



**Canadian Unitarian Council
Conseil unitarien du Canada**

Interdependence. Love. Justice.

CANADIAN UNITARIAN COUNCIL Annual Report for 2019



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CUC President's Report | Margaret Wanlin

We Unitarian Universalists come together in a new way for 2020's Annual General Meeting –completely at a physical distance from each other. These are deeply disorienting times. Our world faces many challenges. In some of them, we are deeply implicated.

Our coming together in our home congregations is special. That is where we are nourished to carry on the work of the world. Two congregations had notable anniversaries in 2019. My own church, Lakehead Unitarian Fellowship turned, 60. And the Unitarian Church of Vancouver/Vancouver Unitarians celebrated 110 years. Congratulations to these two congregations on these milestones in living out our Unitarian Universalist traditions and values each in their own ways, which fit for their time and place.



Like the boards in your congregations, the CUC Board spends a lot of time on the ongoing business – financial processes, the audit, staying in tune with the work the staff is doing. Our leadership work has involved strengthening our risk management oversight, updating some policies, connecting with congregations, strengthening the voice of Youth on the Board by having two, rather than one, “Youth on Board”, and thinking about our shared future – more on that at the Annual Meeting.

As an economy measure the Board only met once in person – in Toronto before the May 2019 Annual Meeting. We experimented with holding the Fall Retreat via Zoom. It won't surprise you when I say that there were some shortcomings. However, our sessions – 2 ½ hours for three days each – illustrated that there is scope to do more than just have a meeting using the technology. We even had a Zoom party on the last night! All in all, it was more successful than I expected and shows us what can be done when necessary. And little did we know at that time how essential effective use of Zoom technology would become! The CUC's early adoption of distance technologies like Zoom has been of critical importance to our carrying on with business as usual in this COVID-19 time. Congratulations and thanks to the staff and previous Boards who did this pioneering work and laid a solid foundation for us all.

While it is the CUC's mission “to grow vital UU communities” we know that as congregations you sustain yourselves. Our part is to help us be connected and in relationship across the country so that we can learn from and support each other, assist you with transitions and when there are challenges, help us work together on key themes and help our youth and young adults connect with themselves and each other in life-changing ways. It is good work and important work.

Thanks to member congregations and Friends of the CUC, for believing in and supporting this work. Thanks to our Executive Director and staff for doing this work with creativity, resourcefulness and compassion.



CUC Treasurer's Report | Joanne Green

2019 began with Tanya Cothran as Treasurer, and the intent was that a new board member would shadow Tanya for the first year. However, circumstances led to the new treasurer taking over in May 2019. I want to thank Tanya very much for her guidance and input to the financial processes.



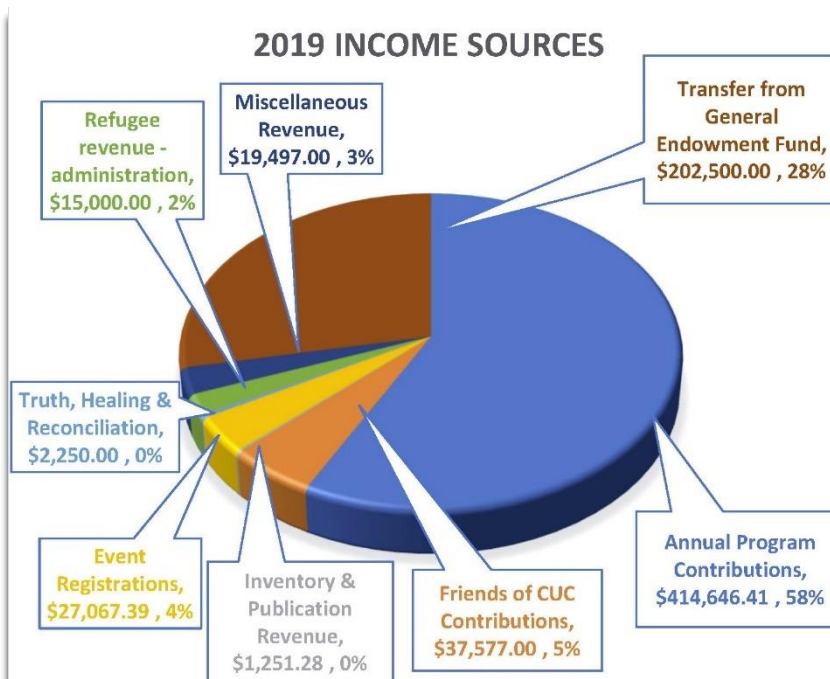
The past year was a very busy one for the Treasurer and the new Finance & Investment Committee formed in May 2019. We worked very hard with the Executive Director to manage our resources. We spent time reviewing financial policies, audits, bookkeeping processes, restricted funds, Annual Program Fund and monthly reporting.

We take very seriously our responsibilities to make wise use of the donations sent by individuals and APC funds sent by member congregations. I want to acknowledge that because of the situation in Canada and & the world with COVID-19, we are taking steps to reduce spending wherever possible. Further details will be provided during the budget presentation.

The following paragraphs review the CUC's income sources, policies, budget & deficits, and changes to policies.

Sources of Revenue for 2019

Annual Program Contributions – Our major source of income is the annual program contributions received from each of our member congregations. At the May, 2019 Annual General Meeting, members approved a major change in the APC calculation method. We sent out the annual certification letter in October; at the time of writing, 95% of member congregations had sent in their member certifications and calculations for the 2020 APC.



Annual Transfer from Investment Fund - Our second major source of income is the annual transfer from the Investment Fund. Refer to the section later in this report for a description of the Investment Fund. The transfer amount is determined by calculating the average rate of return for the past 10 years (7.394%) and deducting the annual CPI at November 30th (1.9%) to arrive at the percentage of the fund available for our use, which for 2019 was 5.494%. This year we determined that we would use only 5.294%. Finally, we multiply the percentage (5.331%) x the unrestricted portion of the investment fund (\$4,722,824).

Donations – Donations of \$37,577 were received to the Friends of the CUC from staff and dedicated supporters of the CUC. The audit figure of \$52,577 includes \$15,000 in administration fees for Refugee Sponsorships. Donations to restricted funds such as the Sharing Our Faith Fund or Theological Education Fund totaled almost \$20,000.

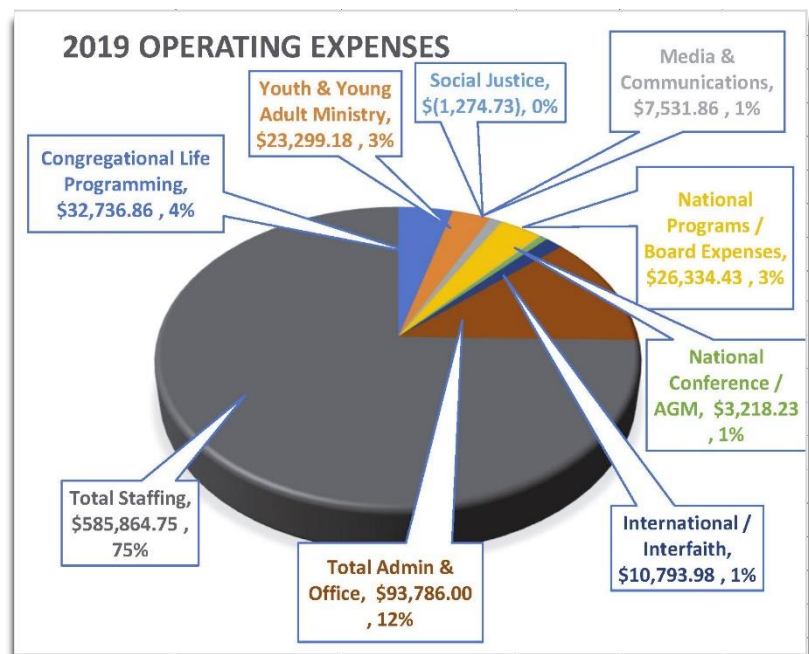
Bequests – A very generous bequest of \$100,000 was received in November 2019 from Eryl Court, a devoted peace activist, a staunch feminist and a long-time member of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto. The CUC Board determined the bequest could be split into two portions - \$10,000 for Friends of the CUC and \$90,000 for the General Endowment Fund.

Event Registrations – Event registrations are intended to cover the entire cost of events. Some events may be subsidized if there are funds in an appropriate restricted fund such as the Youth and Young Adult Leadership Fund.

Major Expense Categories

Staff and administrative expenses make up 87% of our annual operating budget. Congregational Life staff work to engage with and support the congregations, youth and young adults, and organize in-person and online events. The administrative staff manage all financial processes including Annual Program Contributions, manage CUC's governance processes, manage communications, and provide support to the Congregational Life staff.

Congregational resources, Youth & Young Adult Programs, and National Programs make up another 10% of our annual budget. The remaining amounts change from year to year due to conference expenses, attendance at international events, etc.



2019 Budget and Audit:

A thorough review of the monthly statements, draft audited statements and bookkeeping has been done by the Treasurer and Finance & Investment Committee. Due to the poor investment returns in 2018, the annual transfer in 2019 was reduced to \$202,500, which resulted in a very tight (deficit) budget. The audited statements show a year-end deficit of \$67,744, which is higher than budgeted for several reasons. The deficit has been funded from reserves, which included grants received in 2018. The short summary below shows the budgeted vs actual income & expenses.

	<u>Budget</u>	<u>Actual</u>
Operating Income	\$695,054.00	\$719,789.00
Operating Expenses	<u>\$725,966.11</u>	<u>\$787,532.00</u>
Net Deficit	\$ (30,912.11)	\$(67,744.00)

Income was higher (or lower) than budgeted in the following areas:

- | | |
|---|---------------------|
| 1. APC income (includes some 2018 APCs) | \$16,607.41 higher |
| 2. Refugee Administration Revenue | \$15,000.00.hhigher |
| 3. Miscellaneous Income | \$19,947.00 higher |
| 4. Chaplaincy Program Fees removed from Operating | \$ (5,774.00) lower |
| 5. THR Income lower than budgeted | \$(15,570.00) lower |

Expenses were higher than budgeted in the following areas:

- | | |
|---|-------------|
| 1. Youth & Young Adult leadership development subsidies | \$ 5,799.00 |
| 2. International - expenses for event attendance, ICUU Dues, plus prior year expenses charged in 2019 | \$19,043.57 |
| 3. Staff Costs - All contracts and staff travel now shown in staff (from Congregational Life, Media & Comm's and National Programs) | \$21,943.70 |
| 4. Staff Costs - Higher CPP & Insurance Benefits plus accrued vacation | \$14,376.38 |
| 5. Expenses from prior years expensed in 2019 (admin, HST/GST) | \$ 9,362.00 |

Audit

The operating budget does not include restricted program spending such as refugee support payments. It also does not include Investment Management Fees as those fees are deducted directly from the investment income earned. The audited statements present information about all of the funds which can be seen on pages 4 and 12 of the statements.

The CUC uses the restricted fund method of accounting which requires that grants, donations and other income must be recorded in the year received. When money is received for restricted funds, it is recorded as income to those funds. A good example is the Refugee Fund -



income received in 2019 was credited to the fund, and the balance remaining at year end is there to use the following year.

Total General Fund Expenditures:

1. After deducting the investment fees of \$51,991, operating fund expenditures total \$787,530 as shown on Page 18 of the statements.
2. 2019 operating expenses higher than anticipated are 2019 YaYA travel subsidies (\$5,799), higher ED expenses (\$10,250), CPP & Insurance Benefits (\$7,370), international expenses (\$9,294) for a total of \$32,713.

Investment Fund

1. The Investment Fund contains all of the monies invested with ScotiaMcLeod. The fund includes the CUC General Endowment Fund, the CUC General Fund, and all externally restricted funds such as the Avalon Fund or Congregational Investment Funds. The externally restricted funds amount to approximately 20% of the Investment Fund. Refer to the audit for the exact dollar values at the end of December 2019.
2. The value of the Investment Fund recovered in 2019 to \$5,958,847; the average rate of return for the past 10 years was 7.364%. The investment fees are charged quarterly (1% of the monthly balance, \$51,991 including HST/GST in 2019).
3. The Investment (Wealth) Manager makes decisions about the portfolio, within criteria established by the Board, to protect our investment fund as well as possible during good and bad economic times. With the drastic downturn in the markets in 2020, we anticipate reductions in value, and have no predictions about recovery.

Finance & Investment Committee:

1. The Finance & Investment Committee includes the Executive Director, President, Vice-President, Treasurer, and one member at large, Bob Willson, of the Calgary Unitarians. We worked as an audit committee, reviewed existing policies, accounting and bookkeeping processes, and monthly reports prior to board review. As a new treasurer, I have been very grateful for the assistance of the committee.
2. Internally Restricted Funds Review:
 - a. A full review of all internally restricted funds (Refugee Fund, Sharing Our Faith, etc.) was completed for the 2019 fiscal year. The revisions led to a major reclassification of all restricted funds. The General Endowment Fund has been reclassified as an internally restricted fund. The majority of the internally restricted funds are now considered externally restricted. For example, the Theological Education Fund receives donations from donors so the use of the fund is externally restricted. See the audit for a full list.
3. Congregational Investment Funds – there are three congregations which currently invest their endowment funds with the CUC Investment Fund. A review of the income calculations & statements has been done, with changes being implemented in 2019. A review of the standard agreements will be done in 2020.



4. Investment Policies – the Finance & Investment Committee met with Alan Harman of ScotiaMcLeod, the Investment (Wealth) Advisor. We reviewed the general terms of the management agreement, the types of investments, and the process for approval of large transactions. The CUC Board Policy Manual includes an investment policy that outlines investment objectives, restrictions on investments, anticipated returns, and types of investments.

CUC Board of Trustees 2019 – 2020

President	Margaret Wanlin, Thunder Bay Western Region
Vice President	Chuck Shields, Ottawa Eastern Region
Treasurer	Joanne Green, Regina Western Region
Secretary:	Kiersten Moore, Vancouver British Columbia Region
	Michael Scales, New Westminster British Columbia Region
	Rev. Rodrigo Solano Quesnel, Olinda Central Region
	Glenna Hanley, Fredericton Eastern Region
	Tanya Cothran, Toronto Central Region
Minister Observer	Rev. Debra Thorne, New Westminster
Youth Observer, Senior	Liv Gardiner, Winnipeg
Youth Observer, Junior	Fiona Butler, Saskatoon



Figure 1 Margaret Wanlin, Kierstin Moore, Rod Solano Quesnel



Investment Report | Alan Harman, Wealth Advisor

Market Summary

Equity markets were strong in the fourth quarter leaving us with a year of exceptional performance. The Canadian stock market (S&P/TSX Composite total return) was up 3.17% for the quarter, 22.88% for the year. The U.S. market (S&P 500 total return) was up 6.38% for the quarter, 22.77% for the year and International markets (MCSI total return) were up 5.67% for the quarter, 12.82% for the year.



The bond market finally sagged this quarter, -.85%, as markets adjusted to the latest viewpoint that the economy is still fairly robust, recession may not be “around the corner” and so perhaps rates are not going to zero any time soon.

There were several significant geopolitical events in the fourth quarter that supported equity markets. Likely the most important was an agreement in principle between the U.S. and China towards a trade deal. We still have little detail and these talks have been scuttled before but the trajectory remains positive. Also of note, in the U.K. an election was held, a clear winner declared and thus a road to Brexit determined (and uncertainty removed).

Economic news was mixed but ultimately conducive to equity markets. In Canada, inflation, as measured by the consumer price index, was steady at 2.2%. Housing starts were stable and capacity utilization was relatively strong so the Bank of Canada kept it's policy rate at 1.75%.

Equity market fundamentals look reasonably solid as we enter into 2020. Interest rates remain at historically low levels and with elections coming up in the U.S. we expect the Federal Reserve to stay on the sidelines (so as not seen to be supporting one party or the other) keeping rates at current levels. Global economic growth should remain stable at around 3% down slightly from 2019 which was down slightly from 2018. Some of the geopolitical risks of 2019 are showing signs of receding and we expect some sort of China trade deal soon. Election years are usually calm but with Trump as President geopolitical risk can come at any time.

In 2005, the CUC Board of Trustees instructed the financial manager of the funds of the CUC to make all reasonable efforts to avoid the holding of securities issued by corporations and agencies involved in nuclear power, military weapons, tobacco, gambling and all corporations that persist in human rights violations or persist in non-sustainable environmental practices.

The Sustainability screen is used as the measure for ethical and socially responsible investing.

By 2012, the CUC had also divested of all carbon stocks.



Executive Director Report | Vyda Ng

CUC staff work is guided by the four Strategic Priorities approved by the CUC Board and delegates:

- Ensure sustainable revenue generation to continue the work of building vital Unitarian communities;
- Optimize communications capabilities so that they are flexible, robust, and effective, with a continuing focus on the CUC website to make it a useful and appealing communications tool for both members and visitors;
- Advance social justice initiatives, including truth, healing, and reconciliation amongst Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples;
- Encourage innovation and sustainability in the growth and development of UU communities, including on youth and young adults, as they strive to foster a just and sustainable world and to enrich the spiritual lives of their members.



Revenue generation: “Sustainable revenue generation” was intentionally included as a strategic priority by the CUC Board because generating income takes concerted effort, and determines how much or how little can be done by the CUC staff team. Generating enough revenue for the complex work of supporting congregation and communities is increasingly challenging. Board and staff continue to work on creative ways of generating income, and are exceedingly grateful to congregations for their commitment in remitting their Annual Program Contributions.

Friends of the CUC are dedicated UUs who believe in and support the work of the CUC. Every year, they contribute directly to the CUC, which enables the work of growing vital Unitarian communities to continue. We are very grateful to the Friends of the CUC!

Funding and Grants

The CUC administers a number of grants and subsidies that support growth and development of UU congregations, communities and individuals, both in Canada and beyond our borders.

- Sharing Our Faith: these funds support congregational growth initiatives, and come from congregations which hold a Sharing Our Faith Sunday service each year. The First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto sends an amount from its Foundation Fund.
- Theological Education Fund: this fund supports students in the ministerial process, and monies are collected from ordinations and installations.



- Northern Lights: a program where individuals sign up to be Northern Lights supporters, the funds donated support innovative projects that further Unitarian Universalism.
- The Dawning Future Youth & Young Adult Subsidies: support youth and young adults in attending leadership development opportunities, and is part of CUC's work of nurturing young people into leadership.
- EB Ratcliffe Leadership Development Fund: Originally started by a grant from Elinor Ratcliffe in honour of her husband, Edward, this fund provides opportunities to adults for leadership development through attending workshops, training, regional and national events.
- Every Child is Our Child Program, Ghana: See International Connections section.
- International Council of Unitarians and Universalists Leadership Fund: See International Connections section.

Communications

With the CUC's website up and running for over a year, focus has shifted to maintaining and improving content, and to optimizing the other communications capabilities. One of these efforts is focused on increasing online technologies to connect, inform and strengthen the relationships with and among congregations. To this end, CUC staff uses the eNews, google groups, and social media. Staff has shifted to increasing use of the Zoom meeting platform to deliver webinars and convene roundtable discussions, enabling us to reach more UUs across the country virtually.

A combination of using Zoom and Google sheets has meant that the CUC's AGMs have been fully available for online voting and participation since 2017. Each AGM holds new challenges and learnings, as each year's event is in a different location. The AGM tech team has learned from previous mistakes and continue to successfully provide online capability for AGMs, no matter where they are held.

Social Justice

The focus in 2019 has been on the Truth, Healing and Reconciliation initiative, and on refugee sponsorship work with congregations. In addition, *The Ripple Effect* campaign

Lay Chaplain Program

The CUC's Lay Chaplain Program was conceived in 1971 when the CUC was in its infancy, for those congregations which didn't have a settled minister. Through the years, the Lay Chaplaincy Program has grown and evolved. Lay chaplains are trained and supported by the CUC to perform rites of passage such as weddings, memorials



and child dedications. Today, the CUC's national Lay Chaplain Committee plans programs and training, approves lay chaplains appointed by their congregations, assists the Executive Director on matters pertaining to lay chaplaincy, and ensures that training material is current. Lay chaplain training is financially supported by fees remitted by lay chaplains for each rite of passage performed.

In 2019, an issue with the Marriage Office of Ontario was resolved with regard to issuing marriage licenses. The committee and CUC Board are grateful to Margaret Kohr for her work in settling this matter.

The LC Committee has continued to organize training (Designing and Leading Rites of Passage, hosted by the Neighbourhood UU Congregation) and developing online components. The LC manual has been updated, and the website content has been improved for clarity and consistency.

The committee and CUC Board thank Ann Steadman for her years of service as Chair of the committee, where she led competently and effectively, and appreciate Ellen Newman stepping into this role.

Congregational Engagement, Sustainability and Vitality

Congregations are the hub of UU networks and faith communities, and make up the national Canadian UU family. Much of staff work centres on the processes and relationships that keep congregations vital and strong. In 2019, staff engaged with every congregation in areas like:

- Ministerial and church staff transitions
- Youth and young adult programming
- Faith formation and religious exploration
- Conflict management and resolution
- Financial stewardship
- Governance and policy matters
- Refugee sponsorship
- Leadership, worship and volunteer engagement

The CUC acts as a beacon for Unitarian communities across Canada, providing them with leadership, support and advice as they strive to foster a just and sustainable world and to enrich the spiritual lives of their **members**



International Connections:

The CUC has formal agreements with the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists (ICUU) and the UU-United Nations Office (UU-UNO) in New York, which is a program of the UUA's International Office. In compliance with Canada Revenue Agency requirements where Canadian charities can only send money outside of Canada in very specific ways to organizations which are not recognized as Canadian charities, these agreements specify how the CUC's charitable purposes can be furthered through these two organizations.



UU-United Nations Office: With the UU-UNO, the CUC supports the “Every Child is Our Child” (ECOC) program in Ghana. This program provides school supplies and National Health Insurance Scheme (NHIS) health care cards to children made vulnerable by HIV/AIDS.

International Council of Unitarians and Universalists: The agreement with the ICUU provides leadership development support for UUs from ICUU emerging groups around the world. Funds collected by congregations go towards leadership development opportunities for UU leaders from areas like Rwanda, Kenya, and Asia.



Unitarian Universalist Association:

CUC staff have formal and informal relationships with the UUA. Ministerial transitions, religious educator and faith formation resources, staff compensation information, and youth and young adult connections are areas where CUC staff intersect with UUA staff. The Executive Director maintains friendly relations with the President's and International Offices, and values the richness of the connections.



Figure 2 Canadian UUs at General Assembly 2019



Staff Team

The CUC staff team is constantly evolving and growing. At the end of 2019, the staff team consists of four full-time and five part-time staff:

- Lead for Central and Eastern Regions: Rev. Linda Thomson
- Lead for BC and Western Regions: Joan Carolyn
- Youth & Young Adult:
 - Asha Philar – YaYA Ministry Specialist
 - Casey Stainsby – YaYA Events & Programs Coordinator
- Web Manager: Margo Ellis
- Social Justice Lead: Erin Horvath
- Organizational Administrator: Ahna DiFelice
- Administrative Assistant: Caitlyn Seale
- Executive Director: Vyda Ng



In addition, the following were contracted in 2019 for specific tasks/initiatives; each position has a job description and terms:

- Amber Bellemare: Truth, Healing & Reconciliation Program Coordinator
- Kenzie Love: Writer & eNews
- Samia Tecle: Refugee Support
- Jo-Anne Elder Gomes: Conference Convenor
- Wingrove Carmichael: Accountant

Job descriptions, staff evaluations, interviews, hiring, exits, and all other human resource matters are managed by the Executive Director.

Contact Vyda at executivedirector@cuc.ca.



Congregational Life Leads Report | Rev. Linda Thomson & Joan Carolyn

Rev. Linda Thomson: Lead for Central and Eastern Regions

Joan Carolyn: Lead for Western and British Columbia Regions



The Congregational Life Leads portfolio engage with congregations on the spectrum of matters that relate to congregational sustainability, health, growth, vitality, and ministerial and lay leader transitions.

1. Stories of Strength: We share two stories celebrating networking strengths which span years, programs, professionals and congregations.

- a) In 2019 the Guelph congregation connected with CUC staff for support as they considered the next steps in their ongoing congregational discernment. Having already worked with us in their development of their Stewardship program, their capacity to celebrate theological diversity, and their ability to focus on membership growth, they wondered about the possibility of moving into a relationship with a minister.

Following conversations about the financial obligations of ministry and a consideration of congregational priorities, they determined they wanted to seek a ¼ time contract minister. We supported them in the development of a draft contract and in sharing the news of their search. Their shared ministry with Rev. Peter Boullata was announced in late 2019. The congregation has done good and careful work, asking themselves how they work from their strengths, even as they considered some of their shortcomings.



- b. Our second story begins in a BC Ministers gathering to which CUC staff were invited. In that context of sharing concerns and brainstorming, one minister raised a concern that was facing her congregation in 2018 - Hope in Hard Times. This concern resonated with several other ministers present and the idea arose to create an on-line opportunity for UUs across Canada to gather in strength and support as they were invited to share their concerns.

CUC Congregational Life Team Leads then worked together, inviting ideas and presence from Canadian UU ministers as they sought to create several gatherings in early 2019. This effort coincided with work being done by Youth



and Young Adult staff to develop on-line gatherings- Gathered Here. These CUC staff met with each other to share ideas and understand whom these two gatherings would serve and how they might at times overlap.

These gatherings- “Hope in Hard Times”- were well attended and participants expressed appreciation of the opportunity to gather, especially with others of like mind from across the country. What began as two gatherings addressing specific “Hard Times” then morphed into something new, responding to ministers’ initial ideas, participants’ comments and new concerns. CUC had provided three similar gatherings on ad hoc basis in the past two years and response has been good- a response to American election last year; a response to Mosque shootings. In addition to this, at least one minister shared that members moving out of an expensive city now had no in-person link to Canadian UUs. The Hope in Hard Times participants expressed a desire to continue meeting, creating a space to connect and desiring input for growth.

So later in 2019, Congregational Life Team Leads invited ministers once again to brainstorm what an ongoing on-line gathering might look like. Out of this Connect & Deepen was developed using a meeting model based on Small Group Ministry. Congregational Life Team staff also reached out to the Church of the Larger Fellowship to share information about this new on-line gathering, to ensure that this wasn’t overlapping too much with their work and seek wisdom from their experience. The CLF team were happy to support the development of a Canadian option for people to gather on-line.

Connect & Deepen began November 10/19 and ran on a monthly basis for a 6 month trial period. Groups were small but staff responded positively to the heartfelt appreciation expressed by those participating. CUC staff are now seeking new ways to get the word out about these on-line gatherings which will reach non- UUs who may be seeking a place to connect.

A decision has been made to extend these monthly gatherings to the end of 2020. In addition to this, the CUC staff team has decided to move to bi-monthly meetings, at least till the end of May, in direct response to the COVID 19 and limited in-person meetings.

So many connections, ideas and concerns shared, creative development for on-line gathering, openness to review and grow into an unknown future. Thank you to all who have been involved.

- 2) It’s been a busy year!** The following list is just a glimpse into some of the wide ranging types of contacts with which we as Congregational Life Team Leads have been privileged to engage.



- a) Use of CUC-trained facilitators to extend CUC support two BC Region Future Directions Workshops lead by CUC facilitators
- b) More Congregational Interactions:
 - i) Workshops and Retreats:
 - Workshop: Worship as a Beacon- Mar. 30. Country wide.
 - Workshop: En-Vision Workshop- Western Region congregation
 - Workshop: Congregational Discernment - Eastern Region congregation
 - Workshop: Options for our Future- Central Region congregation
 - Workshop: Planning- Central Region congregation
 - ii) Gatherings:
 - BC Spring Gathering- Planned hosts, BC Interior representatives. Plans cancelled due to unforeseen challenges to members of the Planning team.
 - Western Regional Fall Gathering- UCE & Westwood, Oct. 18- 20/20
 - Theme: Toward a Thriving Future
 - 107 Youth, Children & Adults
 - Eastern Regional Gathering - Ottawa, October 19, 2019
 - Theme: Surviving and Thriving in Turbulent Times
 - 70 participants
 - Religious Professional Supports
 - Exit/Transition Interviews & Process
 - One Western Region and four BC Region [3 ministers/congregation, 2 DRE/congregation]
 - Central Region DRE exit interview
 - Start Up workshop- Two in BC Region
 - Immigration Letter of Entry to Canada
 - Consultation regarding Local Board specific agendas-
 - Conflict Management strategies and support
 - Revisioning organizational structure
 - HR reviews - planning, improvements, concerns
 - Future planning
 - Stewardship
 - Sustainable Volunteer Planning
 - Covenant of Right Relation development & implementation
 - Building and properties -
 - Sabbatical Reflection
- c. Worship Speaking Opportunities & follow-up connections
 - West: Four in BC and three in Western Region Congregations
 - East: One Eastern and seven Central region congregations (9 occasions)
- d. Ritual Events: Participation and Attendance
 - Installations- Rev. Rodrigo Solano-Quesnel [Olinda]



- Ordination- Rev. Danielle Webber & Rev. Patricia Trudeau
- Anniversary: Unitarian Church of Vancouver



e. Webinars & Roundtables

- Special Note of Gratitude to all those resource people who gifted us their wisdom and expertise regarding various subject matters!
- Topics chosen based on congregational requests, expressed needs by leaders and religious professionals. Five webinars planned, three with adequate registrations to proceed.
 - Legal Considerations for Boards [Jan./19]
 - Worship as a Beacon [Mar./19] with Rev. Barbara Wells ten Hove
 - Governance [Nov./19]

f. Celebrating our Canadian UU Strengths- Shining Lights Program announces

the second award recipient in May 2020! Five great programs were nominated and we invite you to read their stories in the CUC eNews.



g. Fostering congregational networking regarding best practices

- Membership Resources
- Worship, including Alternative worship
- Annual Stewardship & Endowment
- Governance
- Covenant Development and Implementation
- Conflict Resolution
- Addressing Change- Moves, Organizational Shifts, staff compliments, etc.
- Contract Ministry
- Staffing practices



h. Lay Chaplaincy

- Designing and Leading Rites of Passage - April 2019
- Ongoing work National Lay Chaplaincy committee, providing support to congregations for LC processes

3. **Areas of Development.** We begin with some stories recognizing areas of concern which need development, on the ground and with resources.

a. Emerging and very small group challenges- working with Canadian UU resource people and materials as well as the UUA in order to creatively link small, larger and new groups in ways which simplify organizational demands and build on the concept of “We are Stronger Together”



- We have a number of smaller groups across Canada and in 2019, four of them have invested time and energy exploring options for remaining vital going into the future.
 - Challenges facing all four locations, even with a building, more mid-sized Canadian group, and a full- time minister.
 - Working to build on good things happenings
 - Acknowledging recent growth
 - CUC sharing Cowichan All Souls monies [group closed over 10 years ago] to assist with development and delivery of RE programming
 - CUC Facilitators and staff invited to guide conversations as one fellowship decides future direction and ways to link up for support
 - Several attempts were made to provide expert resources in small site vitality and connections among all congregations via workshops with Rev. Joan Van Becelaere. Session will be offered online on May 23rd 2020 from 2-6 p.m. (Atlantic). Visit [cuc/events](#) for information.
- Elora-Fergus
 - After several years of decline and recent inactivity the Elora Fergus congregation has decided to close. However, the somewhat connected emerging group in Stratford is exploring ways to formalize their group, using some of the foundations by the Elora-Fergus group

b. Some noteworthy challenges addressed by congregations:



- Protocols to explore and share decisions regarding moves and changes in organizational structure
- Stewardship - This is an ongoing issue. Trends indicate that many younger members do not have the secure employment that many in earlier generations did. This reality, coupled with high housing costs, has impacted some larger congregations' capacity to generate annual incomes at levels they previously enjoyed.
- Volunteer Sustainability- Our Canadian UU congregations, whether large or small, are heavily volunteer driven. There continues to be ongoing work being done and support sought [resources, speakers, best practices...] regarding the recruitment, engagement, support, training, supervision and celebration of volunteers.
- Staffing Practices - finding ways to sustainably build staff teams is an ongoing challenge for congregations. While related to stewardship this is also an issue of building solid staffing practices to ensure roles are rewarding, well supported and attractive for qualified individuals.

4. Professional Networking

- Together with related organizations, CUC staff continues to address challenges as we seek cooperation to build best practices. Some of the groups with which we are working include but are not limited to:
 - Unitarian Universalist Association Transitions Office regarding changes to the Exit and Transition Interviews and process
 - UU Ministers of Canada
 - BC Ministers in-person sub-group meeting [Nov./19]
 - Consultations with:
 - Five Western Region ministers
 - Four BC Region ministers
 - Four Eastern Region ministers
 - 3 Central Region ministers
 - CUC Update messages, 2x/yr. To ministers and congregational leads
 - Canadian UU Religious Educators [CUURE]
 - Four meetings with CUURE Exec. to plan CUC staff links and support of CUURE members
 - Plan to assist with training for CUURE members in 2020
 - Attendance at two CUURE on-line meetings
- a. Sharing resources researched and developed by CUC staff [Cdn. Organizations & Specialists] as well as UUA materials and other organizations
- Volunteer Support Strategies
 - Growth Resources and Contacts within UUA & CUC member congregations
 - Stewardship [note: sharing of Building Blocks for Financial Stability]
 - Ministerial and Internship contracts



- Consultation and resource identification for new children's religious educator
- Linked new musicians to resources and AUUMM (Association for UU Music Ministries)

Contact Linda and Joan at congregationallife@cuc.ca



Youth and Young Adult Ministry Report | Asha Philar and Casey Stainsby

In 2019, CUC Youth and Young Adult Ministry saw new projects come to fruition and favourite traditions bloom. Throughout the year, about 215 participants from 37 congregations attended in-person and online youth and young adult events organized by the CUC, including youth cons, trainings, webinars and retreats. These events are important venues for faith formation, community building and leadership development for youth and advisors, young adults and adult allies. Through events, young people develop a deeper understanding of Unitarian Universalist identity and their place in this faith.

Key Definitions:

Youth: 14-19 year olds - usually participating in congregational youth groups and/or regional and national youth cons (weekend long events).

Young adults: 18-35 year olds - some based in a congregation and others only connected through regional and national events, online gatherings and social media.

Youth advisors: Adults 25 and over who support youth ministry in congregations, help plan and lead programs, and accompany youth to youth cons.



Highlights of the Year:

Staff transitions

Asha Philar transitioned out of her position with the CUC throughout 2019, in order to move on to new opportunities. We are sad for our loss of Asha's vision, skill, and great dedication to excellence in youth and young adult ministry, and are excited to see what will unfold for her in the next stages of her career. Asha will particularly be remembered for revitalizing the young adult community and supporting congregational young adult ministry in Canada - where we are now would not have been possible without her years of hard work.

CUC staff are reimagining the potential of the second YaYA Ministry staff role, and will hire for this new position when circumstances allow.

Continuing to grow and strengthen supports for young adults:

Gathered Here, a monthly online drop-in for young adults, hit its stride in 2019. Twenty-nine young adults from across Canada and beyond attended one or more of these gatherings in 2019 to find spiritual grounding, connection with their community, and to be witnessed and held in the ups and downs of their lives.

The CUC's Young Adult Pastoral Care Team was also launched at the beginning of this year. It now provides flexible, accessible pastoral care and listening to young adults across Canada. The team of three ministers also supports Gathered Here by co-facilitating monthly gatherings with



CUC staff. This helps young adults get to know the Pastoral Care Team, and supports the spiritual depth of our gatherings.

Staying connected:

A big part of the CUC's role in supporting national youth and young adult communities is keeping alive our young people's sense of connection to their faith. Casey does this by maintaining an active presence on social media that is both informative and approachable. By nurturing these relationships informally and ongoingly, youth and young adults are reminded of the CUC's value to their lives and are more likely to engage with the opportunities that are offered to them and to reach out when they need support.



Youth events:

CanUUdle, our annual national youth conference, was hosted and supported by the Calgary Unitarians. CanUUdle welcomed 65 youth and adults from 18 congregations. The leadership team of youth and adults planned and coordinated a great program, including workshops, small groups, outdoor activities and worship. The amazing food served by the local Calgary team was definitely a highlight!

We piloted a new age range for CanUUdle in 2019, gathered feedback from stakeholders, and confirmed that going forward, CanUUdle will be for youth ages 14-19 (previously the range was 14-20).

In October, 29 youth and adults gathered in Edmonton for the Western Regional Gathering and Youth Con. As usual, the gathering balanced youth-only time with engaging multigenerational activities, including the "Broast" of retiring minister Brian Kiely and a rousing talent show!

Young adult events:

Thirty Canadian young adults came together at a beautiful camp outside of Calgary for Chorus - the annual national young adult gathering. Due to generous support from the Dawning Future Subsidy Fund, a number of young adults attended who had not been to a UU event since they were youth! During the weekend, young adults explored the theme of Roots and Wings through workshops and worships, relaxed in the stunning landscape of the foothills of the Rocky Mountains, and joined the youth of CanUUdle for the important bridging ceremony and dinner.

In September, 27 young adults from Ontario and Quebec shared a beautiful weekend at the Unicamp Young Adult Retreat. This annual event is an important venue for community building, UU identity development, rest and relaxation. With ongoing support from CUC staff, this retreat has become a significant event of the church year for many young adults. This year, CUC staff and Unicamp collaborated on a mutually beneficial rental agreement and are looking forward to a strong continuing partnership.



Congregational support and consultations:

Asha continued and increased her congregational consulting work - through online meetings with ministers, religious educators and leaders - to support congregations in their youth, young adult and multigenerational ministry. In April 2019, Asha led a webinar about creating intergenerational connections, drawing on materials and insights from the 2017 Young Adult Welcome and Inclusion Project.



It was a pleasure to work with many congregations throughout the year and support the development of local youth and young adult ministry.

Financial support and accessibility:

Financial accessibility remains a high priority for all of our events and programs. In 2019, we continue to offer sliding scale registration fees, or a discounted young adult price at every event. Youth and young adults continue to tell us that financial accessibility enables them to attend events, and shows them that their participation matters. In 2019, we granted a record number of registration and travel subsidies through the Dawning Future Subsidy Fund to help youth, young adults and advisors attend events. By the end of 2019, the fund had granted \$28,240, using money received from event profits, donations and the Youth and Young Adult Program Budget.

Supporting National Youth Leadership

2019 saw the creation of a second Youth Observer on the Board (YOB) position. YaYA Ministry staff supported elections for the new “Junior YOB” in the spring. With two YOBs working together with overlapping terms, these youth leaders are now better equipped to represent their communities at the national governance level.

Our Whole Lives (OWL)

The year began with a facilitator training for the Grade 7-9 and 10-12 Our Whole Lives (OWL) curricula. This training was led by the Revs. Samaya Oakley and Christopher Wulff, and hosted in partnership with the Vancouver Unitarians. Seventeen new OWL facilitators from all over BC, Alberta and Washington State were trained up to deliver these life-saving curricula to youth within and beyond our communities.



Over the past few years, Asha has created a set of resources to help congregations host their own OWL facilitator trainings, and developed a more sustainable way for the CUC to partner with congregations to meet their training needs.



Onward and Upward

Building off the successes and lessons of 2019, we continue to find new ways to support youth, young adults and their allies - within and beyond congregations. More than ever, we are all called to create the vibrant, inclusive, multigenerational Unitarian Universalist communities we dream of. Your CUC staff are honoured to walk with you every step of the way!



Contact Casey at youth@cuc.ca.

Social Justice Report | Erin Horvath | Social Justice Lead



1. National Social Justice Team

a. Structure

The two overarching goals of the National Social Justice portfolio continue to be:

1. Provide a balance of internal and external SJ initiatives
- 2) Connect and share what is happening in both UU and outside communities

b. Members

During 2018 there were two members on the National Social Justice Team: Colin Read and Danielle Webber. In 2019, both of these members stepped back because of personal and/or professional responsibilities. Colin had been working with Erin to rebuild the group before he stepped back mid fall. He and Erin invited several people to become involved and found that people were already feeling over committed in the things they were engaged in at the congregational level. Two young adults have since expressed an interest as well as one adult. In early 2020 Erin will be following up to bring these people together and will continue to look for 1 or 2 others. Our focus will be on communication around the CUC's strategic priorities (Racial Justice, Refugee, Climate, Indigenous rights) however we will continue to leave space for members to share other relevant issues they are particularly passionate about, such as:

- Economic Justice
- Medical Assistance in Dying
- Climate
- Housing
- Criminal Justice
- Water
- Politics
- Peace/War
- Gender equity



Selection Criteria:

1. Must have a specific area (s) that they follow closely
2. Must be willing to share those resources, campaigns, and news articles on Love and Justice FB page (approximately 1 post per month)
3. Must be willing to alert the rest of the team when there is an issue of national significance that the CUC should be making a statement about and share facts in such a way that a short statement can be crafted
4. Helpful, but not necessary, to have writing skills to fine tune articles.

2. Water Focus

In mid Feb 2019 we officially launched *The Ripple Effect* which aims to connect members to the many issues that are connected to water as well as campaigns and activism that are taking place across the country. The fact that water is interconnected with so many other social justice issues has made it a broad platform upon which to explore a range of interrelated issues (i.e. bottled water, climate change, reconciliation with First Nation communities, pollution of water by industry, fluoride in tap water, dams and flooding, plastic in oceans, fracking, privatization of water) and encouraged congregations to explore issues that are most relevant to their region. While the CUC has chosen to focus less on WATER as a strategic priority we continue to speak about water protection as an essential component of climate action. As companies move away from selling oil for profit, they are moving towards selling water for profit. Water is becoming the next natural resource that multinational companies are using to control people and governments. Unlike oil, however, people can not live without water. At the very least we are encouraging Unitarians to ensure that their local water sources are protected by becoming a part of the Blue Communities initiative. (<https://canadians.org/bluecommunities>).



The following UU congregations have shared that they are engaged in a water focused project of importance to them.

Congregation	Area(s) of Focus
Grand River , Kitchener	How water justice intersects with climate justice
UU of Ottawa	Joined with Ottawa Water Study/Action Group to promote water bottle ban in city buildings; banning single use plastics and bottled water in their own building.



Durham Region	Have not specified
Vancouver Unitarians	Children's summer camp (2019) with water focus
Regina	Integrating water justice into services
Huronia Fellowship	Speakers, activist and integrating into services
Guelph	Nestle protest with local community and Indigenous Nations

In addition other congregations have indicated that they are integrating the resources provided into their water focused services.

3. Federal Election 2019

Erin worked with Kairos, providing leadership to create two documents to assist people prepare for the Federal Election.

[All You Need To Prepare For The 2019 Federal Election Guide to Hosting an All-Candidates Meetings](#)

Truth, Healing and Reconciliation

Erin works closely with Amber Bellemare on the CUC's Truth, Healing and Reconciliation initiative. See Amber's report for details.

During 2019 Erin developed a message titled, "The Inconvenience of Reconciliation" which she shared with UU congregations in Guelph and Kingston. She received much positive feedback from this and will be looking to share it more widely. Erin also developed and piloted (at Ottawa First) a workshop titled, "Building Bridges for Reconciliation: By Dismantling Worldview, Privilege and Fragility". She is working to share this message with the wider UU community via technology.

Contact Erin at socialjustice@cuc.ca.



Truth, Healing & Reconciliation | Amber Bellemare | THR Program Coordinator

The CUC's Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Initiative (THR Initiative) is now in its sixth year and continues to be a top priority for the CUC. We offer Canadian Unitarians and Universalists age-appropriate materials and means to learn the history and present realities of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people in Canada so that we may develop relationships based on dignity, respect and justice. I have stepped into the role of programming coordinator with much gratitude for this incredibly rewarding work.



Unitarian Universalist Funding Panel Grant 2018-19:

The CUC received a grant from the UU Funding Panel. We received an extension so we could finish the projected goals of the initial application: between June 27 and September 15 we continued the writing process of the Youth and Lower Elementary guides and updated the online Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Reflection Guides.

After that, the second (and final) round of UUFP funding was applied for. There was a substantial gap (5 months) in the time between applying (September 15), approval, and receiving funds (January 27) so the report reflects what can be done with more financial support.

Before receiving the second (and final) UUFP grant, the THR Initiative:

- Continued administrative support for 9 congregations undertaking the THRRGs at various levels
- including pilots of 2 age groups:
 - Youth (written by Samaya)
 - and Lower Elementary (written by Casey and Meg).
- Maintained basic communication and tech support, plus access to the peer led facilitator coaches
- Trained 17 facilitators. There was little to no energy from the facilitator group to help coach new facilitators. I see this as a reflection of volunteer burnout and another reason we need to focus on sustainable revenue

UUFP Grant 2019-20:

However, after receiving the UUFP grant, (\$15,000 USD= approximately \$19,700CAD) the THR Initiative is focused on creating a seamless and robust program to help expand the reach of the Reflection Guides to the UUA and other organizations.

- THR page on the CUC website has been reorganized and rewritten



- Season 3 of the online **Reconciliation through Film Series** (with partner National Film Board of Canada) features 2 films this year:
 - a. April 11 We Will Stand Up 56 registrants converted to 19 online participants,
 - b. June 16 and Freedom Road June 6 (58 registrants so far)
- Erin's Guelph talk "Building Bridges" Please see her report
- Posted the reaffirmed statement of solidarity with Hereditary Chiefs after news of RCMP involvement at Wet'suwet'en which incited a rich conversation in the leaders email exchange and inspired an example of how the Community of Praxis (see below) can be of use.
- The THR 202 - **Community of Praxis** PILOT - was developed and is now in session
 - a. For participants who have finished the first round of THRRGs
 - b. The programme uses real life experiences of participants to understand and challenge deeply embedded worldviews
- We will be hosting an online Event: **Pipelines, Democracy & Aboriginal Title: Seeking Solidarity in a Divided World** with Guest Speaker Niigaan Sinclair (May 24).

Expansion:

The feedback we receive often is that our programming is thorough and effectively connects with the hearts of many settlers while also being endorsed by our Indigenous consultants. We know that there is a lot of work to be done if we wish to expand our reach. Here's where we are at so far:

- The UUA invited the THR Initiative to lead an online Learning Opportunity on February 26. There was a lot of engagement in the zoom call considering the limited exposure most participants had with the topic. Rev Alicia Forde reported back there was much interest in our work and approach. Amber, Erin and Vyda were co-facilitators.
- The UUA GA was meant to be a similar experience and we are now prepared to do an online version of the presentation
- Both of these presentations as well as the online event with Niigaan Sinclair are part of expanding our reach to a wider audience and market.

Copyright:

For the time being, Erin Horvath and myself have developed a workflow that allows original THR Task Force members and writers to make sure that contributors offer explicit consent for the CUC to use and distribute their content with the knowledge that we will be receiving remuneration in exchange for access to the curated content and facilitation of our programming. It was agreed that the programme be available at a cost that ensures programme sustainability, including fair compensation to staff, contributors, and consultants. Once we have successfully accomplished this task, we can confidently move forward with programme expansion.



Truth, Healing
& Reconciliation

REFLECTION GUIDE



Financial Sustainability

Thank you to Leslie Kemp, Meg Roberts, and Vyda Ng, the UUFP grant was approved for 2 years in a row! However, what happens after that this funding is no longer available? This is an important conversation to have - we cannot depend on grant money to maintain the level of quality programming we provide. What we did this year was dedicate our financial support to meet the basic needs of congregations as they arise, (CUC funding only) however, with more money we provided quality nation-wide programming over the year that folk can depend on - such as the film guide and guest speaker series.

The following is a paragraph from last year's report but is still relevant:

For organizational and financial sustainability of the CUC's reconciliation work, we are exploring other funding and income generating strategies. To cover costs and ensure the continuity of this initiative, this program year we are using a sliding scale donation model to make the *THRRGs* as financially accessible as possible. If your congregation is thinking of participating in the programme, depending on the size of your group or congregation, the number of participants you are facilitating, we suggest a donation amount between \$300 - \$500 for each age group. If your community cannot meet any of these requests, we welcome you to participate in the capacity you can. (We also plan to make the *THRRGs* available to groups and organizations outside the CUC, entering into a Memorandum of Understanding with them as to fees and access to the resources.)

If you are thinking of beginning the *THRRG* programme in the fall, we strongly encourage you to contact reconciliation@cuc.ca in May. Preparing for the guides can take up to 6 months. The most important thing to consider is your relationship with Indigenous elders, knowledge keepers, and educators; together you can discern how best to offer THR programming for your specific context. Please contact us with any concerns, questions, or ideas: reconciliation@cuc.ca. Thank you for your ongoing support.

Refugee Support Report | Samia Tecle

In my refugee support role, I work with congregations to prepare sponsorship applications and provide support throughout the application and post-arrival process. I ensure that sponsors have the most current information available about sponsorships, programs and supports, and I also remain informed and updated on current refugee process, information and programs through the Sponsorship Agreement Holders Council (SAH), Refugee Assistance Training Program (RSTP), IRCC and other sources.



In 2019, seven congregations sponsored refugees. In addition, the CUC also works directly with Capital Rainbow Refuge on LGBTQ2+ sponsorships. There was a total of 37 applications submitted for 71 refugees. Of the 37 applications submitted, eight were submitted under the Blended Visa-Office Referred and Rainbow Refugee Assistance programs. In 2019, refugees from eighteen sponsorship applications arrived in Canada and resettled in Saskatoon, Vancouver, Victoria, Toronto, Guelph, Ottawa, Peterborough, and Halifax. These individuals come from Syria, Eritrea, Burundi, Rwanda, Egypt.



There remain some applications from 2018 and 2019 where refugees haven't yet arrived

Some congregations have participated in funding programs where the government or organizations provide full or partial funding for the first year of resettlement. There are a number of programs where the spaces given to a sponsorship group does not affect the quota that a sponsorship agreement holder (SAH) is allocated each year. These include the blended visa office referred (BVOR) program, and the rainbow refugee assistance program.

Contact Samia at refugee@cuc.ca



Communications Report | Margo Ellis | Communications Manager

The communications plan was updated in 2019. Its focus is to define long-term goals and objectives to increase awareness of Unitarian Universalism in Canada, to increase awareness about the CUC in Canada while engaging in support for the UU community, and to support the CUC in achieving its overall organizational objectives.



Communication channels:

CUC Website

In 2019, editing and additions to the website have continued as new content is developed. More content additions are planned through the coming year. The CUC video was launched in September 2018 on the homepage of the website and shared with many Canadian congregations. The video was viewed 6.7 K times on Vimeo when it initially went online in 2018 and has gained another 2.5 K views during 2019.

A major improvement to the website was the migration from Gravity Forms to WS Form with its user-friendly interface and powerful tools. All registration forms since June 2019, have been developed in WS Form. Another technical addition has been the linkage to the CUC's CRM software, Donor perfect, which allows for direct deposit of donations with automated data recording and tracking. Graphics use has been increased particularly for events, and continuity in registration forms has been accomplished.

Statistics: For six months in 2019, the website has had 11,333 users with 22,235 sessions and 47,155 page views. Monthly, the website has 2.2 - 3.2 K users; weekly, 700-900 users; and daily, ~60-145 users (peaking on days the eNews is published, driving traffic to the website users. Most of those users are from Canada and the US. 65% are desktop users, 25% are mobile and 9.9% are tablet users. The majority of visitors are Windows and Chrome users. In terms of age, 7.1% of users are in the 18-24 age range, 21.02% are 25-34, 17.32% are 35-44, 16.46% are 45-54, 16.96% are 55-64 and 21.14% are 65+. As identified by Google in a binary profile, 59.28% of users are female, 40.15% are male. The website acquires users through search, email, social media, referral and by direct bookmarked links.

Most users enter the website through the homepage. Top pages that were viewed in 2019 were [Find A Congregation](#), [CanUUdle](#), [Congregations & Leaders](#), [Contact Us](#), the [Events Calendar](#), the eNews pages (in particular the April 1 Scandalous edition), [Refugee Sponsorship](#), and the AGM page.



Publications

The format of the CUC eNews was changed in January 2019. The eNews resides on the CUC website with a page for each edition. Readers receive a Mailchimp email with a brief description of each article linking to the content on the eNews website page.

Statistics: Approximately 3000 people are on our mailing list. Statistics collected 24 hours post mailing for 2019, show that the CUC average campaign performance is 35.7% with an open rate of 7-11%.

Facebook and other social media

Regular posting was done 3-5 times a week and features national, international events, and CUC information and events. Readership is highest between 9 a.m. and 1 p.m. ET with equal readership on all days of the week. Facebook events are listed consistently with additional reminder posts. Readership and involvement have increased. A weekly congregational post has been very successful with a consistent readership.



Statistics: The number of followers for the CUC Facebook page has risen to 1,344 from 1,221 (January 1, 2019). Page views and clicks for posts range from 100 – 1000 views (varying with the topic). Engagement varies with post clicks averaging in the 20's and reactions averaging at 10.

Webinars and Roundtables

Webinars and roundtables continue to be an effective medium for reaching UUs across the country for training and discussion topics. In 2018, over a dozen were held, and more are planned for 2019. Two communications events were held with good attendance to support congregational needs:

- Practical Applications of Social Media with Margo Ellis
- Photography and Video 101. With Amber Dawn Bellemare

Note: Margo Ellis stepped down from the Communications Manager position in the fall of 2019, and continues to in the part-time position of Web Manager.



Dismantling Racism Study Group

At the Annual Meeting in 2019, delegates passed a resolution calling for a Dismantling Racism Study Group to identify efforts in our congregations and communities to dismantle racism and other oppressions; and then to explore possible action plans that will engage Canadian Unitarians and Universalists in serious conversation and action about racism.

Shortly after the AGM, a call went out for interested folks to apply to serve on the Study Group, which was to “reflect racial, regional and generational diversity.” Eleven applications were received for six positions.



Late in the summer, the Study Group was formed. Members are:

- Beverly Horton (Hamilton) – Co-Chair
- Rev. Julie Stoneberg (Peterborough) - Co-chair
- Douglas Ennenberg (Vancouver)
- Charmaine Ferworn (Mississauga)
- Ashlyn Noble (Winnipeg)
- Pamela Smith-Loeters (Mississauga)
- Catherine Strickland (North Shore)
- Tamiko Suzuki (Vancouver)

The initial meetings of the Study Group reviewed tasks, created a work plan, and began work on a survey to be distributed to all Canadian Unitarians and Universalists...a survey that assesses what anti-racism work has been done, is being done, and perhaps should be done in our congregations and communities. It also will attempt to collect stories of personal experiences of racism within the Canadian UU context.

The survey will be distributed early in 2020, and with those results, the Study Group will decide upon next steps.



Report of the CUC Task Force on Polyamory

Submitted to the CUC Annual Meeting, May 2020

Contents

1. Background
2. What Is Polyamory?
3. Polyamory and Social Attitudes
4. Polyamory and Unitarian Universalist Theology
5. True Welcome and Radical Inclusion
6. Polyamory and the Law
7. Recommendations to the CUC

“If I was in a loving supportive polyam relationship and my church didn’t approve, I’d leave that church. The fact that my church supports my relationship and my family grows my belief in Unitarian Universalism.”
—a polyamorous Canadian UU



1. Background

Many Canadian Unitarian Universalists are increasingly aware of polyamory as a way of conducting relationships, or are increasingly open about their own polyamorous relationships. In recent years, Canadian UU ministers and lay chaplains have sometimes been asked to officiate at polyamorous unions. Still, public understanding and acceptance of polyamory varies greatly, both among non-polyamorous Canadians in general and among non-polyamorous Canadian UUs.

As Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we aspire to be radically inclusive, and radical inclusion is more than mere acceptance. If we wish to create truly hospitable, diverse, multigenerational communities, we must not just tolerate but welcome, nurture, and support polyamorous people and their families as integral parts of our spiritual communities. However, polyamory remains a difficult concept for some to understand or accept. Canadian Unitarian Universalism will benefit from a faith-based statement on the topic, and from guidance that will lead to greater welcome and inclusion in our communities.

For these reasons, in 2018 the Board and Executive Director of the Canadian Unitarian Council struck a task force to examine polyamory in the context of Canadian Unitarian Universalism, and to develop position statements and resources that will help the CUC and Canadian congregations proceed on this matter.

The task force's mandate was to

- situate polyamory within a Unitarian Universalist faith context, intersecting the topic with our history, our seven Principles, our six Sources, and our five Aspirations;
- consult with those who have knowledge and experience on the matter in order to research current legislation, practices, and attitudes towards polyamory in Canada;
- support officiants in Canada with resources for education and for rituals;
- support congregations in Canada with resources for education in order to become more welcoming; and
- make recommendations to the Executive Director on how to proceed.

The task force's members are

- Rev. Meghann Robern—Winnipeg
- Rev. Rebecca C. “Beckett” Coppola—Kingston
- Shoshanna Green—Montreal
- Margaret Kohr—Toronto

Polyamorous people are part of our congregations, not just as members and friends but also as our clergy and staff. The report of this task force will cover the importance of welcoming and including polyamorous people in every aspect of congregational life. This includes



- celebrating and supporting love and loving relationships based in mutual covenant;
- celebrating and supporting all children and all people rearing children, whatever their family structure;
- supporting people through grief; and
- genuinely welcoming people into our congregations, with all their truths and their loves.

We, the members of the task force, believe that it is important for us to make clear that none of us identifies as polyamorous or is part of a polyamorous community. We have strived to work as allies, recognizing that not all polyamorous people feel safe in speaking openly about their lives and experiences. Aware of our responsibility to ensure that their voices are heard, in our work we spoke with individual polyamorous UUs known to us and have included many of their thoughts and stories throughout this report, sometimes as direct quotations and sometimes summarized in our own words. We also drew on work already done over decades by the UU polyamorous community. Once a preliminary draft of our report was completed, we shared it with polyamorous UUs and revised in light of their feedback.

We are grateful to all those individuals who helped us in the work, and also to Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness (UUPA; <http://uupa.org>), which shared its invaluable materials with us and allowed us to use them freely in preparing this report. UUPA, a related organization of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA), has as its mission to serve the UUA and the community of polyamorous people within and outside the UUA by providing support, promoting education, and encouraging spiritual wholeness regarding polyamory.

2. What Is Polyamory?

What is polyamory? The word combines Latin and Greek roots meaning “many loves.” Polyamory is the philosophy and practice of loving more than one person at a time, romantically and/or sexually, and doing so with honesty and integrity.

The word *polyamory* will bring different images to mind for different people. For some, it may suggest casual sex, promiscuity, or “cheating” on a spouse. Some others may associate it with polygamy, in which one man marries and has authority over several women. But none of these is what people who identify as polyamorous mean by it, or what the Polyamory Task Force means by it in this report.

Polyamory is a general term. There are many ways of being polyamorous, and many forms of polyamorous relationships. Three or more people might be mutually committed to each other and romantically and/or sexually involved with each other, and not seek relationships outside the group; this form is sometimes called *polyfidelity*, and it’s much like the



relationship of a monogamous couple except that it involves more people.¹ In an *open relationship*, two or more people may maintain a primary romantic and/or sexual commitment to each other, but each is also free to form relationships with others. Not all polyam people² consider one of their partners or relationships “primary” and others “secondary,” however; some see them all as of equal importance. Polyam people may form a chain or network of intimate relationships: Lee is involved with Pat; and Pat is also in relationships with Chris and with Alex; and Alex, Evelyn, and Kim are mutually committed to one another. And there are other possibilities, too. There are as many ways of being polyamorous as there are polyam people!

For instance, some polyam people we spoke with consider polyamory to be an identity, like gender and sexual orientation. Others think of it as a lifestyle or behavior choice. There is not a consensus about this within the community.

Although the word *polyamory* was probably coined only a few decades ago, polyamorous people have always been present in our society and our congregations. They’ve often had to hide their loves and their relationships, however, because the cultural emphasis on monogamy led to their condemnation. Polyam people sometimes speak of being “in the closet,” adopting the phrase from gay and lesbian people who have similarly had to hide whom and how they loved.

Over the past decades, beginning with the sexual and social revolutions of the 1960s and 1970s, Canadian (and American) culture has become more open to varieties of sexual preference and practice. It has also, sometimes belatedly, become more aware of the dangers of sexual harassment and exploitation. Too often this awareness has come in the wake of abuses of power, painful and sometimes catastrophic for the people whom they targeted and the communities—including Unitarian Universalist congregations—in which they occurred. Such exploitative relationships were not based in covenants or were violations of covenants, such as those between couples who had promised sexual and romantic exclusivity, and those between ministers and their congregations.

¹ Strictly speaking, the parallel terms to *polyamory* and *polyamorous* would be *monoamory* and *monoamorous*. For a variety of reasons, including the fact that they are the terms used by the UUPA, we have chosen to use *monogamy* and *monogamous* in this report; but we recognize that usage may be changing. Like polyamory, monogamy may be felt as either an identity or a lifestyle choice.

² The words *polyamory* and *polyamorous* have often been shortened to *poly*. However, people of Polynesian descent have called themselves *poly* since before polyamorous people began doing so, and they have asked the polyamory communities to use another term. As members of a faith tradition that seeks to live into multicultural, antiracist, anti-oppression values, we therefore use the full words or the short form *polyam*. We have modified one quotation in this report to do the same, indicating the change with square brackets.



In the wake of such institutional traumas or their own harrowing experiences, some UUs may respond to the concept of polyamory with anger or fear, because they assume that polyamory must automatically involve such exploitation. The Polyamory Task Force acknowledges the wounds that exist, and understands why some may respond this way. But the assumption, while understandable, is incorrect. Polyamory is fundamentally grounded in covenant and in mutual respect among partners.

Polyam UUs confirmed this in their conversations with us. They articulated to us that polyam relationships, done well, require a significant amount of commitment, communication, and respect. Each partner must prioritize the interests of the others. What are held up as the best principles of monogamy are also those of polyamory.

We also determined that a portion of the misunderstandings or misinformation regarding polyamory in our UU communities is generational. The idea of relationship fluidity is more normalized in younger communities. Many UU youth and young adult groups are a mix of queer and straight people who are aware of and exploring alternative relationship structures and are comfortable with them. “Are you open to multiple partners?” is a common and unremarkable dating question these days, and dating apps include questions about their users’ dating and relationship preferences, which helps to normalize polyamory as one option among others.

So while some UUs may react negatively, others of us are comfortable with polyamory and unthreatened by it. Some of us are polyam ourselves. And still others may be curious, wary, or confused. This report cannot heal past wounds, but in offering it the task force hopes to educate non-polyamorous Canadian Unitarian Universalists, to acknowledge and illuminate some experiences of polyamorous ones, and to challenge and inspire us all to be truly radically welcoming and inclusive.

All the forms of polyamory share the essential features of honesty and integrity. As Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness puts it, “Polyamory is a conscious, consensual, and deliberate decision for everyone involved.”³ Moreover, polyamorous relationships rely on clear communication, even more than monogamous relationships do. Monogamous couples sometimes get involved with each other, even marry, without seriously considering and discussing in detail what their mutual responsibilities and expectations will be; polyam people almost never enter into relationships without having those conversations, because there are fewer existing social models and rules that can be taken for granted, and there are more people whose needs and feelings need to be considered.

³ Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness, “Polyamory and Christians,” <http://www.uupa.org/Literature/Christians.pdf>, June 2013, 1.



Polyamory's emphasis on honesty, integrity, and openness is why it's not the same as cheating or infidelity. Lying to and deceiving a partner is the antithesis of ethical polyamory, just as it's the antithesis of ethical monogamy. And polyamory's emphasis on free choice is why it's different from authoritarian or patriarchal polygamy; in a polyam relationship, one partner doesn't claim authority over the others.

Polyamorous people may date, may choose to have or not have casual sex, may choose to remain single or to enter into long-term committed relationships. They may have children, or they may not. Polyam people may be gay, straight, bisexual, pansexual, asexual, or something else; they may be cis, trans, nonbinary, genderqueer, or something else. And of course polyam people may be tall or short, kind or harsh, religious or secular, kinky or vanilla, of any class and any racial or ethnic group.

3. Polyamory and Social Attitudes

"Four responses followed my coming out as polyamorous:

- *"this is wrong";*
- *"don't ask, don't tell";*
- *"great! you'll be a leader in our social justice work";*
- *and the final response was folks were pretty relaxed and genuinely curious but otherwise didn't need to talk about it more."*

A survey of polyamorous people conducted in 2016 by the Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family⁴ asked 480 respondents how they thought others saw them. Most felt that Canadians did not view their relationships as a legitimate form of family. More than three quarters said that non-polyam people still mistakenly treated polyamory as a sexual fetish or kink, and only a sixth agreed that "people see polyamorous relationships as a legitimate form of family." Still, public awareness of polyamory is growing, and cultural hostility is lessening. In June 2018, the Newfoundland and Labrador Supreme Court legally recognized three adults in a polyamorous relationship as equal parents of their child.⁵ And at its 2014 General Assembly, the Unitarian Universalist Association amended its bylaw on nondiscrimination (Rule G-2.3) to include "family and relationship structures," a phrase intended to welcome polyam people.

⁴ Canadian Research Institute for Law and the Family, *Perceptions of Polyamory in Canada*, report prepared by John-Paul E. Boyd, http://www.crilf.ca/Documents/Perceptions_of_Polyamory_-_Dec_2017.pdf, December 2017. Six survey respondents identified their religion as Unitarian Universalist.

⁵ "3 Adults in Polyamorous Relationship Declared Legal Parents by N. L. Court," CBC News, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/newfoundland-labrador/polyamorous-relationship-three-parents-1.4706560>, June 14, 2018.



Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness says, “We are here. We live among you, and have, some of us, for many years. And you have not known us. We are among your close friends and valued parishioners, but there are essential things about who we are that you probably have never known. Unless, of course, you are one of us, yourself.”⁶ Polyamorous Canadian Unitarian Universalists shared with task force members some of their thoughts and feelings about being polyam in their congregations.

One polyam Canadian UU reflected, “At a UU men’s retreat it was interesting to meet others who are in polyam or open relationships, and there was a genuine curiosity that felt very healthy. Questions seeking understanding, rather than information, left me with a very different feeling. There was a presumption of being in relationship, belonging, and the energy was about deepening relationship.”

Another said that it was not difficult for her and her partners to reveal the polyam nature of their relationship because she has “church cred,” meaning she is known and respected in leadership and has a long history of being active in all aspects of her congregation’s life. It was not a stretch to come out, in the way it might be for someone less woven into the congregation. She felt safe in her congregation, and wanted to be able to bring her whole life to her congregational community. Now all members of her polyam family system attend church from time to time, and they participate together in social and fundraising events. As one said, “It is nice to be able to hold hands and not have judgment. It’s nice to be together and to not have to worry.”

This person, like several others we spoke with, noted that such openness will matter a great deal when (hopefully a long time from now!) any member of the polyam family system dies. The others will be able to openly acknowledge the true nature of the relationship, and the true depth of their grief.

Many people, especially young people, have talked to this woman about their own situations, and they appreciate that she spoke out. She feels that her openness has enriched her sense of human community, in that it may help others feel they are not alone while normalizing the great variety of identities that can be present in any single UU community.

4. Polyamory and Unitarian Universalist Theology

“I feel that UU values would embrace the idea that more love and creating community and networks of support is a good match. It doesn’t feel incongruous with anything else in my identity.”

⁶ Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness, “Are We Ready for This? Unitarian Universalists and Responsible Multi-Partnering: New Options for Love, Family, Community,” pamphlet written by Harlan White, <http://uupa.org/Literature/AreWeReady.pdf>, July 2012.



“I’m very frank that, like in a community not held together by creed, communication is at the centre of my relationship. Staying in covenant with my spouses takes work. There has been a lot of therapy and tears to get here, and I don’t believe any of us think that we won’t go back to therapy for a tune-up at some point. I can draw on that experience and the tools learned to better communicate within a congregation—holding space for everyone to feel heard and appreciated, but not holding so much space that we are never able to move forward.”

As a Unitarian Universalist working group, this task force took as its starting place the concept of covenant. Unitarian Universalism is a covenantal faith; we are held together not by creed or doctrine but by covenants, entered into freely and thoughtfully. As a guide for our understanding of covenant as we worked together, we offer a definition from UU minister Reverend Erika Hewitt:

[Unitarian Universalism] is grounded in relationship arising from covenant—the promises a community makes about how they will be with one another. It’s not enough to want to live a life of greater integrity; we need help to be the people that we strive to be.⁷

Perhaps the most fundamental covenant among North American UUs is the one we make, as member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council and the Unitarian Universalist Association, to affirm and promote our seven Principles. Since this task force was struck by the Canadian Unitarian Council, we also sought to align our work with the CUC’s five Aspirations.

Covenant is also central to polyamory. And the freedoms and commitments of polyamory are not in conflict with those of Unitarian Universalism; quite the contrary. The Polyamory Task Force believes that Canadian Unitarian Universalists are called, by our Principles and Aspirations, to welcome and affirm polyam people, polyam relationships, and polyam family structures. We elucidate this by examining each Principle and Aspiration in turn.

⁷ Adapted with permission from Erika Hewitt, *The Shared Pulpit: A Sermon Seminar for Lay People* (Boston: Skinner House, 2014).



The Seven Principles

We, the member congregations of the Canadian Unitarian Council, covenant to affirm and promote

The inherent worth and dignity of every person

Part of affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person is recognizing that there are a multitude of ways of loving other people, and that the bonds between humans are as diverse as our belief systems, philosophies, cultural backgrounds, socioeconomic classes, and other identities. As members of a free faith, we are called to help each person fulfill their potential, and that includes helping them develop covenants of partnership in creative and flexible ways that are right for them and their partner(s).

Affirming the worth and dignity of a romantic or sexual partner includes treating them with honesty and integrity, and recognizing the centrality of free consent. If partners honestly and freely consent together on the form of their relationship, they are acting in accordance with the First Principle, regardless of whether they choose monogamy or polyamory.

Justice, equity, and compassion in human relations

Not every relationship, polyamorous or monogamous, lives up to the standards of our Principles. But every relationship has the potential to bring joy, spiritual growth, and mutual support in daily living.

Justice for polyamory means separating it from the misuses and misunderstandings associated with it in our tradition's history. Equity means recognizing that all relationships are valid as long as they are rooted in a freely chosen covenant that acknowledges any power dynamics involved. And compassion calls us to listen and learn from each other.

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations

Acceptance of one another begins with education, awareness, and familiarity. Accepting polyamorous people and their families on the implicit or explicit condition that they keep silent about their polyamory is no true acceptance.

Those of us who are polyam need to be able to bring our entire beings, including our relationships, into our religious homes, in order to pursue spiritual growth. Those of us who are not polyam are called to listen to and learn from the people who have, over many years, worked out a deep understanding of covenant and relationship in the context of Unitarian Universalism.



A free and responsible search for truth and meaning

Freedom is the ability to seek inspiration and guidance in all of creation.

We live in a largely secular society, in which religion is sometimes categorically condemned as harmful. As members of a free religious faith, we are living proof that this broad condemnation is untrue. A categorical condemnation of polyamory is similarly untrue. It would be irresponsible to conflate ethical polyamory with unethical and harmful misuses of it, and to resist change, learning, and growth on the basis of that conflation.

Healthy relationships require thoughtful, informed consideration. Non-traditional relationships have few role models and little societal support, and therefore require even more careful consideration. The Fourth Principle encourages us to wrestle with difficult relationship questions, and to examine carefully which relationship style best suits our own needs and those of our partner(s).

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large

We affirm the right of conscience for UUs to choose the form(s) of our intimate relationships, and to have those relationships acknowledged and honoured in our faith communities.

Affirming the democratic process includes acknowledging its limitations. In democratically determining what the larger community will say and do, we must always bear in mind the voices of the marginalized and oppressed. Polyamorous people and the polyam community are marginalized and often maligned, both within our congregations and in society at large, and we should work to change this, not perpetuate it.

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all

In the last few decades, the polyam community has done vital work around relationship building, trust, and the concept of covenant. The tools and perspectives that polyam people, both UU and not, have developed can be valuable in our congregational covenants and our engagements with the larger world. Polyam people have made themselves experts in these areas out of necessity, and we should be embracing them and striving to learn from them. From a UU perspective, it would be spiritual and religious malpractice to turn away from this source of knowledge about how to be in community with one another.

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part

Whether others are aware of it or not, polyamorous people are part of our congregations, our communities, our society, and often our families. Polyamorous relationships are already a part of the web, and respecting the web means respecting those relationships when they are created and nourished in alignment with our seven Principles. This task



force has found that people in healthy polyam relationships often have a deep understanding of how interdependent the web truly is, and how much care and attention is required to keep to the covenants that allow us to thrive within it.

“We put our relationship to property and to possessions onto everything, and it interferes with our ability to be a part of the interdependent web. The capacity to live in change has always been with me. The salvation in Universalism—we are all worthy and we are all saved—is a part of why this piece of my identity is something that I try to be public about.”

The Five Aspirations

As Canadian Unitarian Universalists, we aspire to be

Deeply Connected: We strive to foster healthy relationships amongst and within UU communities, with the broader world, and with all life.

We want to create communities to which people can bring their whole, joyful selves—communities in which they do not have to hide crucial parts of themselves and their loving. We want the people who come to our congregations to feel that they can live their authentic lives there, supported by the congregation’s other members.

There are already polyamorous people in our congregations and communities, and we must create spaces that welcome them and enable all of us to deeply connect with one another. Fostering healthy relationships of all kinds means working to make all our members feel safe sharing about their relationships, covenants, and home lives.

Radically Inclusive: We strive to create hospitable, diverse, multigenerational communities.

Our world includes many ways of being in ethical and consensual relationships; polyamory is one. Excluding it from this aspiration would be hypocritical, making us less diverse and hospitable—and less multigenerational, since polyam people may be of any age or generation, and their families may be multigenerational.

Actively Engaged: We strive to work joyfully for a just and compassionate society, experimenting with new forms of community.

Polyamory offers expanded forms of relationship and family; affirming polyamory helps us provide support to our diversity of family systems. Polyam people, including polyam UUs, have wisdom to offer about new forms of community.



Theologically Alive: We seek to be ever-evolving in our understanding, open to new knowledge.

The celebration of honest and generous love has long been a cornerstone of Unitarian Universalist identity and religious practice, and over the years we have expanded access to this aspect of religious life. Many of the earliest same-sex weddings in Canada, including long before equal marriage was legally established, were performed by Unitarian Universalist ministers, and as a national faith community we began advocating for same-sex marriage in the 1970s. Similarly, as we have struggled with racism in our faith communities and our society, we have learned to better welcome, affirm, and support nonwhite and multiracial couples and families. It would have been profoundly naive to have assumed in 1950 that we knew everything we needed to about intimate relationships and how they should be affirmed, and it would be no less naive now.

Spiritually Grounded: We seek transformation through personal spiritual experiences and shared ritual.

No one can fully belong to a spiritual community if they are forbidden to participate in the spiritual practices and rituals that bind the community together. In Unitarian Universalism, the celebration of covenantal marriage is one of these. At the time of this report's writing, federal law criminalizes multipartner weddings and ceremonies of union; for more on this subject, please see section 6 of this report, "Polyamory and the Law." However, the actions and choices of Canadian UU ministers and lay chaplains in this matter are not constrained by the CUC; nor can any officiant be forced by their congregation to conduct an illegal ceremony. If asked to perform such a ceremony, a Canadian UU minister or lay chaplain must consult with congregational governance, spiritual guidance, and their own conscience, in light of our Principles, Sources, and Aspirations.

And there are many spiritual experiences and rituals other than weddings. We are transformed by the rituals we enact and the covenants we enter into when we dedicate children, and a child may be welcomed by more than two parents. We are transformed by shared grief and rituals of mourning, and a person who has died may be grieved by more than one partner. Our Fifth Aspiration calls us to create rituals and spiritual exercises that welcome and affirm all those in our communities, whether unpartnered, singly partnered, or multiply partnered.



5. True Welcome and Radical Inclusion

“The biggest thing is the invisibility of polyamorous family systems within UU communities. The experience of multi-parent households and more is lost, to our detriment.”

“I was a UU before I was polyam. When I entered into a polyam relationship, I was happy to know that ‘every family’ was welcomed, and I assumed that would include my new partners too. It took me quite a while to mention it, though, and I remember being quite nervous when it came up in a young adult chalice circle. But everyone made it a total non-issue.”

Why be welcoming? In section 4 above, we touched briefly on our Canadian UU aspiration to be radically inclusive: We strive to create hospitable, diverse, multigenerational communities. While all of our five Aspirations (and our seven Principles) are fundamental to how we have approached our research and our findings, the aspiration to be radically inclusive is particularly important when it comes to welcoming and equality for polyam people in our communities.

We have a moral and ethical obligation to provide, joyfully and without hesitation, the same acceptance to those of us who are polyam as to all marginalised people. Otherwise, we risk being hypocritical at every level.

In our work, we sought to listen to the direct experience of polyamorous UUs and to draw upon the work they have already done within and for our congregations across North America. Here are some important comments from Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness to UU faith communities:

“Increasingly, new visitors who are openly polyamorous will arrive at . . . churches asking if they and their children are welcome. Also increasingly, . . . churches will discover polyamorous people already within their memberships, closeted, wondering how safe they are in their own faith community.

“Polyamorous people sing next to you in Sunday services and in choir lofts. We serve on church committees and teach religious education. We attend denominational assemblies where many of us serve in a variety of roles in the service of our faith. Our faith is vital to us.

“Polyamorous people have families. We raise children, cherish pets, and keep in touch with extended family. We have jobs, pay bills, carry out the trash. Our family structure may be a little different than most people expect, but otherwise, we are very similar to everybody else.”

“Discrimination by the larger community can burden children of poly[am] families.”



“Ministers and churches can respond to individuals and families as people in need of a faith community, welcoming them without regard to the shape of their relationships and families.”⁸

When monogamous people ask polyamorous people to hide or remain silent about important and intimate relationships—even while the relationships of monogamous people are warmly celebrated, and their breakups sympathized with—they deny polyam people acceptance, community, and support, and they deny themselves a full connection with their fellow congregants.

We asked Canadian polyam UUs, “What do you hope for in a welcoming space?” Here are some of their answers:

“Language, and teaching people to come out of a heteronormative, monogamous assumption. For people to ask for pronouns, to ask if you have a partner or partners (not ‘girlfriend’ or ‘boyfriend’). We could all offer each other a space to just be normal and stop assuming about each other.”

“An acknowledgment that not all relationships follow the model we have been taught to expect. That there is an openness and curiosity that is expressed respectfully. There is incredible possibility in our relationships, that are as meaningful and rich and rewarding as a monogamous relationship.”

“After folks find out that I identify as ethically non-monogamous, I’ve had a lot of people come out to me privately and express that they don’t think their congregations could handle it. They haven’t told their congregations that a highlight of their year is traveling with a partner other than the partner the congregation knows, or that they were heartbroken that a relationship was ending and they had no claim to a relationship with the kids. Too often polyam and ethically non-monogamous folks in our congregations (and in the wider community) keep significant pieces of their lives hidden away in closets, and so never truly feel welcome among us.”

“It’s hard to keep in mind every facet of our intersectional community all the time. We’re going to slip and say things that can be exclusionary sometimes. I think the most important thing is that people be open to learning and reframing things as needed.”

⁸ Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness, “Polyamory and Christians,” <http://www.uupa.org/Literature/Christians.pdf>, June 2013



“It would be cool if the websites for churches that rent their spaces would specifically mention that they are open to hosting ceremonies and rituals and milestones for polyamorous families. That would for sure give me the warm fuzzies of acceptance.”

“With part of our opening welcoming including the phrase ‘we welcome . . . every family,’ I hope people understand that means all families. I hope people in our community don’t see E as an addendum, because he isn’t as active in church life as B and I are. I hope we can create space for less ‘stereotypically ideal’ polyam families and can help normalize it.”

Starting Guidelines for Congregational Welcome and Inclusion of Polyam People and Their Families:

- Acknowledge diversity of relationship forms and family structures in all aspects of congregational life as a matter of course, just as we acknowledge multiple racial identities, genders, ages, and class and economic positions.
- Ensure that you do so in your primary worship service, as that is usually the biggest whole-church event that reaches the greatest number of people on the most regular basis. It is where we affirm our values for the community at large and not just subgroups with particular interests. Also, it is important for everyone to understand that the ministers and worship leaders affirm polyam members and friends.
- Choose and/or design RE programs and procedures, including Times for All Ages and multigenerational services, with awareness that children will come from a variety of family structures, including polyam ones.
- Include polyamory in sensitivity and awareness training and guidance offered for staff members, lay leaders (such as the board), and volunteers serving RE, small groups, and other programs and events.
- Acknowledge and honour, as requested and appropriate, relevant intimate connections in such moments as Joys and Sorrows, pastoral lists, and congregational child dedications and funerals. **On weddings, see section 6 below.**
- Enable respondents to answer as fully as they wish when you are collecting information on congregants’ family structures or relationship statuses.
- Remember that the choice to be openly polyam belongs to the individual; do not out someone or pressure them to come out.



6. Polyamory and the Law

Since 1892, it has been an offence under the Criminal Code of Canada (s. 293) “to practise or enter into any form of polygamy or any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time, whether or not it is by law recognized as a binding form of marriage.” It is also an offence under this section to participate in or perform such a ceremony, even if the parties recognise that it is not a legally binding ceremony.

The enactment in 1984 of the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms, which establishes, among other things, freedom of religion and conscience as fundamental protected rights, cast doubt on the validity of this section of the Criminal Code and chilled any potential prosecutions for polygamy. But in 2011 the constitutionality of this section was confirmed in a constitutional reference case, in which the British Columbia Supreme Court (BCSC) ruled that, because of polygamy’s inherent harms, the law is a justifiable limit on both religious freedom and freedom of association.⁹ As part of its determination, the Court went on to make a clear distinction between polygamy and polyamory on the basis that the former involves participating in a ceremony that purports to sanction (that is, to “approve” or “encourage” or “expressly permit”¹⁰) a marriage or conjugal union. The judge wrote,

I conclude that properly interpreted, s. 293(1)(a) prohibits practicing or entering into a “marriage” with more than one person at the same time, whether sanctioned by civil, religious or other means, and whether or not it is by law recognized as a binding form of marriage.

The offence is not directed at multi-party, unmarried relationships or common law cohabitation, but is directed at both polygyny and polyandry. It is also directed at multi-party same sex marriages.¹¹

The BCSC decision establishes that there is nothing illegal about being in a polyamorous relationship so long as no ceremony, no “sanctioning event,” is held. However, the moment that multiple people choose to hold a ceremony to honour, celebrate, ritualize, or bless the love they share, they run the risk of being charged with a criminal offence. The Court made this clear, despite what it called “the alleged absurdity of such a distinction—the possibility of avoiding prosecution by the simple expedient of not undergoing a sanctioning event.”¹²

⁹ Reference re: Section 293 of the Criminal Code of Canada, 2011 BCSC 1588, <https://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/SC/11/15/2011BCSC1588.htm>.

¹⁰ Ibid., paragraph 1034.

¹¹ Ibid., paragraphs 1036–37.

¹² Ibid., paragraph 1039.



Many polyam people in Canada were glad to see this clear statement that polyamorous relationships are legal. But many were also disappointed that the Court did not go further and decriminalise sanctifying those relationships.

Before the BCSC reference case, the section in the Criminal Code might have been open to broader interpretation. A polyamorous ceremony might have been performed with minimal legal risk to participants and officiant. However, the decision in that case changed this.

Moreover, the Criminal Code uses vague terms and broad language in describing what is meant by “a form of marriage” and what kind of ceremony might constitute a “sanctioning event.” It will probably take another court case (or several) to clarify just what kind of ceremony would be considered a criminal offence. Until then, it is best to assume that any ceremony in which more than two people declare their commitment to each other could fall within the scope of the law.

At the time of this report's writing, the only modern case in which charges have been brought under this section of the criminal code is *R. v. Blackmore*, 2017 BCSC 1288, in which two men of the Fundamentalist Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-Day Saints (FLDS) community of Bountiful BC were convicted of having married multiple wives and were sentenced to three and six months of house arrest. No charges have been brought in any other case, in the FLDS community or elsewhere, even though other polygamous marriages are well known to exist.

It is unlikely that consenting polyamorous adults who choose to defy the polygamy law and have a commitment ceremony will be charged with a criminal offence. But it is possible. Some writers have suggested tactics or workarounds that may reduce the risk that a ceremony will be considered a “sanctioning event” by a court of law:

- Never call the ceremony a “wedding,” “marriage,” or “union” in any context, including invitations.
- Do not include any traditional elements of marriage ceremonies, such as vows. Instead, recognise already-existing bonds, such as those of loyalty, trust, and friendship.
- Do not involve any kind of officiant.
- Do not proclaim the participants “united” or “joined.”¹³

Since the details and social and cultural context of every polyamorous relationship are different, and since the legal situation remains unclear, there is no way to definitively determine the level of risk in any particular instance. It is certainly very high if any party to the ceremony is already legally married to, or in a civil union with, someone else. Performing

¹³ See, for instance, Jenny Yuen, *Polyamorous: Living and Loving More* (Toronto: Dundurn Press, 2018), p. 18.



a ceremony uniting such a person with another clearly meets the definition of polygamy in the Criminal Code.

On the other hand, if two members of a polyamorous group want to marry or otherwise unite with each other and neither is already in a legal marriage or civil union with anyone else, a ceremony would not break the law if it recognised only the union of that couple. In this situation, however, omitting and rendering invisible the other partner(s) might be painful for all of them. And of course, neither member of the couple could legally go on to have such a ceremony with anyone else without formally dissolving the first relationship.

Conclusion

At the present time, entering into “any kind of conjugal union with more than one person at the same time, whether or not it is by law recognized as a binding form of marriage,” is a criminal offence under s. 293 of the Criminal Code. Performing or participating in a ceremony that sanctions such a union is also an offence. It may make participants liable to criminal prosecution, and may endanger the officiant’s license to perform weddings.

The CUC cannot and does not endorse or sanction the participation by Canadian Unitarian Universalist ministers and lay chaplains in actions that are against the law, and the Polyamory Task Force does not recommend that it do so. Additionally, no officiant can be forced by their congregation to do something illegal; in their contracts and their codes of ethics, both ministers and lay chaplains retain the right of refusal.

However, our system of congregational polity means that each congregation is self-governing, and every minister enjoys freedom of the pulpit. The CUC does not set policy for its member congregations, their boards of management, or their lay chaplaincy committees. Each has the freedom and the responsibility to act in keeping with its values and principles, consider the level of risk it and its individual members are willing to tolerate, obtain appropriate expert advice, and choose its own way. The task force expects that Unitarian Universalist wedding officiants requested to perform polyamorous weddings or ceremonies of union will consult their congregational governance, legal experts, their spiritual guides and mentors, and their own hearts.



7. Recommendations to the CUC

We, the members of the Polyamory Task Force, are glad and grateful to have undertaken this work. In concluding our report, we offer, as requested, our recommendations to the Canadian Unitarian Council. Both our work and our recommendations are founded on the understanding that as Unitarian Universalists we are called to be welcoming and inclusive in our language, our actions, and the workings of our faith communities, and to honour the sacredness of human love and connection.

i. We believe that affirming the validity of polyamory and welcoming polyamorous people is both a justice issue and a religious duty, implicit in our Second Aspiration.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC formally and publicly state this.

ii. At the time of writing, it is an offense under the Criminal Code of Canada to perform or take part in a multipartner wedding or other ceremony of union.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC not endorse or sanction the participation by Canadian Unitarian Universalist ministers and lay chaplains in such ceremonies.

iii. The CUC is the voice of Canadian Unitarian Universalism and has a proud history of action on justice issues.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC prepare itself to speak out on this issue, including in future legal cases if they arise, and to support Canadian Unitarian Universalists who may find themselves attacked for being polyamorous or for affirming the validity of polyamory.

iv. The CUC is an important support to Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations in both their institutional workings and their spiritual discernment.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC offer education and training to its staff, to enhance their ability to in turn support congregations working to improve their understanding of polyamory and their affirmation of polyamorous people.

v. We recognize that many people are unfamiliar with the concept of ethical polyamory, and that some may need education and support as they expand their understanding of relationship and family structures.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC establish a committee or working group to discover and develop informational and educational material on polyamory, both introductory and in-depth, suitable for Canadian Unitarian Universalists, including ministers, other religious professionals, professional staff, lay leaders, and congregations.



vi. It is particularly important for ministers, religious education staff, and other religious professionals to affirm and nurture polyamorous people and their families in their faith communities, and for congregants to feel that they are supported by their faith leaders in times of both sorrow and joy.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC work with UUMOC, CUURE, and other relevant professional organizations to encourage education and dialogue.

vii. It is not enough to merely state that we are welcoming and inclusive, nor is it enough to offer occasional services, publications, workshops, or events focusing on polyamory. Such special, separate attention may be necessary, but on its own it can be othering rather than inclusive.

Therefore, we recommend that these educational efforts offer religious professionals, staff, lay leaders, and congregations specific ways to incorporate and normalize polyamory in everyday congregational life.

viii. Unitarian Universalist congregations have long been aware of the importance of highlighting the welcome and richness they offer to particular populations, often through pamphlets that target such groups as LGBTQIA people, elders, multifaith families, and others.

Therefore, as Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations grow in their understanding and affirmation of polyamory, we recommend that the CUC develop or obtain similar material, suitable for visitors to our congregations, that highlights the welcome Canadian Unitarian Universalist congregations can offer to polyamorous people and their families.

ix. A great deal of invaluable educational material has already been created by polyamorous people and communities, and Unitarian Universalists for Polyamory Awareness has placed polyamory in a specifically Unitarian Universalist context.

Therefore, we recommend that the CUC take advantage of the work that has already been done by such groups, and liaise where appropriate with them for mutual support and action on polyamory affirmation.



CUC Committees and Task Forces 2019 - 2020

National Lay Chaplaincy Committee:

Ann Steadman, Ellen Newman, Anne Coward, Mary Anna Louise Kovar, Joy Silver, Rob van Wyck, Peter Scales, Rev. Anne Barker, Yvette Roberts, Rev. Linda Thomson

Nominating Committee:

Wendy Schusterman, Maury Prevost, John Mitchell, Molly Hurd, Rev. Debra Thorne, Rev. Helen McFadyen

Northern Lights Committee:

Rev. Norm Horofker, Susan Ruttan, Rev. Julie Stoneberg

Polyamory Task Force:

Rev. Meghann Robern, Shoshanna Green, Rev. Beckett Coppola, Margaret Kohr

Theological Education Funds Committee:

Rev. Wendy McNiven, Robbie Brydon, Rev. Debra Faulk, Rev. Debra Thorne

Truth, Healing and Reconciliation Team:

Rev. Meg Roberts, Amber Bellemare, Forrest Smith, Rev. Helen McFadyen, Melissa Horvath-Lucid, Erin Horvath

