, the Center had upgraded to another home more than twice as valuable. Even more remarkable, the building committee was considering new construction that would end up costing eight times as much as the Fourth Street Center.

Although the Center's financial records from the time no longer exist, it is hard to imagine that much money was available to put toward construction costs, no matter how well collections were going. Adding to those costs, Mr. Smith discovered, as he worked on the architectural plans, that renovating the water tower would be prohibitively expensive. As an alternative, both the water tower and the sunken gardens could be demolished to create space for more parking, but a new tower was going to cost an additional \$24,000.

Yet in light of these monetary constraints, a consciousness of prosperity prevailed. A donation was received to cover the cost of a floodlit, 96-foot-high tower, topped with giant letters "U-N-I-T-Y" outlined by neon lights. A new design incorporated the tower into the sanctuary itself, which adjoined the south flank of the mansion and extended to NE 21st Street. Creative fundraising was employed to sell seats in the sanctuary for \$35 each. Donors' names were stamped on plaques affixed to the back of each seat, a reminder to congregants ever since of the generosity of the congregants that preceded them.

In March 1959 the membership voted to award a \$225,000 construction contract to Albert Stotter. Mortgages of \$100,000, and later, \$65,000 were also approved. Unfinished but ready for occupancy, the new church opened only six months later by hosting the Southeastern Conference of Unity Churches.

The sanctuary was officially dedicated on February 19, 1961 at a special Sunday service conducted by Reverend Dr. Baughmann. A brass cornerstone box was imbedded in the hallway in front of the large south-facing window beneath the tower. Inside the box, congregants placed personal blessings. A bronze plaque was placed on top of the box which reads, in part:

Unity Center of Practical Christianity of Miami

Dedicated to God and His Jesus Christ Ministry

"Mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people."

Little did anyone realize at the time that putting that last statement into practice was going to be the great challenge, and ultimately the salvation, of Unity on the Bay.

THE GOLDEN AGE

The dedication of Unity's new sanctuary was the crowning achievement of Reverend Dr. Baughman's career in ministry. He retired later in 1961, and a new minister was called from the Field Department at Unity Headquarters. Reverend Ralph Rhea and his wife Helen were greeted at a special reception in the mansion upon their arrival. That was a happy occasion; unfortunately, one of Reverend Rhea's first duties as minister was not: officiating at the funeral of Reverend May Cornell Stoiber.

Reverend Stoiber still resided at the Dallas Park Hotel when she died on September 10, 1961. Her funeral service was conducted at the new Unity Center of Miami in Edgewater, but since there is no mention of her presence at the dedication ceremony earlier in the year, the possibility exists that she never saw Unity's magnificent new sanctuary for herself. The irony is that in many respects it was she who had built it. Without a doubt, she laid the foundation. Unity on the Bay—by which is meant its thousands of members who have come and gone over the years—owes an immense debt of gratitude to May Cornell Stoiber's unwavering desire to carry the Unity message to the people of Miami.

Reverend Rhea went on to serve the Unity Center of Miami for five more years, during which he became the first minister to take up residence in the mansion. In hindsight, his tenure and that of his successor, Reverend Victor Zarley, marked the crest of the Center's wave of success. Sunday services were nearly always full; holiday services were overflowing.

That the Center was flourishing is indicated by many examples. Congregants were privileged to host Lowell Fillmore, eldest son of Unity's co-founders Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, who spoke at the Center in January 1963. In July of the following year, Lowell's son Charles Rickert Fillmore spoke at Unity's Southeastern Retreat held on Miami Beach. It was also during Reverend Rhea's tenure that Unity in Miami produced its first ordained minister. Euna Magrill was recommended to the Unity Ministerial Training School in March 1965. She would return to Miami and serve as Minister of Visitation for two years in the early 1970s before she passed away.

Additionally, in 1962 Reverend Rhea conducted a daily fifteen minute radio show at 11:30 in the morning on Radio Outreach on WMIE (now Univision Radio's WQBA). The show was called "Unity Viewpoint," and Reverend Rhea, known for his fun-loving ways, exercised his wit and humor for the benefit of thousands. Starting in May 1965, Reverend Rhea hosted another radio show on WKAT, a Miami Beach-based talk radio station.

When Reverend Rhea resigned in May 1966, the Center was, by almost all accounts, in excellent shape. Seeming challenges had been met with ease. Although hurricane Cleo damaged the sanctuary in August 1964, repairs were made in short order. A larger hurricane (Betsy) in September 1965 just missed Miami to the south. While Key Largo was virtually obliterated, Miami suffered only minor damage, and Unity came through unscathed. Unity's progress in Miami was even well-noted back in Kansas City, which is where Reverend Rhea went after leaving Miami and where he would broadcast another radio program, "Word from Unity." He also married again in Kansas City in 1968. His second wife was Rosemary Fillmore, granddaughter of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore.

Reverend Rhea's replacement was Reverend Victor A. Zarley, who had been ordained in 1963 and who took over as minister of the Unity Center of Miami in August 1966. Reverend Zarley's wife Terri was also an ordained Unity minister, and although their time in Miami was brief (just over two years) accomplishments on their watch were many. Reverend Zarley established a lending library in the reception room of the mansion, which became the bailiwick of congregant Lillian Newman for the next 13 years. In January 1967, the mortgage on the sanctuary was burned in a symbolic gesture of gratitude for the Center's financial blessings. The guest speaker at the ceremony was Reverend James Dillet Freeman, director of Unity's ministerial training program at the time and widely regarded as Unity's greatest poet and author.

Reverend Zarley also instituted the publication of "Tropical Breeze," the Center's monthly newsletter, but perhaps his most significant contribution was the formation of a Spanish language Unity class in 1967. Spanish speakers were attending Unity in increasing numbers, and accommodating them was an important first step in adapting to Miami's changing demographics. The class met in the afternoon in the carriage house and within one year a Sunday worship service in Spanish was held in the west foyer of the sanctuary.

In spite of all this good news, however, something portentous was happening in the background that would play a major part in the fate of the Unity community. In the 1960s, a couple of sociological shifts came about in Miami that would challenge one of Unity's primary tenets, its inclusivity. Would the Unity Center of Miami fulfill its own mission and truly become "a house of prayer for all people"?

FROM ZENITH TO NADIR

The 1960s were marked by social upheaval around the world, but in many ways the tumult of that era was experienced in Miami like nowhere else. The old social order--especially Miami's self-image as a sleepy southern city--was collapsing, and this phenomenon was characterized in two principal ways.

The first was the flood of Cuban immigrants that arrived in the wake of the Castro Revolution. About 180,000 exiles came during this period. Many more would come in later waves, and no one could have predicted that the Cuban influx was only a precursor to even greater numbers of immigrants from Central and South America. Miami had always had a strong Caribbean influence, owing to its proximity to Cuba and its status as a primary port of departure to--and entry from--other destinations in the Caribbean Basin. Yet the surge of Latin American newcomers that started in the 1960s would impact Miami to an unprecedented degree, not only in terms of population, but also in terms of ethnicity, culture, and language.

The other social transformation that shaped Miami--and the rest of the South--in the 1960s was the integration of African-Americans. Miami's African-American community had always been large and vibrant, dating back to black Bahamian pioneers in the 19th century. But blacks had always lived separately from whites, and each went to their own churches. With the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, that began to change.

The combination of these two circumstances precipitated the same result at the Unity Center of Miami as it did at most of the other churches downtown. Unity's congregation in the 1960s was almost exclusively Anglo-American. As the city's population became more diverse, Anglos began to follow the pattern of urban flight that was occurring in city neighborhoods all around the country.

Edgewater was no exception. What had always been an all-white neighborhood was gradually integrated by Latinos and blacks, the majority of whom were poor. Long-standing white residents started to leave, and as they were generally better off financially than the non-whites moving in, the neighborhood's affluence faded. As economic vitality went down, crime went up, with the result that even more of those who could afford to moved out. It was a vicious circle that threatened to crush the hope with which the Unity movement had arrived in Edgewater only a decade earlier.

Of course none of these changes occurred overnight, and it is unlikely that anyone anticipated the full extent of their consequences at the time. In fact, it would be two decades before the situation reached a crisis for the Unity Center of Miami. When Reverend Zarley resigned in 1968, Wendell Mixson served as interim minister until Reverend Dr. Charles A. Neal took over in January 1969. To his credit, Reverend Dr. Neal would remain through increasingly difficult

circumstances for twelve years, longer than any Unity minister in Miami other than the founder, Reverend Stoiber.

Charles Neal was British, and he served on Winston Churchill's staff in World War Two. He subsequently became a magazine editor and was working in that capacity when he came to the United States in 1949. What led him to Unity is unknown, but he became an ordained Unity minister in 1959. His post prior to coming to Miami was minister of the Unity Church of St. Petersburg, Florida, largest in the Southeast.

Reverend Dr. Neal was a dominant figure who was not afraid to express his opinion. In one particular instance, when he was interviewed for an article in the *Miami Herald* in May 1970, he voiced his opposition to the Vietnam War—and all wars, for that matter—in no uncertain terms. (Considering his service during World War Two in an earlier life, Unity had obviously changed his mind about wars.) Other Miami ministers offered more equivocal opinions. Yet Reverend Dr. Neal was also known for his dry wit and his optimism. He willingly accepted the challenge of leading a church going downhill, whether or not it was what he expected.

It must be pointed out again, however, that the Unity Center of Miami's transition from vigor to languor took place gradually. Early on in Reverend Dr. Neal's tenure, there were sporadically hopeful signs that the church would rebound from its declining attendance. The Sunday school was refurbished between 1970 and 1971. In February 1971, a formalized Spanish Ministry was created under the direction of Reverend Marie Cruz, and two years later it moved into its own quarters two blocks north of the main campus. Later in 1971 another Unity Center opened in North Miami on Biscayne Boulevard and NE 123rd Street. This facility was initially led by Elvina Hausman and later by Charles Lelly. It was short-lived, unfortunately, and closed in 1973.

Other lights in the dark of the 1970s included the return of Charles Rickert Fillmore, by then Unity's president, to speak on Miami Beach in August 1973. That same year, a recently graduated ministerial student came to Miami to serve as assistant minister. Robert Marshall led the Y.O.U. group, and in 1974 he taught classes at a bank on North Kendall Drive. In 1978 he would open Unity of South Dade at a movie theater in Kendall. A year later the South Dade group, under the leadership of Reverend Loren Fleckinger, moved to a local Holiday Inn. Eventually the same entity evolved into the Unity Center of Miami in Kendall, led today by Reverend Charlene Manuel.

Back in Edgewater, however, it was clear that the glory days were over. In fact, in 1976 a drive led by Reverend Dr. Neal sought to sell the Edgewater property and move the church to another location closer to where most congregants lived--by which, although unspoken, was meant the homogenous white suburbs. Second-guessing was heard more and more openly in

regard to the decision made twenty years earlier to move the Center from Fourth Street to Edgewater.

Nonetheless the membership voted against the move. Apparently there were those who still clung to the memory of better days. As Reverend Nancy Neal joined the staff as assistant minister in January 1979, Reverend Dr. Neal continued to speak before more and more empty seats. As income continued to dry up, the annual operating budget of approximately \$300,000 could not be met. In 1981 Reverend Dr. Neal moved again to sell the property, the land portion of which alone was appraised at \$960,000, but again he failed. He tendered his resignation in October 1981, and Reverend Fleckinger filled in as interim minister for the balance of the year. On January 1, 1982, a new minister arrived, Reverend Alan Stanley.

There is little information about the five years that comprise Reverend Stanley's stint at the helm of the Unity Center of Miami, probably because it was an overwhelmingly dismal period. About the only bright spots were Reverend Stanley's marriage in 1982 to his beloved Catherine, and the sponsorship of Unity Centers, also in 1982, in Nassau and Key West, the latter of which was led by Reverend Evelyn Casper.

By the 1980s Miami had become an international capital of the illicit drug trade, and neighborhoods like Edgewater were havens for the lower tiers of drug dealers and their clientele of addicts. The motels lining Biscayne Boulevard, which formerly catered to middle-class vacationers, were now barely-disguised houses of prostitution. The Unity Center became a frequent target of vandalism, and pedestrians in the area were unsafe. Police presence was sorely lacking, as most police officers were none too eager to risk their own lives patrolling streets ruled by outlaws.

Attendance at Sunday services had fallen to less than fifty people. To call the situation discouraging would be a gross understatement; on life support is more like it. Shutting down the church and selling the property seemed inevitable, although no one had the energy to initiate the proceedings. By all accounts, the poor morale of the skeleton of a congregation that remained was merely a reflection of the depressed mood of Reverend Stanley himself. He finally gave up and resigned.

This describes the scene that Reverend Bill Cameron found in 1987 when he was sent by Unity Headquarters from his post in San Diego to make an appraisal of the state of affairs at the Unity Center of Miami. His initial reaction, understandably enough, was not very positive. He had not come to consider taking on the project of rescuing the church himself, and no one expected him to do so. On the flight back to California, however, Reverend Cameron had a thought which surprised him. Most people thought he was downright crazy to think such a thought, but he held it in mind anyway. His thought was, "Maybe it's worth saving."

A CHURCH WORTH SAVING

When he came to Miami, Reverend Bill Cameron was 59 years old, and he knew that whatever job he took at that age would probably be his last. By any standard, his legacy as a Unity ministry was already burnished, yet he had the nagging feeling that there might still be something more for him to do. After seeing for himself just how bad things were at the Unity Center of Miami, it occurred to him that if he could indeed find a way to resuscitate the Center, it would make a meaningful end to his career as a minister. It was the second great epiphany of his lifetime, and he made up his mind to give it a try.

William Earle Cameron grew up in a small farming community near Johnstown, Colorado. Unbeknown to him until much later, his grandmother was one of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore's original Unity students. Unfortunately, that did not prevent him from experiencing a very unhappy childhood. At the age of twelve he was packed off to St. John's Military School in Salina, Kansas, where he had an uncle, but he had to go back home when he suffered a severe and prolonged kidney infection. His relationship with his father only worsened, and with his mother's reluctant permission, he ran away to the Merchant Marine at sixteen years old. The next year he joined the Marine Corps and served for a year-and-a-half in China.

In spite of having acquired a decided affinity for alcoholic beverages by this time, he managed to obtain a high school diploma and enroll at Drury College in Missouri, and, later, at the University of Michigan, majoring in Political Science. When the Korean War broke out, he reentered the military for three more years, serving in the Air Force as a fighter pilot. His return to civilian life proved disillusioning, however, and he fell into the abyss of full-blown alcoholism as he drifted around the country. His dark night of the soul culminated in homelessness in San Francisco.

At this low point in his life, a series of apparent coincidences (a doctor's harsh appraisal of his physical condition; the faint rekindling of a long dormant desire to love and be loved; an encounter with an Episcopal minister who happened to be a recovered alcoholic) led to his first great epiphany: that there was another world in which he could choose to live, besides the physical world he had come to dislike so intensely.

Many years later, he wrote that this other world "embraces the realm of the Spirit, an ever-present invisible realm behind the scenes of the physical world. The important proviso was that it would only become an active force in my life if I invited it to do so." He subsequently joined a group of altruistic fellows who helped him get over his drinking in the same manner they had gotten over theirs, and he made amends with his estranged parents in the process. One day one of his sober friends happened to give him a copy of the Unity publication *Daily Word*.

He found employment with the Emporium Department store, eventually working his way up in a training program for buyers. In the meantime, however, the inspiration he found in the little Unity publication led him to the Unity Center in San Francisco. Eventually he chose to leave his business aspirations behind and instead enroll in the Unity Ministerial Program at Unity Village. He was ordained in 1966. He first served as a youth minister at Unity Village, co-founding Camelot Academy, a fine arts summer camp. Subsequent ministries were at Unity churches in Kansas City, Decatur (Illinois), Philadelphia, San Diego, and finally Miami.

Reverend Cameron's first order of business in Miami was making it clear that he was not there to facilitate the sale and relocation of the church, as everyone assumed. In fact, he was the one who came up with the name "Unity on the Bay" to emphasize that the Center's location was a plus, not a problem, and they were already right where they needed to be. Like May Cornell Stoiber 60 years earlier, he came to Miami to bring the Unity message to people who were suffering, not people who were comfortable. People in Edgewater were suffering.

Unlike all the Unity ministers who preceded him in Miami, however, Reverend Cameron came with the conviction that the uniquely diverse backgrounds of people in Miami, which could not be better represented than they were in Edgewater, were an asset, not a liability. He was determined to show that in diversity there is strength; that Unity on the Bay would grow strong again precisely because it included everyone, not in spite of it.

On a practical level, Reverend Cameron's first task was cleaning up the administrative mess he inherited from the leftover staff. For example, the bookkeeper was evading taxes; the receptionist was running her own retail franchise out of the bookstore; and janitorial help was nowhere to be found. When personnel were summarily dismissed, not everyone was happy about it, but everyone got the message that things were going to change.

It quickly became clear that the biggest problem facing the church was neighborhood security. The church could not survive if Edgewater remained such a dangerous place. In a two week stretch there were four robberies at the church, and a subsequent newspaper article about the situation quoted Reverend Cameron as follows: "They even took my dial-a-prayer phone and a picture of Jesus." While delivering the Sunday collection to the bank one Monday morning, Reverend Cameron and the church caretaker were held up at gunpoint.

Reverend Cameron was met with stiff resistance from the police department when he agitated for a police mini-station nearby, but with the help of Miami City Commissioner J. L. Plummer, the station materialized. He also prevailed upon a police officer to park his patrol car in the parking lot at night. A long-standing squabble about recreational vehicles parked in the street between the church and the apartment building next door was taken to City Hall, the result of which was an amicable reconciliation in the church's favor.

Perhaps the greatest stride toward achieving a safer neighborhood came with the establishment of the non-profit Edgewater Neighborhood Association, which Reverend Cameron formed and served as president. The Association was instrumental in bringing together neighborhood businesses and residents to work on common security issues, augmenting their influence and hence their ability to improve everyone's safety. The Association succeeded in having several abandoned buildings in the neighborhood torn down.

Progress was slow, nonetheless, and setbacks were many. Church attendance remained anemic, even though in 1988 Reverend Cameron brought in two renowned guest speakers: Connie Haines, a big band singer and ordained Unity minister, and James Dillett Freeman, Unity's poet laureate. When the church applied for a loan to pay for much-needed repairs to the tower and the roof, as well as to remove asbestos from the walls, the bank turned the church down. Without the loan, Unity on the Bay would not have survived, but influence was brought to bear by steadfast church activist Doug Harris, and the bank relented. The sanctuary had to be closed for six weeks and services moved to a hotel while repairs were made.

It is difficult to pinpoint a breakthrough moment when things started to turn around; rather, it was an accumulation of many different efforts to revitalize the church that ultimately brought it back from the brink. One of these was "The Great Giveaway of 1989," an event at which various donated items, including food, clothes, and toys, were offered in the parking lot to all comers free of charge. The event was publicized not as charity, but as circulation. It was so popular with neighborhood residents that it was given an encore in 1990.

An event which ironically did Unity on the Bay more good than harm was Hurricane Andrew in August 1992. Although there was some water damage to the physical structures of the campus, the contingent of homeless men that took shelter in the sanctuary during the storm stayed after it was over and helped with the cleanup. Donations of food, water, and other supplies poured in, and deliveries were made to the harder hit city of Homestead by Reverend Cameron and volunteer Hal Martin. This example of community service went a long way toward convincing skeptics that Unity on the Bay had something to offer. Hal Martin, a fireman, and his wife Marcie would go on to become essential members of the Board of Trustees and lead the team which rebuilt Unity on the Bay over the course of the next decade.

Other factors that helped the church get back on its feet included theater performances. A production of "Oliver," in particular, drew positive reviews and a relatively large audience. The church also applied for and received registry with the Art Deco Preservation League, as well as designation of the carriage house as a historic site. Reverend Cameron's wife Dori, a yoga teacher and converted Catholic, revived the Sunday school and ran it from 1990-1995.

Supplementing these activities were visioning weekend retreats in local hotels, which served to focus the efforts of the church's increasing number of leaders and volunteers. One in particular, held in Lantana, Florida in 1995 and facilitated by David and Gay Lynn Williamson, produced a "Blue Ribbon Team" that became the backbone of Unity on the Bay's administration for years to come.

Actions speak louder than words, of course, but Reverend Cameron's words were also a major factor in the rejuvenation of Unity on the Bay. He had spent most of his life distilling the Truth of the Unity message, and he had a natural gift for expressing it. An erudite and engaging speaker, he drew on a vast wealth of knowledge and personal experience gained from working on the front lines of ministry. The news slowly began to spread that a wise man spoke on Sundays at Unity on the Bay, a man who said things that made sense for everyday living.

As a scholar himself, Reverend Cameron's emphasis as a minister was always on education. From the very start, he offered many classes at Unity on the Bay in his areas of expertise: the Bible, the teachings of Charles and Myrtle Fillmore and other early Unity teachers, and the Perennial Philosophies. One of these classes was attended by a man who was living in an Edgewater rehabilitation center for recovering drug addicts and alcoholics. This man had reluctantly attended a service at Unity on the Bay at the urging of a friend soon after Reverend Cameron took over, and much to his surprise, he found himself interested by what the minister had to say. He kept coming back, and soon he became one of Reverend Cameron's most eager and devoted students. Reverend Cameron knew there was something special about this fellow, and he invited him to serve on the Board of Trustees from 1989 to 1992. His name was James Trapp.

When Unity on the Bay received a monetary legacy from former congregant Richard Burns in 1992, the Board decided to use the funds to sponsor two prospective ministerial students at the Unity School in Missouri: James Trapp and Daisy Guibarra. Upon graduation in 1994, Reverend Guibarra went on to found Spanish Silent Unity, while Reverend Trapp came back to Miami to serve as Reverend Cameron's associate minister. Under their co-leadership, renovations to the front of the sanctuary and the foyer were made, and the grounds and entrance area were landscaped. An improved appearance without reflected improved spirits within.

By 1997 average Sunday service attendance had increased to triple digits, occasionally as many as 300, but moreover there was a very different energy about the place, an abounding sort of optimism, an intuitive feeling that something big was about to happen. That something was built on a completely new foundation, best described at the Fourth of July service when Reverend Cameron asked the congregation, "How many of you were not born in the United States?" Astonishingly, a glance around the sanctuary revealed a rainbow of black, brown, yellow, and white faces, more than half of whom had their hands raised. "You see?" he

continued, "This is America. We are living the future right here, right now. Miami is the blueprint for the rest of this great nation, and Unity is going to be its church."

Reverend Cameron, almost 70 years old, felt that he had accomplished a worthy goal, getting Unity on the Bay back on its feet. Over 600 congregants attended his farewell service. He retired to "Minister Emeritus" in order to devote himself more completely to his scholarly pursuits and the continued publication of his writings (65 articles and three books). When he handed the reins to Reverend Trapp, who brought with him the same consciousness of co-creation with God, it turned out to be the moment God was waiting for.

A DIFFERENT KIND OF CHURCH

The final chapter in the history of Unity on the Bay is not only the story of its most recent two ministers; it is also the greatest testament of all that thoughts held in mind become reality. Reverend Cameron had held the thought in mind that Unity would flourish as a beacon of joy, love, peace, and prosperity shining upon Miami. He passed that same thought on to Reverend Trapp, who, upon becoming senior minister, witnessed its reality almost immediately.

James Trapp spent his early childhood in Freeport (Long Island), New York. At twelve years old, however, his mother abandoned his family, and James moved with his father and siblings to Miami, where his father remarried. For decades James tried to fill the emotional void left by his mother's absence with a succession of material substitutes, the first of which was academic accomplishment. In Miami he was an excellent student, and he manifested a knack for public speaking on the debate team of Miami Jackson High School. Inspired by the admission of several upperclassmen to Princeton University, he applied there himself during his senior year at Jackson. To almost everyone's surprise but his own, he was accepted.

His years at Princeton were enlightening as much from a cultural perspective as they were academically. He was a minority there in almost every way, and he learned how people from different backgrounds, almost all of which were more privileged than his own, viewed the world. He majored in Economics and minored in African Studies, but he was also drawn to audit classes in religion and philosophy. Upon graduation in 1974 he returned to Miami to pursue success in a business career. After a year in the circulation department for Knight-Ridder, owners of the *Miami Herald*, he changed course and decided to go to law school at the University of Florida in Gainesville.

In 1978 he returned to Miami again, this time to establish himself as a lawyer. After a brief stint as a law clerk, he and a partner set up their own criminal defense practice. Mostly they were representing drug dealers, a booming business at that time in Miami. Those associations, however, led James to his own addiction to drugs and alcohol, which eventually led him to a long term treatment center for substance abusers in Edgewater.

It was during that time of trial, as already mentioned, that James Trapp was first exposed to Unity. He had not been to a church of any kind in twenty years, and he fully expected this visit to endorse his absence. Yet he was amazed to hear Reverend Cameron give, as James put it, “a lesson specifically for me.” His mother reappeared in his life at almost the same time, adding to his suspicion that perhaps he was in the right place at Unity on the Bay. Three years later, by which time he had become much more involved with the church, he was with a friend and the friend’s child at the Miami Youth Fair when he had a totally unexpected vision of himself as a minister. As much as he may have wanted to, it was a thought he knew he could not resist, and he gave himself up to holding it in mind.

At Unity Village, James Trapp had his most interesting school experience ever. The ministerial training was focused on self-discovery, reflection, and personal development, because, as Reverend Trapp himself says, “You’re only as good a minister as you are aware of yourself.” For the first time he was able to “see beyond the material approach to the world.” He brought this consciousness with him back to Miami, and it was contagious.

In a three-year period around the turn of the second millennium, attendance at Unity on the Bay more than tripled. At the same time, downtown Miami was experiencing an economic renaissance fueled by a real estate boom, and Edgewater had finally turned the corner and was again beginning to prosper as a viable neighborhood. By Easter 2001, by which time a second service was added on Sunday mornings, it was standing room only in the sanctuary with over 1300 people showing up.

This remarkable growth occurred organically, spawned almost entirely by word of mouth. The congregation was a veritable cross-section of Miami’s population, and people mixed like nowhere else in the city: rich and poor, black and white, young and old, gay and straight. The lion’s share of the credit certainly goes to Reverend Trapp. His sermons were delivered in powerful, compelling, and mesmerizing terms. His listeners felt like they were hearing things they had never heard before. He showed them a positive new way of looking at not just life in the collective sense, but at their own individual lives.

Yet as Reverend Trapp has also said, “You’re only as good as the people you attract,” and there were many other individuals who played significant supporting roles in drawing people to Unity on the Bay. One of these was Dan Geary, whom Reverend Trapp hired to take over the Music Ministry in 1996. Reverend Trapp intuitively knew that music was a powerful component of spiritual communion, and Dan Geary and his house band have provided Unity on the Bay with an outstanding musical backdrop ever since.

Vocal music also contributed greatly to the attraction of Unity on the Bay. When Karen Jones was hired as Choral Director, Unity on the Bay’s choir began to gain widespread regard as the

best church choir in Miami. This tradition has been perpetuated by successive Choral Directors Julie Ellis and Julie Jensen. Top-notch professional guest singers were also brought in every week.

Another key figure was Reverend Tita Calzada, who replaced Reverend Trapp as associate minister in 1998. Reverend Calzada did double duty, directing both the Spanish Ministry and the Children's Church. At the latter, scores of children were given Unity lessons week in and week out at the newly renovated carriage house, renamed the "Cameron House." When Reverend Calzada moved to Unity of Fort Lauderdale as senior minister in 2001, she was replaced by Reverend Gloriamaria Lopez in the Spanish Ministry, and by Audrey Sorg as director of the Children's Church. Both of these women served Unity on the Bay admirably for many years.

Between 2002 and 2004, the church administration was reorganized to better serve the explosion of new members. Now that God had cooperated to bring about a dramatic reincarnation of Unity on the Bay, the challenge was how to continue to cooperate with God in managing it. New positions were created, filled by dedicated persons too many to name, and new mission and vision statements were drawn up. The wild popularity of Unity on the Bay was still a somewhat dumbfounding experience for everyone, however, and no one knew for sure just how to bring order to the chaos.

Then things got even more confusing when Reverend Trapp was offered a job as CEO of Unity Worldwide Ministries. It was not an easy choice for him to make, considering the bond he had with Unity on the Bay, but he decided to make the move with his wife Angela and son Jalen. Shortly before that happened, in September 2005, Reverend Karen Epps, newly graduated from the Unity Ministerial Training Program, had joined the staff as associate minister. Only two months later Reverend Epps found herself leading the most successful Unity church in the world. It was trial by fire, but she did an excellent job holding the fort during the search for a new senior minister.

Reverend Trapp left big shoes to fill, but there were several highly qualified candidates for his vacated position. Three of them were invited by the Board of Trustees to conduct one Sunday service each in order for the congregation to make their own evaluation. The eventual selection was Reverend Chris Jackson, who resigned his previous post as senior minister of Unity of the Palm Beaches in West Palm Beach, Florida, in order to join Unity on the Bay as senior minister in May 2006.

Reverend Jackson has the distinction of being the only Unity minister in Miami's history who grew up in the Unity movement. His grandparents were from Kansas City, and in the 1930s his maternal grandmother left the Methodist church and began to attend the Unity Center at Ninth

and Tracy Streets in downtown Kansas City. Thus Chris is actually third generation Unity, having attended Unity with his mother Willa as far back as he can remember. He always loved going to Unity, and by the time he was twelve years old, when he was one of Reverend Bill Cameron's Youth Ministry students, Chris knew he would be a minister.

After high school, he spent a wayward year at Kansas State University, returning home to a series of jobs at Unity Village. In 1983, he entered Unity's Ministerial Training Program while also studying at the local branch of Ottawa University, obtaining a degree in Ministerial Studies. He was ordained in January 1990. He stayed in Kansas City and worked his way up within the Unity administration to become Executive Vice-President of Unity Worldwide Headquarters. He left that post in 2000 to become senior minister of Unity of the Palm Beaches, a large Unity church from the same era as Unity on the Bay.

From the beginning of his tenure at Unity on the Bay, Reverend Jackson saw the church as the prototype spiritual community of tomorrow. However, the explosive growth that the church underwent prior to his arrival brought a new set of challenges. What was until relatively recently a family/pastoral church had become, in essence, a corporate church. The transition took place faster than its foundation could be properly laid, and the church's infrastructure was still catching up. Meanwhile, the church and its staff were still changing and growing all the time.

When Reverend Epps left Unity on the Bay in 2009 to become senior minister of Unity in Dallas, Texas, she was replaced by Reverend Elizabeth Longo, who, like Reverend Trapp, was a Unity on the Bay product. Reverend Lopez left and was eventually succeeded by Reverend Juan Jose Tavio in the Spanish Ministry. A prayer ministry led by Licensed Unity Teachers Luzette Rivera-Diaz and, later, Debbie Montoya recruited and trained hundreds of prayer chaplains. The church continued to offer dozens of classes and workshops throughout the year, and serving the local community through a variety of partnerships remained one of the church's core activities. There were other administrative and staff changes under the leadership of Diana Perez, Executive Director of Ministry Support, but the mission remained the same: "to pray, educate, serve, and celebrate to inspire and transform ourselves, our community, and our world."

For Reverend Jackson, it has been a matter of redefining spiritual community by encouraging the total engagement of the congregation. New membership is at record levels. One possibility for the future is the televised broadcast of Reverend Jackson's lessons worldwide. It may sound far-fetched, but Unity's Third Principle has been borne out so many times in Miami that there is no reason to doubt that holding this thought in mind will bring about its reality.

Regardless of what the future holds, the history of Unity on the Bay is a prelude to something greater. We are living in a time of whirlwind change, and the Unity movement embraces the technological advances that are bringing people together from every corner of the world. The walls that separate us are falling. A new consciousness is emerging, one that recognizes the divine nature of every single human being. Unity's principles are at the heart of this metamorphosis, and in Miami at least, Unity on the Bay is leading the way.