



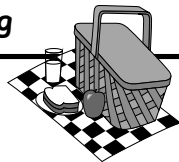
## UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

A church for people  
with enquiring minds

### June 2011

#### Sunday Services

June 5 Picnic...for details contact  
Rhonda Armstrong



#### Harvest Festival

Please Join Us at the Queenston St.  
& Area Neighbourhood Meeting  
Thursday, June 9, 2011 at 7:00 pm  
Start Me Up Niagara  
17 Gale Crescent  
For More Information:  
Call 905-984-5310  
All are Welcome to help Plan Your  
2nd Annual Harvest Festival

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**Note:** If desired, an 8.5 x 11" size  
announcement of the Harvest Festival is  
available for printing from the website.

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#### Who We Are. . .

Shari Virtue

As a child growing up in Burlington and Hamilton, Ontario, Shari was most likely to be found with her nose in a book! She loved to read, and she believes that it was those early childhood stories and the teenage consumption of magazines, newspapers and just about any book at the public library that have been the cornerstone of her life choices. Books provided insight to other worlds...worlds that needed to be discovered.

Although Shari excelled at school, she couldn't wait to get out! At Brock University, she completed a combined BA/BEd degree in Teaching English as a Second Language (TESL) and history with a minor in geography. Although not immediately drawn to teaching, (she was very shy back then!) she saw this as her way to see the world. However, it has turned out to be a profession that she truly loves, even after 22 years!

So, off she went! Upon graduating (1989), Shari backpacked around Australia and New Zealand, working in a movie theatre to cover costs. The travel bug took hold and there was no looking back! The following year, she went to Iwaki, Fukushima (the little northeast corner of Japan now sadly affected by the tsunami) and taught English at a language school for a year....

...contd. Pg.2

#### Unitarian Congregation of Niagara

Phone: 905-687-8433  
Website: [www.unitarian-stcatharines.org](http://www.unitarian-stcatharines.org)  
General Inquiry: [ucn.contact@gmail.com](mailto:ucn.contact@gmail.com)  
Communications e-mail: [ucn.communications@gmail.com](mailto:ucn.communications@gmail.com)  
Web administrators: [ucn.webadmin@gmail.com](mailto:ucn.webadmin@gmail.com)

#### Lay Chaplains:

Ed Gilbert  
Valerie Jaeger  
[ucnlaychaplains@gmail.com](mailto:ucnlaychaplains@gmail.com)  
905-687-8433

**Unitarian Congregation  
of Niagara**

223 Church St.  
St. Catharines, ON L2R 3E8  
Tel: 905-687-8433  
www.unitarian-stcatharines.org

**2011/2012**

PRESIDENT: John Mayer  
VICE PRESIDENT:  
John Northover  
PAST PRESIDENT:  
Michael Petrocci  
LAY CHAPLAINS:  
Ed Gilbert  
Valerie Jaeger  
SECRETARY:  
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Ed Gilbert  
CHOIR/MUSIC:  
Penny Blake  
COMMUNICATIONS:  
Roy Blake  
DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS:  
Merelie Scott-Armstrong  
LAY CHAPLAINCY:  
Jenny Leach  
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NEWSLETTER:  
Sofia Vuorinen  
PASTORAL CARE:  
Inactive  
PHONE MONITOR: Ed Gilbert  
PROGRAM:  
Karen Johnson-Hosein  
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Peter Skelton  
RELIGIOUS EDUCATION:  
CONTACT FOR ADULT RE:  
Joan Rothman &  
Marie Belliveau  
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SOCIAL: Hilde Wheeler  
SOCIAL JUSTICE:  
Marie Belliveau  
SPECIAL EVENTS:  
Rhonda Armstrong  
TRUSTEES:  
Andrea Gravelle, Don Herne  
Doreen Peever  
WEBSITE: Roy Blake

**Shari Virtue . . .** (...continued from pg. 1)

Students ranged in age from 2 to 72, from housewives and kids to factory workers and businessmen. It was a fun and crazy place to be for a 24 year old!

After returning to Canada and completing Teacher's College at the University of Toronto, Shari taught briefly at a Catholic boys school in Sri Racha, Thailand. The following year she taught at a high school in Barrie, Ontario. Although wildly different, each with their own unique charms and challenges, neither seemed to be the right fit. So, she headed off to Switzerland to teach at a Japanese boarding school. Shari lived in the tiny village of Leysin in the Swiss Alps for 3 years. She soaked in the cultures of Europe and learned to ski, but eventually came back to Canada to be closer to family and friends.

It was about this time (1999) that Shari came to live in St. Catharines. She got a full time position teaching ESL at Niagara College (a great employer!), bought a condo on Geneva Street and joined the local community, including the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara. ESL students at Niagara College are a mix of international visa students and landed immigrants or refugees from around the world. The best part of the job is watching students from different countries learn about each other and become friends. While at Niagara, Shari completed a Master's degree in Applied Linguistics with an emphasis on reflective practice and teacher development, and also had the opportunity to work in China and Dubai. She is grateful to Niagara College letting her escape once in a while!

One highlight of the last few years was a Rotary Group Study Exchange to Ethiopia and Uganda in 2007. It was truly a life-changing experience. Shari had the opportunity to meet with teachers and students in both countries, learning about life there and the challenges that people face. At the end of the one-month exchange, she stayed on for an additional month working independently at the Shola Children's Library, the only library of its kind in Addis Ababa. Thus began a wonderful relationship with *Ethiopia Reads*, an organization that has pledged to build a culture of literacy for the next generation of Ethiopians through the building of libraries and rural donkey-mobiles, the publishing of books in English and local languages and on-going professional development for teachers and librarians. There is a direct link between literacy and education and the health and wealth in a community. Imagine a life with no fairy tales, no information, no education! Putting a book in the hands of child can make all the difference!

Shari was able to help the organization establish some connections with the Rotary groups in Addis, which lead to the building of several libraries in recent years....

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## Congregation News

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### FRAGRANCE-FREE POLICY

The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara is a fragrance-free zone. Fragrance may be distressful and threaten the well-being of those around you. In order to make this a safe and welcoming environment for everyone who comes here, we ask that you refrain from wearing fragrances. Your understanding and co-operation is appreciated.

### Denominational Affairs

Doreen Peever and John Mayer were our delegates at the May CUC conference in Toronto. Sofia Vuorinen and John Northover took the opportunity to attend the Friday, May 20th, general meeting open to all interested. Good reports on that day. Ed Gilbert was also at the conference, attending the lay chaplaincy sessions.

– Merelie Scott-Armstrong

## UCN Board Meeting Highlights April 26, 2011

**\*“Sharing Our Faith” Grant:** a cheque for \$3000 is in the mail. \$1000 of the Grant will be returned to church funds as we paid the first installment in November 2010. The other \$2000 will be put aside for the next two years.

**\*Chaplaincy Committee:** Karen Johnson-Hosein is interested in becoming a lay chaplain in training. **M/S/C Doreen/Mike to welcome Karen as a Lay Chaplain in training.**

Julianne Momirov has resigned and Valerie Jaeger plans to resign in September. Sincere thanks to Julianne and Valerie for all their hard work and dedication.

**\*Program:** Judith, Sandra and Karen are meeting next week to plan the summer program. David Galston is available to speak here every second month.

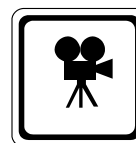
**\*UCN’s Got Talent** took in \$598.50

**\*Harvest Festival:**  
(see item in NL)

**\*SGD Facebook Page:**  
(see item in NL)

**\*Next mtg.:** May 31<sup>st</sup>, 7:00 p.m. at the church.

*(A copy of the full meeting report may be accessed by congregation members through the UCN website.)*



## UCN Night at the Movies

June 24th – "The Soloist"

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### SGDC launches new Facebook group

On May 17, the Sexual and Gender Diversity Committee of UCN established, with the much-appreciated assistance of techno-wizard Roy Blake, a Facebook group called Unitarian Pride in Niagara. The launch deliberately coincided with International Day Against Homophobia and Transphobia.

The Facebook group is part of SGDC’s mandate to reach out to the LGBTQI community. The site also provides an important resource for stories and commentary related to the sexual- and gender-diverse community. Joan Wiley and Roy Blake are the current administrators and monitors of the open site.

While it’s no secret that our Unitarian congregation celebrates and supports sexual and gender diversity, the site reinforces our commitment and raises our profile as a CUC-recognized Welcoming Congregation.

If you’re on Facebook, just type in Unitarian Pride in Niagara at the top of the page and you’ll be directed to the site.

## Who We Are ...

(continued pg. 2)

She is in the planning stage of some teacher development workshops, and has now embarked on her own fundraising endeavour. She hopes to raise \$10,000 to build one library, in a rural province of Ethiopia: Th. She began in January 2011, and with the help of family, friends, colleagues and community, she has already raised \$7000 through bake sales, raffles, a read-a-thon, a storytelling event and most recently a trivia night held here at the UCN church building! That evening alone raised \$2,240! Many thanks to the UCN for the use of the church, for your participation at trivia night and for all of your generous donations! There are a few more events coming up on this last leg of the fundraiser: a garage sale in Burlington on May 28, an Ethiopian dinner in the Fall and maybe even a karaoke party!

Helping to build this children's library is a small labour of love, but it represents the convergence of a number of core values, many of which have been nurtured right here at UCN. Seeing how Unitarians take their beliefs and put them into action has been an inspiration for Shari as she seeks to build a meaningful life of love and compassion for herself...and now for her daughter. As many of you may know, Shari is adopting a child from Ethiopia, a little girl of about 3 or 4, and she

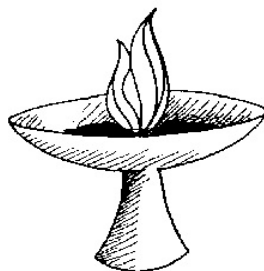
hopes the adoption will be completed some time this year.

Adoption? Well, that's another very long story, but in short Shari hopes that the next time she gets bitten by the travel bug, she'll be able to take her little one by the hand and say "Hey honey, look at that!" And, when she heads to Ethiopia to show her daughter her homeland, she'll be able to show her a place, a library, that was built by the wonderful people in Canada for her and for all of the children of Ethiopia. And finally, quite simply, Shari looks forward (impatiently!) to sharing life's joys and sorrows, both great and small with this little person and helping her as she grows into a young woman to LIVE and LOVE and LAUGH and just BE the person she was born to be!

Many, many thanks to the special people of the Unitarian Congregation just for being who you are and sharing so much yourself with me over the years!

Love, Shari

For more information about the "First Canadian Children's Library" in Ethiopia, please visit the fundraising blog: <http://growingalibrary.wordpress.com/> or contact Shari at [svirtue@niagaracollege.ca](mailto:svirtue@niagaracollege.ca)



## Choral Wrap ...

'When words fail, music speaks'.

Its time to say adieu to the formal part of the year at the UCN. What are some of the highlights of that year?

Well, with our small but plucky band of musicians and singers we have brought you (to name a few items):

- \*new anthems
- \*interesting variations on old hymns, such as 'We're Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table'
- \*Carl Beckett's inimitable Valentine's program, 'Love in Words and Song'
- \*and in a congregation wide collaborative effort, UCN Got Talent

As I said, we take a break now from our formal participation in services, but with a little luck, and congregational support, hope to be back in the fall, fresh and ready to go. I leave you with another quote to ponder:

'If the King loves music, it is well with the land'. - Penny



**Unitarian Congregation  
of Niagara**  
223 Church Street  
St. Catharines, ON  
L2R 3E8

Editor: Sofia Vuorinen  
[sofia.vuorinen@3web.net](mailto:sofia.vuorinen@3web.net)

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August 21, 2011