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Deadline for next issue **Feb. 28, 1999**

Editor's not to contributors: We're working on an editorial policy (what we include in the newsletter, and why), and will publish it here when we're finished! In the meantime, here are some guidelines. All letters to the editor are welcome, and we'll publish as many as we can, but they may be edited for brevity. All contributions are welcome, but we don't guarantee publication. If your article or letter doesn't appear immediately, don't lose heart! We'll file it for future consideration.

Unitarians help mount hurricane relief effort

THERE'S A MOUNTAIN of bags and boxes growing in the sanctuary of Toronto First Unitarian Church. The boxes are labelled *chicos*, *niñas*, *zapatas*, *mujeres* and *hombres* (i.e. Spanish for boys, girls, shoes, women and men).

It's early November, and Toronto First has become one of the city's key centres in collecting relief supplies for the victims of Hurricane Mitch in Central America. Every day a new 40-foot container is parked out on St. Clair Avenue, to be quickly filled with boxes of donated goods. Inside, 10-20 volunteers sort clothing, food and other donations until late every evening. "It's like cleaning out your basement forever," jokes Gwen Wulff, one of the volunteers.

Coordinating the effort is Frank Chavarria, a Nicaraguan who came to Canada almost 10 years ago and has worked almost since then as the custodian at Toronto First. He's reading as little as possible about the disaster, which killed 6,000 Central Americans and left one million homeless. "It just makes me feel low and depressed," he says.

Instead, he uses the relief work as an antidote to worrying about the disaster. He says, "It's great to feel like you're doing something for someone who really needs it." The response to Toronto First's press release asking for help was almost immediate -- within 24 hours people started arriving with donations. And the flow continued for 18 more days.

By late November, the church had filled five containers with medicine, clothing, toys, bedding and food. These donations, along with \$15,000 in cash, were sent through the International Red Cross to Nicaragua and Honduras.

The whirlwind of activity shook up the church, and brought many new people through its doors. As donors came to the church they passed a table of information about Unitarianism, including brochures in Spanish. A special bilingual worship service to remember the victims of Hurricane Mitch was held on Dec. 6. And Toronto First members report that a plan is now in the works to found an Hispanic Unitarian society in the city.

Toronto wasn't the only Canadian congregation to respond to the emergency, however. The Unitarian and Beacon churches in Vancouver raised \$10,000 and collected 200 boxes of goods. (Margo Howe of Vancouver contacted almost every congregation member by phone, bringing in the bulk of the cash donations.) North Shore Unitarian in West Vancouver raised \$2,600. The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough raised \$800. And the Unitarian Service Committee in Ottawa reports collecting \$12,000 in Hurricane Mitch donations by mid-December.

Frank Chavarria is involved in an organization that will do aid work for Central America, because the need is ongoing he says. Next on his agenda is construction materials, for rebuilding. Will North American construction materials be suitable for Central America? "Anything will do," says Frank. "Many Third World countries could live happily on just the garbage produced by North America." For more information about the Canadian Foundation for Sustainable Development in Central America and the Caribbean (CAFCA), call Frank Chavarria in Toronto at 416-652-3999.

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FIRST-HAND REPORT FROM THE FRONT LINES IN NICARAGUA

WELL, THE HORRORS just go on and on, and I sit in my little yellow office in Managua trying to fathom how it is that these things can really happen. Of course they do, all the time, and we see them on TV, but it's another thing altogether to be right on the outskirts of it.

A brigade worker came back from the region of La Casita today, describing the scene. Rescue workers

wade through waist-deep mud, pushing their way between tree trunks and other unthinkable debris that has been swept along in the thick torrent. They have no gloves or masks to prevent disease, and often go shirtless. The instructions they have been given now are to rescue only the living: the dead are too numerous, and they are being burned.

If you see a person with 60 per cent or less of their body sticking out of the mud, they are most probably alive (they may be unconscious or unable to move, but they are probably alive). Work your way through the mud to them, haul them out, and try to work your way back to safety with them. If you see a person with 70 per cent or more of their body buried, chances are their ribcages have been crushed and they are dead.

Obviously if the person is upside down, they are dead. So rescue workers have the blood-curdling task of scanning the fields of mud, evaluating motionless heads and shoulders, and deciding where to wade to. These relief workers are provided no food, and are only offered relief rations, when they are available.

Not to be tugging too hard at your heart-strings or anything, but things are grim grim grim. We need help help help. Use your heads and hearts (and if you can, your wallets) and try a little ant-work.

-- a Nov. 3, 1998 e-mail dispatch from aid worker Carol Wood of Casa Canadiense and daughter of a Winnipeg church member

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THE 1999 CUC ANNUAL MEETING

**SPIRIT OF
THE NORTH**
**Living our Canadian
Religious Identity**

*At the Meadowvale Resort &
Conference Centre, Mississauga, Ont.
May 21-24, 1999*

FURTHER DETAILS COMING SOON

letter to the editor

PASS THAT NEWSLETTER ALONG

Good morning from Victoria, B.C. Just a brief note to thank you for the professional format and content of the Canadian Unitarian. I now feel very comfortable in sharing and passing on copies to friends and other community connections. The newsletter reflects what we are about in a clear, descriptive style.

-- *Alastair Mont, Victoria, B.C.*

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president's column

JOHN HOPEWELL

UPDATE ON THE CUC--UUA DISCUSSIONS

IN OCTOBER 1998, CUC Board representatives met with UUA Board representatives to continue the discussions we began the previous January.

At the January 1998 meeting we agreed to cancel the existing Accord between our organizations and negotiate a new agreement after the CUC Commission finishes its work. The October meeting focused on the long-term relationship of the two organizations, and was chaired by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed, Minister at Toronto First.

We began by defining what would constitute a healthy relationship between two national organizations. Factors such as equity and fairness, permanence and stability, partnership and "congregation-centred" were discussed.

We went on to discuss factors affecting the relationship, like the dual national and continental roles of the UUA; the CUC mandate; confusion between UUA, its Districts and the CUC; the time and effort expended in CUC/UUA negotiations; and differing perspectives on financial resources.

Then we reviewed the options presented in the Stage I Report of the Commission on Services to Canadian Congregations (see the update on page four of this issue) and explored possible outcomes of the options.

Finally, there was a discussion on financial issues. While the two organizations have very different views on the CUC claim to certain UUA assets, we do agree that the feeling of dependence in the current relationship needs to be addressed. We made some progress on this issue, but there is much work ahead of us.

The two meetings held this year have been productive in that they have developed on both sides a better understanding of the issues between the two organizations. This is a critical time for both the

CUC and the UUA because of the CUC Commission on Services and the UUA "Fulfilling the Promise" process, both of which could have major impacts on the continental organization.

As the Commission continues its work, communication with the UUA will also continue. A further meeting is planned for Spring 1999.

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Are the Raging Grannies 'anti-Canadian'?

SECRET MILITARY documents released at the RCMP Public Complaints Commission last fall showed that the police had an eye on the Grannies as a potential threat at the November 1997 APEC conference in Vancouver.

The Raging Grannies are about a decade old and got their start in Victoria, B.C. (they include Victoria Unitarians). They sing songs of protest and satire, generally aimed at the prevailing economic and political orthodoxy. For instance, they sing about the Multilateral Agreement on Investment and about the dismantling of Canada's social programs. There are now Raging Grannies chapters in almost every province of Canada, with Unitarians in most of them.

The B.C. Grannies were not on the front lines when the pepper-spraying started at APEC in 1997. But they were definitely seen as a thorn and a potential problem by the powers that be in the military. Defence department documents marked "secret" and "Canadian eyes only" assessed the Grannies as "anti-Canadian forces." No doubt the troupe will come up with an appropriate song to mock the military's paranoia.

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across the country

BUDDY CAN YOU SPARE A TOOL?

THE UNITARIAN Congregation of Saskatoon is looking for hammers, drills, screwdrivers, files, rasps, glass cutters, caulking guns, saws and much more as they begin renovation of their new home. For three years the congregation of 110 members has been meeting in a senior citizens centre. Earlier this year they found a former convent with lots of space and an attached chapel that will serve as their sanctuary.

"It's a commitment," says Saskatoon minister Linda Stowell. "We'll have to grow to pay for it." Although the building is relatively new, it still needs alterations to fit the new tenants, and that's where the tools come in.

GOING BACK TO MINUDIE

A work party of Unitarians from Halifax and Wolfville converged on an old Universalist church in

Minudie, N.S. last fall to undertake some initial repairs to the structure. Although no congregation worships regularly in Minudie, a group of Nova Scotia UUs are working to preserve it as a Universalist heritage building.

Bruce Coyle worked on a ladder and felled loose plaster from the walls. Heather Watts, Amy Moonshadow and Irene Baros-Johnson gathered up a couple of pickup truck loads of plaster from the floor. Allyn Clarke bolted some joists and beams while Peter Proctor puttied windows. Their next step is to get the building assessed and further repairs prioritized.

EDMONTON QUILT RAFFLE

In mid-December the Unitarian Church of Edmonton raffled a unique quilt that's truly a family heirloom. Following a quilting service some time ago, church members contributed cloth scraps from their homes. A team of quilters led by church administrator and master quilter Linda Stolle transformed the scraps into a magnificent design and a true UCE family heirloom. Offered as a fundraiser, the quilt raffle has raised over \$2,000 for the church.

BEANS BEANS BEANS

The Elora and Fergus Unitarian Church distributed 5,000 pounds of dried beans to food banks in Ontario and Quebec late last year. It called this effort *The Bean Project*. Other Unitarian congregations in Waterloo, St. Catharines, London, Toronto and Montreal bought large quantities of the Elora and Fergus beans to distribute to food banks in their areas. Why beans? "It takes about 17 pounds of feed grain to produce one pound of meat. When we eat beans instead of meat for protein we lessen our intake of the earth's food resources," says Bean Project coordinator Jim Sannes.

MAYBE HAMILTON'S NEW BUILDING CAME WITH TOOLS!

The First Unitarian Church of Hamilton moved to their new church in late November -- a renovated hardware store in the downtown area. The growing congregation raised \$479,000 for the building purchase and renovations. Senior congregation members, who had helped build the old church 40 years ago, lit the chalice at Hamilton's Nov. 29 service. Then the flame was carried down the street to the new location. Rev. Allison Barrett reported that spirits were very high in the 185-member church as the final renovations were being completed in time for the Christmas services.

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unitarian people

MEN RETREAT TO RAINY WOODS

Forty-eight Unitarians from the Pacific Northwest (including 17 from North Shore Unitarian) travelled to a men's retreat in North Bend, Washington on a dark and stormy night last fall. The program, led by Rev. Brian Kiely of Edmonton, was about "Soulwork and Responsibility" and followed a four-fold cycle through affirmation, repentance, rebirth and creation. "Most men found it an inspiring, growing and bonding experience," reports Harold Rosen of Vancouver. "Some left with as many questions as they arrived with, but felt enriched by the process of searching with other men." Another retreat is being contemplated, perhaps for next fall.

MINISTER INSTALLATIONS

- Rev. Nancy Anderson was installed as minister by the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton in late November. The congregation had been working toward full ministry for a number of years, sharing their minister or making other part-time arrangements. Two years ago Nancy arrived as an extension minister and last spring was called to be permanent.
- Rev. Anne Treadwell was installed as minister of the Waterloo and Elora--Fergus congregations in late October. The nearby groups will share Anne on a three-quarter / one-quarter basis. The installation service was held at the Waterloo church, with a delegation from Elora and Fergus making the half-hour trek from their smaller community.

OTHER COMINGS AND GOINGS

Rev. Everett Morris arrived in Coquitlam last fall as the interim minister for the Beacon congregation. Frances Deverell is doing a field placement at the North Shore church in West Vancouver. John Benford is at Toronto First as an intern minister. Donna and Mark Morrison-Reed and Jane Bramadat have returned from sabbaticals in New Zealand, Australia, India and Europe.

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CUC commission enters its 'focus group' phase

A **SERIES OF** focus groups created last May are studying the feasibility options for future relations between the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) and the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA). Created by the CUC's Commission on Services to Congregations, the reports of the groups will form the basis for a study to be presented to the CUC Board this spring.

At the heart of the issue is the future of how closely the CUC and the UUA will work together to provide services to Canadian congregations.

At the May 1998 annual meeting, the Commission presented a Stage I report outlining four possible directions the CUC might go in the future. They range from keeping things the way they are to complete separation:

- We can maintain the status quo with the UUA, though at a considerably higher cost, thanks mostly to exchange rates.
- We can drop some UUA services and have them provided by the CUC.
- We can become two Canadian-only districts within the UUA.
- Or we can break away completely, providing most of our own services and purchasing a few as needed from the UUA.

When faced with these options, the CUC Board asked the Commission to prepare feasibility studies on each of them.

In this second stage of its work, the Commission opted for a focus group model where each commissioner gives leadership in a specific area of congregational life. The focus groups include: Ministry and Settlement, Social Responsibility, Religious Education, Extension and Growth, Leadership Development, and Multilateral Relations.

Each group is looking at all four options in terms of their area of concern. Various leaders are offering input on how each option could be made to work and what roadblocks there might be. Teams are also looking at cost concerns and are seeking good advice in any form from both sides of the border.

If you wish to offer input or need further information on the Commission's work contact Brian Kiely at (403) 455-9797 or e-mail to: BriKie@aol.com.

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cuc notices

THE TAPES ARE HERE

The CUC has a new supply of VHS format videotape copies of the popular Sharing Our Vision show that originally aired on Vision TV. As well, two copies of the show in Betacam format (broadcast quality) are available for loan only. The tapes can be purchased for \$28.50 from the CUC. Please enclose a cheque with your order.

FREE SPIRIT CLOSES

The Canadian distributor of UU books has gone out of business, although he is still selling in-stock titles. *Free Spirit Literature*, run by Dave Dessens of Winnipeg, was hit by the declining value of the Canadian dollar and other circumstances that prevent him from continuing. The CUC has set up a task force to explore other possibilities for distributing UU materials in Canada. In the meantime, CUC publications can be ordered directly from the Toronto office (416-489-4121), and Beacon or Skinner Press materials can be ordered directly from the UUA bookstore (800-215-9076). As well, Free Spirit is continuing to sell its in-stock items, including CUC publications (204-488-9894).

NEW COUNCIL IN B.C.

In late October 1998 the B.C. Unitarian Council was established at a special meeting in Vancouver. The Council's goal is to stimulate Unitarian growth in B.C. by providing a forum for exchange, networking, support and cooperation between the B.C. congregations. The new chair of the Council is Lynn Price of Comox Valley (250-338-1658, or lprice@island.net).

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exploring our faith

REV. RAY DRENNAN

Helping children grapple with existential questions

WE HAD SOME mighty intense conversations in our home last fall. Maybe you did too, if you have small children.

It all began innocently enough last summer when we flew to Northern Ireland. My younger children, Elizabeth and David, took particular note of the safety card in the seat pocket and studied it carefully.

They became instant experts on airplane safety procedures. They knew where the life jackets were and how to put them on. They rehearsed what to do if the plane were to “take a bath” in the ocean. They read about the slides, the rafts and the rescue.

It all seems so straightforward on those safety cards. Then, a couple of months later, the Swissair plane crashed off Nova Scotia, and the questions mounted.

"What about the rafts, Dad?" asked Elizabeth.

"There weren't any rafts," I replied.

"What about the life jackets, Mum? How come the people didn't know how to put on their life jackets?"

"It just happens sometimes that way, Elizabeth," said my wife, Ann.

"But the flight attendants, they ..."

"No Elizabeth, even the flight attendants died."

"But how come *they* didn't know how to put on their life jackets?"

Elizabeth asked probing, agonizing questions as she tried to make sense of things. We felt her pain as tears came to our eyes.

How do you explain to a six-year-old that life is often not what it seems? That even if you read the safety card over and over again, airplanes seldom (if ever) land smoothly on glass seas so that the passengers have a chance to put on life jackets or get into rubber rafts to be rescued.

How do you explain to a youngster whose consciousness is only dawning that life is not as safe as she thought and that there are times when it doesn't come out happily-ever-after?

I couldn't help but imagine those people living through their last few moments together. Did they have time to look into the terror-stricken faces of their children as their airplane plunged in darkness?

And did the kids look back to see that Mummy or Daddy couldn't reassure them or make it alright?

Did they look into each others' eyes and meet death together?

We struggled with Elizabeth as she began to awaken to the deep, existential questions of life. We struggled with her, not wanting to destroy her trust in life. As parents we wanted to accompany her; we didn't want to avoid her questions, but we also feared robbing her of childhood innocence.

At times I wanted to reach out, hold her and protect her from her own inquisitive mind and to make it all better. There was a temptation to retreat into the myths of gods and angels and heavens.

It was even tempting to dodge her questions, but as a Unitarian and as a cosmic humanist, that is not what I believe. We tried to honour Elizabeth's questions at *her* level and intensity.

Through this experience we have been drawn closer together. Once again it reminded me how children so often stretch us. Somehow, I feel the tragic plane crash has graced our family. These days we seem to say, "I love you," more often. Ann and I take a moment longer to say goodbye or to look into each other's eyes and our children's faces.

Having been reminded how fragile life is, we take each other a little less for granted now. We know we must take the time -- while there is still time -- to express love, to care for, and be cared for by each other.

Life slips by so very quickly and is gone. There will come a time when there is no more time. Today is a great day, because we have been given life.

-- Ray Drennan, Minister, Unitarian Church of Montreal

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web browsing

[THE WORLD WIDE YOUNG ADULT CONGREGATION](#)

-- A fledgling attempt to create an on-line community of UU young adults (ages 18 to 35). The page offers sermons, discussion groups and a network of people. If you really like the place, you're encouraged to contribute your "membership profile" -- a confidential file describing who you are, which other members can read. This site is created by James Park, an existentialist philosopher in Minneapolis, Minnesota.

[EVOLUTIONARY HUMANISM](#) -- A great place to learn about the work of Canadian writer Pat Duffy Hutcheon. It includes a précis of her book, *Leaving the*

Cave: Evolutionary Naturalism in Social Scientific Thought, plus numerous humanist articles, reviews and papers. Hutcheon is a sociologist and educator, now retired in Vancouver, and a long-time member of Vancouver Unitarian Church.
-- We'll publish notices of new or innovative web sites that are of potential interest to Canadian UUs. Just send the URL and a description of the page to the Unitarian editors at: nic@writedesign.com.

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uua trustee's report

HERMAN BOERMA

UUA CHANGES INTERNATIONAL FUNDING POLICY

IT'S Nov. 7, 1998. In three weeks, my spouse and I will move to the west coast. Our two youngest daughters will stay in Saskatoon, where they attend university. Usually, the kids leave home. In our case, the parents do -- with trepidation, to be sure.

The UUA Board recently considered an Administration proposal to reduce and reallocate funding for the UUA's international work. The source of this funding, a designated trust, is providing less income than anticipated. Also, the Administration wanted to increase funding of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, the Partner Church Council, and the World Conference on Religion and Peace -- while reducing funding of the IARF.

The Board considered three questions: Why are we doing this? What is our vision for the UUA's international work? Would the proposed change move the UUA towards implementing this vision?

Following a lengthy discussion, the Board voted to accept the Administration's proposal to reduce funding of the IARF over a two-year period and to hold the decision on the precise distribution to the other organizations over to January.

While I know that people involved in IARF are not happy with this decision, it will still receive more than half the available funds. I believe the reassignment of priorities is reasonable. What do you think?

Note my new address: RR 1, Site 1A, Compartment 8, Gabriola, BC, V0R 1X0. Phone/fax: 250-247-9543. E-mail: hboerma@uua.org.

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CUC leaders speak out in favour of Nisga'a Treaty

CUC REPRESENTATIVES spoke out strongly in favour of the B.C. government's proposed treaty with the Nisga'a First Nation, and against censorship in the treaty debate by a chain of weekly B.C. newspapers last fall.

CUC President John Hopewell wrote to B.C. Premier Glen Clark urging his government to resist calls for a referendum on the treaty. "We strongly support the just settlement of outstanding land rights questions, through the treaty process or in direct negotiations with First Nations peoples," said Hopewell.

"We take the view that it is not for non-aboriginal people to say that any particular negotiated agreement is not fair or just for a particular First Nation," he said. "There must be an end to that kind of colonialism. A debate and ratification in parliament is more appropriate than a referendum on the treaty," concluded Hopewell.

CUC Vice-president Kim Turner wrote to David Black of the Island Publishers newspaper chain. She asked him to "retract" the chain's editorial ban on opinions in favour of the Nisga'a Treaty.

"We are concerned that much of the opposition to the Treaty may come from unacknowledged racism," she argued. "We know you have said that you did not intend any racist attack... Still, racist overtones need not be intended in order to be felt," Turner said.

Referring to arguments against the Nisga'a Treaty, Turner wrote that, "The fundamental law of Canada does not insist on a rigid equal treatment of all; on the contrary, Canadian precedent is to take legitimate differences into account."

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social action

TIME RUNNING OUT FOR 'WEB OF LIFE' CONTRIBUTIONS

The "Web of Life" project is well underway, guided by a group of environmental activists from the Unitarian Church of Victoria. Its aim is to prepare a policy resolution and action plan on environmentalism for the May 1999 annual general meeting of the CUC.

The Web of Life coordinators are encouraging congregations or sub-groups to react to a series of documents they have prepared. It is distributing a set of environmental principles, an environmental policy for the CUC and an action plan, and is seeking responses from all interested congregations and individuals. Time is of the essence, however. The group needs to receive comments on the principles, policy and plan before the end of this month. For more information contact: Philip Symons, 250-592-6484, philmar@islandnet.com.

RECOGNIZING SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

The CUC is giving recognition to members who have been involved in successful social responsibility projects over the past year. To nominate an individual, congregations should describe the person and their project in 500 words or less (plus a photo, if possible) and send it to: Margaret Brown, 357 Montgomery Street, Fredericton, NB, E3B 2X2, or e-mail to brownma@nbnet.nb.ca.

GLOBALIZATION STUDY UNDERWAY

The two-year study on globalization mandated by the last CUC annual meeting is well underway. The Victoria Social Responsibility Committee is coordinating the effort. They've produced a thick, green pocket folder full of interesting articles and commentaries about the subject, a copy of which was sent to every congregation. For more information contact Joop Schuyff at 250-388-4748, ur966@victoria.tc.ca.

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What's the IARF conference all about?

AFTER OUR OWN International Council of Unitarians and Universalists, our closest international connection is the International Association for Religious Freedom (IARF). It's a network of faith groups working together toward common understanding and for common concerns. The IARF's triennial congress is in Vancouver, July 29 to Aug. 3, 1999, and the CUC is hosting the event.

Started about a century ago by Unitarians and others, IARF was primarily an organization of North American and European liberal religious groups for most of its history. In the past 30 years, however, the membership has become increasingly diverse. There are substantial numbers of member groups from Asia, particularly from southeast Asia and Japan. IARF's current president is Rev. Yukitaka Yamamoto, the Master of the Tsubaki Grand Shrine, a Shinto religious body.

Three years ago, the IARF held its triennial congress in Iksan City, Korea. The event attracted people from around the world, and for the first time delegates from North America and Europe were in the minority.

Although the week-long congress features numerous workshops and discussions (this year's theme is "Creating an Earth Community"), the highlight for me is the worship experience. Each afternoon a different group leads the assembly in a worship service in their own style.

Some interfaith activists have as their goal "one big religion," a unity that will erase all our differences. But that seems to me to be most unlikely. When I observe or participate in a Shinto ritual celebrating nature, I know that I will never be able to enter into it with the spirit that true commitment would demand. But as I learn more about what the ceremony means to the Japanese for whom it is their central religious practice, I can gain understanding and respect. Sharing that experience helps me understand and articulate more clearly what it is in my religious tradition that matters most to me.

For information on registering for this year's IARF congress, contact the CUC, or see the registration

web site at: www.conferences.ubc.ca/conferences/events/iarf/registration.htm.

-- by Ellen Campbell, CUC Executive Director; Ellen was nominated as the new IARF Vice-president last fall (a position that will be elected at this year's congress)

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executive director

ELLEN CAMPBELL

REVENUE CANADA IS DECIDING QUESTIONS OF RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

WHEN MOST of us think about religious freedom today, we're inclined to look abroad. But Canada? Surely there are no religious freedom issues here? Well, you might ask some of the Unitarian "emerging groups" that have applied for charitable status with Revenue Canada about that.

For centuries, "advancement of religion" was seen as a charitable activity, under British and then Canadian law. Most faith communities see religion in broad terms: as religious practice, of course, but also as a set of beliefs, values or principles that guide one's day-to-day behaviour. Religious commitment has inspired people to work for social change, to speak out against injustice, to establish significant social services and institutions.

Revenue Canada has a different idea. Their definition of advancement of religion is, "promoting the spiritual teachings of a religious body, and maintaining the doctrines and spiritual observances on which those teachings are based."

There has to be an element of theistic worship, which means the worship of a deity or deities in the spiritual sense. To foster a belief in proper morals or ethics alone is not enough to qualify as a charity under this category. A religious body is considered charitable when its activities serve religious purposes for the public good.

Revenue Canada requires religious groups to submit their purposes for approval. They have questioned purposes that include references to social action or other activities that go beyond religious observance and education.

Ours are not the only religious groups to experience challenges. And now there are indications that Revenue Canada's objective is to remove "advancement of religion" as a charitable purpose, on the grounds that it is a matter of private belief, and not, therefore, of benefit to the broader community.

There are arguments for *not* giving "tax breaks" to religious institutions. But if the ground rules are to be changed, I think there should be a community-wide discussion about those changes. It seems

inappropriate for a body that has as its main purpose maximizing government revenues to be making decisions about the appropriate purposes of faith groups.

We are working with other groups that are also concerned about these issues, as well as helping new congregations work through the process of getting registration with as little difficulty as possible. The Board will be establishing a task force to consider these issues and how best to respond.

* * *

APOLOGY -- When I wrote about *Sharing Our Faith* in the last issue, I forgot to include the Unitarian Fellowship of Kelowna in the list of grantees.

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The day the kids led the church service

FOR A COUPLE of years now, the children of the church school at South Fraser have planned and led a service for the whole congregation of 85 people. As the date for last year's service approached I was feeling pretty anxious about it. I had learned that the Middlers (our 10- to 12-year-olds) were unavailable, so the service would be led by five-to-nine-year olds!

As a new Director of Religious Education I was unsure about how to direct the kids in their planning, but with two weeks to prepare, I knew planning was needed! We had been following the *Around the Church, Around the Year* curriculum, and the children had recently brought in a favourite object to share.

That became the spark for our intergenerational service called "Special Objects" -- which was like a giant Show and Tell. The congregation was asked to bring in objects of special significance to them. I wrote an Order of Service that we modified as a group, and the children chose the parts they would lead.

They were very taken with the idea of role reversal -- especially the Story for Adults, "Where's My Teddy?" read by nine-year-old Ben at the front with adults on the carpet.

The children led every part of the service, from greeting, to taking the offering, to being the service leader for joys and concerns. We sang the songs *a capella*. The children displayed exceptional leadership and public speaking skills; I was glad that the Middlers couldn't participate after all because the younger ones wouldn't have had the same chance to shine.

The only anxious moment was when I looked at the clock and discovered that we'd flown through the first half of the service and were left with an extra 10 minutes for small group sharing. The extra time was well used, however, with many congregants saying they enjoyed a chance to talk together about things they didn't normally cover.

It was truly a community-building experience for us all.

-- Lou Skinner will gladly share the children's order of service; contact her at 604-576-8986. This article first appear in CANUUE, the newsletter for Canadian UU Educators.

A NEW UNITARIAN TAKE ON CHRISTMAS

A new intergenerational Christmas service made its debut in several congregations last month. The *Spirit of the Christmas Tree* presents the nativity story from a UU perspective. The service was written and produced by Joyce Poley and Frank Henning, and is available from Songstyle Music for \$50. Contact Song-style at 604-596-3980 / jpoley@istar.ca.

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