

## **THE STORY OF OUR CHURCH BANNERS IN THE SANCTUARY**

The history of the banners hanging in the sanctuary of First Unitarian Church of St. Louis is one of creative activity shared by many members. They were all made in community, as they are shared in community.

The first set of banners – the Holiday banners – were designed in the 1970's by Mary Lynn Brophy and Helen Meatte, both of whom were professional graphic designers. The design elements were cut out and sewn together by women of the church.

Around 1990, Karen Albin Edmonds decided we needed something more festive for the Easter season and designed the flower set still in use, which features local spring blossoms. After she designed the patterns and cut out all the felt pieces, she gathered a church work crew in her studio to help assemble each banner. The laughter-filled banner-making gatherings connected us in a new way, and we all cheered when they were finally hung.

A few years after that, Karen decided we needed a set for fall, to be hung each year on Homecoming Sunday. She also wanted to involve more of the congregation in the process. Autumn leaves were the obvious motif with which she could create a process for an all-church project. She created a set of printing blocks based on actual leaves, then painted paler neutral backgrounds on canvas, which would help lighten up the sanctuary on those gray autumn days.

One Homecoming Sunday during Coffee Hour in Fellowship Hall, the painted canvases were laid out on tables, each with its appropriate color paint in a pie tin. All in attendance that day were invited to hand-stamp a leaf. Karen had asked other artists in the church to help, so each table had a creative overseer keeping an eye on the process and guiding the many hands block-printing the leaves. The youngest (2-year-olds) to the most senior among us took part. Each person created a leaf print on each of the banners. We had two services at that time, so after the first Coffee Hour group left, the paint had time to dry before we turned the panels over and the second Coffee Hour attendees repeated the process on the other side.

The next Sunday the leaf banners were in place in the sanctuary. They continue to remind us to celebrate not only the changing of the seasons but also the church community both past and present. (Written by Karen Albins – 2019)