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UU Expressions: Love in Real Life
Episode 10: Goosebumps

This groundbreaking 10-episode docu-series takes an inspiring and honest look at how Unitarian Universalism (UU) is evolving across Canada in 2024. This isn't just a celebration—it's an invitation to all of us to reflect on what it means to live our UU values in the diverse communities we call home, from bustling cities to small towns, and for diverse people to shape diverse expressions of UUism beyond congregations and, if so, what this means for our national identity.

In each episode, Erin Horvath and Amber Bellemare, the Canadian Unitarian Council's Justice and Equity team, interview Unitarian Universalists who have formed groups outside of congregations and are experiencing an alternative kind of UU community. The individuals share their perspectives and reflections on their experiences, and speak only for themselves. We thank them for their generosity.

Transcript for Episode 10 - Goosebumps

In our final episode of this series, we explore the Canadian Unitarian Council and how it serves Unitarian Universalism in Canada

Our guests include:

- Robyn Newton and Catharine Strickland, UUs of the Salish Sea
- Anonymous leaders of QUQueer Connecting
- Liz James from Mirth and Dignity, and
- Reverend Wendy Luella Perkins, founder of Soulful Singing.
- Peter Scales at First Unitarian Church of Victoria
- Jim Sannes and Ellen Papenburg from Canadian Unitarians for Social Justice (CUSJ)
- Reverend Danie Webber, CUC Youth and Young Adult programming staff
- Camellia Jahanshahi, Rising Together host



- Z Brimacombe from Loving Justice group
- Brenagh Rappaport, host of Gathered Here
- Reverends Anne Barker and Linda Thompson, CUC's Congregational Life Team

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- Rev Anne Barker, Rev Linda Thompson, CUC staff, Congregational Life
- catherine strickland, Robyn Newton, UU's of the Salish Sea in British Columbia
- Claire Heistek, Rassemblement unitarien universaliste d'Ottawa
- Anonymous leaders of QUUeer Connecting
- Liz James from Mirth and Dignity
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Episode playtime is 51 mins

MUSIC	
Wendy Luella	What are the real needs you're meeting? These are real people who are really hungry for something. They're hungry for genuine community. They're hungry for creative expression, they're hungry to remember what really is important to them. And then to say, "What I offer feeds that!" If you can't generate the goosebumps, if you can't generate the emotional energy for that, then maybe your ladder is up the wrong building, or maybe it's not a ladder you need. Maybe it's something completely different.
MUSIC	
Amber	Welcome to UU Expressions: Love in Real Life, a docu series that discovers, celebrates, and challenges how Unitarian Universalism is practiced across Canada in 2024. In our final episode of this series, we explore the Canadian Unitarian Council and how it serves Unitarian Universalism in Canada. I am your co-host, Amber Bellemare.
Erin	And I am Erin Horvath. You just heard the voice of Rev Wendy Luella Perkins relaying a teaching she received from her mentor. She shared that ministry should not be doing something a certain way just because it's been done that way in the past, but instead we should be aiming to meet the deeper needs people have. She proposed that whatever we do should be <i>so engaging</i> that it creates <i>goosebumps</i> .



Amber	Such a great measure to evaluate our choices. The CUC was prompted to do this research to better understand what is happening because we had an important realization that made us wonder if our ladders were up some wrong buildings or if perhaps it's not a ladder that we need at all right now.
Erin	When we started doing the inclusivity work through various national forums, we started with racism, then disability, relationships and family structure, class, age, and finally gender. During these forums we learned a lot about the ways certain UUs feel excluded. Then, we engaged people in Inclusivity <i>Action</i> groups around specific issues, and learned even more. The <i>game changer</i> was realizing inclusivity isn't about creating space for diverse people to exist within a rigid UU Expression, but creating a fluidity so that UUism could be shaped by the diverse people that call Unitarian Universalism home.
Amber	Right. So in the language of the metaphor, we began to wonder if focussing on the congregational expression to the <i>exclusion</i> of all other expressions is an approach that is serving UUism at this point in history. To be clear, we are not implying that we should do away with congregations. We are highlighting the potential of including other expressions in the things we embrace within the structure of Unitarian Universalism in Canada.
Erin	Exactly. Should we be putting the metaphoric ladder somewhere else? Or perhaps we should be adjusting and not using a ladder at all but some other tool that helps us get where we want to go. Several of the people we interviewed provided some great feedback and suggestions about how we could approach things as a national body that oversees Unitarian Universalism in Canada. We thought it was worthwhile to share some of those themes as a way to wrap up and consider how we might move forward after all we have learned.
Amber	First off - What is the CUC anyway? I think it's important that we answer this question because occasionally we hear people say they don't know what we do or who we are, if it's worth the membership fees they pay, and sometimes that we exist at all! Generally speaking, the Canadian Unitarian Council is the overarching body for Unitarian Universalism in Canada. In 1961 we became a separate entity from the Unitarian Universalist Association that oversees UUism in the United States. At that time, the only expression of UUism in Canada were congregations and so the CUC was incorporated as a charity with the purpose of Advancement of Religion, and congregations became the members the organization served. The organization itself has a volunteer board of directors (consisting of two UU representatives from each region) and a small but mighty staff of which Erin and I are a part. The staff and board work cooperatively to develop a vision which the staff then carries out under the direction of the Executive Director. And <i>that</i> vision is shaped by what the board and the staff understands through being in relationship to the congregations. The organization of the CUC sustains itself financially from contributions from member congregations based on their membership, private donors, and by using interest on available investments held by the CUC.



Erin	In terms of the tasks the CUC staff undertake, most of these are centered around congregational life such as linking congregations, providing resources, support through ministerial transitions, as well as navigating transitions and rough waters. This makes sense given that these are the voting members and the people whose membership dues help fund activities that the staff do on their behalf.
Amber	And some groups may not engage with us regularly if they are happily busy doing their own thing but we have been told we're a bit like CAA- you don't need it til you need it, but when you need it, it's priceless!
Erin	In addition to providing support for the business of running congregations, the CUC provides resources to congregations and communities within our UU sphere - leadership training, education, governance and charity information, and information around social, environmental, inclusivity and other justice issues. The CUC does what congregations may not be able to do on their own - we help UUs connect nationally and find each other around areas of interest and need. The communications team creates connections via enews, social media, website, as well as our special events team that organizes national services, conferences, symposiums, workshops and other in-person and on-line gatherings. Our youth and young adult team provides leadership and support directly to younger UU's as well as to those who work with them.
Amber	So we exist to serve congregations but also to provide leadership, which can be a bit tricky at times since our pluralistic stance means that each congregation is viewed as having its own agency. A congregation works similarly to the CUC, in that a congregation also serves voting members using the funding it receives from their donations. We, the CUC, have to be careful not to step on the toes of congregations while at the same time we aim to have a forward looking perspective so we are not only focussed on what has been but also what is to come, and to do so with some sort of cohesive voice that honours difference. We are a living entity as much as we are a legal entity.
Erin	The living nature of the organization led the CUC down the path of this research as we sought to recognize and better understand the different expressions that have developed in more recent years.
Amber	Right, with the intent to better support these initiatives that fall within the national umbrella of UUism in Canada but are not happening within congregational packages as was the case in previous decades.
Erin	We invite listeners to hear what our interviewees thought the CUC was getting right and where they thought there was potential for growth. At times they refer to the legal structure of the Canadian Unitarian Council, and other times they will be talking about the overarching collection of people, which includes everyone regardless of the capacity that they are involved.



Amber	I like to think of <i>how we are all participating</i> as the movement of UUism. Since there have been a lot of interconnected moving parts throughout this series, which we hope was uncovered in a way that sheds a light on how our movement has been functioning, we do want to tie it all together loosely with some meaning making and areas for further research and consideration. We hope you keep all of this in mind as we move into a season which will further engage the national body in imagining together how UUism could look into the future. Let's get started.
MUSIC	
Amber	Before we get into constructive feedback, I'll mention that many interviewees expressed gratitude. For instance, Mirth & Dignity needed help with a legal question and the CUC connected them with a lawyer. A congregation was working on an inclusivity issue and received some pushback from the board of their congregation. Our social justice and congregational life teams were able to support the entire congregational unit as they found a solution that worked for all of them. In other cases, gratitude was expressed for the consultation on grants, financial support received through the Northern Lights award, support publicizing events, and connections made between UU's across the country and the USA.
Erin	We also heard gratitude for the CUC's involvement with staff and initiatives helps to build a sense of connection to the larger national body. Several young adults mentioned this as important as so many of them are not involved in local congregations. For instance, here's Brenagh Rappaport, one of the co-hosts of Gathered Here, an online Young Adult community.
Brenagh	I'm really appreciative of the ways in which I'm involved with the YA (young adult) community and the active role that the CUC has been playing in helping that to exist is really cool. Getting to the chance to work with Casey and Rev Danie and yourself, Erin and Amber through the inclusivity forums and just different things that the CUC has been doing, I think it's helped me to have a much stronger sense of a national or bigger UU community than just a specific congregation or specific place and I think that
	for lots of folks who are located in different places where they don't have a physical UU community, I think that's been really valuable for them as well. I'm excited to see how YA Community continues to evolve and as people maybe take on different roles or want to see different things happening or as perhaps the value of being together in person might slowly be taking priority again in people's lives over gathering online.
Erin	For Z Brimacombe, of the Young Adult led social justice group, Loving Justice, it is the sense of connection they found with other Young Adults after the tragic loss of a UU peer from police violence that brought them back into UU community.
Z	It's been important to have this space to share our ideas and our values with one another.



	And I know that for myself, to some extent, doing this work has brought me back closer into UU community where I really hadn't been so what does this initiative or this expression say or offer for how we could think about ministry more broadly? We know ourselves and other young adults sometimes have become disconnected from our UU communities because of this lack of radical political action that a lot of us really value.
	And being able to be in a space with people who share this religious spiritual community with me, and also have this shared value and shared desire for fire and political action and movement feels very enriching and encouraging and like pulls me into community. So that feels really nice and alive right now. And I hope that we can keep doing that and building it.
Amber	I want to point out a connection here: Z, Brenagh, Ilara, and two others we interviewed are among a dynamic group of young adults that you and I, Erin, have had the opportunity to engage with as small group facilitators at the various Inclusivity forums the CUC hosted. We witnessed how willing they are to engage when the cause relates to values they care deeply about.
Erin	Yes, and they brought with them some excellent skills, knowledge and experience that was invaluable to the process. When it came to the 8th Principle vote, Young Adult UU's were united and vocal about their stance that UU's should approach anti-racism and other inclusivity work with renewed dedication. We have heard a considerable amount from this demographic about the CUC's leadership with these challenging but important cultural shift conversations. UUism becoming truly inclusive is a non-negotiable for many of them.
Amber	For some, their participation within intergenerational expressions of UUism hinges on the outcomes of inclusion work.
MUSIC	
Erin	Another set of things we were told were suggestions about what the CUC could offer that we are currently not. Here's catherine strickland of the UU's of the Salish Sea describing how the CUC could help organize and facilitate resource sharing between different UU communities in a particular geographic area.
catherine	One of the things that maybe the CUC can provide leadership or creativity around is this idea of sharing ministers and like, what would that look like and how would you resource that?
	And even spaces. Part of the reality in Vancouver for us is that there's no way on earth we're ever going to be able to afford to have our own building space. That's multi, multi millions of dollars. So, we have these physical buildings, two of them, I guess we may be the only ones, I think the other congregations rent space.
	How do we utilize that for the broader movement? I don't know whether it's leadership again or even starting the conversations around this sort of regionality, sharing of



	resources and these multi expressions, the idea that being a diverse faith that welcomes diversity means it's diverse expression of what that looks like and supporting that.
	How to expand the vision that those resources serve all of Unitarianism and all of the expressions as opposed to how they might traditionally think about membership and who who gets access?
	And then the other kind of like more the basic level, is there an opportunity for sharing of admin staff or that admin function? And I do think that we're, as I mentioned, people like Kiersten Moore (CUC President) and Rev. Shawn Gauthier and others who have these formalized positions and they're there as a really important resource to the wider UU faith in the region,
	I think they're really starting to understand and expand their vision of who they serve and recognize the value of that being more of a collective resource as opposed to how that used to be. And what would that function look like or any expression of Unitarianism that we needed to or wanted to access and then support or religious education support or ministry support or whatever.
Erin	The idea of the CUC providing some leadership around regional organizing came up a couple times within the interviews as small groups of UU's search for ways to economize. I also heard similar ideas when talking with UU's at the Symposium in May 2023. In that context an example that was brought to my attention from a YA from the maritimes who expressed how challenging it is to be a UU in parts of the country where there aren't UU congregations (or groups) of any significant size; only handfuls of people. As the structure is now UU's have to organize to make a volunteer board in order to be a congregation that is eligible to be a voting member within the CUC. These individual people may find themselves spread out with no one to turn to. Creating a Regional Body for the Maritime provinces, for instance, may allow these folks to find one another <i>regionally</i> and build from there.
Amber	The amount of time and energy that could be saved by sharing a board and administrative staff could be significant for small groups and solo UU's. And it might be refreshing on a social level to connect with others within their region, not just those in their immediate area.
Erin	In the case of the UU's of the Salish Sea they exist within the Lower Mainland of British Columbia where there are a <i>variety</i> of UU expressions happening, and with people engaging in <i>more than one</i> of them. Shifting to collaborate could open up time and energy for groups to specialize in certain things rather than trying to be everything to everyone.
Amber	What about some of the UU Expressions that exist outside of or separate from congregations - do they have a desire to be in relationship with other UU's locally, regionally and nationally? I wonder if there is a type of CUC membership to help them flourish?



Erin	I guess this is where we'd need to hear more about what they would feel is beneficial. Liz James of Mirth & Dignity and the Hysterical Society spoke about the need for community-based ministries to be explicit about what they need from the CUC and congregations.
Liz	So all the way along I've asked myself at each step, how are we of benefit to congregations and traditional structures and what is it that we need from congregations and traditional structures? It's been my experience that when we ask, the CUC and congregations are both really eager to help and be supportive as our individual or you use, but because what we're doing is so strange, they have no idea how to be helpful unless we tell them.
	And because we're so unusual, it's our job to articulate our needs. So that relationship of making sure that we are connected and beneficial and that we have congregational polity, which is it's easy to know what collegiality and polity looks like if you're a congregation or a minister. It's much harder as a lay leader outside that system. And I felt like it was our job to think about that.
Erin	I was very struck by the many ways the community ministry initiatives I interviewed could grow with strategic coaching. I did not get the impression that any of these expressions felt like it was their place to ask the CUC for support, but as we began talking, it was clear they would benefit from connecting with other like minded folks and coaching support.
Amber	There could be people even within the national UU body who could provide coaching and services related to things like business planning, branding, marketing, financial management, online stores, growing mission based businesses, and other skills that are not typical for congregational life but critical to the success of a community-based ministry.
Erin	This is an area to explore further especially since there are now a few CUC staff with passion and expertise in these types of things.
Amber	And like we learned in our conversations with Young Adults there is a need for good jobs, and this presents UU groups with an opportunity to create them. This could be a meaningful contribution at a time when people are scraping by with part-time, contract, and piecemeal jobs. The more we can supply good jobs feels like a really important bit of justice and equity activism that is very relevant for our times.
Erin	I agree, and would be very relevant and likely have the power to engage young adult UU's in ways that feel responsive to their needs and exciting to their activist spirits.
MUSIC	
Erin	Another theme that we heard from groups such as Unicamp and Mirth & Dignity, is that the CUC acts as a legitimizing body, which has been appreciated by some UU expressions that fall outside of congregations. Here's Liz James, from Mirth and Dignity explaining



	more.
Liz	And also that legitimizing thing. The CUC has always lifted up the stuff that we're doing, the shining lights. The word is a really good example of that. That's the sort of thing that's really helpful to have on a grant application. And so when you are that weird, having a denominational body that is behind you makes a big difference.
Erin	As much as UU's enjoy their independence and do not look to the CUC for permission to create new expressions, some of our interviewees stated that the recognition from the CUC legitimizes what they are doing as real ministry. We heard this from Unicamp when they spoke about their desire to have a closer alliance with the CUC, and from Rev Wendy Luella Perkins as it relates to the work of community based ministers who aren't connected to a congregation and therefore don't have a place as voting members within the existing CUC structure.
Amber	The idea of legitimizing an expression is an interesting one that could become important in the future. For instance, if more social enterprises or other community-based ministries pop up, a <i>legitimizing process through the CUC</i> might help people determine if certain types of competencies have been reached. Competencies in terms of legal structure, accounting practices, HR practices etc. It could also show up in terms of membership that we offer to help provide community based ministers and/or ministries with resources and coaching similar to that which we provide to congregations. It adds a layer of trustworthiness to the relationship.
	So we are kind of imagining what membership would look like in our modern era because it hasn't changed in 60 years. And we do need to figure out a way to be serving all of Unitarian Universalism in Canada in a way that is meaningful and has better impact.
Erin	Right now, with the way the bylaws are set up, congregations are the formal members and have voting rights, according to the number of members they have. This limits the ability of affiliated groups, UU communities and individual UUs to get involved in decision-making and voting. So there's a working group that is updating the bylaws, including exploring additional pathways to membership.
Amber	So the type of legitimizing could range from less formal - like what we are doing now, in showcasing UU Expressions that are not a congregation - To more formal such as figuring out how to include community-based ministries as voting members within the CUC.
Erin	Yes, lots to explore here if someone was interested in doing so.
MUSIC	
Erin	Another category of suggestions we heard related to what constitutes a religious professional and how to support this person. In the past, most congregations were large enough to afford a minister, but this isn't the case anymore. And in the case of smaller UU communities, many have only had part time or no minister at all. Rev Danie Webber spoke about the culture shift required within UUism to bridge the culture gap between



	<p>young adults and older adults. I would say that their thoughts are also relevant for addressing a shift toward supporting community-based ministries. Here's Danie talking about the intentional practice of trying something, evaluating the outcome, shifting and trying again.</p>
Danie	<p>Unless you are willing to be a part of that practice and do things in a different way and tweak them and do them in a little bit of a different way, it's not going to shift and often congregations bring in ministers to help make that shift happen.</p>
	<p>And oftentimes we're going to need to look elsewhere, because congregations aren't always finding ministers who are willing to relocate. And so how do you find somebody else who's responsible for community development, responsible for social justice, engagement? What if we started shifting the way that we look at who's considered a religious professional?</p>
Amber	<p>In listening to these interviews, it is clear that there are a lot of interesting people providing leadership within UUism - lay chaplains, directors of religious exploration, youth sponsors, young adult event coordinators, and community-based ministers that are not currently being viewed as religious professionals in the same way that congregational ministers are.</p>
Erin	<p>And as Rev Danie suggests, perhaps we need to be looking at the impact this is having more closely as we are trying to make this big culture shift. This is an area that the CUC could consider during this "all hands on deck" time, where equipping those who are willing to provide leadership could make a difference in the outcome. Here's Camellia Jahanshahi, who provides leadership in various areas, including but not limited to Rising Together, the online group for UU's of Colour, various young adult events, and is a religious educator for children and youth. She shares a variety of ways she could imagine the CUC supporting the work that she does.</p>
Camellia	<p>I would love us to have our own subset of the way that you have chorus, you have CanUUdle within our symposiums. I would love us to also have things like that that I think can only happen when there is somebody who has more hours and, because obviously that's a much bigger position.</p>
	<p>My support needs I think are help with promo. I would love it if I had and I'm sure I could have more facilitators so that it could go back to being a bi monthly thing or a monthly. I just don't have the capacity to do that much with all of my other things, which is the main reason that we are meeting less frequently.</p>
	<p>But there's still a desire to meet more frequently. And if there were more people who the CC was willing to pay, it could expand again. And just generally diving into an 8th Principle ministry position is I think, the direction that would be beautiful.</p>
Amber	<p>For those who are not familiar with the term "8th Principle position," Camellia is referring to the Dismantling Racism Study groups recommendation to hire someone to address racism and the removal of barriers to all forms of inclusion within ourselves and</p>



	UU institutions.
Erin	And as of October 2024, Camellia is now the CUC's first Dismantling Barriers Lead staff.
Amber	Right and until now, you and I, Erin, have been doing 8th Principle work as part of the Justice & Equity Team.
MUSIC	
Erin	Another category of feedback I heard in these interviews is a desire and willingness for the CUC to not only play a role in legitimizing and supporting community based ministers, ministries, and other religious professionals, but also support in the spiritual work that would help those who are apprehensive about the kinds of changes we have been talking about.
Amber	And this work could be a bit tricky for some but what an opportunity for collective renewal within ourselves if it's approached well.
	I think folks want to know that the energy they are putting into their community is worthwhile in the grand scheme of things.
Erin	Yes. Ellen Papenburg from Canadian Unitarian for Social Justice spoke very frankly about that.
Ellen Papenburg	I don't think that our movement I mean, just in general, you know, not just CSJ, but Unitarianism and Social action and everything is futile. I think we do make a little dent. And even a little dent is something, right.
	So that's very important and that is why we're inspired to continue. Otherwise I would say, "okay, I'm just going to be behind my telescope and that's it." Because I like astronomy, and the greater thing of the universe is holding us together as well. But it's good to continue. It is not without hope.
Amber	How awesome to hear her words "It's not without hope".
Erin	The impression I got from Ellen and Jim of CUSJ, is that they aren't afraid of the next generation shaking things up a bit. They were even willing to put some of their remaining resources towards good causes. There wasn't a sense of being replaced, but of participating in what's coming with an understanding that their value comes from their wisdom and trust. Here's Robyn Newton, followed by catherine strickland, of UU's of the Salish Sea who provide an example of this mindset.
Robyn	There are some wonderful elders at North Shore, and I've really enjoyed their company over the years. And I don't think I really even need to lose that, even though I'm not part of that congregation anymore. Honoring them is very appropriate and feels right to me.
Catherine	We're really longing for Unitarian Universalism to thrive. And we have an understanding that that looks, and can look, and needs to look different. And like you say, we're trying to offer something different for those folks that aren't currently caught by what's already out there and and we're not trying to say what's already out there isn't valid or



	worthwhile or whatever.
	We're trying to bring another opportunity, another place for those who are seeking, for those for whom our foundational principles and values call them, but for whom the current manifestation of those don't fit.
Amber	They've captivated me with their regional hub idea of different expressions, and how they want to honor all those expressions without taking away from those who want to remain in tradition.
Erin	It's a celebration when there is another expression created!
Amber	I'm very interested in How we celebrate each other more as a national body.
Erin	Well, another area that was identified was how the CUC can facilitate the connection of all the beautiful different UU's that exist across the country.
Erin	Peter Scales lifted up the idea that the wisdom of UU elders should be shared with younger generations before they pass on. I had fun brainstorming with him ways the CUC could be involved with this.
Peter	One of the members of First Unitarian Church of Victoria,
	Lyn Hunter was a member of Parliament in the 1970s. She knows about levers of power. She knows what parliamentarians listen to because she was a parliamentarian and I bet there's a lot of people in the congregation who don't know she was a member of Parliament.
Erin	So never mind just not knowing in the congregation. Then there's this whole national body that doesn't know. And when we talk about things changing over time with the Internet and Zoom and you and I meeting as we are right now, that's changed from only being a local community with occasional big conferences where people fly and go to extraordinary measures to stand beside one another or be with one another. So there's this evolution that's allowed us to become more national focused in a less well, in a way that's less effort really, because you could connect a young person in Nova Scotia with someone in Manitoba and someone in Victoria in the drop of a hat, like there's nothing stopping these connections from being made and there's nothing stopping
	this wealth of information from being known and shared and that even utilized to equip people who are wanting to make these changes and do the work that they do. There's a version of UUism that I'm imagining in my head right now that has a website that has here's our elders, these are our elder UUs.
	And here's like a little bio of who these people are and here's how you can connect with them. And maybe it's folks from outside of UUism too, that are doing the work that they do in their organizations or their communities and find out that in UUism they're not limited. They can still reach out to this organization and find people who have lived experience and then we can maybe help connect them.



Peter	Library of Wisdom or something like that.
Erin	You know, maybe there's a role for the CUC to try to help create that space for the work, which I don't know if they're doing it in every place, but I haven't heard of this ceremony of recognizing elder hood. But I think that maybe there's something there to continue to build on, of not just recognizing it for the sake of the local community, local UU community, but to expand it out into the local broader community and then the national UU community and then the national community as a whole that that folks would be able to connect with and even ask questions of whatever it might be.
	And maybe there's a way that, ...when people have an affinity to a club or the girl guides or whatever, and they go anywhere in the world, that there's a sense of being able to find one another. I'm wondering if there's a way for the CUC to reflect back into the world using social media, a more fulsome expression of what's actually going on so that people can more easily find one another.
	And so that there can be more easily facilitated connections between some of these elders and the knowledge keepers of these very specific things that they've done and that they know. And then these young people. And then also this connection where people are are just geographically centered in their their view of how they are UUs and are having this experience of our movement is dying because we are growing older and are feeling all of the big feelings one would have about seeing their wealth of experience potentially going into that final abyss, the final drop off when they leave planet Earth.
	I mean, that can be quite daunting. And I'm just wondering if there's a way using media and we have some pretty great staff right now that have expertise in this area of ways of putting it back out into the world in such a way that everything's fertilizing each other as opposed to being silos.
Amber	I love this train of thought. As one of those skilled CUC staff you mention Erin, I hear all of this and have a lot of ideas for a website that celebrates and connects people who share our values. Tthe idea of honouring our UU elders, their wisdom and their legacy while fertilizing the soil for the next generation of UU's does give me goose bumps!
Erin	Wendy Luella would be so proud!
Amber	Doing this well and with reverence could be part of that ceremony you and Peter referred to as a way to honour UU Elders.
Erin	Yes, Not only would it be a tribute, but it would be a legacy that would be enduring. A way for younger UU's who will co-create forward to say, "This is where we have come from collectively. These are the types of people that have inspired us and guided us



	during this phase in UU history.”
Amber	So much potential to be explored here.
MUSIC	
Erin	Something that became very clear to me as I conducted these various interviews is the fact that so many UUs exist in their geographical bubbles that they have limited understanding of the trends happening across the country, as well as <i>why</i> they are happening. Something the CUC can do to remedy this is to share with all UUs the state of affairs in terms of the challenges that are being faced. This podcast is a part of that.
Amber	I agree with Liz who said earlier, that our vulnerability and transparency is our best asset. Laying things bare in a way that gives everyone the information they need to forge promising paths forward is empowering.
Erin	The CUC is a registered charity, so the operating budget is available to anyone who is interested, but to many, budgets aren't really interesting nor are they easy to understand. There are two impressions of the CUC's finances that seem to be at odds with one another, neither of which are completely correct. One is that the CUC has vast amounts of money in a vault available to fund all the great ideas people come up with. The other is that money is so tight there isn't enough to sustain us for more than a few years so we need to stop all spending and cut as many costs as possible. These extremes are not helpful, nor are they accurate.
Amber	Well the truth is, the way we are operating right now is not sustainable. We are consistently operating at a deficit because we are using a model that suited us over 60 years ago. Congregations are decreasing in size, and that has been a key source of funding in the past, so something new will need to be created. This is a very important moment for Young Adults to know what they are inheriting and to have more say in how they want to move forward. Our financial situation shouldn't be ignored because it's a sensitive topic...Innovation is needed and welcome here! And by saying this I don't mean just for the sake of keeping a governing body alive if it's not serving a good purpose. I mean if we look at the CUC as an entity that includes us all, and allows for a sharing of resources and expertise in a way that makes it easier of each UU Expression to thrive, then planning forward for sustainability on all levels means a strong national fabric for years to come.
Erin	It could be said there has never been a more important time in the recent history of UUism for all involved to have all the information they need to come together to co-create what comes next.
Amber	And as we are trying to model in sharing these interviews, transparency will be key.
MUSIC	



Erin	Another thing that you and I discovered during these interviews is that there are over 10,000 people in Canada that identified as UU's in the 2021 Census. That's a lot of UUs that we have never met, are not networked in, and have not yet been invited to co-create with us.
Amber	Who knew there are so many people who identify as UU's that we have never met!
Erin	Right!?! Apparently, this wasn't news to Rev Linda Thomson:
Linda	There are always about three times as many Canadians who identify as UU than people who hang out in our congregations. That's been fairly constant. So we know that there is this group of humans in the world, maybe they were married by a UU officiant, maybe they grew up in a UU congregation, we don't know the answer who all those people are, but here are three times more people who know who we are than who are currently counted as being part of our communities.
Erin	And it wasn't news to Peter Scales who offered some possible explanations for why this is.
Peter	So people are living Unitarian values, who said they were Unitarian.
	Some people say that they are SBNR - they're spiritual but not religious, and those SBNR, if there's no census question that says reverential naturalist or SBNR or none, they put none. But maybe they attended a Unitarian wedding once, or a wedding led by a Unitarian chaplain, and they went, "oh, I read the principles of Unitarianism and that's me. I am never going to your church. But that's me." Or they've done the Belief-o'matic quiz online and it's told them that they're Unitarian and they'll never step foot in. We do get people who have come to Capital (congregation) over the years, usually in their or early thirties, because they thought, "I'm new in this city, how do I meet people?"
	I'm not going to go to the bars and hook up. I don't want to use Tinder or Grindr." One suggestion they might hear is "see what religion you are and go to that." So they do the belief rheumatic quiz and it says you're a Unitarian and they step foot in and they go, "Holy shit, I am a Unitarian. These people look like me.
	They all have a university degree. They're all white, They're all middle class, upper middle class. They all think they're progressive lefties and save the whales and don't cut trees down and down the pipeline." And once they realize that they never have to go back again, they can just say they're Unitarian.
Amber	So how are we going to connect with them? Like we're obviously not reaching them right now, but they are identifying strongly enough to put it on a census.



Erin	<p>That's a great question. I remember during one of our staff meetings Brigitte Twomey from our communications team brought in a reddit post of a young adult who was wondering where the other young adult UUs were after going to their local congregation to only find seniors. It's also very possible that a person of colour might find UUism online somewhere, show up to a congregation and find that most if not all people there are Caucasian. They might not realize there are online groups for UUs who look like them and have a similar lived experiences.</p>
Amber	<p>It would be ideal for us to have the type of structure that it wouldn't matter how people found us - at a wedding, funeral, protest, social enterprise, online, somewhere else - that they would be immediately shown to an online space that showcases all the diversity that exists within UUism - not just in people but in expressions, and be encouraged to explore to find something that fits them.</p>
Erin	<p>That would be wonderful outreach as well as a wonderful way for UUism to be branded. Along with the idea that we are a dynamic group of people that are constantly co-creating and evolving - "If you don't find what you're looking for, come join us and we'll co-create it with you!"</p>
Amber	<p>We can be a hub for collaborating with each other and the world</p>
Erin	<p>Funny you say that, because Camellia from Rising Together called out the artificial nature of boundaries and the potential in working together more broadly</p>
Camellia	<p>I would like to see more collective action, especially I totally understand why this is a see, you see, separate from the UUA, you know, we are a smaller group that's easier to mobilize and Canada is not the United States and they're very different and that's important.</p>
	<p>And while holding that importance, I also think that borders are stupid and we are all on Turtle Island, which is one big landmass. And I do wish that there was more recognition of that connection and kind of a dismantling of the manmade boundaries that we put on our land, and therefore our ability to relate to other people.</p>
	<p>Because certainly from the conversations that I've had with this group of people from the UUA with the CUC, it's very apparent that we are going through many of the same things and having that collective wisdom and collective commiseration has been really nice.</p>
Amber	<p>The online nature of the current world makes it possible to connect with UU's and others throughout the world. Take Rev Wendy Luella's Soulful Singer for instance. She has people from the USA and overseas participate. Geographic borders are not stopping them!</p>
Erin	<p>Exactly! So another area for potential exploration by the CUC is how we can use technology and other strategies to engage with others within Canada who identify with UUism but are not connected, and there are beneficial ways for the CUC to engage on a</p>



	global scale.
Amber	I suppose we are only limited by our imagination as technology really does open up new worlds and possibilities.
MUSIC	
Erin	The last thing we heard is that hard times are opening up the willingness of UUs to try new things. Here is an excerpt of a conversation between Rev Linda Thomson, Rev Anne Barker, and me as we discussed how necessity seems to be having a positive impact.
Erin	I think that's often the case, right, when people feel the necessity to for whatever reasons, they'll suddenly come forth and be willing to to engage in things maybe they wouldn't have considered before.
Linda	One of the most heartening things is that it's being perceived by a lot of people as an opportunity that they were oblivious to before.
Anne	One of the things I'm remembering is coming in as a UU I was told of stories of how ministers could be competitive or congregations could be competitive. And when they came together, they want to tell stories about what's going well and not so much about what's a challenge. And I think necessity opens up our willingness to talk to one another. Now I'm in spaces with ministers where we're putting heads together and trying to figure out how can we help the system, how can we help each other?
	...I had a lunch with five congregations represented in a room and they shared what they're proud of and they shared what's making them nervous or what's hard. And that was groundbreaking for me to see that, to see this willingness to share the vulnerabilities and what happens when we do that is that somebody later says to me, "If they're having trouble with the number of kids present or something to like, I guess we don't have to feel so alone in this.
	And now now we're talking together about how to help each other." We're seeing things like the two Ottawa congregations share one lay chaplaincy committee. So the lay chaplains serve both congregations. And now that's happening between South Fraser and the Vancouver Unitarian Congregation. It's a model that just easily transported into the other side of the country. And those kinds of things are just the simple ways to start to break in.
	And then people are looking at bigger ways of, maybe would it be better if we were one congregation or looking at ideas around satellites: we could have a congregation with a bunch of satellites and not all have all the same governance work to do so that we can still have independent locations, have unique ideas, but share in some of the bigger challenges, like one one bookkeeper, one one admin person who does the bookings for ceremonies, say, you know, those kind of things.
Amber	It's so encouraging to hear how many UU's are beginning to come together to collaborate



	with a willingness to do things differently.
Erin	Willingness is an important first step when beginning on a new journey. One can approach it full of fear and resistance or embrace it with the belief that the journey itself will be an opportunity worth taking, wherever it leads, because the opportunity it presents to evolve and grow together.
Amber	As we wrap up this episode and this series it feels like an opportune time to invite listeners to join the CUC and fellow UU's as we delve deeper into co-creating what UUism looks like into the future. The CUC has assembled a group of UU's called the LIFES Crew (Living Into the Future - Emergent Sustainability) that will be looking to engage UU's in conversation about this topic in 2024 and 2025. The CUC will be also be hosting some exciting opportunities to engage intergenerationally in a way that practices the heart and art of co-creating, with the intention of finding paths forward together. We will share links to both of those things in the episode notes and strongly encourage our listeners to explore these further.
Erin	Yes, lots of exciting things are happening as we embrace the opportunity that uncertainty brings. We will end this episode and this series with two quotes that feel a bit like a benediction of sorts for us to take with us as we ponder what we have learned and where we will go next. The first is Rev Danie Webber:
Danie	We're not going to fix Unitarian Universalism in Canada with one solution. It's going to be multiple different solutions in multiple different places in order to figure out how we are going to continue to be people of faith going forward. And I think that a big part of our faith, going back to that, living it in your bones kind of situation that we were talking about earlier, this is the thing that I am versus this is a this is a thing that I'm moving away from, is the practice. It is a practice to be Unitarian Universalist. You have to practice these principles, you have to engage and participate in the discovery of what your community is going to look like.
Amber	Wise words, And what we co-create together as we practice is yet to be discovered.
Erin	And our last benediction was created in 2013 by a group who were young adults at the time. This writing captures the essence of conversations they, and other young adults, were having. Some of those people include Curtis Murphy, Sean Neil-Barron, Carly Gaylor, Rev. Rodrigo Emilio Solano-Quesnel, and one of our interviewees Liz James of Mirth and Dignity and the Hysterical Society. This piece is called the Church of Our Imagination.
Multiple Voices	We love our congregations
	and we are called out of them.
	And all of that intentionality requires such courage.



	We imagine church through social enterprise - a café, bike shop, community centre.
	We imagine church in houses - meeting as small groups as part of a larger body.
	We imagine church online - maintaining connectedness over distance when we can't be together in person.
	We imagine church on the street - building relationships, hearing stories, becoming friends.
	We imagine church embedded in neighbourhoods - with deep roots and porous walls.
	And we imagine our present churches, vibrant and sustainable, embedded in a dynamic web of symbiotic relationship, within and beyond.
	We are called to start building this web.
Amber	Thank you everyone for engaging with us through this series - interview participants and yourselves as listeners. We look forward to carrying on the conversation further into the fall and new year. Wishing you all goosebumps!

End of Episode 10 transcript
