

JUBILEE! COMMUNITY OVERVIEW & HISTORY

OVERVIEW

Jubilee! is a spirit-led faith community that honors all spiritual paths, all peoples and Earth. Grounded in Creation Spirituality, Jubilee!'s inclusive Sunday Celebrations joyfully express the divine mystery through music, creativity, laughter, compassion and inspiring messages. Jubilee! is a participatory community that is strongly committed to social and environmental justice, working together to create a compassionate, just and sustainable world.

Vision

Jubilee! envisions an equitable, sustainable world where all life thrives and is renewed in sacred love, compassion and joy.

Mission

As a compassionate and inclusive spiritual community, Jubilee! celebrates the divine mystery in all of creation and calls each of us toward a heart-centered, compassionate, equitable and sustainable way of living and being.

Values

- Reverence for all creation
- Original blessing (rather than original sin)
- Compassionate engagement with and advocacy for all life
- Generous collaboration to serve the greater good of our community and earth
- Laughter, music, creativity and hope
- Welcoming everyone to our Sunday Celebrations
- Creating safe space for all to thrive physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually
- Receiving the creative gifts and wisdom of the whole community
- Nurturing the growth and ongoing transformation of all adults and children
- Holding celebrations and gatherings that are participatory, inspirational and creatively energizing
- Creating rituals to honor important transitions and moments in our lives, community and cosmos
- Keeping the main thing the main thing

Affirmations

- We believe all creation reveals and expresses the Divine
- We hold that diversity of faith enriches our community
- We love and respect all life with all our hearts, minds, bodies and spirits
- We are originally blessed by the Creator and called to co-create blessing in this world
- We accept the wisdom and teachings of all spiritual traditions
- We know that the Creator continually calls us to be who we are created to be
- We live our faith through compassion, forgiveness and justice
- We practice community service, proportional financial support of Jubilee!, and outreach giving as spiritual disciplines
- We accept that living faith must grow and change

HISTORY

Planting the Seeds

On a Sunday night in May 1984, Rev. Howard Hanger (then on the staff of Central United Methodist Church in Asheville) gathered together a small group of people in the church's basement to explore creative new ways to celebrate the divine mystery. Among them were a dancer, a storyteller, a couple of theatre people, a poet, several musicians, two graphic artists, and others.

Howard had written what he titled "Seeds of Celebration," eight different themes with accompanying quotes from the scriptures. He presented these to the group and they spent the next several hours brainstorming how these Seeds could be presented in dance, song, poetry, and other expressive ways. They knew from the outset that they wanted the whole process to be as participatory as possible. Before the night was over, they had outlined plans for celebrating each of the Seeds.

The First Jubilee! Celebrations

Just two weeks later, Central United Methodist Church opened its basement doors for the first of the series of creative ventures dubbed "Jubilee! Celebrations" (from the ancient Hebrew celebration of Jubilee, a time of restoration, balance, and freedom — a time in which everyone can find their home).

Throughout that first summer, about 75 people attended each of the eight Jubilee! Celebrations. The Celebrations were so popular that they were repeated each summer for the next five years. Each year, the number of people attending continued to grow. The impetus and interest were soon there for the Celebrations to continue year-round. Jubilee!'s spiritual expression had grown well beyond the doctrines of the Methodist church, and it was time to go out on its own.

Jubilee! achieves Moves to 46 Wall Street

In 1989, Jubilee! Community was incorporated as an inclusive non-denominational church offering creative alternatives to traditional Sunday services.

Jubilee! found and rented an old nightclub at 46 Wall Street in downtown Asheville. After some repairs to the building, Jubilee! Community held its first celebration in August.

Jubilee! purchased the building in 2000, fully aware by then of the structure's faults and limitations. They knew from experience and observation that it was desperately in need not just of repair, but of a complete renovation, which was completed in March 2006.

Ordination of Eleven Jubilee! Ministers

On Aug. 19, 2012, Jubilee! ordained its first two new ministers in a ceremony that included leaders from a number of Asheville-area faiths, including Episcopal, Baptist, Buddhist, Presbyterian, Jewish, United Church of Christ and Unitarian-Universalist representatives. These two ministers formed Jubilee!-inspired communities in their own regions:

- Rev. Candace Chellew-Hodge, associate pastor at Garden of Grace UCC in Columbia, SC, who now leads Jubilee! Circle in Columbia.
- Rev. Chris Andrews, pastor for 22 years of of the largest Methodist Church in Louisiana, who now leads Jubilee Pioneers in Baton Rouge.

During the next years, Jubilee! ordained nine more ministers:

- Daniel Barber, Minister of Music & Ritual
- Barbara Brady, Minister of Teaching
- Jacquelyn Dobrinska, Minister of Community Wellness

- Yona Frenchhawk, Minister of Native American Ritual
- Vicki Garlock, Minister of Education
- Jay Joslin, Minister of Ritual, Teaching and Counseling
- Justin Martin, Minister of Ritual
- Alba Onofrio, Evangelist
- Cathryn Davis, Minister of Movement

Jay Joslin and Yona FrenchHawk continue as ministers at Jubilee! in Asheville, regularly participating in the community's Sunday Celebrations, and other rituals and ceremonies.

A Successful 30+ Years

The Jubilee! community continued to grow to nearly 600 members (called Jubilants), holding two Sunday Celebrations each week. A wide variety of teams were formed to address the spiritual needs of the community, the environmental and social justice needs of the world, and artistic expression of Jubilee!'s members. Jubilee!'s own in-house band, the World Beat Band, provided a wide range of upbeat spiritual and secular music every week. The Jubilee! Singers and individual community members shared gifts of song, poetry, dance, storytelling and other creative expressions at Sunday Celebrations. A "Nurture Program" was created to support the spiritual growth of the community's children.

During this time, Jubilee's spiritual expression was increasingly informed by Creation Spirituality and its concept of Original Blessing. Outreach giving became an important part of Jubilee!'s culture, with the community donating over \$2 million since its inception to non-profit service organizations that directly support unhoused, low-income and underserved individuals and families in Asheville and beyond.

Jubilee! had a formal membership program called "Pathways to Membership" which was disbanded during the pandemic. Jubilee!'s bylaws provide that anyone 13 and older who has gone through Pathways or is active in the community and/or supports it financially is a member. Thus, all adult Jubilants are by default members. There is no accurate membership log at this time.

Howard's Retirement & Search for New Leadership

After leading Jubilee! for over 30 years, the community's beloved founder Howard Hanger retired in August 2019. Following a one year search, a candidate was hired as the new minister, but during the initial six month review process it was apparent that the new hire was not a good match for Jubilee! The loss of Howard's leadership and the community's mixed feelings about the hiring and firing of the new minister, brought Jubilee! to a period of unrest with some members leaving at that time.

Surviving the Pandemic

The Jubilee! community was hard hit by the impact of COVID, shutting its doors to in-person Sunday Celebrations and group activities in mid-March 2020. Drawing on its spiritual energy and creativity, the community quickly began virtual Sunday Celebrations on Zoom with Jubilee!'s Community Life Coordinator, band leader, Yona FrenchHawk, Jay Joslin, and guest speakers from near and far joining together via the internet from their own homes.

In August 2020, with the pandemic still forcing Jubilee! to remain a virtual community, Rev. Laura Collins accepted a one-year contract as Jubilee!'s minister of transition. Laura extended her contract to continue as Jubilee!'s minister of transition during a time when Jubilee!'s Sunday Celebrations moved from virtual celebrations to in-person celebrations and then back to virtual celebrations as the pandemic ebbed and surged.

Return to In-person Celebrations

In June 2021, with Laura still in the role as minister of transition, Jubilee! permanently returned to in-person celebrations while continuing to offer live streaming for folks who did not want to or could not come in person. In the fall of 2021, Laura decided not to extend her contract any further.

Jubilee! then decided to form an experimental Celebration Team of four individuals who would be responsible for organizing and presiding over Sunday Morning Celebrations. After a time, it was decided that Laura Collins would be rehired as the interim minister of celebration in September 2022, responsible only for organizing and presiding over Jubilee!'s Sunday Celebrations. She has agreed to remain in this position until a new minister is hired.

Replays of Jubilee!'s Sunday Celebrations can be watched on our YouTube Channel at <https://www.youtube.com/channel/UCB2c8G5nCTDBH37iHvehg6g>

Current Situation

Between 80 and 110 people currently attend Jubilee!'s in-person Celebrations, and another 35-50 people watch it live streamed on YouTube and Facebook. About 100 people watch replays of each celebration on YouTube. Much of the virtual audience is made up of local Jubilants who are not comfortable returning to in-person celebrations, while others are from out-of-state.

With the decrease from nearly 600 members at its height to about 150 today, came a significant drop in donations, forcing Jubilee! to face the financial reality of needing to sell its 46 Wall Street building in downtown Asheville, and rent space for holding Sunday Celebrations.

The 46 Wall Street building was sold in March 2023 for \$1,825,000 with a closing date of May 19th. Jubilee! is renting [Rainbow School Auditorium](#) to hold Sunday Celebrations while exploring the possibility of buying another building.

With the proceeds from the building sale, Jubilee! is now well positioned to hire a new minister to collaborate with its board, staff, teams and community to co-create Jubilee! as we grow our membership and donations to a sustainable level that will enable us to thrive into the future.