

A Humanistic Church and Members' Values

by Robert B. Tapp

This study describes and analyzes the religiosity of a large Midwestern congregation affiliated with the Unitarian Universalist Association. This congregation is noteworthy for its historic commitments to what has been called "humanism" within that denomination. We will hereafter refer to it as MHC, for "Midwestern Humanist Congregation." While the adjective "humanist" has many positive associations for many Catholics and Protestants (Shaw, 1982), it has more recently become a polemical term of abuse among evangelical Protestants (LaHaye, 1980) and in right-wing political circles: If the term is used with more descriptive intent, we would need to recognize a number of varieties of "Christian humanism" as well as some forms of "religious humanism." This latter term was used as long ago as 1936 to describe a nontheistic religious orientation (Wieman & Meland). For our purposes, religious humanism is organized, has reference groups local as well as distant, and functions as a "religion" for its participants. In this sense, it is distinct from so-called "secular" humanism which may have reference groups but is neither organized as a religion nor knowingly functions as one.!

The data used in this paper were gathered in connection with a 1985 survey conducted as part of a longrange planning project. The questionnaire was compiled by a committee, and included selected items used in previous local surveys as well as previous national surveys of the denomination. This questionnaire was mailed to all adult members of the congregation, with a covering letter from the minister and a stamped return envelope. Questionnaires were coded with an explanation that the identification was only for followup purposes. After 45 days, a card was sent to persons who had not yet returned questionnaires. As a result of these procedures, plus several pulpit and newsletter requests, 502 questionnaires were eventually received. Tables below are based on this total group unless otherwise indicated.

Our discussion begins with issues of self-image, moves to a more demographic description, explores the kind of institutions desired by the MHC members, locally and nationally, and concludes with their feelings about the religious education of their children.

How Do They See Themselves?

A variety of data allow us to describe the self-perceptions of MHC members. Clearly the most useful single adjective would be "humanist." As shown in the first two columns of Table 1, this preference has remained steady over time, and the label characterizes 60 percent of the members. It is also clear, however, that "agnostic" and "atheist" remain primary self-descriptors for significant groups of members, and that "atheist" has increased in acceptability since 1978. Given the nuanced selection among the several adjectives of Table 1, some members responses to question 7, "Would you personally define your religion as 'Christian'," become semantically interesting. Since 11 percent said Yes, there is clearly some disparity between private use of this term and the selection of it as an appropriate descriptor when other labels are available.

Table 1
Preferred Description of Religious Orientation
(percent)

	<u>Self</u>		<u>MHC</u>	
	1985	1978	1985	1978
Agnostic	19	25	8	17
Atheist	13	9	7	3
Christian	2	2	1	1
Deist	4	3	1	1
Humanist	60	57	83	77

Another way of describing individuals and groups is in terms of their values -- styles that they choose and cherish with some consistency. Milton Rokeach developed a Value Inventory in the 1960's that has been widely used and has proved excellent on a descriptive level (Rokeach, 1968). This inventory has the merit of asking people to rank among groups of values generally viewed as positive. Rokeach found that most values could be classified as either "terminal," reflective of states that individuals felt would be desirable to achieve, or "instrumental," reflective of preferences necessary to the achievement of desired terminal states. Fortunately for our purposes, Robert Miller had used the Rokeach Inventory in a 1974 study of Unitarian Universalist Association membership on a national level (1976).

Miller's findings have been included in Tables 2 and 3 for purposes of comparison.

These tables present rank orders of the composite median rankings by these two groups. Values have been arranged in the order of MHC preference. They should be read as follows. MHC members, overall, gave their highest preference to "self-respect" (i.e. it was their first choice), and "salvation" was ranked lowest/last at 18. We are calling this arrangement by "descending ranks." In most of the subsequent analyses of value data, we will always list the values in this same order of their preference by the overall MHC membership.

Table 2
Terminal Values
(descending ranks, medians)

	MHC 1985	UUA 1974
self-respect	1	1
a world at peace	2	8
freedom	3	3
wisdom	4	2
inner harmony	5	5
a sense of accomplishment	6	6
family security	7	4
true friendship	8	10
equality	9	9
mature love	10	7
happiness	11	12
a world of beauty	12	11
an exciting life	13	13
a comfortable life	14	16
social recognition	15	14
pleasure	16	15
national security	17	17
salvation	18	18
N=	502	1979

If we adopt an arbitrary criterion of three rank orders as significant differences, the striking thing about the list of terminal values (table 2) is how similar the MHC members are to the national group a decade prior. They differ, in fact, on only 3 of the 18 terminal values. In the case of "a world at peace," most studies in the 1980's show that this value has increased in rank for Americans. This presumably reflects the unsettled international and nuclear situation. The other differences are the drops in "family security" and "mature love" (3 ranks for each). Toward the end of this report, where we discuss value changes,

we will attempt an explanation of these shifts.

Table 3
Instrumental Values
(descending ranks, medians)

	MRC 1985	UUA 1974
honest	1	1
loving	2	3
broadminded	3	2
responsible	4	4
intellectual	5	7
independent	6	6
courageous	7	5
helpful	8	9
capable	9	8
imaginative	10	10
forgiving	11	11
logical	12	12
cheerful	13	13
self-control	14	14
ambitious	15	15
polite	16	16
clean	17	17
obedient	18	18

N= 502 1979

Using the same criterion for instrumental values (Table 3), the MHC members have precisely the same value ordering as the national group in 1974. Even if we make the minimal assumption that the Unitarian Universalist religious movement does not create values but simply selects persons in the larger society who have consonant sets of values, the reliability of the Rokeach inventory over this decade is remarkable. We should also note at this point that the peculiar ordering of values by UU's is distinct from any other religious group studied so far. This led Miller to reaffirm Dorothy Spoerl's term "differently religious" (1961) in characterizing members of this group.

Further clarification of the meanings of self-description becomes possible when these are compared to descriptions of other persons and groups. More members (83

percent) now identify MHC as "humanist." This apparently includes some atheists and agnostics who do not see those as accurate MHC labels. It might be noted here that the 1978 survey, showing that 77 percent viewed the Society as "humanist," was conducted during the process of selecting a new minister, and that the present minister, who was called at that time, held and holds a prominent national role as a humanist.

Somewhat parallel information was obtained by the use of a more generalized question on "philosophical/theological issues and values" (Table 4). Since "theology" has been historically a negative term for many UUs, this double designator was chosen. With the implied alternation of terms, most were willing to respond. This type of question had been employed in previous UU surveys, locally and nationally, but it was felt that the former response-spectrum of liberal-to-conservative might no longer adequately reflect the membership. The correctness of this estimate is shown in the distribution of responses to the expanded spectrum with "radical" and "reactionary" at the extremes. For some time, Unitarian Universalists generally have chosen "liberal" as their preferred descriptor.^f At this point in time, that term needs to be supplemented (in one direction only) by some such term as "radical." Whatever else such a term might denote, its user is no longer completely satisfied with "liberal." We might also infer, at least within MHC, that it is not necessarily a negative term. While individuals see the minister as somewhat more radical than themselves (22 vs. 15 percent), they also see the congregation generally, and their denomination as less radical, but nevertheless, "liberal." Discriminatory judgment remains evident here in seeing the congregation as significantly more "liberal" than the denomination.

Table 4
Designations on Philosophical/Theological Issues and Values Spectrum
(percent)

	(1)Radical	(2)Liberal	(3)
own position	15	67	15
minister's position	22	73	5
congregation of MHC	3	68	27
UUA	2	52	35

* questionnaire employed a 6-point spectrum, running through ((5)'conservative' and (6) 'reactionary'. Since most respondents put themselves in one of the first three positions, only those data are reproduced here.

Who Are They?

All previous studies, within MW-City and elsewhere, have shown that most Unitarian Universalists are converts. This continues to be the case, on a sharply increasing basis, as indicated by the first line of Table 5.

Table 5
Previous Religions of MHC Members
(percent)

	1985	1978	1968	1957
born UU*	8	10	13	12
Lutheran	24	26	25	23
Methodist	14	17	14	15
Congregational	7	10	11	13
Presbyterian	12	10	5	9
Baptist	4	5	5	3
Episcopalian	6	6	4	6
Jewish	5	2	4	8
Catholic	12	7	9	7
other	6	6	8	7
none	12	12	13	10

* as percent of all respondents. These persons are excluded from percentage base of subsequent groups.

There are greater percentages of ex-Catholics and ex-Presbyterians within the current membership than was the case in earlier years. This is somewhat puzzling since membership exit rates in those two groups have stabilized in recent years. (The seeming drop in ex-Congregationalists may be due to the disappearance of this denominational name in the recently-formed United Church of Christ). In general, these data show that, over the past thirty years, MHC converts have come from essentially the same religious origins.

The current study, as well as two of its predecessors, also gained information on the "childhood" religions of MHC members. These data, shown in Table 6, provide additional insight into the conversion routes of present members. It appears that most of them move directly from their childhood religion into Unitarian Universalism (based on comparisons, group by group, of the percentages in Tables 5 and 6). Only 7 percent go through a period of non-affiliation (12 percent "none" minus 5 percent).

Table 6
 Childhood Religions of MHC Members
 (percent)

	1985	1978	1968
Unitarian-Universalist"	8	8	28

Lutheran	24	26	24
Methodist	17	19	15
Congregational	8	10	9
Presbyterian	11	12	7
Baptist	4	6	6
Episcopalian	6	5	4
Jewish	5	5	4
Catholic	13	8	5
other	6	5	9
none	5	7	18

* as percent of all respondents. These persons are excluded from percentage base of subsequent groups.

This conversion process, which clearly reflects a changing from one religious affiliation to another for most of these MHC members, is obviously of central importance. The data shed indirect light on the significance of educational institutions, which appear to be a major component in this process. This conversion process clearly involves stages of "disenchantment" and "new attraction." The data in table 7 let us understand the timing of these two phases in the lifecycle. By high school, 44 percent of these eventual UU converts were already alienated from their prior religions. Only 29 percent, however, would have said at that point that the values of liberal religion were then meaningful for them. This disparity could be explained in terms of some inevitable period of being "between religions." But it seems more likely, in terms of consistent findings regarding the high religious activity among adolescents, that lack of awareness is a better explanation. The limited national availability of UU churches seems the more likely explanation.

Table 7(q. 20121)
 Lifestages When Previous Religion Lost Meaning and
 When Liberal Religion Became Meaningful
 (cumulative percentages)

	alienation	attraction
grade school	13	10
high school	39	29
college and/or before marriage	74	63
early married	84	76
early parenthood	90	88
later maturity	100	100

Another dimension of church mobility is reflected in shifting affiliations within the UU denomination. Strictly speaking, this should not be termed "conversion" (although the heavily-humanistic complexion of MHC may make it approximate a major shift). Residential mobility is, of course, the obvious explanation for movement from one UU group to another. That such movement occurs is clear from comparison of data in Tables 8 and 9.

Table 8 indicates that the median length of UU affiliation is in the 1~20 year bracket, and that this was also the case in 1978.

Table 8
 Years of UU Affiliation -
 including Sunday School
 (percent)

	<u>1985</u>	<u>1978</u>
less than 1	5	
1-2	11	6*
3-4	12	10
5-10	15	18
11-20	16	25
21-30	18	20
31-40	13	6
41-50	5	8
51-60	4	4
60+	2	1

* questionnaire listed 'less than 2'

Table 9, containing data on length of MHC membership, suggests some interesting new patterns. Fully 22 percent of the members have been with MHC for less than 3 years, as against 11 percent in 1978 or 14 percent in 1968. Assuming that very-new members had equal chances to participate in all three surveys, many more of the present members are quite new to the MHC.

Table 9
Shifts in Years Affiliated with MHC
(percent)

	1985	1978	1968
less than 1	6	1	2
1-2	16	10	12
3-4	14	14	10
5-10	19	20	15
1-20	14	22	19
21-30	13	18	6
31-40	9	8	10
41-50	4	4	3
51-60	4	2	1
60+	2	1	1

Another interesting shift in the past decade has been the lowered self-description of activity within the organization. Granting that such self-estimation is subjective and open to semantic shifting, the data of Table 10 show a jump in the low-activity categories from 20 to 56 percent. Unfortunately, comparable data is lacking from previous years.

Table 10
Self-assessment of MHC Activity
(percent)

	1985	1978
very active	13	15
moderately active	31	64
slightly active	39	20
inactive	17	0

Shifts in the distribution of membership among age brackets has paralleled the "greying" trend in the U.S. population. This steady shift, over the four successive survey

periods, is readily apparent from the data shown in Table 11. It is clear that the congregation of the '50's was 'younger' than were the successor congregations of the '60's, '70's, and '80's. This demographic profile parallels that of the larger U.S. society.

Table 11
Age Shifts Within Membership
(percent)

	<u>1985</u>	<u>1978</u>	<u>1968</u>	<u>1957</u>
15-24	2	1	2	5
25-34	14	13	14	20
35-44	21	20	23	24
45-54	17	24	23	20
55-64	22	21	19	14
65-74	13	14	12	10
75+	10	7	7	5

Long-term shifts in gender distribution could also be expected with these age shifts. Unfortunately we only have data for 1978 and the present (Table 12). Nevertheless, the percentage of female members has risen from 53 to 57, which is consistent with the demographics of an ageing membership.

Table 12
Gender
(percent)

	1985	1978
male	43	47
female	57	53

Marital arrangements of the congregation shifted sharply between 1978 and 1985, as indicated by Table 13. The increase from 3 to 10 percent widowed is consistent with the increased median age of the group. The impacts of ageing and divorce, with or without remarriage, is striking from these data. If we combine the 1985 marrieds and remarrieds,

to get a comparable group to 1978, we now have only 61 percent marrieds, as against 71 percent in 1978.

Table 13
Marital Status
(percent)

	1985	1978
single, never married	11	13
married, never divorced	51	71 ^a
divorced and remarried	10	a
divorced or separated	16	13
widowed	10	3
unmarried family, opposite sex	1	b
unmarried family, same sex	1	b

a 1978 questionnaire did not distinguish these two categories

b not included in 1978 questionnaire

Given this trend toward an older, less married, more female, congregation, one obvious prediction would be that members will have lived longer in the MW-City area. Surprisingly, this is not the case, as shown in Table 14. The percentages of those who have lived here more than 10 years remain essentially steady since 1968. One obvious inference here is that new members (from outside MW-City) are joining at all age levels.

Table 14
Years Lived in MW-City
(percent)

	1985	1978	1968
less than 2	2	1	2
2-5	7	4	5
6-9	10	8	9
10-19	17	20	16
20-29	15	17	17
30-39	17	18	17
40-49	10	14	16
50 or more	22	18	18

Perhaps the most dramatic trend in the makeup of the congregation, however, is the increase in formal education. As seen in Table 15, there has been a steady increase in the percentages of members with college educations throughout the four successive surveys. The percentage of members with graduate education more than doubled between 1957 and 1985 (21 to 44 percent)! This is so far beyond any national or local trends that it must reflect programming changes and changed images within the congregation.

Table 15
Shifts in Highest Educational Level
(percent)

	1985	1978	1968	1957
8th gr. or less	1	0	3	6
some hs.	0	0	2	*
high school	3	4	11	22
some college	9	16	23	18
2-yr. degree	3	*	*	*
4-yr. degree	41	40	38	33
master's	29	23	16	14
doctorate	15	17	7	7

* not on questionnaires in these surveys

What Sort of Institution?

Despite the demographic changes in the congregation just discussed, there is a startling consistency to the institutional values of the congregation over the past 20 years, as shown by the data in Table 16. This list of possible church values, with some modifications, was used in the 1967 national UU survey, and therefore affords a good picture of this congregation, over time and comparatively. There was another minister during the 1968 survey, and the 1978 survey was conducted as part of a self-study in the search process that eventuated in the hiring of the present minister. These two leaders are quite different in style and in the types of sermons that they deliver. They do, however, share a common humanist philosophy. Thus these data reflect three distinct points in the life history of the congregation.

Table 16
Shifts in MHC Features Accounting for Continued Affiliation
(ranks, descending, of times cited)

	1985	1978	1968
the religious philosophy	1	1	1
the minister	4	4	4
being with like-minded people	3	2	3
location of building	8	8	9
topics/quality of sermons	2	3	2
Sunday forum	5	6	5
discussion groups	7	9	7
so children can attend Sun. Sch..	10	7	6
music & arts	6	5	na
other	9	10	8

Quite apart from any personal popularity that they might have, the charisma of the ministers is not central to the life of this congregation. Their sermons are important, however. Inferentially, their religious philosophy is also important, and it is hard to conceive this congregation calling a leader who did not share its humanist philosophy. One way to describe a congregation with the institutional values of this one would be "lay-centered." "Being with like-minded persons" is very important. This should not be surprising, given the minority values in terms of the large culture and therefore the likely need to seek out support for such values. This is also a congregation with intellectual-aesthetic expectations, as indicated by the consistently high ranking of forums and discussions, as well as music and arts.

Members were asked about their frequencies of attendance at the 11:00am assemblies and the 10:00am forums on Sundays, and the results are shown, in cumulative percentages, in Table 17. Comparable data for 1978 and 1968 are also presented here, and the increased attendance trends are unmistakable, especially for the forums. Even the median attendance level for assembly has shifted from monthly to twice monthly! How to integrate these attendance levels with the reported trends to lower activity (table 10 above) is problematic. One explanation might be that members view attendance at forums and assemblies as 'passive' involvements and regard activity, which they have lowered, as committee work and similar higher-commitment participations. Another explanation, which seems more plausible, is that activity is less perceived, certainly less perceived with any negative connotations, as morale level rises. Put another way, more members are presently: more involved, but 'feeling it less.' Since self-reported activity no doubt has

some comparative basis, some persons may no longer feel that they are doing 'more than others.' In the absence of more quantitative measures of activity levels, such explanation must remain speculative.

Table 17
Shifts in Frequency of Sunday Attendance
(cumulative percentages)

	<u>Forum</u>		<u>Assembly</u>			
	1985	1978	1968	1985	1978	1968
Every Sunday	10	7	7	13	10	16
Three times month	26	16	18	36	27	35
Twice month	41	31	27	58	42	47
Once monthly	53	43	32	67	55	53
Less than once	66	54	39	76	64	64
Few times year	91	88	79	96	93	96

A detailed breakdown of desired institutional emphases can be found in the data of Table 18. Respondents were asked to indicate the importance of 12 possible individual needs in terms of how important it would be for MHC to meet them. Since a somewhat similar list was used in 1978, the data also permit historical comparison.

Table 18

Individual Needs that MHC Should Meet (‘very strongly desire’ percent)	1985	1978
	intellectual stimulation	73
ethical guidance	66	55
liberal religious education for children	59	58
emotional or spiritual enrichment	46	40
liberal religious education for adults	46	*
friendship and fellowship with other members	35	35
active participation for social justice	32	18
aesthetic enrichment through music and the arts	30	24
developing and promoting other humanistic societies	12	*
relaxation and fun	10	11
reassurance and counsel for crises and everyday prob.	10	21
participation in regional/national UU activities	9	12
cooperation in social improvements in community	*	15

* not included among possible responses.

The only two needs for which significant shifts in rank ordering have occurred are: 'active participation for social justice' (up) and 'reassurance and counsel for crises and everyday problems' (down). When we compare the actual percentages of persons listing needs now as against with the 1978 percentages, we must take account of an interesting phenomena: the wider differentiation that now occurs with regard to specific needs. In 1978, the 'very important' selections ranged from 69 to 11 percent. The same needs now range from 9 to 73 percent. Have these people become more emphatic, more differentiating - or both? If we interpret these data on the basis of increased numbers call particular needs 'very important,' then we would add to the two need-shifts above (which are confirmed) increased senses of need for 'ethical guidance' and 'aesthetic enrichment.'

Another way of evaluating the institution is by means of members' perceptions of outreach. Table 19 presents the data from a question regarding MHC commitment of "resources and programming" toward several potential membership/audience groups. The first level of interpretation of these percentages would seem to be a rank-ordering of the "not enough" column. On this basis, "minorities" would seem to have the highest priority,

and women the lowest (8th rank). It must be remembered that these responses are not from isolated individuals but rather from members of a church, evaluating the program of this same church. The seemingly low priority for programming toward women might reflect a negativism toward such programming. But it also might reflect a satisfaction with a present level (which could, in fact, be quite high). A further exploration of these possibilities, to examine the extent to which responses were conditioned by gender, is reported below. A second level of interpretation would be the examination of "moreness percentages", created by the percent of 'unsatisfied' persons who specified "not enough" in regard to efforts toward some particular group. Combining these two levels, it is quite clear that the congregation supports more programming toward ethnic minorities, families, and youth and is either satisfied with, or does not support more, planning directed toward single adults and women. The data on efforts toward gays is ambiguous, but appears to be somewhat negative.

Table 19
Evaluation of Program Efforts for Various Groups
(percent)

	too much	about right	not enough	moreness *
children	4	79	17	81
youth	2	67	32	94
single adults	4	78	17	81
families	1	76	23	96
seniors	2	83	15	88
women	5	83	12	71
gays	9	73	18	67
ethnic minorities	1	63	36	97

* moreness as 'not enough' percentage of unsatisfied ('too much's-'not enough') responses.

The Institution and Social Values and Action

The translation of individual and group values into reality is what most religious groups have called social action. :MHC members are comfortable with this term, and the Society has a long history of social activity. We will begin our discussion with issues of self-designation. Table 20 shows ways that members described themselves, their minister, the :MHC Social Action committee, and their denomination, the Unitarian Universalist Association. Whereas earlier versions of this probe had used a four-point liberal-to-

conservative spectrum, it seemed important in 1985 to add a "radical" category (as well as a "reactionary" category, for balance).

Table 20
Designations on Social Issues and Values Spectrum
(percent)

	(1)Radical	(2)Liberal	(3)
own position	13	65	16
minister's position	11	82	6
MHC Social Action Com.	24	78	7
UUA	3	60	31

* questionnaire employed a 6-point spectrum, running through (5)'conservative' and (6) 'reactionary'. Since most respondents put themselves in one of the first three positions, only these data are reproduced here.

Table 21
Designations on Social Issues and Values Spectrum in 1978*
(percent)

	<u>(1)Very Liberal</u>	<u>(2)Liberal</u>
own position	27	64
MHC Position	26	62

* A four-point spectrum, with different row-labels, was used in this questionnaire -for social values only. Direct comparison would be difficult, but the contrast between rows remains instructive.

In retrospect, this was a useful expansion. The 1978 questionnaire, shown in Table 21, indicated that MHC members viewed the Society and themselves as occupying essentially the same point on a putative spectrum, and 91 percent used the term "liberal" to describe this position. By 1985, the term "radical" seems necessary for significant numbers of MHC members. It does not seem feasible to conflate the 1978 'very liberal' and the 1985 'radical.' It would also probably be risky to imagine that we still have a spectrum (right-to-left) with 'radical' being 'most left.' Whatever the connotations of 'radical,' it is a useful term for present MHC members. It is interesting to compare the more limited 1978 data with the current situation. At that earlier time, members felt a parallelism of their own social positions and those of MHC. This is no longer the case.

Probably some history is in order. The local Social Action committee has been very much in evidence in recent years. Because it can take stands without having to represent the whole membership, there is greater freedom to take stands that reflect committee members (who may well have more intense and deeper value commitments than the membership at large). Thus 24 percent of the members view this committee as radical (more 'radical,' indeed, than the church, congregation, or minister, and much more radical than the denomination). At this point in our analysis, it matters little whether the denomination is really as non-liberal as MHC members make it. What counts is the strong labelling in evidence. It is also clear that members, by and large, view their minister as somewhat more liberal than they see themselves.

Members' evaluations of specific issues requiring social action are shown in Table 22. Using the 'very important' percentages, arms control is clearly the paramount issue on their agenda. Other issues are listed in order of priority. It is also instructive to compare these rankings to the 'moreness index' in that table, which describes the emergent issues in the past 5 years. Racism, for instance, ties for second place on the agenda in terms of urgency, but receives a low moreness index indicating that it is a long-standing problem area. Hunger and nutrition, however, in the perception of MHC members, is newly perceived as urgent.

Table 27
 Social Action Issues, with Index of Increased Importance
 (ranked by 'very important' percentage)

issue	very important	moreness
arms control	77	94
hunger & nutrition	47	84
racism	47	60
poverty	43	81
sexism	42	67
government. intrusion	40	75
overpopulation	38	69
pollution	36	89
economic issues	30	78
unemployment	28	69
violent crime	24	65
health care	24	69
chemical/substance abuse	22	55

* moreness index is 'more important than 5 years ago' percentage of ('more important than 5 years ago' + 'less important')

What Lan~er AffiliatiQn.s]

From its founding, the MHC has been affiliated with the Unitarian movement. In 1961 the American Unitarian Association completed a full merger with the Universalist Church of America, creating the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Many Unitarians perceived the Universalists as "more conservative." This may have been even truer in MW-City since the Universalist church had for years been more "Christian" and less "humanistic" than MHC.

We have already seen, from Table 4 above, that MHC members view themselves as more "liberal" than the congregation at large in philosophical/theological terms. They feel yet more liberal than the UUA. This same perception regarding the UUA is true in terms of social values (Table 20). What is less clear is whether these perceived distances reflect disappointment, alienation, or the urge to be some kind of leaven within the larger body. In 1968 and in the current survey, MHC members were polled regarding the UUA's future directions. These results are shown in Table 23.

table 23

Desired Future Direction of Unitarian Universalist Association (percent)	1985	1968
	closer to liberal Protestantism	2
closer to ecumenical movement within Christianity	2	1
closer to an emerging, universal religion	25	23
closer to a distinctive, humanistic religion	72	73

These data can be interpreted several ways, especially since the MHC members feel so different from the UUA. The remarkable thing is the semantic consistency over a generation of institutional experiences and individual changes. To the extent that MHC members have not simply 'given up' on the UUA, they wish it to turn leftward as they have. Not included in the survey, but relevant at this point, is the active affiliation of many members with the new North American Committee for Humanism, which is presently training leaders who may, in some circumstances, be competing with UUA ministers for the more liberal pulpits. Nonetheless, MHC retains its financial contribution level to the UUA.

What About Religious Education?

MHC has a Religious Education department which is primarily responsible for children and young persons, but also carries on some educational programs for adults. Previous studies of UU's have shown that they have essentially the same educational agendas for themselves and for their children. In the 1985 survey, this was probed in a slightly different manner. Members were first asked to rank curricular emphases for children and young people, choosing 4 items for "most" emphasis and four for "least" Results are shown in Table 24. It is likely that these must be viewed somewhat contextually, especially in the case of the negative agenda. Given the post-Christian nature of the congregation, it is not surprising that Bible and Judeo-Christian traditions are the most popular candidate for deemphasis. The remaining items on the negative list may not reflect this "absolute" negative preference as much as the feeling that they have been sufficiently dealt with in the recent history of MHC.

table 24
Curricular Emphases in Religious Education III
 (rankings)

<u>Most important:</u>	
ethical relationships	1
world religions and views	2
moral reasoning	3
UU/ Humanist history and traditions	4
Least important:	
the Bible and Judeo-Christian traditions	1
environmental issues	2
artistic and creative projects	3
evolution of life and culture	4

*The 1978 anti 1-68 questionnaires each used slightly different lists of categories, making direct comparison problematic. Most important for both years were items dealing with personal and ethical values systems, and problems of modern world. Least important were the Bible, and creative and artistic activities. In 1978, non-Western religion was third least important

The curricular items viewed as "most important" are consistent with other responses of this congregation. Ethical issues are, not surprisingly foremost. Similarly the stress on "UU/ Humanist history and traditions" (although this conflation prevents exploration of feelings about the UUA). The second ranking of "world religions" must be born in mind when we come to estimate the secularity of MHC humanism.

This same interpretive strategy seems in order when we turn to the preferences for adult programs. In this case, of course, respondents are indicating their own preferences for programming directed at themselves. These results are shown in Table 25. There is clearly an open preference for religious issues in this ranking - by persons who, by-and-large, regard themselves as non-Christian humanists.

table 25
 Preferences for Adult Programs by Religious Education Department
 (percent citing)

moral, ethical and human development	65
new ways of looking at world	52
UU/Humanist history and traditions	48
building your own religion/philosophy	47
world religions	38
feminism vis-a-vis humanism	34
environmental topics and strategies	27
parent meetings - orientation to "Connections Curriculum"	17

In-group discussions among religious liberals often move between two extremes when discussing religious education. There is a strong concern that it is to be done, and done well. And there is a widespread lament that children don't remain within the fold. The former concern is understandable in a church of converts, where education becomes the means of initiation for adults as well as children. The 1985 questionnaire attempted to explore these issues.

Value Pattern in ~s AmQn~ MEC Members

Demographic effects.

In our discussion of Tables 2 and 3 above, we described the general nature of Rokeach's Inventory of Values, and suggested the rough criterion of three-rank difference as requiring explanation. We also noted the few differences between the present MIIC patterns of ranking and Miller's 1974 national study of UUs. By way of hypothesis, we would suggest that this same representativeness of the MHC sample would hold for more refined analyses of conditions under which changed rankings of values occur.

Gender. Table 27 [Tables 27-31 are grouped at the end of this report] presents the effects of certain demographic factors on the ranking of terminal and instrumental values. Rokeach found a gender gap on 3 terminal and 8 instrumental values. This gender gap reduces dramatically among the UUs. Given more recent studies of other populations, we suspect that this lowered differential is a result of special ideological elements rather than an

effect of the times. MHC women place a much higher valuation than MHC men on EQUALITY and TRUE FRIENDSHIP and a lower value on FAMILY SECURITY. [Recall that the rank of '1' indicates the ~~hi-~~hest evaluation of a value]. None of these gaps existed in the 1971 national scene. Conceptually, they all are associated with the rise in feminist consciousness created by *the* women's movement. Surprisingly, MHC men rank EQUALITY lower (10 vs. 6) than did U.S. men in 1971. We suspect that there may be a polarization here that is exacerbated by the intensity with which the women's movement has taken root within UU circles (as evidenced by literary activity, resolutions, percentages of women ministers, and similar indices). It may also reflect special Midwestern patterns of sexism among males that have remained unaffected by changes in consciousness among women, or even exhibited a backlash effect. This certainly deserves further analysis. Apart from this issue of equality, the disappearance of a gender gap among all of the instrumental values must be seen as noteworthy. Any full profile of the UU value pattern would need to attend to this set of nonsexist indicators.

~A number of value shifts appear if we look at MHC members in terms of age. [It should be remembered that these tables generally examine the effects of demographic factors taken singly. The gender differences we have just discussed, for instance, might be partially caused by other factors such as different age distributions for men and women. Given the size of our sample, it nevertheless seems best to examine these factors singly at first to see if any patterns emerge]. PEACE, ACCOMPLISHMENT, EQUALITY, BEAUTY and FAMILY SECURITY become more important as MHC members grow older [strictly speaking, as we move from younger to older members within this 1985 sample]. FREEDOM, MATURE LOVE, AND TRUE FRIENDSHIP lose importance [or, should we interpret the lower ranking as indicating that these needs are more fulfilled among older persons and therefore are not as salient in the rankings?]. The instrumental values of being HELPFUL and RESPONSIBLE become more important, with decreased stress on being CAPABLE and IMAGINATIVE.

Education. Education also creates shifts in values. Contrasting members with very low (high school) and very high (doctorate) levels, ACCOMPLISHMENT, MATURE LOVE, and SELF-RESPECT seem to be products of education, while the need for BEAUTY and EQUALITY diminish. The instrumental values associated with education are being CAPABLE, IMAGINATIVE, INTELLECTUAL and LOVING. Losing importance are BROADMINDEDNESS, CHEERFULNESS, COURAGE, INDEPENDENCE and being LOGICAL.

[again the caution that these values may drop in importance in some real sense or simply be satisfied sufficiently to lose saliency].

MHC Involvement and Patterns of Values

Childhood religious background Childhood religion plays a surprisingly persistent role in the value rankings of MHC members. These data appear in Table 28. In interpreting these data, we must first focus on the first column representing the born-UUs. [As will be noted, these first five columns represent the questionnaires of 321 members. For obvious reasons, persons who did not characterize their religious backgrounds or rank the values have been excluded]. These born UUs may have a significance beyond their number since they embody in some way the idealized values of the institution. Putting this another way, the converts in the next five columns joined MHC in some sense because of the values they perceived in that institution and which are presumably found in some intensive way among the inheritors of the institution. In some statistical way we could correctly characterize the MHC at the present time as reflecting the summed values of its members. But on another level, we would do better to expect to see the converts as moving toward the born UUs in their value patternings rather than both groups moving toward some central mean. We may therefore expect the present overall pattern (Tables 3 and 4) to shift toward the first column of Table 28. In this case [taking 2-rank differentials as significant], we could expect the overall membership to begin to value EXCITEMENT, ACCOMPLISHMENT, EQUALITY, and MATURE LOVE more highly. At the same time, we might expect the values of HAPPINESS, INNER HARMONY, SELF-RESPECT, and TRUE FRIENDSHIP to move lower in their rankings. Less shifting would be predicted within the instrumental values. Being HELPFUL would become more valued, while being COURAGEOUS or INTELLECTUAL would become less important.

Paralleling previous findings (Tapp, 1973, Table 1.6) and the historical emergence of Unitarians and Universalists in American history, we find the value patterning of the born UUs to be closest to the Methodist/Congregational grouping used in this table. If we assume that converts may be in the process of value shifting in the direction of dominant patterns among their new co-religionists, we would expect some of the present differentials to have been greater at earlier times in the converts UU lives. A WORLD AT PEACE, for instance, is still dramatically lower for persons of Lutheran and Catholic backgrounds. The same is true for EQUALITY. This would be consonant with the historic

unconcern of those denominations for such matters. More puzzling is the lowered concern for ACCOMPLISHMENT among ex- Jews, Catholics, and Lutherans.

At the very least, these variations in value patterning among converts indicate a lack of effective socialization into the new UU pattern. To the extent that we see them as marking partial moves away from old pattern and toward new, UU patterns, these variations suggest the very different recruiting appeals that MHC has.

Membership Lonieyity Another way of understanding the directions of value shifting is to examine the effects of length of membership. The data of Table 28 show this for MHC-converts. In order to measure more accurately the effects of a humanist congregation, it seemed better to exclude persons who had converted in some other kind of UU situation. Some generalizations seem in order regarding the impact of:MHC longevity [recognizing that these are linked with effects of ageing]. PEACE becomes much more important, as does FAMILY SECURITY. HAPPINESS and MATURE LOVE drop somewhat, and the desire for INNER HARMONY drops sharply. On an instrumental level, COURAGE, HELPFULNESS, and RESPONSIBILITY become more important. Being IMAGINATIVE, *FORGNING*, and A~BmOUS become less significant.

Activity The final two columns of Table 28 contrast the value patterns of persons describing their involvement as very active and inactive. The active members give more importance to TRUE FRIENDSHIP and PEACE - and much less to FAMILY SECURITY. At the same time, the very active members value being CAPABLE, COURAGEOUS, and INTELLECIU AL more highly, and are less concerned about being INDEPENDENT or BROADMINDED.

Self-Descriptions, Explicit and Implicit, and Value Patterns

Since the effects ofMHC activity will be analyzed more closely in discussion of Table 30 and 31, let us now turn to Table 29 where we can explore the value patternings of different forms or explicit and implicit self-ascription. This term grows out of the 1967 study (Tapp, 1973, ch. 1) and similar items were included in the present questionnaire to permit comparison. Explicit self-ascription is the willingness to use such labels as 'liberal' and 'conservative' to describe one's orientation. As already indicated, the previously-used

continuum was extended by the addition of 'radical' and 'reactionary.' Respondents were asked to characterize themselves in terms both of social values and of theological/philosophical values. These data permit a check on the meanings of the Rokeach inventories as well as a fuller specification of the meanings of these labels within the MHC community.

The Radicals. The first issue to consider is whether, conceptually, 'radical' means 'more liberal' or 'different from liberal' for these MHC members. We need to recall that 'liberal' is a positive term for most of these respondents. More than half of them chose it both to describe themselves theologically and socially. These primary data were presented in Table 4, for philosophical/theological values and in Table 20 for social issues and values. If we interpret the questionnaire's position 3 as 'less liberal' or as 'somewhat liberal,' we can ask whether or not there is some kind of linear relationship between these first three designations (i.e. is 'radical' more/less of some quality than 'liberal' which in turn is more/less of that same quality than 'somewhat liberal'). In the case of the terminal values, the answer seems clearly to be No in the case of theological values and Yes in the case of social values. As for instrumental values, the evidence for a linear spectrum or continuum is mixed in the theological case and clearly negative in regard to social values. Putting this another way, being 'radical' seems to have the clearest conceptual meaning in terms of social issues and values, although it reflects distinct value ranking-profiles in all cases.

Among MHC members, it is distinctly 'radical' to give the highest values to PEACE and EQUALITY, and lowest values to FAMILY SECURITY, FREEDOM, HAPPINESS, and INNER HARMONY. In terms to instrumental values, INTELLECTUAL is highly valued, and low value imputed to being CAPABLE. Radicals also give a higher value to being HELPFUL and a lower value to INDEPENDENCE. These consistencies are clearest when we look at the way people designate themselves on social issues and values.

The Liberals. Turning from the radicals to that majority who are 'liberals-without qualification,' it is instructive to see the ways in which they differentiate themselves from persons who are 'less liberal' (i.e. 'more conservative.'). When the descriptor liberal applies to theological issues, these members value PEACE, WISDOM, A SENSE OF ACCOMPLISHMENT more highly; while at the same time giving lower value to MATURE LOVE, INNER HARMONY, AND FAMILY SECURITY. Regarding instrumental values, they

give higher rating to being INTELLECTUAL and lower rating to being CAPABLE.

If we focus on that slightly differing group of members who are 'liberals without qualification' on social issues, comparing them to the less-liberal members, that majority is higher on PEACE and EQUALITY, and lower on FRIENDSHIP. They value BROADMINDEDNESS more, and do not rank being INTELLECTUAL as highly.

These descriptions of value differentiations associated with differing forms of explicit self-ascriptions appear, by and large, to be plausible. That is, they resemble what qualified referees might predict. In that sense, they reflect a kind of mutual validation of the Rokeach Inventory as well as the usefulness, at least with group like MHC members, of a direct query on ideological self-identity. We need to see whether more indirect estimates of ideological identity corroborate these patterns.

Implicit self-descriptions. Rokeach has suggested that the relative rankings of equality and freedom will provide a reliable measure of political/economic ideology. A fourfold typology places those giving a high ranking to both as 'democratic socialists,' a low ranking to both as 'fascists.' The two mixed cases would be high EQUALITY coupled with low FREEDOM (,communists') and high FREEDOM coupled with low EQUALITY ('capitalists '). If we define high as value rankings 1 through 6 and low as rankings 13-18, the two groupings significantly found within MI-IC would be democratic socialists (126 members) and capitalists (36 members). Comparing these two groups, the 'socialists' give significantly higher ratings to PEACE and FAMILY SECURITY and lower ratings to HAPPINESS, MATURE LOVE, and HARMONY. Instrumental values of IOYING, HELPRJL, and FORGIVING are higher for the socialists; and AMBmOUS, IMAGINATIVE, and INTEILEeruAL are lower. As was the case with more explicit self-ascriptions, these value patterns have a high plausibility. [Note that these two subgroupings of MHC members comprise 162 persons since we have excluded many whose freedom and equality ratings were less than 7 rank orders apart].

PosttraditiQnality. Unitarian Universalists have recently been characterized as 'posttraditional' in the sense that, whatever their own religious origins, they were distancing themselves from Christianity and Judaism (Tapp, 1967; 1971). The two questions that had created this implicit self-ascription were repeated in the 1985

questionnaire (Tables 1 and 23). As can be seen from the total figures on Table 29, :MHC members were overwhelmingly high in posttraditionality. The 'low' group (containing only 6 persons) perhaps represents too small a percentage of the membership for confident generalizations. To the extent that the values of this group resembles those more Christian-oriented UUs that are largely found in smaller New England, significant differences appear regarding 21 of the 36 values. What is clear is that the values of the MHC posttraditionals are almost identical to the value patternings of the full :MHC membership.

An Alternative Methodology in Value Analysis.

As indicated above, Rokeach has typically employed the same interval-ranked transformation of composite median rankings that we have employed this far. He has occasionally used a median test to compare samples for significant differences in individual values. This form of analysis has the advantage of being conceptually simple and understandable. One drawback is that, even though the raw data consists of interval rankings of values, the comparison of interval median rankings cannot take account of ties in composite medians. Depending on the order in which medians are sorted, shifts in ranking will occur. Another probability is that greater discrimination, and therefore distance, will occur among the high and low ranked values while the middle values will be clustered. Feather has employed standardized scores for rankings which provides "continuous" values permitting an analysis of variance between subgroups (1975).

These analytical strategies rely upon measures of central tendency which may overlook very different distributions of value rankings among various subgroups. We therefore will explore other measures of difference for the remainder of this paper-. The significance levels of the chi-square computation give a direct measure of the differences between two subsamples. Measures of central tendency can then be used to determine the overall direction of such difference in distribution.

In exploring this alternative analytical strategy, several considerations emerged. The probability levels of the chi-square statistic are affected by the size of the subsamples being compared. The computation is also affected by the number of empty cells. In making 2-way comparisons (men and women, for instance), the raw data consists of a 2 x 18 contingency table. In addition to this computation, we pooled the value rankings into 2 x 9 and 2 x 3 comparisons to reduce the number of possible columns with empty

cells. Each of these different computations produced a different significance level for the chi-square statistic. Since this was an exploratory procedure, we chose to examine actual distributions in cases where one or more of these probability levels was below .10. The remaining tables in this paper present the already-familiar composite rank: orders of value medians as well as the significance levels for these three differing chi-square computations. To facilitate comparisons, a significance column is followed by the ranking of those levels. We have also included in these tables columns containing the absolute differences of median rankings for each value and a ranking of these differences by magnitude. All rankings are printed boldface to facilitate reading.

Gender, Religious Activity, and Values

One of the most interesting [and least-researched] issues is this effect of religious activity on church members. What, if any, difference does church participation make? Since we know that the value patterns of UUs generally are quite different from the general American population, we can ask if these peculiar patternings are sustained by church activity. Another way to probe this is to determine whether consistent value shifts occur when people leave the religious group. Researching actual dropouts would be exceedingly difficult and expensive. We can, however, infer that persons who are inactive are on the verge of dropping out, and examine their values from that perspective. MHC members described their levels of activity as well as indicated their frequency of assembly and forum attendance. These three measures intercorrelate quite highly, and our analysis will make use of the self-described level of activity.

Were we to contrast the value patterns of the most and least active members, we would concentrate on three terminal and six instrumental values that show significant differences (as shown in the last two columns of Table 27). Were our sample to have been smaller, it might have been necessary to settle for this. Given the number and proportion of MHC members who completed questionnaires, we can reduce the known effects of age by focusing on a subsample comprised of converts between 25 and 44 years old who first joined MHC (rather than some other church in the denomination which might have been less humanistic and therefore attracted persons of differing value profiles) and who have been members for at least one year. We are making an additional assumption that almost all persons in this age bracket who are inactive are so for voluntary reasons rather than reasons of infirmity. To the extent that these assumptions are correct, we can view these

persons as being one step short of ceasing to be members. This should let us look at value changes as both the effects of reduced contacts with other :MHC members and as indicative of the value preferences of those who may be about to leave the institution. Since gender clearly affects value patterns, even within the :MHC population, we will analyze men and women separately to test these procedures.

Focusing on these smaller subsamples reveals some shifts in values that the full age range might have obscured. These data are shown in Tables 30 and 31. These data also indicate the risks of relying on single measures to detect subgroup differences when using measures that are rank-ordered by respondents. Let us illustrate these by close examination of the terminal value section of Table 30, indicating ways that religious activity affects the values of women.

If we were to continue using the criterion employed by previous investigators and up to this point in this paper (3+ rank differentials between composite rank orders), we would single out SELF-RESPECT, WISDOM, and INNER HARMONY as reflecting activity-based differences. If we were to employ a median test (based on the largest median differences), we would probably select SELF-RESPECT, INNER HARMONY, WORLD OF BEAUTY, PLEASURE, and HAPPINESS. If we used a chi-square test of difference and a p.10 level of significance, we would select the same three values with unpooled data and with data collapsed into 9 categories: SELF-RESPECT, INNER HARMONY, and COMFORT. When we pool values into three categories, however, we would attend to SELF-RESPECT, FREEDOM, and COMFORT. Only SELF-RESPECT would be consistently chosen by each of these analytic strategies.

Given these remaining ambiguities, our proposal is to retain all of these screening criteria, and proceed in inconsistent cases to examine the actual distributions in the contingency tables on which the chi-square computation is based. This will allow judgment on unusual distributions that may or may not seem significant in generalization but which nonetheless affect a particular chi-square computation. While a more complex procedure, this seems highly preferable to reliance on some measure of central tendency or some single chi-square computation alone. In terms of the direction of value change, the medians remain the best indicator.

BROADMINDEDNESS with inactivity. Given the perceived gender differences in regard to EQUALITY within this group, as an instance, it may be that women who become inactive are reflecting a rejection of ideological intensity that is viewed as narrow.

Summary.

After describing in some detail the deviant religiosity of this humanistic religious group, this paper proceeded to explore value patterns in relation to demographic and ideological factors. It then explored some new ways of determining subgroup differences in relation to values, and applied these strategies to an analysis of the effects of religious activity, focusing on those who are now inactive, and presumably will soon drop out of the group.

Future Research

Two immediate research directions are a better value mapping of the surrounding contemporary environments to facilitate testing of the hypothesis that dropouts from axiocentric will resemble their larger environment more than do the more active group members. This will be important in documenting the varied value-support roles that groups play for their members. Somewhat parallel to this will be more detailed exploration of subgroup differences in relation to belief items. **If** the axiocentric hypothesis is correct, inactivity should produce less differentiation on such items than it does on value items.

1 Leo Pfeffer (1988) reviews the interesting history of this term which appeared in three separate amicus briefs before the U.S. Supreme Court for the 1961 Torcaso case. Pfeffer notes that he had used the term first) in his Creeds in Competition (1958). Whatever the uses made in subsequent legal history and evangelical polemics, there are enough distinctions between organized and unorganized humanism to reserve the modifier "secular" for the latter.

2 A total of 720 questionnaires was originally mailed, making for a 68 percent return rate. As is often the case with church lists, a number of dormant, distant, and dead members were included in the original mailing. The return rate seems normal for this kind of population.

3 Note historic choices of this name in Council of Liberal Churches, Liberal Religious Youth, etc..This remains true with FUS members, few of whom located themselves near to (5) conservative or (6)reactionary.

4 The current name for the latter group is United Church of Christ, but the

questionnaire used the older denominational name since it was seeking childhood recall.

S. This alternative procedure was suggested by Sanford Weisberg, Professor of Applied Statistics, University of Minnesota.

References

- LaHaye, Tim F. (1980). *The Battle for the Mind*. Old Town, NJ: Revell.
- Miller, Robert L'H. (1976). Religious Values Systems of Unitarian Universalists. *Review of Religious Research*, 17, (Spr.), 198-208.
- Rokeach, Milton (1968). *The Nature of Human Values*. New York: Free Press.
- Rokeach, Milton (1979). *Understanding Human Values: Individual and Societal*. New York: Free Press.
- Shaw, I. et al. eds, (1982). *Readings in Christian Humanism*. Minneapolis: Augsburg Press, 1982.
- Spoerl, Dorothy. (1961). The values of Unitarian-Universalist youth. *Journal of Psychology*, 51, 421-37.
- Tapp, Robert B. (1971). Dimensions of religiosity in a post-traditional group. *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 10 (41-47).
- Tapp, Robert B. (1967). A look at Unitarian Universalists Goals. *Christian Century*, LXXXIV, 515-18
- Tapp, Robert B. (1973). *Religion Among the Unitarian Universalists: Converts in the Stepfathers' House*. New York: Seminar Press.
- Wieman, Henry N., & Meland, Bernard E. (1936). *American Philosophies of Religion*. Chicago: Willett, Clark.