



UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

A church for people
with enquiring minds

January 2008

Sunday Services

January 2008

- Jan 6** John Mayer – *Not Too Late for Resolutions*
- Jan 13** James Lawler – *The Spiritualist Tradition in Modern Western Philosophy*
- Jan 20** Donna Ford – *Blacks in Ontario*
- Jan 27** Vivianne LaRiviere – *Topic to be advised*

February 2008

- Feb 3** Marg Glassford & Friends – *With These Hands*
- Feb 10** Kate Green – *USC*
- Feb 17** AGM
- Feb 24** Sadesh Sachdeva – *Women Who Have Changed the World*

"As I grow older, I pay less attention to what people say. I just watch what they do."

- Andrew Carnegie

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www.unitarian-stcatharines.org

Questions . . .

You might best recognize me as the mother of the little blonde girl who has been coming to church sometimes, lately. Another part of who I am is a person full of questions. I am always a work in progress and currently part of that process involves deciding if church-going and Unitarianism are for me and for raising my daughter with. Of course, what I am writing is totally biased because it is my personal perspective . . . and that is all I have to share. Will you bear with me as I stumble through this? I genuinely mean no offense to anyone and share this all in a respectful spirit of simply searching for answers. So please forgive me if I demonstrate a lack of finesse in any of my musings. I am a beginner in my learnings (and certainly would like to become a master . . . which takes lots of practice, I imagine). I have decided to make this process a "public" one as a way to challenge myself and as a way to invite you, the people who essentially *are* the church and Unitarianism in my experience, into my process. This way, I hope we can get to further know one another.

When I search to join some kind of spiritually based group . . . what I look for is not so much a church or congregation but a community that supports, challenges and contributes to my abilities to bring love to the world. For the last 10 or so years, I have been a part of various circles that were intended for such and similar purposes. When I relocated to St. Catharines almost 5 years ago, I had to continue the search for something that grounded me in my community. I opened myself up to the idea of joining a church when I happened upon Unitarian ideas during this time of searching. It has taken me a while to surpass my discomfort with the idea of entering a congregation of people who have known one another for some time and who have established roles, relationships, and rituals.

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2007/2008

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Questions *(cont'd from pg. 1)*

That is a bit daunting for me, having spent most of my life more like an outsider (even within my own family experiences), because I tend toward nonconformity, eccentricity and challenge.

Still, I've spent much of my life living and believing based on heady, intellectual considerations, as I think most of us are strongly socialized to do; what that got me was more and more distance - from myself, from others, from Spirit. However, I've begun to learn that when I fully breathe and connect with the heart at the core of my BEing, I live truly alive, open, and maybe for a bit in the space of **now**, where peace and joy and love reside.

I am wondering what has happened to the self in Unitarianism? Ever hear the idea that you cannot truly give love to another unless you truly, deeply love yourself first? Given that I (and I think most of us) tend to be my own harshest critic, this makes sense to me ... if I can truly love me, who I tend to be hardest on, then I will certainly be able to love others. (And, what is love? Is it a feeling ... or is it actions, like taking time to nurture myself to keep up my energy and vitality or talking gently and tenderly to myself, as I would to Anandi, when I do or say something differently to my ideal?)

From the little bit that I've been introduced to in my goings to some of the Sunday services, my perception is that in Unitarian practices the heart and true spirit of self has been to some degree forgotten and that there seems instead to be intellectual externalization of rational ideas for pondering, as well as a goodwill aspect of reaching out in hopes of saving the rest of the world. Yes??? No??? Yet, how might the world, or any portion of it, be saved by those who may be forgetting to love and save themselves? Can living by principles override (and maybe even suppress) true human experience, and if so, can people function in a healthy and truly generous way? Or can we bring joy, peace and light (if that is, indeed, the goal) to the world by lighting up from within and shining outward? Could maybe giving true nurturing and gentle tenderness to ourselves and living by example be a powerful tool of salvation for this world? Or is the risk of crossing over into egocentricity and narcissism too great?

Are you familiar with the idea that what you focus on expands and becomes your world, while what you resist also persists? I've experienced that to allow, accept and to love, even something that I don't want in my life, generates peaceful space to enable shifts of growth and expansion - a soaring into a world I do want to live in.

Within this Unitarian congregation, I have noticed a wonderful concern for the plight and suffering of others. Is there, though, a risk of contributing to problems when they are focused on - for instance, while information is important to have ... how powerful is the way in which it is presented, advocated, and acted upon? I remember a quotation that I think I heard in the movie "The Secret," referring to Mother Theresa's claim that she would not attend an "anti-war" event but if you invited her to a "peace" event she would certainly want to attend.

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While my beliefs are that I create and am responsible for what I feel and think and I am NOT a victim but an individual empowered to choose my feelings and thoughts, I still sadden myself to see the small numbers and especially the lack of young people who attend this church. What would it take to invite and make happen that this be an expanding energetic, enthusiastic and truly diverse (in age, ethnicity, education level, socioeconomic status, etc.) congregation? I appreciate the value and comfort of ritual and I also crave the inspiration of change and newness. How can / do the two need to co-exist to promote life and continuation? Will this church of the Niagara Region die? Or will it rebirth? Do parts need to die to allow some rebirth? Is it a matter of the Unitarian principles or how they are interacted with? Do things need updating, reinterpreting, rethinking or does the "mind" need to give over to the heart and things need re-inspiration, rejuvenation, and reconnection? Or what?

I know that I am not the only or the first to ask these questions. Will these questions, and the many others out there, be answered, or at least seriously explored (are they already and, if so, how do I get in on that action?), or will they flicker away? Is it time for the flame lighting this church to extinguish or to reignite? Or is it simply, to put it back on myself, that I am in the wrong place?

Sincerely, *Tara Dajka*

P.S. I must say, the last two Sunday's speakers (Carol, and Vivienne) really heartened :) my experience, perception and hopes! I'm feeling quite inspired - hooray!!!

Membership News

The Congregation welcomes the following as new members:
Aubrey Bissett
Penny and Roy Blake
Karen and Paul Golden

I am sorry to announce that Marion Hood has left the Congregation as she has moved out of the area. Best of luck to you, Marion.

Ed Gilbert is intending to join the Congregation.

Jim Glassford
Membership Co-ordinator

Upcoming Social Events

On Sunday, **January 13th**
we will be having a
"Chili Day Lunch"
instead of our usual
monthly salad day.
Please join us!

Peter and Barbara Skelton have volunteered to host the January walk at their house the afternoon of **Saturday, January 12th**. Call Peter for details.

Annual General Meeting

The Annual General Meeting of the congregation will take place on Sunday February 17, 2008 at 11:00 a.m.; please mark it on your calendars and plan to attend.

Due to legal technicalities, we need to revisit the issue of our congregation's name, so the following motion will be presented at the AGM:

Motion: That the members of the congregation legally change the name of the congregation from The Church of the Unitarian Fellowship of St. Catharines to The Unitarian Congregation of Niagara."

– *Anita Miecznikowski*

Canadian Elected to Head World Religious Body

Representatives from 27 countries have elected the Reverend Brian Kiely of Edmonton as President of the International Council of Unitarians and Universalists. Reverend Kiely previously served as President and Past President of the Canadian Unitarian Council until May 2007.

In the first week of November, Unitarians and Universalists from around the world gathered in Oberwesel, Germany, overlooking the banks of the Rhine river. Following their liberal religious faith's inclination towards voluntary simplicity, they met in a youth hostel, not a cathedral. Nor did they pollute the air with black smoke or white smoke as they burned their ballots. In fact, they elected Rev. Kiely by acclamation.

Unitarian and Universalist organizations tend to build from the grassroots up, rather than being directed from the top down. Although the faith traces its roots to the Protestant Reformation of 1450, and has centuries of tradition in England and New England, its

emphasis on democracy and self-determination works against monolithic policymaking structures.

There are about 18,000 Unitarians in Canada (who may or may not be affiliated with one of the 45 active congregations) and more than 1,000 Unitarian Universalist congregations in the US. In addition, groups from as far as India and Africa have discovered Unitarianism for themselves, often through the Internet.

Governing Unitarians has been compared to herding cats. Rev. Kiely, who previously served several years on the Canadian Unitarian Council Board (including two terms as President), has experience with leading a flock composed of people who prize independence and diversity. Promoting the individual's "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" is one of the seven Unitarian principles.

Rev. Kiely describes himself as a "theistic humanist", meaning he has a deep sense of the spirit and of the divine, but that he does not believe in a god that watches over us or that intervenes in our lives. He says, "We must rely on our human abilities to solve our own problems, and develop strong, trusting and supportive communities to help us along the way."

Current CUC president Jean Pfleiderer noted that the growing global interest in Unitarian philosophy reflects the faith's relevance to world affairs and an awareness that "the fostering of the individual's spiritual path is more important than ever in the twenty-first century."

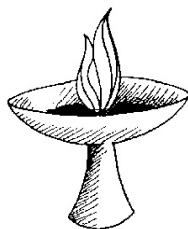
She also pointed to Unitarian leadership in the environmental movement, notably the Green Sanctuary movement and the organization, Ministry for the Earth. Rev. Kiely's election brings a Canadian perspective to the development of the world Unitarian movement. He will play an important role in preserving what Unitarians call "the interdependent web of all existence, of which we are all a part."

The Canadian Unitarian Council/conseil unitarien du Canada (CUC) is an association of forty-five congregations located across Canada with 5,200 individual members. Arising out of the work of outspoken reformers and dissenters within the Christian tradition five centuries ago, the Unitarian movement today flows in a broad religious stream augmented by Humanist, Earth-centred, Buddhist and other progressive beliefs.

For more information, contact: Jean Pfleiderer, President, Bd. of Trustees, Can. Unitarian Council jeanp@cuc.ca 613-389-2388

Rev. Brian Kiely, Pres., International Council of Unitarians Universalists

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Eliot Institute

This is a notice from the Eliot Institute. I hope it is not too late to get it in the December newsletter. Especially attractive given the drop in the US\$.

Got plans for New Year's Eve? Come to Eliot Institute this year! Eliot is a conference and a camp all in one. Winter Eliot, a 5-day session at Seabeck Conference Center on the Hood Canal in NW Washington, is a restful, stimulating, affordable, catered vacation for yourself or the whole family. More info at

<http://www.eliotinstitute.org/>

Donna Hamilton

Friend of Eliot Institute, from Beacon Church, Coquitlam

January 2008 workshops

Mark your calendars

The next Welcoming Congregation workshops will be held on the following Sundays from 1 to 3 p.m. — Jan. 6, 13 and 27. Please bring a bag lunch.

February dates are still to be decided.

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Deadline for Next Issue:

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