

Looking for spiritual truth, on the streets of Vancouver

There was a point in the middle of her daylong “street retreat” when Karen Fraser-Gitlitz decided to be fully honest with the people she was meeting in Vancouver’s downtown eastside. Up until then, she’d been cagey, committing “lies of omission” when people asked her what she was doing in their neighbourhood. She decided to tell the truth to the next person she met.

“I’m on a spiritual street retreat,” was her answer. The response she got surprised her. She had been afraid to admit the purpose of her solo journey, feeling she was a voyeur – a poverty tourist.

Instead, the reply cracked her up: “When most people go looking for spiritual enlightenment, they sit under a tree, not a lamppost!”

Fraser-Gitlitz was relieved to find that her admission of difference – that she didn’t live in the area and had come instead to witness their lives – was not an embarrassment to the people she was meeting. “They already knew that,” she says. “They live with stereotyping every day.”

It allowed her to be more open and honest for the rest of the retreat, to engage the people she met and make human connections. “The passage was difficult,” she says, “because part of me wanted to keep the separateness.”

Fraser-Gitlitz wasn’t alone. She was one of five members of the Unitarian Church of Vancouver who ventured into the downtown eastside in early August, on an intentional retreat led by ministerial candidate Laura Friedman. (It was the second street retreat Friedman had led for church members, with a third planned for this November.)

The objective of the retreats is to embark on



Rebecca Noon performs “The Witness,” about a spiritual street journey, at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver last October.

a non-judgmental presence, listening and seeing the diversity of the street community and interacting on a human level. After a 45-minute orientation, Friedman doesn’t give her charges many instructions, other than to “notice the boundaries, play with them, explore them.” Then, she gives each participant a mantra, and sets them off on their own, without identification or money. The mantra goes like this:

*What holds me separate?
What keeps me separate?
I walk the streets
What still connects me?*

After their day of exploration, the participants return to the group and reflect on the experience, individually and together.

Friedman first learned about this sort of street ministry when she was at school in San

• see “Faithful Fools” next page

As I Drift

BY GRAHAM THURSTON

The water lapping against my canoe
as I drift

Does so with no rhythm but its own.
Unpredictably constant.
Its metarhythm tapping
some inner part of me.

The gentle chaos of the sound
takes me inside myself
To a peaceful place of reflection
Where I see my life
staring back at me.

I realize then that I am blessed
Simply to be aware of the sound of

The water lapping against my canoe
as I drift.

Graham Thurston is a biologist and a member of the Unitarian Fellowship of Fredericton, where he started a men’s spirituality discussion group. This poem resulted from his journaling about life changes.

Poetry Contributions

cuc members are invited to submit short, spiritual poems. Please include a brief bio and send to cuc poetry editor, Franci Louann, at flouann@telus.net, or by fax to 519-846-8995.

*Lay
Chaplaincy
at 35 years ~
see page 5*



Mary Bennett

CUC Executive Director

You must be the Messiah Mary was telling us about!

Have you heard the story of a small group of monks who feel their order might be dying out? They call on a wise teacher and declare, “We need a Messiah.”

The teacher replies, “The teacher is among you.” Of course, they start to look at each other and their human foibles in a different way. What seemed cranky was now decisive and assertive; what had appeared wishy-washy was compassionate and empowering. And the group became vital and grew in depth, maturity and numbers.

Earlier this fall, I had occasion to send out some virtual introductions. Because I couldn’t do it in person, I sent emails to people – many of them young adults – who were moving to different cities, and to people I knew in their new congregations.

I wanted them to feel welcomed and I also wanted their new congregations to know that there was a “gift” coming for them. After asking permission, I suggested the congregation invite the new people to lead a workshop or a worship service. And lo! This has come to pass.

Furthermore, I received emails of gratitude from both congregations and new members – often commenting on how they had felt nervous the first time they went to the fellowship but then were heartily welcomed, especially after they were noticed as being the person who had been pre-introduced.

So next time you notice someone new – in particular a young adult – why don’t you pretend you’ve received an email from me, telling of the unique gifts and talents of the individual, and encouraging you, not just for their sake but yours too, to help them discover their “personal ministry” in your congregation. Think: “Hmm. Mary probably sent us something about this person but the email got lost in cyberspace.”

Letters to the Editor

HARPUR GETS US

I agree with Tom Harpur when he writes that some seekers for meaning in their lives try to find it in the mainline churches, but are frustrated because they carry on with minor adjustments to their contemporary thinking. I turned to a UU congregation when my traditional church could not respond to my questions. I enjoy the individuality and diversity of each UU congregation and am happy not to be bound by an outdated doctrine or the authority of an established clergy. The search for meaning in our lives goes on and, I think, we are destined to struggle for it, which has its own rewards.

– Lien Patel, Capital UU, Victoria

HARPUR DOESN'T GET US

I trust that reprinting Tom Harpur’s Toronto Star column “Unitarians could fill a spiritual vacuum” was done as a matter of interest rather than of endorsement. Despite Mr. Harpur’s undoubted good intentions, the column gives a strangely skewed

impression of Unitarianism. First, he disdainfully suspects the Unitarian congregation to be a “debating society” of a bunch of “do-gooder, would-be intellectuals.” Then, astonishingly, he proposes that Unitarians lead the spiritually forlorn to “a truly living experience of God.” This betrays Harpur’s gross ignorance of the denomination. If he had ever read our seven principles he might have noted that not a single one expresses or implies belief in any supernatural realm, whether or not populated by gods, demons, angels, saints, souls or cherubim.

– James A. Struthers, Regina

POSITIVE FEEDBACK

The summer issue of The Canadian Unitarian is great. I read every line. There are more than a few items that I have followed up on for my own interest. I know that feedback is a seldom thing and this for me is a first time so I’ll simply be brief: thank you and everyone for an excellent piece of work.

– John Cochrane, Nanaimo

Faithful Fools

• continued from front page

Francisco and came across the “Faithful Fools,” an interfaith ministry that includes UUs. Now she’s bringing the concept to the Vancouver church.

The ministry was launched at a special evening at ucv in late October, with the presentation of a play about street retreats called *The Witness*, followed by a Sunday service led by Friedman.

What’s the point of the retreats, or a street ministry, for Unitarians who live far from the neighbourhoods they’re visiting for a day?

“I’m more aware now of the difference between working *for* people, and working *with* them,” says Fraser-Gitlitz. “Think of our social justice work on drug policy – are we talking to drug users as well as policy makers?” she wonders.

“We have lots of great stuff we do as UUs, but it’s often in our heads, and we need to balance it with our hearts, and with people.”

AT THE END OF HER DAY, Fraser-Gitlitz agreed to go for coffee with a man she’d met on the street. She was about to pay, then realized she had no money.

“I’ll pay,” he offered.

She mumbled an embarrassed reply – “I normally have money...” – then realized the contrast she was drawing between herself and this new friend.

Then she thought, “Why not? Why should I be ashamed of him buying me coffee?” – in other words, *what keeps me separate?* – and accepted the offer, thereby establishing a genuine connection. **U**

For more information about Faithful Fools, contact Laura Friedman: toweringtrees@lycos.com or 604-255-4076.

CUUL: filling the spiritual toolbox at leadership training

ON A SWELTERING WEEK-end in the middle of last summer, 28 Unitarians gathered in Calgary for the second Canadian UU Leadership school (CUUL school for short). They spent three intense days together, learning the ropes of UU history, leadership styles, congregational growth and worship. At the end, they went home ready to take on new challenges in their local congregations.

One participant concluded, "I'm pumped. I feel more connected to my faith community."

Another said, "My spiritual toolbox had maybe a flathead screwdriver, a hammer and a set of basic pliers. Now I've got one of those multi-head screwdrivers, some needlenose pliers, a smaller hammer, a jigsaw, some picture-hanging supplies, a level, and a really good measuring tape!"

Professional staff rev. Jane Bramadat of Victoria and Rachel Collins of Calgary delivered the main content about history, theology and leadership in large-group sessions. However, a major part of the experience was small group work, where the participants planned and then presented short worship services to the entire group. Each of the four worship groups was facilitated by an experienced CUC volunteer.

Bramadat says the school "gives people a taste of intentional religious community and puts future UU leaders in touch with each other." She's a veteran, having attended leadership schools in the Pacific Northwest District in the 1970s, and then in the St. Lawrence District. "I was there the year we named it EAGLES," on which the CUUL school program is modelled.

Diane Heise-Bennett of Waterloo was a small group facilitator for the past two CUUL schools, and is on the national



There was plenty of hard work, laughter, challenges, worship and celebration at CUUL school.

planning team that leads the school. She says that the process is as important as what each worship group produces. "The task and the timeline definitely make it real, but the benefit is a deeper understanding of your own style and those of the others in your group." She says that some groups work together fairly painlessly, while others face greater challenge. "It all depends on the different styles and ideas, and it's not a bad thing when there are clashes."

Overall, says Heise-Bennett, "it's a great, supportive, accepting community of learning, to which everyone comes with an open heart."

Sharon Ingraham of the Unitarian Church of Edmonton attended CUUL school this year, looking for more opportunity to lead services at her church. (Although the Edmonton church has a full-time minister, its summer services

are lay-led.) She describes it as "one of the highlights of my spiritual life so far." She returned home and led a service on mental health advocacy, a subject she feels close to because of her own bipolar disorder. "I felt reassured that my congregation made the correct decision when they sent me to CUUL," she says.

Although most of this year's participants were from the west, there were representatives "from Comox to Newfoundland," according to CUC Director of Regional Services, Sara McEwan, who helped coordinate CUUL this year.

Next year's school will move east again, and will be held at Carleton University in Ottawa from July 20-23, 2006. Watch the CUC web site for details. [U](#)

More info: cuul@cuc.ca

Unitaridées

par Gilles Marchildon

Notre patrimoine « catho » : boulet au pied ou fondation solide ?

La majorité des francophones du Canada ont hérité un « patrimoine religieux » de l'église catholique, bercaïl de notre pratique religieuse d'enfance.

Certains d'entre nous sommes plus ou moins à l'aise avec tout ce que contient cette malle catholique : idées du péché et de la culpabilité, notions étroites du bien et du mal, le ciel et l'enfer, répression de la sexualité, etc.

Or, y aurait-il quand même des aspects positifs à puiser de l'intérieur de cette malle (pour ne pas dire de ce mal) ? Le catholicisme est épousé par des millions de personnes sur la planète. Peut-il servir aux universalistes unitariens ?

La religion de nos ancêtres nous influence sans doute. On ne peut nier le fait que l'histoire canadienne-française a tissé langue, religion et culture dans une tresse serrée. Certes, la Révolution tranquille et l'explosion culturelle de l'époque moderne sont venues délier, voire libérer ces filons.

N'empêche qu'il serait intéressant d'explorer les contributions de notre patrimoine spirituel catholique.

Par exemple, très peu d'autres églises peuvent rivaliser avec le sens du rituel de l'église catholique (pour le meilleur ou pour le pire). De plus, la communauté catholique semble assez élastique, permettant à des gens qui ne partagent pas les opinions des leaders (sur la contraception ou bien l'homosexualité) d'adhérer néanmoins et de se considérer « fidèles ».

Comprendre les legs du catholicisme nous permettrait d'appréhender et de mieux apprécier les fondements universalistes unitariens.

De plus, cela nous donnerait des outils pour convaincre davantage de catholiques découragés que la communauté UU pourrait les accueillir.

Testimony

by Amanda Tarling

Disability helps our family grow a little differently

In the summer of 2002 my family and I moved from Kingston, Ontario to Victoria B.C. We knew no one in Victoria and had no job or place to live. Our first home was a tent in a park just north of Victoria.

We desperately needed to connect with a community, so after being in Victoria for four days we thought we would see what a UU service was like. Now we have settled into a wonderful community at Capital UU Congregation and are active members of the church.

What we didn't expect was the arrival of a disabled child into our lives.

My son, Cal, is two years old. Five months ago he was diagnosed with Patau Syndrome, a very rare genetic disorder. He has cardiac complications, significant problems with his gross motor skills and uses sign language to communicate. There are also many unknown health issues we will face in the future. Suddenly my dream of becoming a UU minister was postponed and life was dramatically altered for us.

Our third principle talks about "acceptance of one another." Cal's disability has taught me acceptance, but it is a questioning acceptance. What strength resides in weakness? How does my son Cal influence his world? Will his dependence on his family illustrate how interdependent we all are? Cal's disability is part of who he is, but it does not define him nor me as his parent. He too is a part of the interdependent web of all existence.


I now have a heightened awareness of difference. I am learning that all human skills and attributes lie along

a spectrum and that every person possesses some quality, ability or lack of ability that deviates from the majority.

Disability is not the same thing as being sick or ill. Disability does not mean incomplete – all kinds of bodies can approach the Goddess. We are all in process and the work is never done. I have heard it said that God is change.

Living with disability is like a constant wind in our family's life – altering the topography of our days and causing our family to grow at an angle. We don't judge the wind as good or bad, just observe the truth of it and acknowledge the force of it in our lives in order to accommodate it.

As the parent of a child with a disability I have come to a new place where I have discovered that I have been opened to a more complex love and as a consequence have been transformed. Now I have new ways of seeing the divine, my children and our own humanity. I have lived and learned the great human paradox – that out of pain, sorrow and disappointment are forged growth, power and strength.

How does disability relate to spirituality? For me, I just need to think of our principles. I live in the moment in a way I never thought possible, and I am present in that moment and full of faith. And just maybe because my family is different – I can make a difference. 



Amanda Tarling can be contacted at: tarling@shaw.ca

Lay Chaplaincy ~ celebrating 35 years



Lay chaplain Pam Harte officiates at a wedding in Victoria.



Nicoline Guerrier marries Heidi Shapiro and Marleigh Greaney in Montreal this year.

Lay chaplains provide right to rites

I LOVE IT WHEN I SEE SOMEONE accidentally writing “rights of passage” instead of “rites of passage.” I believe people do indeed have a *right* to passage, to transition, to transform. And it’s a *right* for us as congregational members to have someone of our own congregation – our minister or a lay chaplain – assist us in planning and carrying out a ceremony to recognize the transition.

This coming year the cuc Lay Chaplaincy Program turns 35! Long before marriage commissioners, our ministers often found their time and energy pulled away from their congregation to perform weddings for individuals whether unchurched or “differently churched.” And in congregations without ministers, Unitarians often did not have access to a Unitarian ceremony, so had to make compromises when planning their ceremony.

That’s why we invented the Unitarian concept of “chaplain” in 1971; four years ago we modified the term to “lay chaplain” to avoid confusion with the professional ministry.

Today, there are nearly 90 lay chaplains across Canada (an average of two for every congregation). The program is foremost one of ensuring the “right to a rite” for anyone – Unitarian or not – who wants a religious ceremony, custom-designed for them to mark a significant passage in their individual or family life. (That’s why our lay chaplains and ministers have led the way for decades on same-sex marriage.)

Secondly, as ambassadors of our religion, lay chaplains are in a unique position to tell others about us.


The third purpose of the program is to provide spiritual development for the lay chaplains themselves. Our hope is that all of the roles that people take on in our congregations will provide spiritual development, of course, but in this case it really is front and centre.

If you’ve never had a conversation with your lay chaplains, ask them about how their experience has encouraged their spiritual growth. You will hear what a rich experience it is.

The cuc encourages congregations to celebrate their own lay chaplains’

rites of passage – from appointment to retirement. It’s particularly important to have smooth transitions and to honour those transitions given the new maximum term of six years.

Some congregations have a mentor program whereby a “lay chaplain in training” has a full year to work with the retiring lay chaplain before taking on the role. This provides the support needed for a new person to confidently begin their term and at the same time provides the retiring lay chaplain the opportunity to pass the flame.

Lastly, as part of the revisions made to the lay chaplaincy program in 2001, the cuc is offering enhanced training and enrichment opportunities, for experienced, new and prospective lay chaplains – three workshops this November, and three more in the spring. Any congregation member is welcome to attend. See details on the web site, below. 

– Mary Bennett, cuc Executive Director

www.cuc.ca/lay_chaplaincy/index.htm
or email to: lcc@cuc.ca

Lay Chaplaincy ~ celebrating 35 years



Lay chaplain Katherine Roback officiated at this memorial service in Vancouver, where the ashes of the deceased were scattered from a fishing boat into the Fraser River near Ladner

Memorial services are a challenge and a reward

When lay chaplain Katherine Roback first met the family of an elderly woman who died last spring, she felt an inexplicable coldness from them towards their mother. She couldn't square this apparent lack of familial love with the woman's public face as an outgoing and well-loved physician.

"I wondered, what caused this? What could have created such a mask?" says Roback, one of four lay chaplains at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. As usual, she had a brief time to get to know the family, and prepare a memorial service with them. "I took it as a challenge," says Roback, and set to work.

The night before the service she learned a secret from one of the sons of the deceased – that she was a holocaust survivor, and had hidden this fact (and her Jewish identity) from her children until they were nearly adults. In the memorial service, Roback alluded to this history by discussing the impact of

surviving a war when others don't. After the eulogy, the woman's friends poured forward to the open microphone, delivering stories of gifts and love they had received.

Roback concludes: "I felt some closure happened in the family. The testimonies from her friends expanded their view of their mother, and something shifted."

Lay chaplains cherish experiences like this, even if memorial services are the most difficult they must perform. (Generally, the weddings outnumber the memorials by about 10 to 1 – not to say that they don't contain challenges also.) Since lay chaplains aren't ministers, they bring their own life experience to the job, complemented by training they receive from the CUC (like the upcoming, November workshop in Vancouver on "The Challenging Memorial Service").

Vivianne LaRivière of Neighbourhood UU in Toronto was drawn to lay

chaplaincy, got trained, but had to take a deep breath when she got her first call – a memorial for a man who'd committed suicide.


Besides meeting the family and planning the service, LaRivière faced a personal hurdle – understanding and accepting a planned suicide by a father who suffered from depression, but was also a massage therapist and yoga practitioner. "I had to stand tall and say, 'I can own this,' and then try to grasp his outrageous darkness.

"If I didn't do another service, the richness of that one would be enough," says LaRivière, and then adds quickly, "although I don't know what's coming up, do I?"

A year ago, lay chaplain Clark Kenyon of the First UU Church of Winnipeg performed a memorial service for church member John Peters, because the congregation's minister was on sabbatical. "He was relatively young, at 46, and died suddenly. I immediately volunteered to help with his service." Kenyon was expecting 80–90 people at the service, but instead 240 showed up. "He had three or four communities of people who knew him, but none of us was connected to the others." In total, 12 people spoke during the "open sharing" at the heart of the service. "It was a wonderful celebration of his life," says Kenyon.

Nicoline Guerrier of the Unitarian Church of Montreal describes the intensity of a memorial service for lay chaplains. "You get a call, and then there are three or four days where you meet the family, then walk around living and breathing this person you've never met. You have to use all your intuitive skills, and find the hidden richness in every life."

LaRivière thinks of the people who don't get memorial services – like the thousands dying in recent natural disasters. Or even closer to her home – the 30,000 of 80,000 people who died in the Greater Toronto area last year and received no service of any kind.

"We're privileged," she says, "We need to be reminded of it, and share it." 

Lay Chaplaincy ~ celebrating 35 years

Meet our amazing lay chaplains

Here are six diverse lay chaplains who are performing weddings, memorials and dedications across the country on behalf of their congregations.

KATHERINE ROBACK

Katherine Roback is in her fourth year of lay chaplaincy at the Unitarian Church of Vancouver. Her turning point came when she had to organize two memorial services for her mother in 1999, at both ends of the country. "It was so enriching and deepening," she says, that she decided to become a lay chaplain. (She's an anthropologist by training.)

She says that the real gift of the role is "in seeing the humility that comes with being close to the mysteries of life and growth." For instance, with regard to marriage, she says, "It's a divine accident when people find each other, I'm convinced of that!"

As a Unitarian, Roback feels she brings her "authenticity" to the job, "not to get boxed into any set template or 'should', but rather being present with the family or couple and finding

what's meaningful to them." In fact, she says she's inquisitive about the diversity of beliefs she finds. "My last wedding was earth-based; it was great to come up with something relevant to the couple."

MEREDITH SIMON

Prior to being asked by the Unitarian Church of Calgary to serve as a lay chaplain two years ago, Meredith Simon was a family practice physician, and she compares that work to what she does now.

"It's similar, with some differences," she says. "It's more immediately intense as a lay chaplain, because you must get to know people really quickly. In medicine, we're taught to maintain some degree of professional detachment, and it's the same as a lay chaplain, but I find this relationship a little less formal. You must become emotionally involved, without allowing yourself to be overwhelmed."

At a recent same-sex union ceremony, Simon helped the couple cope with less-than-enthusiastic support from one

of the families. "My role was to support, and help them not to have to justify their decision to the family."

CLARK KENYON

"There are a thousand volunteer jobs at church," observes Clark Kenyon, "but becoming a lay chaplain was the one that interested me. I knew I'd be capable of helping my congregation," something he's been doing for four years for the First UU Church of Winnipeg.

He believes that rites of passage are a "community building thing." He finds it easy to connect deeply into people's lives at the services he performs and adds, "it's quite an honour." It's also a break from his day job, in the Water and Waste Department of the city.

He finds that, "as an officiant, you can help set up the framework for a service, but it happens all on its own." When people come to him for a wedding, he says, "whether they have a kernel of an idea or a complete plan, I'll work with them, so that the service honours their path."

• see "Our Lay Chaplains" next page



When Aimée Ziegler was dedicated by lay chaplain Katherine Roback, her feet were placed in sand to connect her with the earth element, part of a blessing that also included fire (candle flame), air (an eagle feather wafted) and water (on the forehead).

PHOTOS: DALE ZIELGER





**Brian
Kiely**
CUC President

We are facilitators, not definers, of sacred ritual

It only took a few seconds. I was holding Finnegan's face in my hands while the vet injected the drug. As I looked deep into her eyes, I felt her pulse stop. It was so peaceful.

Finnegan had been my beagle companion for 12 years. She was sweet-natured, full of life and a great food scrounger. We joked that we would miss her most when we clean under the baby's high chair – something we didn't have to do before.

At first we thought she would recover. Then she stopped eating and started burrowing into closets. Animals know how to prepare. We made an appointment. The doctor assured us it was time. Perhaps because she was having a good day, it seemed a good time to say goodbye.

A little later the people who loved her gathered beside the river. Child and adult alike scattered handfuls of her ashes. As a final gesture, a grown-up gave my young daughter Lily a dog biscuit to float on the water. It was healing.

Life and death touches us all, whether it's family pets or family members, or even ourselves. When it comes, ritual helps us find peace.

Maybe the greatest service Unitarians offer our wider communities are the rites of passage offered by our ministers and lay chaplains. They are personalized, fitting and professionally accomplished, thanks to the training our lay chaplains receive.

We seem to understand that the most important thing at a wedding or memorial are the feelings and spirituality of the key people involved. In that role, we are facilitators of the sacred, not the definers of it.

This fall I will have a chance to co-lead a training session for lay chaplains in Edmonton. It will be an honour to help keep this great tradition alive.

Lay Chaplaincy ~ 35 years

Our Lay Chaplains

• *continued from previous page*

NICOLINE GUERRIER

Nicoline Guerrier is a social worker, and became a lay chaplain for the Unitarian Church of Montreal last year.

She believes that, "When people are real with each other in a deep sense, and that is witnessed by other people, then something sacred takes place."

Guerrier has performed 21 marriages this year, including quite a number of same-sex weddings, plus some ceremonies in French (Guerrier is fluently bilingual).

"I love the creation of ritual," she concludes. "It's unsatisfying to just do it by the book!"

VIVIANNE LARIVIÈRE

When Vivianne LaRivière heard a lay chaplain from her congregation speak about the program, "my heart just melted and I thought, that's what I want to do." She's now been a lay chaplain for two years and is considering the ministry.

She describes the two broad purposes of the program. The first is, "to get the word out into the community that extends beyond the congregation, about who we are and how we do things. You have a unique opportunity when you're doing a wedding with 100 guests." Secondly, "it's a spiritual

deepening for the lay chaplains."

Since LaRivière's Neighbourhood UU Congregation in east Toronto has its own minister, the lay chaplain officiates for outsiders who call seeking help with a ceremony. LaRivière is learning to find commonalities with the strangers she meets in this work. She concludes, "If you think you don't have something in common with another human being then you have yet to experience yourself."

DOREEN PEEVER

Doreen Peever has performed 162 weddings over the past two years, most of them same-sex marriages. Situated in St. Catharines, Ontario, she sees a steady stream of U.S. gays and lesbians who cross the border at Niagara Falls looking for a legal union. Counting the ceremonies she performed before equal marriage was legalized last year, Peever has officiated at 141 same-sex weddings.

She has also performed two weddings where one of the partners was transgendered. Does that pose any special challenges? "No," she says, "I treat everyone the same."

Peever, a veteran of the lay chaplaincy program with the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara, also does memorial services, child dedications, and even a house blessing and a pet funeral this year. **U**



We need more doubt, less skepticism

UNITARIANS ARE POOR doubters and our lack of doubt, rather than its excess, contributes to our theological rigidity. We think we are good doubters because we confuse doubt and skepticism. More often than not we use the two words as synonyms for the same experience. Yet, I do not think that reflects the actual experience of doubt and skepticism.

Doubt can, of course, take a variety of forms, from trivial to grave. We can name scientific doubt, relativistic doubt, moral doubt, and philosophical doubt as examples. I want to focus on doubt as it approaches the search for meaning. We occupy an existence fraught with ambiguity, yet as thinking people we want to live lives of moral and intellectual integrity. We yearn for solid ground as much as we seek to explore the uncertainty.

Doubt and skepticism begin in different places and point in different directions. First, doubt is the larger of the two categories and sometimes includes skepticism. Grammatically, doubt can be both a noun and a verb. Doubt is a particular attitude or feeling. It carries an emotional charge.

As a state of being, doubt heads toward resolution, even if it is death, even as it recognizes complexity and ambiguity. Doubt is epic. Therefore doubt is a journey, a process.

Doubt is also an action. Skepticism remains a noun. You can doubt, but you can't "skept." Probably one reason we often confuse the two ideas is because

we can't say, "I skept that." Doubt has to do for the two.

Doubt and skepticism have different focuses. Doubt is a state of being. One can live a lifetime with it. The focus of doubt tends to be inward. It is a capacity of the heart. Therefore it tends to involve emotion as much as intellect. You might also say it is a capacity of the "mind"



– using mind to indicate the wholeness that involves intellect, emotion, sensation and intuition.

Doubt focuses not only on what I believe or do not believe, but how that affects my being, my perceptions, my identity, and my ability to move and act in the world. It affects the wholeness that I know as self and the place of my self in the universe of meaning. In this sense, doubt involves the capacity to be positively self-critical.

In contrast, skepticism is a capacity of the intellect. It is detached from the emotions, using logic and rationalism as tools. It claims to be subjective. Its focus is outward, concerning "the other." It is more likely to consider abstractions. One is rarely, if ever, skeptical about matters dear to one's self or one's being, but can easily focus on the matters dear to another's self or being.

There is a relational difference between doubt and skepticism. If doubt asks, "What if?" skepticism says, "Prove it." If doubt leads the doubter to dig deeper into the meanings of living and one's place in it, skepticism exposes inconsistencies in the other's digging.

As a state of being, doubt heads toward resolution, even if it is death, even as it recognizes complexity and ambiguity. Doubt is epic. Therefore doubt is a journey, a process. It leads toward mystery, toward further seeking, toward knowledge or toward acceptance.

Skepticism, a methodology, does not travel well. Radical skeptics believe that nothing can be known, nothing confirmed or denied. Timon, a disciple of skepticism's founder, Pyrrho, wrote, "I do not lay it down that honey is sweet, but I admit that it appears to be so." Where do you go from there? Even the more moderate and modern forms of skepticism do better at negating than affirming.

Doubt, it is true, may induce paralysis. We call this state the "dark night of the soul." But because it is so often underlain with a sense of faith, a sense of connectedness to the Whole, the paralysis is often temporary. In contrast, skepticism, while a useful tool in science and logic, can too often yield to orthodoxy. It admits too easily a damning pride and arrogance. ■

Susan Van Dreser is minister of The First UU Church of Winnipeg. This is an abridged version of the Confluence lecture she gave at the CUC annual conference in Hamilton last spring.

The full version of *Allergies and Antigens: Belief, Doubt and Humility in Unitarian Universalism* is available online at www.cuc.ca/ministry

Friends Profile

by Brian and Teilya Kiely

We're going to be better friends this year

We've been "Friends of the cuc" for a long time. Frankly, some years we have been better friends than others. Some years we have forgotten to be friendly at all (in a financial sense). But we have always been the \$25-\$100 kind of Friend.

With Brian on the Board, we know just how much our friendship is needed this year. The cuc's long-term prospects are pretty good, but so-so investment returns and slower than anticipated growth have the organization in an immediate financial crunch. The cuc has cut all it can without seriously damaging the very popular service delivery system. So the cuc needs all of its Friends to step up and help out a little to keep the short term deficit in check.

So here's our family's plan. First, we are starting out as \$100 Friends

this year. And then we're going to double that because it is a year of special need.

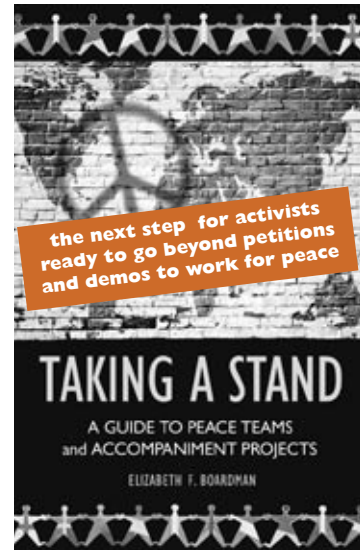
And then there is a third part. At all cuc events like Regional Gatherings, cuc workshops and Sunday services and the ACM, someone will be passing around Friends envelopes and asking for our help. The last part of our commitment is to pull out another \$20 every time we get one of those extra envelopes. After all, we will be benefiting from the Sunday service or the workshop, so why not?

Join us in helping out. If you are a Friend, dig a little deeper if you can. If you aren't, consider becoming a Friend of the cuc. A lot of us sharing just a little more will make an enormous difference to the bottom line. **U**



CUC BOARD NOMINATIONS

Do you know a CUC board member? Have you ever thought about being one? What would you bring to such a role? Think about it! Talk about it with someone. Or contact Ruth Patrick, mruth.patrick@shaw.ca.



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ACM DEADLINES

• poetry wanted

The cuc poetry chapbook project is looking for poetry on a water theme, to be published for the annual conference in May 2006. Email to edit@ellipsemag.org or mail to cuc CHAPBOOK, 180 Liverpool Street, Fredericton, NB, E3B 4V5, with 100-word bio, by Nov. 25, 2005.

• and workshops

Submit your proposals for concurrent sessions at the cuc annual conference by Nov. 19, 2005. Email to: proposals@cuc.ca.

THE CANADIAN

UNITARIAN

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The Canadian Unitarian is the quarterly newsletter of the Canadian Unitarian Council. It's mailed free to all members for whom the CUC has a current address.* The Unitarian reports on newsworthy events in the denomination, including the annual conference each spring. It attempts to reflect all segments of Unitarianism and Universalism in Canada. We welcome all submissions, however, publication is based on the criteria of newsworthiness, relevance to readers, length and balance. We try to publish all letters to the editor, although they may be edited for brevity and clarity.

* Non-members can subscribe to the Unitarian for \$15 Can. or \$10 U.S. Send name, address and cheque to CUC office.

Mary Bennett Executive Director mary@cuc.ca

Office **018-1179A King Street West**
Toronto, ON M6K 3C5

Toll-free **888.568.5723** Toronto **416.489.4121**

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

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

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

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

Editorial **Art Kilgour** canu@cuc.ca


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

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

Advertising info: cuc.ca/newsletter/canu.htm

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Designs by Donna

Order early for Christmas gifts! Donna offers her own copyrighted chalice designs, in vivid rainbow colours, on T-shirts, tote bags, aprons, etc.! Designs include the chalice at left, and a musical variation. There is also a limited selection of T-shirts with the CUC logo (in rainbow colours).

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Check Donna's website and contact her soon!

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