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SHARING OUR FAITH

2014

A program of the Canadian Unitarian Council

Sharing Our Faith is a program of the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC), and it encourages greater associational awareness in our congregations, the fostering of relationships, and a sense of community and connection among and between our member congregations and communities.

Each year, the CUC encourages all congregations to hold a Sharing Our Faith service, and to take up a special collection. The collection is administered by the CUC and given directly back in the form of grants to congregations applying for projects they may otherwise not afford to undertake, and which enhance ministry, growth and/or outreach for that congregation and for the Unitarian and Universalist movement

The 2014 Sharing Our Faith service package was coordinated by Rev. Fiona Heath, with help from the UU Ministers of Canada (UUMOC), and is for use by congregations as they plan their Sharing Our Faith services. It is the hope that as congregations create their worship service, they will remember others are using the same resource package and that the connections and relationships between congregations and communities will be strengthened.

2014's Sharing Our Faith theme, *Journeys and Buildings*, considers the future of Unitarian Universalism in Canada. In November 2013, the CUC Board of Trustees spent several days reflecting on a new vision for the CUC, which will be the focus of discussion at the May 2014 Annual Conference and Meeting. This packet is intended to help frame the CUC conversation within a greater vision of Unitarian Universalism.

Where a Canadian Unitarian Council maple leaf chalice symbol  is displayed after the name of a writer, it indicates that he or she is a Canadian or has served a Canadian congregation as their minister. If you have any questions about this package or the program please contact us at sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca.

We hope this collection will be a valuable aid in preparing your Sharing Our Faith service.



SHARING OUR FAITH SUNDAY RESOURCES 2014

Prepared by Rev. Fiona Heath and the UU Ministers of Canada

SELECTION OF CHALICE LIGHTINGS

1. Rev. Robert Schaibly (adapted)

We drink from wells we did not dig,
We eat bread from wheat we did not plant.
We are warmed by fires we did not light.
We are sheltered by walls we did not build.

We light this chalice in thanksgiving for
those who have passed their light to us.

2. Rev. George G. Brooks (adapted)

May we light this chalice to honor our past:
for all those prosecuted and injured
for speaking out for reason and freedom;
for all those shunned and despised
for believing in God's great love.

May we light this chalice to endorse our present:
for our commitment to truth and freedom,
without which right relationships are impossible;
for our commitment to character and honor,
without which our dignity is a sham.

Let us light this chalice to symbolize our future:
for brighter days for every person on earth;
and for this tradition which honours the light.

3. Liz James, Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon 

As we light this chalice we remember
that no flame can hold still

we remember
that this church
is neither a house built on sand
nor a house built on rock



this church is a series of movements
steps to a dance that will carry us
over rock
 sand
 and mountains

through streams and city streets
to kitchen tables, school hallways, and hospital rooms

and, into the arms of this community
as we gather in reverence
as we light this chalice we remember
that no flame, no *life*, can hold still

may we embrace the dance
and be open to it

SELECTION OF OPENING WORDS

1. *Rev. Julie Stoneberg, Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough*

Behold this place. Behold this community. Behold what is.
All comes into being through waves of creation and destruction.
Our world, our lives, all of who we are,
has come into being through waves of creation and destruction.
This is how our lives are built...

...through ups and downs, moments of strength and times of weakness,
following beacons of hope and blinded by clouds of despair...
Waves of creation and destruction.

And through it all, we keep going. Through it all.

May we trust that destruction leads to creation.
May we trust that our efforts will amount to something...
...that change is possible
...that we can make a difference in the world.
Come. Let us, together, create what will be.

2. *Rev. Shawn Newton, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto*

Let us remember that there is a transformative power
at the centre of this faith that works on us over the long haul—
when we let it, and sometimes even when we resist—



wearing down our prejudices,
challenging our assumptions,
enlarging our hearts and
widening our capacity for wonder and awe
at the great gift of life we find in this present, precious moment.

In this moment, let us worship together.

3. *James Luther Adams, Unitarian Professor*

I call that church free which is not bound to the present,
which covers not before the vaunted spirit of the times.
It earns and creates a tradition binding together past, present and future
in a living tether, in a continuing covenant and identity,
bringing forth treasures both new and old.

... I call that church free which does not cringe in despair,
but casting off fear is lured by the divine persuasion
to respond in hope to the light that has shown and
that still shines in the darkness.

MEDITATION

**1. *Rev. Diane Rollert, Unitarian Congregation of Montreal
For the Sacred***

The emptiness that is full,
The ending that begins,
The darkness that is filled with light.
All things exist within the shadows of themselves.

We know love because our hearts have ached.
We know joy because of sorrow.
We know gratitude because of loss,
and warmth because of cold.
All the seasons of our lives turn in contrasts.

To live without the mountains and the valleys
Would be to live within a nothingness
that surely cannot be called life.

The loves, the sorrows, the hunger and the thirst,
the satisfactions and the longings,
These things are all connected.



What more can we do than to share this journey?
Seeking understanding as we travel our rising and falling paths.
Walk with me and I will walk with you.

2. Rev. Richard Gilbert
Life Is Always Unfinished Business

In the midst of the whirling day,
In the hectic rush to be,
In the frantic pace of life,
Pause here for a moment.

Catch your breath;
Relax your body;
Loosen your grip on life.

Consider that our lives are always unfinished business;
Imagine that the picture of our being is never complete;
Allow your life to be a work in progress.

Do not hurry to mold the masterpiece;
Do not rush to finish the picture;
Do not be impatient to complete the drawing.
From beckoning birth to dawning death we are in process,
And always there is more to be done,

Do not let the incompleteness weigh on your spirit;
Do not despair that imperfection marks your every day;
Do not fear that we are still in the making.

Let us instead be grateful that the world is still to be created;
Let us give thanks that we can be more than we are;
Let us celebrate the power of the incomplete;
For life is always unfinished business.

For the central portion of the service, there are four readings as well as two sermons to choose from. You may wish to use all the readings in place of the sermon, using multiple voices to represent the many voices of our community.



Readings

1. **Rev. Allison Barrett, retired**

Building a Foundation

When you are building a foundation,
from far away, it looks as if nothing is happening.
Small figures, without any discernible movement
gather around a hole in the ground

From time to time, a truck arrives,
bringing supplies
that cannot be made out at a distance

Wood? Stone? Cement?
Something is happening.
But no-one can see what.
They turn away, disinterested.

But on the place where the house will stand,
people are sweating, hauling,
heaving and sweltering in the sun
Measurements are taken,
lines are drawn and digging begins.

For days nothing is seen above the ground.
But beneath - ground is leveled, tamped, made solid.
Pillars and beams plotted, space made;
the entire plan envisioned -
made possible by what lies beneath.

When you are building a foundation
From far away, it looks as if nothing is happening

Everything is about to happen.

2. **Rev. Ray Drennan, retired**

Paddling a Canoe

It has been said that participation in our association of congregations is a bit like
paddling a canoe, a really big canoe. There are a few simple guidelines that come in
handy:



You have to show up, grab a paddle and step into the boat. Virtual paddling or instructions shouted from the shore are not helpful.

In our community of communities canoe there is no room for passengers. Everyone needs to lend a hand and paddle. If you are not there the canoe is off balance.

Just because you have a paddle in your hand doesn't mean that you know how to paddle in community. Take the time to learn how to paddle with others effectively. There are lots of different stokes, different talents and energy levels. They will all come in handy as we float down the river together.

Someone has to steer. We can take turns but only one direction at a time, please.

Even though we may be in separate canoes and there are diverse readings of the map, there is only one river and whether we recognize it or not we are all heading in the same direction.

Music, laughter and singing are always good travelling companions. They help, especially when our muscles and sprits are bone tired.

Don't forget to stop along the way and listen to the silence and the water lapping at the boat. Beauty surrounds us.

Paddling, both the fun part and the hard-work part, takes passionate and steady engagement.

Paddling together with friends makes life worth the living, especially when the currents are strong.

3. Rev. Shawn Newton, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto 
Confluence Lecture 2013, excerpt

To get at the question of identity requires staring as hard as we can and as far as we can into the future to see the challenges and the opportunities that are there.



To ask ourselves what the religious landscape of this country will look like in twenty years or fifty years or a hundred.

To question what shape religious communities will take in the future, and whether our message will be relevant a generation or two from now.

To ask ourselves what needs coming generations will have and whether we will be equipped to meet them?

To consider that maybe our future won't be congregationally based at all, but that we will become more a movement of people who call themselves Unitarian without necessarily being part of a specific community, or at least one that functions in the ways our congregations typically do.

Now, predicting the future is obviously impossible to do with precision. It carries with it the high risk of looking incredibly foolish down the road.

And, yet, to not pay attention to trends, to ignore the direction that things are going, is to risk facing the challenges of the future utterly unprepared.

Given our tiny numbers and the long-term financial challenges it seems so many of our congregations have, I believe our margin of error is far too small to not do everything in our power to prepare for the dramatic changes that most likely are ahead.

*

As I said earlier, it is hard to predict what future generations of Unitarians are going to need. I'm fairly certain they won't need pipe organs.

What they will need, I suspect, is a meeting place, a hub, a geographic centre, a meeting house where they are renewed in community and inspired and equipped to meet the needs of a hurting world.

*

The challenges facing the human race and life on this planet we call home are arguably the most serious the world has ever known.



In light of all of this, I find myself wondering what would it mean
for us to be not merely relevant,
but a truly transformative religion for the times in which we live?

I will tell you that that is the question that flickers in my heart at all times.
Because it is a question of burning importance.
We live in a time of increasing alienation and fragmentation.
The enduring notion of community is being lost.
Material consumption and mass marketing
define our existence in ways almost too powerful to resist.
Our participation in genuine democracy is eroding,
just as it seems we need it most.

The extreme concentrations of wealth and poverty
have left our social contract with each other in tatters
and our covenant with the planet all but broken.

But as devastating as this long list of woes is,
I still have hope and I still have faith that we can build a better world.

For we share a religion that is not only relevant,
but one that can change this world for good.

I believe this faith—that teaches us to honour life
and to respect difference, to seek justice and to work for peace—
is the religion the world needs for just such a time as this.

Every problem I mentioned a moment ago has, at its root,
a spiritual crisis.

And, every problem, I believe has a spiritual cure
that I think our theology speaks to in powerful ways.

The healing of this world isn't entirely up to us,
but I believe we can play an outsized role,
if we were to come alive and model a different way of being.

This planet and her people are in desperate need
of courageous souls who have come alive
with a burning commitment to create a better and sustainable world—
a world of justice and peace, held together in love.



If we are to be a vital part of that—
to be truly relevant to the times in which we live—
we will have to summon the courage to embrace
much bolder ways of being.

*

Friends, the need for evolution is upon us.

Whoever you are,
from the perch that you hold and the perspective it gives you,
what would you do in charting a course through these challenges,
what would you do in building for the future?

Or, better put, not what *would you do*, but what *will you do*?

My deep hope is that we will work together to meet the future with courage,
that our tradition will not merely survive, but thrive in times yet to come.

4. **Liz James, Unitarian Congregation of Saskatoon** *Diversifying the Ecosystem*

When I think of the future of Congregations, it's tempting to ask what changes we'll need to make in our structures to meet challenges and opportunities of an uncertain future. If we could figure that out, we could come up with a model--with a "best way to do things" that would certainly take off and meet the needs of a new world. This is what the people who made the iPhone did--they predicted, analyzed, and came up with a genius idea. Which would be great if we were a manufacturing plant--but we're not. We are a living, breathing creature, filled with diverse people with habits and expectations and individual needs. We're an ecosystem.

And what is the characteristic of a robust ecosystem? It's certainly not that it has one genius idea that is spreading widely. The words for that kind of "genius idea" in ecosystem language is "invasive species", "plague" or "cancer". An ecosystem is *robust in proportion to its diversity*.

We've heard of the food chain. Bunny eats grass, Fox eats bunny, Fox dies and is digested into soil, and soil grows more grass again. This kind of simple chain is very fragile. It's vulnerable to, say, Bunny fever. The bunnies decrease in population, the grass grows like crazy and kills all other vegetation, and the foxes starve to death.



Now, if it's a food web, it's another story. Maybe there are a dozen things that bunnies eat, and a dozen things that foxes eat. Then, the foxes don't all starve, and the grass doesn't take over everything, and things stay in balance because the impact is spread out. Over time, bunny fever runs its course, and the ecosystem is still in tact for the bunnies to re-establish themselves.

In church terms, we have this diversity in terms of spiritual beliefs. But what if we also had it in terms of *style of Unitarian expression as a community*? What I mean is, what if we count any group of people saying, together "I am a Unitarian, and I express it by..." when we think about what is happening in Canadian Unitarianism? We would have Churches, fellowships, and congregations, of course. We'd have some denominational groups, like Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice. We'd have various associational groups, like the Ministers' group, or the Directors of Religious Education, or even the Lay Chaplains. We even have some groups that exist independent of congregations. We have campus groups, in some cities. We have summer camps.

But, that's a pretty simple food chain. It could include more. It could include Unitarian Bike Co-ops and Cohousing and Unitarian Shelters and Parents' groups and neighbourhood groups and online communities. It could include travel clubs and bloggers' communities and book clubs and hospice centres.

What would that be like for Congregations? Would it steal all the potential members?

I don't think so. Our Congregations are made of people who meet two criteria--they are Unitarians, and they are Congregationally minded. There are another twice as many people who identify as Unitarian and are not in Congregations, and a whole host more who might be Unitarian if they were aware of what that was. A more diverse web makes room for these people. The diverse communities wouldn't draw on those who love Congregations--their needs are already met. It would reach out to new types of people.

So what would it look like from a Congregational perspective? It would look like more visibility. More people would know the meaning of the word Unitarian. It would look like more impact--more Unitarians out there doing the work of our religion in our communities. It would look like potential for partnerships on projects and events. It would look like an interconnected web of people moving from one expression of their religion to another. It would look like making room for many types of belief, and also many styles of religious community.



I believe we are needed. There are people looking to grow spiritually within a community that understand that when you grow, you sometimes change shape a little. There are parents wondering how to teach their children good values without controlling their beliefs. Couples looking for a wedding service that expresses who they are. People looking to run homeless shelters or environmental groups from a perspective that is grounded in meaning without being rigid in creed. People looking for online community, or neighbourhood groups.

Larger Churches are able to provide all sorts of complex programming. In Canada, maybe we need to think differently. Maybe we need to start looking for those people who are on the fringes, who don't quite jump into Church membership and regular attendance but who are really passionate about the idea of Unitarianism. And maybe we need to put less energy into trying to figure out how to restructure Church to fit their needs, and start asking how we can partner with them to create new kinds of creatures, new "species" of Unitarianism that are interconnected with Congregational life.

Each creature would be different. One might be a grant funded social justice based project, or one might be a potluck dinner club. Maybe they'd be visibly Unitarian, or maybe there'd be a subtler influence. Maybe they'd be thoroughly integrated into our structure, and we'd talk about their impact on the world as a part of our annual canvass. Maybe they'd use our building and take a collection for the congregation. Maybe their active online presence has made it so that Unitarian ranks much higher on the page when people search for "liberal religious".

Or maybe their contribution would be for us to know that they're there, serving along side us. An interconnected web that can now stretch just a little further.



SERMONS

1. Rev. Steven Epperson, Unitarian Church of Vancouver

Faith in Our Future

“Faith,” said, Ali, the cousin, son-in-law of Muhammad, fourth of the Rightly Guided Caliphs of the Muslim community, faith, he said, “stands on four pillars: Patience, Certainty, Justice, and Striving.” I don’t usually pair up those four words with faith. But when I started wrangling with the thoughts and feelings that are my dread and welcome companions on Thursdays through most Saturdays, and as I started writing down the words I am reading on this page, “the four pillars of faith”—patience, certainty, justice and striving seemed fitting and helpful. *Patience and faith?* I have to patiently attend for the arrival of feeling/thoughts and then type them out word by word; it doesn’t come quickly or in one fell swoop. I have to trust that if I wait and welcome them, they will arise to greet me in my mind and heart.

Certainty? An odd choice perhaps to be paired with faith—but think about it: we say we have faith in reason; or that we have full faith and credit in government bonds; we had faith that the sun would rise and the world continue on the day after December 21st—it did, didn’t it? Certainty—I knew that we would be worshipping together this morning, that I would have a sermon to share with you, and that it would be written out before 5 pm Saturday! It takes a measure of trust, that not just anything, but *certain* things, including our rendezvous here, would and will take place.

Justice as a pillar of faith? Looking up the root meaning of the word—I was pleased to discover that our word justice goes all the way back to its origins in the ancient language of Sanskrit where it means “to join”—that is, to connect things according to what is fitting like well-plumbed pipes in a building, or the repossession of rights denied through means of the justice system. Justice?—trust that we will be rightly joined together in worship and community, and that I might do justice to this topic.

And the fourth pillar—*Striving?* Though Martin Luther, the great 16th century Reformation leader, hated it and would have written it out of the Bible if he could have, I always thought that the *Book of James* in the Christian Scriptures had it right, where we read that “faith by itself without works”—or striving—“is dead.” Every artist, every parent, each and all of knows that without striving, without works, all the faith in the world is idle, wishful thinking. The power of positive thinking wasn’t about to write this sermon, or get you out of bed this morning; it took effort. But here again, the striving is sustained by trust—trust last Friday that I would get these



words written, and trust that if you journeyed to 49th and Oak at 11 a.m., we would be meeting and worshipping together.

“Faith stands on four pillars: Patience, Certainty, Justice, and Striving.”

I wanted to talk about faith in our future because it’s time. I feel the wheel of time turning. I feel it in my own bones. I’ve felt it recently in the number of memorial services I have been conducting; and doubtless, there will be more. The cycle of generations is moving on; those who, for years, have been in the vanguard of our faith are journeying toward life’s horizon; we find ourselves stepping forward in the middle ground to take their place—stewards of this community, our religious heritage and their well-being, called to nurture them in trust for the generations rising and approaching behind us and at our side. And how can we best embody and enact that trust placed into our hands?

I wanted to talk about faith in our future because the world is changing around us, and that has momentous implications for our religion. I was born in the middle of the last century in a time of rotary phones, vacuum tubes, typewriters, the rise of rock music, civil rights, vinyl records and reel to reel tape. I remember when the introduction of polyester, no-iron shirts was a big deal. My mother brought some home for me one day and said, “I’m never going to iron another shirt again.” I hated those polyester shirts, and ever since, I bought and have worn button-down cotton ones and ironed them, every one, ever since. But I digress...

Back then when I was growing up, Canada and the States were church-going, synagogue and temple-going societies. If you didn’t attend, you kept the fact quiet. You went to church because that was what was done, especially if you had kids, and it was a world booming and crazy with children. Except for watching hockey and football on the tube, there was little else to do on Sundays. The neighbour who mowed his lawn on Sunday morning was something of a scandal, and shopping was hardly an option. In BC, you even recited the “Lord’s Prayer” every day in public schools. Do you remember all that?

In this landscape, people showed up at Unitarian churches—like this one—because they *had* to belong to a church; but Unitarian churches were different even then—they were free from the requirements of doctrines and dogmas that people couldn’t affirm or believe in. That was, in Christine Robinson’s words, our “successful niche,” and she put it crudely like this: *back then, Unitarians were free to believe whatever they wanted to, and most of us didn’t.* (Rev. Christine Robinson, “The Future of Unitarian Universalism: What’s Possible?” Minns Conference Lecture, 2011. A lot of what follows is informed by that and other 2011 Minns lectures.)



The times have changed haven't they? Certainly we live in a world transformed by technology; the social sensibility has mutated too, from something more like a "we're in-this-together" outlook to one far harsher, more impatient, individualistic, and if it's possible, more hedonistically driven, more anxiety ridden and awash in medications, too; don't think that's a coincidence. Or is that just me thinking?

"The relationship of society to religion has changed just as much." (Robinson) It's not exactly news that we live in an increasingly un-churched society; plenty of people don't participate in organized religious observance, and British Columbia leads the way in this trend.

From the late 40s to the end of the 90s, weekly church service attendance *nationally* dropped from about 65% to the low 20s; and in the 18-34 year old age group those numbers nationally have declined into the low teens. Even organized conservative religious denominations, whose leaders and supporters in the media have long sneered at the decline in mainline, more liberal church attendance while vaunting their own relatively robust numbers, have recently been having to grapple with the flat-lining and decline in their own figures—from attendance to financial support. (On the Canadian data, see Reginald Bibby, *Restless Gods...2004*, pp. 12-25. On trends generally, and conservative churches in particular, see how this is presented and analyzed in: www.pewforum.org/Unaffiliated/nones-on-the-rise.aspx.)

Today, most people, including parents who bring their children to church, are *choosing* it over a plethora of competing options: shopping, family time, chores, TV, movies, computer games and in-and out-door recreation. As well, the right to believe "what your heart and mind suggest to you is true, including "nothing," is taken for granted in much of elder society and in virtually all of younger society." (Robinson) Religious observance and affiliation is no longer a privileged part of the social landscape in most parts of the nation. When people decide they're going to try religion again, or for the first time, and let's take ours for example, it's not because they want freedom or because they're interested in community as such—we have freedom in spades: the right to believe and practice *or not* across a whole spectrum of religious and spiritual options; and there are all kinds of community we can join—from dragon boat clubs to Facebook.

Why do people show up at our door; why do we? And what does it have to do with faith in our future as a religion?

We show up to experience something that just doesn't happen, that we don't get at the gym, or a political party headquarters, or an island cabin, or on the road for a wine-tasting festival. We're here because the gods are restless, the spirit



moves, real existential crises and questions arise—and what we need is a safe and sustaining place to explore what happens to us when we feel moved to deepen our lives in the most profound and fulfilling ways for ourselves and our children. “We are looking for a religious community, not a secular one.” And for those of us who’ve tried more orthodox options but can’t bring ourselves to sign on, or who already know what they don’t believe—they are the ones, we are—who might just show up at those doors. “This is our natural constituency...these are the people we are supposed to be serving...this is our niche in the religious landscape.” And it’s going to take patience, certainty, justice and striving to sustain our trust, our faith that we and they have a future here. *And if we don’t serve these needs for real “depth, heart, spirituality, hope, faith and love outside of an orthodox” or none-of-the-above “setting, who will?”* That’s us. Welcoming a sustainable future will entail a change in our thinking about what we are doing and require something of a different focus on who we are. (Robinson)

Remember the successful niche we provided in the mid 20th century? It read like this: *“Unitarians are free to believe whatever we want to and most of us don’t.”* And that was an important role we willingly took on; it was a crucial service we provided in a landscape soaked with religious convention and conformity. But the landscape is changing. And while it is true that the secular tide that rose up and washed over most of the organized religions of Europe in the 1900s seems now to have finally reached the shores of North America, and church attendance is plummeting while the ranks of the “none-of-the-aboves” is rising, the number of Canadians who express deep and abiding spiritual needs includes far more than half of us, and far, far more than the number of those who are actively participating in religious groups. (see Bibby, 190-7)

Now that we’re well launched into the 21st century, and the religious landscape is changing, and the wheel of generations is turning, what was once our niche: “free to believe in whatever we want to and most of us don’t,” needs to change to read more like the following: *“Unitarians worship and grow in spirit in religiously diverse congregations.”* (Robinson) That is, we respond with integrity and vision to real, if less conventional spiritual needs; and we provide a place in our hearts and in our congregations publicly where that deep search for meaning can flourish.

Ever since our evolution into conscious beings who know we are going to age and die we have sought out the meaning of our existence. That search, expressed from the individual out into the collective, the community is what we call religion. We wish to participate in something larger than our individual concerns. Sometimes that desire is focused on political and secular goals, but when it’s focused on the meaning of our existence—its whys and wherefores and wheretos—when it takes us



into the spiritual terrain of our lives and when it coheres into beliefs, history, practices and community, we call it religion and spirituality burns at its core.

Here, young and old, young adults and the middling aged can meet. While formal adherence to an organized religion bottoms out among the 20 and 30-somethings, don't be fooled into thinking that they're a bunch of hedonistic heathens. Questions about and needs for meaning and real purpose in life run as deep in them as in any human cohort. All of the data and analysis on spirituality and religion in North America bear this out. The difference is that they are not as attracted nor as dependent on the time honoured institutions, beliefs and folkways as we older people are—less enamored of the sermon, the hymnbook, the formal committee meeting, the Sunday morning put-your-backside-in-the-pew church service. And they really get impatient with us, and for good reason, when we don't understand the crises they face: their howling need for affordable and decent housing, their worries over finding dependable and meaningful work and a livable wage, and their deep anxieties over a planet heating up and getting depleted by us.

And the kinds of conflicts going on in too many of our churches that soak up institutional energy and suck up all the available oxygen in the room?—they just don't have time for it, nor do they get it: a UU church that spent the better part of two years arguing over whether or not the minister could use religious language: like “worship service,” “prayer” and “God,” or another church that spent years arguing over what colour hands should be on their church's banner with accusations of racism shooting back and forth—all the while, the need for de-centering, other-regarding, going down deep prayer and the devastating facts of systemic poverty and racism in one's own backyard go unattended with timely, decisive action—you get the picture, and I could go on with other lamentable examples, some of them closer to home.

Given all this: the myriad choices available on Sundays and throughout the week, the waning of commitment to institutions, the soul-sucking, me-centered, pointless conflicts, the rise of a generation of image-based learners who haven't been socialized into a world of classical music, sermons, and kumbaya, whose outlook underlines that there are a lot of paths to enlightenment and salvation, and experience that tells them that, all-too-often, we just don't get their world—*still*, as Roger Daltry of the Who sings—“after the fire the fire still burns”—and so burns the enduring, abiding need for meaning, purpose, depth, heart, spirituality, reverence and faith. If we feed that fire, that hunger—there will be those—younger and older—who will be attracted to our church and connect with it; but it's going to take getting serious about religion; it's going to take getting over the hump of thinking that Unitarianism isn't an alternative TO religion, rather, it's an alternative RELIGION that can meet *them and us*, welcome *them and us* with faith in our future and with deep



hospitality which knows that when one welcomes a stranger, one is likely to be changed, transformed by creative interchange with that stranger.

I see lots of encouraging signs, of portents that give me faith and builds my trust that we have a future worth living and giving and deepening into.

“How Firm a Foundation” I used to sing as a kid...may the pillars of our faith—patience, certainty, justice and striving be strong. May we risk—that’s that leap of faith thing—may we risk offering our heart, our means, our spirit, prayer and blessings—a people of deep faith, wanting to go deeper, clear about our mission, and passionate and purposeful about this amazing religion of ours—nearly five hundred years now it has provoked, inspired and blessed. As the circle of the generations turn, may we do our part to ensure its future.

2. **Rev. Fiona Heath,** 
Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Durham in Whitby, Ontario

Carrying the Chalice

I was a stay at home mother and free-lance writer for many years.
If you wish to be popular at parties, do not tell people you are a stay at home mother.
I quickly learned to lead with free-lancer...
However, I have now found that the greatest conversation killer at parties is telling people you are a minister....

People sometimes look worried, as if I am going to suddenly sing “onward Christian soldier”. They straighten their backs and mentally review our conversation in case they swore.

The well meaning ones tell me about their grandmother who still goes to church. But mostly, they just aren’t interested.

This does not surprise me. It saddens me, but it doesn’t surprise me.

Canada is an increasingly secular society;
religion is not so much disliked but seen as a left over relic
from the days of Prime Minister Diefenbaker,
like record players or playing hockey without helmets.
Kind of cool in a retro nostalgic way,
but most definitely not the way we live now.



And there is truth in that.
We do live differently now.
We aren't embedded in one community,
where we live and work and raise our families,
where everyone looks pretty much the same.
In this world the local church was the central hub of community,
caring for people from birth to marriage to death,
living in a straight line between heaven and hell.

Now we are embedded in multiple communities in multiple ways.
We live in a network of relationships that are greatly expanded by technology.
Our lives aren't linear anymore, our choices complex.
We don't need a single community hub,
because we have many communities,
and we want to access them when we need them,
not just Sunday mornings.
We now live in a vast web in an infinite universe.

Much of what churches used to offer, people find elsewhere
- hanging out with friends, with trusted counsellors,
through music and art.
And the tools we use - cell phones, texting, facebook, twitter -
have drastically changed how we access information and
communicate with each other.

But I am sure we need spiritual communities more now than ever.
There is no other institution which considers the big picture,
no other communal way to be together with a focus on the whole.

For me, religion is a system for understanding the relationships between things. It is a
framework of perception, providing a meaningful narrative
which shapes how we interact with others.
It is the bigger story within which we tell our own stories.

And I am convinced - indeed it is why I became a minister -
that the perspective of Unitarian Universalism is the one we need,
right here, right now.

There are so many people yearning for more out of living.



They just don't know where to find it or how to find it.
Whether they call themselves spiritual but not religious,
or atheist and spiritual, they are seeking a place where they can explore their fears
and confusions, express their hopes and dreams.

They aren't seeking answers from above,
and aren't willing to accept ones at odds with scientific knowledge.
They want to explore questions of meaning and purpose in community, whether that
is on-line or in a pub or on a Sunday morning.

They want their lives to matter,
to belong to something larger than themselves.
Our way of being in the world resonates with these seekers.
We offer a way to explore life's immensity,
to stand in awe together before the universe unfolding,
holding hands in love.

They need us and don't know it.
Small as we are, we are easily missed,
it can be hard to hear our signal in all the media noise.

We are also young, for a religious tradition.
Although you can see the beginnings of both Unitarianism and Universalism in the
early Christianity of 2000 years ago,
we are less of a mature plantation and more of a freshly seeded garden.

The merging of Unitarianism and Universalism took place just over fifty years ago. Our
chalice symbol dates back to world war two,
but only came into common use in the seventies.
Our newest ritual - the January fire communion - is barely 10 years old.

We are still integrating our Unitarian, universalist and humanist ancestry in a
meaningful way, and learning language that expresses
our particular perspective of mystery and kindness and connectedness.

There is much patient work to be done for us to truly bloom.
Our leaves are still unfurling.
But the potential is there, waiting to flower into glory.
It just needs tending.
Students of history say you can tell what is important to a society by looking at its
biggest buildings.



The ancients of Great Britain built Stonehenge - as a memorial to their ancestors, as a celebration of the cycles of the seasons - we don't know.

The Egyptians built the pyramids as testaments to the god status of their pharaohs.

Medieval Europeans built vast cathedrals to worship God.

Downtown Toronto is filled with pinnacles celebrating business and commerce, and crowned by the CN Tower - the ultimate tourist experience.

Around here, big box stores and shopping malls trumpet the All Mighty Consumer, while luxury condos and big fitness centres elevate the Individual.

Business, Tourism, Consumerism, the Individual.

All these focal points are great ways to generate wealth, but all are terrible ways to generate meaning.

Watch advertising anywhere for more than five minutes and you begin to believe the purpose of life is to have white teeth.

But we know deep down we are more than individual consumers, and that there is a greater bottom line than wealth.

Unitarian Universalism is a different - and better - understanding of how we are in the world; we offer a challenging vision of respect for all beings and a radical understanding of the interrelated web of life.

Our way of being is a way of collaboration and community.

It is a way of hope.

It is a way worthy of sharing, worthy of great care and dedication.

I want to retell a story I'm sure most of you will have heard before, because it speaks so well to what it means to have a vision.

Almost 800 years ago in England,

a traveler to Salisbury happened upon a large group of workers working a pile of stones beside an empty field.

He watched them as they went about their physical labour.

Curious, he moved towards the man closest to him.

“My dear fellow, he said heartily, what is it that you are doing?”

The man continued his work, not looking up, and grumbled,

“I am cutting stones.”

Realizing that the mason did not wish to engage in a conversation, the traveler moved towards another man working nearby and asked again, “what is it that you are doing?”



To the traveler's delight this time the man stopped his work,
and announced "I am a stonecutter."

The mason stretched his back, grimacing.

"I cut each stone precisely and exactly. It's hard work but I do it well. Though I'll be glad when it's done and I can get on home."

The traveler thanked the second mason, and, still a curious man,
decided to ask one more worker his question.

"What is it that you are doing?"

This time the mason paused, and looked skyward, smiling.

"I am building a cathedral."

He continued, "People from all over England will come here to worship.

It is to be a place of sanctuary and hope.

It won't be completed in my lifetime,

but the future depends on my doing this work well.

If these stones are not cut just right, the cathedral will not stand."

And he went back to his great work.

Imagine if we all felt like our lives were dedicated to something like building a cathedral.

If instead of saying we collect garbage, we say we make our city more beautiful or we look after that which no one else wants.

What if we could understand ourselves in the context of the greater whole, know that we are contributing to a grand vision of a better world?

When we believe that our lives are making a profound difference to the others, to the future, anything is possible.

It is the soaring imagination that gives our lives meaning.

You may be simply cutting stones into squares, but you can still be creating something magnificent.

To know that we have made a contribution to the greater whole satisfies our spirits.

It gives us a firm place to stand when the storms of life are blowing strong.

When we question the value of our lives,

knowing that we are creating a cathedral makes all the difference.

Here at [] it may look like we are simply hanging out on a Sunday morning, but we are also building a cathedral.

All of us together.



Each of us, whether we are playing a role or offering the gift of presence, are part of this grand and audacious exercise in meaning making.

Our Unitarian Universalist cathedral will look very different than the gothic Salisbury Cathedral in the story.

The lives we lead as Unitarian Universalists here and now,
the work we do together,
these are the foundations for the generations who come after us.

This is a cathedral made not from cement and glass,
but from hospitality and care.
The walls are shaped by the stories and songs of this chalice tradition,
made stronger each time we tell them anew.

This is a temple open to the universe,
which celebrates the ever unfolding mystery,
based in the knowledge of the interconnectedness of life.

This is a cathedral worthy of our energy and dedication.
The part each of us may do may be small, but it all matters.
Every stone well made creates a solid foundation.
And on these foundations, our temple will offer hope
for the seekers of today and the generations to come.

One of the aspects of Unitarian Universalism which first drew me in
was the chalice.
I loved that the symbol of this community was a living, flickering flame cupped in a
beautiful container.
I love that as a candle or with oil, it needs to be renewed,
it needs care and attention.

We often speak of ourselves as a living tradition and
I see the flaming chalice as perfectly embodying that livingness.
The light flickers, grows stronger or dimmer, responds to the movement surrounding
it, and needs oxygen, just like us.
Just as Unitarian Universalism changes and evolves, so does the flame.

The chalice light is a symbol of the spark of life within all beings,
of the spark of life on this little blue planet in this great big universe.
We are the people of the chalice.



As we build our cathedral, we also tend the flame of the chalice.
The light of our chalice guides the work of our hands and hearts,
helping us to see clearly the meaning of our lives.

Unitarian Universalism says each of us matters,
that each of us is welcome just as we are,
that we are whole and holy beings,
embedded in a whole and holy universe.

Our tradition offers hope without hell.
We offer a world of belonging, of connection, of relationship,
not just with one another but with all beings.

We are called to be in community with one another,
working through difficulties with respect and compassion.
We are called to strive for justice and end oppression.
To live all of this out in our daily lives is a challenge!

But that challenge, to live into to this vision of a nurturing,
life enhancing way of being,
is one most worthy of our time and dedication.

I believe we have a message worth hearing.
I believe that we have a path people want to walk.
I believe that the world needs our spiritual community.
My deepest hope is that you believe this too.

Let us carry the chalice with pride.
May it's shining light remind us of the worth of the work we do together,
and blaze brilliantly as a beacon of hope,
guiding those in need to our welcoming arms.

May it be so.



Offering

Today, our congregation is marking Sharing Our Faith Sunday.

Sharing Our Faith is a program of the Canadian Unitarian Council.

It encourages greater associational awareness in our congregations, the fostering of relationships, and a sense of community and connection among and between our member congregations and communities.

During Sharing Our Faith services, the collection taken is in support of the Sharing Our Faith fund. This fund consists of monies collected by congregations at special Sharing Our Faith services during the year and contributions from a Foundation Fund administered by the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto. These funds are sent to the CUC to be allocated in the form of grants to congregations applying for projects they may otherwise not afford to undertake, but which enhance ministry, growth and/or outreach for that congregation and for the Unitarian and Universalist movement in Canada.

Between 2001 - 2013, through the generosity of our congregations and members, the Sharing Our Faith program has awarded over \$135,000 to congregations. Initiatives include:

- Support for part-time professional ministry
- Communication, publicity and increasing visibility
- Religious education and music programs
- Youth programs
- Commissioning of music for “Missa Brevis Pro Serveto, a mass for UUs

Today’s collection is in support of the Sharing Our Faith fund.

Let your giving this morning be a true expression of spiritual generosity.

After: Our relationship with the larger Canadian Unitarian Universalist movement is a gift. Our generous support today is an expression of our gratitude for the larger community and our hope that together we can serve the needs of our congregations, our communities, our country and our world.

Closing Words

1. *Carl Sagan in Pale Blue Dot: A Vision of the Human Future in Space*

“How is it that hardly any major religion has looked at science and concluded, “This is better than we thought! The Universe is much bigger than our prophets said, grander, more subtle, more elegant?”

...



A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths.
Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.”

2. *Scientist Chet Raymo, “When God is Gone, Everything is Holy:”*

... any religion worthy of humanity’s future will have three characteristics.

One, it will not imagine itself to be exclusively true but will be open to the best and holiest of each faith tradition.

Two, it will be ecological, inclusive and aware of the earth and all creatures.
Three, it will embrace the scientific story of the world, looking for the divine in the extravagant wonder of the earth.

This is Unitarian Universalism. We are the religion of this new century.
Inclusive of the wisdom of faith and science, embracing the wonder of life.

May it be so.

3. *Rev. Fiona Heath, Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Durham* 

As we extinguish the flame of our common chalice
and go forth from our time together, let us remember:
“It is good to have an end to journey toward,
but it is the journey that matters in the end.” (Ursula Le Guin)

May our journey together be one of warmth and possibility.
Blessed be.



Thank you for holding a Sharing Our Faith Sunday,
and for contributing to the growth of our national community.
Please send funds in the form of a single cheque made out to
Canadian Unitarian Council and marked “*Sharing Our Faith.*”

For any members wishing a tax receipt,
please include their names and the amount donated.

Further information on the Sharing Our Faith program or application for
congregations or communities can be obtained by e-mailing sharing-our-faith@cuc.ca,
by referring to the [Sharing Our Faith](#) section of the [CUC website](#),
or by calling the CUC office at 1-888-568-5723.
