

A SPECIAL REPORT ON A  
 PROPOSED NEW SERVICE STRUCTURE  
 FOR THE CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL

# Regions and RNGs\*

\* REGIONAL NETWORK GROUPS (WE SAY “RINGS”)

At last year’s CUC annual meeting, members voted overwhelmingly in favour of Canadian autonomy from the UUA. The organization quickly set up an Implementation Task Force (profiled in the last issue of the Canadian Unitarian) and asked them to come up with a new plan for delivering services to congregations.

Their plan – titled *Of Regions and RiNGs* – was unveiled in December, circulated to congregations and posted on the CUC web site. At their late January meeting, the CUC Board of Trustees approved the plan, with some amendments, and will be recommending it to the CUC annual meeting for approval in May, and for implementation beginning on July 1.

The new service delivery plan proposes four new regions to replace the six UUA districts that now serve Canadian congregations. These new regions will be constituted as:

- B.C.
- Western (the Prairie provinces, plus Thunder Bay)
- Central (most of Ontario)
- Eastern (Quebec, the Atlantic provinces, and possibly eastern Ontario)

In addition, the plan proposes hiring three new,

full-time CUC program staff to deliver services to congregations. Two Directors of Regional Services (DRS) would each serve two RNGs. The third person, a Director of Lifespan Learning (DLL), would coordinate religious education across the country. (Information on these three positions is on the last page of this supplement.)

As well as the new full-time staff, the plan proposes two types of volunteers to work within each RNG, supported by the full-time DRS:

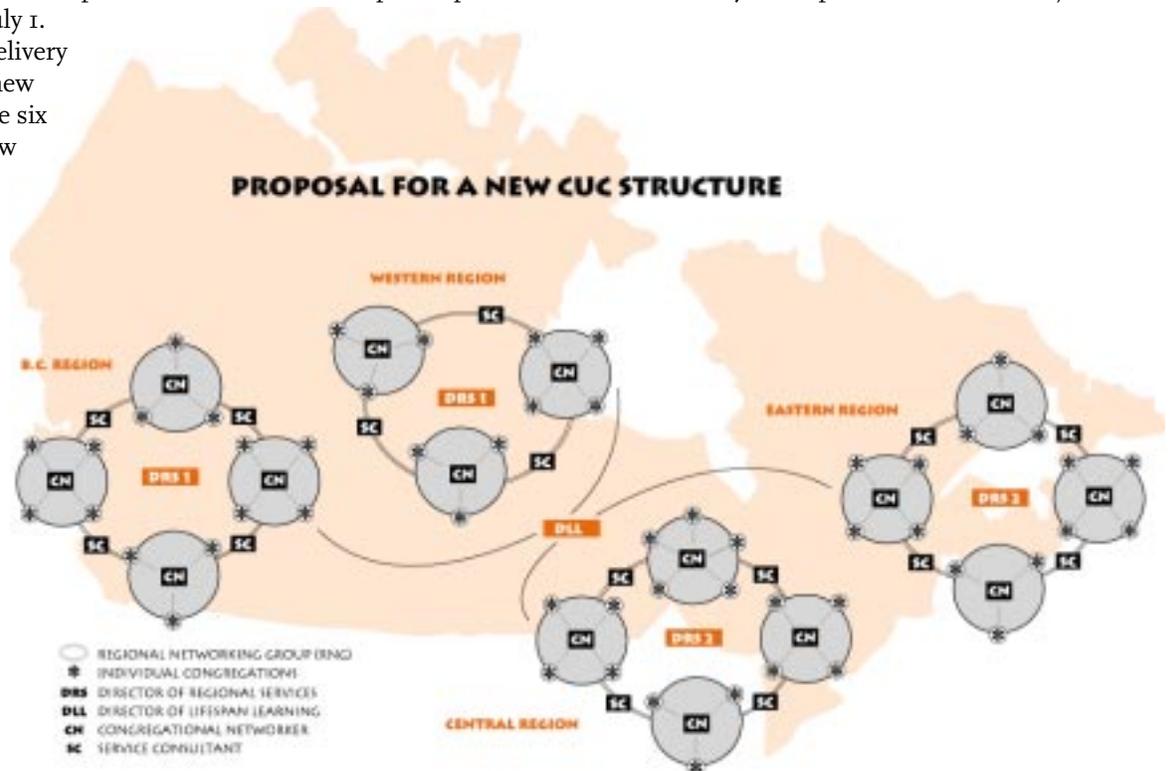
- *Service Consultants* are experts who deliver workshops and hands-on training to congregational leaders. They are trained, and are paid an honorarium plus expenses for their

congregational work.

- *Congregational Networkers* are the messengers of the regional system, each keeping in touch with a cluster of two to six congregations, and communicating their needs to the DRS.

The volunteers in each RNG would meet several times a year with the DRS, and the region would hold an annual educational meeting each fall.

That’s the bare bones of the proposed new CUC structure. The full plan is at [www.cuc.ca](http://www.cuc.ca). A diagram shows the proposed new structure below. And the following pages contain an in-depth interview with two CUC board members, plus a preliminary description of the new CUC jobs. •



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*The Canadian Unitarian interviewed two members of the CUC Board in early February. Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, the CUC president, spoke from his office at Toronto First Unitarian. Rev. Brian Kiely, who chaired the Implementation Task Force and wrote its report, was home sick in Edmonton, but consented to the interview anyway!*



Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

**Can-U:** Is the objective of this new plan simply to substitute the UUA's services with made-in-Canada services – or is it an entirely new way of serving Canadian congregations?

**Mark:** Yes, and yes! I realize that sounds contradictory, by the way.

**Brian:** I think the first yes means that of course we're replacing the UUA district services. That was part of our mandate. The second yes is because we're responding to the clearly stated wishes of congregations for better services and a better way of doing things.

**Mark:** The answer is also no, because there are services we aren't replacing – the services to do with ministry, which will be provided as before except for things that resided in the district organizations. We're not replacing programs that came from the UUA departments of ministry, or youth and young adults.

**Can-U:** What's the biggest change in the new plan, from the point of view of congregations?

**Mark:** We'll be a much bigger help to congregational leaders. The mechanisms we're putting in place with the new staff people, the service consultants and the congregational networkers will give leaders more coaching and a greater presence from the CUC than they've previously received from anyone.

**Brian:** I think you're bang on there. That's the biggest

change. The other thing that will touch the lives of rank-and-file members who don't normally pay attention to denominational stuff is that when they go to regional meetings they'll find a richer offering of educational programs.

**Mark:** The other change is that it should be a little less confusing – where the services are coming from – the CUC, the district, or the UUA.

**Can-U:** These four new Regional Networking Groups, or RNGS – are they like the old UUA districts?

**Brian:** Yes and no. The RNGS will work with regions of the CUC, not free-standing entities, like most of the UUA districts are now. The RNGS will also be staffed by two kinds of volunteers: the *service consultants*, who are specially trained in specific areas of service – like RE, finance or youth –

and deliver programs in the congregations, and the *congregational networkers*, who work with a cluster of two to six congregations to share ideas and news, putting people in touch with each other. The RNGS bear some resemblance to the existing districts, because they deliver services to congregations, but structurally they're different.

**Can-U:** Why are there two types of volunteers, the congregational networkers and the service consultants? Isn't that confusing?

**Brian:** The service consultants are trainers – people who go to congregations with specific areas of expertise to deliver workshops. The congregational networkers are people who share ideas and keep congregations in touch with each other. One is the trainer; the other is a good neighbour.

**Mark:** The other advantage of this is that good leaders think about the whole organization. They're pro-active in offering guidance to congregations. They think about the whole, and then offer what the group needs.

**Can-U:** Under last year's agreement with the UUA, services to youth were left alone – that is, they'll still be delivered by the UUA after July 1. Yet, the Task Force report talks a lot about services to youth. Why is this?

**Mark:** The services to youth are provided by the UUA, but the way youth organization works continentally is through YACS – Youth Adult Committees. And we will need to create a mechanism that functions regionally to support young adult work, because we don't have that now. That's why we address it in the new structure.

**Can-U:** Under the plan, the CUC staff complement will double, from three to six. Can the organization handle that rapid an expansion?

**Mark:** We're moving from a family style organization to a program style of organization, which calls for a better definition of roles and accountabilities. That has already been going on for the past year. We've had expert help in designing the roles,



Rev. Brian Kiely

expectations and reporting structures of the new positions. As well, we've done little things like having our payroll handled externally. So, we're putting into place the structures we need to have by later this year.

**Can-U:** Where will these new staff be based?

**Brian:** The two regional staff will be based in the field. It's going to depend a great deal on where they live now, because this is an open competition for jobs. We have not yet determined where they'll be based, but it will have to make sense geographically.

**Can-U:** Will they work from home?

**Brian:** There's money in the budget for them to rent office space if they so choose, presumably in a local congregation. If they wish to work from home, that's okay too – we'll be flexible. They'll live in one of the regions they serve. And the Director of Lifespan Learning will work from wherever she or he lives. One thing is for sure, however: *none* of these people will work from the cuc office in Toronto, and they'll all spend a lot of time on the road.

**Can-U:** How will they be trained, supervised and evaluated when they're spread across the country?

**Brian:** We have an arrangement with the UUA that our staff can attend their field staff training events, because there are similarities. That's in the

budget, especially in the first year. There will be regular consultations with the cuc executive director and strong email connections.

**Mark:** We've been doing this for almost two years because [Executive Director] Mary Bennett has been working partly from Vancouver. cuc staff meetings have happened by teleconference and email. We've accumulated some experience here, and our new structure will be an extension of what we're already doing.

**Can-U:** The December version of the taskforce report that was circulated to congregations forecast a deficit for the first few years of operation under this new plan. Why didn't the taskforce or board recommend growing more slowly, and staying within budget?

**Brian:** We don't see it as a deficit – it's the gathering of investment capital for a new organization. The draft of our report that went out in December was only looking at new expenses and new money, not the existing cuc budget. We discovered that the cuc has funds that can be used as the start-up capital – a little more than \$250,000. We're confident that within four or five years the organization will be in the black, without excessive increases in annual program fees from congregations.

**Can-U:** Did the board accept that argument at its January meeting Mark?

**Mark:** Brian's right: we see this as an investment, based on money we've been able to save, plus the interest on the money the UUA has held for 18 months up to July 1. We're not going to raid our endowment. We're taking reserves and are using them as start-up capital to create the sort of program that can succeed.

We looked at several options and found we couldn't provide the services our congregations need if we started slowly, hiring one or two people, and then increasing as we could afford it.

We considered using three new part-time people, but rejected that idea because it lends itself to exploitation.

**Can-U:** You felt you needed three people, in order to cover the country and the programs, and it wasn't fair or realistic to have them less than full-time?

**Mark:** Right. If you don't have at least three full-time program people, how do you manage a country this large? – you'd spend all your time travelling. The other option was to take part-time people and use them full-time, which isn't fair, and we didn't think it would work.

**Brian:** The board wrestled with this question: if we structured only for a break-even budget, then we would have been accepting the financial constraints of the UUA as if they were our own. We felt we had to come up with the right plan, and then figure out how to raise the money. It's a little bit like, "if you build it, they will come." With the right program, we'll get the support and we'll grow to fill it.

**Can-U:** Two priorities have been identified by Canadian congregations in recent years: growth of the denomination and made-in-Canada Religious Education. How is this new structure designed to meet these needs?

**Brian:** We've created a single person to manage lifespan RE, not splitting it up between regional people. We felt that in this program area, there are 30–40 Directors of Religious Education across the country in congregations, and one person can manage that many contacts.

In the area of growth, the specific mandate for the new regional staff is to be growth-focussed in everything they do. There is nothing in their positions that doesn't impact on growth. As well, we'll set aside some money each year specifically for extension projects.

**Can-U:** Finally, what do you think will be the impact of this change, in five or 10 years' time?

**Mark:** My expectation is that that the awareness of ourselves as being

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Unitarians and Universalists and Canadians will continue to grow. I also think that awareness of the importance of networking between congregations is also growing. None of us can do it alone, not as individuals within congregations, nor as congregations within Canada, nor ultimately not as national organizations, unallied and unsupported.

While this change looks like a form of separation, it's actually the creation of healthier, respectful relationships – more so than we've had in the past.

**Can-U:** How about you Brian? The cuc represents over 5,000 members spread all across the country. Can we serve their needs for community, connection and growth – and can we afford to do it?

**Brian:** I think we can, and I think we're starting in a very good place. After we first hired an executive director in 1984–85 it took a few years to sort things out, but since then we've grown by about 10 per cent. I see no reason why that can't continue, especially now that we're putting the tools in place to help congregations grow.

**Can-U:** All this talk of RNGS and journeys makes me think of a popular movie I just saw, and it makes me wonder: who is the Lord of the Rings in this new structure?

**Brian:** Mark is the Lord of the Rings because he's the president! And I'm Gandalf, the wizard who gets killed along the way, but hangs around haunting everybody!

**Can-U:** Are you comfortable with that role Mark?

**Mark:** Well, you know what happens to the Lord of the Rings in the end, so I'm wary. There are problems with people who want all the power. The stronger metaphor here for me is really the Fellowship of the Ring – that's the group we are and that's the direction we're headed ...

**Brian:** ... bringing in all kinds of people, with different skills, who are needed to help us get where we're going. •

## The search is on!

We're looking for all kinds of qualified people to help us “found” and run the new CUC

**The search is on for** people who can make it happen! Many people are needed to “found the new cuc,” both volunteers, and new staff.

### People like you

The plan for the new cuc focuses on grass roots volunteers – perhaps people like you! These volunteers will include congregational networkers (who will help to establish and maintain a nurturing network of congregations within a geographical area), and service consultants (willing to share their area of expertise with those in other congregations through workshops). Many others will be involved but these will be the key people on the RNG – Regional Network Group – the ring leaders, if you will.

In addition to our powerful base of volunteers, we have proposed three new staff positions for the cuc to ensure volunteers receive support. More than anything else, these will be people who have a talent for “making things happen” – people who can take a vision and a plan and work with others to turn concepts into reality.

### Making things happen

Two *Directors of Regional Services*, one based in the west, one in the east, will work with a wide variety of volunteers to grow the UU movement in their half of the country. The overriding focus will be growth – one of the two areas identified all along as key to offer within Canada. They'll be recruiting, coaching, mentoring and training service consultants. They'll help congregations in many areas related to growth – defined broadly in terms of how congregations and individuals grow, as well as numerical growth (the financial plan calls for a three per cent increase in membership each year over the next five years).

One *Director of Lifespan Learning* will

work directly with religious education professionals and volunteers across the country to help congregations with their lifespan RE programs as well as youth programs and young adult programs. They'll be helping to create and support a lifespan learning network.

Tall orders? Yes, if you think about doing it single-handedly. The people who will thrive in these positions are those who are experienced and enjoy working with and through others.

The salary range for these positions is \$40–\$45,000 per year. In order to maximize accessibility and minimize travel costs, it is likely the successful candidates will be located in an area within driving distance of a number of Unitarian congregations. That said, we will entertain realistic and cost-effective alternatives put forward by qualified applicants from anywhere in Canada. In forming this national team of field staff, consideration will also be given to the mixture of locations.

### Help us find these people

Can you picture yourself in one of these roles? Do you know someone who you think would fit the bill? As we form search committees more details will be available on the job descriptions, hiring process, etc. The positions are subject to approval of the implementation plan at the annual meeting in May, but we expect to be ready to interview shortly after that meeting and get new staff in place for the start of the church year in September.

Further details will be circulated through our monthly congregational mailings, on the website, and through email lists. As well, if you would like to receive information directly, please contact me and I will ensure you receive information as it becomes available. •

– Mary Bennett, Executive Director