



UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

A Congregation for Everybody

UCN NEWS

December 2022

Our Covenant

We come in peace
To this place of fellowship and love,
Searching for truth and meaning,
Seeking justice and equity through action,
Supporting each other and serving our community,
Acknowledging and preserving the gifts of this world,
This is our covenant with each other and with all.

UPCOMING SERVICES

December 2022

December 4 - Myths We Buy Into - service presented and led by Karen Stovell

December 11 - Hope - service presented and led by Brian Jones

December 18 - Hanukkah at Home - service presented and led by Penny Blake. Penny will share her experience of Hanukkah growing up and here in Niagara, and delve into the meaning of Hanukka past and present.

December 21 - Winter Solstice Ceremony - CANCELLED

December 24 - Christmas Carol Service, 4:30 pm - service presented and led by Karen Stovell

December 25 - **No Service**

WINTER EVENTS

CIRCLE DINNERS

Our last Circle Dinner was a bust. With the influx of flus and colds, many who regularly attend were not as healthy as they wished and stayed at home choosing to keep themselves and others safe.

As Niagara Region continues to experience rising numbers in Covid, flus and colds, further Circle Dinners are not planned.

ADULT DISCUSSION GROUPS

These groups will be cancelled for December and will resume in the New Year.

If you are interested in exploring and attending these discussions in the future, please contact Karen Stovell.


DECEMBER HOLIDAY POTLUCK LUNCH

Sunday, December 11


Noon

This is scheduled for after Sunday's Service on the topic of Hope presented by Brian Jones. The luncheon will be holiday themed.

HOLIDAYS
- by anonymous



So many holidays in December
Here's a poem to help you remember
First there is Chanukah, Festival of Lights
A Jewish tradition that lasts eight nights
In Sweden we have Saint Lucia's Day
The girls in white serve buns on trays
Travel to Mexico for Las Posadas
With fiestas, parades, food and piñatas
Now for a holiday from the Great White North
Kids await for Santa and gifts coming forth
Christmas Day, trees, food, lights on the wall
Goodwill to all men and peace to all
This next holiday will end December
A time that African Americans remember
At Kwanza presents are made by hand
Candles are lit, on a mat they stand.
That's the end of our December
Hope this helps you to remember



PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

- Matt Virro

I was reviewing a recent email exchange between the Canadian Unitarian Council (CUC) and Kelowna Unitarians. I was struck by their news relating to charitable organizations and the amount of time they can devote to so called political activities.

I remember in Prime Minister Harper's day the Federal Income Tax auditors feasted on organizations such as Unitarian congregations in Canada. They were in pursuit of those penitent ones operating outside the then 10% rule; that is, no political activity in furtherance of a political candidate or political organization. There were severe penalties.

Since the Income Tax Act in 2018 and a more liberally minded government, income tax rules governing political activities of charities have been amended dramatically to remove the quantitative limits (no more 10% rule) on the resources a charitable organization or charitable foundation can devote to political activities. This still requires we do not directly or indirectly support or oppose a political party or candidate for public office.

Yes, a charitable organization must be constituted and operated exclusively for charitable purposes. However, UCN can comfortably engage in political activity that "enhances public policy dialogue and development." Hypothetically, if it was all we did, it would be permitted. We would be meeting the test of enhancement of public policy dialogue and development. If we do that, all is fine.

What does this mean for UCN today? We cannot directly or indirectly support or oppose a political party or candidate for public office, but there is no limit to any of us participating in letter writing campaigns to MPs and MPPs or participating with other political organs. Further, we are not restricted from participating in rallies that further enhance public policy dialogue. To this end, we can host climate change political action at UCN. This sounds like liberal social action to me.

"Learn from yesterday, live for today, hope for tomorrow.
The important thing is that you never stop questioning."
- Albert Einstein

WELCOMING THE WINTER SOLSTICE

For Everything there is a Season

excerpt from *In Nature's Honor: Myths and Rituals Celebrating the Earth* (2005)

by Patricia Montley

On Solstice Eve, value the dark. On the longest night of the year, before the light overcomes the dark (sit in the dark alone or with friends) and think about the importance of darkness.

Bless mushrooms that grow in the dark, the fire flies that dot the black sky and the honeysuckle that sends its luscious scent into the night. Be grateful for the darkness that soothes us to sleep, the darkness that is required for hibernation. Give thanks for the dark sheltering places; the rich earth where seeds germinate, the caves that harboured our ancient ancestors (and where some of our sun gods were born), the cellars that keep us safe from tornadoes, the womb that provides our first nourishment.

Acknowledge the darkness of suffering, which can deepen our appreciation of life and strengthen our connection to one another.



Welcome to our New Members!
Jacob Santos and Nathan Smith



SENIORS' CHRISTMAS HAMPERS

Each year UCN members and friends have generously given to St.Catharines Community Care Christmas initiative for seniors who require support to make their Christmas special.

Since Covid we were restricted to giving money only. This year Community Care is reverting to the previous method of giving, either with money or the following necessary items:

- bathrobes, pyjamas, socks, slippers
- outdoor clothing such as warm hats, scarves, mitts, gloves
- mugs or throws
- boxed cookies, hard candy, nuts

NOTE: All donated item are to be new and unused.

Money collected will be used to purchase the above items not supplied by our congregation and to purchase canvas grocery buggies which assist the recipients in toting their groceries and other purchases.

Items donated can be placed at the rear of our sanctuary in a box marked 'Christmas for Seniors.' If you prefer to give money, please pass on your donation to LesLee or Maurice Turmel. The deadline for contributions has been extended to December 4, 2022.



These special gifts will be gratefully received by the seniors of this community. They will know they are cared about and remembered this holiday season.

FOOD DRIVE

Just a reminder that we continue to collect non-perishable food items to be donated to various food banks across Niagara Region. We ask that UCN congregants contribute one item each Sunday. This way we have a substantial collection of food to donate within a week or two.

You will find a box at the rear of the sanctuary where you can drop off your contributions. Let's help feed those who cannot adequately feed themselves.



NOTEWORTHY

This is the section in our newsletter that provides a forum for UCN congregants to contribute material that is of interest to them. These may include personal reflections, experiences and general information consistent with UU principles and interests.

This month's contributions are from Jenny Leach and Paul Pipher.

REFLECTING ON CONNECTIONS

In response to Jim Glassford's Remembrance Day Service on November 6.

- Jenny Leach

I chose to write out this vignette. I could not share the story at Sunday's service without becoming teary eyed and very emotional.

I came to Canada from the Netherlands when I was 25. There were many returning Canadian veterans visible to me upon my arrival. I was astonished how many men told me they were in Holland during the war once they heard my Dutch accent. It was more than I thought was randomly possible.

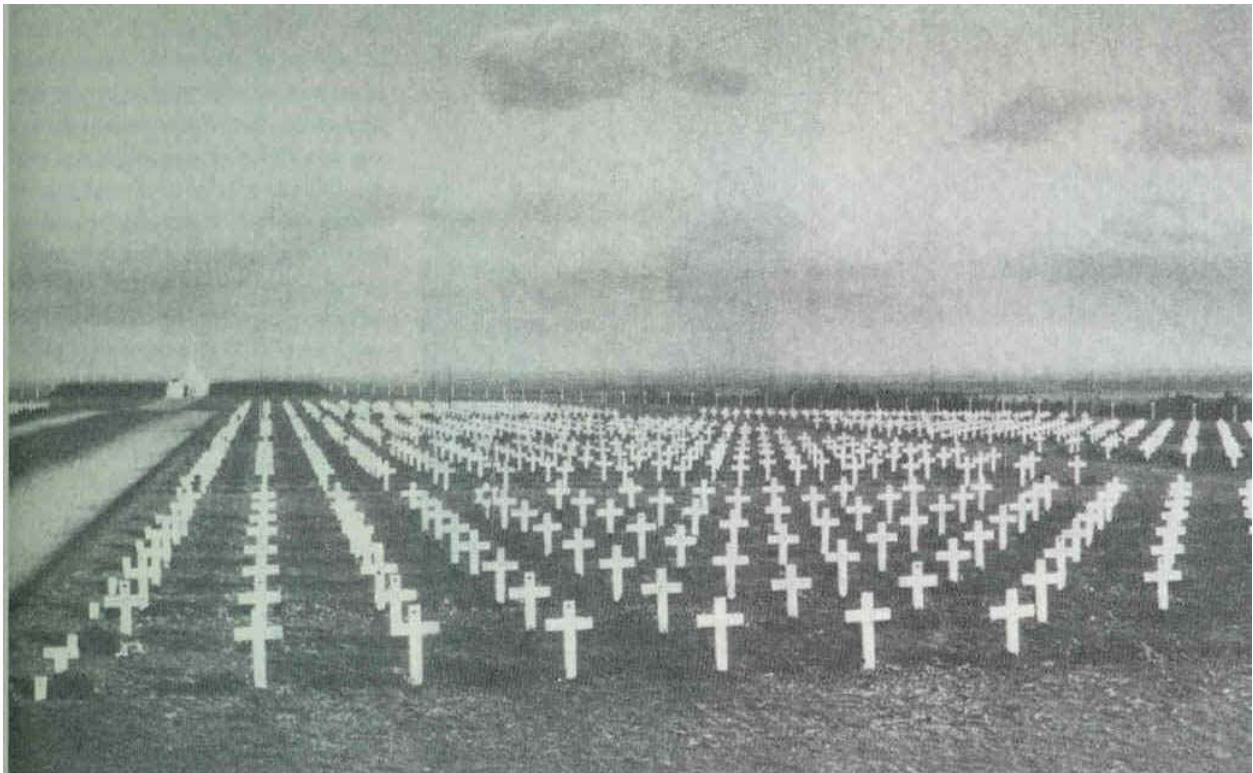
The Canadian soldiers who were killed in Holland during WW 2 are buried in a special war cemetery, the Groesbeek Canadian War Cemetery. Many school trips are organized for Dutch children to help them appreciate this reality of war. I once visited as a private citizen and will never forget the experience of being surrounded, as far as I could see, by white crosses representing each fallen Canadian soldier. The enormity of the losses!

No wonder the Dutch people were grateful and remain grateful.

Each year, on Liberation Day, there is a ceremony and parade to which Canadian representatives are in attendance and are warmly received. Decades after the war, many veterans have died. In response to this, the Dutch government extended invitations to and paid for all surviving veterans to participate in a spectacular and the final Remembrance Day Service Parade. Many came, some in frail condition. They were astounded by the enthusiastic welcome they received. Those in wheelchairs were surrounded and mobbed with warmth, hugs and gratitude by old and young. This deeply touched me.

Who would expect the young to remember? This is Dutch history and taught in schools and kept alive. The youth also help to tend the graves at Groesbeek.

Canada continues to receive an annual gift of tulips in gratitude for Canadians sheltering the future Queen Juliana from the impending Nazi occupation. The original gift was 100,000 tulip bulbs. In 2022, Ottawa received more than one million bulbs. The legacy continues.



REFLECTIONS ON EVIL

A response to the service of Sunday, November 13, 2022

- Paul Pipher

The Bible says that Evil occurs when we give in to the temptations of the Devil; Good, however, comes from following God's commands. This is a theological concept. But we are Unitarians and believe in explaining things using a scientific or logical perspective. If the idea of Evil is to be useful to us, we must start with a non-theological way of defining Evil.

I suggest that if we define Evil as 'harming others for our selfish gain,' we might have set up a framework that leads to a broader and practical understanding.

An understanding, for example, that things such as ignorance and injustice are not Evil themselves, but instead factors and situations which contribute to the likelihood of Evil being committed. So to, insecurity and pride. Dealing with such matters then becomes a practical way of reducing the chance of Evil occurring. Conversely, empathy, generosity and patience become tools that lessen the chance of Evil occurring.

Two practices or techniques, frameworks for reducing chances of Evil happening:

1) Bhagavad Gita

The basic thinking of this scripture is this: 'If I am in a situation where I am forced to choose one of two valid possible actions, either of which will cause hardship to others, I should choose the action which brings me the least possible personal gain. This will help lessen my bias towards making a selfish decision.'

2) The Golden Rule

This is a similar technique, a prompt to shift us into introspection and self-reflection that will increase the likelihood of virtuous treatment of others. I find the way Hillel expresses it easier to understand and put into effect: "Don't do to others what you would not want done to yourself."

We may never be in the position to confront Evil on a grand scale, but we can and must do it on a personal level. Charity begins at home, my mother used to say.

"May my mind come alive today.....to break the dead shell of yesterdays, to risk being disturbed and changed."
- John O'Donohue

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“You may not always have a comfortable life and you will not always be able to solve all the world’s problems at once, but don’t ever underestimate the importance you have because history has shown that courage is contagious and hope can bring on a life of its own.”

- Michelle Obama



**Deadline for Jan. Newsletter:
Dec. 16, 2022**

