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OF THE CANADIAN  
UNITARIAN COUNCIL

[WWW.CUC.CA](http://www.cuc.ca)

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## Empowering youth with a new vision of ministry

**Wow – what a burst of energy!** Early last December, 12 exciting and innovative people met for the first time to form the Youth Advisory Group (or YAG) of the CUC.

The YAG consists of one youth and one adult from each of the four regions of Canada, the youth observer to the CUC board, the CUC Director of Lifespan Learning, and one representative from both the UUA Youth Office and YRUU (Young Religious Unitarian Universalists) Steering Committee.

- to honour the diversity of regions and establish cohesiveness among a community of faith by fostering communication links from the local to the global level

We also created a YAG covenant that will help ensure we are working for Canadian youth, both in meetings and when acting as representatives in our respective regions.

So what are we going to do? Our upcoming projects include a nation-wide coffeehouse to take place in February or March, a website, the

CanUUdle in May (the youth conference held in conjunction with the CUC annual conference), and connecting with a youth representative from every single congregation in Canada.

Watch out for the youth in your church – they are ready to show the world what they can do!

The YAG started as a group of lively and creative individuals, willing to donate their time and energy to a project they believed in. Two days

later, we had produced a covenant, mission statement, main short-term and long-term goals, and individual objectives.

So much was accomplished in two short days – just imagine what the New Year will bring! Way to go, YAG!

– Camille Twomey

(Youth Representative to the Central region)

More info. at [www.cuc.ca/youth](http://www.cuc.ca/youth)

## Celebration of Elders

BY JENNIFER GETSINGER

Haiku for Harold Brown at his Celebration Concert and Clare Buckland on her 88th Birthday, January 13, 2002

### Snow-covered Elders

Tremble with life yet shiver

In winter music

N.B. Reference is to Box Elder, *acer negundo*, whose dried keys hang on bare branches in winter.

*Jennifer Getsinger is a writer, editor, geologist and member of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. Raised a Unitarian since age five, she hails from Concord, Massachusetts. Contact her at: 604-734-9365, jengets74@post.harvard.edu.*

### Poetry Contributions

Please send your short, spiritual poems to our poetry editor Franci Louann: [floann@telus.net](mailto:floann@telus.net), or by regular mail to the Canadian Unitarian (address on back page).

**GROWING VITAL  
RELIGIOUS  
COMMUNITIES  
IN CANADA**



The new YAG: (front, L–R) Jesse Jaeger, Stephen Turnbull, Rachele Rickards, Sam Trumbull, Dorothy Ashworth; (back, L–R) Keith Barron, Asha Philar, Roger Davies, Camille Twomey, Samaya Oakley, Elizabeth Gamble, Sylvia Bass West.

With such a wide range of members, the YAG will help us build a flexible infrastructure to benefit Canadian youth for many years to come.

Two of the YAG's main goals, from our mission statement, are:

- to create a vision of ministry with youth in Canada by empowering youth – both voice and role



## Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

CUC President

### Hopes, and down home cooking, for the new year

**It is New Year's Day** and I've been preparing *Sekihan* for a *Shogatsu* I'll be attending later on. My Dad said he'd be eating *Hopping John*, a southern dish, and another New Year's tradition.

*Shogatsu* is the Japanese New Year celebration, which is a time for paying off obligations and seeking reconciliation, while *Sekihan* means rice and red beans, and the colour red stands for joy. *Hopping John* is made of black-eyed peas; its name refers to the fact that children hopped with delight around the table before it was served!

These traditions remind me that to hope for good luck, for joy, or for blessings is a common practice at the beginning of each New Year. There is much for which to hope.

We hope the CUC continues to evolve and grow strong, that it attracts the creative involvement of more volunteers, and that individuals contribute generously to the anticipated Endowment Campaign.

We hope that war with Iraq can be avoided, and that the UN can become an effective means of maintaining peace. We have hopes for our loved ones and resolutions for ourselves. And all of these, if they are to become more than wishful thinking, require our participation.

These New Year's Day traditions also remind me of the nature of Canada. Where else does a black Canadian born in Chicago, raised on soul food and educated in Switzerland cook *Sekihan* for a Japanese-Canadian Unitarian from B.C. who was interned in Alberta during WWII and later attended graduate school in Montreal?

This Canadian style multiculturalism is something I hope the CUC will increasingly reflect in the years ahead as well.

Now I need to get back to the kitchen.

## Testimony

by Larry Phillips

# How I found a spiritual habit in Unitarianism

**I was born in 1952** and raised on a farm in northern Manitoba where my family attended the local United Church on an irregular basis. I stopped attending church in my early teens. Very soon after I became an atheist – rejecting Christianity and religion in general as being too implausible from an analytical perspective, and too self-serving when I thought about the magnitude of the universe.

For the next 35 years, formal religion was of little importance to me. I got married, began a career in Information Technology that was a good fit with my analytical tendencies, and my wife and I raised three sons. While growth and self-development were important to me during this period, I didn't make any connection with the spiritual side of my life.

I can trace my recent interest in religion back to a single book – Stephen Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Successful People* – not what most people would think of as religious reading. Covey believes that to be effective, a person (or organization) must balance the social, mental, physical, and spiritual segments of their life.

While I had been attending to the social and mental dimensions in my life, I was not addressing the remaining two. I started a fitness regime that I still follow. However, I remained unconvinced on the value of spirituality as I equated it with the traditional Christian religion that I had rejected.

Some time after, an article about the Winnipeg Unitarian Church appeared

in the local paper. I was very sceptical and intrigued at the same time. What kind of church had no creed, would accept anyone (including atheists), and didn't care what you believe? What intrigued me was the sense of community and fellowship that was evident.



From the first service, I felt immediately accepted and at home and became a member after three months. I began to realize community was very important to me and here was an opportunity to participate in a new community in a religious environment. I continue to enjoy the volunteer aspect of the church and am involved at many levels – one of which is chair of the host committee that is helping plan the 2003 CUC annual conference in Winnipeg next May.

I have found that being part of a group whose members have widely divergent belief systems is very stimulating. A major source of growth for me has been exposure to new books and teachings. Writers such as Scott Peck, Wayne Muller, Thich Nhat Hanh and Elaine St. James have made me think about what is important in my life. As a result of this exposure my own belief system has become less insular and more aware of the "interdependent web of all existence."

My current concept of religion is to develop and understand my relationship with the universe. I don't consider myself an atheist any longer – as someone once said "I don't have enough faith to be an atheist." □

– larry.phillips@shaw.ca

# First Unitarian Universalist Church of Winnipeg



Winnipeg Unitarians meet in the back yard of their new, riverside church. Inset photo: Church members march in front of the Manitoba legislature on Gay Pride Day.

## Building a deeper church, one Chalice Circle at a time

**One of the fastest-growing** Unitarian churches in Canada is the First UU Church of Winnipeg. The 240-member congregation moved to a new, central location four years ago and hasn't looked back. Their unique building – a large heritage home with office, meeting and RE space, connected to a large new addition they built as their sanctuary – is busy every night of the week.

They have a seven-class religious education program on Sunday mornings (115 registered children), a great music program and choir, a diverse adult education program, a youth coordinator on staff, and Our Whole Lives programs (sex education) for all ages. In the past year they've added small group ministry to their agenda – which they call Chalice Circles.

Whew. But if that isn't already enough, the next four months are going to be especially busy for the Winnipeg church. They're hosting the cuc annual conference on the May long weekend. The local organizing committee will do much of the legwork in setting up the four-day event, as well as par-

ticipating in the planning and overall direction.

However, there's an interesting tie-in between the cuc meeting and the local congregation. A major focus of the meeting will be small group ministry – something the Winnipeg church has some fresh experience with, and a technique it is using to manage their membership growth.

Winnipeg's Chalice Circles are an attempt to create an intimate space in a larger church – a concept that is sometimes called covenant groups, cells, or simply small group ministry. Each group of seven to 10 adults meets monthly to discuss spiritual and ethical questions, including topics like:

- What is my individual responsibility to find truth?
- How can foreknowledge of my death contribute to my life?
- How much do I have to do for the world before I feel comfortable?

"A minister can discuss these sorts of things on Sunday," says Rev. Susan Van Dreser of Winnipeg, "but the small groups give people a chance to speak in-

dividually, with a respectful audience. These aren't the sorts of questions you can talk about with co-workers. It's a chance to get down deeper."

The Winnipeg church currently has seven Chalice Circles, which are mostly organized around meeting times (although one is a bisexual, gay, lesbian and transgendered circle, and one is "child-friendly" – it has babysitting). Each circle has a facilitator, who is trained and coached by Van Dreser.

How do they prevent the Chalice Circles from becoming a church within a church? "We all discuss the same questions," says Van Dreser, "and the facilitators meet together themselves every month." As well, the groups are kept deliberately small; as more congregation members express interest, they'll create new Chalice Circles rather than enlarge the current ones.

"The circles have been especially important for us, because of our growth," says Van Dreser. "They allow new people to get to know us intimately and to feel immediately comfortable, and they allow older members to get to know the new ones, so they don't feel like their church is being taken over."

Winnipeg's other major way of dealing with congregational growth has been a carefully managed visioning process. After more than two years and the involvement of most of their members, they've identified seven key areas where they want to make changes:

- connecting and caring
- meeting community needs
- choices for religious experience
- nurturing volunteers
- welcoming youth and youth adults
- making the organization work
- sustaining their strengths

In specific terms, they want to tackle conflict resolution, improve social action, and welcome young adults better.

They've got a lot on the go in Winnipeg. Perhaps the decision to hold the annual conference there is a little like the saying: "If you want to get something done, ask a busy person to do it!" ☐

## Action on Social Justice

### CASHLESS AND COLD FOR A DAY

Ever heard of a Street Retreat? You spend a day alone on a downtown street, for a personal take on the reality of homelessness and street life. Six members of Toronto First tried it out late last fall on a sub-zero day. They went cashless and without identification for about five hours. What they found was loneliness and cold, but also some companionship with homeless people they met at shelters and in food lines. The Street Retreat was led by intern minister Laura Friedman, and she has plans for more retreats in the spring. More information: [lauraf@firstunitariantoronto.org](mailto:lauraf@firstunitariantoronto.org).

### MARCHING IN VANCOUVER

Vancouver Unitarians were very active in social justice last fall. A contingent of 40 people joined the 10,000-strong peace march in mid-November, carrying at least four large banners and numerous signs. And another group joined the Multifaith Social Justice Coalition of B.C. in its first public action – protecting squatters around the old Woodward’s store in downtown Vancouver from eviction by the police.

### MITTEN TREES

More than one Unitarian church has developed a tradition of “mitten trees” at Christmas – which is a seasonal church decoration with a social justice twist. In Edmonton, members decorated their tree with new mittens, scarves and hats, which went to a local drop-in centre. In Victoria they suggested people tuck cash into their donated mittens, which they did, almost \$600 worth in 43 pairs; the mittens and money were donated to Victoria’s Together Against Poverty Society.

### EMPTY BOWLS IN MONTREAL

The Unitarian Church of Montreal’s second Empty Bowls “fundraiser to fight hunger” was a big success last fall, raising over \$4,000 for food banks in the city. Over 200 people attended the event, purchasing ceramic bowls donated by local potters, eating a simple meal of soup and bread, then taking the bowls home at the end of the evening.

## Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice

# New head of CUSJ wants to tackle the big issues

**Philip Symons**, new president of Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ), believes there are good reasons to do social justice work through the church. “Our biggest strength is that we know each other and we have similar philosophies,” says Symons. “It’s difficult to get people to act together until they know each other.”

Symons, 65, a semi-retired fisheries scientist from Victoria, took over as president of the CUSJ last spring. He says the organization tries to have “a national view” in the issues it tackles. It has 350 members, is a separate organization from the CUC (although it’s an “associate” of the larger body), and speaks only for its own members.

The CUSJ’s main activities are the tri-annual newsletter *Justnews*, an active email list, discussion papers, lobbying and brief-writing, letters to the news media and public demonstrations.

The CUSJ was born seven years ago by members who wanted to push the CUC in a social justice direction. In that, it has largely succeeded. The CUC now has social responsibility groups in nine areas, many of whose members also belong to CUSJ (see [www.cuc.ca](http://www.cuc.ca) under ‘Social Responsibility’). And the CUC has learned to respond quickly and publicly on social justice issues.

So does the CUSJ still have a role to play? “Yes, we do,” says Symons, “and it complements the CUC’s work.” He explains: “Because of its charitable status, the CUC can’t do lobbying – it must be apolitical.” As well, the CUC may only speak out on issues where it has passed formal policies. The CUSJ can move more quickly, and assertively.

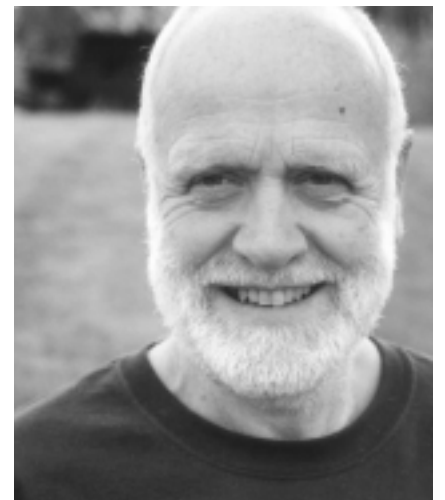
Almost all Unitarian congregations engage in charitable projects, like do-

nations to food banks or shelters. Is this social justice? “Charity is a part of social justice,” believes Philip Symons. “We cater to two kinds of people. The hands-on people, who like to be doing things that make a direct difference, and the policy people, which is where I’m coming from.”

He sees two recent activities as bridging the gap between these two types of activists: the campaign to use fair trade coffee in congregations and homes, and the move to buy locally-grown Canadian food.

In the longer term, Symons wants to orient the CUSJ around sustained action on three big issues:

- electoral reform (towards some sort of proportional representation)
- political reform (changing the way political parties are financed)
- values reform (the good of society, instead of just individual good)



He likes the first one especially, because there’s already a push in that direction from many other groups in Canada. Symons predicts that we’ll see a new political system within 10 years if enough people contribute.

As a scientist, Symons readily admits that he approaches social justice from a humanist direction. But he doesn’t discount the spiritual aspect of doing the right thing, and he feels that when it comes to values reform, there’s a lot of common ground between head- and heart-oriented Unitarians who care about social justice. ■



## Lighting candles to burn the cold winter away

Maybe it's the darkness that comes with living in Canada's largest northern city. Or maybe it's the strong pagan influence on the smaller of the two Edmonton churches.

Whatever the reason, Westwood Unitarian Congregation now hosts what must be one of the largest winter solstice celebrations in the country. Four services brought 300 people to the church in under 24 hours last December.

Although they've held solstice services for 15 years at Westwood, the event has really mushroomed in the last four. In order to accommodate all those wanting to attend, they keep adding services to the evening roster.

Last year they had two. This year, they scheduled three on the Saturday night (followed by the regular Sunday service). Seven o'clock was the family-oriented solstice (with childcare provided), 9 P.M. was the adult service, and 11 P.M. was the pagan service.

The best-attended of the three was the late service, with 120 people

squeezed into the small church. It featured chanting and a lot of moving in place (dancing was out of the question). The two earlier services included the choir and the family service featured a children's play about the solstice. In all three services individuals lit candles – including people who had never attended the church before.

"It is extremely moving," says Lorian Kennedy, who organized PR for the services. "Maybe the solstice is more important in Edmonton," she says, "because it gets dim at 4 P.M., and the absence of light affects everything we do."

The two Edmonton churches collaborate each December, with Westwood focussing on the solstice, and Edmonton offering specialized Blue Christmas and storytelling services. The 65-member Westwood church enjoyed the services of intern minister Meg Roberts last year, and is now looking for a permanent, part-time minister. [U](#)

## Unitarian People

### INNOVATIVE IDEAS

A Don Heights Unitarian came up with one of the most influential new ideas in the world last year, according to the New York Times and the Times of London. **John M. Kennedy**, a psychologist who studies perception theory at the University of Toronto, discovered that even blind people have a sense of perspective that can be seen in their drawings. The New York Times said his idea "changed the way we think," and it was also recognized as one of the top 10 ideas and inventions of the year in the London newspaper. Kennedy is a former president of the Don Heights congregation.

### YOUTHFUL PIANIST

The Unitarian Fellowship of St. Catharines has a new music director and pianist: **Blair Salter**. The catch is, Blair is a Grade 9 high school student – albeit one with amazing musical gifts. Besides playing piano at the Grade 10 conservatory level, she plays clarinet in the Niagara Senior Youth Orchestra, sings in a youth choir, and is comfortable playing other woodwinds, brass, violin, guitar, organ, harp and percussion. So, besides all the bands, orchestras, choirs and percussion groups she participates in each week, she now has a Sunday gig at the southern Ontario fellowship.

### DONATIONS BENEFIT STUDENTS

The \$4,000 raised in the collection plate at the last cuc annual conference in Kelowna has gone towards scholarships for four mature students at Okanagan University College, where the meeting was held. The students were selected on the basis of need, and all four are raising children while they attend cuc. Three are working towards social work degrees and the fourth hopes to go into law after finishing his undergraduate arts degree. **Barbara Bowmar**, former vice-president of the cuc and a Kelowna resident presented the scholarships last November.



## Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

### The internet has changed my life – how about yours?

**The internet just turned 20.** I started using it for email in 1991, when my son Jamie was at school in Waterloo. He said: “I don’t write, I don’t phone, but if you get email, I promise I’ll send you messages.”

He was true to his word. Sometimes I received a response within minutes, usually starting with: “I should be studying, but ...”

I know a little bit about how the internet has changed the way the CUC operates. And I hear stories from congregations saying most of their new visitors have checked out the website before they come.

I “lurk” on half a dozen congregational email lists (or “groups”), each with its own flavour and priorities. In a small lay-led group using rented space a recurring theme is: “I need to open the church on Sunday, who has the key?” Another list frequently heats up with strong theological debate. A third features primarily informational messages on social activism.

Most but not all of our congregations have a website now (every one we know about is linked to [www.cuc.ca](http://www.cuc.ca) under ‘Congregations’). The CUC website has grown in leaps and bounds and is not slowing down (thanks largely to volunteer webweaver Bert Christensen.)

You may know that the founder of the world wide web is Tim Berners-Lee, a Unitarian-Universalist who has been quoted in Time magazine about his values (openness, communication, sharing), which fit his interests in the world of communication and technology.

I’d like to hear your stories (send an email to [mary@cuc.ca](mailto:mary@cuc.ca)). How has the internet affected your personal or congregational life? What are your predictions for how you’ll use it in the next few years? We’ll publish responses in a future Canadian Unitarian.

## Board of Trustees

### Two new taskforces on principles and ministry

**The CUC Board** struck two new taskforces at its fall meeting, to help Unitarians make the transition to an autonomous denomination in Canada.

*The Statement of Principles Taskforce* will spend the next three years investigating the appropriateness of the Seven Principles to our national context. We adopted the UUA’s principles and sources as our own last spring, at the same time as we took on service delivery from the Unitarian Universalist Association.

The principles themselves were formulated by the UUA (including Canadian input) over two decades ago. The taskforce will help Canadian congregations and members determine a statement of principles that may be based on the UUA principles, but adapted for our national context. (Your comments can be sent to [statement@cuc.ca](mailto:statement@cuc.ca).)

Wilf Innerd of the UU Church of Olinda, Ontario will chair the Statement of Principles taskforce, which includes these members: Samantha Magnus (Calgary youth), Rev. Wendy McNiven (Kelowna), John Hopewell (Victoria), Denis Barsalo (Montreal), Calvin Drake (Toronto), Rev. Mark

Morrison-Reed (CUC Board), and Mary Bennett (CUC).

*The Shared Ministry Taskforce* will spend a year investigating how ordained professional ministers and a supported lay ministry can best work together in Canada. The taskforce was needed because of the new and somewhat complicated reality for ministry after the CUC’s move to autonomy from the UUA.

Canada, with one-third of its congregations fewer than 50 members, has a high percentage of lay-led groups. The taskforce will attempt to define the unique characteristics of Canadian ministry, including how to support strong lay and professional ministry within our congregations. Overall responsibility for full-time ministerial settlement remains continental.

Chairing the Shared Ministry taskforce is John Storm (St. Catharines). Its members include: Bob Woodham (Vancouver), Elaine Roberts (Edmonton), Christine Johnston (CUC Board), Rev. Kathy Sage (Kingston), Christopher Wulff (young adult, Kingston), Lynne Picard (Winnipeg), Rev. Stefan Jonasson (Arborg, Manitoba), and Mary Bennett (CUC). ☐

### Letter to the Editor

#### INTERWEAVE AWARD

First let me commend you on a wonderful publication. I always enjoy the CUC newsletter when it comes. I serve the The Derby Line, Vermont church, located two doors from the Customs Station, right across the border from Stanstead / Rock Island, Quebec.

I am also Interweave Continental’s president. Thanks for mentioning that Stan Calder of Edmonton won the

2002 Mark DeWolfe award. But I need to make a correction. The award is Interweave’s award and has nothing to do with the Unitarian Universalist Assembly (UUA). Interweave Continental is an independent affiliate of the UUA, is funded solely on our own, and has activities solely of our determination (including our annual Convo, held in February, a fabulous bimonthly newsletter, and many activities at the UUA General Assembly, one of which is the presentation of the Mark DeWolfe award). We remain a continental group!

– Rev. Jane Dwinell

## Regional Gatherings Fall 2002

# The birth of the CUC regional gatherings

*Last fall, the newly organized regional networks of the CUC took their inaugural steps with well-attended gatherings in West Vancouver, Waterloo and Ottawa. (Western Canada held its concluding District meeting in Saskatoon.) In Waterloo, for example, organizers expected 100–120 people, and 133 showed up. Here are a selection of photos from the meetings.*



*Top: Youth delegates to the B.C. region gathering lead a plenary energizer (“I’m a little teapot”). Bottom left: New Brunswick members at the Eastern region gathering. Bottom right: Katherine Jesch of the Seventh Principle Project (an independent affiliate of the UUA) with Fiona Heath of Waterloo at the Central region gathering.*

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\* 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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## Ministerial Musings

# We need to keep the beat, but leave room to improvise

**In high school**, I played viola in the high school orchestra – and played poorly I might add! I never quite mastered all the scales and key changes. My daughter's Suzuki violin teacher, on the other hand, plays a mean viola. He once told me that subbing in an orchestra was a difficult task, and to do it well you have to follow three rules: always watch the conductor, look busy, and if you must fake a part, do so in the right key!

I thought these rules might apply to everyday life as well. Like subbing in an orchestra, each of us is here for but a brief musical repertoire. Or to use a popular aphorism, "Life is not a dress rehearsal." If there is a reincarnation, then next time, rather than a minister, I'd like to come back as a jazz saxophone player – so I could stay out late Saturday nights, and sleep in on Sunday mornings!

In my current life as a humanist Unitarian minister, however, I haven't met any grand conductor of the cosmos. So *Rule One* needs interpreting. I would probably rewrite it as follows: "Always keep your eye on your own wise, inner conductor, whose rhythms call us to play the most beautiful and wholesome music that our instruments will allow."

I totally disagree with *Rule Two* ("look busy"). I would re-cast it in the contrary: "Make sure your life's musical score has pages and pages of rests so you can savour the symphony of sounds and sights that float by each day."

*Rule Three* ("just fake it") is causing me even more grief. How can anyone fake life in the wrong key, or even in the right key? To really fake a life,



Ray Drennan now (inset photo) and in his next life!

wouldn't you have to pretend to play an instrument that wasn't your own? To fake a life would mean to live as straight when you're really gay, or as a Christian when you're a humanist pagan, or as an e-commerce type when your soul cries out to build canoes.

In other words, to really fake a life would mean living an inauthentic life. It would mean squeezing into a classical suite when your soul is hard rock. By contrast, an *authentic* life must develop a fluidity of movement, allowing for numerous changes of key and tempo as we pass through the various and inevitable stages of living.

Perhaps life isn't anything like subbing in an orchestra after all. I think it's more jazz than classical. There's a beat to life somewhere that we need to keep in our heads and in our souls – and then dare to leave lots of room for improvisation! ☐

– Rev. Ray Drennan,  
Unitarian Church of Montreal