



UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

*A church for people
with enquiring minds*

Our Mission Statement: “We covenant to support an empowering church that affirms the individual and celebrates history, science and mystery in a welcoming, joyous and evolving fellowship.”

April 2021

Upcoming Services

April 4 - Easter Sunday - service presented and led by Reverend Patricia Trudeau of the Unitarian Fellowship of Northwest Toronto. For the first time we will be sharing a Zoom Service with another congregation.

Reverend Trudeau will be exploring the facts and myths that are embedded in our understanding of the Easter story.

NOTE: This Service will begin at 10:30 a.m.

April 11 - Embracing the Ordinary - service presented and led by LesLee Turmel

Embracing and celebrating our ordinary life with its limitations, frustrations, disappointments and failures may just open us up to seeing possibilities for extraordinary achievements.

April 18 - Spirituality and Music: Part Two - service presented and led by Eva Schwartzenruber

Eva's first service "Spirituality and Music" on March 7 was so well received that there were calls for an encore performance. For her second service, Eva wants you to think about the music that is personal to you and share it with the congregation. It could be a favourite song with special meaning from your past or it could speak to you today.

Eva will coordinate your contributions with Roy Blake. If you decide to perform your selection, Roy will assist you in prerecording for the service. Let Roy know as soon as possible if you wish to prerecord your selection. Eva would like your submissions no later than April 11 so she and Roy will have ample time to plan and coordinate the service. Let Eva know if you need help finding a particular piece of music.

April 25 - TBA - service led and presented by Karen Stovell

“The best and most beautiful things in the world cannot be seen or even touched - they must be felt with the heart”

~ Helen Keller

**Unitarian Congregation
of Niagara**

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2021

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EDUCATION: Karen Stovell

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Karen Stovell

COMMUNICATIONS:

Roy Blake

DENOMINATIONAL AFFAIRS:

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NEWSLETTER:

LesLee Turmel

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Glassford, Karen Stovell,
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Jim Glassford

Jenny Leach

Doreen Peever

A Word of Appreciation to UCN and its Congregation

Over the past year UCN has contributed to organizations as part of our Social Action activities. These acts do not go unappreciated.

We have received words of gratitude from Child Haven International, an organization which assists women and children in developing countries in need of food, shelter, clothing, education, healthcare, emotional and moral support. We are assured that our donation of \$380.00 has been especially important this year when COVID-19 has restricted much of their fund raising capacity.

Positive Living Niagara has also expressed appreciation for the \$380.00 which UCN has contributed to their coffers. This money helps them fill gaps in their service, providing additional medical supplies, personal items, nutritional supports and hygiene supplies to the most marginalized in our community.

Community Care is likewise grateful to our congregants who directly and collectively donated just over \$1000.00 towards gift cards and grocery buggies over the Christmas season for those seniors living on the edge.

Thank you to our congregants for their direct contributions and to those members whose monthly pledges make our Social Action goals possible. You are all appreciated.

– *Beryl Stovell*

“Kindness is the language the blind can see and the deaf can hear.” – Mark Twain



President's Message . . .



As we round this year of COVID lockdown, times and the weather are changing. People's thoughts are turning to the coming of Spring, birds returning, grass greening, and more sun shining on our noses.

Hopefully, we will soon be beating the race between pandemic ills and good health with vaccinations. The two great religious holidays coming up, Passover and Easter, are tied to this Spring season. This means to me that it is a season that speaks to freedom.

What does freedom mean to you?

Sometimes it is seen as a claim for rights, to be free from. It means Liberty.

Marginalized groups have historically claimed their freedom from despots and kings, economic elites and slave owners. This type of freedom has done great good in the world, righted wrongs that have suppressed individuals, whole cultures and persecuted minorities. Today, we have hopes and fears for many groups, such as the Uyghur's in China and the Rohingya in Myanmar. The fate of the two incarcerated Michaels also weighs upon us.

Sometimes, in our wealthier and relatively carefree society, it seems that we only think of freedom as freedom of choice, the right to do anything we want. This often gets us in trouble. Our personal freedom, taken too far, harms society. Tension exists between our individual rights and the obligation to give everyone an equal chance, and to look after those who cannot thrive.

Many of us have bad memories from our mainstream religious heritage: too much blame and guilt, too much negativity.

Still, this is the season when many of us re-unite over Passover and Easter. Perhaps, we can take a look at what is the best these religions offer philosophically.

Freedom, for St. Thomas Aquinas, is a means to human excellence, to human happiness, to the fulfilment of human destiny. Freedom is the capacity to choose wisely and to act well as a matter of habit or, to use the old-fashioned term, as an outgrowth of virtue. Freedom is the means by which, exercising both our reason and our will, we act on the natural longing for truth, for goodness and for happiness that is built into us as human beings. Freedom is something that grows in us, and the habit of living freedom wisely must be developed through education which, among many other things, involves the experience of emulating others who live wisely and well. In St. Thomas's view, freedom is the great organizing principle of the moral life. And since the very possibility of a moral life (the capacity to think and choose) is what distinguishes the human person from the rest of the natural world, freedom is the great organizing principle of a life lived in a truly human way.

I find this embodies a pretty rosy view of human nature, almost Rousseauian, with which many have argued against. In many respects it seems true; we innately know when we are free and when things are wrong. We exercise choice and we need choice. Although an innate part of our human nature, St. Thomas holds that it also needs education. In order for freedom to be well expressed, it needs to be an endeavour and not just an outcome of our natural state.

Any musician knows that freedom of expression is the ultimate goal, but that many hours of practice and even drudgery may precede that freedom. When you can truly express the emotion and thought behind the

music without the initial difficulties towards its expression, then, and only then, do you feel music as a free and joyful offering.

Judaism posits that freedom without responsibility means slavery to one's basest impulses. When Moses confronts Pharaoh in God's name, he doesn't say just "let my people go." He adds "so that they may serve Me." In other words, freedom has a goal, a higher purpose than just being able to do what we please. May we all enter this season, whatever our religious or philosophical bent, with joy and hope. And may the promise of this season of freedom help guide us to more peace and fulfilment in our lives.

– Penny Blake

April's Guest Speaker

Sunday, April 4, 2021 at 10:30 a.m.

The Reverend Patricia Trudeau of the Unitarian Fellowship of Northwest Toronto has offered to present and lead our Easter Sunday service. She is recently ordained and will provide energy and enthusiasm to her Easter sermon as she challenges long held myths about the celebration while keeping true to the facts.

Reverend Trudeau has agreed to share services with our congregation via Zoom on an intermittent basis. We will be testing a reciprocal relationship whereby Northwest will provide services in exchange for participating in UCN led services. The details have not yet been determined. The only downside to this is that Northwest begins their services at 10:30 a.m. so sleepy heads will have to be ready 30 minutes earlier.

Sharing services can provide a broader understanding of Unitarianism practices. I believe this is essential to our congregation's growth as community citizens. From challenges and exposure to different perspectives comes growth.

We look forward to welcoming Reverend Trudeau and the members of Unitarian Fellowship of Northwest Toronto to our congregation.

– LesLee Turmel

Pub Night

Thursday, April 29 @ 6:30 p.m. via Zoom

Please join us for our monthly Zoom Pub Night. This month we will focus on COVID-19 and how we have fared. Was this past year one of sorrow or resolve or resilience or some combination of these? What strategies have you used to navigate through this past year? Was there one time that has stood out to you? Are you feeling anxious about returning to some semblance of normalcy? Do you feel that you will be ready to resume meeting in groups after receiving a vaccine? What are you looking forward to after receiving your vaccinations?

Everyone is welcome. This includes newcomers and those who haven't checked in for a while. Looking forward to seeing you and to an evening of enthusiastic discussion.

– *Matt Virro*

Summer Sunday Services June 6 to August 29

Are you Zoom fatigued? I know many who are. I know I am. Don't get me wrong. I am grateful for the technology and the expertise of Roy Blake which have kept us together virtually. Yet, I look forward to the day when we can again meet face to face.

Some of our board members, including me, are proposing we take advantage of the informality of our Summer Services and the seasonal weather to take some of our services or post service gatherings outside. There are few Canadian regions other than Niagara that are blessed with as many parks and open spaces to gather and recreate. Outside gatherings become more tenable as more of our congregation is vaccinated. We would continue to comply with COVID-19 guidelines of wearing masks and social distancing. Please give this idea some serious thought.

On a more practical note, we need to give Roy a break from his Zoom activities. He and Penny enjoy camping and will want to get away over the summer. If we do not agree to meet in a place other than on Zoom, we need to find a temporary replacement for Roy to do our Zooming. As the time for summer services will be quickly upon us, please let me know your preference for Zoom and/or outside meetings as soon as possible. You can either email me or phone me directly.

Please remember your pledges and donations are as necessary through the summer months as they are through the rest of the year. Our expenses have been reduced through COVID, but so has our income. As we approach Autumn and hopefully a return to our sanctuary, our expenses will naturally increase and it may be some time before we can restore income from renters. Please help keep UCN viable. You can make your cheque payable to UCN and forward it to our treasurer, Erdwin Hueniken, or you can e-transfer funds directly to UCN. Every cent counts and is gratefully appreciated.

– *LesLee Turmel*

The Times They Are A-Changin' (Whitmark Demo - 1963)

I wrote this three years ago. The walk that Ben and I went on that day in March has never been recreated on that pathway, at least not for us. I desperately hope that the awe of our walk that day has been created for another. Yet, I continue to be concerned that we are losing so much of the beauty and mystery of nature to short term gain and the disintegration of our planet.

The Times They Are A-changin' - Bob Dylan

Come gather 'round people
Wherever you roam
And admit that the waters
Around you are growin'
And accept it that soon
You'll be drenched to the bone.



If your time to you
Is worth savin'
Then you better start swimmin'
Or you'll sink like a stone
For the times they are a-changin'.

I find no better way to be celebrate the awe of our planet, Earth, than being surrounded by nature. It matters not if the sun is shining, the rain pouring or the snow falling. It is not important if I am tending my summer garden in my bare feet or sitting on the deck sipping morning coffee in the dead of winter or walking through puddles of water in my galoshes. Being outside is always a blessing. And if you have a buddy to join you, all the better. Such is my luck. My stalwart canine companion, Bennett, and I recently walked along the old Welland Canal. As he ran wildly through the burr laden underbrush sniffing everything within his olfactory capacity, I sauntered between the bare trees and upon frozen grasses looking about at what nature provides. At first glance, Spring looked far off even as the calendar was heralding its near return. Yet, all was a little more active. As I looked more closely, I saw the plumping of last year's tree buds. There was evidence of coyote tracks in the snow, possibly leading to potential den sites. The resident hawk, lean and scraggly from a cold long winter, had uncovered voles beneath the receding snow. A Blue Heron sat huddled high upon a stripped Willow, studying the broken ice below, watching for a meagre morsel that might be swimming too close to the surface. A ruby red Cardinal was perched amongst the grey branches, a glorious standout. Robins were checking out last year's nesting sites with the same fervour as the squirrels were leaving their treetop winter homes and bouncing from tree to tree. A chevron of Canadian geese honking their presence across the blue sky caught Bennett's and my attention. He was mostly curious. I was joyous. I offered them a silent welcome.

Now, take time to hold in your mind and your heart the full beauty of the season and then imagine, if you can, the complete absence of that beauty. For that matter, try to contemplate the absence of the beauty of any season. It is hard to imagine because, when you do, it is a chilling scenario with ramifications too brutal for consideration. And one of those unbearable facts is that we chose not to confront an issue with the urgency that it deserves. And this issue is the Crisis of Climate Change.

Right now. Today. Here, in this time and place, our planet, Earth, is being transformed. What started as apparent insignificant changes have magnified and manifested into a colossal challenge. Snow caps and glaciers are melting. Our waters are rising. Some of the planet has too much water. Some has too little. Some of our lands are drought ridden, charred by fire or reduced to dust from the rays of an unrelenting sun. There are areas where water is not suitable for any living organism. There are increasing numbers of life forms that are near extinction or now extinct. People are starving. In some areas of the South American rain forest the insect population has been reduced by 95 percent with a concordant reduction of the bird population. In other areas of our planet, insect population has risen to extraordinary levels, resulting in decimated crops, forests and other habitats which sustain life. We, too, and most significantly, have and are contributing to habitat destruction. All these changes are challenging all life. The life of you and me. And if not you or me, that of our children and our children's children. And if not them, all other creatures that provide biological significance. That is ALL life.

Many people call climate change a crisis. I am not confident that all these people believe this. A crisis is when your house is on fire. Your home's destruction is imminent. You stop. If you cannot manage the crisis by yourself, you remove yourself from immediate threat. You call 911. You behave in a timely manner. After, you restore and recreate. A choice of inaction leaves you without a home, or worse.

If you believe, as I do, that we are facing this global crisis, then we must behave as if there is one. That means action now. Right now. Choose a means of addressing this crisis as you are so able. Do something. Do it regularly and do it often. If you don't know what to do, ask others or research activities and groups that recognize the urgency. Act singularly or find like minded people and plunge forward collectively. Mother Earth has nurtured life selflessly for millions of years. We have brought her to her knees. It is our responsibility to make honest attempts to heal her. The choice is ours. The consequences of inaction are grave.

– *LesLee Turmel*

It's a Dog's Life

How great it is to be a canine who walks the same trail as Susan Velkers. Susan has shared her recipe for doggie treats which she reliably makes and shares daily with her canine social network. Reports are that the dogs love them. I am confident that it provides a great opportunity for social interaction between canines and among their human care givers.

At the same time Susan passed on her recipe for dog biscuits, I had just finished reading an article about how the processing of pet food, primarily composed of meat, significantly contributes to green house gases. I was delighted that Susan's recipe contained no meat products, and I wanted to share it with those of us who are more prepared to give up meat in our own lives before we completely withdraw meat from our pets' diets. Moving towards the elimination of green house gases, this recipe provides a modest start. Thanks, Susan.

– *LesLee Turmel*

Environmentally Friendly Doggie Biscuits (Biscotti for Pups)

Preheat oven to 350 F

1/3 cup smooth peanut butter

3/4 cup unseasoned canned pumpkin

1 egg

1 T baking powder

1/2 banana (optional)

Thoroughly mix the above ingredients together

Add 2 cups preferably whole wheat flour

Blend wet and dry ingredients together using your hands

Using a roller, roll out dough to 1/4" thickness

Use a cookie cutter, preferably bone shaped so as to mislead the dogs, to shape the biscuits

Place out on parchment paper

Bake for 20 minutes

Remove from oven and flip the biscuits

Return to oven. Turn off oven

Continue baking for 10 minutes using reserved heat

Makes 3 dozen

Can be stored in the fridge for a few days or frozen
Pass them out to your canine friends

– Submitted by Susan Velkers

UCN History

Doreen Peever has provided me with extensive material related to UCN history, from its inception in 1954 to present day. I believe our history would make a good mini series for our newsletter starting in September when it resumes printing after the summer break. To help flush out the story, I am asking for input from all congregants, members and friends, to provide some insights or memories, old or new about UCN and your experiences at UCN. I cannot promise that all will be included, but I will work over the summer to try to incorporate all submissions. All I need from you is your input. You can mail your submission to me either via Canada post or email, or can phone me.

Let's tell our story!

An Invitation . . .

We are always looking for articles for our newsletter. Is there something that tickles your funny bone or touches your heart or fires your passion? Challenge your creative juices and share! If you wish to submit an article, a poem, a parable or an experience, here are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Is the article in keeping with UCN principles and practices? If you are unsure, please check with the Board of Directors.**

- Is it timely?
- Is it relevant to a season or upcoming UCN or global event, a national holiday or celebration? Such submissions will be given priority if newsletter space is limited.
- Is it short or lengthy? A maximum length of 250 words is suggested.
- Is it personal?

Our newsletter cannot be considered a private publication. Be careful about sharing private information you do not want passed around such as email addresses or phone numbers.

– LesLee Turmel

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Deadline for
May 2021 issue:
April 14, 2021