NEW THOUGHT CHURCHES IN WICHITA, KANSAS
HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

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NEW THOUGHT CHURCHES IN WICHITA, KANSAS
HISTORY AND STRUCTURE

The following faculty members have examined the final copy of this thesis for form and
content, and recommend that it be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for
the degree of Master of Arts with a major in History.

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DEDICATION

To my husband, James, and my sons, William and John
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ABSTRACT

This thesis traces the development of the philosophical and religious movement of New Thought and outlines the histories of the two New Thought churches in Wichita, Kansas: Unity Church and New Thought Community Church. Though based on the teachings of Christ, New Thought incorporates other sources including Hinduism, Swedenborgianism, Transcendentalism, and Mesmerism. New Thought is sometimes referred to as New Gnosticism, but where the Gnostics were dualists, New Thought is monistic and can more properly be called a Christian/Hindu syncretism.

The spiritual and mesmeric healer, Phineas Quimby, provided in the 1850s and 1860s a focus around which the New Thought movement coalesced. Later writers and teachers developed New Thought into a theology. They include Warren Felt Evans, Julius and Annetta Dresser, Horatio Dresser, Emma Curtis Hopkins, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore (cofounders of Unity School of Christianity), Emilie Cady, Malinda Cramer (founder of Divine Science), Ernest Holmes (founder of Religious Science), Emmet Fox, and Masaharu Taniguchi (founder of Seicho-No-Ie). Proponents of New Thought call it “practical Christianity” for its emphasis on healing and improvement of life. Modern psychology, self-help methodologies, and New Age understandings of spirituality all owe a pioneering debt to New Thought.

Personal interviews, material from Unity Village archives, and publically available online and book sources provided the data for this thesis. Besides chronicalling people and events, it focuses on how the organizations of churches founded by New Thought leaders tended to mirror their earlier church affiliations. The resulting churches represent functional syncretisms of traditional church structures with a superimposed New Thought theology.
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CHAPTER I: A BRIEF HISTORY OF NEW THOUGHT

New Thought is a revolt against the old and conventional dogmas of the historic religion of the Western World.¹

Introduction

Unity Church and New Thought Community Church occupy a unique place among churches and religious organizations in Wichita, Kansas. As denominations of the theology of New Thought, their beliefs and outlook are distinct from those of mainstream Christian denominations, and they attract leaders and adherents who reflect these differences. As churches, however, their development and structure bear similarities to other churches, though their particular circumstances of time and place and persons have, as with all organizations, stamped each with an individual character.

The early history of Unity Church is preserved primarily in annual conference lists and other printed publications. In addition, several Unity ministers have authored articles and books that provide clues about themselves and their ministries. More recent Unity history and the history of New Thought Community Church are within the memory of congregants of these churches, and much has been gleaned from individual interviews. The Wichita Eagle has also been a source of a great deal of information. Tracing the history of these churches illuminates not only their past but also the pasts of a number of people who have been connected with them. The resulting sketches provide a study of each church and offer opportunities for comparison and analysis between these churches and with other denominations.

The New Ideas of New Thought

Before New Age, before self-help, before psychology, there was New Thought. In its attempt to find in science and other faiths the missing pieces or lost wisdom of Christianity, especially as that pertained to mental and physical healing, New Thought paved the way for more specific, and now more well-known, avenues for this quest. Among the widely disseminated but rarely attributed ideas of New Thought that have become mainstream in our thinking are: thoughts are things; think and grow rich, healthy, happy, successful, etc.; self-hypnosis; autosuggestion; visualization; talk therapies; behavior modification; mind/body/spirit connection; 12-step programs; and the general idea that spirituality can have concrete, practical, and personal applications in human life. These concepts are now so much the norm that to truly understand the thought of people in previous eras who did not share these ideas may be almost beyond the reach of those raised in modern American culture.

New Thought was not an idea imposed from above by any hierarchy or authority but a product of a time and place: nineteenth century America. In his book, *Spirits in Rebellion*, Charles S. Braden observes that New Thought developed in opposition to “old thought” on two fronts: against the classic forms of Christianity and against the Age of Reason’s excessive faith in rational analysis. New Thought teaches that the fundamental truths of existence are to be discovered not through adherence to theoretical religion or study of external phenomena but through applied Christianity and within one’s own interior consciousness. Braden quotes Charles Brody Patterson, an early New Thought author, as saying, “Man’s real search is the discovery of his own soul.”

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In “Lecture IV” of *The Varieties of Religious Experience*, the philosopher William James discussed New Thought as a religion of “healthy mindedness.” He claimed:

> [T]he spread of the [New Thought] movement has been due to practical fruits; and the extremely practical turn of character of the American people has never been better shown than by the fact that this, their only decidedly original contribution to the systematic philosophy of life, should be so intimately knit up with concrete therapeutics.³

To this observation on the practical nature of Americans and New Thought can be added another: in the nineteenth century the United States was one of a handful of places in the world where a new religion could freely develop, grow into its own form, and be practiced by many without fear of repression or reprisal.⁴ It is appropriate, then, to include in a summary of antecedents of New Thought the political environment of the new republic that explicitly protected freedom in the establishment and exercise of religion.

New Thought began as a philosophic movement and healing practice in the early nineteenth century. By the 1890s, it had evolved into a religious belief. It was a result of individual, often idiosyncratic writers and thinkers who each put a stamp on the philosophy as it developed. New Thought ideas traveled through lectures, letters, books, magazines, pamphlets, newspapers, correspondence courses, classes, study groups, social organizations, high teas, and coffee klatches. Charismatic leaders formed groups of varying size that tended to lack a hierarchical or dogmatic structure imposed on followers. In the beginning, these groups often functioned more as cults of personality than as organized, disciplined groups with well


⁴ Michael Sheets, Interview with author, 2 May 2006.
identified norms and boundaries. As they lost their leaders through departure or death, many groups faded from existence, but a few flourished and grew. The groups that continued tended to lose their spontaneous character over time and become established organizations that could carry on on the strength of their message and structure alone.

Unity, Divine Science, Religious Science, and Seicho-No-Ei (a Japanese form of New Thought) comprise the primary denominations. At its inception, Christian Science was briefly allied with New Thought, but its founder, Mary Baker Eddy, soon pursued a theological path that led her to widely different conclusions from other New Thought thinkers. Consequently, Christian Science is not now considered a New Thought sect.

**Philosophy, the Enlightenment, and Eastern Religions**

The great philosophers of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, among them Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Schopenhauer, and Hegel, are often cited by early New Thought writers as precursors to the New Thought movement. An analysis of the work of these philosophers as it pertains to New Thought is beyond the scope of a historical sketch, but worthy of note is the fact that the remarkable blossoming of philosophy at this time was the result not only of the European developments of the Renaissance, Reformation, and Enlightenment, but also to new understandings of non-European religious and philosophical traditions, some of great depth and antiquity. In particular, the Hindu tenet of panentheism took the European philosophical imagination by storm. From this perspective, all the diversity of things and beings in the world – and indeed the world itself – constitutes limited and impermanent manifestations of the illimitable and eternal substance of God for the purpose of
expressing all the potentialities of existence.\(^5\) By contrast, both Christianity and Deism (the 18\(^{th}\) century Age of Reason’s nod to religion) tend to see God as transcendent and beyond the world, which is His creation but is separate from Him.\(^6\)

Belief in panentheism has several implications. In this view, human beings are not separate entities but literally part of God. Evil, therefore, has no reality. What is perceived from the limited human perspective as evil is actually, in this belief, experience in an undeveloped or incomplete state. Sin, therefore, is also nonexistent because it implies a state of ungodliness. Since human beings are part of God, they cannot also be ungodly or spiritually corrupt but only temporarily errant or momentarily moving against the grain of good. Without a concept of the reality of sin, there is no need for atonement. In a panentheistic interpretation, Christ is not seen as a redeemer but as the great teacher and deliverer of humanity from ignorance of its true divine state. New Thought embraces panentheism and all its implications.

**New Thought and Gnosticism**

New Thought adherents often call themselves “New Gnostics” because, like the Gnostic sects of early Christendom, New Thought rejects the role of atonement given to Jesus by traditional Christianity. This similarity is coincidental, however, and does not constitute a lineage of tradition. The Gnostics were dualists, holding to the belief that the material world is separate from God because it was created by a corrupt demigod. From this perspective, the material world is evil. The Gnostics considered human beings to be spiritual entities who had

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become ensnared in evil matter. Christ, in the Gnostic view, came into the world to reveal this knowledge (gnosis) to humanity and to show the means to regain the spiritual world after death. These teachings were set down in Gnostic gospels and writings, but were later suppressed in the early centuries of Christianity by the Roman church in favor of what became the canonical gospels and accompanying approved writings. This early orthodoxy reversed the Gnostic polarity of good and evil, holding that the world is good but human beings are fatally flawed with original sin.\(^7\)

In contrast to the Gnostic dualist point of view, New Thought is radically monistic, believing not only in a single God but a single substance of the universe. New Thought rejects not only the reality of evil, but also the existence of the Gnostic pantheon of demigods and evil spirits. New Thought is thus not dualistic Gnosticism but a monistic Eastern syncretism expressed as an interpretation of the canonical Bible.

**Emmanuel Swedenborg and Spiritualism**

Emanuel Swedenborg is often mentioned as a philosophical forebear of New Thought. As late as the 1700s, he could not openly write of his vision of spiritual truth, which diverged radically from the Lutheranism of his native Sweden. Considered heretical, the writings he dared publish during his lifetime were composed in Latin and under a pseudonym to hide his identity. After his death, many more of his writings were published causing intense public furor.\(^8\)

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\(^8\) Larson 2.
Swedenborg’s cosmology was similar to that of New Thought. He wrote of the oneness of all things and that God is everywhere equally present including within each person. He also denied the idea of God as a powerful and judgmental person outside of us and our world, a person who keeps score during our lifetime and decides on our fate when we pass from earthly life. Both the Catholic and Protestant churches of the time based their theology on belief in a God of judgment and were willing to use violence to suppress those who opposed it.

The greatest difference between New Thought and what Swedenborg wrote is that Swedenborg was a strong believer in spiritualism. He felt that the souls of those who had passed away lingered as bodiless entities on the earthly plane and were not only accessible to us but sought to give us advice. Swedenborg wrote that he was able to contact Beethoven and others who had died many years earlier.

Spiritualism was very popular in the United States in the nineteenth century. Interest in spiritualism became most intense after the Civil War when many people, distraught over the loss of family members, wanted to make contact with those who had passed away. Emily Cady, a New Thought author, wrote that in New York City in the late 1800s, some 2000 spiritualists were listed in New York directories. In a population of 30 million people at that time in the United States, nearly half believed in the possibility of contacting the spirits of the dead through séances and other means. In the early part of the twentieth century interest persisted in spiritualism, but it declined in popularity until the New Age movement of the 1960s sparked a renewal of interest in the occult.⁹

The original founders of the New Thought churches did not believe that benefits could be derived from the practice of spiritualism. One of the reasons that Charles and Myrtle Sheets interview.

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⁹ Sheets interview.
Fillmore of Unity left the International New Thought Alliance in the early twentieth century was because they felt that too many within the membership had begun practicing spiritualism, which ran counter to their belief that we can all make direct contact with the source of all knowledge without the need of any intermediary.\(^\text{10}\) Their idea of “entering the silence” encompassed this belief and echoed Jesus’ injunctions to “Seek ye first the kingdom” (Matt. 6:33) and “The kingdom of God is within you” (Luke 17:21). For the Fillmores, the kingdom is the counsel of God, and entering the silence is listening to what God has to say. The Fillmores’ question to spiritualists was: Why would a person want to directly contact or have another act as a go-between with a spirit that can only be inferior in wisdom to God? Not all New Thought groups were so absolute in their rejection of spiritualism, but none made it a central tenet of belief or practice. This constitutes a fundamental difference between Swedenborg and New Thought.\(^\text{11}\)

**New Light and Universalism**

The decades of the 1770s and 1780s witnessed the “New Light Stir,” a unique religious revival that has gone largely unnoticed in the shadow of the monumental events of the American Revolution. New Light dawned in rural New England among the farming and working classes, gaining converts for the Shakers and other millenarian groups.\(^\text{12}\) It rejected the region’s traditional Calvinistic religious tenets that had been handed down from the Puritans to the Congregationalists. Chief among its objections was the idea of predestination, which by the

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\(^\text{10}\) Braden, 259.

\(^\text{11}\) Sheets interview.

New Light appeared to be a human invention for the purpose of frightening people into the pews. New Light, and its direct successor Universalism, held that all human beings would ultimately be saved or in some way be reunited with the divine after death.\(^{13}\)

Though New Thought does not claim a direct lineage from New Light or Universalism, the idea that all of humanity might be saved through God’s grace harmonized with and reinforced the philosophical doctrine of panentheism.\(^{14}\) As a theology of charity, inclusiveness, and good will, Universalism complemented the egalitarian ideals of the new American state and foreshadowed the lofty, intellectual flights of Transcendentalism.

**Emerson and Transcendentalism**

In reaction to the cold light of the Age of Reason and the clockwork universe of eighteenth century Deism, the dawning of the nineteenth century witnessed a renewed appreciation for the human faculties of emotion, intuition, and spirit, which as a movement came to be known in Europe as Romanticism.\(^{15}\) In America, Ralph Waldo Emerson, a Harvard educated Unitarian minister, composed brilliant and popular essays and poetry that infused the Romantic impulse with mysticism, a belief in the possibility of direct communion with God and knowledge of ultimate reality through spiritual insight. A thread of the mystic already ran through the Quaker faith in its doctrine of Inner Light, which is a gift of God’s grace. Inner Light expresses itself as divine intuition or knowledge that cannot be arrived at through ordinary


\(^{15}\) Anderson and Whitehouse, 22-3.
thought or reason. The melding of Romanticism and mysticism by Emerson and others in America came to be called Transcendentalism for their belief that truth transcends what can be known from evidence acquired by the senses.

Transcendentalists proposed that every human being possesses an Inner Light that can illuminate the highest truths and put one in touch with the divine. Inner Light knowledge is an individual, personal experience. For this reason, Transcendentalism stressed self-development, self-reliance, individualism, and freedom. Though not directly concerned either with healing or theology, the spirit of Transcendentalism permeated the age and served as a foundation for New Thought.

**Phineas Quimby and Spiritual Healing**

By the mid 1800s, New Thought began to coalesce into a philosophy from a number of sources including the Enlightenment philosophers, Eastern beliefs, Emmanuel Swedenborg, Universalism, and Transcendentalism. The spark that gave life to New Thought as a religion, however, was Phineas Parkhurst Quimby, a Maine clockmaker turned mesmeric healer whose ideas were the genesis and inspiration for New Thought as theology.

Born in 1802, Quimby was a great student of the Bible but not a reader of philosophy, so it is unlikely that he had much knowledge even of Swedenborg. After attending a lecture and

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16 Williams, 129.


19 Braden, 73.
demonstration of Mesmeric healing, Quimby began to experiment using the theories of Anton Mesmer, an Austrian physician who originally believed in the healing power of magnetism. As an adjunct to treating his patients with magnets, Mesmer had begun having them hold positive thoughts about their physical improvement. In one fortuitous experiment, he removed the magnets from his treatment apparatus and found that his patients still made the expected progress in their health. He believed, however, that he personally possessed a form of mental magnetism that facilitated his patients’ healing. It does not seem to have occurred to him that the positive suggestions themselves might have been the cause of improved health.

In a pre-antibiotic society with few means of treating illnesses, any method of healing kindled great public interest. As Quimby began achieving success healing his New England friends and acquaintances using Mesmeric methods, he melded Mesmer’s ideas with his Christian study and spiritual views. In particular, he took literally Jesus’ statement, “According to your faith, let it be done unto you” (Matt. 9:29). Quimby thought that if he could change a person’s belief about his or her state of health, he could cause a change in the physical body and produce healing. Eventually Quimby became convinced that healing is fundamental inner wisdom, and people can heal themselves by correcting their own thoughts and their vision of themselves. Quimby coined the term “Christian Science” to indicate that his healing incorporated the teachings of the Bible with the knowledge he obtained through experiment. He attributed to Jesus, however, the greatest influence on his thought.

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20 Sheets interview.
21 Braden, 41.
22 Sheets interview.
23 Braden, 77.
Besides his many letters to patients, Quimby kept a fragmentary journal with the intention of eventually committing his healing method to paper. He could not turn people away, however, and it is estimated he treated 12,000 patients in the six years preceding his death leaving him little time for writing. Though the intended book was never written, Quimby did write out answers to fifteen questions most frequently posed by those interested in his healing method. This became known simply as Questions and Answers, which was widely circulated as a tract.

Mary Baker Eddy and Christian Science

In the course of his healing practice, Quimby treated Mary Baker Eddy who later became his student and a great early influence on the American public concerning ideas of spiritual healing. Eddy founded the First Church of Christ, Scientist – often known simply as Christian Science – whose tenets and organization diverged from what would become New Thought. She also wrote extensively, sometimes using tracts from Quimby’s works. Nineteenth century ideas of plagiarism were not the same as those of today, and her transgressions might have been forgiven except that she later made a point of repudiating Quimby and claiming originality in her ideas.24

Eddy based her healing method on Questions and Answers, a fact originally disputed by her and by the Christian Science Church. A copy of Questions and Answers exists, however, with notations for her own work in Eddy’s handwriting, thus proving the connection and the precedence of Quimby. In addition, Eddy wrote fourteen letters to Quimby that included questions on healing practice as well as expressions of glowing appreciation for the instruction.

24 Sheets interview.
he had given her. A number of articles written by Eddy in praise of Quimby also appeared in various New England journals and newspapers in the early 1860s. The letters, as well as excerpts from the articles, were published with the first edition of the *Quimby Manuscripts* edited by Horatio Dresser in 1921.\(^{25}\) Under pressure from the Christian Science Church, these letters and articles were omitted by the publisher from subsequent editions of *Manuscripts*.\(^{26}\) The *Quimby Manuscripts*, including the letters and articles as originally published by Horatio Dresser, are now available both online and in book form.\(^{27}\)

Eddy codified her doctrine in her book *Science and Health*, which was first published in 1875. This volume became the Christian Science textbook and was regularly updated throughout Eddy’s life. Most early editions of *Science and Health* are available online. This includes the first edition which is posted by the Christian Science Institute.\(^{28}\)

In addition to *Science and Health*, which outlines Eddy’s theological principles, she also wrote her directives on the structure of her church. The resulting volume, first published in 1891, was called simply the *Church Manual*. Both *Science and Health* and *Church Manual* are considered by the Christian Science Church to be divinely inspired. A key doctrine is that they may never be altered by anyone except Eddy herself. Since she died in 1910, these must remain

\(^{25}\) Braden, 57-9.


forever in their present state. The official Christian Science Church in Boston is called the Mother Church. All other Christian Science churches are merely affiliates centrally controlled from the Mother Church. The Mother Church is authoritarian. No deviation from the doctrines contained in the authorized literature is allowed.

It is probable that New Thought would not have developed in the way it did and that those who now think of themselves as New Thought followers would all be Christian Scientists, except that Eddy went to court to formally and legally disassociate herself, her writings, and the Christian Science Church from New Thought. Through her legal proceedings, she forced a distinction between New Thought and Christian Science that was not originally there. Eddy felt that the New Thought movement, which only became known by that name in the 1890s, was a dilution of the thought, practice, and tradition that had become Christian Science. The people involved in New Thought, of course, felt they were preserving the original thought, practice, and tradition as Quimby and later writers had envisioned it – a theology that brought philosophy, science, religion, and God together in a belief in a single God who is everywhere present. By contrast, Eddy increasingly embraced dualism going so far as to claim that “there is no life, substance, or intelligence in matter,” including the matter that composes living beings. She taught that all matter is illusion and only spirit has reality, making Christian Science alone among the denominations following Quimby to express a theology akin, at least in part, to ancient Gnosticism.

29 Braden, 20.
31 Anderson, 35.
Warren Felt Evans and the Dresser Family: Writers and Practitioners

In addition to Mary Baker Eddy, several of Quimby’s patients took up the banner after his death and not only began healing practices but also wrote what they had learned from Quimby. Most prominent of these early writers was Warren Felt Evans who published six volumes, including *The Mental Cure*,32 *Esoteric Christianity and Mental Therapeutics*,33 and *The Divine Law of Cure*.34 These texts are considered foundation works of New Thought.35 Also important are Julius and Annetta Dresser who wrote *The True History of Mental Science*36 and *The Philosophy of P.P. Quimby*37 respectively. As Quimby’s secretary for many years, Annetta Dresser is considered a particularly credible source. Their son, Horatio Dresser, also wrote prolifically, including *A History of the New Thought Movement*,38 *Knowing and Helping*32


People, and The Quimby Manuscripts. These writers and others of lesser note are the most direct source for Quimby’s original thought and practice.

Emma Curtis Hopkins, Teacher of Teachers

Mary Baker Eddy made one of the greatest contributions to New Thought in the form of one-time student, devotee, and Christian Science practitioner, Emma Curtis Hopkins. Hopkins broke away from Christian Science in the mid 1880s over doctrinal differences with Eddy in the Christian Science Journal, which Hopkins edited. She went on to found her own metaphysical school in Chicago, which commonly had an enrollment of a thousand students. Tuition for each of her courses was $50, a substantial sum in the 1880s. Virtually all of the later New Thought pioneers, including Malinda Cramer, Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, and Ernest Holmes, were her students.

Hopkins provided a common thread that runs through all of New Thought as it exists today, and for that reason she is called the teacher of teachers. She stressed the idea of oneness and the power of love as the great harmonizing, attracting force for health, relationships, finances, or any other area of human concern. Hopkins wrote High Mysticism and Scientific

39 Horatio W. Dresser, Knowing and Helping People (Boston: Beacon Press, 1933).
40 Horatio W. Dresser, The Quimby Manuscripts.
41 Anderson and Whitehouse, 35.
42 Sheets interview.
Christian Mental Practice during her years teaching in Chicago. At the turn of the twentieth century, Hopkins moved to New York where she continued to teach and assist individuals in private practice.

The Fillmores, Emilie Cady, and Unity School of Christianity

Charles and Myrtle Fillmore, the founders of Unity School of Christianity, attended Emma Curtis Hopkins’ school in Chicago after Myrtle was healed of tuberculosis by one of Hopkins' graduates. The Fillmores were great students of the Bible, as Quimby had been. They were raised old-time Methodists, but felt something was missing in the fundamental teachings of their faith. Myrtle was also a graduate of Oberlin, a Presbyterian college in Ohio. In New Thought the Fillmores discovered the means to make personal sense of the Bible. Though Charles had also studied Eastern religions and the occult in his quest for enlightenment, the Fillmores eventually adopted the strongest declaration of Christian belief of all the New Thought denominations, identifying Jesus as the greatest master teacher though not agreeing with traditional Christianity that he died on the Cross to redeem the sins of humanity. A unique aspect of Unity practice and belief is the special emphasis placed on silent meditation and prayer.

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45 Sheets interview.

46 Anderson and Whitehouse, 37
After they left Hopkins’ school in 1889, the Fillmores went to Kansas City and founded Unity School of Christianity, now called simply Unity. The Fillmores did not originally intend to start a church. Their vision was for Unity to be a mystical adjunct to Christianity, in the same way as the Kabbalah is to Judaism, Sufism is to Islam, and the Vedas to Hinduism. They wanted to preserve, research, and teach Christian mysticism, or the means of entering into direct communion with God in the ways that Jesus taught directly or implied in parables. Their Unity group gained a modest following in the Kansas City area, but their ministry through printed journals and pamphlets, most notably Daily Word and Unity magazines, soon reached national and then international readers. Eventually a need arose to train licensed teachers to serve the many study groups that formed. As groups became larger and wanted to organize into churches, they required trained ministers as well. Unity rose to these challenges by establishing courses for teachers and ministers, but it never lost sight of its original vision to spread knowledge through the printed word and to serve through prayer.

Emilie Cady, a schoolteacher, student of Emma Curtis Hopkins, and eventually homeopathic doctor in New York City, became a contributor to the Unity publications and authored a book, Lessons in Truth, published by Unity in 1896. Lessons in Truth became the official Unity textbook for the denomination and has gone through many printings with well over a million copies sold and translation into a dozen languages.

47 Sheets interview.
48 Lippert interview.
49 Braden, 236ff.
In 1919, the Fillmores purchased fifty-eight acres of farmland between Kansas City and nearby Lee’s Summit as a spiritual retreat and campground. Over a course of years, the church purchased 1400 additional acres at the site and built a religious, educational, and administrative complex on the grounds in a distinctive Mediterranean style of architecture. Today the independent municipality of Unity Village is the worldwide headquarters for Unity. With its several large churches and many smaller churches and study groups, Unity is the largest New Thought denomination based in North America, though the Japanese New Thought denomination of Seicho-No-Ie claims more adherents.

**Malinda Cramer and Divine Science**

Malinda Cramer, a Quaker from Indiana, suffered from the age of fifteen with an ailment diagnosed by the doctors of the Civil War era as tuberculosis. On the advice of her physicians, her family took her to California for the benefits of a drier climate. She improved somewhat, married, and had three sons, but after twenty-five years of chronic illness, her sufferings became intense and she turned to prayer for relief. One morning she had a mystical epiphany where she suddenly realized that God was part of her and she was part of God. After that she began to be better. She told other people about her experience and helped them to realize what it meant, and their health began to improve as well.

Sprunger interview.

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51 Welcome to Unity Village, World Headquarters of Unity, Map and Self-Guided Walking Tour (Unity Village, Missouri: Unity House, 2007).

52 Rev. Brent Sprunger, Interview with author, 21 March 2006.

53 Braden, 268-9.

54 Sprunger interview.
Hopkins in San Francisco, Cramer began her own ministry. From individual contacts, she went on to teach small groups and then to conduct lectures. Malinda Cramer founded the Divine Science Church in 1886, wrote *Hidden Harmony* and *Divine Science and Healing*, published *Harmony* magazine, and lectured across North American and in England and Australia.

Cramer read widely of mystic, spiritualist, and Theosophical literature as well as of religious traditions from around the world, though she remained committed to a “Christ method of healing” in the tradition of Quimby. The Divine Science movement paralleled the other New Thought movements of the same time in the eastern part of the nation, making Malinda and Emma Curtis Hopkins contemporaries and colleagues. Hopkins had a far wider audience and thus might be considered the founder of the New Thought movement, but Cramer had her own perspective on New Thought and was well-respected by both Hopkins and the Fillmores. In 1888, she started the Home College of Divine Science in San Francisco.

Malinda Cramer’s star was on the ascendant and Divine Science promised to become a great light in the New Thought firmament when tragedy dimmed the prospects of the faith.

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55 Braden, 272.


57 Cramer, *Divine Science and Healing*.

58 Theosophy is the study of metaphysics and religious philosophy after the manner of Mme. Helena Blavatsky.

59 Cramer, *Divine Science and Healing*.

60 Sprunger interview.

61 Braden, 271.
Cramer was critically injured and her school and library burned to the ground in the great San Francisco earthquake and fire of 1906. She died soon thereafter. Most of the original Divine Science writings were lost, and in a sense Malinda was also lost to history. Certainly her death came at an inopportune time from the standpoint of building the Divine Science Church.

Like the founders of many churches, Malinda Cramer was a powerful presence and vibrant speaker. She performed very dramatic healings, and was devoted to teaching her vision in an intense and personal way. With Cramer and the early writings gone, the movement lost its driving spirit as well as the body of work that might have sustained it intellectually. Nona Brooks and her sisters, who had been disciples of Cramer’s and had founded their own Divine Science Church and metaphysical college in Denver in 1898, carried on the Divine Science teachings. Though well-versed and sincere, the Brooks sisters were not able to materially advance Divine Science as a denomination. Of the Divine Science churches that formed, many had difficulty attracting younger adherents and eventually perished as their congregations aged and passed on. At this time there might be no more than thirty Divine Science churches left in the United States.\footnote{Sheets interview.} Even among those, schisms have divided Divine Science into three factions: Brooks Divinity School in Denver, Divine Science Federation in Washington, D.C., and United Divine Science in San Antonio, Texas.\footnote{Divine Science History, http://divinescience.com/beliefs/ds_history.htm (Accessed 14 October 2007).}
New Thought very early displayed a quality that is both its strength and its weakness when organizers first attempted to form an umbrella group to assist New Thought churches in broadcasting their message and to give New Thought lecturers and teachers a forum in which to speak and exchange views. New Thought followers tend to be so strongly independent and individualistic that they resist aligning themselves with a formal group. As Horatio Dresser observed, “It was not easy finding common ground among representatives of individualism.” This characteristic persists among New Thoughters today.

Eventually, however, the urge to come together overcame the urge to follow a lone star, and several groups were formed. Malinda Cramer founded the International Divine Science Association, which met annually from 1894 through 1899 in various cities of the United States. The year 1899 proved to be particularly active for New Thought groups. A New Thought Convention was held that year in Hartford, Connecticut, that boasted an impressive array of well-known New Thought speakers. In addition, Horatio Dresser proposed the formation of an International Metaphysical League for the purpose of mutual support, education, and the consolidation of strength around the world. A convention was organized for the League and held in Boston in late 1899. This convention again attracted many famous New Thought speakers and lecturers. Malinda Cramer, the Fillmores, and Col. Henry S. Taft (brother of the Unitarian William Howard Taft who was to become president of the United State) were on the executive committee. A thousand people attended of which the overwhelming majority were women.

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64 Braden 183
A second International Metaphysical League convention was held in New York in 1900 and a third in Chicago in 1903. The fourth convention in St. Louis billed itself as the International New Thought Convention, and by 1905 the conventions were being organized by the National New Thought Alliance, which was an outgrowth of the old Metaphysical League. In 1914, London hosted the convention under its current name, International New Thought Alliance. The INTA is an umbrella organization for all the New Thought denominations except Unity, which officially ceased participation in 1906. Many Unity members and ministers still attend the annual INTA Congress, however, which is usually held the end of July and beginning of August in Phoenix, Arizona.

**Ernest Holmes and Religious Science**

Before the age of twenty, Earnest Holmes began his lifelong study of religion, philosophy, mysticism, and New Thought. As one of the last students of Emma Curtis Hopkins to receive individual instruction during her years of private practice in New York, Holmes absorbed much of her mystical approach to faith and healing. He wrote two influential books: *Creative Mind: Tapping the Power Within* and *Science of Mind*.

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65 Braden, 170-185, 259.
66 Lippert interview.
67 Braden, 291.
Holmes developed his ministry and practice on original lines, eventually founding Religious Science in 1927. His ministry was perhaps the least Christ-centered of all the New Thought denominations but draws instead on points of correspondence among many religions and on development of esoteric and philosophic themes. An innovation of Religious Science is a method of healing called Spiritual Mind Treatment, which is similar to prayer but is practiced with clearly defined steps. Religious Science now has two divisions, Religious Science International and United Church of Religious Science. Religious Science International is based in Spokane and publishes the magazine *Creative Thought*. United Church of Religious Science is based in Burbank, California, although they have a large church in Denver called the Mile High Church. It publishes the magazine, *Science of Mind*. The faith’s presence is mostly concentrated on the West Coast where a mystic way of thinking finds freer expression than in other areas of the country. Religious Science has many churches in California, including several mega churches with memberships in the thousands.

**Emmet Fox and AA**

Educated in England as an electrical engineer, Emmet Fox also began studying New Thought early in life. In 1914, he attended the organizing meetings for the International New Thought Alliance in London. As a result of this interest, he began lecturing on New Thought and eventually immigrated to the United States. He was ordained a Divine Science minister and

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70 Braden, 295.

71 Anderson, 41-2.

72 Lippert interview.

73 Sprunger interview.
in 1931 became minister of the Church of the Healing Christ in New York City. An immensely popular speaker, Fox wrote a number of books including *Sparks of Timeless Truth*, Power Through Constructive Thinking, and *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life*. The son of Fox’s secretary worked with the founders of Alcoholics Anonymous and introduced them to Fox’s lectures and writings. As a result, *The Sermon on the Mount: The Key to Success in Life* not only became a staple of early AA literature but was used as a resource in writing *The Big Book of Alcoholics Anonymous* by AA founder Bill Wilson.

**Masaharu Taniguchi and Seicho-No-Ie**

When Ernest Holmes was first starting his Religious Science church, his brother Fenwicke Holmes also worked within the movement. Fenwicke later became a Congregational minister and wrote *The Law of Mind in Action*. In Japan in 1928, Masaharu Taniguchi, who worked as an English translator, read this book and it helped him crystallize his thoughts on religion. In 1930 he founded Seicho-No-Ie, the Truth in Life movement, which teaches the

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principles of New Thought. Adherents also practice a form of meditation and divine visualization called *shinsokan*.  

Seicho-No-Ie is non-denominational, and its literature stresses that a person may study its teachings without giving up their present religion or church. The movement’s home is Tokyo, but it is international in scope with centers in the United States, Canada, and Brazil. Seicho-No-Ie claims three million members worldwide making it the largest single New Thought denomination.  

**Comparison of Church Structures**  

Considered from the standpoint of the broadest spectrum of possible theologies, the doctrinal differences among the denominations following Quimby, including even Christian Science, are matters of subtlety. This is not to say that the differences are not important to the people involved, but just that a similitude of faith in Christ and healing as well as similitudes of culture, language, education, and background exist for all the founders of these churches, hardly excepting even Masaharu Taniguchi with Seicho-No-Ie, thus tacitly encouraging them to develop theologies that address concordant spiritual and practical needs. Significant differences arise in the organizational structure of the churches, however, which to an extent can be understood in light of the faiths in which the different founders were raised.  

Mary Baker Eddy grew up in the Congregationalist church, which was a development of the Puritan church of the pilgrims. Under duress, Eddy joined the church as a very young

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80 Anderson and Whitehouse, 44.

woman in spite of refusing to adopt the doctrine of predestination.\textsuperscript{82} Considering the closed, private, disciplined, and authoritarian form of the present Christian Science church with the Mother Church in Boston exercising complete authority over a system of satellite churches, it seems reasonable to observe that while Eddy radically changed her theological belief, she retained the imprint of the form that her new church would take from her perceptions from childhood of the repressive and dictatorial nature of Congregational membership with regard to females in the early nineteenth century. In this way the new religion of Christian Science is a functional syncretism of Eddy’s new-found theology and a Calvinistic church structure as she perceived it as the recipient of its dictates and its disciplines. Had Eddy melded her theology with a Baptist structure, the resulting religion would have been experienced very differently for her adherents. Indeed, her church in that case would probably have attracted a different type of congregation, which in itself would have influenced the development of the denomination.

An analogy might be made with the manner in which people learn a new language. When left to their own devices they tend to learn the vocabulary of the new language but retain the syntax of their native language. The resulting pidgin can be uniquely expressive. If large numbers of people speak a pidgin form, as for instance in a port town, it can become a distinctive dialect of its own. It seems reasonable to propose, then, that a new theology (the new vocabulary) that arises within a culture but builds on an existing church form (the old syntax) will tend to express itself as a religion in a unique way not entirely accounted for by the nature of its theological arguments or requirements.

Charles and Myrtle Fillmore were Methodist and did not leave that church until well into adulthood. Their view of the form of Methodist organization was likely on a broader scale than Eddy’s of Congregationalism, which she left earlier in life. The Methodist faith is organized in a loose hierarchy with a central leadership whose function is to oversee doctrine and determine policy for the denomination. The individual churches, however, enjoy considerable local autonomy compared to many other faiths. As expected, this type of organization is reflected in Unity, where Unity Village provides a central school for teachers and ministers, a library and archives of collected information and works, and an educational outreach in the form of printed publications and distance learning courses. Individual churches and study groups are mostly autonomous, however, receiving little in the way either of material support or denominational governance.

At the far end of the scale, Malinda Cramer was originally a Quaker. Consonant with the theory outlined above, the Divine Science religion she founded can almost be construed more as a religious movement than as an organized church. On the local scale, individual churches and study groups are very much on their own, much like Quaker congregations, and, predictably, the people who gravitate to them tend to be individualists to the point of being repelled by authority in any of the forms normally associated with an organization. The cohesive force in a Divine Science congregation is community of belief and the social inclination to hear and worship in a group.
CHAPTER II: UNITY CHURCH OF WICHITA

New Thought is a term that comes from the mystic teaching most perfectly embodied by Christ that as we renew our thoughts we transform ourselves.  

Mabel B. Schopf

New religious groups in an area often begin by meeting for study or worship in a private home. This seems to have been the case with Unity in Wichita, though no records exist of exactly when the group began to meet. The first reference to a regularly meeting group appears in the Unity Annual Conference Yearbook of 1936, which identifies Mabel Schopf from Wichita Unity Center, 1215 N. Broadway, as an attendee to the Unity Annual Conference in Kansas City. Since this location on N. Broadway is a residential address, the Wichita Unity Center probably referred to the group rather than the building.

Services at the Wichita Center were listed for 8 p.m. on Sundays, though there were no morning services. Of the churches represented by the 96 attendees to the 1936 conference (from the United States, Canada, and England), evening services were equally as common as morning services. Possible reasons for a preference for evening services may have been that in the summer it might have been cooler in the evening than in the morning. Perhaps, also, evening services may have been scheduled to not conflict with other Sunday activities, such as athletic or social events. Some people then (as now) may also have attended the services of a more traditional denomination in the morning to be with family and friends, or for social or business

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84 “Members of Unity Annual Conference,” in Unity Annual Conference Yearbook: Year ending July, 1936 (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1936).
reasons, or because they accepted the message of Unity but were not yet ready to sever ties with a more structured, atoning religion. Or if it were a small group of people who attended regularly, they may simply have preferred to meet in the evening.

In addition to Sunday services, the Center offered regular weekly classes and gave a telephone number. In 1936 most families could not afford a telephone in their home, so it seems safe to assume that Mrs. Schopf had independent financial support, although the congregation may have provided this amenity for the benefit of the Center.

Mabel B. Schopf appears in the 1910 U.S. census as the wife of William Schopf, a barber by profession. She was nineteen, which would have placed her birth year in 1891. They lived in Genesee, Michigan. By the 1920 census, Mabel and William had moved to Muskegon, Michigan, and had a five-year-old son, William G. 85

The conference list of 1934 shows Mabel from Decatur, Illinois. 86 In 1935, she is again listed as affiliated with Unity Center of Decatur. After her Wichita listing in 1936, there was no one listed for Wichita in 1937, though Mabel’s name appears as affiliated with Unity School in Kansas City. 87 It seems safe to conclude, then, that Mabel probably lived in Wichita for less than two years. A handwritten notation on a newspaper clipping from Unity Village archives suggests that she had actually moved to Omaha, Nebraska, but was taking ministry classes in Kansas City at the time of the 1937 conference. The notation, which appears above Mabel’s


86 "Recognized Unity Leaders Attending the 1934 Conference," in 1934 Unity Leaders and Teachers Conference (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1934).

photograph, reads: “June 26, 1937, Omaha, Nebr.” Below her photograph appears the following text:

**Ordain Omaha Woman, Unity Center Leader**

Mrs. Mabel B. Schopf, leader of the Omaha Unity Center, will be ordained to the ministry at Unity School of Christianity, Kansas City, Wednesday at 8 p.m. Mrs. Schopf has been affiliated with Unity school for 10 years. She organized and conducted Unity ministries in Michigan, Illinois and Kansas before coming to Omaha a year ago last February.

For the past year, in addition to her Omaha ministry, she has conducted classes and Sunday evening services in Lincoln Unity Center. She is spending June at the Unity Training School, Unity Farm, Lees Summit, Mo., completing work for her ordination.  

This article implies several aspects of early Unity ministry. The first is that at a time when women were not allowed in the pulpit of any but a very few traditional churches, Mabel Schopf was actively organizing and leading Unity groups for the ten years prior to the 1937 date of the clipping. Indeed, she did so even before being ordained a Unity minister. This speaks for a tolerant and message-driven rather than structure-driven church philosophy. It also suggests that talented and energetic women may have been attracted to a Unity ministry in part, at least, due to opportunities for leadership and community involvement that were lacking for them in traditional religious settings.

Among the churches that participated in revivals in the early nineteenth century, leadership and exhortations by women speakers was an aspect that both electrified revival congregations for its daring and scandalized old school church leaders as apostasy. Women revivalists were notably accepted at Methodist revivals. In the Victorian era following the Civil War, female leadership was forbidden in most churches and became much more sedate,

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88 "Ordain Omaha Woman, Unity Center Leader," *newspaper unknown*, 26 June 1937. Unity Archives biographical holdings on Mabel B. Schopf.
dignified, and participatory in the remainder. Yet women persisted in leadership roles in religious activity, even founding their own schools and churches as Mary Baker Eddy, Malinda Cramer, and Emma Curtis Hopkins, among many others, attest. They could only do this, however, by promoting independent religious movements outside the framework of established churches. In addition to issues of theology and belief, this factor of opportunity worked to draw women attracted to leadership into the New Thought fold.

On a more general note, Mabel moved from Michigan, to Illinois, to Kansas, to Nebraska, and finally to New York in the fourteen years she can be tracked through the archival material; hence, she made a major move at least every three years. We are probably safe in presuming that Mabel had reasons for her moves beyond the opportunity to begin new Unity churches. She might have been following her husband who was making the moves for business reasons. Wherever she went and for whatever reason, however, Mabel could take her Unity message and begin another group. In this way, as well, the independent study group model favored as the means of start-up by New Thought denominations worked to the advantage of women because it was flexible, informal, and portable with no sorts of certifications required from a central denominational authority. A woman could have a home and family and still lead a group of this kind.

While in Omaha, the article states that Mabel also conducted classes and services at the Lincoln Unity Center, probably in Lincoln, Nebraska, some fifty miles distant. Apart from

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Anderson and Whitehouse, 36.

Larson, 336.
moving a household, this implies mobility on a regular basis, which in 1937, in the depths of the Depression when most families did not own personal transportation, further suggests both time and material resources at Mabel’s disposal. Though the meeting attendees may have been from any socio-economic stratum, it seems likely that Mabel was of that group of able women in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries who could not take paid employment due to their social position and so turned their energies to civic, benevolent, and religious leadership.

The photograph of Mabel in the clipping shows a stately woman of perhaps forty-five dressed in a full-length white satin gown with a very high lace collar and long, full sleeves. She is wearing a pendant necklace with a cross on a long chain and what appears to be a large signet ring on the index finger of her left hand. The effect is very formal, and, considering the dress color, the cross, and the gravity of Mabel’s expression, is suggestive that this may have been her actual ordination attire.

Photographs of past ordinations on the wall of the Unity Village Education Building in the hall outside the archives show that white formal gowns for women and black dinner attire for men were the custom until the middle of the 20th century when white robes, such as are worn at other sorts of graduations, began to appear for women, presumably to lend uniformity by covering diverse styles and colors of dresses. At first the robes were full length, but as hems rose, so did the length of the robes until they were knee-length by the 1960s. By 1970, robes were dispensed with and, though graduation photos still show dark suits for men, the women were now wearing street-length dresses in a range of colors, mostly pastels. Viewing the ordination photographs also allows one to see at a glance that from the beginning of Unity’s inception in the early 20th century, the proportion of women to men was nearly always greater than half.
Mabel was affiliated with the Omaha Unity Center in 1938 and 1939, but her name did not appear in the 1940 book. In 1941 she is listed as affiliated with the Unity Center of Practical Christianity in Buffalo, New York. Though the Buffalo Center continues in succeeding years with other people listed as principals, this is the final listing for Mabel Schopf in the Unity Yearbooks, which is not to say, of course, that she might not have been active in the church or in teaching classes, but just that from the record she does not appear to have held a position as minister of a Unity church. If one considers, however, that when Mabel was ordained in 1937, she had been active in the church for ten years, then by 1941 she would have devoted fourteen years to Unity work.

Frederick Elias Andrews

After the lapse of no listing for Wichita in 1937 (which only indicates that there was no conference attendee, not that there were necessarily no Unity followers meeting in Wichita), in 1938 Frederick Elias Andrews attended from Wichita Unity Center, which was then holding Sunday services at 11:00 a.m. and 8:00 p.m. at the Eaton Hotel on Douglas and Emporia. Built in 1886, the Eaton (whose opulent bar was heavily damaged by temperance activist Carey Nation in 1900) was one of the finest hotels in Wichita, and its central location made it an ideal gathering place.

92 “Members of Unity Annual Conference,” Unity Annual Conference Yearbooks: Years ending July, 1938 through 1941 (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1938 through 1941).

When small religious groups begin to attract new members to the extent that they can no longer conveniently meet in a private home, a typical next step is to rent a banquet or conference room at a hotel for Sunday services.\footnote{Joe Rodriguez, "Storefront Salvation," \textit{Wichita Eagle}, 21 January 2006, sec. Faith and Values.} At first glance this seems like an expensive and impersonal solution, but using hotel facilities can have many advantages. First and foremost, the congregation is not encumbered with a mortgage or lease for a property. If the group should diminish or disband, it has paid its way and there are no debts to be paid off. Banquet room rental is also flexible. A worship group with twenty members may require a moderate sized room and pay accordingly. If their numbers fall, they can engage a smaller room. If the group should double in size, it can rent a large room. If they decide not to meet on a particular Sunday, they pay nothing. In addition, there are no utility, upkeep, or furnishing expenses, nor do members have to be recruited for menial tasks. This was so seventy years ago, and is still so today.

Since the group was meeting at a hotel, it may be presumed that it was too large for comfortably meeting in a home and probably numbered more than a dozen regular congregants. Clouding the issue somewhat is an additional notice that the Center was open daily and a telephone number is given. The group may have permanently engaged a room or it may have rented office space suitable for classes and doing church business and then rented a larger room for Sunday services.

Frederick may have had another occupation during the week, but he also may have been a full-time pastor of the Center, since his involvement in Unity at the national level is documented. In 1933, before he came to Wichita, Frederick had been President of the Board of
Unity in Kansas City. Thereafter he is listed in each yearbook as a member of the Devotional Committee, an honorary post reserved for past presidents. In 1934 he was listed as a recognized Unity leader from Cincinnati, Ohio, attending the annual Leaders and Teachers Conference. In 1938 and 1939 Frederick is listed as not only a regular attendee from Wichita, but also as a member of the Unity Executive Board.

Frederick also published two articles in Unity publications before he came to Wichita: “A Miracle Healing and How It Was Done” and “It Never Fails.” The first article reveals a great deal about both Frederick and Unity beliefs. When he was thirteen, Frederick was diagnosed with a form of tuberculosis that was generally fatal before antibiotics were developed: tuberculosis of the spine, sometimes known as Pott’s disease. He tells of his sufferings, which were severe, but also of his hope and determination to be well. During the course of his illness, he was given several books on the principles of New Thought and began a regimen of prayer, visualization, auto-suggestion, and mental discipline. He made great improvement until several years later he seemed almost well. Then an accident precipitated a


96 "Recognized Unity Leaders Attending the 1934 Conference."


99 Frederick Elias Andrews, "It Never Fails," *Youth: For Everybody* IV, no. 9 (September 1930).
relapse, and he had the recovery experience to go through a second time. Finally, in his words, after twenty years of suffering he was entirely healed.  

This article appeared in *Weekly Unity* in 1925, but a note at the end says it was previously published as a tract by Unity School and that it had inspired thousands. Since the tone of the article is retrospective and it had already reached many people, it is probably safe to assume that Frederick was at least in his late twenties or early thirties at the time of publication and thus was born before the turn of the century.

Besides the human interest of Frederick’s story, it is notable on several points. The first is that he uses the term “suggestion” in the psychoanalytic sense in that he is not referring to a casual suggestion made to him by another but to the psychological phenomenon that the human mind in a state of reverie is susceptible to belief in and action upon direction given it in a positive, forceful, and repeated manner. The year 1925 seems early for this language, but Frederick uses the term in a way that assumes his readers understand the principle and don’t need an explanation of it. It therefore was probably in general use at the time, at least in New Thought circles.

The second point of interest is that in the course of the article he admits he used not just mental and spiritual methods but also physical means to effect a cure. In other words, he used medicines and medical treatment because, as he says, human beings are threefold – body, mind, and spirit – and any serious disorder must be treated on all three levels. This contrasts with Christian Science, which denies not only the efficacy but also the spiritual advisability of taking physical treatment for an illness or injury. In the early twentieth century, medical means for treating tuberculosis were not sufficient for a cure but might have supported Frederick’s overall

100 Andrews, "A Miracle Healing and How It Was Done."
health in a manner that allowed his body to cure itself. He says, however, that the doctors gave his parents essentially no hope for his survival, so it is not unreasonable for him to have ascribed his recovery to his mental and spiritual practices as well as to medical intervention.

From a broader perspective, it is worth remembering that as a religion New Thought received its initial impetus and support not as a method for increasing prosperity or improving human relationships or even gaining betterment of the human condition as it is commonly perceived at this time, but for healing physical ailments at a time when medical science was comparatively limited in its capacity to treat disease. With improvements in medicine, especially the development of antibiotics, the practical applications of New Thought were turned to other areas of life, though the basis for the movement has always been healing.

Frederick’s 1930 article, “It Never Fails,” as it happens, does address another aspect of New Thought practice. It tells how Frederick and his wife, Maude, both ministers of Cincinnati Unity Center, used positive affirmations (another term for suggestion but with an additional meaning of affirming to the universe) of love, wisdom, and blessing to increase and maintain the Center’s finances. It also mentions a “silent healing” group. Silent healing is a hallmark of Unity practice. It is accomplished by a prayer group, usually made up of congregants from a church who pray in silence for the healing of an individual. Since 1890, Unity School in Kansas City and then at Unity Village has maintained a silent prayer group called Silent Unity of volunteers who pray for others on request.101 Silent Unity responds to thousands of prayer requests from around the world each day.102


In 1940, Frederick is listed as an Executive Board member but not an attendee from Wichita. This suggests that he was in a process of transition away from the city. Indeed, in the 1941 and 1942 yearbooks, Frederick is listed as affiliated with the Devotional Center in Ft. Wayne, Indiana. Then in 1943 and 1944 he is shown to be with the Unity Center in Indianapolis, and in 1945 through 1958, he is back in Ft. Wayne with the Unity Center in that city. Like Mabel Schopf before him, Frederick seems to have led something of a gypsy life, moving frequently until his last residence in Ft. Wayne.  

Carl Moran

In the early 1940s, Carl Moran came to Wichita Unity Church. According to a survey he filled out for Unity Village in 1949, he first began studying Unity teachings in 1935 after picking up a copy of *Unity* magazine in a railway station. He was having difficulties with his health and was in need of physical healing, but the metaphysical aspect of Unity appealed to him as well. Born in 1921, he would have been fourteen or fifteen at the time.

Carl attended Unity Training School and also worked at the school between 1936 and 1940, earning nine credits toward graduation. At some point he was Charles Fillmore’s secretary at Unity Village. He became a licensed Unity teacher in 1940, and was listed in the

103 "Members of Unity Annual Conference," *Unity Annual Conference Yearbooks: Years ending July, 1940 through 1944* (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1940 through 1944).


105 Eric Page, Unity Village Archivist and Reference Librarian, Unity Village, Telephone conversation with author, 29 August 2007.

106 Lippert interview.
1941 Yearbook as an attendee from Wichita. Ordained in 1942,\textsuperscript{107} by 1944 he is listed in the Yearbook as the minister for Unity Church of Wichita, which was still at the Eaton Hotel. In 1946, Carl’s wife, Lois, is listed as minister with him at the Wichita Center. Thus began an association spanning three decades for the Morans and the Wichita congregation.\textsuperscript{108}

The survey asked Rev. Moran to write about his religious beliefs and affiliations before coming to Unity, to which he answered:

From the time that I was a small child, I was intensely interested in the esoteric and read largely on subjects of this type. I have never belonged to any religious organization. In fact, until I came into Truth, I was inclined to be critical of orthodox Christianity, especially so toward the “so-called” Protestant movements.

The survey also asked him to give an account of any “outstanding healings, either of yourself or of those to whom you ministered.” His brief reply runs thus:

As far as the world is concerned, all healings which result from metaphysical applications are outstanding. However, I was healed. Here in the Center, many healings result. Especially so, since I am inclined to stress this part of the work. We have had many healings of cancer.\textsuperscript{109}

In 1946 the Center moved to 3241 Victor Place, according to a newspaper clipping dated June of that year, which the Wichita congregation sent to Unity Village (postage: three cents).\textsuperscript{110}

There was a morning consecration ceremony, afternoon services directed by the Youth of Unity (Y.O.U.), evening musical entertainment followed by a reception, and all-day open house. The

\textsuperscript{107} Moran survey.


\textsuperscript{109} Moran survey.

\textsuperscript{110} “Unity Center to Be Dedicated Sunday.” [newspaper unknown], June 1946.
1946 Yearbook still shows the Center at the Eaton Hotel, but by 1947 it records the Victor Place address.\footnote{111} Another newspaper clipping titled “A Sermonet” from the Go to Church section of the Wichita Beacon shows a photograph of Rev. Moran, a spare man of about fifty with a broad smile. He is dressed in a dark suit and tie, with his fingers poised over the keys of a typewriter and an open Bible in front of him. On the ring finger of his right hand is a large signet ring. The accompanying “sermonet” is on light. It begins by recounting God’s command in Genesis to “Let there be light,” and continues with a description of how important light is for life. Rev. Moran then identifies two other kinds of light: the light of the mind and the light of the spirit. He mentions that people too often concentrate on lack of light and that even two thousand years ago Confucius recognized this error when he said, “It is better to light one candle than curse the darkness.” Rev. Moran goes on to quote Jesus, “Ye are the light of the world,” and Paul, “Walk as children of light,” and concludes that people must bring forth the light of the spirit from within themselves.\footnote{112} Embedded in this homily is the New Thought idea that people attract into their lives what they give their attention to. If they have faith and dwell on ideas of light, that is what they will then experience.

By 1955, the Unity congregation had built the church at 2160 N. Oliver, which the Yearbook records. A photograph of the new church is included in the Unity Center archives folder. It shows the present Unity Church building appearing much like it does today: a one-story, buff brick building with a gabled roof and a long, low addition attached to one side. The

\footnote{111} “Members of Unity Annual Conference," Unity Annual Conference Yearbook: Year ending July, 1947 (Kansas City: Unity School of Christianity, 1947). The church at Victor Place was probably a residential house converted to church use, but it has since been torn down.

\footnote{112} Rev. Carl Moran, "A Sermonet," Wichita Beacon, [no date], sec. Go To Church, .
church sits back from Oliver Street with a manicured lawn in front. A band of windows stretches across the full width of the front of the church, while several tall, narrow windows are on the side. The effect is modern, functional, and clearly a church, but with elements, especially in the addition, of the design of a school.

The New Thought movement tends to attract independent thinkers and self-starters, and this seems to have been the case with the Unity Church in the 1950’s. Among its congregation were members of the Coleman family of the Coleman Lamp Company, who were involved in the construction of the church and who donated the heating, ventilation, and air conditioning system for the building.

Other socially and financially prominent members of the Wichita community have also worshipped regularly at Unity. Many would request that their names and pictures not be included in a published directory because they risked public censure if it were known that they came to a church that taught the ideas of New Thought. Some were members of other churches that were mainstream or fundamentalist. Some had family or business relations who would be deeply angered to know that they were not 100% mainline Christian. Unity members could be accused of going to hell and might be shunned by people who felt that contact with them invited divine condemnation by the association. People not in the public eye but who had family or business connections in certain denominations could also be taking something of a risk by

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113 Untitled photograph of Unity Church of Wichita, c. 1955, Association of Unity Churches collection, Unity Village Archives.

114 Lippet interview.
attending Unity, especially if their name appeared in a Unity directory. All these people may, however, have contributed materially to Unity, especially with regard to building the church.  

Another document preserved by the Unity Village archives is a typed manuscript by Carl Moran titled *Metaphysical Doctrine*. On the front page is the following note: “This is a special edition. All proceeds from the sale of this folder are being placed in the Wichita Unity Church building fund.” Though no date appears on the manuscript, at the bottom appears the address: “Unity Church; 2160 N. Oliver; Wichita, Kansas.”  

According to the Unity Yearbooks, the Wichita congregation was called Unity Center through 1956 and only began to refer to itself as Unity Church in 1957. It may be presumed, then, that the manuscript was offered for sale after that date and that the church was still in the process of either completing the building or paying off the debt for its construction.

The *Metaphysical Doctrine* manuscript consists of fourteen chapters dealing with biblical concepts and how they are interpreted by New Thought. Their subjects run as follows: symbology of the cross, the Church, Christ as the Only Begotten, the Sabbath, communion, baptism, the antichrist, the devil, hell, judgment, heaven, immortality, vicarious atonement, the Second Coming, and the goodness of all. In addition, there is a handwritten inclusion following the title page that defines the Greek compound word “metaphysics.” When the manuscript was published as a book by Devorss & Co. in 1964, this became the first chapter titled “What is

115 Sheets interview.

116 Carl Moran, "Metaphysical Doctrine," c. 1957, MS (typewritten), Biography and Manuscript Collection, Unity Village Archives, Unity Village, Missouri.
Another new chapter, “What is Truth?” was also added. The remainder of the book consists of a slight rearrangement of the chapters from the original manuscript.

*Metaphysical Doctrine* presents itself as a distillation of Rev. Moran’s understanding of New Thought belief. Written in a simple and direct style with many biblical references, it underscores Unity’s Christian orientation and highlights its unique interpretation of the Bible. *Metaphysical Doctrine* is short and clear enough to be used as a religious primer, but deals in concepts with many levels of subtlety making it a text to also be studied by those conversant in the faith.

In 1972 and 1973, Lois Moran is listed alone in the yearbook as the minister of Unity Church. Thereafter Carl and Lois no longer appear on the rolls of Unity ministers. The Morans’ 32-year tenure as leaders of Wichita Unity Church testifies to a stability of character and harmony of vision shared by the congregation and pastors.

**Ronald Bernard and Paula (Polly) Dozier**

In 1973 Ronald Bernard and Paula (Polly) Dozier are listed in the Yearbook as Unity ministers residing in Wichita, though Lois Moran is still the minister of Unity Church. In 1970 the Doziers were listed as Unity ministers in Minneapolis, Minnesota, though not with a church affiliation. In 1971 they are listed from Austin, Texas, and in 1972 they are with Unity Church in Dallas. It seems likely that the Doziers were young ministers searching for a good match

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with a church, and perhaps also searching for an identity. In some listings they are Ronald and Paula and in some Bernard and Polly.  

After their 1973 period of acquaintance, in 1974 and 1975 Bernard and Polly Dozier are listed as ministers of the Wichita church. Possibly they had simply moved to Wichita and fortuitously discovered an opening in the church, but possibly also they were recruited to assist Lois Moran and to move into leadership of the church following a time of acclimation both for themselves and for the congregation, many of whom may have known no pastors of their church besides the Morans.

For long-term congregants, the loss of a familiar and beloved pastor can be little short of traumatic. New pastors thus may have this emotional charge among the congregation to deal with in addition to learning about their new church and performing their duties as pastors. They also must deal with what might be termed the church bureaucracy in the form of the board of directors, the social leaders of the church, and the large contributors who feel they should have a proportionally large say in how the church is run. Over the course of three decades, the Morans would have come to a balance of understandings with these groups, but new pastors may be at something of a disadvantage because they will not have that long history of give-and-take, nor will they likely have many committed allies. In addition, some in the congregation who were kept in check while the old leadership was active may see new leadership as an opportunity to


promote their own ideas. If the new pastors also have ideas for change, additional adjustments must be made and additional opportunities for discord may arise.

Some of these destabilizing elements are likely present in any handoff to a new pastor. If they are not too great and other elements of cohesiveness, cooperation, and accord are strong, the transition may be relatively smooth. Nevertheless, under the best of circumstances the experience can be trying. Whether it was for this reason or for others, by 1976 Bernard Dozier is listed alone as pastor of Unity Church of Wichita, and Paula (now Polly) is listed as a Unity minister in Waco, Texas. In 1977, Bernard is in St. Petersburg, Florida, and Polly in Chicago, Illinois.\(^\text{121}\)

Like Frederick Andrews and Carl Moran before him, however, Bernard wrote a number of works that appeared in Unity Publications from 1966 to 1992: two articles in Weekly Unity, five in Unity Magazine, and a pamphlet titled This Is Unity.\(^\text{122}\) His first article in 1966, “A Positive Approach to Military Service,” deals with a hotly debated topic as the Vietnam War hit full stride and young men were increasingly subject to the draft. The other articles cover topics more typical of New Thought: the power of calling on God, the way to wealth, tools of the mind, a discussion of the occult, and a Christmas miracle story.

William Cameron

In 1977, William Cameron became minister of the Wichita Unity Church. His wife’s name was Suzanne. From earlier Yearbooks, Rev. Cameron appears to have begun his career in


\(^{122}\) Card Catalog of Unity Authors, Unity Village Archives, Unity Village, Missouri.
1969 as an Associate Minister at Lee’s Summit, the main Unity Village campus. In 1970 through 1973, he was at Unity on the Plaza in Kansas City. In 1974 and 1975, Rev. Cameron was at Unity Church of Decatur, Illinois, – interestingly, the same community, perhaps the same church, where Mabel Schopf had served as pastor forty years before in 1934 and 1935. In 1976 he was at Unity Church of Christ in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Following his two-year stay in Wichita in 1977 and 1978, he returned to Kansas City. Though listed as a Unity minister, he does not seem to have been affiliated with a church there but perhaps served in an administrative capacity.123

William Cameron was a prolific writer, producing between 1969 and 1994 a substantial body of work including six meditations published in Unity News, one meditation published in an Easter booklet, several essays for the annual Unity Easter booklet, four articles published in Weekly Unity, 47 articles published in Unity Magazine including a series of 25 articles titled Great Dramas of the Bible that were later published as a book,124 and his final work, the book Where Eagles Soar: A Spiritual Alternative to Negative Religion; A Flight Path to Higher Life published in 1994.125 In addition, a number of Rev. Cameron’s articles were reprinted at later dates in Unity Magazine, Easter booklets, and the Study in Truth booklet series.

Great Dramas of the Bible reveals Rev. Cameron as an astute biblical scholar and an especial admirer of Paul, with his tumultuous adventures and grand breadth of vision. In Where


124 William Cameron, Great Dramas of the Bible (Lee's Summit: Unity Books, 1982).

Eagles Soar, however, we get a glimpse of the author himself. After two tours of military duty, first as a Marine Corps rifleman and then as an Air Force fighter pilot, Rev. Cameron acknowledges returning to civilian life troubled and bitter. He mentions that his Air Force tour was contemporaneous with the breaking of the sound barrier, which occurred in 1947. Hence, his two tours were for World War II, which places his date of birth in the early 1920s. He tells of a difficult civilian readjustment compounded by having come “to regard the brotherhood of man as a grim joke.” At some point, however, he experienced a physical healing accompanied by spiritual awakening, which he compared to Paul’s “soul-shaking Damascus Road experience.” The old religious frameworks were not sufficient to encompass his new vision of life, nor could sectarian promoters frighten him into empty professions of faith.

At first startled and then dismayed by the negative undercurrent of hard-shelled proselytization, I began to see through so much of the adversarial strategy of this fear-based approach. More than anything else, in the glow of the fresh hope and promise of my newly born life, I truly wanted to become a part of something that was affirmatively “for” the good and Godly, not bellicosely “against” a continuously perceived epidemic of the bad.

After a period of intense biblical and historical study, Rev. Cameron evolved a personal perspective on matters of the spirit that was at the time most closely reflected in the teachings of Unity. The back cover of Where Eagles Soar indicates that Rev. Cameron spent “28 years as a ‘front line’ Minister” beginning around 1966. As noted earlier, Rev. Cameron first appears on the Unity Yearbook rolls in 1969, though he may have served as pastor or spiritual leader for several years before.

Where Eagles Soar expresses Rev. Cameron’s insights into the structure and narrative of the Bible and his understanding of the spiritual nature of human life. Unwavering in its message

126 Ibid, ix, x, 13, 89, 203, back cover.
that Christ is the one, true, and final revelation to humanity, this book reflects a completely
Christian orientation to the development and expression of the spirit. It is not from a traditional
perspective, however, but dwells instead on mystical meanings, symbolism, and underlying
principles, sometimes couched in Freudian terms.

Significantly, Rev. Cameron makes no mention in the book of his association with
Unity, nor is the book published by Unity but instead by Cross Cultural Publications in Notre
Dame, Indiana. Possibly he wanted to reach a wider audience and so omitted identifying with a
particular denomination. But possibly also, by 1997 he no longer himself identified with
Unity’s increasing religious eclecticism. For Rev. Cameron, religion is a path, not a
smorgasbord, a faith rather than a culture. One suspects that Unity moved away from Rev.
Cameron’s old-time vision of it being the mystical and esoteric expression of Christianity.
Though he and Unity shared the way for awhile, he may have ended his spiritual journey as he
began it, a lone pilgrim following his own star.

**Marilyn White**

In 1979, Marlyn White became minister of Unity Church of Wichita. Rev. White first
appears in the Yearbooks in 1970 as a minister from Livonia, Michigan. In 1971, he was
affiliated with Unity of West Suburbia in Livonia. From 1973 through 1975, he was with the
Unity Church of Truth in Toronto, Canada, and from 1976 through 1978, Rev. White was

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affiliated with the Unity Church of Truth in Syracuse, New York.\textsuperscript{129} His wife, Patricia Anne, noted for her poise,\textsuperscript{130} is first mentioned in the 1976 Yearbook.

Before his listing in Wichita, Rev. White’s given name was spelled “Marlyn,” but during his Wichita sojourn, it was spelled “Marlin” and occasionally even “Marlon” both in the Yearbooks and elsewhere until 1997 when it was again spelled with a “y.”\textsuperscript{131} Perhaps he changed it at some point, or perhaps the Unity Village Yearbook recorder persisted in an error from one year to the next.

Rev. White published two articles in \textit{Weekly Unity}: “Stop Blaming the Serpent” in 1970 and “The Inside of Christmas” in 1971. “Stop Blaming the Serpent” illustrates New Thought’s perspective on the Genesis account of Adam and Eve and how they lost their free and blessed life in the Garden of Eden. In the story, the serpent persuades Eve to eat of the fruit of the Tree of Life, and she gives some to Adam to eat as well. When God finds them hiding in the Garden, Adam blames Eve, and Eve blames the serpent for their yielding to temptation. In the traditional Christian interpretation, God expels Adam and Eve from the Garden to a new and inhospitable life on account of their disobedience. But New Thought sees the story in a different light. Rev. White identifies the cause of Adam and Eve’s fall as their failure to face experience directly even if it is unpleasant (as the wrath of God probably would be). In shifting their focus to the serpent, they gave up dominion over their world and dwelt instead on the


\textsuperscript{130} Dudley Dodgion Toevs, Interview with author, 30 September 2007.

viewpoint that something outside themselves had determined their fate. Rev. White observes that the tendency to place blame is part reflex and part habit, and he notes that in the very act of blaming we give to the person or thing we condemn the power to determine our thinking, feeling, and acting. In this way we give up our autonomy and our freedom, as Adam and Eve gave up theirs. Apart from being a persuasive psychological principle, the injunction to “stop blaming the serpent” has an additional spiritual dimension in New Thought. People who believe they are in bondage to circumstance cannot also believe they have within themselves the power to improve their lives and their health. According to Rev. White, giving up the habit of blame is a necessary first step on the path to all the possibilities of a spiritual existence.132

In “The Inside of Christmas,” Rev. White notes a complaint made by many that we should put Christ back in Christmas. He counters that we should instead be trying to get as much of Christ out of Christmas as we can. His definition of Christ is “the incarnation of all that is good in every individual.” He says there is as much of Christ in Christmas as there ever was, and we can find it in quiet meditation, in appreciation for the love and beauty around us, and in service to others. The article is in a sense a play on words. Those who say we should put Christ back in Christmas mean that the holiday should return to a more reverent and less commercial event. Rev. White argues that the real meaning is internal, inside Christmas. When the spirit of Christ is reborn within a person, it is then a time to bring it forth as an active presence in life – to take it out of the event and put it into thought and practice.133


Gracefully expressed, this brief article supports a favorite saying of Rev. White’s – that the principles of New Thought are “caught, not taught.” That is, they are apprehended by a person ready to receive and incorporate them but cannot be drilled into an unwilling or unready spirit. This may in part explain why few people who attend a New Thought church were raised in the faith. They generally arrive there because the church is their choice, reflective of their personal philosophy and beliefs, not because they were raised in a culture or with a dogma which had become habitual to them or that they were afraid to leave. Rev. White took an eclectic approach to theology, teaching that all the major religions, including Judaism, Christianity, Islam and Buddhism, have the same core beliefs. He taught that these religions were the repositories of universal principles that are “all the same for all time, everywhere.”

In 1981, the Yearbook lists Sue Burson as an assistant to Rev. White. After the lapse of a year, the 1983 Sue Ellen Kelly is an assistant. Sue Ellen was noted in Syracuse in 1982, so it is possible that Sue Burson went to Syracuse where she married and then returned to Wichita as Sue Ellen Kelly. In any event, Sue Ellen remained in Wichita through 1985 and then is listed as an ordained associate minister in Syracuse in 1986. Since ordination classes are held at Unity Village, if becoming a Unity minister was Sue Ellen’s goal, then the Whites may have invited

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134 Bruce Fueling, Interview with author, 30 July 2006.

135 Larson, 336.

her to come to Wichita from Syracuse and thus be in relative proximity to Kansas City for her classes.  

In 1997, Norman Jessup is listed as a Licensed Unity Teacher. He continued with Unity of Wichita through the remainder of Marlyn White’s service there and with Charlotte Prossen until 2004 when he is listed as affiliated with the Unity Church in Topeka. Norman eventually became ordained as a minister of Divine Science. On occasion he preaches the sermon at the New Thought Community Church as a guest minister, but he and his wife live in Topeka.

Rev. White is remembered as a “terrific platform minister,” but not so much as a “pastoral minister.” Though with Unity Church for twenty-two years, from 1979 to 2001, and respected and admired for his Sunday service lessons, Rev. White seemed to some to be very shy and uncomfortable speaking with people individually. He generally left immediately after each service. Many parishioners hardly felt they knew Marlyn, but they appreciated his ability as a preacher.


139 Sheets interview.


141 Sheets interview.
Another view of Rev. White was that he was a “professional golfer who spoke on Sundays.” Dudley Dodgion Toevs, the soloist and music director at Unity between 1985 and 1995, recalls Rev. White as an excellent speaker who could deliver a sermon on cue. Sometimes he even repeated his sermons, but the congregation enjoyed his message and mode of delivery so much that they either didn’t notice or didn’t mind.

When Toevs would ask Rev. White about the topic of the upcoming sermon so that he could choose songs to go with the message, Rev. White would never say in advance. He just told Toevs to do a musical comedy number and a more serious religious piece for each service. At one point, Toevs went to Unity Village in Kansas City and also to a religious musical conference in Dallas for the purpose of researching Unity hymns and spiritual music. He was disappointed to find that Unity had no developed musical tradition and offered only the rather bland Unity hymnal. Unity relies on the judgment of the music director of each church to bring in music that is acceptable to the congregation.

When Toevs began singing at Unity in 1985, the church had a stable membership of about 85% intellectuals – highly educated, often very successful people who were interested in the philosophy and underlying principles of the Unity religion. The remaining 15% were drawn to the church because of its broadminded, openly accepting views and for the depth of its spirituality and the quiet time to meditate.

By 1995, the church dynamic had changed in his view to about a 60% stable core and 40% visitors and “floaters” from other denominations. By 2005, these numbers had reversed. As a sign of accommodation to the new demographic, in 2000 Unity brought Tim Henry to play jazz with a trumpet and bass. The general sentiment is that whatever type of music serves the
spiritual experience of the congregation is all right if the church keeps to the core of its message and principles.\textsuperscript{142}

Such fundamental change as that of the type of church music, propelled as it generally is by changing tastes of the congregation, probably hastens alteration in the make-up of a congregation because it has the double effect of driving away those who do not like the innovation and pulling in new people who do. In this regard, the phenomenon of “floaters” takes on a new dimension. From their inception, New Thought churches have attracted not only seekers and the curious, but also a contingent of members from other churches who appreciate the spiritual, philosophic, and nonjudgmental aspects of the New Thought denominations as a leavening to the dogma, ritual, parochialism, and even political incompatibility they may sometimes experience in their traditional or fundamentalist church. Such people will often go to services of both denominations on a Sunday, or may alternate Sundays, or even, for instance, go to Unity on Sunday and mass on Wednesday.\textsuperscript{143} Some floaters may eventually come over to Unity exclusively, but many continue to attend both churches not out of divided loyalty but because of a sense that worship at Unity expands their experience of the spiritual and even allows them to be tolerant of what they may feel are the negative aspects of their chosen religion because they also have an opportunity to worship in a venue where those aspects are absent and where God is perceived as close and accepting rather than far away and judgmental. Such

\textsuperscript{142} Toevs interview.

\textsuperscript{143} Norman interview.
people typically feel that attending New Thought services deepens their faith as an adherent of their chosen denomination.\textsuperscript{144}

Additionally, people are occasionally sent to the services of New Thought churches by professional therapists, usually in conjunction with treatment for depression, chemical dependency, or even smoking or weight control. Since the time of Emmet Fox’s influence on the Alcoholics Anonymous 12-step program, sharing in the New Thought perspective of an all-encompassing, non-judgmental spiritual perspective has been perceived as a valuable adjunct to clinical intervention. Social contact in a safe environment may also play a role. Regardless of the reasons, floaters comprise a pool of congregants whose needs, expectations, and tastes can have a material influence on a church over time.

A favorite service of Rev. White’s was the "Burning Bowl," usually done at the end of the year. For the Burning Bowl, congregants would write down on a piece of paper negative things that had affected them from the past year. They would then bring their papers to the front of the church and place them in a large bowl where they were burned. This symbolized the congregants’ recognition of the negativity, an activity to neutralize it, and a moving on leaving the negativity behind.\textsuperscript{145}

Rev. White served as Unity’s pastor for 23 years, from 1979 to 2002. He presided over a relatively stable era of the Church’s history characterized by measured changes in response to new needs. These changes, however, gave little hint of the turbulent times to come.

\textsuperscript{144} Vilma [last name omitted by request of interviewee], Conversation with author, 30 September 2006.

\textsuperscript{145} Toevs interview.
Charlotte Prossen

In 2002, Charlotte Prossen took over as minister at Unity Church. In the year 2000, Rev. Prossen was listed as minister in Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada, but by 2004 she had moved on to Hillsboro, Oregon. Rev. Prossen came from an Episcopalian background but had been with the Unity faith since 1968. At the time she came to the church in Wichita, about 100 congregants were attending the church regularly.

As sometimes happens through no fault of either the new minister or the congregation, the adjustment between Rev. Prossen and the Unity congregation did not go smoothly, and she did not finish her contract. Perhaps after so many years with Rev. White as pastor, the congregation had become accustomed to his style and his message. Where Rev. White was an excellent sermon maker, Rev. Prossen’s public speaking delivery was not as polished as the congregation was accustomed to hearing. In addition, with his preference for avoiding personal interaction, Rev. White may also have left church business to the members, in particular the Board of Directors. Some among them may have become used to a behind-the-scenes leadership position and were not ready to make alterations in the decision-making hierarchy.

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148 Lippert interview.

149 Toevs interview.
Part of the difficulty may have arisen because Rev. Prossen was inclined to be much more active than Rev. White had been. She wanted to make significant changes at Unity and had ambitious plans for doing so. One of her first actions was to have the church lit inside and out at all times. Previously the church was lit only for Sunday Services. She also began offering services and classes throughout the week instead of only on Sunday. Her rationale was that there was a "need to bring this building alive because basically it has sat empty six days a week. There's no sense in having empty buildings."

Her vision for the church was to provide a teaching ministry, to expand the membership, and to educate the public concerning the fact that Unity was a Christian church. In addition, she encouraged regular attendance by members of other churches in Unity classes.\textsuperscript{150} These goals sound admirable in many respects, but they may not have been to everyone’s liking. Sometimes when long-term church supporters are confronted with change in the organization they feel they have been a significant or even founding part of, and the change diverges from the established comfort they are accustomed to, such congregants become dissatisfied even if the changes are what they thought they wanted. For some or all of these reasons, and perhaps for others as well, when it became apparent that Rev. George Gardner would soon be available, Rev. Prossen was asked to step down as minister of Unity.\textsuperscript{151}

\textsuperscript{150} Lewis.

\textsuperscript{151} Toevs interview.
CHAPTER III: REV. GEORGE GARDNER

Rev. Gardner at College Hill Methodist

When he was a senior in high school George Gardner fell ill to polio. The illness left him with a slight limp, but neither dimmed his intellect nor dampened his energy or enthusiasm. In 1957 he graduated with a B.A. in Sociology and Radio/Television from the University of Kansas. He then attended Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University in Dallas and earned a Masters of Divinity degree. From 1960 to 1986 he served as pastor of several Methodist Churches in Wichita and south-central Kansas. From 1986 to 2002, he was minister at College Hill United Methodist Church. In 2002, he earned a Doctor of Divinity degree from the University of Creation Spirituality in Oakland, California.

College Hill was one of the largest and most politically liberal of Wichita’s Methodist congregations. Often guided by his heart, Rev. Gardner is remembered as a good minister, an excellent speaker, and a tireless worker for the spiritual health and well-being of his parishioners. His caring spirit was demonstrated when his friend and colleague, Charlie Harrison of Aldersgate United Methodist Church, died from an accident in 1999. Rev. Harrison had annually held services to bless parishioners’ pets as part of the celebration of the Feast of St. Francis of Assisi, the patron saint of animals. When Rev. Gardner found that


Aldersgate was no longer going to hold the service, he decided to take up the banner at College Hill. For the ceremony, animal owners brought their pets to church, or, if that was not possible, brought a picture of the pet. Rev. Teri Messner assisted Rev. Gardiner in blessing and saying a prayer for each pet. The service was a symbol of the unity of all creation and a celebration of the spiritual connection among all living things.155

Rev. Gardner was very progressive both spiritually and politically. Some went so far as to call him a renegade Methodist.156 In addition to his ministerial duties, he made a career of political activism, supporting such causes as civil rights, women’s reproductive freedom, gay rights, gun control, and abolition of the death penalty on the local, regional, and national levels.157 In the 1960s, Rev. Gardner joined civil rights demonstrations.158 In the 1960s and 1970s, he also had a local radio talk show on station KLEO called “The Wallpaper Session.”159 In his program, Rev. Gardner aired his interest in social issues by inviting speakers who were liberal and progressive more than the norm for Kansas.160 Reporters often turned to Rev. Gardner for quotable opinions to balance conservative views on such topics as abortion, gun

156 Lippert interview.
157 Gardner, Obituary.
158 Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
159 Gardner, Obituary.
160 Strongin.
control, or the death penalty.\textsuperscript{161} He also hosted a number of public interest programs for KAKE-TV.\textsuperscript{162}

One of Rev. Gardner’s signature characteristics was that if he cared enough about an issue to have an opinion on it, he cared enough to not only act on the opinion but to act to the fullest of his capacity. As an example, he not only was a proponent of gay and lesbian rights, but he performed same-sex marriages until the practice was banned by the Methodist hierarchy in 1998. At times it no doubt took great courage to brook the censure and weather the storms attendant on his political activism.

Rev. Gardner helped found the Kansas Religious Coalition for Reproductive Choice\textsuperscript{163} and in 1991 was on the front lines of the pro-abortion pickets during the first of several bitter abortion protests staged at abortion clinics in Wichita, in particular the clinic of Dr. George Tiller. Rev. Gardner was so prominent in the rhetoric of the event that he was quoted in \textit{Time Magazine}.\textsuperscript{164}

Rev. Gardner also involved his church in the struggle. He not only personally manned the picket lines during the protests but provided his College Hill church facilities as a an air-

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{162} Gardner, Obituary.
\textsuperscript{163} Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
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conditioned sanctuary and place of rest for other pro-choice protesters.\(^{165}\) This drew the attention of the anti-abortion group, which then picketed College Hill on Sunday mornings as parishioners were entering the church with their families to attend services. The protesters carried the graphic posters they displayed in front of Dr. Tiller’s clinic. During the services, Rev. Gardner counseled his congregation, "The challenge for us as Christians is to look in the faces of those who are surrounding our church and see the face of God."\(^{166}\)

Rev. Gardner was truly beloved and esteemed at College Hill Methodist, which for the most part supported him for his courage in acting on his convictions, though some were less pleased with the notoriety he had brought to their church. Rev. Gardner’s divorce from his wife of many years, however, added to this growing distress, and in 2002 he was pressured to retire as minister for College Hill.\(^ {167}\)

In spite of his resignation, many in the congregation still respected the leadership he had brought to the church and his success in increasing the membership of College Hill Methodist. They also liked him personally and enjoyed his charismatic sermons. For Rev. Gardner’s part, he was not wholly regretful about ceasing to be minister of College Hill church, claiming that to pastor a large church is much akin to being a corporate manager and can lead to loss of the inward life that is so important to a person for whom spirituality is central.\(^ {168}\)


\(^{166}\) Richard Crowson.

\(^{167}\) Lippert interview.

\(^{168}\) Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
Rev. Gardner at Unity Church

At the same time Rev. Gardner’s official association with College Hill was drawing to a close, the congregation at Unity was becoming increasingly dissatisfied with Rev. Charlotte Prossen. A number of floaters worshipped or participated in study or meditation groups at both churches, so the situation was well known within both church communities. When Rev. Gardner became available as a result of his retirement from College Hill, he was invited to become the spiritual leader of Unity and replace Rev. Prossen. Though Rev. Gardner was not a Unity member and many in Wichita considered him a radical, Unity accepted him wholeheartedly because Gardner maintained openness to all things spiritual, which is the emphasis of Unity.

One hundred congregants followed Rev. Gardner from College Hill to Unity, essentially into exile from Methodism. The newly melded Unity congregation fell in love with George Gardner, but the perennial question for those who followed him was “Am I Unity or am I Methodist?” The history and theology of Methodism is very different from that of Unity where there are no sacraments, no atonement, no belief in hell, no prescribed path to salvation. To become a Unity minister, Rev. Gardner had to renounce his Methodist credentials. He then began the process of preparing for ordination with Unity.

169 Lippert interview.
170 Toeys interview.
171 Lippert interview.
172 Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
173 Lippert interview.
174 Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
Rev. Teri Messner, an associate pastor at College Hill Methodist, followed Rev. Gardner to Unity.\textsuperscript{175} She had been campus minister at Wichita State University and was well aware of the need to deliver dynamic, drama-filled messages to people steeped in a culture dominated by 30-second sound bites and interactive video games.\textsuperscript{176} As the daughter of Dr. Jon Kardatzke (known in Wichita both as a physician and as the owner of the collection of antiquities that became the Museum of World Treasures)\textsuperscript{177} and the granddaughter of a pastor of the former First Church of God in Wichita,\textsuperscript{178} Rev. Messner’s family is well-known and socially well-connected in the city. In the past it was not uncommon to find Rev. Messner’s name in the Lifestyle or Celebrations section of the Wichita Eagle in connection with benefit dinners or society fundraisers. She also possessed a certain finesse and a classic attitude that allowed her to move in any social circle, which is a great advantage for a minister, and especially one such as Unity Church whose congregation includes many established and successful families.\textsuperscript{179}

The opinion of some was that George at his core was always Methodist, but he served the Unity congregation very well and was universally appreciated.\textsuperscript{180} In private, he even admitted not adhering to all the Unity teachings. In public and in his sermons, he did not say

\textsuperscript{175} Toevs interview.


\textsuperscript{177} Toevs interview.


\textsuperscript{179} Toevs interview.

\textsuperscript{180} Lippert interview.
that, however.\textsuperscript{181} He did admit to acquiring an increasingly ecumenical viewpoint, taking
inspiration for his sermons from many religious traditions besides Christianity. He claimed his
religious beliefs were not merely eclectic but continuously subject to change. By the time he
came to Unity, he felt he had gone as far as he could spiritually in Methodism and considered
himself more of a Zen Buddhist with shades of Hinduism and Christianity.\textsuperscript{182}

Unity emphasizes positive, practical Christianity based on the principles exemplified
and taught by Jesus, but it believes that other faiths and traditions can add depth and meaning to
these principles. For Unity believers, salvation is attainable in the here and now whenever
people turn in their minds from fear, anxiety, worry and doubt to love, harmony, joy and peace.
It considers heaven and hell to be states of consciousness rather than locations. These states are
created by a person’s thoughts, words and deeds. Unity stresses prayer, meditation and the
spoken word as ways to increase connection with God.\textsuperscript{183} Rev. Gardner found a kindred home
with Unity, and his ministry there advocated an acceptance of the view that not all religious
truth is found in the Bible and any spiritual path is good that produces benefits for the
individual.\textsuperscript{184}

associate minister from College Hill, held their first service as ministers of Unity Church. The
service was titled, "A New Day - New Vision" to indicate that the church was taking a new

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item\textsuperscript{181} Donna [last name omitted by request of interviewee], Conversation with author, June, 2007.
\item\textsuperscript{182} Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
\item\textsuperscript{183} Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
\item\textsuperscript{184} Lippert interview.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
focus on metaphysics, practical Christianity, and Interfaith worship. Rev. Gardner subsequently became involved with the International New Thought Alliance and spoke at the INTA Congress in 2003.

Rev. Gardner used a microphone to deliver his sermons, often leaving the dais and walking at the level of the congregation. His approach was warm and personal. “You are a unique and unrepeatable child of God,” was a favorite phrase that he used often in his sermons. His delivery was never strident, and he often infused his message with humor. Traditional religion, fundamentalist churches, and a literal view of creation were his particular objects of amusement. Besides religious literature, to enliven his sermons he was able to draw from a wide variety of secular sources such as poetry, children’s literature, best selling novels, movies, popular speakers, and bits from Broadway plays. He also had a sure sense of his audience and could move the congregation to laughter or to tears with equal ease. One of Rev. Gardner’s popular innovations was a sacred jazz service featuring a piano, saxophone, drums, and bass, which eventually drew more attendees with its festive atmosphere than the regular service later in the morning. Another well-received innovation was a separate weekly session that Rev. Gardner called “Practice” that he began as a way to explore deeper with the congregation into the message of the regular service and to discuss how to put the message into their everyday life.


186 Lippert interview.

187 Richard Crowson.

188 Abe Levy, “Charting a New Course.”
Rev. Gardner continued to promote his deeply held causes after joining Unity. Concurrent with his Unity ministry he accepted the position of Chaplain for Dr. George Tiller’s clinic, which specializes in abortions.¹⁸⁹ This was a separate employment from being minister at Unity and not connected to his duties there¹⁹⁰ except in the sense of ministering to the spiritual needs of those who came to the clinic.¹⁹¹

When Rev. Gardner joined Unity, church attendance had dropped to about 50 people with one service on Sunday. Two years later that number was edging toward 200, and he held two Sunday services. In addition, he led well-attended meditation and study groups and brought nationally recognized, though sometimes controversial, speakers to the church.

The year 2004 was a time of promise and of shock. In January, Unity celebrated its 50th anniversary of worship in the building at Oliver and 21st Street.¹⁹² Not long after, Rev. Gardner became very ill from cancer, and he passed away in October.¹⁹³ Rev. Gardner’s funeral was a great coming together at the Orpheum Theater. It was attended by 1500 people of all faiths whom Rev. Gardner had touched in his life and ministry.¹⁹⁴

Rev. Gardner’s death was devastating to the congregation, but Unity believes that we are spiritual beings, that God is in all including in one’s body, the doctors, and the medications,

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¹⁸⁹ Pearce.

¹⁹⁰ Lippert interview.


¹⁹² Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."

¹⁹³ Rev. Cynthia Lippert, Email to author, 12 December 2005.

¹⁹⁴ Abe Levy, "Charting a New Course."
and that death is a transition to another plane of existence. The congregation both individually
and as a whole went through a period of mourning and reassessment. During this time Rev.
Messner decided to leave Unity to pursue higher educational goals.

Rev. Gardner had been personally much beloved by the congregation, and for his sake it
had taken the brunt of bitter, sometimes vicious, criticism for his stand on reproductive choice
and his association with Dr. Tiller. Church finances had also become an issue. The
congregation wanted a person with a New Thought perspective to assume leadership of the
church, and was very happy when Rev. Gardner’s friend and colleague, Rev. Cynthia Lippert,
agreed to be interim pastor.\footnote{Lippert interview.} Thus ended a brief but colorful and incisive era in the history of
Unity Church, and it embarked on a new course in its spiritual journey.
CHAPTER IV: REV. CYNTHIA LIPPERT

Rev. Lippert at New Thought Community Church

Before Rev. Cynthia Lippert made the decision to devote her life to religious leadership, she held a career as a telecommunications executive. After studying New Thought and applying its principles in her life, she considered becoming ordained as a Unity minister but her family circumstances would not allow her to move from her home in Ohio to Unity Village for classes. She then looked for a way to become ordained in a denomination that embraced her beliefs but where she could study on a distance learning basis. In the mid 1990s, she began her minister’s education at the Divine Science Brooks Divinity School in Denver. During the time she was studying with Brooks Divinity School, a schism occurred in the denomination. Rev. Anne Kunath felt that the Brooks School was diluting the original Divine Science teachings and not presenting them in an authentic way. She left and founded United Divine Science in San Antonio, Texas, also forming her own church and ministerial school. Rev. Lippert followed Rev. Kunath and completed her studies in San Antonio with United Divine Science, becoming ordained in that denomination in June of 1999.

While Rev. Lippert was still living in Ohio, she had a dream that she was going to start a church in Clearwater. Her immediate response was, “Hallelujah! We’re going to Florida!” Then her husband got a job in Clearwater, Kansas, which was not quite what she had been anticipating, but she nevertheless went on to start a church in Wichita in October of 1999.

196 Lippert interview.
197 Sheets interview.
United Divine Science Church of Wichita met first in a banquet room in the Marriott Hotel. Rev. Lippert packed the house with her friends, about twenty people, for the first Sunday service. By the third Sunday, there were four people attending. Ironically, her lesson was, “How Big Is Your God?” She was ready to quit but possessed a strong sense of purpose and so persisted. New people arrived and the church grew. The early development of Rev. Lippert’s church was based on the strength of her personality. As the church gained in numbers, it coalesced around her vision. She had strong ideas, and brooked few challenges to the shape of her dream.

For awhile, only half a dozen people attended on any given Sunday. Rev. Lippert was something of a one-man band, using a great deal of humor in the beginning and even being something of a comedian. She had a boom box for the music, and the congregation would sing along. She did the greeting and the preaching and collected the offering and served refreshments and did everything else that needed to be done. When they got to their present location, behind the pulpit was a large stylized cross with candle sconces. Currently this cross is on a sidewall and the candles are lit during the service. But when Rev. Lippert was conducting services, the candles could not be lit for fear that her poofy hairdo might catch fire.

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198 Lippert interview.

199 Sprunger interview.

200 Barb Robison, Interview with author, 23 July 2006.

201 Sheets interview

202 Bertie Rush, Email to author, 16 August 2006.
From the beginning, a number of the congregants attended other churches as well, especially College Hill Methodist and Unity. Rev. Lippert was willing to meet people outside of church to discuss the teachings of Divine Science or deal with any other spiritual need. This cemented relationships with her church. Besides Rev. Lippert’s friends at the first service, other people began hearing of the services by word of mouth or from notices in the newspaper. United Divine Science also benefited from disaffection at Unity Church during Charlotte Prossen’s leadership, and several Unity members began attending UDS services instead.

For a couple years perhaps ten people would attend one week and four the next. The regulars got to know one another very well, but the church didn’t seem as though it was ever going to grow. When Rev. Lippert got a chance to lease space in the building the church presently meets in at Oliver and Central in 2001, this made a big difference. Some people had liked the hotel because they were comfortable there, and they didn’t want to come to the new building. But most of the congregation wanted to move and once in the new building, attendance began to grow. At this time the church was meeting in what is now the children’s room and had a total space of perhaps 1000 square feet divided into three rooms, which is about half what it is presently.

203 Rush email.  
204 Sheets interview.  
206 Fueling interview.
Rev. Lippert also became involved in the International New Thought Alliance (INTA) as a speaker and organizer. In the 85th Annual Congress held in San Antonio, Texas, in 2000, Rev. Lippert made a presentation titled “The joy of receiving world wide recognition for you and your church.”

Beginning in 2002 she served as a 2nd Vice President of the International New Thought Alliance Executive Board.

When Rev. Lippert first embarked on becoming a minister, her husband, Richard, decided he needed a hobby to occupy his free time. Richard loves cars, so he attended a race car driving school in California. He then started competing in regional and national races.

Though Richard does not attend church, he supports his wife in her calling. For her part, Rev. Lippert has found inspiration in her husband’s avocation. In the 91st Annual INTA Congress held in 2006, Rev. Lippert gave a workshop titled, "New Thought and the Art of Race Car Driving," and at the 92nd Annual New Thought International World Congress held in Phoenix in 2007, Rev. Lippert made a presentation titled, “New Thought and the Art of Race Car Driving.”

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Successful Race Car Driving,” where she described how winning race car drivers practice by nature what New Thought teaches.\textsuperscript{211}

Currently, Rev. Lippert is President of the International New Thought Alliance, serves on Unity's Journey of Renewal committee, is District President of the South Central Region of INTA, and is on the Board of Trustees for the Knox Center of Wichita, a multi-cultural alcohol and drug treatment center. She has been a guest speaker at each INTA Congress since 2000.\textsuperscript{212}

When the Wichita United Divine Science church became increasingly confused in the public’s mind with Scientology, they formed a vision group in 2001 and renamed it New Thought Community Church.\textsuperscript{213} This was a compromise, umbrella name, but the result was that they acquired ten new members immediately. The new name made a difference in public perception of the denomination.\textsuperscript{214}

At first the music was very traditional, mostly borrowings from Unity and other church-type music that had been adapted to New Thought. The service was also like a Unity service and far more traditional than now. Rev. Lippert performed all the parts of the service, including the meditation, which now other people can volunteer to do. From this traditional


\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{213} Sprunger, "Surprised By Purpose.”}

\footnotesize{\textsuperscript{214} Lippert interview.}
beginning, the service began to evolve a little at a time as the members began actively participating in the church.  

When the church moved to the building on Central and Oliver, it engaged a piano player to provide music. After about a year, this person left and Rev. Lippert asked Rev. Sprunger, who at the time was not yet a minister but studying to be a practitioner, if he could help in the search for another piano player. At that time, Diane Houseman was working at Menno Travel Service with Rev. Sprunger. Diane’s husband was part of the Wichita Theater community, so Rev. Sprunger asked her if she would inquire of her husband if he knew anyone who would like to play the piano at his church. She said she didn’t have to ask her husband because music is what she had studied at school and she would like to have the music director position.

Diane was soon doing all the music, and she developed a unique and dynamic music program. At one point she went to a New Thought music conference where she heard music that other people were experimenting with and playing. When she came back with the new music and ideas, it seemed to some congregants that moving away from a traditional musical presentation made Rev. Lippert uncomfortable. Nevertheless, the music changed, and the services became more animated.

Perhaps in part because of these changes, Rev. Lippert seemed to become restless with having to be at church every Sunday. In 2002, Rev. Sprunger was ordained with the intention of assisting Rev. Lippert. She took a vacation, and upon returning told him she

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215 Robison interview.
216 Sprunger interview.
217 Robison interview.
218 Sprunger interview.
was soon going to be leaving and was turning the church over to him. 219 Within a few months, Rev. Lippert announced her resignation to the congregation. 220 When Rev. Lippert left, attendance averaged around thirty people on a Sunday. 221 Since not all of the regular attendees would be at a service at any one time, this number translates to a regularly attending congregation of perhaps sixty or seventy.

**Rev. Lippert at Unity**

After retiring from New Thought Community Church in 2003, Rev. Lippert traveled extensively teaching and lecturing at a variety churches. 222 When Rev. Gardner became ill, he asked his friend and colleague, Rev. Lippert, to assume his duties as pastor at Unity Church. She and her husband had built a home in Arizona and were preparing to move, but they agreed to delay their plans in order to see Unity through its crisis.

Rev. Lippert bonded immediately with the Unity congregation. They found mutual sympathy and support for each other through the illness and death of their beloved friend and pastor. 223 In December of 2004, six weeks after Rev. Gardner’s passing, Rev. Lippert accepted the position of interim senior minister at Unity Church. 224 Her agreement with the congregation was that she would stay for six months to help the parishioners through their grief and to assist the

219 Robison interview.
220 Sprunger interview.
221 Sheets interview.
222 Lippert, "Seeding Your Way To Financial Freedom."
223 Lippert interview.
church in finding a new pastor. In addition to the congregants who had followed Rev. Gardner from College Hill Methodist, Unity has many long-term congregants, some going back fifty years. Though George Gardner was pastor of Unity for only two years, he had been a public figure in Wichita and a private friend of many Unity members for decades. These first months of 2005 were a time of sharing memories and “George stories” as the church became reconciled to going on without him.

As the six-month interim period drew to a close, the congregation gave Rev. Lippert many less-than-subtle hints that they wanted her to remain permanently as pastor of Unity. As many have done before, Rev. Lippert struggled with the call to serve. She and her husband had long dreamed of their move to Arizona, but her friend, George Gardner, had expressed his desire for her to follow him at Unity and the congregation now seconded that choice. At length, with her husband’s support, Rev. Lippert yielded to what she called “divine direction” and in July of 2005 became Unity’s permanent senior minister.

The congregation breathed a collective sigh of relief and gratitude, but more soul searching was in the offing. Rev. Gardner had brought spirit, innovation, and a vibrant message to Unity that could be shared across denominational and generational lines. From the strength of his charismatic personality, the congregation had put aside differences and comfortable old habits to follow the joyous fluting of their favorite Pied Piper. With George

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226 Lippert interview.

227 Pearce.

gone, Unity now had to decide if it were to retreat to the old ways or build on what he had brought to the church.

The congregation had grown to over 200, Sunday service attendance had doubled, and participation in church activities remained vigorous.²²⁹ This was the good news. The not-so-good news was that the fifty-year-old Unity building needed serious attention and the church had not operated in the black for twenty years. Many circumstances can contribute to a temporary deficit, such as the 1991 tornado that blew the roof off the main worship room causing great damage and destroying the grand piano. A twenty year shortfall, however, bespeaks fundamental errors in approach for an organization. Unity Church with Rev. Lippert at the helm rose to both challenges and embarked on a period of renewal.²³⁰

In 2006, volunteers began major remodeling of the basement, the youth and children’s areas, and the minister’s office. They also laid substantial portions of new carpet. The bathrooms were in particular need of updating. Volunteers installed new fixtures and tiled and painted these facilities. Professionals were hired to re-roof the church.

Coming from a business background, Rev. Lippert considered the financial aspect of Unity Church to be a critical challenge to be met and dealt with in a firm manner. As a New Thought minister, her approach and implementation were characteristic of a faith that believes in a spiritual aspect to all things, even the phenomena of money and prosperity. In New Thought, the injunction in Galatians 6:7 that “whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap” is taken as a literal statement of a spiritual law. In this view, if the church wants to receive more money for the spiritual support and benefits it provides, the first order of business is not

²²⁹ Pearce.

²³⁰ Lippert interview.
to plan fundraisers or ask congregants for more donations but to start giving in the same kind as the church wants to receive and in the amount – a tithe or tenth part – as specified in the Bible. In the case of Unity Church, this means giving a tenth part of its income to its sources of spiritual support, in particular the main Unity organization in Kansas City. This is not done in order to benefit Unity (though it does this as a side effect), but to create a greater circulation of prosperity to the Wichita church.

In the summer of 2004, Rev. Lippert had given a class on tithing, so this was an opportunity to put New Thought teaching to work. Previously, Unity Church had given five percent, but the church’s income kept dropping and eventually it gave up giving altogether. Not giving did not improve its financial picture, however, and its income continued to slide. Rev. Lippert believes that the tithing spirit must come from the church leaders, so she and the Board Treasurer began to move the board toward the ten percent tithing goal. The church began to project a strong prosperity message and ended 2005 in the black, for the first time in two decades. By 2006, Unity of Wichita not only tithed in spiritual giving but had added charitable giving as well putting its total contributions over ten percent. In spite of this its income has continued to grow. By 2007, the church had become a gold (second to the highest) level sponsor to Unity in Kansas City, which indicates a contribution of between $5000 and $10,000.

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231 Pearce.

232 Lippert interview.

233 Pearce.

Unity Church

Unity Church of Wichita is located at the southeast corner of Oliver and 21st Street just east of the Wichita State University golf course, which it faces. Parking is in the back of the building, and congregants enter through the back entrance rather than through what presents itself as the front of the church. This arrangement is convenient, non-ostentatious, and affords a degree of privacy and perhaps security. The general atmosphere of the church is muted and low-profile, as opposed to churches where the entrance dominates both the façade and much of the experience of attending church. This low-key sense is augmented by the 1950’s style architecture, which was its era’s vision of modernity but now seems dated, though familiar and comfortable.

The first interior space upon entering the church is the bookstore with New Thought and Unity volumes showcased for sale lining the wall on the left and display cases of church photographs and memorabilia on the right. The juxtaposition of educational and commercial aspects upon first entering the church impresses this two-fold theme upon the experience.

Worshippers pass through the bookstore by way of a large doorway into a commons area with chairs and tables. Coffee and refreshments are served from a counter at the far end. Five minutes before the service is to begin, many people are still gathered here in convivial conversation.

Passing through a hall from the commons area, one is greeted by a person at the door to the main worship room and given a service bulletin. Within, the comfortable pews made up of individual seats with arm rests – enough to seat perhaps 200 – are upholstered in mauve plush. A row of windows spanning the wall on the left is glazed with mauve-swirled stained glass, and the large front window panel displays a stylized golden sun on a mauve cloud background.
Arching, laminated-wood trusses span the room and support the ceiling. The walls are painted cinder block except for behind the dais, which is brick. Prints of various religious symbols decorate the brick wall: a cross, black-and-white yin/yang, menorah, Arabic script, and others. On the right side of the dais is a grand piano and drum set, while on the left is a large podium or lectern. The speaker addresses the congregation from the middle of the dais, and projects his or her voice with electronic sound amplification. No altar table is immediately evident, nor is there a choir, though a pianist plays a blues-style composition as congregants filter in and take their seats.

Attendance usually numbers upwards of 100 people, at least 80% of whom are over 50. About 10% of the congregation is black and another 10% Asian. Women outnumbered men by about two to one. Since there is a separate service and Sunday school for children, few children are present. Dress is generally on a par with what might be termed business casual – comfortable but not sporty.

Service begins at 10 a.m. and takes about an hour and a half. This service time is an alteration from times past when there were a 9 a.m. and an 11 a.m. service. This change has caused many people accustomed to going to the 9 a.m. service at Unity and then the 11:00 a.m. service at another church to have to decide which church they would attend. Perhaps this was a calculated move on the part of Unity.

Reverend Lippert speaks in a sincere, conversational manner. She directs the service with confidence, and, since most of the congregants seem to be regulars, the songs and order of service are very familiar to them. In addition to Sunday service, Unity offers a variety of weekly meditation classes as well as book studies, art and craft classes, health strategies, and
game activities. The book store and art gallery featuring local artists is open to the public from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m., Monday through Friday. Unity is also active in gathering food and clothing for the Wichita Food Warehouse and serving meals at local shelters.

In one respect, Rev. Lippert has turned 180 degrees from Rev. George Gardner’s approach by not continuing the political activism aspect of his ministry. In spite of coming from a political family background, she does not believe in promoting or taking a political stance from the pulpit. Instead, she feels that in church people should be brought together rather than divided. In part this no doubt represents Rev. Lippert’s personal perspective, but in part it may also reflect a move away from the radical grass-roots activism that characterized the latter half of the twentieth century.

Political activism is not the only area in which Rev. Lippert made a significant break with the past. She was raised in a fundamentalist faith but rejected that in favor of the principles of New Thought. Her original choice of New Thought denomination was Unity, but ordination through Divine Science proved more feasible. Though she founded a Divine Science church, when it began to exhibit the radical independence characteristic of Divine Science, she left, but was later lured back to Unity, her first choice and a denomination with a more defined structure both for the organization as a whole and for the relationship between the congregation and its pastor. This sequence of events and choices supports the idea that though

235 Pearce.


237 Pearce.

238 Lippert interview.
people may change their theology and even teach their new insight to others, they will tend, if possible, to practice and express their beliefs within a structure that is familiar, comfortable, and comprehensible to them in its dynamics.
CHAPTER V: BRENT SPRUNGER AND NEW THOUGHT COMMUNITY CHURCH

At the heart of New Thought is a minimalist creed, a simple system of beliefs that make optimistic idealism credible.\textsuperscript{239}

Rev. Brent Sprunger

Rev. Brent Sprunger was raised in the Mennonite church in a small town in Indiana. His grandparents, who lived next door, often entertained Mennonite missionaries from all over the world who told stories of their experiences and of the difficulties converts from other religious faiths encountered when they converted to Christianity. He credits these stories with instilling in him a wanderlust and lifelong love of travel. Perhaps they also prepared him for his own experience in changing to a different religious belief from the Mennonite.

The summer before going to college, Rev. Brent experienced a spiritual awakening. One of the ministers at his church told him he would be at the pulpit someday. Just out of high school, Rev. Brent gave little thought to this idea until many years later when he actually became a minister. He was accepted at Wheaton, a Christian college in Illinois, but discovered that attendance at the college presupposed joining the ROTC. As a pacifist, he refused the Wheaton offer and went instead to Goshen College, a Mennonite school in Goshen, Indiana.

After college, Rev. Sprunger talked to a travel agent in Goshen about going into that business because of his interest in travel. After some thought, however, he decided to manage a bookstore owned by the Mennonite Church in his hometown. After several years at the bookstore he went into a family business. Four years later he happened to hear that the

\textsuperscript{239} Anderson, 6.
Mennonite-owned Faith in Life Bookstore in Newton needed a manager, so he took that position and moved his family to Kansas. By coincidence, next door was the Menno Travel Service travel agency managed by the same man whom he had visited in Goshen years before.

After six years at the bookstore, he grew impatient with denominational politics and went to work for the Menno agency. This event was an occasion for a second spiritual awakening for Rev. Sprunger as he contemplated the circuitous route he had taken and the people whose paths he crossed and recrossed to get to his destination.

Though the Mennonite Church is Rev. Sprunger’s religious ground, he began seeking a deeper spirituality among New Age groups. Then a friend told him that a new church called United Divine Science was starting up in Wichita at the Marriott Hotel, and he ought to visit it. He did and discovered it expressed what he had come to know as his own truth.

Rev. Sprunger began helping at the church and then taking Divine Science classes in San Antonio. He became a practitioner and then studied to become a minister. The classes were not the in-depth academic training of a mainstream denomination three-year seminary, but they were a practical education in the beliefs of the denomination and the responsibilities of a pastor.

In June of 2003, Rev. Sprunger was ordained with the intention of helping Rev. Cynthia Lippert as an associate pastor in the Wichita church. Within several months, Rev. Lippert announced that she was leaving and Rev. Sprunger was taking over the church. By this time the church had changed its name to New Thought Community Church and was meeting at its present location at Oliver and Central.

Rev. Sprunger was apprehensive but at the same time elated at the prospect of going on his own so early in his pastoral career. For a year after Rev. Lippert left, attendance at the church remained about the same, but then new people began arriving. In September of 2005, the
business in an adjacent suite of rooms moved out, and the church was offered this additional
space at a good rate if the congregation donated their labor to do the needed renovation. They
agreed and began ripping out walls, making new doorways, and rebuilding room interiors. When
the renovation was complete, the church consisted of a greeting area, a children’s room, a small
library, the minister’s office, and a spacious worship space. New Thought Community Church
does not have deep pockets or big budgets. It functions on what people give month to month.
Rev. Brent was concerned about doubling the rent and paying for renovations, but he felt called
to improve and enlarge the church, and the money flowed in for the project.

Though a Mennonite, Rev. Sprunger’s father is supportive of his son’s involvement and
leadership at New Thought Community Church. Others in his family have been less accepting.
One cousin told him that he had sold out to the devil, and he wanted nothing more to do with
him. Rev. Sprunger recalls what the missionary visitors to his grandparents’ house had told
about new converts in other cultures being shunned by their family.

Rev. Sprunger teaches that God is literally all – omnipresent, omniscient, omnipotent, all-
loving. He also stresses a particular discipline of thought and speech. One aspect of this
discipline is paying attention not only to how one thinks but to the reflection of what one
believes through language. He gives the example that when people talk about how God is going
to do this or that in their life or how God is working through them, they are still seeing separation
between themselves and God and between others and God. In the Divine Science faith, God not
only works through a person but as the person.

Another aspect of the discipline derives from a belief that both thoughts and speech
contribute on a spiritual level to shaping the life a person experiences. It is important, then, to be
aware of metaphors and other figures of speech that express an idea we don’t really want in our
life. A simple example is to say, “I’m afraid you have the wrong number,” because this expresses an unreasonable fear. Better is to say, “I think you have the wrong number.” Other negative metaphors follow such forms as: something gives someone a pain, they’re sick or tired of something, they can’t afford something when they really mean they don’t want to spend that much, and so forth. New Thought asks the question: Do we really want to have a pain, or be sick, tired, or lacking in resources? Before psychology became a science and demonstrated empirically that the subconscious mind tends to process and act on literal meanings, New Thought teachers were saying that spiritually we shape our future with our words and thoughts. For this reason, Rev. Sprunger encourages a sort of plain speech in the sense of being specific and accurate in verbal expressions rather than metaphoric.

Rev. Sprunger admits that sometimes the Divine Science perspective on the relationship between human beings and the divine still seems a little strange because, as he says, his mind occasionally plays back the old Mennonite tapes about a judgmental God, sin, hellfire, and the devil. He has chosen another path, but habits of belief, like other habits such as speaking in metaphors, require conscious effort to change.²⁴⁰

Though Rev. Sprunger came from a conventional religious background, he has been willing to listen to people in the congregation and let the church develop after its own fashion.²⁴¹ This flexibility of approach, which allows others to be a vital part of the evolution of the church, has critical for the success of the church.

²⁴⁰ Sprunger interview.

²⁴¹ Robison interview.
New Thought Community Church

New thought Community Church meets in a one-story, tan brick commercial building just south of Central and Oliver. This location assures a drive of less than half an hour from any point in the city. The church is not the only tenant of the building; a modeling agency and the Sedgwick County Department of Health also lease suites of rooms.

The neighborhood around the church is a stable, middle class area composed of a mix of small bungalows dating perhaps to the thirties intermingled with one-story red brick apartments from the early forties’ housing boom that provided residences for aircraft workers during World War II. Just to the north of the building is a small, well-patronized Dillons’ grocery store. The more upscale College Hill residential area begins on the other side of Oliver Street.

A central hall running through the building gives interior access to the church. Entrances at either end of the hall open onto ample parking in both front and rear. The first room upon entering the church is a small foyer with a table of literature against the opposite wall and coffee and refreshments to the side. Those who partake are expected to put a dollar in a small vase.

To the right is a spacious room for children. Next is a lending library of several hundred New Thought and related books and CDs. Since the library is stocked from donations, the range of subject matter is eclectic. Next to the library is the pastor’s office, and to the left is the worship room. On the walls of the foyer, library, and office are original works of art produced by members of the church. In the worship room are a full-size reproduction of a painting from a European cathedral depicting monks in a prayerful attitude and a four-foot wrought iron cross with sconces for candles at the ends of the beams and in the center. The candles are lit before the service begins and extinguished when it ends. Seating accommodates perhaps a hundred congregants, though it is seldom full. The plush chairs were donated by the United Divine
Science church of San Antonio, Texas. In a small recess to the back and right of the congregation is the sound equipment.

To the front of the worship area is a raised dais with a piano on the right and a set of drums on the left. In the middle is a lectern and table with a vase of flowers. Besides piano and drum, the music is accompanied by guitar, base guitar, and voice. Music is an important and integral part of the service at New Thought Community Church. Where Unity tends toward jazz and blues, New Thought Community Church music leans more toward country, bluegrass, and contemporary music with an emphasis on a new genre of New Thought songs and music. In addition to a regular vocalist and musical group, there is also usually a guest vocalist and occasionally a guest group.

The congregation of New Thought Community Church is a diverse group characterized more by qualities of temperament than by socioeconomic or other factors. Mostly white, mostly hailing from a mainline Christian background, mostly in the mid-ranges of age and income, these demographic aspects are almost incidental compared to shared personality traits of individualism and nonconformity. Many of the congregants are in the arts, some to acclaim. A rule or doctrine that has been handed down as gospel on account of antiquity or authority makes little impression on most of the members of this congregation. They are spiritual seekers who are looking for answers that make sense to them, and they see themselves as on a spiritual path, implying a constant state of progression or exploration of ideas and experiences. They take for granted that no one is on quite the same path as anyone else. Diversity is, therefore, accepted, and some who
might draw criticism elsewhere for their background or circumstances find a safe haven at New Thought Church.\textsuperscript{242}

A Divine Science congregation does not look for rules to live by or ways to define themselves or systems of belief to subscribe to or even ways to shelter themselves from the buffets of life by creating theological defensive walls. What they generally seek in spirituality is methods of enhancing life. These can be learned as easily in individual or small group study as in a church setting. The reason for this group’s coming together as a church is the social impulse, the desire to be in the company of others who think and believe in the same way.\textsuperscript{243} The word “community” as part of the church’s name is intended to express this concept.\textsuperscript{244}

Very few people who attend a New Thought church were raised in the faith. Almost without exception they come from another religious (or nonreligious) background. Most adhered to the tenets, if in an uncrystallized form, of New Thought before they ever found a New Thought church. Congregants often report having felt as though what they believed was so outside the pale of the generality of belief that they could never talk about it with another person. Sharing an expression of their convictions without risk of condemnation or ridicule is not something many thought they would ever be able to do.\textsuperscript{245}

Because New Thought attracts individuals for personal reasons and because they often come to it later in life, families with young children do not make up as large a proportion of the congregation as in many churches where young couples are drawn to the denomination in

\textsuperscript{242} Sprunger interview. \\
\textsuperscript{243} Norman interview. \\
\textsuperscript{244} Robison interview. \\
\textsuperscript{245} Sheets interview.
particular because of the family orientation. Unity and Religious Science have each developed children’s literature, but Divine Science with its more philosophic focus and fewer numbers has not taken up this calling. New Thought Community Church provides a large room with tables and chairs for the children of parents who want to attend the services.\textsuperscript{246} It has recently embarked on its own children’s educational program, and in the summer of 2007 held a vacation church school called Indigo Summer. Rev. Sprunger would one day like to develop a full teaching program for the New Thought Community Church’s youngest members.

New Thought Community Church has tried several methods of attracting new members including paid advertising and announcements in the newspaper. These are expensive, however, and their track record for gaining congregants does not seem to support the cost. At present the church is not even listed in the telephone book, and its only advertising is the modest sign in front. The principal way the church has acquired its membership is through word of mouth. People of like mind have a way of finding each other.

Divine Science officially recognizes only the sacrament of marriage but not communion because the ideal of the Divine Science faith is to be in constant communion with God, not just at the time of the communion rite. Baptism is also not an official sacrament of the faith. In point of practice, however, Rev. Sprunger has held communion services jointly with Unity Church and has baptized infants at the request of parents. He feels that if these rites are meaningful to the participants, then they have spiritual value.\textsuperscript{247}

The only ritual that Rev. Sprunger identifies within Divine Science practice is the Sunday service, which functions as ritual because it follows a consistent pattern. The order of songs, \footnote{Sprunger interview.}

\footnote{Rev. Brent Sprunger, email to author, 20 November 2007.}
music, announcements, meditation, and sermon (called the lesson in a Divine Science service) has deviated little from the beginning of the church, and the congregation is very accustomed to this cadence.

Besides the Sunday service, a practitioner program, usually with meetings once a week, is available for those who would like to study Divine Science in more depth. The training results in licensure as a practitioner qualified to apply the denomination’s healing methods and to counsel and teach others. Prayer is also an important part of Divine Science practice, though it is conceived in a different light from most other denominations. In New Thought, prayer is not a supplication to a distant God but recognition of the innate divinity and perfection in the person or circumstance being prayed for. 248

Rev. Sprunger’s vision for his congregation is unique among churches as well. His main goal is for people to know their dreams and follow them – even if this means they leave the church. New Thought Community Church isn’t a place to hold people, says Rev. Sprunger. It’s a place to launch people. 249

248 Sheets interview.
249 Sprunger interview.
CHAPTER IV: NEW WINE IN OLD SKINS

*Evander, in exile from Arcadia, came to the Latin fields,*
*And brought his gods with him aboard ship. – Ovid*  

From the earliest roots with the Fillmores, Hopkins, and others, New Thought groups have depended greatly on floaters to engage participants and attract people who eventually become adherents. This dynamic has probably played a role in the development of many religions, large and small, including the early Christian church when it began forming Gentile congregations. Factors of population density and religious plurality are also conducive to the formation of small, nonmainline churches in an urban setting. An additional requirement, however, is the appeal that the leader of the church has for the congregation, a quality that trumps even attraction to the church’s theology. New Thought principles can be studied and applied in solitude, so adherents do not need an organized institution to learn and practice their beliefs. They attend church for other reasons, and the pastor, through both direct means of communication and indirect means of organization, plays a greater proportionate role in the success of such a church than for the mainline institutions.

George Gardner presents a case in point. His personal appeal and charismatic sermons increased church membership at both College Hill Methodist and Unity in spite of the divisiveness and negative publicity accrued to his political activism. Cynthia Lippert and Brent


Sprunger seem also to have this quality for their congregations, but some of Unity’s earlier pastors did not and the church declined in membership during their tenures.

The reverse can also be the case. A New Thought church leader may accept the post due to affinity with the congregation in spite of avowed theological belief elsewhere. Methodist George Gardner again illustrates this point. Even Cynthia Lippert was not Unity when she became pastor of the church but was ordained in Divine Science and indeed had founded a Divine Science church.

For a small church congregation in an urban area, the draw is largely enjoyment of the church-going experience. The appeal of the pastor, the message, the service, the other people, and the music all play proportional, perhaps surprisingly equal, parts. For a small church pastor, a similar litany pertains to which is added inducement of the role of leader. In a small outlier denomination, being pastor – and even more so being founder – of a church includes an opportunity for creative expression on the plane of social organization. Unity of Wichita’s first spiritual leader, Mabel Schopf, illustrates this abundantly. We can ascertain from the historical record that she founded Unity study groups and small churches in five cities (Decatur, Wichita, Omaha, Lincoln, and Buffalo) during the fourteen years of her church activity traceable through Unity archives. Mabel clearly demonstrates a desire, capacity, and ability for leadership, and she found in Unity an approach to religion that was portable, that she could carry with her on a moment’s notice without the encumbrance or expense of a special facility, religious materials, or other accoutrements of an established denomination. For a religiously ambitious woman of the early twentieth century who also had commitments to home and family, Unity made a perfect match.
Ministers who take over leadership of an established church have in some respects more options with regard to the organizational aspect of their churches than founders who must, by definition, create the organization. Some, like George Gardner and Marlyn White, seem to allow the existing organizational machinery to run on its own. Others, like Charlotte Prossen, want to make organizational changes but clash with board and congregation and are either not strong enough or not well enough liked to carry the day. Still others, like Cynthia Lippert at Unity, are much more adroit at enlisting participation in change.

Of founders, the record indicates that in spite of fundamental changes in their theology from the beliefs in which they were raised, the tendency of founders is to structure their denomination or church on a pattern accessible and familiar to them. They may not know or conceive of any other organizational pattern than that of their native faith, or they may still perceive the old organization as optimal and simply impose the new theology onto it. From a rational standpoint, giving new congregants a familiar religious berth is probably a good way to maximize acceptance and attendance by new adherents at a time when they are abandoning the old sureties that had promised, most likely, the one true path to eternal salvation. To take a new path constitutes a spiritual risk of proportions not to be underestimated. A familiar setting no doubt works to allay the anxiety that must occasionally arise even in those who are intellectually sure of commitment to their new faith.

Church leaders can experience the same apprehensions over change in faith as new adherents. For them, creating a familiar structure may also work to allay disquiet. In the case of Cynthia Lippert, we see a slight extension of the pattern. Her background is not only religious but also from business. The previous pastors did not seem to be particularly distressed about Unity’s financial shortfalls, and the church persisted in its spiritual path almost without regard to
the red ink. Upon becoming permanent pastor, however, Rev. Lippert immediately made finances a priority because not to do so would probably cause her anxiety. The congregation rallied around her new program, applied the principles of their faith, and with a will turned around the church’s financial picture in a remarkably short period of time. Though the individual congregants certainly had input and influence in this progression of events, the role of the pastor in establishing the direction of a church is clearly pivotal.

Outwardly, Rev. Sprunger seems to be the exception to the theory that when people change their theological beliefs they will still tend to gravitate to a church that resembles their original church in its structure. Divine Science with its near lack of structure except that imposed by the congregation on itself is a long way from the clear, even dogmatic, structure of the Mennonite church. Perhaps Rev. Sprunger’s early exposure to missionaries who described many alternatives in religious belief left him with a more flexible mode of thinking. Perhaps his affinity for travel is an expression of desire not only for geographical travel but also for theological and spiritual travel. Perhaps also his long and eventually trying experience with Mennonite church politics loosened his appreciation for this mode of organization as a means of promoting a sense of security.

From another perspective, however, his experience of “the old tapes playing” may be less a result of concern over New Thought theology, in which he seems confirmed, and more along the lines of a sort of culture shock of leaving the old, dependable limits of Mennonite life in favor of the spiritual freedom but also near total lack even of guidelines of Divine Science. He is quite aware that the people who are the mainstay of the congregation and regularly attend New Thought Community Church services do so precisely because it is a freeform church. So far from comforting them, limits of any sort very quickly make these people uneasy and in search of
escape. Even the mention of a membership list makes many among them cringe. There is no official membership because the congregation does not want one. Their feeling, and Rev. Sprunger’s as well, is that if a person walks in the doors on a Sunday morning, it is their church. Even so, he sometimes expresses concern that in order for the church to survive and grow in the long term, it will need an official membership, money-raising mechanisms, and the other accompaniments of organized religion. He maintains that official organization is part of doing business on this planet. Whether aware of it or not, he would, if it were possible, reorganize the church – the nonconformist church of his choice that he became ordained in – along traditional lines, perhaps even on Mennonite lines.

Whether the tension that so far resides at a low level within New Thought Community Church will remain there or escalate is a story not yet written. Although New Thought may indeed be about new thoughts, it takes up residence in the same old human nature, one aspect of which is a desire for community. The structure of that community depends on peoples’ backgrounds and motivations. It is constantly in flux, shaped and reshaped by new people, new ideas, and new leaders. Amid this sense of being new, the old traditions may retreat but are never fully abandoned. Like Ovid’s Evander, we may sail to new lands, but we carry our old gods with us.

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252 Sprunger interview.
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### APPENDIX A

**CHRISTIAN BELIEF SYSTEMS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Orthodox (Judaic)</th>
<th>Gnostic (Platonic)</th>
<th>New Thought (Esoteric)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The essential nature of human beings – the imperishable part, the seat of consciousness and identity – is spiritual.</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human beings inherited the earth, which God gave them stewardship over and which was intended to be a paradise.</td>
<td>Human beings have become ensnared in an alien world of matter.</td>
<td>Human beings are independently thinking and acting parts of God who have descended into the world of matter to experience the material state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human beings are weak and sinful and have destroyed the paradise and become prey to evil forces.</td>
<td>Human beings have lost their memory and are preyed upon by the evil forces.</td>
<td>Human beings have temporarily lost their memory so that they may fully interact with the material world, which is also a construct of God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When the spirit is released from the body at death, it has an opportunity to escape the otherwise inevitable judgment of God and go either directly to heaven or to a place of rest until the earth shall be renewed.</td>
<td>When the spirit is released from the material body at death, it has an opportunity to escape its ensnarement and return to the spiritual realms from whence it came.</td>
<td>When the spirit is released from the material body at death, it has an opportunity to make the transition from the earthly state and return to communion with God.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus descended into the world to teach the knowledge of how to gain heaven and also to demonstrate that a human being can live a life free of weakness and sin.</td>
<td>Jesus descended into the world to teach human beings the knowledge of how to escape from matter.</td>
<td>Jesus descended into the world to teach the knowledge of the true nature of human beings and to aid the spiritual progress of those ready to receive his message.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jesus gave himself as the perfect sacrifice for remittance of the sins of humanity.</td>
<td>Jesus did not resist death because the ultimate good is to be released from the evil of matter and return to the spiritual realm.</td>
<td>Jesus did not resist death because it merely signals a change of state.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To escape God’s judgment and punishment, a human being must acknowledge Jesus’ sacrifice.</td>
<td>To escape from matter, a human being must traverse a mystical gap between the material world and the realm of spirit that requires certain knowledge on the person’s part and a move toward union from the other side.</td>
<td>Most human beings, regardless of religious persuasion or lack thereof, successfully transition to the realm of spirit as a matter of course. A few temporarily do not realize their change of state and persist as ghosts, and a few utterly reject their connection to God and are eventually subsumed back into the All.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Christ guaranteed salvation and reinstatement either in heaven or in the earthly paradise to come for those who have faith that he died on the Cross to redeem their sins.</td>
<td>Christ guaranteed union with the spiritual realm for those who know the passcode: “I am from the realm of spirit, and I return to my home.”</td>
<td>Christ guaranteed reunion with God for all who desire it.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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253 Some denominations believe in immediate judgment and some in “soul-sleep” until a final judgment.

254 Some denominations believe that “saved” souls go to heaven in a spiritual form and some believe that they will be given a new body and a new life on a renewed, perfect earth.

255 Anthony Gythiel, *Gnosticism*, History course, Fall 2006, Wichita State University, Wichita, Kansas.

256 Anderson, 41.
APPENDIX B
HISTORY OF NEW THOUGHT

Adapted from INTA chart (no longer available), http://www.newthoughtalliance.com/newthought.htm