



CUC supports Mi'kmaq fishing rights

"IT IS OUR INTENTION to walk with both non-Native and Aboriginal peoples who seek a path to reconciliation," said CUC President Kim Turner in a letter to Prime Minister Jean Chrétien in early October. It was the second time she had written Chrétien in as many months, urging the federal government to stop their harassment of Mi'kmaq lobster fishers in Burnt Church, N.B.

At press time, she had received no response from the Prime Minister, nor from the Ministers of Fisheries and Oceans and Indian and Northern Affairs, to which she also wrote.

In early September, as the dispute escalated into violence, Turner faxed an urgent letter to Chrétien. She asked the government to "negotiate in good faith with the

Burnt Church First Nation, with the goal of implementing [their] Aboriginal and treaty rights to fish."

Turner argued that the government was using fisheries conservation as a "pretext" to disrupt and destroy the Burnt Church fishery. She noted that last year's Supreme Court decision regarding Mi'kmaq fishing rights specifically said the federal government could not regulate the Aboriginal fishery without "appropriate consultation" with the Mi'kmaqs.

She also pointed out that according to the Supreme Court, Mi'kmaq fishing rights, "take precedence over federal non-Aboriginal commercial or sports fishing licenses," and must be considered first, once conservation matters have been addressed.

Finally, she argued, the federal government's strategy of harassing the Aboriginal fishers, "is creating a climate of resentment and violence." She urged the PM to support a peaceful, negotiated settlement of the problem.

A month later, she faxed Chrétien with four specific steps his government could take to end the New Brunswick fisheries dispute:

- resume talks with the Esgenoopetitj First Nation (EFN, Burnt Church) and the Maritime Fishermen's Union, which represents non-Native fishers
- order the Department of Fisheries and



Community and spiritual leaders rally by Miramichi Bay at Burnt Church, N.B. in late September. CP PHOTO / ANDREW VAUGHN

Oceans to stop seizing Native lobster traps

- ask the RCMP and DFO to prevent non-Native fishers from taking action against the Mi'kmaqs on their own
- offer safety and protection to the Mi'kmaqs

The CUC's response on this issue was drafted by its Justice for First Nations monitor, Harold Koehler of London, Ontario, who helped the CUC respond quickly to the crisis (hkoehler@execulink.com). ♦

WHO WAS ACTING ILLEGALLY IN FISHERY DISPUTE?

HERE ARE THE REAL numbers behind the Department of Fisheries and Oceans crackdown on Mi'kmaq bands fishing lobster without federal approval in Atlantic Canada this past summer.

There are about 11,000 licensed lobster fishermen on Canada's Atlantic coast. They put approximately three million legal traps in the water each year. (The actual number of traps is higher, since fishermen in some, but not all, areas habitually set dozens more than their legal allotment.)

continued next page ▶



WE'RE DEFINING OUR RELIGION FOR WHAT IT TRULY IS

I SHARE WITH MANY UUs a common insecurity – how to respond when someone asks “What is Unitarian Universalism anyway?” I have a rehearsed response, and carry a “purposes and principles” card with me. I am learning, finally, to define our religion *for what it is*, and not just for what it is not.

Similarly, as a Canadian, I have long struggled with defining my nationalism in a positive way, and not simply by what we are not (i.e. not American). With the recent discussions around greater CUC autonomy, these two issues have now combined themselves into the perplexing question, “What is a Canadian Unitarian Universalist anyway?”

Through our congregational discussions on Canadian service delivery over the past two years, Canadian UUs have continued to ponder and formulate answers to these questions. Even as the discussion continues, it is now time to put those answers into action.

In late September, CUC and UUA “bargaining team” representatives discussed how to implement the wishes of Canadian UUs with respect to service delivery. This month, the CUC Board is meeting to re-examine the CUC’s vision, mission and begin work on our next long range plan.

In both cases our challenge will be to positively articulate who we are and who we want to be as a Canadian religious movement. The participation of our congregations on these issues has been vital to our discussions to date. As our conversations move ahead we look forward to your continued feedback, input and guidance. ♦

MI'KMAQS HAVE RIGHT TO REGULATE THEIR OWN FISHERY

▶ continued from previous page

The Mi'kmaq band in Indian Brook, Nova Scotia proposed to set 800 traps in St. Mary's Bay, although it issued only 335 tags. Lack of equipment and continual seizures by the Department of Fisheries and Oceans kept the actual number of Mi'kmaq lobster traps in the bay to about 35.

In Burnt Church, N.B. the band authorized four traps per man, woman, and child, a formula that could yield 6,000 traps. But the band issued fewer than 2,000 tags, and media reports said only about 50 traps had initially been placed in the water.

NATIVE FISHERY IS TINY

That's 85 Mi'kmaq traps in two provinces, verses three million-plus for white fishermen. Call it 7,000 Mi'kmaq traps if you like. It's still barely 0.2 per cent of the non-Native fishing effort.

The federal Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) responded to this threat with massive displays of force, sending riot-equipped fisheries officers to seize Mi'kmaq boats and equipment in St. Mary's Bay and arrest their crews.

In New Brunswick, DFO official Andre-Marc Lanteigne boasted of having 700 armed fisheries officers ready to subdue any attempt by the Burnt Church reserve to exercise fishing rights that the Supreme Court confirmed in its Marshall decisions last fall.

WERE NATIVES FISHING ILLEGALLY?

The DFO argued that it had reached lobster fishing agreements with 29 of Atlantic Canada's 34 aboriginal bands, and portrayed the Indian Brook and Burnt Church lobster fishing as illegal.

The truth is murkier.

The two Supreme Court of Canada decisions last year (known as the “Marshall” decisions because they arose from a fisheries case involving Donald Marshall Jr.) confirmed the Mi'kmaqs' treaty right to a limited commercial fishery, with one loophole – the right is subject to federal regulation for policy objectives like conservation.

However, this regulatory loophole does not give Ottawa unfettered power to dictate when, where, and how Mi'kmaqs can fish.

The federal power to regulate is subject to a complex, four-part test set forth in the Marshall decision. Here's how it works.

The federal right can only be exercised in pursuit of an overriding policy objective like conservation. It must be the least intrusive way of meeting that objective. It must follow good-faith consultations that are both procedurally fair to Mi'kmaqs, and that substantively respect their legitimate treaty right to a limited commercial fishery.

The temporary lobster fishing agreements DFO secured with most Mi'kmaq bands this year side-stepped this process. In effect, Ottawa offered the cash-starved bands a bribe: Agree to fish by existing white rules and we'll give you millions of dollars in cash, gear, licenses, and boats. We'll defer the negotiations contemplated in the Marshall decisions to some future time.

Most bands agreed. This enabled the DFO to cajole most Mi'kmaqs into fishing on the same basis as non-Native fishermen, many of whom hate the idea of Mi'kmaqs being subject to different rules than they are. But the DFO process did not follow from the reasoning of the Marshall decision; it merely allowed DFO to defer implementation of a true Marshall-based process.

TWO BANDS STOOD ON PRINCIPLE

The Burnt Church and Indian Brook bands did not agree. They saw the DFO plan as a return of colonialism, with the implicit assumption that only white authorities were capable of deciding how to conserve lobster.

This was not wanton defiance. It was a stand on principle, a stand much admired within bands that took the easier path of compromise and accommodation.

Earlier this summer, Indian Brook Chief Reg Maloney proposed mediation of the dispute. Regional DFO director Neil Bellefontaine flatly rejected the offer, saying there was nothing to mediate. A Mi'kmaq offer to submit the dispute to the federal courts was likewise rejected.

In other words: our way, or forceful suppression.

If there was anything illegal going on in St. Mary's Bay or Miramachi Bay this past summer, it wasn't Mi'kmaqs who were defying the law of the land. It was the Department of Fisheries and Oceans. ♦

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A holistic, Unitarian approach to sex education

THERE'S A UNIQUE effort underway in southwestern Ontario to offer a joint, co-ed Unitarian Universalist sex education course to teenagers from three congregations. The course is called Our Whole Lives (OWL for short) and the teens are from the Unitarian fellowships in London, Guelph and Elora-Fergus.

The OWL curriculum, which was seven years in the making by the Unitarian Universalist Association, is still very new to Canadian congregations. "We needed a

lifespan program," says Cynthia Breen of the UUA's Religious Education department, "sexuality education that was for more than

just junior-high aged kids." The present curriculum has five levels, from kindergarten to adulthood, addressing sexuality at each stage of life and connecting it to UU values.

Breen says that, "Because we have a community of like-minded souls, with shared values of respect and dignity, our churches have a huge advantage over the schools in offering sexuality education."

At the Grades 7-9 level - which is now being offered in southwestern Ontario and several other congregations across Canada - the OWL program begins with anatomy and physiology, but quickly moves on to gender, sexual orientation and relationships. Once the kids are comfortable with each other and their leaders they go on to learn about masturbation, lovemaking, responsible sexual behaviour, abortion, sexually transmitted diseases and sexual abuse.

"We want to show kids the bigger context of sexuality," says Linda Reith of Guelph, one of the leaders of the southwestern Ontario group. She says she is very

confident in the new curriculum, and not just because of what's in it but also for its teaching style. "It teaches that sexuality is a part of the larger human experience," she says, "and it does this through games and lively activities the kids can relate to."

The UUA requires that OWL leaders have special training before they lead the course. The Ontario leaders spent 18 hours over a weekend learning about the curriculum and how to present it. "We believe that parents have to have confidence in it," says Breen of the UUA, "and we also want to protect the integrity of the program."

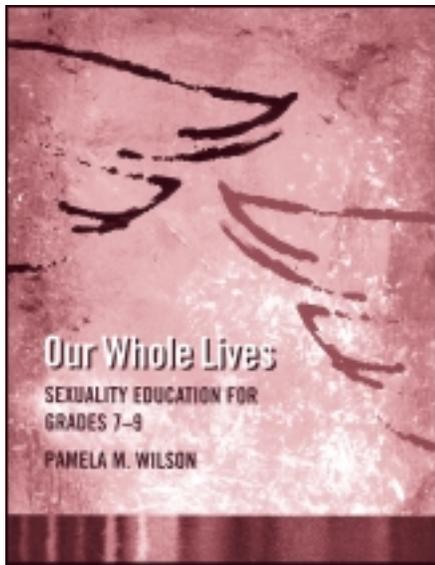
The Grades 7-9

program is nothing if not comprehensive. It spans 27 sessions and the curriculum runs over 300 pages. It also includes an optional set of educational slides, covering anatomy, masturbation and lovemaking, which are used in three different sessions. The slides are artistically-rendered pencil drawings that show a wide diversity of body types and sexual expressions, including homosexuality.

Before their children take the Grades 7-9 OWL program, parents must also attend an orientation session, which includes viewing the slides and giving written consent for their children's participation.

OWL is not an "abstinence only" curriculum, says Breen, however, it does present abstinence from sexual intercourse as an appropriate choice for young adolescents. "The program ultimately teaches young people to be responsible for themselves," she says, "educating them so they can make their own decisions." ♦

- For more information about the OWL program, at all ages, visit the UUA web site and follow the links to OWL: www.uua.org



cuc updates

CUC-UUA NEGOTIATIONS

Two days of intense negotiations in Regina earlier this month resulted in significant progress regarding the future of CUC-UUA relations. While no formal agreements were reached, members from both sides felt a shared sense of purpose. There is strong optimism that a framework agreement will be ready for approval by the CUC and the UUA next spring. To that end, further meetings are scheduled for the first week of January in Toronto. In the meantime consultations with the CUC and UUA Boards are expected and negotiators anticipate continuing the dialogue electronically.

The CUC negotiating team includes President Kim Turner, Board members Mark Morrison-Reed and Brian Kiely as well as past-President John Hopewell. Executive Director Mary Bennett is an observer. The UUA team includes Moderator Denny Davidoff, Director of Congregational, District and Extension Services Bill Sinkford, and Trustees Kathryn McIntyre, Gini Courter and Judi McGavin.

MARGARET ROBSON REMEMBERED

Thanks to Rev. Jane Bramadat, and to John and Robert Robson for donations to the CUC endowment fund in memory of their mother, **Margaret Robson**. She was a long-time member of the Winnipeg church, founding the Thursday Lunch Group and the Theatre Discussion Group.

MINISTERIAL CHANGES

Rev. Norm Stewart is the Interim Minister at North Shore Unitarian Church this year. **Frances Deverell** of Coquitlam was is the Interim Minister at Don Heights Unitarian this year. **Rev. Andy Backus** of Schenectady, New York will be the Interim Minister at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. And the two Unitarian congregations in Edmonton are co-sponsoring **Frances Dearman** as their Intern Minister this year.

NEW CUC BOARD MEMBER

Keith Jobson is the new member of the CUC Board of Trustees for B.C. He's a retired law professor and former school-teacher who has belonged to Unitarian congregations in Calgary, Halifax, Ottawa and now Victoria. He is active with the church's social responsibility and financial planning committees.

unitarian people

GIL GILLESPIE WAS A COMMUNICATOR

A dynamic member of First Unitarian in Toronto passed away suddenly outside their building in June. **Gil Gillespie** was active as president of the church for six years, and its publicity chair. He produced *Unitarian TV* for Horizons Interfaith Council and he hosted programs on Vision TV. He was also a gifted and devoted RE teacher.

HUMANIST OF THE YEAR

Pat Duffy Hutcheon of Vancouver received the Canadian Humanist of the Year award last June, given annually by the Humanist Association of Canada. Previous winners include Dr. Henry Morgentaler, Sue Rodriguez, John Ralston Saul and Dr. Robert Buckman. Hutcheon is the author of 75 articles and essays and three books. Her next book, *The Road to Reason: Landmarks in The Evolution of Humanist Thought*, will be published this fall.

JANET'S FAMILY OF FAITH

Janet Evans, office manager at Victoria First, died of cancer this past summer at the age of 65. Janet Evans wrote this commentary in the church newsletter last year: "Church is not just Sunday mornings. Church is our family of faith, our friends. Church is how we are with each other. Church is how we are in the wider community. Church is what gives our life meaning, a core, a base from which to operate. Church allows us to have a counterpoint to the material aspect of life. Some of us call it the spiritual. Church is our opportunity to minister (meaning 'to serve') to each other."

UNITARIAN RADIO

Chaplain **Terry Choyce** of Halifax is hosting a new radio show called *Inter Connections*, featuring music and readings with a spiritual content. Catch the show on Sunday afternoons, from 2:00–3:30 p.m. on 97.5 FM.

Why do I have to go to Sunday school?

Every year, Rev. Allison Barrett of Hamilton invites people to ask their burning questions, to which she responds in a sermon. This year, 10-year-old Ian Rath asked her a question that she answered during the children's time. His question was, "Why do I have to go to church school?"

YOU ASKED a really good question, Ian, one that many people have asked before. As a matter of fact, even though I grew up to be a minister, I asked this question a lot when I was a kid, and you know the answer I got? Can anybody guess?

"Because I say so."

Has anybody ever gotten, or given, that answer? It's a pretty common answer too, isn't it? But you know, I never thought it was a very good answer. Maybe if I had kids of my own I would change my mind!

But Ian, I'm not going to answer that way today, because you don't have to go to Sunday school because the minister says so – you don't even have to go to *church* because the minister says so.

Here's one reason I think you should go to church school: because there are no report cards or homework. There is no competing with the other students in your class. It's a different kind of school where we learn together by asking questions and helping each other. Even if you don't do well in regular school, you can do fine in church school. We think everyone should have at least one place where they can learn without having to worry about how well they're doing.

Here's another reason: we believe that it's not just your mind that needs developing as you grow up. There's another part of you that's just as important – you can call it your conscience, your heart or even your soul. It's the part inside you where you think and feel very deeply about things like, "How should I treat others?" "What's right and what's wrong?" "What's a good person?" "Why am I here?" and even "Why do we have to die?"

I call these the big questions, and thinking about them is a big part of being a human being. In church school we try to get you to start thinking about the big questions, because we want that other, special human part of you to learn and grow too. The world needs kind and thoughtful people as much as it needs people who know a lot.

You should also come to church school because as you become a teenager, we want to teach you that sexuality and spirituality should go together. Not everyone likes to talk about this, because it is kind of personal, and that's okay. But we do talk about it, because as you grow older we think it's important that what you do with your body is connected to your heart and feelings, and to the heart and feelings of others too. We want you to grow into a man who is respectful and caring with the people you love.

Finally, Ian, we think you should go to church school to learn that there is always more than one way of looking at things. We don't teach you just about our religion in

church school. We teach you about all the religions, and lots of other ideas too. We hope that you'll see that there are many different beliefs and ways of being in the world.

We hope that when you grow up you will be curious about others

and open to hearing what they have to say. There are so many people who are closed to anyone else's point of view, and sometimes this leads to fighting and even war. We think this world needs people who can listen to and respect others, and not just believe that their way is the only right way. We hope that being in church school will help make you that kind of person.

Finally, my last reason for going to church school is – it's fun! If it's not fun yet, hang in there Ian. It's definitely fun being in the Youth Group. Thanks for asking your question, and we can talk some more any time. ♦

In Sunday school we try to get you to start thinking about the big questions



Performing Spirit of the Christmas Tree last year at the First Unitarian Church of Victoria. PHOTO BY KEITH MILLER

Finding a Unitarian take on Christmas

JOYCE POLEY of Surrey, B.C. felt that Christmas was “a problem” for many Unitarians. For secular humanists, the central image of Lord and saviour is alienating. Yet for those who come from a Christian background, the story contains images and values that resonate strongly.

“To me, Christmas is a joyous time,” she says, “and I wanted to make it accessible for all Unitarians. I believe people can enjoy the metaphor, without getting into who Jesus was.” So she set out to solve the problem, in the form of an intergenerational Christmas worship service for UUs.

That was three years ago. With support from the UU Funding Program she composed new music and wrote a service that included the traditional Christmas story, but with a new spin: the focus was on the promise of new life and opportunity, or as she says in the conclusion of the service’s pageant, “a story for that place in our hearts where divinity and humanity interact.”

Her service, titled *Spirit of the Christmas Tree*, was tested, then produced and published in 1998, and has been performed in hundreds of Unitarian churches across North America over the past two years, including about a dozen in Canada. The accolades have been pouring into Joyce Poley’s email box ever since.

“What an absolutely wonderful program,” wrote Pat Kahn of Atlanta, Georgia. “We had involvement of all ages, and so many people said it was the best program we’ve ever done.”

“It all hangs together so well,” said Sally Braswell Murphy of Victoria, B.C. “The music is great, the congregation loved participating, your introductory words are excellent.” (Victoria First will use the service this year for the second time.)

No doubt, *Spirit* is enjoying success because it handles a tricky subject so well, but it has two other things going for it: a wonderfully organized package, and great music. The *Spirit* binder contains everything a congregation needs to conduct the service, including job descriptions for the organizers, an order of service, sheet music, a children’s story, and a CD with listening samples of Poley’s original songs and accompaniment tracks for everything in the service.

Music is central to *Spirit of the Christmas Tree*, before, during and after the Christmas pageant that forms the heart of the one-hour service. The theme song is an upbeat tune with a calypso rhythm. Here’s the chorus:

I’ve got a light and it shines in me,
It shines in the eyes of a little baby.
It lives in you and it lives in me,
It lives in the spirit of the Christmas tree.

During the nativity pageant, the congregation sings reflective responses, as well as four traditional Christmas carols and three other original songs by Poley. For example, after the shepherds visit Bethlehem, the congregation replies in song with, “Just like lowly shepherds, keeping watch throughout the night; in the still and quiet of the darkest hour, is born the seed of light,” followed by *The First Noel*.

Poley explains the juxtaposition of traditional carols with her music: “We can take from the old and add the new, because it’s a timeless spiritual story.” In fact, she likens the Christmas story to a work of art, one that is open to interpretation by anyone. “The nativity story is a myth,” she argues, “and each of us can figure out what it means for our own life.”

Spirit of the Christmas Tree has been so successful that Poley is now working on a follow-up Christmas service, tentatively titled, *Would You Like to Hold the Baby?* She’s not sure of the direction yet, “but it will have to deal with Mary and Jesus.” Beacon Unitarian in Coquitlam, B.C. will test the new service this December, and Poley will publish it next year. In the chorus of the title song, a lullaby, Mary sings to a stable girl: “This gift that I’ve been given, is yours as much as mine; would you like to hold the baby, take your time, take your time.” ♦

Joyce Poley is a musician, singer and composer (she wrote One More Step in the Unitarian hymnal). Spirit of the Christmas Tree is available for \$75 (which includes the right to photocopy all parts and sheet music). Poley’s own Christmas CD, titled The Gift of Christmas, is available separately for \$20, with 10 of her own tracks, mostly original songs, including the four from Spirit of the Christmas Tree. Contact Songstyle Music, P.O. Box 84507, Delta, B.C., V4C 8G1, 604-596-3980, jpoley@istar.ca.



I AM RETURNING TO SASKATOON, FAREWELL TO ALL

TWO YEARS AGO I wrote in this column that, "In three weeks, my spouse and I will move to the west coast. Our two youngest daughters will stay in Saskatoon, where they will attend university. Usually, the kids leave home. In our case, the parents do – with trepidation, to be sure." As things turned out, that trepidation was prescient.

I had dreamed of moving to B.C. for decades to pursue outdoor interests. I dragged Gloria along against her better judgement. Dreams of a happy retirement became a nightmare. Neither of us adapted well to our new environment, far from most of our children.

When I remained in denial that we had made the wrong move, Gloria returned to Saskatoon by herself. I continued to resist until it appeared that my 27 year-marriage was in jeopardy. Shocked into reality, I too am moving back to Saskatoon, the place that became more home for this immigrant than I was aware of.

I don't know what kind of relationship Gloria and I will have. Whatever happens, I shall be happy to be back home. Positive changes have come out of this seeming disaster. Gloria has found strength and power in her independence, our family has drawn closer together, our kids are supportive, and I now know my family is what matters most.

To put all my efforts into my personal life, I have resigned as your UUA Trustee. It has been a great honour and privilege to have served in that capacity for five years. Thanks to everyone I've worked with over the years. *Farewell!* ♦

Do social activists need spiritual nourishment?

WHAT'S THE *connection between spirituality and social justice?* Rev. Anne Orfald of Peterborough, Ontario recently posed this question on the internet mailing list of the Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice. Her intervention sparked dozens of return messages, in which Unitarians from across the country tried to answer her queries. Here is an edited selection.



FEED THE SPIRIT, WITH SUSHI
"Do I find time to feed my spirit?"

Anne asks. I'm not very good at this, but I am interested in exploring the question, whether the concept of spirit or just good mental health is the focus. We had a spirituality workshop about three years ago at our church in Victoria. One of our activities was to make sushi and see how easy, beautiful and artistic it could be, and how delicious it was; it was intended to demonstrate the beauty in art, food and nature."

– Bob Van Alstyn

ACTIVISTS NEED SPIRITUAL WHOLENESS

"As a committed social activist coming to Unitarianism in my later years, I would like a workshop on spirituality and social justice that says it's okay to need spirituality and that all of us – atheists, humanists, whatever – need something that restores the soul. They can and must go hand in hand, a combination that I and many activists did not understand. Spiritual wholeness is a necessity for all of us and especially for helping activists make sense of this irrational world and to communicate with others."

– Aphrodite Harris

WHICH SPIRITUALITY ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

"If we are talking about a greater appreciation of beauty, such as bestowed on us by nature, or a greater appreciation of fine music, literature or art, I believe few Unitarians would object. Unfortunately, many Unitarians use the word spirituality as a code word for a desire to have our meet-

ings resemble more the Sunday morning services of the established churches. In my view, most humanists and social activists did not become Unitarians to pray."

– Morry Smith

SOCIAL ACTION IS SPIRITUAL

"When people raise distinctions between social action and spirituality I think the question becomes, why do social action within the Unitarian church? For me, it's because social action is a form of spirituality. We keep separating the two, but if spirituality is about your soul's transcendence, then I can say that sometimes when I do social activist work my soul transcends."

– Nichola Martin

ACTIVISM IS JUST ONE ROAD TO SPIRITUALITY

"To me, spirituality is that overriding transcendence and joy we get from good music, nature, helping others, social activism, or living to the highest principles."

– Kathlene Willing

TALKING IS NOT DOING

"I think that social justice and spirituality are linked. I honestly feel that someone who is truly spiritual will act to support social justice. To me, an act of justice is an act of spirituality. I believe I am probably less a humanist and more a humanitarian. I find humanism too stark and scary. Talking about social justice is *not* doing social justice, and Unitarians like to talk."

– Hank Einarson

across the country

NOW THAT'S OLD!

In November, the Olinda, Ontario congregation will celebrate their 120th anniversary. They plan to have a dedication service for the new spire that will be erected by then. It has been made to specifications from old photos they have of their church.

ECUMENICAL DANCING

Windsor Unitarians recently held an ecumenical dance, led by Randy and Sandra Locke, two UUs from Illinois. Members of Windsor's United Church, Metropolitan Church and local Unitarians attended. June Gilbertson of Windsor reports, "It was a really great evening, with inclusive dances for people of all ages. They started with gentle dances and by the end had a vigorous limbo dance underway. Randy and Sandra built on the fact that many in the room knew nothing about each other. At the end, everyone wanted more evenings of communal dance and fun."

UNITARIANS AGAINST LITTER

The Peterborough fellowship has adopted a three-kilometre long section of the Warsaw Road, outside the eastern Ontario city. A couple of times a year, the church organizes a team of volunteers to scour both sides of the highway, a task that takes about two hours. They also have their name displayed on a large sign beside the road.



Young people want more than a lecture series

ONE OF THE greatest achievements of Unitarian Universalism in North

exploring our faith

MARK HAMILTON

America, I think, is its youth program. The youth community is an amazing, loving, supportive environment, and I was fortunate enough to grow up in it. It was an incredible and wonderful contribution to my development, and I have heard similar sentiments from many others.

Sadly, though, we don't do nearly so well in ministering to our youth once they have grown up and left the youth program. We give our youth so much, and they take it in and thrive and grow and emerge wanting to take the next step. But there is no next step.

It is well-established that there is a lack of people in their twenties and early thirties in our congregations. Our young people tend to leave when they graduate from high school. The prevailing myth is that this is somehow okay, that people need to leave, but they will come back at some later time when they have children. While some do come back, most of them don't, and this myth also ignores the very real religious needs of our young adults.

For most of us, UUism and the experiences we have had in it are incredibly important, and we want to continue in our tradition as we begin the next, exciting but also frightening, stage of our lives.

So if that is true, why do so many of us leave? I think that for many of us, what we find once we emerge into the adult congregation just doesn't speak to us. This is not the UUism we know. Where is the inspiration, where's the passion? We grow up in the tradition, drink it all in, and burst into adulthood saying, "Okay, that was fantastic! What's

next?" only to be told, "Well, nothing. There is no next. Come to our Sunday

morning lecture series."

What are we looking for? I can't speak for anyone other than myself. But I want a church that is more than just a lecture series. I want music, passion, fire. One reading from our hymnal says, "To worship is to stand in awe under a heaven of stars ... it is the window of the moment open to the sky of the eternal." Well, I want to stand in awe! I want to be moved, touched, inspired by worship. I want a sense of the Mystery. To borrow from the old joke, I want Heaven, not just a discussion about Heaven.

I am not claiming that everyone who grew up in the tradition feels this way. But I have heard similar things said by enough of us that I believe it is widespread. And it isn't only our young people. I have known several people who were devoted UUs, who joined when they were adults, but who left the denomination after discovering the spiritual depth and richness of other traditions.

I think it is this depth that many of our young people are looking for, and not finding. And I believe that UUism needs to discover that richness in order for us to be a vibrant, exciting faith that will grow and thrive into the future. ♦

- Mark Hamilton is a lifelong Unitarian, now living in Toronto (umbra@math.utoronto.ca)



Mark Hamilton casts his vote at last year's CUC meeting



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MARY BENNETT



THIS JOB IS A PERFECT FIT FOR ME – I'M GLAD TO BE HERE

"IT'S BEEN A DREAM JOB, MARY," Ellen Campbell said to me as I took over as CUC Executive Director last July. "I hope you'll have as wonderful an experience as I have had."

I replied: "I feel honoured to be carrying forth your legacy, Ellen. I hope you'll feel I've done well by it."

With this summing up, we said good-bye and "passed the flame." And then we hugged. And cried.

Both before and after that afternoon in early July I have said to people, "This is the perfect job for me." (Perhaps I should say, "This job feels like a perfect fit," since they sometimes look taken aback.)

Ten years ago (or even two) it wouldn't have fit me so well, and I know that while parts of the job are very appealing, it actually wouldn't be a perfect fit for many people – even ones with very similar skills and experience to myself.

My lifestyle – I live alone in an apartment, with no cats and few plants, I have grown kids who I talk to via e-mail – means that the plan to do the job half-time based in Vancouver and half-time in Toronto means I can have the best of both worlds. (I sometimes add, "And half-time in all the other parts of Canada" – but that doesn't add up right!)

The job is also perfect in the sense of using my consulting skills with clients I am committed to supporting (whether that's one client, the CUC, or 50 clients, our congregations, or the 5,200 individual Unitarians in Canada).

I recently read a sermon written in 1984 by our first Executive Director, Kathleen Hunter. She said she knew she could do the

work from the moment she saw the job description and, "more importantly, I knew I'd enjoy it." She then asked a friend, "But what if I can't walk on water?" The reply was, "The problem will be how to swim with the weights attached to your feet."

Kathleen was hired as the sole employee of CUC, but things have changed since then. I'm not out in the water alone! Here in the CUC office Carol and Kevin work almost full-time as Administrator and Administrative Assistant respectively. Rev. Wendy Luella Perkins works half-time as CUC Growth Program Coordinator and we have a myriad of people working on contracts: Art Kilgour and Nichola Martin, co-editors of this newsletter; Rev. Pat Webber and Barb Wallace, co-editors of CANUUE (the newsletter for religious educators) and Charlie Walker, our webweaver.

To extend the water analogy, my job is to make sure we're all paddling in the same direction.

I had to laugh when I read Kathleen Hunter saying proudly, "I have had the mailing lists word-processed and stored on disks." She says, "This is not the stuff of dreams but it is necessary." I would proudly say that we now send the database electronically to each congregation, and many returned the information we need via e-mail.

"The more interesting facet of my work," she continued, "is becoming acquainted with the whole spectrum of UU activity in Canada." I would agree. Late one Sunday night when I'd

returned from yet another weekend away, my Toronto housemate said, "Your job is interesting, but you seem to be away most weekends and then you work most weekdays as well." I pointed out to her that when I'm away for a weekend I may be working throughout, or only for a few hours, and that I do take some time off to compensate when the weekend is only work.

"Perfect" in a Buddhist use of the word means "completeness or wholeness." The parts of the Eightfold Path that lead to release from suffering are often translated as "right" or "perfect" as in Right/Perfect Livelihood.

I am glad to be here. It feels perfect. Let's "do church!" ♦

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