

A PLACE FOR THE CHILDREN

INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to show the needs for the religious education program, and make recommendations for the first phase of the WUU building program. By presenting these recommendations, which we believe are realistic, but not idealistic, we hope that the congregation will share our spirit of compromise blended with uncompromised advocacy for the children and youth who are our future. In the words of the Home 95 mission statement, "By building, we give a gift to us, our children and the children yet to come. We are all inheritors of what previous generations have done for us. Now is our chance to leave a legacy for those who follow us."

In order to evaluate and address immediate RE needs for WUU children and youth, we reviewed past and present RE enrollment and attendance, and looked at national UU guidelines¹ for development of RE space. The Committee also contacted 40 parents and teachers to learn their views on RE programs and space needs in the context of the building program.

A REALISTIC LOOK AT OUR NEEDS

We have a current enrollment of 73 children from infant through high school. Attendance fluctuates within each class. At present six areas or classrooms are used on Sundays, with middle school and high school students meeting every other week. If we base our needs on current registration, and use the national UU guidelines to determine the space needed for each child, the existing program requires about 2000 sq. ft. of classroom space.

We expect RE enrollment to increase as the general membership increases. For example, in 1993, 30 people with 16 children became new

¹A *Working Paper for the Religious Education Building Committee*, by Eugene B.

Navias, available from the Department of Religious Education, UUA, 25 Beacon Street, Boston, MA 02108; reissued 1988.

January 15, 1994

members. As enrollment increases, more space will be needed, and the way in which it is utilized will change. For example, in 1994-1995 we will require one additional classroom due to the increase in the number of children in the K - 2 and 3 - 5 grades. Projections of expected RE growth and space needs are given in the Appendix. Our projections indicate that we will need about 3300 sq. ft. for the RE program within five years. This represents a 65% increase over our present requirements, and is consistent with the anticipated growth of the adult membership.

Based on our survey, most parents and RE teachers feel that infants and toddlers should be in a nursery close to the sanctuary, i.e., immediately accessible to their parents. Most were also of the opinion that at least some preschoolers are not ready to be placed in a separate location such as the UU House while their parents go to the Church for worship services. Allowing 3-4 year olds who might be anxious about being separated from their parents to remain in the nursery program until they are comfortable attending preschool in the UU House would address this concern, and could provide for a positive "rite of passage" for the preschooler who is ready to move on.

RECOMMENDATIONS

#1) HOUSE THE NURSERY IN THE MAIN BUILDING, equipped with a sink and diaper changing area, preschool sized toilet, and adequate storage space. UUA guidelines recommend 490 sq ft to accommodate 14 children ranging in age from infant through 3 years. Recognizing the relative inflexibility of dedicated space within the new building, this plan anticipates growth in the UU infant/toddler population with an expectation that this nursery would be adequate for the foreseeable future.

By dividing the room with moveable storage shelves and baby gates, separate areas could be organized for infant care and toddlers' play with comfortable chairs, portacribs, baby walkers and swings, and toys appropriate to the age. Audio access to the sanctuary would allow parents and nursery attendants to hear the service in progress if they wish.

Other uses: This space would be ideal for child care (for our own use and for use by other groups renting the sanctuary) or as a place where children of all ages could spend time while their parents are participating in Church activities such as congregational meetings, pot lucks, rehearsals, committee meetings, etc. Older children could use the room for games, crafts, or meetings of their own. It could function as a changing/waiting room for a bridal party and a "staging area" for other ceremonial functions. It could also be rented out during the week for a "Mothers Day Out" program.

#2) HOUSE LIBRARY/YOUTH RE ROOM IN THE MAIN BUILDING, providing space for older youth who would appreciate a place to meet which is away from the younger children, and again, representing for them a symbolic move toward adulthood. It is probably desirable to limit a youth group to about 12, and UUA guidelines suggest that about 240 sq. ft. are needed to accommodate a youth group of this size. (Some additional space would be needed for shelving, and any other equipment to be placed in this room.) Note that about 12 youth are presently enrolled in each of the middle and high school RE groups, so that when enrollment and attendance in these groups grows, additional space will be needed if more than one group wishes to meet at the same time.

Other Uses: This would also be a multi-use room, serving as a library-research area for meetings with the minister, committee meetings, counseling, or for adult education such as "New UU" classes and for Womenspirit, Menspirit, etc.

#3) USE THE UU HOUSE AS THE PRIMARY RE FACILITY for preschool, primary and elementary classes and for RE storage and work space. Given the present enrollments and number of classes, we need four classrooms large enough to accommodate children from preschool to fifth grade. Under recommendation #2, one youth group (middle or high) would meet in the main building, but there is no provision in this plan for space of the second youth group to meet at the same time as the first.

However, the **UU House will not meet immediate needs**, even with

January 15, 1994

careful use of the existing space. Our present enrollment of 44 children in the preschool through fifth grade requires a total of 1380 square feet, and even more space will be needed in two years when these plans are implemented. The UU House has only 1109 square feet available for classrooms. (This does not include the bathrooms, kitchen counter area, and storage space.) In addition, the house will need air conditioning, soundproofing, and access to toilets to allow each group to pursue its activities without disrupting others. There is also a need for a safe and adequate playground located so that it will not disturb adult worship services or other activities taking place in the sanctuary.

We also need a large activities/multipurpose area where children can gather for arts, crafts, and seasonal activities. During this year we have carved pumpkins at Halloween, made bird feeders at Thanksgiving, and made cookies for Christmas in the UU House kitchen. This area could be used for children's worship, to light a chalice and to share joys and concerns. It would also provide communal space for social events such as games, lunches, movies, guest speakers, music and pageant rehearsals.

Other uses of the UU House might include shared space with a weekday childcare program or preschool.

But, while the UU House would serve as a work and meeting place for the DRE, RE teachers and the RE Committee, please note that this proposal does not include space for the minister's and administrative assistant's offices. There is not enough space in the UU House to allocate separate space to Church staff or office equipment, nor is it feasible for RE teachers and young children to attempt to "share" such office space. It is preferable that this space be shared with youth in the main building. Another consideration is that a logical "multi-use" (and potentially profitable use) of preschool RE classrooms in the UU House is for weekday children's programming. In this case it would not be practical to house our only week day staff there. An alternative would be that the minister, administrative assistant, and youth RE utilize the proposed library (complex) in the church, as described above.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS

With the present number and ages of children and youth enrolled in RE, it will not be possible for middle or high school classes to meet in the UU House on Sunday mornings, nor will there be space in the UU House for the minister's and administrator's offices. Space is needed in the main building, not only for the Nursery, but for some preschoolers who are not yet ready to be separated from their parents, for at least one youth group, and for the church administrative offices (including minister and administrator). If the UU house were to be dedicated to the use of the children, so that they can truly make it their own, they can create their own spaces, and in doing so, build a community where they feel accepted and at home.

Even if the recommendations of this report are adopted, the RE space which will be available is something the congregation can *live with* but probably *not grow with*. Our projections show that we have already outgrown our presently planned facilities (Phase I). Therefore, we strongly recommend that the RE Committee participate in developing a second phase, and participate in *long range* planning for any additional building, including development and implementation of agreements for outside use of RE space. It has been the experience of other congregations that the building of a new Church and the development of an adequate RE program attracts new families with young children. If growth is to be one of the goals of this congregation, appropriate RE space is crucial.

APPENDIX - PROJECTIONS OF WUU SPACE REQUIREMENTS

This section describes how the space requirements stated in this report were obtained. We used the following data:

- registration lists prepared in September of each year,
- detailed attendance records kept from September, 1992 to the present,
- estimates of future enrollments and church membership based in part on our WUU application for a building loan, and
- guidelines on the number of square feet of floor area needed for each child of each age supplied by the national UU office.

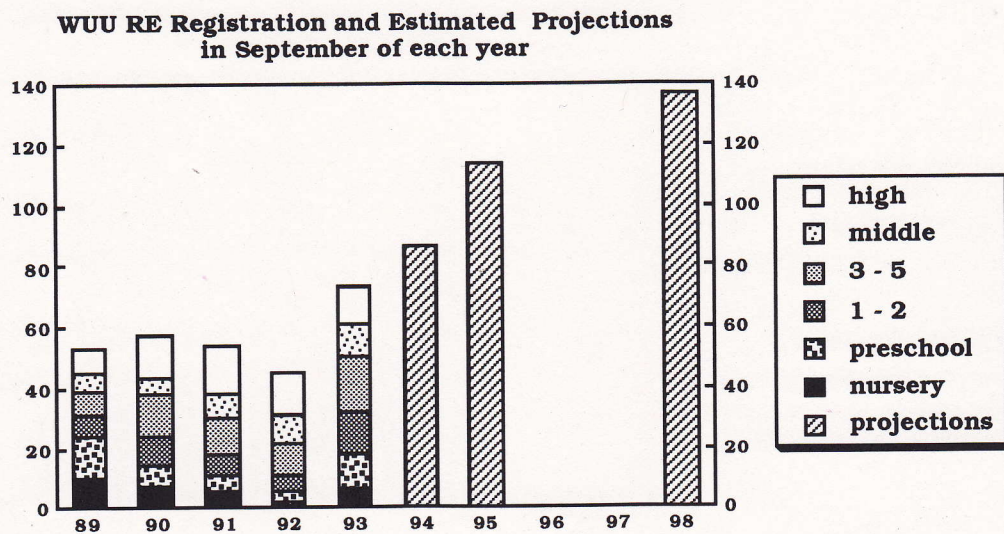


Fig. 1

The Committee was guided by the size of the sanctuary, which according to the current plan would hold over 200 people.² This is a factor of 1.6 times the present voting membership of 125.² Applying this same increase to the current RE registration of 73 (see Fig. 1) we obtain an estimated attendance of 117 children. From this estimate, and the UU guidelines for floor area per child, we obtain the following needs:

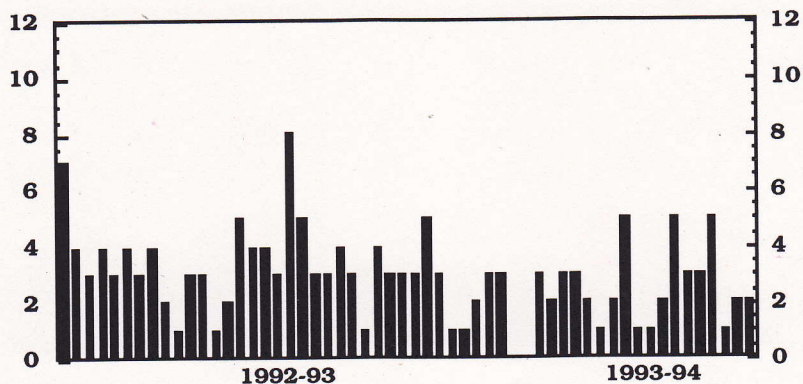
Nursery	$6 \times 1.6 =$	10	$\times 35 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	350 sq. ft.
Preschool	$12 \times 1.6 =$	19	$\times 35 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	665 sq. ft.
K - 2	$14 \times 1.6 =$	22	$\times 30 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	660 sq. ft.
3 - 5	$18 \times 1.6 =$	29	$\times 30 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	870 sq. ft.
middle	$11 \times 1.6 =$	18	$\times 20 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	360 sq. ft.
high	$12 \times 1.6 =$	<u>19</u>	$\times 20 \text{ sq. ft.} =$	<u>380 sq. ft.</u>
		117		3285 sq. ft.

To estimate the size needed for the combined nursery and toddler room discussed in Recommendation #1, combine the size of the nursery with the space needed for 4 preschool children (only one-fifth of the projected preschool class), giving $350 + 140 = 490 \text{ sq. ft.}$

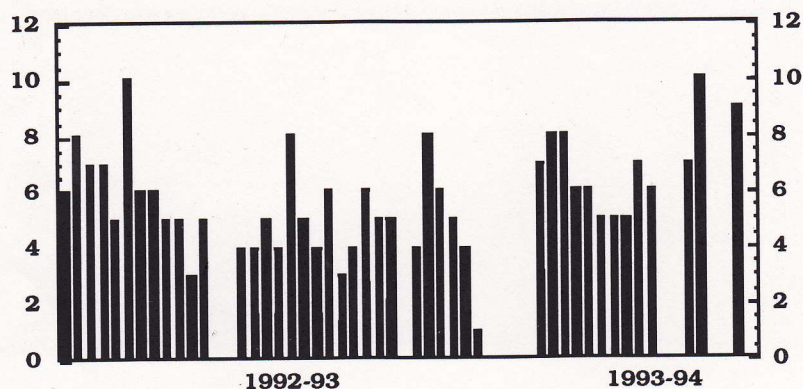
² January WUU Newsletter.

Recent attendance figures show that the maximum attendance is a good estimate of class activity, and that it is not significantly different from the 1993-94 registration.

Nursery Attendance by Week - Sept 1992-present



Preschool Attendance by Week - Sept 1992-present



Middle School Attendance by Week - Sept 1992-present

