

Empty Bowls can build concern and community

How can you get people to be more aware of hunger, do something about it, and have an entertaining evening – all at the same time? The answer is Empty Bowls, a fundraising for hunger idea that's slowly catching on with Unitarian congregations in Canada.

Here's how it works. Artists or congregation members create bowls in advance. The event is a simple meal of soup and bread, where guests choose a new bowl to use for dinner and then keep afterwards. The materials are all donated, so the entire proceeds from admission (usually \$20–\$30 per person) go to a local, national or international hunger-fighting organization.

The symbolism of bowls is deliberate, to remind guests that many people face “empty bowls” around the world – as well as in our own communities.

The Unitarian Fellowship of London has organized an Empty Bowls event annually since 1998, raising over \$20,000 for food banks and breakfast programs in the southwestern Ontario city. Sylvia Bass West of London says the project, “really engages caring community, and connects three main groups – the arts, socially-conscious businesses and volunteers – towards a common goal.”

The London fellowship has used Empty Bowls both as outreach, and for internal religious education. The local potter's guild, schools, bakeries and other businesses are all involved in the preparations. Children are engaged by making ceramic bowls in their RE classes. And church musicians donate their talents to the event.

“I think it's one of the best opportunities around for multi-generational community,”



Margo Pineau of Montreal at the Empty Bowls event in October.

says Bass West, who is also the cuc's Director of Lifespan Learning.

In Thunder Bay, Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship just finished their fifth Empty Bowls event. The lay-led congregation of 100 members attracted nearly 300 people to the dinner, mostly from outside their immediate circle, while raising about \$7,000. Organizer Pyteke Blaauw says the concept's strength is joining artists with social justice organizers, plus the publicity it brings to the congregation.

In Montreal, organizer Alison Hall says that Empty Bowls has grown steadily since 2001.

continued next page >>

Three Poems from my Taos Retreat

BY PATRICIA RENÉE EWING

Dawn

black butterfly
divest yourself
of your mourning cloak
Quick catch a falling star!

Advent

pageantry of desert suns
painted rainbow
red splashes of flowers
a ladder descending
from heaven to earth
the cries of prophets
lost in the wilderness

Images

the dark horse
the white spirit dog
and the moonlight on the valley

Patricia Renée Ewing, an acclaimed “woman of myth and metaphor,” is a member of the Unitarian Church of Montreal. In 1978 she won a fellowship from the prestigious Helene Wurlitzer Foundation of New Mexico, where she wrote these poems.

Poetry Contributions

Short, spiritual poems by cuc members are invited. Please send them to poetry editor Franci Louann, flouann@telus.net, or by fax to: 604-731-0228.



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

Prix fixe or buffet? It's your choice!

The CUC fall Regional Gatherings are now in their third year. They offer workshop streams – like a *prix fixe* menu – for those in particular roles (board members, lay chaplains, young adult or youth ministry, religious educators). As well, they include a stream for those who are there because they want their spiritual life deepened.

While each of the four regions is developing its own culture and sense of what works for the gatherings, all offer “streams” as the entrées of the weekend. Starters include an in-gathering on Friday, usually with optional networking sessions and display tables. Saturday night often includes a coffee house as dessert. Sunday morning worship with the host congregation is the coffee that both stimulates and warms.

In the springtime, our Annual Conference and Meeting has grown into a large buffet of workshops and worships, although CUC business meetings and resolutions remain an integral part of the weekend. In five years we’ve gone from three workshop times with several choices in each, to six event times with up to 10 offerings – ranging from workshops, presentations, networking sessions and targeted worship services.

Pre-conference events at the ACM have also increased, as have lunchtime programs, Monday afternoon workshops and evening workshops. (It’s getting hard to choose what to attend, and there’s a danger of overeating leading to indigestion!) We expect this year’s ACM in Hamilton, May 20–23, 2005, to be the biggest in CUC’s history (500–600 people), and also the biggest in the number of events on offer.

Whether you choose the fall Regional Gathering *prix fixe*, or the spring ACM buffet (or both – after all they’re six months apart!), the CUC is definitely a family restaurant. All our events welcome Unitarians and Universalists from babe to sage.

Letters to the Editor

STORY MISSED UU STRENGTHS

I was dismayed that the supporters of your endowment campaign made no mention of either our obligations to the wider world, or of our fine religious education programs (“Why I support the endowment campaign,” Spring 2004).

What special and unique gift does Unitarian Universalism offer our fellow citizens, and especially those who have dropped out of their traditional religious homes? My take is that we believe in human responsibility and do not solicit or expect divine intervention.

Our RE efforts, the crown jewel of many UU societies, got no mention in the endowment story. How strange, since many have joined UU congregations specifically to give their children the privilege of a program that emphasizes individual and creative decision making, lack of dogma, and toleration for those of other faiths, cultures, and life styles.

Others, probably, have yet more reasons for supporting the endowment campaign, but these are what I would have headlined had I been asked.

– Ken Morrison, Thunder Bay

LAMENT FOR A NATION

At last summer’s Elliot Institute gathering for Unitarians and others from the Pacific Northwest, I met American Unitarians who lament the Canadian withdrawal from the UUA. Although my sons continue to connect with Unitarian youth in the American Northwest, they, like us, have no connection with Canadian Unitarians from outside B.C.

It is disheartening for us that our Unitarian ties have been weakened and that you used the summer issue of *The Canadian Unitarian* to preach the separation gospel (“Tales from my diplomatic mission to a foreign country,” Executive Director’s column, Summer 2004).

When you travel to that “foreign” country, do you try to increase the interaction of individual Canadian Unitarians with their American kin? Is the CUC helping increase the “cross border conferences and events” for the rest of us who are still mourning?

– Dan Maas, Vancouver

Empty Bowls

>> continued from p. 1

She likes to keep the event simple: a serving of soup, bread and an apple, with only water to drink. She also likes the outreach value of the event, saying, “we’re not just raising money, we’re opening our doors to the broader community.” (Montreal translated Empty Bowls to *Bols en partage* – Bowls for Sharing – for use in their bilingual community.)

The CUC Annual Conference and Meeting in May 2005 will have a multi-generational Empty Bowls dinner on Saturday night, as an alternative to go-

ing out to local restaurants. Some ceramic bowls were painted at last year’s annual conference, plus conference-goers will also be asked to bring their own bowls. “The concept is an excellent fit for Unitarians,” says CUC executive director Mary Bennett, “and it will also work well with our annual meeting.”

For more information go to: cuc.ca/conference or emptybowls.com. □

CUC Regional Gatherings



Participants singing "De toi je reçois" in a French choir at the Eastern Regional Gathering

Loads of activity at this year's regional gatherings

This fall I attended three of the four CUC regional, weekend gatherings. Here's a round-up of what went on:

The **Eastern Regional Gathering** was in Kingston, the westernmost point of the region. More than 70 people convened for the mid-October event, which featured music, drama, leadership, diversity, youth and young adult sessions – many of them delivered to multi-age groups.

Two weeks before that I was in Winnipeg for the **Western Regional Gathering**. Our Winnipeg hosts showed us the meaning of "Friendly Manitoba" and carried the theme of *Rekindling the Flame* throughout the weekend in many ways. Youth, advisors and allies participated in a Leadership Development Conference, one of the many services we still receive from the UUA.

I returned to my home in B.C. in time for the **B.C. Regional Gathering** in Nanaimo, where we experimented with a social responsibility pre-conference session on Friday. A dynamite team came up from the U.S. to lead a Spirituality Development Conference, which is a service still provided to us

by the UUA Youth Office.

I missed the **Central Regional Gathering**, in London, Ontario in mid-November, but three CUC staffers were there: Sylvia Bass West (Director of Lifespan Learning), Linda Thomson (Director of Regional Services – East) and Paola Jani (CUC Administrative Assistant). Full-day workshops included: Conflict in the Congregation, Pastoral Care, Storytelling and Young Adults. There was also a Youth Social Justice Conference, plus Young Fun (7–12 years) and Junior Youth (12–13 years) programs. 

– CUC Executive Director
Mary Bennett



A multigenerational dinner at the Western Regional Gathering

CU*UL School

First leadership training conference for U*Us

This year was the inaugural session of the Canadian Unitarian*Universalist Leadership School, held July 14–18 at Brock University in St. Catharines.

In a picturesque room snuggled up against the Niagara Escarpment this all-Canadian group gathered for the first time to share stories, listen to plenary sessions about our religious history, develop skills in leadership, conflict resolution, and strengthen our understanding of leadership styles and types.



The program got underway slowly, with a major storm causing many planes to be late arriving in Hamilton, but eventually 30 UUs from Newfoundland to Alberta arrived. The group was led by the talented team of CUC Regional Director Linda Thomson and Rev. Carole Martignacco of North Hatley, Quebec with volunteer help from many others.

The CU*UL school was an all-round success, with the group developing into a caring, sharing community and many participants contributing to a scholarship fund to offset the costs of attending for future participants. (Additional scholarship funds can be sent to the CUC Office, marked CU*UL Scholarship if you are interested in helping out.)

The Canadian Unitarian*Universalist Leadership School is a self-funded program of the CUC. It will move across Canada in order to provide opportunities for leaders in all congregations. Next year's CU*UL School will be held in Calgary.

If you are interested in developing your leadership skills in a U*U context, watch for news on the CUC website or contact us at cuul@cuc.ca.

– Cheryl Jewell

CUC Updates

YOUTH ADVISOR TO THE BOARD

Alex Dundas, 18, of Winnipeg was elected Youth Advisor to the CUC Board of Trustees in July. A first-year university student, Alex has been attending youth conferences for five years and credits them with giving him, "more guidance, acceptance and happiness than anything else I have ever participated in." He believes there is a lack of communication among youth nationally, and has ideas for improving it, like a youth message board on the CUC website. He also wants to turn the youth advisory position on the Board into one with full vote.



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GETTING TO KNOW UU

The theme for next year's CUC Annual Conference and Meeting is designed to create excitement and attract people to Hamilton. When I watch people at denominational events, particularly those attending for the first time, I find it amazing how quickly they learn – and how this deepens their relationship with our denomination. They quickly realize that, 'we are not just that little church from (fill in your city or town); there are congregations like us all across the country.' Our strengths and wonders can even be a secret amongst ourselves, which is why we'll be doing a lot of sharing and *Getting to Know UU* next May! For more information: cuc.ca/conference.

– Cheryl Jewell

ENDOWMENT UPDATE

The CUC Endowment Campaign, with a fundraising goal of \$1 million, has raised \$825,000 to date, in its "major gift" phase. Campaign Director Paul Evered fully expects that *Growing Forward* will surpass its target by the time it goes into its "special gift phase" early next year. Evered thinks that surpassing the target amount can only help the CUC in the coming years, because, "the funds we're raising are for an endowment, so the CUC can only draw on the interest from year to year. A larger principal will give the organization a more stable base of income in the future."

Testimony

by Terry Reilly

Music is and always has been my ministry

Reviewing the music I was inspired to compose during the recent regional gathering in Kingston, Ontario it doesn't surprise me that Unitarianism is such a good fit for the person I've evolved into.

All my adult life I've been a composer of songs, or as my sweet rabbinical student partner Sherril likes to say, "You're a story singer." And that's what I do I suppose. I sing the stories of the experiences I find myself a part of. To quote one of my songs, "I like to hear what my heart is trying to say ..."

I spent many years as a Christian, and I seriously considered ordained ministry at a couple of points. It took almost 50 years, but it finally dawned on me that music is and always has been my ministry. A half dozen years ago our then minister, Rev. Katie Stein-Sather called to say that the Avalon Unitarian Universalist Fellowship was looking to nurture a musical component to their gatherings. I gladly took on the task, and have delighted in watching us become more and more musical. Not only have they cultivated the harvest of songs that their fellowship/friendship has inspired, but they have supported me through some of the darker moments in my life.

I still think that Jesus was a very cool individual and I'm not surprised that the young Jewish man inspired a new religious movement. Justice and equality are core values to the man he was. For myself, I never quite understood why his resurrection had to be believed as physical, his birth as virgin, or why more fundamental Christians feel he

is the only true way to God.

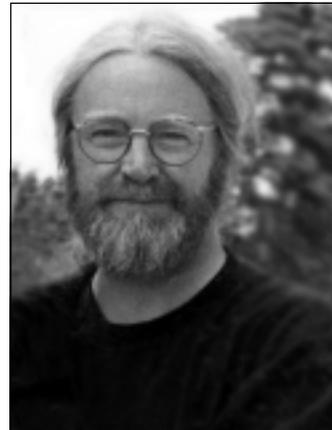
Unitarian Universalism seems to embrace some of the core values that I learned as a Christian. It's refreshing to feel that we do not expend a lot of energy on some of the dogma that I feel sometimes over-burdens Christianity. There have been many great prophets and no doubt there will continue to be others.

God? Yes I believe in some sort of God, and that She dwells within me – not out there in some far away Heaven conversing with Jesus only. There is not enough room here to take a real look at all that I think God is, might be, or isn't, but I also know and accept that God isn't for those who believe otherwise.

That's part of the beauty of our small, but vibrant fellowship that meets once a week to re-affirm the community we have chosen to belong to. We know that we come to our spiritual selves by many different paths, that we each have a light to share with one another, and that we are stronger and more energized as community. **U**

"As we come together,
may we take this chance,
To open up our hearts,
and join the sacred dance.
To touch our deepest yearnings,
to let them find their voice.
We are a sacred circle.
It's reason to rejoice."

Terry Reilly of St. John's, Newfoundland will soon release a 24-song tape and CD of Unitarian material, and is available to lead workshops or services in other congregations. You can contact Terry at: trp@nfld.com.





The current CUC Board of Trustees: Karen Fraser Gitlitz, Jean Armstrong, Nora Prosser, Christine Johnston, Keith Baxter, Elizabeth Bowen, Brian Kiely, Mark Morrison-Reed, Alex Dundas, Vyda Ng-Cornish. They met at Unicamp, northwest of Toronto, in late September.



**Brian
Kiely**

CUC President

We asked ‘What’s next? – Where do we go from here?’

Three years ago we launched the new CUC. There was a new autonomy, three new program staff and a plan that outlined a fresh approach for meeting the needs of Canadian Unitarian and Universalist congregations.

The plan was bold and risky, but it offered only a sketchy framework. The job of filling in the colours was given to the staff and volunteers who would have to bring the plan to life. They have done a wonderful job. There is excitement at the Annual Conference and the Regional Gatherings. Attendance at these events has jumped noticeably and

volunteerism in the CUC is at an all-time high.

Nearly everything the Board has done since then has been geared to making the plan work. We filled in details, updated policies and worked on the Endowment Campaign. Most of that start-up work is now complete or well on its way. Recently we looked at our last Long Range Plan and realized we had accomplished nearly everything on the list, at least to some degree.

So, at our Fall Board Retreat we spent a day asking, “What next? Where can the CUC go from here?” We used an open-

ended method called Appreciative Inquiry. As you will read, it produced exciting results. In the next year we will be coming to congregations, asking you to use a similar process. Our goal is to devise a new and creative CUC Vision and then Long-Range Plan, something fresh and inspiring.

One catch-phrase that came up in our work was, “Dare to be religious.” It is my hope that Canadian Unitarians and Universalists will dare to dream. There really is no limit to what our faith and our Council can become – but first we have to dare to dream it. •



Envisioning the future of the CUC

The CUC Board of Trustees has just proposed four “provocative propositions” to guide its work over the coming year (right).

The four propositions grew out of small group discussions using the “appreciative inquiry” process (see “What is Appreciative Inquiry?” next page), at their fall board meeting in September. The propositions are like vision statements, to inspire the organization for the future based on the best of what it does right now.

So, why did the board decide to embark on this visioning process? How did they come up with the four propositions? What do the propositions mean? And how will they be put into action?

Learning appreciative inquiry

For the past three years, the board has been focussed on getting the newly independent CUC up and running. But now they believe that job is complete, and their role can be more visionary. As Jean Armstrong of Portage La Prairie says, “We’ve looked after ourselves secularly, and now we must focus on who we are religiously.”

Vyda Ng-Cornish of St. John’s says it felt the board was taking a “huge, deep breath” before moving forward.

The Board’s four Provocative Propositions:

1. *Dare to be religious in all that we do (spirituality)*
2. *Inspire participation (teamwork)*
3. *Create connections (communication)*
4. *Risk diversity (outreach)*

The appreciative inquiry process is based on a couple of simple concepts:

- build on strengths instead of dwelling on problems, and
- use personal, narrative stories instead of strictly rational analysis.

After positive feedback from an appreciative inquiry workshop led by Leslie Kemp of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver during the CUC annual conference last spring, executive director Mary Bennett proposed it for the board retreat in September.

“It starts from people’s most powerful and emotional experiences with their own church,” says Bennett, “even if they may not be very common. These are shared in one-on-one interviews, then built upon to create provocative propositions about what it would be like if the best was commonplace.”

1. Dare to be religious

The first of the Board’s propositions for the CUC relates to spirituality: *dare to be religious in all that we do*. Nora Prosser of Hamilton observes that she has “noticed a hunger for spirituality in our congregations.”

Jean Armstrong of Portage La Prairie thinks there’s a simple way to inject spirituality into our practices, at least at denominational events like the CUC annual conference. “I think our professional ministers should play a larger role, since they’re trained in theology and contemplate these things every week.”

Alex Dundas of Winnipeg, on the other hand, worries about this proposition, because, “that’s what George Bush is doing in the U.S. election – daring to be religious in all that he does.”

2. Inspire participation

The second proposition relates to teamwork and leadership: *inspire participation*. It grew out of the vision that, “everyone wants to be on the cuc team.” Board members observed how willingly volunteers have flocked to the new organization over the past couple of years, because of an ethic of teamwork. Karen Fraser Gitlitz of Vancouver, who was attending her first full board meeting since being elected last spring, observed that, “when I volunteered at my church, I wasn’t just working for the success of the church, I was working for a vision that mattered to my community and to my religious movement.”

Fraser Gitlitz summarizes teamwork as, “we have a sense of fulfilment when everyone has something to do and feels that their work is worthwhile.” She sees great possibilities for the cuc if its team circle grows bigger and bigger, as it has been doing recently.

3. Create connections

The third of the board’s propositions is to *create connections*, which relates to communications. It began as the goal that, “congregations are connected so that anyone can obtain information and can do so easily and efficiently.” It grew out of the observation that great re-

sources exist all across the country, and need to be shared easily among congregations.

The obvious communications link is now electronic, of course. Almost everything the cuc does ends up on its web site, in one way or another. Almost all the cuc’s staff, volunteers and consultants are in frequent email communication. Nora Prosser, another new board member, also hopes to see better use of print communication as well. “Even busy people prop up their church newsletter at the breakfast table,” she believes.

4. Risk diversity

The fourth proposition, to *risk diversity*, is perhaps the most challenging. Many board members felt that the cuc has provided leadership in celebrating sexual diversity, which has strengthened the denomination. But the challenge is to go further, and extend the concept across racial, age group, class and even theological divides.

“Risking diversity means going into the fearful unknown,” says Keith Baxter of North Hatley, Quebec. “You carry your own baggage when you try to cross a divide,” he thinks, “and to do so requires a great effort in acquiring com-

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What is ‘Appreciative Inquiry’?

The **appreciative inquiry** process used by the board to come up with its four propositions is not a new thing. The concept has been around for about a decade, and an internet search on the term yields an amazing 64,000 web sites and documents! Here are the five basic steps of appreciative inquiry, summarized as five Ds:

Define: Before the board retreat, Mary Bennett devised several questions for the board asking,

“What’s the best of what we already do?” The board’s purpose was to determine common goals for the coming year as well as build synergy between newcomers and veterans in the group.

Discover: Board members (and several staff) interviewed each other in pairs, trying to discover the times when each person felt our religion is at its best.

Dream: The interview results were shared with the whole board, and they tried to imagine what the cuc would look like if the best things were commonplace instead of exceptional.

Design: The large group summarized their findings in four propositions, then took them back to small groups to devise action steps.

Deliver (or Do It): The board will use the action steps in its decision-making over the coming year. •



Nora Prosser



Vyda Ng-Cornish

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 competency in another culture.” Baxter also believes there is an intrinsic reason for risking diversity, beyond attracting newcomers to the church: “It broadens our perspective, which is vital for our well-being.”

He offers the following examples as challenges in risking diversity: “Could we risk dancing in church? Could we risk going where young adults want us to go spiritually, and even change the way we worship, which is now very humanist and secular?”

Christine Johnston of Victoria connects diversity to outreach. “Some of our most effective social responsibility work is interfaith,” she believes, “and it requires us to work side-by-side with people whose views are sometimes different from our own.”

Dreaming the vision

The CUC board would like to engage the whole denomination in a visioning process similar to the one it has just gone through itself, although it has yet to work out the details and timeline for the project. The board’s four propositions are not the final word, but a starting point to guide the board’s current work. During the 2005–06 church year, congregations will be invited to participate in dreaming the vision for 2011, the CUC’s 50th Anniversary.

At least two Canadian congregations already have experience with the appreciative inquiry process. The Unitarian Church of Vancouver used it earlier this year as a long-range planning tool, and Avalon UU Fellowship in St. John’s also did an appreciative inquiry workshop in October, facilitated by Sherril Gilbert.

Nora Prosser thinks that appreciative inquiry is a good fit for Canadian UUs. “I’ve been to a lot of workshops,” she says, “and I was positively inspired by it.” She believes the propositions the board came up with are “like vision statements that people can grow into, because they describe an image of the future and stretch our ideas of what is possible.” □

Getting to know the board

What is the CUC Board?

What does it do?

The CUC Board of Trustees is the organization’s governing body. It sets policy, hires the executive director, and is accountable for CUC finances. To put it simply, the Board leads the CUC. Its current president is Rev. Brian Kiely of Edmonton.

How the board is composed:

- it has eight members, two from each of the four CUC regions (B.C., Western, Central, Eastern)
- it also has three non-voting participants: the past-president and the CUC executive director as *ex officio* members, plus a youth observer
- board members (trustees) are elected at the CUC annual meetings for three-year terms, with the possibility of a second term (the maximum is six years)
- two trustee positions are up for renewal at the annual meeting in 2005
- the CUC nominating committee ensures that prospective trustees are balanced in terms of gender, age, role (lay or ministerial) and areas of expertise

What the board does:

- meets in person three times per year, with much email and many conference calls in between
- does long-range vision and planning for the CUC
- members take on specific roles and tasks for the board and also serve on taskforces with other CUC volunteers
- responsible for budget and fundraising (eg. the endowment campaign)
- current task forces include statement of principles, social responsibility and shared ministry

Who is currently on the CUC board?

- *B.C.:* Christine Johnston (Victoria), Karen Fraser Gitlitz (Vancouver)
- *Western:* Jean Armstrong (Portage La Prairie), Brian Kiely (Edmonton)
- *Central:* Mark Morrison-Reed (Toronto), Nora Prosser (Hamilton)
- *Eastern:* Keith Baxter (North Hatley), Vyda Ng-Cornish (St. John’s)
- *Others:* Elizabeth Bowen (past-president), Alex Dundas (youth observer), Mary Bennett (executive director)
- *Board officers:* Brian Kiely (president), Keith Baxter (vice-president), Jean Armstrong (treasurer), Nora Prosser (secretary)

What CUC board members say about their role:

- “exciting”, “challenging”, “enormous satisfaction”, “great team” •

Keith Baxter



Same-sex Marriage Updates

Moving ahead on same-sex equality

The issue that puts Unitarians in the news these days is same-sex marriage. The last few months have featured many developments in this story, including these three.

Supreme Court hearings: we were there

The Canadian Unitarian Council was one of 17 interveners in support of same-sex marriage in front of the Supreme Court of Canada in early October. The court is considering the constitutionality of the federal government's draft bill that would change the definition of marriage to include same-sex unions. The cuc joined three other religious groups – the United Church of Canada, the Metropolitan Community Church of Toronto, and the Canadian Coalition of Liberal Rabbis – in support of the legislation.

cuc Past-President Elizabeth Bowen of Ottawa spoke at a nationally-televised press conference the day before the Supreme Court's two days of hearings. She argued that, "the cuc strongly supports equal-marriage rights for all Canadians, regardless of sexual orientation, and opposes 'separate but equal' civil unions. We have a long history as champions of human rights and have advocated repeatedly for equal-marriage rights. Unitarians believe that marriage is the legal and religious recognition of the love between two individuals and their commitment to care for and support one another."

The appearance of the cuc and three other groups at the Supreme Court in support of the bill offset the impression that all religious groups oppose equal marriage rights. "It's important that we're on record concerning this civil rights issue," says Bowen. •

Manitoba marriage finally recognized

Same-sex weddings became legal in Manitoba earlier this fall, after a provincial judge declared the current definition of marriage unconstitutional.

The victory was a long time in coming for Chris Vogel and Peter North of Winnipeg – 30 years to be exact. They were first married by Rev. Norm Naylor



Chris Vogel and Peter North of Winnipeg, in 2001

at the First UU Church of Winnipeg in 1974, however, the province refused to recognize their union. (The lawyer who argued the recent Manitoba case for Vogel, North and two other same-sex couples was Patricia Lane, who is also a youth advisor at the Winnipeg church.)

About a week after the Manitoba decision a Nova Scotia court reached a similar decision in that province – a first for Atlantic Canada. Same-sex marriages are now legal in six Canadian jurisdictions: Ontario, B.C., Quebec, Manitoba, Nova Scotia and the Yukon.

The cuc's Equal Marriage Working Group is proposing Feb. 11 as a day of celebration on a new calendar of special dates being devised by the cuc's social responsibility monitoring groups. Feb. 11 is the date of Vogel and North's 1974 marriage. •

Everyone: a movie with a Unitarian lay chaplain

A dark, romantic comedy about same-sex relationships and life-long commitment won "Best Canadian Feature" at the Montreal Film Festival earlier this fall. Playing the role of lay chaplain in the film is Debra Thorne, an actor and member of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver (and previously a lay chaplain as well).

Everyone follows the characters Ryan and Grant as they prepare to get married, along with five other couples who are invited to the wedding. The movie is about, "how difficult relationships are," according to Thorne. She calls her character "the conscience" of the melodrama as everyone's frailties come to the surface during the wedding preparations.

"As a lay chaplain, you end up being what everybody needs you to be," she says, "because you're not often marrying Unitarians – you're dealing with many different people who can be suspicious, judgmental or distant because of their past negative religious experiences."

Although she's not referred to as "Unitarian" in the movie, Thorne found her role was similar to her real-life experience: "Because of our Unitarian values, lay chaplains can find the way into honest, healing communication – and sometimes a new door is opened."

The Vancouver makers of *Everyone* are looking for a Canadian distributor in order to get the feature onto national movie screens. You can also look for it on DVD or television next year. For more info: www.everyonethemovie.com. •



Debra Thorne

CP / WINNIPEG FREE PRESS (PHIL HOSSACK)

Unitarian People

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

Several members of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto including **Mairy Beam** are part of a unique experiment to establish an ecological community called “Whole Village” northwest of Toronto. Construction of a communal farmhouse began earlier this year on their 190-acre property near Caledon. Their goal is to create an “ecovillage in conjunction with a biodynamic farm” as a model of environmental sustainability and community living. For more information: www.wholevillage.org.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

Rev. Charlotte Cowan is serving this year as the interim minister at Don Heights Unitarian Congregation. **Rev. Krista Taves** was ordained by Toronto First Unitarian, and is now serving as an interim minister in New Orleans. **George Buchanan** is the intern minister serving the Edmonton and Westwood churches this year. **Antonia Won**, originally of North Shore Unitarian, is the intern minister serving First Unitarian Church of Victoria. Finally, **Debra Faulk** is the intern minister this year for North Shore Unitarian.

OTTAWA SAME-SEX MARRIAGE

Ottawa First Music Director **Jane Perry** and her spouse **Margaret Stubbington** were married in September in a small private ceremony.

MEMORIAM: CEC MULDREW

Long-term Unitarian **Cecil Muldrew** died in September and was honoured in a service at the First UU Church of Winnipeg. Besides his career as a school science teacher and principal, Cec was deeply involved in his community and church, with connections to Unicef, the Red Cross, Veterans Against Nuclear Arms and the Scouts. He was active in the Winnipeg church for 25 years, serving as a financial secretary. He was also on the board of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice. Cec Muldrew was 81 when he died.

Across the Country



Ottawa Centre MP Ed Broadbent was one of several speakers at an October rally for Samsu Mia held at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa in October.

Fred Cappuccino joins Ottawa refugee in sanctuary

In late June, retired minister Rev. Fred Cappuccino joined Samsu Mia in sanctuary at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. Mia of Bangladesh has been living there since July 2003, sheltered from a federal government deportation order by the Ottawa congregation.

Cappuccino joined Mia because he feels the federal government’s refugee process is unfair and felt he had to “up the ante” in the case. (Mia fears persecution if he returns to Bangladesh, and his case is supported by Amnesty International.)

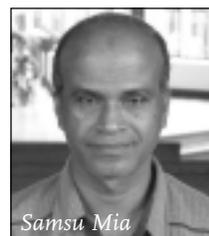
Cappuccino has this to say about the refugee system: “First of all, the judges are political appointees, and many of them know very little regarding the culture about which they are making life-and-death judgements. Secondly, some of the judges reject outright all cases before them, even without any kind of hearing. And thirdly, there is no appeal from this decision, even though Parliament passed a law that

would set up an appeal system.”

At a national rally for sanctuary held at the Ottawa Unitarian Congregation in late October, Liberal MP Marlene Catterall and NDP MP Ed Broadbent both criticized federal Immigration Minister Judy Sgro for failing to act.

(The rally also heard leaders from Catholic, United, Anglican and five other religious groups, as well as leaders from two national labour unions.)

Sgro criticized churches that offer sanctuary in July, prompting a letter from CUC president Brian Kiely. He wrote, “No congregation or larger religious group takes on a sanctuary case lightly. It is costly, time-consuming and often disruptive of church life. Giving sanctuary potentially involves legal risk as well. That people of faith are willing to make those kinds of sacrifices demonstrates that they believe in the people they support. Their act of faith and commitment strongly indicates that there are serious flaws in the Canadian refugee screening process.” □



Samsu Mia

Building community is give-and-take

We certainly bring much energy and many gifts to the building of community. But what about our spirit? Do we bring one spirit to the community we are building? And what is the quality of that spirit? In order to build a spiritually rich and deep community, I think we need to bring ourselves fully to the endeavour, then take responsibility for ourselves as we build community together.

Bringing ourselves

There are several obstacles in the way of bringing ourselves to community, however. To a greater degree than the general population, we are introverts – and introverts tend to have their deepest relationships with themselves. It's not easy to build community when our dialogue is internal. As introverts, we often don't know how to move the conversation with a stranger to a deeper spiritual level.

Another impediment to bringing ourselves to community is distrust. If you

The joy of building community is found in bringing vision to those who have lost their way, bringing energy to a place that has become stuck, bringing companionship to the lonely, and love to a community that is hurting.

risk bringing yourself to community, sooner or later you will find yourself in a dysfunctional community. If you are shopping around for the perfect community, I suspect you will never find it. By definition, to bring yourself into community means bringing yourself into imperfect community.

The joy of building community is found in bringing vision to those who have lost their way, bringing energy to a place that has become stuck, bringing companionship to the lonely, and love to a community that is hurting.

There's a third impediment to bringing ourselves to the building of commu-

nity: our fiercely independent spirit. One of our principles is a commitment to the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. But we don't do interdependence very well. "I can take care of myself, thank you very much," we say.

Think about it for a second. Do you find it much easier to give than to receive? When tragedy or disaster strikes in your own life, do you reach out to others, or run away and hide? Perhaps you find it difficult to collaborate on projects because you already have it all figured out before the meeting even begins? Building community is the ongoing drama of give and take.

Bringing ourselves is the difference between building community and simply observing it, standing back and judging rather than joining, reading ahead in the hymns to see if you agree with the words, acting as if you are an outsider, as if others belong but you don't, as if others are responsible but you're not.

Taking responsibility for ourselves

We must take responsibility for ourselves as we build community together. This means claiming our own power and using it constructively and wisely. The truth is, as Unitarian Universalists, as fierce individualists, as humanists rather than theists, we are deeply distrustful of power outside ourselves and deeply ambivalent about our own power as well.

We don't like to acknowledge that every word we say and every word we leave unsaid, every action we take and every action we fail to take has a power-

ful and lasting impact upon our sense of ourselves, upon others, upon this community and our world. We deny our own power, believing our actions and our words don't make any difference.



To take responsibility for ourselves means claiming our own power and using it constructively and wisely. It means being who we are rather than moulding ourselves to please others. It means speaking directly and clearly. It means being accountable for our actions and holding others to account for theirs.

Hanging in there

Building healthy community where spirit runs strong and deep means bringing yourself rather than standing back and observing. It means taking responsibility for yourself instead of criticizing others. And it means hanging in there, through thick and thin, being there, committing to the task. ■

This is an excerpt from "Building Community," delivered by Morrison-Reed to the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto (the complete sermon is at www.firstunitariantoronto.org). Donna Morrison-Reed will lead a one-day sermon-writing workshop at the CUC Annual Conference and Meeting next May.

THE CANADIAN

UNITARIAN

ISSN 0527-9860

The Canadian Unitarian is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It's mailed free to all members for whom the CUC has a current address.* The Unitarian reports on newsworthy events in the denomination, including the annual conference each spring. It attempts to reflect all segments of Unitarianism and Universalism in Canada. We welcome all submissions, however, publication is based on the criteria of newsworthiness, relevance to readers, length and balance. We try to publish all letters to the editor, although they may be edited for brevity and clarity.

* Non-members can subscribe to the Unitarian for \$15 Can. or \$10 U.S. Send name, address and cheque to CUC office.

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Printed on Canadian, acid-free recycled paper (30 per cent post-consumer fibre)

Deadline for next issue **Jan. 21, 2005**

Canada Post Agreement #40009492
Send Address Corrections and Returns to:
CUC, 502-112 St. Clair Avenue W., Toronto, ON, M4V 2Y3



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