

Annual meeting proposes alternative drug policy

“Addiction is a disease and the consumption of drugs should not be a crime,” states a new CUC policy on *Alternatives to Drug Prohibition* that was passed after considerable debate at the annual meeting in May.

The comprehensive policy, which followed a year of study involving many local congregations, will result in a new CUC monitoring group to follow the issue. This means the organization will be prepared to speak and act quickly, especially with the issue of marijuana decriminalization on the public agenda.

However, the CUC policy goes much further than that. “The current policy of drug prohibition isn’t working, from a legal or financial point of view,” argued Leslie Kemp of Vancouver as she spoke in favour of the CUC resolution. “It’s also not working from a social and ethical point of view, as addicts are marginalized and treated as criminals.”

The new policy proposes that “drug addiction be regarded as a health issue rather than a criminal one,” and that, “the concept of harm reduction be incorporated into current drug policy.” It recommends the “depenalization” of drugs for personal use, while supporting government drug regulation. Drug importation and trafficking would still be illegal.

Not all delegates were comfortable with the proposed policy. Allison Akgungor of Edmonton, who is a community health nurse, argued that health education alone doesn’t necessarily reach addicts, and more active intervention is necessary.

John Slattery of Coquitlam, B.C. said the policy contradicts itself in recommending increased penalties for drug trafficking and decriminalization for personal use. “I think it needs further work,” he concluded.

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Same-sex couples flock to Ontario churches for weddings

When Ontario legalized same-sex marriages in early June, the phones began ringing in Unitarian churches across the province. The denomination that has been conducting same-sex “commitment” ceremonies for over three decades was an obvious choice for gay and lesbian couples who now want a legal union.

In the following month, about 100 couples visited Unitarian ministers and lay chaplains – from across the country and south of the border as well. Doreen Peever, a lay chaplain in St. Catharines, has performed seven same-sex unions since 1996; by late June she had 15 same-sex weddings booked for the summer.

Rev. Brian Kopke of Ottawa has performed



Elizabeth and Dawn Barbeau of Vancouver, whose story was featured in the last issue of the *Canadian Unitarian*, were formally married by CUC staff member and lay chaplain Linda Thomson in Toronto on June 21.

about 250 same-sex “holy unions” since becoming a minister in 1970. But he says the most meaningful ones were two lesbian couples he married on June 11, a day after the Ontario court

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handwoven (the newcomer poem)

BY LIZ JAMES

because our faith cannot be found
in any book, or any temple
held deep, it is most visible
in the spaces between us
when our hands touch in greeting
when our voices interweave

so much a part of daily living
we forget there are people
who had never imagined
this is possible

who sit in the corner of a service
with eyes filled with tears
and dream of belonging here

what a tragedy
if even one melts away
unwelcomed, only because
we could not hear their dreams

Liz James, a busy new mother and
step mother, runs the newcomer
program for the Unitarian
Congregation of Saskatoon –
lizjames@shaw.ca

Poetry Contributions

I invite your short, spiritual poems.
Send them to me, Canadian
Unitarian poetry editor Franci
Louann, at frouann@telus.net, or
by fax to 604-731-0228.

**GROWING VITAL
RELIGIOUS
COMMUNITIES
IN CANADA**



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

You say goodbye, and I say hello

I started humming the Beatles' song "Hello Goodbye" as I read through this month's crop of congregational newsletters.

With summer, it's time for the "see you later" sort of goodbyes as congregations shift to a more relaxed rhythm. In churches with ministers, a pot pourri of visiting guests and member-led services often fill the agenda while the minister takes vacation and study leave. However, in Prince Edward Island and North Hatley, Quebec, the summer services are busier, as visitors crowd in. Like the song says, "I don't know why you say goodbye, I say hello."

But of course, not all who say goodbye will be returning to say hello in September. People move. Ministers leave. Before doing so, they prepare their congregations for the new ministry by ensuring goodbye is said well. They help the congregation achieve closure, so that, as much as possible, people are not trying to say hello without having said goodbye.

These ministers all said goodbye recently: **Dana Worsnop**, interim minister in Calgary; **Frances Deverell**, consulting minister at Don Heights in Toronto; **Robert Gentile**, interim minister in London; **Debra Faulk**, student minister at South Fraser. **Meg Roberts** who has been serving the Unitarian Church of Montreal during Ray Drennan's sabbatical will say hello to the Unitarian Church of Calgary. **Leaf Seligman** is saying hello while still living in the U.S. and readying for her move to London. **Katie Stein Sather** who interned in Vancouver, is packing up house in Newfoundland to make the journey to Beacon Unitarian Church in Coquitlam, B.C.

The song asks, "Why do you say goodbye?" The answer is simply this: it is necessary for our growth. Saying goodbye frees us to say hello to something and someone else. But that isn't always easy or simple, is it?

cuc Annual Meeting 2003

Alternative drug policy urged

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John Taylor of Vancouver was fully supportive of the policy. "Once people become addicts," he argued, "we write them off." He noted that there are doctors and private clinics for "kids of the middle class" who get into drug problems, "but that doesn't help the people at Main and Hastings," a low-income, drug-ridden neighbourhood of downtown Vancouver.

Bryant Brown of Pickering, Ontario, who moved the policy resolution, argues that decriminalizing drug possession and regulating distribution will "get rid of the profit motive." He believes that currently, "the pyramid selling in the drug market is more effective than Mary Kay's," and



Bryant Brown of the Durham congregation

that "kids can get grass easier than beer, because it's not a controlled substance."

For a copy of the new policy or more information about the issue, see: www.cuc.ca/social_responsibility/drug_prohibition_alt.htm.

Same-sex weddings

• continued from page one

decision. He fought back tears as they received their licences at city hall, then again when he married them in the church's meditation garden later that afternoon.

In Thunder Bay, Richard and Jean Armstrong witnessed the city's first gay marriage, performed by their lay chaplain, Trish McGowan. Dwayne and Doug, a couple from Minneapolis, were married in a city park, after which they all went out to lunch. Jean urged the couple to attend a Unitarian service in Minnesota, and light a candle for themselves as legally married gays.

"While the battle is over for now in Ontario, there is so much more to do to end homophobia," says Brian Kopke of Ottawa. "The battle is won, but the war is not yet over."

Letter to the Editor

FINDING GIMMICKS

As you noted in the last issue of the Canadian Unitarian, a number of the terms we use are "loaded" because they reflect our Christian origins. I find it odd, however, that we bend over backwards to accommodate every philosophy, but terms that are part of Unitarian history and tradition are found to be offensive. It appears that we follow St. Paul, who discarded anything and everything from his religious tradition in order to get new adherents. Just get new members. Forget all about the past. Don't worry, old members won't leave, and those who remain will soon be in a minority. The new ones turn over quickly, but we shall find another gimmick to replace the leavers with more new members.

— E.N. Terry, Montreal

Getting to the heart of it in Winnipeg

BY STEVEN EPPERSON

DID WE GET to the heart of it these past four days? That was the goal of this annual meeting. But Deborah Romeyn told us in a song on Friday night that, “there’s something about the prairie that strangers just don’t understand.”

Thankfully, we were not made to feel like strangers in this place. We had the members of the First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg to greet us, guide us, and make us feel at home. Because of their generosity and grace, we experienced the gift of community and hospitality. Thank you Winnipeg.

Did we get to the heart of our quest this weekend? Well, I’d do it all over again just to witness what I saw at The Forks on Saturday night. For those of you who weren’t there, I’m talking about the youth-led worship service at the confluence of the Red and Assiniboine Rivers. I saw UUs rising from their seats and in a great weaving line, dancing under the stars to whoops, drums and the repeated refrain, “Marching in the light of love, dancing in the light of love,” sung full-throated to the night sky. We came close together that night.

We approached the heart of our quest on Saturday morning when the Rev. John Baros-Johnson said that, “faith is a concern for meaning in life,” and that, “the task of the conversation of faith is to develop our ability to discern more lovingly and caringly the *speaking of the gods* amidst the cacophony of the everyday.”



The cuc’s new banner, made by Marya Nyland (carrying on the left) leads the Winnipeg banner parade.

We caught a glimpse of what resides at the heart of our religious tradition during the business sessions of this annual meeting. Looked it right in the face when a delegate reminded us, with procedural questions and amendments from the floor, of the right relations between our societies and their elected representatives.

We felt that heart pulse as a first-time delegate proposed thoughtful amendments to social responsibility resolutions. We may have felt the heart skip a beat when our proposed budget

was presented on Sunday – but then we voted for our future and took one visionary, principled step after another by passing prophetic resolutions on sane drug policies, on anti-racism, on democracy in Canada, and on calling this nation’s government to refuse to join the U.S.’s missile defence system.

Did we get to the heart of this weekend’s quest? The place may have looked like a hotel. These sessions may have been advertised as annual meetings and workshops, with resolutions to pass and papers to present. But look again. Think again. Ponder one more time before we go our many ways.

This weekend we approached the mystery that transforms a hotel into a house of worship. That transforms a business meeting into a re-enactment of historic principles forged more than 500 years ago. That transfigures a workshop into a loving conversation with those who lived before us.

That mystery is with us still. We have walked with it this weekend. May it always lead us to choose the deeper path of living, quickened by reason, enhanced by faith, enlivened by justice making. May we take it with us and abide in it as we leave this place and return to our homes, families, colleagues and congregations. May it be so. [U](#)

This address (abridged here) was given by the Rev. Steven Epperson of Vancouver during the closing worship in Winnipeg.

Annual Meeting Tidbits

IMAGINE DEMOCRACY

Delegates to the cuc annual meeting approved a two-year social responsibility study to “Imagine Canadian Democracy” – but not without some debate of course. Critics of the plan wanted to be sure the study would be open-ended, and not focussed solely on proportional representation. Leading the study are several active members from the two Victoria churches. To get involved in the study immediately, contact Bob Dolf: democracy@cuc.ca, 3034 Westdown Road, Victoria, B.C., v8R 5G2.

SHARING OUR FAITH

Four congregations were successful in applying for “Sharing Our Faith” grants from the cuc this year (the money comes from a nation-wide special collection in February, and are for growth projects). The \$5,800 in grants will be shared by these congregations: Kingston, to help produce a special “Songs for Children” hymn book; Lakehead Unitarian and Sarnia–Port Huron, both for visiting minister travel expenses; Guelph, to help set up a youth room.

OFFERING TO USC CANADA

The offerings from the two Sunday services at this year’s annual meeting will go to usc Canada (also known as the Unitarian Service Committee). The \$3,260 donated will go to support usc programs in the third world.

AWARDS AND MENTIONS

Several congregations and individuals received special mention at the annual meeting. **John Hopewell**, a former cuc president, received the Victor and Nancy Knight Award for his service to the organization in many capacities. **Pat Lane** of Winnipeg was presented with a Queen’s Jubilee Medal, for the “Youth Helping Youth” RE project she founded. Representatives from **Durham** and **Saint John** were greeted as new, full-member congregations of the cuc. And **Comox Valley** became the first congregation to earn “Welcoming Congregation” status under the cuc (Canadian congregations previously earned this citation under the UUA).

cuc Annual Meeting 2003



SCENES FROM AN ANNUAL MEETING (clockwise from top left): The cuc choir at the Sunday service • Rev. Susan Van Dreser of Winnipeg • The Sunday agenda at the Youth Conference • Over 70 youth attended the conference, held in the Winnipeg church • cuc President Mark Morrison-Reed • A moment of reflection in the Religious Education workshop



More annual meeting photos at: www.cuc.ca

New president says CUC must meet expectations

This past June was a busy one for marriages at the First Unitarian Congregation of Ottawa – same-sex marriages that is. “We’ve had five of them in the last couple of weeks,” says Elizabeth Bowen, who is the new president of the Canadian Unitarian Council. “And you just have to look at the joy on the faces of those people to know that we’re doing the right thing,” she says. It’s what Unitarianism is all about, she believes – justice, not judgement.

We raised expectations

Bowen was a natural choice to lead the cuc for the next year (she reaches the maximum six-year term on the Board of Trustees next spring). She’s been involved in denominational work for three decades. And she’s been through the crucible of the last five years with the Board, as the organization gained autonomy from the Unitarian Universalist Association.

She’s hoping to help the cuc deliver on the promises that were made during the internal debates of the recent past. “Did we raise expectations about better services in a new cuc?” she asks. “Yes we did, and now our challenge is to meet them.”

Although she believes the structures are in place – with three new staff and a greatly enlarged base of active volunteers – “we have a long way to go before better service delivery is up and running, making a difference at every level.”

Although she grew up in the Niagara region of Ontario, Bowen went to university in the U.S., earning her masters degree in microbiology. Raised an Anglican, Bowen was an undergrad in Illinois when someone told her at a political meeting that “she sounded like a Unitarian.” She had to find out what that meant, so she attended a service, and was surprised when the woman sitting next to her immediately struck up a conversation. She was impressed. “When I

grew up, you just didn’t talk in church!” she says laughing.

When Bowen moved to Ottawa as a newlywed in 1971 she promptly joined First Unitarian. Within two years, she agreed to serve as registrar for a conference, “and I’ve been saying yes ever since,” she says. Bowen didn’t have children, and her marriage dissolved a decade later, but she says, “my congregation is my family here in Ottawa now.”

Bowen is soft-spoken, gracious, and she laughs easily. But behind the easy-going exterior is a precise mind. As a scientist, her work involved detail, solitude and focus (now retired, Bowen’s working life was spent with the federal government, in genetics research). She says almost apologetically that, “it’s terrible to admit that I’m such a detail person – not everyone has the patience for it – but it’s what I like.”

She piloted bylaw changes

Over the past year, Bowen filled two roles for the cuc. The first, public one, was to step in as acting cuc president for three months last summer, when her predecessor, Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, was on vacation. That included delivering the news to 2,000, mostly American delegates at the UUA General Assembly in Quebec that the Canadians had finally decided to go their own way.

Her second role was to oversee a wholesale revision of the cuc bylaws, so they would match the new structure. “An army marches on its stomach,” declares Bowen, “and an organization on its bylaws.” The revised bylaws were passed with very few amendments at the

recent annual meeting.

Is she worried about the cuc’s projected budget deficit of \$170,000 for the current year, which was discussed and approved at the annual meeting? “Of course I’m concerned,” she says. “As a responsible president, I have to be.” But she’s not losing sleep over it either. “It was caused by an unexpected drop in our investment income,” she argues, “not by cost overruns. And we’re taking several steps to deal with it.



“Our member societies contribute 98 per cent of what they owe, which is a very good rate. Our ‘Friends of the cuc’ are growing, and now provide 10 per cent of our annual revenues. And we’re well on the way to launching an endowment campaign this fall,” the aim of which is to provide a stable, additional source of income.

Joining together

Bowen’s favourite moment at the annual meeting was on Saturday evening, as she walked from a downtown restaurant to the youth-led service by the river. “We kept meeting other groups headed the same way, coming from different directions. We all joined at The Forks, were quiet for awhile, then we celebrated.” It parallels Bowen’s dream of a new cuc, with growing congregations, a stronger youth wing, and lots of contact between congregations. 

Across the Country

WOMEN IN THE WOODS

Two Unitarian grandmothers from Victoria have been arrested twice and imprisoned for three weeks because of their opposition to logging on Vancouver Island. **Betty Krawczyk**, 74, and **Jen Bradley**, 48, are part of the Women in the Woods protest that has been challenging the B.C. government's "Working Forest" policy. They describe themselves as "prisoners of conscience" after being held in jail without charges for three weeks in May. You can follow their story or donate funds to their cause at: www3.bc.sympatico.ca/Womeninthewoods/intro.htm.



PHOTO: INGMAR LEE

SCIENTIST BECOMES MINISTER

A geneticist turned Unitarian minister received prominent coverage in a CBC radio documentary last May. **Dr. Penny Allderdice** spent her career doing genetics research in Newfoundland, from 1973 to 1997. She identified the genetic cause of severe disabilities among the residents of Stephenville (the condition is now called Allderdice Syndrome). After retiring, she moved to Chicago, studied at the Meadville-Lombard theological school and became a Unitarian community minister in the city. On the radio documentary, Allderdice described herself as an atheist. "I know from looking at genes that nothing organizes or controls things. The genetics of plants, animals and humans all behave the same way – we're all interconnected through the marvel of DNA."

VANCOUVER ISLAND CAMP

Unitarians on Vancouver Island are organizing a weekend camp, Aug. 15–17, at the George Pringle Camp in Shawnigan Lake. There is programming on Saturday morning for children and adults, while the afternoon is free for relaxation. Saturday night features a campfire and talent show. Cost is \$80–\$30, depending on age (registration before July 30). For more information: barbara_meredith@telus.net.

Testimony

by Gordon Koppang

You can believe in stories without taking them literally

I believe in bears – although I have never encountered one in the fur. I'm told there are hikers who can discern bear scat from deer droppings, but I'm not one of those. Though I have not acquired it, I believe in the wisdom of experienced hikers. I think bear bells are cool and I may even take to wearing them when I'm "hiking" to the store to buy milk. Wearing bear bells would be a beautiful way to proclaim my belief in bears to everyone around me. I'm not ashamed to say it: "I am a believer!"

Some stories told about bears are true; many are not. We all know the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears*. In recent years a new series of stories has been published under the title, *The Berenstain Bears*. These stories are wonderful, and I have delighted in telling them. I am drawn in by the warm and fuzzy illustrations. There's Mama Bear in her checked apron. There's Papa Bear, wearing a bowler hat at a jaunty angle! And, of course, the bear cubs, now into mischief, now snug in their beds.

Bears do not live in cabins; nor do they wear aprons or hats. Bedtime stories are an anthropomorphic account of the lives of bears. But children do not suffer a crisis of faith when they realize the bear stories we tell them are not true.

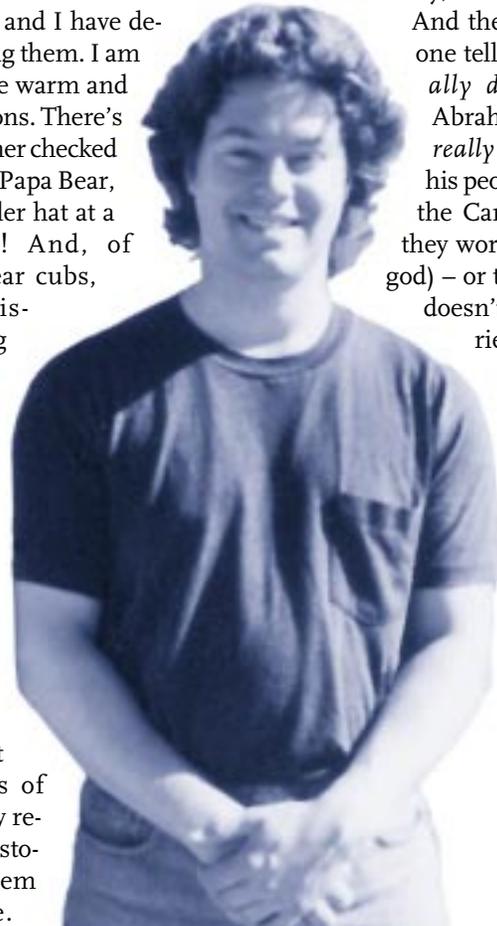
How is it that children continue to believe in bears?

To my knowledge no one has yet argued that, "because the story of *Goldilocks and the Three Bears* is not true," it must follow that, "bears do not exist." On the other hand, no group has yet arisen to proclaim that *Goldilocks* is an inerrant or infallible account of the lives of bears, or to insist that the *Berenstain* stories are the result of divine revelation.

So, the next time someone says to you, "God is like a person" (or three persons in one) just say, "I've heard that story." The next time someone says to you, "God has favourite people," or "God's *only* Son was born into a particular ethnic group" – just smile and say, "I've heard that story."

And the next time someone tells you that God *really did* give land to Abraham – or that God *really did* "command" his people to exterminate the Canaanites (because they worshiped the wrong god) – or that, "anyone who doesn't believe these stories is going to miss out" – look them in the eye, summon all your kindness and say, "Friend, I've heard those lies." 

– Gordon Koppang, UU Fellowship of Lethbridge, gordonkoppang@yahoo.com



Across the Country



Members of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver Worship Committee practice their clapping (or not): Ken Wood, Diana Ellis, Margaret Murdoch, Way Kent, Louise Bunn.

Don't clap in church, unless you can't not!

Is it appropriate to clap in church? Or is applause more suited to the concert hall? That's the question members of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver are pondering this summer, as their Worship Committee tries to come up with a recommendation.

The congregation's new minister, Rev. Steven Epperson, is in favour of clapping as a spontaneous response to music or an address – he sometimes leads the applause himself. But others feel that the church is a sanctuary, and fear that clapping could become routine.

Here are two views from Vancouver, on both sides of the issue:

Louise Bunn

It seems to me the pro-clappers and the anti-clappers are not really talking about the same thing. The pro-clappers are concerned not to discourage spontaneous displays of emotion and approval. I suspect that most of the anti-clappers are not really opposed to spontaneous displays. The anti-clappers are concerned that a clapping culture may degrade their worship experience.

Clapping, after all, is something many of us associate with theatrical performances, opera, and sporting events. But I am sure that the pro-clappers (or most of them) would not want routine clap-

ping to occur in the same way as it does at these events.

I am not fond of the American Sign Language version of clapping [hand waving above the head]. It doesn't convey the feelings of delight that may cause me to clap. Perhaps it would in time, but it feels forced and artificial to me. I also wonder how a "no clapping" rule would sound to a newcomer. Very uptight, perhaps?

Margaret Murdoch

As most of you know, I was initially very opposed to the idea of clapping, which most of the time seemed to me like appreciative applause for a performance that was intended to be a part of our worshipping experience.

It certainly interrupts for me the feeling of worship, into which I like to slip soon after arriving in church on a Sunday morning – another world, beyond the everyday world most of us live in. Understand, please, it's not the music, which seems near perfect most of the time, it's the applause.

However, after Steven spoke his heartfelt ideas on the subject at our Worship Committee meeting, I felt like becoming quiet on this subject, and seeing what I could do about it within myself. A big stretch, still I hope to succeed in time – just let it go. After all, I don't have to clap and usually don't, in spite of "teaching" from childhood that it's a group experience and better join in.

I too, am moved occasionally, usually later in the service, to clap with verve and gusto – when I almost can't help it. It reminds me of my mother's advice: "Don't get married unless you can't not!"

So how about this for a new rule: "Don't clap unless you can't not!" 



The UU Fellowship of Kamloops built this permanent brick labyrinth in memory of one of their founding members, Karsten Iverson, who loved the silent meditation of walking its circles.

He died of ALS three years ago. Situated in the trees by the Thompson River, Kamloops Unitarians hope the labyrinth will become a spiritual centre for the city.

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.

Mary Bennett Executive Director mary@cuc.ca

Office **55 Eglinton Avenue East, #705
Toronto, ON M4P 1G8**

Phone **416.489.4121** Fax **416.489.9010**

Email info@cuc.ca Web www.cuc.ca

Sylvia Bass West **519.472.7073**
Director of Lifespan Learning syliva@cuc.ca

Linda Thomson **905.332.3851**
Director of Regional Services, East linda@cuc.ca

Sara McEwan **866.877.7787**
Director of Regional Services, West sara@cuc.ca

Editor **Art Kilgour**

Office **RR2, Elora, ON N0B 1S0**

Phone **519.846.8994** Fax **519.846.8995**

Email art@writedesign.com

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ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT WANTED

The CUC has an opening for a full-time "Administrative Assistant" working from the Toronto office. You will be part of a three-person administrative team with a part-time bookkeeper and part-time database manager. You'll report to the executive director and liase with the three full-time program staff based in home offices across Canada. You'll have good organizational skills and the ability to juggle many demands and priorities. Normal working hours, with some weekend work. More information: mary@cuc.ca

Deadline: Aug. 15, 2003

THE REGIONS ARE GATHERING!

This fall's CUC regional gatherings are now being planned. Here are the meeting dates and locations. More info: www.cuc.ca

B.C. Region: November 8, Vancouver

Western Region: October 3-5, Regina

Central Region: October 25, Toronto

Eastern Region: October 3-5, Halifax

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