

# Four congregations leap into refugee sponsorship

**Four congregations** have sponsored refugees and brought them to Canada this year. The cases are different, but there's a common thread of compassion from the congregations, backed up by the whole Canadian denomination (since 2000, the CUC signs the sponsorship agreements with the federal government).

It's a happy ending to a long story of support and advocacy by the resourceful, politically-savvy Ottawa congregation.

## Vancouver: a history of sponsorship

Refugee sponsorship is not new for the Unitarian Church of Vancouver, having hosted earlier refugees from Guatemala, Vietnam and Afghanistan. Last fall, they heard of a young Eritrean woman who was stranded in a camp in Ethiopia, and they applied to help her. Wenta arrived in February, and immediately moved in with members Fiona Graham and Caroline Farley and their two young boys.

"We were told Wenta was 22, but now we think she's only 17," says Roberta

Kirby of the church's refugee committee. "She was very weepy at first, and it was difficult because we had to communicate with her through a translator, however, she's now learning English quickly because she's living in a family with children."

Kirby says the Vancouver congregation is very supportive of the refugee effort, with many individuals donating time, money • see "Social" next page



Samsu Mia (back right) is reunited with his family at the Ottawa airport.

## Ottawa: rescuing a family

Samsu Mia was sheltered in sanctuary for 18 months at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa. The political deal that gained him freedom and permission to stay in Canada last November included an agreement to bring his family from overseas.

The Mia family arrived in Ottawa in April – reunited after 11 years of separation. "They will face a lot of adjustments," says Phil Nagy, chair of Ottawa's sponsorship committee, "like the weather, the language, the culture." However, they have the advantage that Samsu is already established, working as a cook, and they have their own apartment.

## Newborn

BY C. A. LARSON

Welcome to my world,  
little friend.

I cannot promise you  
it will be a place of beauty,  
for beauty lies  
within the eyes  
of those who see.

But I wish you vision  
to see beauty  
where it is,  
and hands and mind  
to add to what is there.

Andrew Larson, 85, is a member of the Church of the Larger Fellowship. He is a veteran of the RCAF, the RCOC, and many years of teaching. His personal anthology of poetry was inspired by found lines.

## Poetry Contributions

Short, spiritual poems by CUC members are invited. Please send them to poetry editor Franci Louann, [fouann@telus.net](mailto:fouann@telus.net), or by fax to: 604-731-0228.



Wenta, in her new Vancouver home.



## WE'RE GREEN!

With this issue, The Canadian Unitarian is now printed on 100 per cent recycled paper!

Lifespan Learning  
PAGES 5-8  
FOCUS ON



## Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

### We're generous according to our means

**That's how** I sum up the CUC's contribution to the recently-organized Religious Coalition in Support of Equal Marriage Rights (which held rallies across the country in April, and has a website at [www.religious-coalition.org](http://www.religious-coalition.org)).

You probably know that U\*US have been at the forefront of this issue, both in Canada and continentally. All our ministers signed a petition two years ago, and we've performed hundreds of same-sex weddings since seven provinces and one territory made it legal to do so.

The chair of the CUC's Equal Marriage Working Group, Rev. Mac Elrod, recently helped create "An Affirmation of Diversity" statement with the Religious Coalition. As I looked for places where we could offer support to this effort, I conspired with Bert Christensen, our webweaver, and offered his services to set up a domain name so the coalition statement could be posted in one handy location. This idea grew into an on-line petition, and then a place where equal marriage activists could upload photos and news about their events.

Many people worked on the April events, and lots more have stood in support of equal rights over the long haul. Since I can't list everyone here, I'd most like to thank those who work within their own congregations to ensure they are welcoming to bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgender persons.

If you're among the 81 per cent of congregational members who belong to a certified Welcoming Congregation, I encourage you to look further into the "Living the Welcoming Congregation" program that the UUA has created.

Rallies and press conferences get great visibility and media coverage in the short term, but to my mind the work of removing barriers to full participation of all people is even more important.

## Refugee Sponsorship

### The 'social' part of social justice work

*• continued from front page*

and goods. Although the federal government will support Wenta financially for two years, "we're her bridge to learning how to live in Canada."

#### Toronto: the toboggan initiation

Toronto First Unitarian hadn't sponsored a refugee in nearly two decades when an address about sponsorship at the church convinced them to try again. They quickly learned of a desperate Eritrean family, completed the paperwork to sponsor Sara Gebre-Michael, her mother and young daughter, and waited. For four years.

The three generations of women arrived suddenly in Toronto last January, in the dead of winter. They stayed for one month with a church family, then moved in with the Eritrean friend who brought their case to the congregation's attention in the first place. The church held fundraisers, and has made a commitment of \$500 a month in support.

"It was very much a leap of faith," says Margaret Rao of Toronto First, "but they've turned out to be a lovely family; it's a blessing for them and us."



Mehdiin, Saron and Sara Gebre-Michael are welcomed to Toronto First.



Jean Bijojote, Jocelyne Nibogora and their two sons.

The congregation has welcomed them into their fold, but not without incident. During a winter retreat in February, Margaret took Sara on her maiden toboggan voyage, but they lost control and the crash sent Sarah to the hospital with a bruised tailbone – to the horror of those watching. "You're a real Canadian now!" they later joked with Sara, after her recovery.

#### Mississauga: inter-faith sponsorship

The South Peel congregation (west of Toronto) had also hosted refugees, going back to the 1960s, but they do it with a twist. They share the responsibility with other nearby congregations, this time in conjunction with a Jewish synagogue and a United Church. Like Toronto's case, they applied to help a Burundian refugee family, then waited for years for approval. Then, with barely three weeks notice, Jean Bijojote and Jocelyne Nibogora and their two small children arrived in April.

"They're fluent in French, and we have many French speakers in our congregation, so we've been able to comfort and welcome them very easily," says Rev. Jeff Brown of South Peel.

Why does his congregation put such energy into refugee sponsorship? "Social justice has two aspects," he says, "and it's important to do both. Justice involves systemic work with groups like Amnesty, and the 'social' involves compassion for people in desperate situations. The two are connected."

# A million faces and many names for global peace

The CUC Peace Monitoring Group has found that while their aspirations are large, our denomination's numbers are small. So sometimes, the most effective work can be done in coalition with other organizations, or by piggy-backing onto larger campaigns. Here are two recent examples:

## A Million Faces

Phil De Gruchy of the First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo is the CUC's representative to Project Ploughshares, the Canadian ecumenical peace action group. He heard about their plans to support the international Million Faces Petition against small arms and light weapons, and immediately thought Unitarians would support it.

De Gruchy consulted with the Peace Monitoring Group and then asked Ploughshares to speed up their plans so that it could be launched at our annual conference in Hamilton, this May.

Million Faces is a visual petition to world leaders. Instead of signing names, supporters submit a photo of themselves holding up a peace slogan. The international campaign – coordinated by Oxfam, Amnesty and the International Action Network on Small Arms – is collecting the photos on a web site at [www.controlarms.org](http://www.controlarms.org). (By late April, 245,000 people had submitted from around the world, with 100,000 photos posted, but only 3,700 of these were Canadians.)

Although anyone can add their name and photo to the petition on-line, DeGruchy wanted to make it less individual. So he organized a digital photo booth at the CUC annual conference, and hopes to collect 500 photos right there. It will be the first big contribution to the Ploughshares effort, which will eventually include the other major Canadian denominations.



12 members of First Unitarian Congregation of Waterloo join the Million Faces Petition.

## A Thousand Signatures

Helmut Kuhn, who chairs the Peace Monitoring Group, learned in March that Physicians for Global Survival (Canada) was trying collect names for a petition to the Nuclear Arms Non-Proliferation Treaty Review Conference at the UN, in May.

Kuhn made a quick pledge to the Physicians: to collect 1,000 signed declarations from Unitarians across the country in less than a month. With contributions from scores of congregations, he surpassed that total by late April, in time to send the declarations to the UN.

Each one states: "I do not accept that nuclear weapons can defend me, my country, or the values I stand for. I demand that negotiations are started leading to the abolition of nuclear weapons under strict and effective international control." 



Brian  
Kiely  
CUC President

## Risk commitment – realize a dream

The Unitarian Church of Edmonton moved into its new and spacious home in January. The sanctuary opened in February. Many still think fondly of the old church we built 40 years ago, but there is real satisfaction with our new home.

More importantly, a lot of people have discovered a new sense of commitment, because they put heart and soul into making this their church. They raised money, found a building, bought it, found the architect and then poured thousands of hands-on volunteer hours into renovations.

When people give themselves over to realizing a dream, it stays with them a long time. Perhaps that's why UCE still has so many members who recall building the last church 40 years ago.

One fault in Unitarian Universalism might be that we don't ask enough of each other. We emphasize the 'free' part of 'a free and responsible search' without talking too much about being 'responsible'. We don't ask prospective members to commit to our dreams. Instead we say, "Hi. Welcome. You can stay if you like."

The UCE experience has taught me how energizing the risk of committing to something can be.

The CUC has launched the Visioning Task Force. They will ask all U\*US in Canada to help create the future vision of the CUC. There are lots more people involved in the CUC than even five years ago, but that's just a start. This will be another way to commit to this faith. Take the chance to get involved.

The first female minister in North America, Universalist Olympia Brown wrote, "Stand by this faith. Work for it and sacrifice for it. There is nothing in the world so important as to be loyal to this faith."

UCE folks looking around their church know that the rewards of commitment are great.

# Unitaridées

par Gilles Marchildon

## Le printemps, un état d'esprit?

La saison printanière évoque toute une gamme d'idées et d'émotions.

D'abord, on ressent un grand soulagement lorsque l'hiver et la neige nous quittent. Plus besoin de gratter le pare-brise pour enlever le givre, ni de déblayer l'entrée!

Quand le mercure grimpe dans nos thermomètres, on enlève les épaisseurs. On a l'impression de faire peau neuve.

Le soleil nous accompagne davantage et les journées s'allongent. Cela nous éclaire – littéralement.

Pour certains, le renouvellement annoncé par le printemps provoque une période de grande créativité. L'inspiration se trouve dans la nature en pleine éclosion!

Cette créativité peut inclure la nouveauté : recherche d'un changement d'emploi, un déménagement, de nouvelles activités de loisirs ...

En discutant du printemps au sein d'un groupe Unitarien Universaliste, l'idée m'est venue soudainement, comme un perce-neige! Et si le printemps était un état d'esprit?

Imaginez si vous pourriez provoquer, à n'importe lequel moment de l'année, les sentiments positifs que vous ressentez au printemps. Un regain d'énergie, d'enthousiasme et de créativité vous serait immédiatement disponible!

Évidemment, c'est un défi quand la chaleur de fin juillet nous accable ou bien lorsque le vent glacial du début janvier vient nous ébouriffer.

N'empêche que l'idée exerce un attrait.

On se sent un peu paresseux en août? Hop! On s'imagine un bourgeon qui pète de vie, incapable de se retenir face à l'appel du printemps.

Le découragement nous guète en octobre? On attaque avec l'idée d'une jonquille, brillant jaune d'optimisme avec des feuilles vertes, couleur de l'espoir.

Et voilà, le printemps nous accompagne tout au long de l'année. Il suffit de remarquer ses attraits et de les emmagasiner comme de la sève.

# Unitarian People

## 'OUT OF THE STARS' CHORAL WORK

Toronto First's music director Peter Tiefenbach

has composed a new choral work that will be sung by the Saskatoon Children's Chorus at the World Children's Choir Festival in Hong Kong in July. And the words to his piece come from *Singing the Living Tradition*, Reading 530, which begins, "Out of the stars in their flight, out of the dust of eternity, here have we come." Besides directing music at Toronto First, Tiefenbach is a conductor, pianist, CBC 2 radio host (*The Arts Tonight* and *Radio Concert Hall*), performer and recording artist. Those are his qualitative and artistic achievements. On the Google scale of



fame (we're talking quantity now), he registers 859 hits for his name search!

## LISMER'S PRODIGIES IN VICTORIA

Every spring, the First Unitarian Church of Victoria runs a special art workshop for children called Lismer's Prodigies. They invite artists from their church and community to teach their children, in various media and styles. This year marked the eighth workshop organized by member Mel Moilliet, herself an artist. The workshop is named after Arthur Lismer, one of the original Group of Seven artists. He established a children's art school, because he disagreed with the conventional art instruction of his time, which involved copying masterworks. He believed that an artistic impulse was inherent in everyone and should be encouraged to find expression. Lismer was a member of Toronto First Unitarian.

## Letters to the Editor

### EXERCISES IN CENTRE-FILLING

The CUC is lucky to have Ray Drennan among its ministers. Thanks for reprinting part of his "Confluence" talk to the 2004 Annual Conference last issue, and for putting the full text on the CUC website. He offers a view of what's wrong with the U\*U movement in Canada, and a vision of what could be right with it, that revives my enthusiasm for our timid heresy. I can't read Brian Kiely's piece in the same issue (or the Statement of Principles Task Force report that goes with it), without remembering what Rev. Drennan had to say about such exercises in "centre filling." Do we U\*US really need or want a "credo" statement that defines us? Will any amount of refinement of such a text get us any closer to Drennan's "empty centre ... where spirit is strong"?

– Michael R. Wilson, Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon

### SEMANTIC CHANGES

Our congregation has been especially affected by the decision to split from the UUA, as we serve members in both the U.S. and Canada. More and more as a U.S. member, I feel left out of the loop. Many of the activities in our international fellowship, located in Sarnia, Canada, have focused on Canadian issues. U.S. members no longer receive many of the benefits that membership in the UUA provided. Additionally, at this time, Americans feel more and more isolated from the international community. Revising our Unitarian principles will only widen the schism. Our principles should be universal, not specific to a particular country. They represent our shared religion. Why create further divisions in what should be a global community?

– Susan Koch, Unitarian Fellowship of Sarnia and Port Huron

## Bridging generations at North Shore

**Intergenerational.** Multigenerational. Mixed generations. There are many terms for it in Unitarian circles, but the concept is the same: getting kids and adults together, and making the spiritual and social community one.

At North Shore Unitarian in West Vancouver, they do this in three deliberate ways: through special services, during the chalice lighting at regular services, and every spring, with a large program they call Secret Buddies (other congregations call it Mystery Friends).

The goal of Secret Buddies is simple, according to Director of Religious Education Lynn Sabourin. "Every child needs an adult in their life besides their parent or grandparent." That's the official objective. But there's a spin-off: "It's just plain fun – it's sneaky!"

Secret Buddies is an elaborate, five-week-long game that pairs North Shore adults and children together (44 pairs last year), and helps them get to know each other through the weekly exchange of objects and gifts. At the end, the identities of each buddy are revealed at a large potluck meal.

At North Shore, the adults know the

children's identities, and the bag that's used for the exchanges has the child's name on it. Sabourin encourages them to exchange jokes, puzzles, letters and photos each week – objects that express and give clues about identity, but don't cost any money.

"It's the ultimate in generational mixing," says Sabourin, "and it's especially great for adults who don't have children in their lives." It can involve ages as wide as 3 to 80.

But multigenerational mixing also goes on in the church sanctuary (above photo). Each week, Sabourin arranges a child chalice lighter, who sometimes performs the ritual with their parents and even grandparents. "Kids love to be



Chalice lighting (above) and Secret Buddies (right).



in the spotlight for a minute," explains Sabourin. She tries to choose dates that are near the children's birthdays.

And finally, the congregation holds several officially intergenerational services each year – at the major holidays, and for the youth-led service.

"If we look for opportunities to connect young people and adults in our congregations, they're there," she says. ■



### Sylvia Bass West

CUC Director of  
Lifespan Learning

## Lifespan Learning enlivens our faith

"It takes a village to raise a child," wrote Hillary Rodham Clinton. In the midst of all of our busy-ness these days, our UU faith communities are reaching out to be just those sorts of villages.

Our congregations now offer a place where people of all ages can listen for, practise and honour the deepening of

becoming more fully human – to find life abundantly and hold it with great care.

Families who are taking the time to regularly engage their children in caring, spirited, exciting and supportive religious education and youth programs and welcoming multigenerational community are offering them a real gift.

We all want to feel like we belong and that we can count on sustaining relationships. There are very few opportunities where young and old engage with one another with intentionality and consistency in community these days. Our faith communities offer those places.

Lifespan faith community is an investment, to be certain, from both family and congregation. Such an investment – of time and care – surely results in

our children, our youth *and ourselves* being more peaceful, more focused, more able to meet life's certain chaos with mindfulness and centeredness.

The hour of religious education time for children in our congregations is one for planting seeds – seeds of possibility, seeds of interest, seeds of wonder, seeds of potential on a spiritual journey. Those seeds will germinate and grow in time, through an inner wisdom sparked by the individual's creativity and imagination and through thoughtful examination and human interaction within community.

We all hope that our children, or the children of our community, will remain UUs as time takes them into adulthood. And we hope they are now, and will continue to be, enlivened by their faith.

# FOCUS ON: *lifespan learning*

## Saskatoon kids are coming of age

**It wasn't your** typical Friday night youth event – i.e. no pizza and no movies. Instead, a dozen kids were invited to catch a mysterious bus from city hall to their imaginary “Hogwarts” destination (for you Muggles, that's the boarding school in the Harry Potter stories), at the house of organizer Liz James. Once there, they participated in a great feast, a spiritual quest, and a weekend-ful of classes, challenges and games.

The objective was to cement the connection these 12–15 year-olds felt towards this year's Coming of Age program at the Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon. “It was very exhilarating,” says James, who coordinated the 40 volunteers who helped stage the Hogwarts weekend. Carl von Baeyer, who leads the overall program, states point-blank that, “it was the best youth event I've ever seen.”

Why go to so much trouble for a weekend event attended by a dozen kids? According to Saskatoon Director of Re-



*Coming of Age participants are invited to Hogwarts for the initiation weekend; they had to quiz their way by the knight, below in order to fulfill their Vision Quest.*

ligious Education Laura McNaughton, “It's the age when kids, especially boys, stop coming to church. Coming of Age teaches them to be members of our congregation, and it's a bridge to the youth group.”

The program started with the Hogwarts retreat in October, continued bi-weekly on Friday nights throughout the winter, and concluded with a weekend, out-of-town retreat in April. It was organized around these five themes:

- leadership skills
- relationships and sexuality
- developing a personal credo
- worship and ritual
- facing challenges (physical, social, emotional)

In addition to the bi-weekly sessions, each of the kids was paired with an adult mentor, a source of support that was neither parent-child nor friend-friend. Each pair chose their own activities, everything from sports, to travelling, cooking, playing games or volunteering – at least a couple of times per month.



The bigger aim of Coming of Age is to usher the children into adulthood – “a ceremonial, or rite of passage function,” according to von Baeyer. He equates it to a confirmation class in a Christian faith. There's no bible study here, but the heart of it for some kids are the three sessions led by Rev. Frances Deverell, on developing a personal religious credo.

Carl von Baeyer has two children of his own who've experienced the Coming of Age program in Saskatoon. “They're more mature, confident and committed to the church because of it,” he says.

The medium-size congregation, which has 45 children enrolled in its Sunday RE programs, can't run the Coming of Age program every year, but they now hope to offer it every second year. “The future of our congregation depends on it,” says McNaughton.

For more about Saskatoon's program, go to [www.ucsaskatoon/coa](http://www.ucsaskatoon/coa). 

# OWL is spreading its wings

It's been six years since the Our Whole Lives (OWL) sexuality education program replaced About Your Sexuality, and it's becoming a staple of lifespan learning in Unitarian congregations across the country. More than two dozen of the 45 congregations in Canada currently teach the curriculum.

The First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa has jumped into owl in a big way. This year, for the first time, they've offered all four children's owl curricula, and are set to launch the adult program as well.

According to the congregation's owl coordinator Kerri Timoffee, "owl is no longer an add-on or a special event for us, it's part of RE, something we do every year." She thinks it's essential that a supportive, caring community provide value-based sexuality education, which goes way beyond what youth are taught for a very short period of time in school.

Ottawa is now offering these owl curricula every year:

- Kindergarten–Grade 1: an eight-week course taught as a module in RE on Sundays

- Grades 4–6: eight weeks, also taught as part of RE

- Grades 7–8: the most intensive course, taught over 27 weeks as a year-long RE class unto itself

- Grades 10–12: a 16-module course taught over four weekends (with sleepovers), like a youth group

All four of the courses are based on these core values: self-worth, sexual health, responsibility, justice and inclusivity. They each progress, in an age-appropriate way, from building trust, to physiology, gender, and on to love and relationships. The teenage curricula also teach sexualization and healthy sexuality, and the adult program includes sexuality and aging.

All owl teachers must be trained by certified trainers, and the curriculum is distributed by the UUA. Some Canadians have been trained at UUA-sponsored sessions south of the border, but training sessions are available in Canada as well – about a dozen over the past five years.

For a full explanation of the owl curricula, go to [www.uua.org/owl](http://www.uua.org/owl). For up to

date information on owl training in Canada, see [www.cuc.ca/lifespan](http://www.cuc.ca/lifespan). For more on Ottawa's owl program, go to [www.owlinottawa.blogspot.com](http://www.owlinottawa.blogspot.com). 

## Understanding our bodies, and our whole lives

**OWL: just the mention** of it sends shivers up your spine and produces a cold sensation in your left foot. There is only one way to dispel a wary traveller's uncertainties about that crazy land called "sex" – and it happens here in Ottawa over a few monumental weekends, in the senior owl program.

It's more than just sex ed, however. owl is a gathering of beautiful minds, of independence, of curiosity. It is where the new generation and the old empathize together and consult on that forbidden and evasive topic. owl is familiarity, love and family. Honestly, I don't know where I'll go for therapy once owl is over.

I'm not that religious, nor do I possess the insight or attention span to contemplate higher beings, but to me, owl is not about worshipping some god or other. It's about harnessing spirituality, and in this instance, directing it towards the understanding of our bodies and, coincidentally enough, of our whole lives.

It's about watering the flower of your mind, and watching it bloom. 

— Possum Rivers-Moore,  
16, Ottawa



# Youth making change, with a very long banner

A small group of five youth activists – supported by other youth and adult members at the Unitarian Church of Calgary – are creating a huge banner in support of equal rights. Maybe it’s just a coincidence, but as they progress, the issue gets hotter in Alberta, and across the country. (To follow their progress, go to [www.priderainbowproject.com](http://www.priderainbowproject.com).)

When they first hatched the plan almost two years ago, same-sex marriage was in the courts, but not really on the national radar. They started gathering scraps of material and sewing their banner with long strips of red, orange, yellow, green, blue and purple fabric. At first, they didn’t really know what they were doing, admits 17-year-old Christine Michell. But they gradually acquired sewing expertise, and the loan of some industrial-strength sewing machines.

At one point last year, their local MP, Conservative Jim Prentice, became a dissenting voice for legalizing same-sex marriage in his party. Coincidence, you say?

As the issue became an election topic last spring, then made it into parliament this past February, the group kept sewing. On April 9, the Pride Rainbow Project Banner passed the 500 foot mark, and three days later the Canadian parliament rejected Stephen Harper’s

motion to restrict marriage to opposite-sex couples. Another coincidence?

Now the banner is making public appearances at rallies in Calgary. (It takes about three people to lift that 500 feet of fabric, so their “publicity” banner is only 52 feet long.)

“Our goal is to get same-sex marriage legalized,” says Michell. They also aim to set a North American record for a rainbow banner – two miles long. “That’s a scary prospect,” says Christine, “so we don’t look too far ahead.” □



## CUC’s Lifespan Library: it’s cheap and it’s convenient

Religious Education leaders across the country are aware of a growing resource: the cuc’s Lifespan Learning Library – which lends curricula, books and videos to individual congregations. But now the two-year-old project is expanding to fulfill the “lifespans” mandate, with resources for adult study, personal spiritual development and board training.

The library is run by volunteer Karen Mills, out of her house in Edmonton, but it can be browsed from anywhere, via the cuc web site: [www.cuc.ca/lifespan/lifespan\\_learning\\_library.htm](http://www.cuc.ca/lifespan/lifespan_learning_library.htm).

Ordering is as simple as sending an email, with borrowing times of three months for books and eight months for curricula.

Karen Mills is the Lifespan Learning Service Consultant for the cuc Western Region and music leader at the Unitarian Church of Edmonton. She says that some of the newer titles in the lifespans library include:

- *Never Call Them Jerks* – healthy re-

sponses to difficult congregational behavior

- *The In-Between Church* – to help growing churches change their culture
- *What Do You Stand For?* – a children’s guide to values, ethics and decisions

The library has multiple copies of all five *Our Whole Lives* curricula, which give congregations who are contemplating the program a chance to investigate the materials before investing.

All told, the library currently holds 176 books and videos, with 114 different titles. (Several dozen more were purchased recently and are waiting to be catalogued.) At any given time, about a third of the materials are out on loan. For more information, visit the catalogue on the web site, or email Karen Mills at [lifespanlibrary@cuc.ca](mailto:lifespanlibrary@cuc.ca). □



## Testimony

by Cameron Linton

# Why my family attends the CUC conferences

For the past two years I have proudly watched my son Owen carry Toronto First's banner at the opening parade of the CUC's Annual Conference and Meeting. I have also been delighted to watch both of my children shed their shyness and interact



Owen Linton: addicted to CUC conferences at a dangerously young age!

freely and confidently with Unitarian children and adults from across Canada. Their passion for the friends they make, for the adventures they have, and for the experiences they share with others is contagious.

Our family's attachment started three years ago when I went to the Kelowna Conference on my own to deepen my personal connection to Unitarianism. The next year I took my family to Winnipeg and last year to Edmonton – and now my kids insist on going every year.

For Owen who is eight and Laura who is 10 the conference:

- helps them appreciate the diversity and size of this country;
- illustrates that ours is a national movement, not just something that happens at our local church;
- and gives them fresh opportunity to broaden their UU connections.

For my wife Janet and I the CUC conferences:

- help us better appreciate the democratic process and resources available that give shape to our Canadian Unitarian values;
- let us immerse ourselves in a diverse yet similar community with inspiring sessions;
- and simply give us opportunity to have a coffee with a Unitarian from Vancouver, a beer with another from Montreal or Halifax, to share a meal,

with wine, with someone from Ottawa, and so on.

This often leads to a better appreciation of life at our local congregation in Toronto – and always a better appreciation of Unitarianism in general!

But back to my children. Laura and

Owen embrace the UU experience of the conference in their own ways. Laura loves doing the crafts and exploring museums with other children. Owen loves the games, stories, and freedom from home ties. The children's program is well organized, very safe, and conscientiously managed – it is not simply a video-watching kid-sitting service! The leaders actually focus on the kids as their ministry to the conference.

Who knows, in five or so years you may see me working with the CUC Board governing denominational policy, Janet engaged in a social action cause, and my kids flopping around with the youth establishing their national network of friends and connections. Or maybe we'll just keep attending to hang out with other UUs. Either way, the conference will help us better connect with this Canadian religious movement that matters.

I'm Cameron Linton, and my family is going to the CUC conference in Hamilton this May, to Saint John, N.B. in May 2006, and wherever the CUC conference is going to be held in May 2007, 2008, 2009, and so on.

And we'd love to see you there! ☐

— Cameron Linton is past-president of Toronto First Unitarian, and now leads a "Living in Spirit" group. He tries hard to balance his two religions: Unitarianism and hockey.

Eliot Institute Presents

## Letters of the Spirit

Rev. Stefan Jonasson

July 2-9, 2005

Naramata Centre  
Lake Okanagan, BC

A week-long Unitarian camp for families, couples and individuals: Play, worship, music and learning in a loving multigenerational community.

Morning adult program with Stefan while children and youth enjoy their own special program.

Joyce Poley, well known among UUs as a singer and songwriter, will be camp Song Leader!!! Everyone sings when Joyce leads us!

Afternoons and evenings are available for a variety of multi-generational activities: swimming, games, workshops, art, as well as musical and performance events.

For information about all Eliot camps:

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# What should democracy look like?

**Democracy, in idea and practice** – that is government by and for the people, in everyday actions and in the spirit of our diverse population – has been a major concern of all Canadians. It is reflected in our laws, constitution, and authoritative institutions and practices.

But democracy is more than this. It also requires of us a set of lively, deeply held and oft-expressed dispositions, or values. Democracy is not a once-for-all achievement; it is a way of life. It embraces values and practices people engage in daily in all aspects of our public lives, including the workplace, our schools, the community, our relations with the media, with human services, as well as with government.

As we well know, when we advocate the flourishing of “the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large,” (our fifth principle) we’re talking about a long, often painstaking, sometimes exasperating process of education, inclusion, deliberation, participation and dialogue in order for the goods of democracy to be established in fact and deed. But we affirm it as a virtue, as a practice, as a *how* to achieve our other principal and fundamental values.

### Frontline news: not good

A commitment to democracy requires a great deal from us and is beset with formidable, corrosive challenges on all sides. The news from the front lines is not good, and we know it.

Take, as an example, free, fair and regular elections, and our participation in the political process. Barely half of us are voting in federal elections, with the youth vote being particularly low. Are we just taking all of this for granted? Are we getting lazy? Let me put it another way. Is it the case, in fact, that we are being presented on a regular basis with truly alternative policies and leaders such that citizens can express effective preferences?

Or perhaps we find ourselves disenchanting from the electoral process, that

we are becoming disenchanted with politics altogether, because market ideology has become so pervasive in our lives that we don’t think of ourselves as citizens at all, but as mere consumers of what the government can deliver.

Is the government a political market that “delivers goods” that serves our interests – interests like laws, policies, education, services and subsidies that we “purchase” with our taxes? How often do we call ourselves “taxpayers” whose chief concern is how much money we spend for the goods and services tax dollars can buy?

What can we do in such a climate, one where democracy both as practice and disposition are giving way to disengagement, cynicism, and isolation? What to do? *Not stand idly by and be resigned to this perilous state of affairs.*

One characteristic practice, one virtue of this fellowship of ours is a commitment to democratic process in our congregations and in the world at large as a means of achieving our most deeply held values.

### A Unitarian study of democracy

These values, this practice, and this current crisis of democracy led the Canadian Unitarian Council in May 2003 to authorize a two-year study on democracy that would result in resolutions being presented at this year’s annual meeting in Hamilton. The goal is to put Unitarians on record in support of democratic values and practices and identifying steps we can take toward making them real in our congregations and our nation.



*Epperson exercises his democratic rights at the 2004 CUC conference.*

Four resolutions will be presented in Hamilton for final review and amendment by delegates from across Canada. From that meeting, the CUC will establish a Democracy Monitoring Group charged with the task of lobbying government and the media to promote democracy within their spheres of action, and preparing educational materials on democracy for congregations to implement in their RE programs, their social justice projects and in their worship services.

I know this is no panacea. No final remedy for what ails us and this society. But it is something, not nothing. And it expresses and strives to make real *what* we say we believe, and *how* and by what means we seek to achieve our most deeply-held values.

It is an expression of our conscience and our trusting fellowship – a call to remember and to reassert our values. May we recommit our selves this day to that mundane and sacred virtue of democracy, in word and in deed. **U**

— Steven Epperson is minister to the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. This is an abridged version of a sermon he delivered there in April. For the full sermon: [www.vancouver.unitarians.ca](http://www.vancouver.unitarians.ca) (follow the “Minister’s Welcome” link).

## Across the Country

### Demystifying meditation for U\*Us

**Vivianne LaRivière** of Neighbourhood UU Congregation in Toronto believes that, “anybody can meditate – it’s not the insight of any one particular following or religion.” Meditation has a place in each service at Neighbourhood, followed by music from LaRivière, and the church holds meditation classes during the week.

LaRivière and Rev. Wayne Walder began to realize that meditation was one of the new congregation’s spiritual niches, and they decided to apply it to a fundraising project. Together, they have composed and produced a new CD titled, “deMystifying Meditation,” which they launched last fall. It consists of four short meditations (4–6 minutes each), which appear with and without spoken words on the CD. They are appropriate for use as congrega-



*Vivianne LaRivière and Wayne Walder*

tional meditations at a Sunday service, small group meeting, workshop or class. “The music is light-classical and focussed, with a solid pattern, not new-agey,” says LaRivière, “and the lyrics, written by Wayne, are poetic and contemporary.”

Neighbourhood is hoping the CD sales will help them produce a second disk, and then a curriculum for teaching meditation to go along with the music. “This is a fundraising idea that benefits our congregation,” says LaRivière, “but it also expresses who we are to the wider community.” ☐

### Connecting small congregations to something bigger

**Bunty Albert** belongs to a small, lay-led congregation in Canada’s smallest province, and she cherishes her connections to the wider denomination.

Like many people, she was introduced to Unitarianism by a friend, having grown up in a Christian church. She joined the Unitarian Fellowship of PEI in the early 1990s, soon after it started. She attended the 1996 CUC annual meeting in Halifax, and felt immediately connected to the wider movement.

“I can get very emotional when I’m singing, and our small group doesn’t

always sing very much. So to be in such a big crowd singing Unitarian hymns in Halifax really took me away,” says Albert.

She went on to become very active in her fellowship – president, secretary, lay preacher – and continues to attend denominational events like the spring annual conferences and the regional fall gatherings. Her daughter attends the Waterloo, Ontario congregation and her son has volunteered with Childhaven in Bangladesh (run by Canadian Unitarians).

And she gives annually to the CUC Friends campaign. “I give because our congregation is small and the CUC has helped us, and I think it’s important to be connected.” ☐

For more information see: [www.cuc.ca/friends](http://www.cuc.ca/friends)



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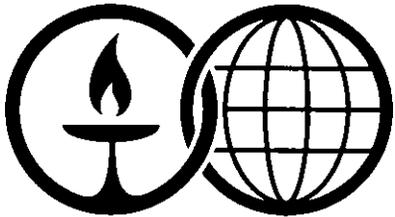
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The Canadian Unitarian is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It's mailed free to all members for whom the CUC has a current address.\* The Unitarian reports on newsworthy events in the denomination, including the annual conference 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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Deadline for next issue **June 24, 2005**

 Printed on Canadian, acid-free recycled paper (100 per cent post-consumer fibre)

Canada Post Agreement #40009492  
Send Address Corrections and Returns to [info@cuc.ca](mailto:info@cuc.ca) or:  
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## Designs by Donna

**Just in time for year-end gifts!** Donna offers her own, copyrighted, chalice designs, in vivid rainbow colours, on T-shirts and other various items! These designs include the chalice at left, and a musical variation. There is also a limited selection of T-shirts with the cuc logo (in rainbow colours).

**Donna Hamilton**

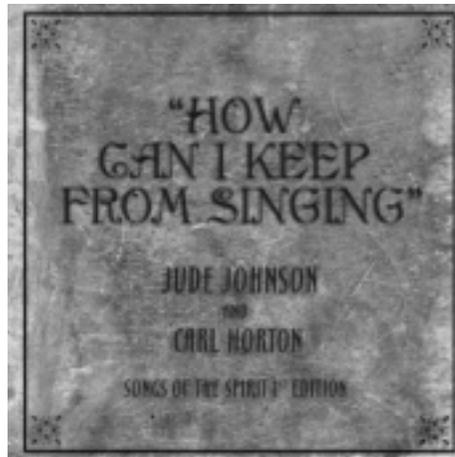
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