

Lobbying for same-sex rights across the country

Unitarians are standing up for justice as a parliamentary committee travels the country this spring debating the issue of same-sex marriage. In Ottawa, Vancouver, Winnipeg and Toronto, individual Unitarians and CUC representatives advised the committee to side in favour of same-sex marriage.

Executive Director Mary Bennett and Ottawa retired minister Rev. Fred Cappuccino appeared before the committee in Ottawa last February. Bennett told the all-party committee that she is “proud” of the stance Unitarians have historically taken in “affirming the rights of all peoples, regardless of gender identity and sexual preference.” And she said she will be “very proud when Canada finally affirms marriage for same-sex couples.”

Bennett and Cappuccino spoke for 10 minutes to the committee, delivered a 10-page brief, then answered questions from the members of parliament.

Gilles Marchildon is the director of Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere (EGALE), the lobby group that is keenly focussed on changing the law for same-sex marriage. He says the CUC brief was “well-received” by the committee. Although Marchildon says some members had “badgered” witnesses in favour of same-sex marriage at previous hearings, “they seemed very respectful, particularly of the kind of experience represented by the CUC and Fred Cappuccino.”

(Cappuccino is a senior minister, a member of the Order of Canada, the father of two natural and 19 adopted children, and the founder



Elizabeth and Dawn Barbeau of Vancouver

– with his wife of 50 years – of Child Haven, which cares for 700 orphans in Asia.)

In Vancouver, Elizabeth and Dawn Barbeau of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver delivered an eloquent brief to the committee describing their seven-year relationship. They detailed their “commitment ceremony” five years ago, their legal name change, their common finances, their wills, and their desire to have children. They also described the confusion and discrimination that results from the lack of societal recognition of same-sex partnerships.

When Elizabeth arrived at the hospital once for emergency surgery, she designated Dawn as her “next of kin.” However, a nurse was confused and still quizzed Dawn at the bedside. “I’m her partner,” replied Dawn. The attendant looked puzzled. “I’m her spouse,” she offered, to another blank stare. Finally, Dawn declared, “She’s my wife!” – and the confusion was resolved.

• continued on page three

One Day: A Suite of Haiku

BY FRED COGSWELL

Morning

... the egg-shell sky breaks:
my eyes feast on the rich warmth
of a gold-yolked sun ...

Noon

... the world’s so heavy
with the weight of sky colour that
we need not look up ...

Evening

... star-flowers will shine
when the gardener, Night, snips the
last rose from the sky ...

Night

... close your eyes and all
the shapes and hues of the day will
live on in the dark ...

Fred Cogswell, a member of Fredericton Unitarian Fellowship, has recently relocated to New Westminister. Fred was editor of Fiddlehead Poetry at the University of New Brunswick from 1952–66 where he also taught, and publisher of Fiddlehead Poetry Books from 1952–1984. As such, he mentored generations of poets from coast to coast. Now 85, he published two books of poetry in 2002 and the first book of 2003 is already in press.

**GROWING VITAL
RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES
IN CANADA**



Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

CUC President

Viewing the war from a Unitarian perspective

This past month has been an anxious time. We don't understand, and in hopes of doing so we turn to the media. It doesn't help, because in the media's drama-driven myopia of the moment, the story always begins "today" rather than "once upon a time."

Last year, when commentators claimed that Sept. 11 had fundamentally changed America's self-understanding, I assumed it was hyperbole. I was wrong. Americans are very scared. Think about it. The heart of the U.S. military machine was attacked, and America's financial erection was destroyed. Imagine their sense of vulnerability and loss of face.

President Bush is being true to his God, and to the American context that shaped him. It is one of moral conservatism, manifest destiny, and a deep regard for the ideals of freedom and economic self-interest. The irony is that his situation is so similar to the one faced by the Muslim world. Both identify as God's Chosen, and both feel embattled.

What difference does it make to us? We affirm a religious way of being in the world that is very different from the fundamentalist, Manichean view – which divides the world into black and white, God versus the Devil, the army of good combatting the axis of evil.

The Divine does not choose sides, but is found in the inherent worth in each and the bonds that connect each to all. The challenge we face is to live with the tension of ambiguity rather than pretending certainty is possible.

The challenge is also to not give up hope. We must do what we can to make sure the U.S. carries through and promotes true democracy, rather than continuing the long line of policy decisions that have served American geo-political needs and economic self-interest instead.

Témoignage

par Lucie-Marie Castonguay-Bower

Quel bonheur de trouver un groupe spirituel aimant

À un moment où le monde a de plus en plus besoin de paix et de justice, je me sens privilégiée de faire partie d'un « Fellowship » qui, tout en restant bien à l'écoute de la communauté qui l'entoure, est très actif et centré sur le support des uns et des autres.

Grâce à une amie, en décembre 2001, mon mari et moi découvrons « ce trésor caché » : le UUF d'Ottawa.

Pourtant il y a huit ans, j'étais à Cleary, au UUC de l'ouest d'Ottawa; j'accompagnais alors au piano pour le mariage de la fille d'une amie. J'ai admiré cette merveilleuse église sans aucun souci de connaître sa communauté.

En janvier 2002, au cours d'une conversation sur le « Fellowship » avec ma fille aînée, cette dernière me fait réaliser que son mariage en août 2000 avait été présidé par Margaret Kopke (chapelain à Cleary). N'est-ce pas la preuve de la confirmation que nos enfants sont nos meilleurs professeurs?

L'accueil chaleureux mais non étouffant, que mon conjoint et moi avons reçu à notre première rencontre au UUF, a tout de suite ouvert mon cœur. Le symbole de la lumière et l'aisance avec laquelle cette simple célébration se déroulait était pour moi le prélude d'une symphonie.

Depuis plus de 30 ans que j'ai une soif ardente d'un mouvement qui me permet de tout questionner, sans pour autant avoir toutes les réponses.

Ici, au UUF d'Ottawa, pour la première fois de ma vie, je

peux me permettre d'être moi-même avec toute ma vulnérabilité et toute ma force. Au fond le « Fellowship » me donne l'opportunité de vivre ce dont j'ai le plus à cœur : le respect de la personne humaine et ce, dans la lumière la paix et l'amour. J'ai aussi eu cette preuve lors de mon bénévolat à l'assemblée générale de juin 2002.

Je sais que beaucoup de francophones sont avides d'une communauté telle que « notre UUF ». Comment leur en faire connaître l'existence? Nos voisins de Montréal ont fait un travail gigantesque à ce niveau; ne pourrions-nous pas, avec leur appui et expérience, promouvoir le bilinguisme sur nos sites internet? Et que dire de la place que nous pourrions faire à la minorité française dans chacune de nos communautés? Y être déjà sensibilisé est la porte du succès : le comment se fera naturellement.

Je souhaite donc, du plus profond de mon cœur, voir grandir au niveau national notre visibilité auprès des francophones. Quelle richesse que ces deux cultures! Après trente ans de vie conjugale avec un anglophone, j'en sais quelque chose!

Merci d'être là et de me permettre de partager ce qui présentement, prend une place extrêmement importante dans ma vie spirituelle. ☐

See English translation on page 4





Here are the words that make Unitarians squirm

Late last year, something new hit the virtual world of Canadian Unitarian email discussion – the Name Game!

It was a way of thinking carefully about the language we use in public, with suggestions for new terms that might be more inclusive and inviting.

For example: if we call our ourselves a “church,” what does this imply to potential newcomers? Would we be better off using the term “fellowship,” “meeting house,” or “congregation”?

According to Calvin Drake – who hosted the exercise on a custom web site – the Name Game was meant to examine the loaded terms we use, many of which are borrowed quite directly from protestant Christianity. “Our challenge,” says Drake, “is to communicate to non-Unitarians our essential message and philosophy using a vocabulary they will understand, while avoiding an unnecessarily negative response to ‘loaded’ words.”

Participants were asked to suggest words they found to be loaded. Then they were asked to suggest alternatives. Finally, they were asked to vote on the suggestions (all of this happening on-

line of course, without the participants actually meeting each other).

Unitarians weighed in from across the country, with responses from 44 distinct participants. Here’s what they came up with (the loaded term is in bold, followed by alternatives):

- **religion** – faith, fellowship, philosophy
- (*worship*) **service** – service, Sunday service, gathering, celebration
- **sermon** – reflection, address, message, talk
- **hymns** – songs
- **pulpit** – lectern, podium
- **lay chaplain** – celebrant
- **church** – fellowship, meeting house, congregation

Some of the Name Game’s findings aren’t surprising. For instance, 70 per cent of the congregations affiliated to the cuc already use a term other than “church” in their official name. And the use of “sermon” is probably no more common than the alternatives.

So, was the Name Game worthwhile? Drake says that individual Unitarians get into debates about vocabulary all the time, but the Game was a chance to do

Same-sex marriage

• *continued from page one*

The parliamentary committee is entertaining three options in regard to same-sex marriage:

- extending legal marriage to same-sex couples
- the status quo (with the possible option of a parallel legal institution called “civil unions” for gays and lesbians – or “marriage lite” in the words of EGALÉ)
- removing civil marriage from the law, and leaving marriage to religious institutions

In its brief, the cuc sided with EGALÉ in favour of the first option. Gilles Marchildon doesn’t think the government is serious about option three, but he fears the sort of second-class laws it might come up with under option two. The hearings ended in April and the committee will deliver a report to the Minister of Justice by June. Marchildon thinks the government will address the issue in the fall, so that it doesn’t hang around until the next federal election.

In finding the marriage laws unconstitutional last year, the Ontario Supreme Court gave the government two years to make changes. That clock runs out in July 2004. [☐](#)

– For more information visit these sites: www.cuc.ca/queer, www.egale.ca, canada.justice.gc.ca/en/dept/pub/mar

it carefully. His hope isn’t that any term becomes “official” but rather that we use conscious vocabulary, especially in public forums and communications. [☐](#)

– For more information about the Name Game, see www.unitaria.org. Calvin Drake is a member of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto, plus he’s the congregational networker for the cuc Central Region and a member of the cuc Statement of Principles Taskforce.



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

It's a team effort to prepare a brief for federal committee

"You're presenting to a parliamentary committee? I'm jealous!" said CUC President Mark Morrison-Reed upon hearing I would be delivering our same-sex marriage brief to the Standing Parliamentary Committee on Justice and Human Rights.

I'd observed the committee in action, after seeing media reports that weren't very complimentary. And I worked over the previous months with the CUC's Gender and Sexual Diversity Monitoring Group to distribute their brochure on same-sex marriage and encourage signing of the petition by the national lobby group, EGALE (Equality for Gays and Lesbians Everywhere).

Mark's spontaneous response changed my emotional stance from nervous to excited. Hey! I was ready! (Or at least I would be by Feb. 26 – with a little help from my friends.)

I'd met Gilles Marchildon when I visited our congregation in Winnipeg and discovered he was now executive director at EGALE. Gilles briefed me on the issues that were being raised, as well as coached me in the use of the headphone that provides simultaneous translation, and introduced me around.

In our brief, we argued strongly in favour of legalizing same-sex marriage. When I first started learning more about this issue, it seemed complex, but by the time I arrived on Parliament Hill with Rev. Fred Cappuccino, it seemed simple – *it's about justice!*

While Fred and I were well-prepared for questions, we got asked very few. One question was to define "marriage" in 8-10 words. My response was easy: "A public declaration and recognition of a lifetime commitment."

It was an honour to present our brief, but I wasn't on my own. I fully appreciate the many people who contribute to our social responsibility stands.

Testimony

by Lucie-Marie Castonguay-Bower

I'm happy I found mutual support in Ottawa

At a time when the world increasingly needs peace and justice, I feel privileged to be part of a fellowship that, while being attentive to the surrounding community, is very active and focused on mutual support.

Thanks to a friend, my husband and I discovered this "hidden treasure," the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Ottawa (UUFO), in December 2001.

However, eight years ago, I was at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa on Cleary Avenue in the west end of Ottawa; I was playing the piano for the wedding of a friend's daughter. I admired this wonderful church but did not care to know more about the people who went there.

In January 2002, in a conversation about the Fellowship with my older daughter, she reminded me that Margaret Kopke, a lay chaplain at Ottawa First, had officiated at her wedding in August 2000. Does this not confirm that our children are our best teachers?

The warm but not overwhelming welcome that my husband and I received at our first encounter with the UUFO immediately opened my heart. The symbol of *light* and the ease with which this simple celebration proceeded was like the prelude of a symphony for me.

For more than 30 years I have longed for a movement or organization that would let me question everything, without having all the answers. Here in

the UUFO, for the first time in my life, I can be myself, with all my vulnerability and all my strength. Basically, the Fellowship has given me the opportunity to live out what is most important to me: respect for the human person, in an atmosphere of light, peace and love. I also had the same experience when I volunteered at the UUA General Assembly in June 2002.

I know that many francophones yearn for a community like our UUFO. How can we let them know that it exists? Our neighbours in Montreal have made a huge effort in this regard. Could we not, with their support and experience, promote bilingualism on our web sites? And what about the room we could make for the French-speaking minority in each of our communities? Awareness is the key to success: the "how" will come naturally.

From the bottom of my heart, I hope that we can increase our visibility among francophones across Canada. What richness is found in having these two cultures! After 30 years of marriage to an English-speaker, I know something about it!

Thank-you for being there and letting me share what is now an extremely important part of my spiritual life. ☑

– English translation by Peter Schmolka



Border doesn't divide Canada-U.S. fellowship

There's been a lot of U.S.–Canada friction in recent months, with the two countries' differences over the Iraq war, and inflammatory comments from politicians on both sides. So how does this play out at a local level, in a fellowship that straddles the border?

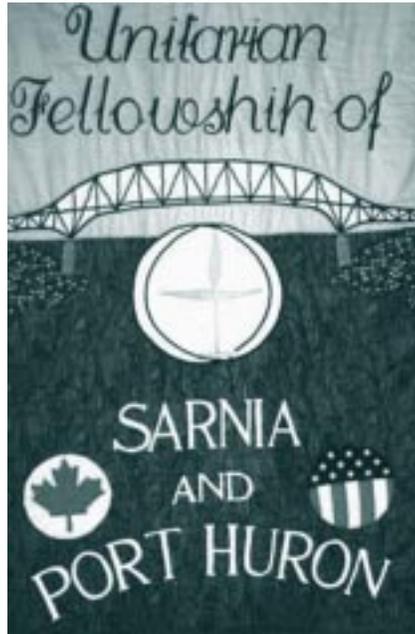
The Unitarian Fellowship of Sarnia-Port Huron (Ontario and Michigan) has existed as a lay-led group for 46 years. They began on the U.S. side of the St. Clair River, but switched their meetings to the Canadian side 20 years ago, for insurance reasons. Currently, about eight of their 50 members are American citizens.

"We're very careful and sensitive when it comes to politics," says president Wendy Starr. "After MP Caroline Parrish's comments, we had one of our Canadian members stand up and say that he certainly didn't think all Americans were bastards!"

When it comes to the U.S. war on Iraq, "most of our members, on both sides of the border, are against it anyway," says Starr. "But one American member said she supported the war, and we just accepted that as a diversity of opinion." The issue certainly hasn't divided the fellowship.

Heightened border security has led to longer line-ups at the two bridges that link the cities, however. It means the fellowship's U.S. members have to put up with longer waits on Sunday mornings. But it works both ways, because some of the social events are on the Port Huron side as well.

A larger issue for Sarnia-Port Huron was last year's decision to shift service delivery from the UUA to the CUC. "Before last year, we were really forgotten by both organizations, because we were so much on the margin. Now, we're finally tapping into resources we can really use," says Starr. The Sarnia-Port Huron fellowship now connects to other Unitarians in the region



through its congregational networker, Dwayne O'Neill.

It continues to pay dues to the UUA – "so we're paying twice, to the CUC and the UUA," says Starr – so the congregation's American members can attend district events and the UUA General Assembly as voting delegates.

The biggest change for the fellowship, however, was last year's decision to hire a part-time minister, Rev. Pat Webber of Hamilton. "It's made a huge difference," says Starr. Webber's skills in the area of growth helped the congregation sign up eight new members recently. They've contracted her to visit the fellowship almost monthly next year, which involves "a full dance card" each weekend, including Saturday meetings and pastoral visits, in addition to the Sunday service.

So Canada-U.S. divisions are not hurting the Sarnia-Port Huron church. If anything, they're doing better than ever, with a growth focus, a community presence, two active lay chaplains, and for the first time, professional ministry. ☐

CUC Updates

PEACE MESSAGES

Rather than sending a letter to Ottawa when the U.S. invaded Iraq, the CUC took a different approach to the crisis. It established a daily "peace message," via the web or email. Lay leaders, poets, religious educators and ministers all contributed. For instance, Montreal RE director **Trudy Blumstein** wrote on April 4: "Where is Mr. Rogers when we need him? He would surely say, limit your children's and your own exposure to the media, but be open to answer their questions." The messages remain on the CUC website, at www.cuc.ca/peace.

SAINT JOHN STEPS FORWARD

The UU church of Saint John, N.B. is about to become the newest full congregation of the CUC. Having passed the threshold of 30 members, with a part-time minister and rejuvenated leadership, Saint John will hold its charter service in June. They're currently housed in a rented space, but are working hard to articulate their identity and their future. For more on the Saint John church, see: www3.nbnet.nb.ca/uucsj/uum.htm.

GOODBYE CAROL

The woman with the infectious laugh and high-energy organizing skills is leaving the CUC. Our administrator for more than a decade, **Carol Dahlquist**, is moving on to a new challenge as an event manager with a consultant to non-profits. **Kevin Virtue** becomes the senior employee in the Toronto office. And two part-time contract employees – **T'Hayla Ferguson** and **Judy Ramkelawan** – will take over some of Carol's responsibilities while the organization looks for a replacement. *Our best wishes and many thanks Carol!*

A BREAKFAST FOR FRIENDS

The "Friends of CUC" are being recognized in a special way at the annual meeting this spring. The regular CUC donors will be thanked at a complimentary breakfast, prior to the Sunday worship in Winnipeg on May 18. Mary Bennett thanked all the Friends for their support – "financial and other" – in a special letter this spring.

OUR DIVERSITY

In the last issue, Larry Phillips wrote that he belongs to a denomination that accepts a wide diversity of theological beliefs and requires no creedal affirmation. But aren't our Purposes and Principles just such a creed? I think our core faith really comes down to our approach to the God question. Formally, we haven't taken any position here, but informally we have. In our denomination you don't hear appeals for divine intervention, nor promises of heavenly rewards. Emerson says we all have a Central Conviction, a Ground of Being, an Inner God. I believe this is the god of human responsibility and human creativity, of love, compassion and empathy. There are many paths to a good life, and we must each choose the one that suits us best.

— Ken Morrison, *Thunder Bay*

100 PER CENT RECYCLED?

I note that you now print the Unitarian on 30 per cent recycled paper. Would it be possible to use 100 per cent post-consumer, non-bleached recycled paper, in keeping with our seventh principle? The production of paper results in the destruction of forests and wildlife through clear-cutting, and the health and livelihood of many aboriginal people has been negatively affected by the bleaching of paper. It would be a progressive step to switch to fully recycled paper.

— David Mackay, *PEI*

EDITOR REPLIES

Two years ago, we switched the Canadian Unitarian from non-recycled paper to the stock we now use – Rolland New Life Opaque. It is bleached with oxygen, not chlorine, and carries the federal government Ecologo as a “good environmental choice.” You're right: it's only one-third recycled. We checked out several alternatives, and the totally recycled option would add 70 per cent to the cost of printing the newsletter. Right now, that's not possible for the cuc. Paper choices are continually changing, however, and we'll pester our printer for a white stock that has more recycled content without such a heavy premium.

— Art Kilgour, *Editor*

In Memory

Gooding was a pioneer in the field of religious education

She was our first ordained Minister of Religious Education. She led the RE program at the country's largest UU congregation for 13 years. And she was a “salt of the earth, loving Universalist,” according to Rev. Brian Kopke of the First UU Congregation of Ottawa. Margaret (Peg) Gooding died in early February at the age of 81.



Born in New Hampshire and educated in Chicago, Gooding moved to Ottawa in 1973 to become the Director of Religious Education. Her two doctoral degrees led some people to refer to her as “Dr. Dr. Gooding,” but that didn't make her any less approachable as an RE teacher. “The kids loved her,” says Kopke, who worked with Gooding towards the end of her time in Ottawa. “She knew the exact level she had to be at with kids, and was so respectful of them.”

Gooding was also very active in the wider scene, as the denomination began to recognize the importance of RE. She wrote curricula for the UUA (Exploring our Roots, Growing up Times, and others), as well as children's stories and histories of Universalism in Canada. In the early 1970s she worked to get recognition of DRES as profes-

sionals by the UUA. She won that battle, and in 1981 was ordained as a Minister of Religious Education. When she retired from Ottawa in 1986, she was named the congregation's Minister Emeritus.

Kopke remembers Peg Gooding as a “smart, insightful and happy” person, one who could have “kerfluffles” now and then (her word for anxiety), which “didn't last long.” He emphasizes that the core of her faith was Universalist, and she believed the denomination had made an important contribution in Canada.

“At a ministers' retreat, we once pitted her against Rev. Phillip Hewett [the authority on Canadian Unitarian history] in a debate. The result was a draw. She really held her own.”

Although she retired to California, Gooding continued to write curricula for the UUA, and to serve as an RE consultant to the Central Midwest District.

She is survived by three of her siblings, her daughter Frances Tigner, and a step-grandson. Donations in her name can be sent to USC Canada, 56 Sparks Street, Suite 705, Ottawa, ON, K1P 5B1, or to UNICEF Canada, 2200 Yonge Street, Suite 1100, Toronto, ON, M4S 2C6. 

Why Not A Star

BY MARGARET GOODING

(excerpt from reading 621 in *Singing the Living Tradition*)

Why not a star? Some bright star shines somewhere in the heavens each time a child is born. Who knows what it may foretell? Who knows what uncommon life may yet again unfold, if we but give it a chance!



Three days of songs, fun, worship – and a new YAC!

So, listen up Canada – our youth rock! They're moving fast to create new and better ways to serve youth needs across Canada.

We're creating a new regional youth structure to replace the former UUA district services we used to rely on. Although we still have ties to the UUA Youth Office, we're also organizing CUC regional Youth Adult Committees (YACs): one each in B.C. and the West, and a large one for Quebec, Ontario

and the Maritimes (we call it QUOM).

Last month, the QUOM YAC (were you paying attention when we explained those acronyms?) officially got off the ground with a youth conference in Toronto, hosted by the Youth Group at Toronto First. Over 60 youth and advisors met for three days of workshops, songs, fun, games, worship, and finally, the election of the QUOM Youth Adult Committee.

So, we are beginning to create a new way of interacting, learning, sharing, growing, supporting, nurturing, listening, prodding, challenging, and having fun. We welcome the support of the all UUs in Canada. 

– by *Sylvia Bass West*, CUC Director of Lifespan Learning

– photos by *Richard Guy Briggs*, rgb@tricolour.net

Across the Country

NEIGHBOURHOOD NEWS

The Neighbourhood UU Congregation in Toronto's Beach neighbourhood passed a milestone last fall. After four years of meeting in rented spaces, the growing congregation bought their own building last year (a former Anglican church) and moved in last October. Now they've got another fundraising project on the go: to buy a grand piano. Other recent events include: a silent retreat, a Build Your Own Theology workshop, and participation in the annual Beaches Easter parade, with members dressed as famous Unitarians!



NEW YOUTH COORDINATOR

Samaya Oakley has joined the staff of the North Shore Unitarian Church as part-time Youth Program Coordinator, a job she's done as a volunteer for the past five years. The West Vancouver church has one of the largest youth programs in Canada. Sam is a UUA-trained Youth Advisor and is a member of the CUC Youth Advisory Group and the B.C. Regional Youth Adult Committee.

THE GREAT STORY

Two authors who integrate science, evolution and spirituality are the theme speakers at the second Eliot Institute conference at Naramata B.C. this summer. The week-long Unitarian conference is entitled "The Great Story" – humanity's common creation story – and its theme speakers are Connie Barlow and Michael Dowd. The conference runs from June 28 to July 5. For more information go to: www.eliotinstitute.org.

HOLY CHOCOLATE!

Imagine a buffet table laden with nothing but ... chocolate desserts! That's what Unitarians in Saskatoon had to face in February at the congregation's second annual "Death by Chocolate" fundraiser. The event included entertainment from a local band and pianist. There were draws for four special baskets, including one entitled "The Naughty Basket."

The Canadian Unitarian is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It's mailed free to all Canadian 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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Across the Web

Congregational web sites are becoming essential

Several years ago, having a church web site would have been an “extra” – a cool, new innovation. Today, it’s almost essential, as both members and potential members look to the web for timely information.

The secrets of a good congregational web site are simple, as we found by talking to a handful of Unitarian webmasters. You need dedicated volunteers to update the site regularly. You need good liaison with the newsletter editor (the source of much fresh content). A digital camera is helpful, and someone who can take good photos. In short: it comes down to people, not machines.

For the congregations that get it right, the rewards can be great: most members can easily keep in touch with everything that’s going on, and potential members can suss out the fellowship before ever attending. (The downside is that if your web site is ancient and boring, newcomers may draw the same conclusion about your congregation!)

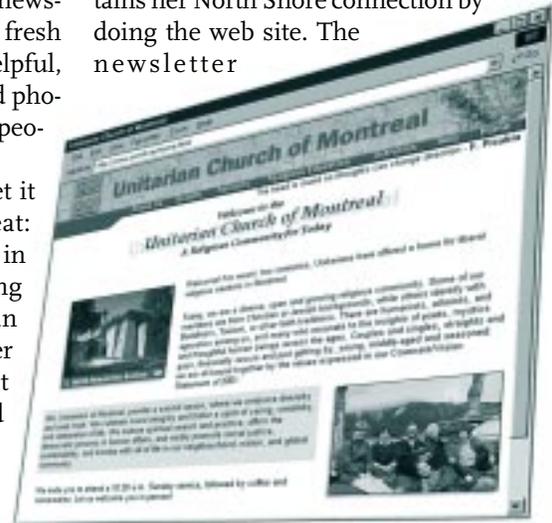
“Twenty per cent of our new members come directly from the web site,” says Bert Christensen of First Toronto. “We know, because we ask them.” Calgary has a similar experience. “When we invited 19 newcomers to an event last fall,” says web manager Penney Kome, “most said their first contact was the web site.”

Maintaining a site as large as Toronto’s is demanding. Christensen is an energetic retiree who maintains five large web sites voluntarily (including the CUC site). He updates the Toronto site “almost every day – in fact, twice already today!”

That’s probably not necessary for a smaller congregation. Neil MacLean, the Saint John, N.B. web guy, says his updates are monthly, when the newsletter comes out. He adds fresh con-

tent to the “services” page, plus a monthly feature photo. He estimates that the 50-member church recently gained four newcomers as a result of the web site.

North Shore Unitarian has a colourful site that showcases their beautiful location and building. But their web designer lives in another country, on the opposite seaboard. Jenny Giddy moved to New York last year, but maintains her North Shore connection by doing the web site. The newsletter



The Montreal site welcomes newcomers.

editor feeds her content by email, as does the church secretary. She believes strongly that “you can really get a feel for a church” by visiting its web site first. (One great idea from North Shore: their web address is now listed alongside their number in the phone book.)

All the web managers we talked to felt their sites are increasingly valuable to their congregations. In some places, the web site is now the single most important communications tool, both for new and existing members. □

- www.cuc.ca (click “congregations” for the web sites mentioned above)
- www.bertc.com/web_stuff.htm (for Bert Christensen’s web design advice and links)