



UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

November 2021 Newsletter

*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

November 7: Remembrance Day. Presented and led by Karen Stovell.

November 14: TBA

November 21: Communicating With an Open Mind and Heart. Presented and led by LesLee Turmel. We live in a time where the manner of communication has often become virulent. This service will explore how we can abstain from falling into this trap. We will examine effective communication and listening within the context of expressing our Unitarian Principles through words and action.

November 28: Hope. Presented and led by Penny Blake. This Sunday, the first Sunday in Advent, co-incidentally happens to be the first light for Chanukkah. We'll explore the theme of hope, common to both Christmas and Chanukkah, and the theme of light, common to all faiths at this time of year.

President's Message: On Principle Eight Penny Blake

We live in challenging times. Graves are uncovered, hearts are broken. Sympathy is awoken, words must be spoken. And, action is needed.

But which words and which actions? How do we decide?

I had mixed feelings to the congregation's responses to Principle Eight at our October 3 general meeting and the subsequent survey. Over the last century, my own people have been the object of genocide, and my personal life has not been unblemished by the unfair stings of hatred and prejudice. Still, I did not feel that Principle 8 would help my cause or the cause of others.

In the end, the UCN board reached the consensus that Principle 8, as currently proposed, is not a principle but an action plan.

What is the difference, then, between a principle and an action plan? In short, a principle is universal. It protects all people and identifiable groups without exception. Face it, prejudice and oppression have moving targets, including Blacks and our First Nations, but also, Ukrainians, Roma, and peoples we may not be overly familiar with, such as Yazidis. It can even strike white, Christian, cis-gendered males from northern Europe or scientists who do not tow the official line. Prejudice and oppression have no respect.

A principle needs to be universal or it can become divisive. In discussions with CUC leaders on this new principle, I have seen many questions come up: Do we need a principle not only for BIPOC people, but also one for gays, the environment, and the differently abled? Should the acronym be IBPOC to prioritize the Indigenous? In my opinion, the concentration on labels and these descriptions have been divisive. Sadly, I have heard of divisions within congregations and learned of people dropping out of the Unitarian movement.

In contrast, an action plan is focused and specific. It prioritizes and concentrates its efforts on what needs to be done.

Right now, we are playing catch-up, learning more about the lived realities of our fellow First Nations Peoples and people of colour. It is an exciting time. Happily, it is a time that has finally come. As they reach out to us, we must reach out to them.

I have come to believe that 'Truth and Reconciliation' is the right approach, not 'Accountably Dismantling Racism'. The former unequivocally and proudly states its case, but does not tear down 'the other'.

The purpose is not to affix labels to people, such as "white supremacist", but to address the mechanisms of supremacy. It is counter-productive and can be undemocratic to tell people what to feel, think, say or do.

Rather, we must be free to ask for action, taking into account that we all have the right of conscience. And the use of the democratic process is paramount. We have taken ‘political’ actions at the UCN. There is no doubt that concerted political action can be very effective, but only after reaching a consensus of the congregation.

There are many actions we can take to understand, appreciate, and support the BI-POC community. By living our seven UU principles we can motivate and direct ourselves. This has been a UCN tradition to which we are committed.

Let us move forward with continued commitment and resolve.

Food for Thought

The following are excerpts from CUC Principle 8 discussions:

John Boyle - Unitarian Church of Vancouver

... I have two concerns with the proposed 8th Principle that make it difficult for me to support: It isn't a principle. It is a covenant to action, a commitment to serious anti-racism work. It would thus rest awkwardly within the existing set of principles, which are timeless guides to right living ... It focuses on what we don't want – racism – rather than on what we do want, and covenant to live and create the existing principles. In my experience, it is generally much more empowering to be for something rather than against it.

I'm very worried the currently planned CUC process for considering and, perhaps, adopting the proposed 8th principle will be seriously divisive for our members and congregations. There are already tremors. If the planned yes/no vote passes, I expect there will be a significant number of thoughtful, respectful members who will be very unhappy with the process, the result, or both. Similarly, if it doesn't pass. We may even lose members over it and cause long-lasting rifts in our congregations. We need a fresh approach to the whole matter. After all, we are dealing with the foundations of our faith community.

Brad Walker - Neighbourhood Unitarian, Toronto

In addition to the land acknowledgement statements, congregations can:

- incorporate a consistent message addressing racism at the beginning or end of each service.
- regularly invite guest speakers from advocacy groups and organizations.
- establish a scholarship in communities and schools where opportunities are limited or lacking.
- offer a safe place for groups to meet for developing community action plans.
- reach out to other progressive faith groups in a common cause.

Resuming Activities

1) So many of UCN's activities fell to the side since the beginning of the Covid-19 pandemic. Now that our doors have re-opened to services, we can anticipate resuming some of those activities. This cannot be done without your participation. So, how many of you are ready for some of those traditional informal and fun gatherings which help to sustain our UCN community? Are you ready for a Circle Dinner? A Trivia Night? A Game Night (Boogle, Yahtzee or Scrabble or...)? Or a Film Night?

If you are interested in any or all of the above, speak to Karen Stovell, Abu Hosein, Susan Velkers-Glassford or Jim Glassford.

2) We are still in need of an organizer for Pub Night. This requires a once a month commitment to organize and facilitate a Unitarian-themed discussion with UCN members. It is meant to be a casual gathering at a local pub or restaurant which can accommodate a group of 12 to 15 people. It has always been a fun and dynamic way of learning about our fellow congregants, as well as exposing ourselves to knew ideas and ways of thinking.

If you are interested in assuming this role, please contact Matt Virro, who previously facilitated Pub Night, or another board member.

Furnace Fund Erdwin Hueniken

In July, UCN installed a new furnace and ventilation system. This new system provides greater efficiency and improved air circulation, especially important during this pandemic. The cost of this needed renovation was \$15,481. Although we were able to pay for this, it drastically diminished our financial reserves. The board agreed to start a Furnace Fund whereby congregants could contribute to help offset the cost. Donations to date total \$1725.00 and range from \$25.00 to \$1200.00. As you can see, any contribution, large or small, has been gratefully received. You can offer your donation at services, via Canada Post or e-transfer. Be sure to make a notation that your donation goes towards the Furnace Fund. As always, donations may be eligible for an income tax credit.

All donations are deeply appreciated.

2022 Pledge Drive

It is that time of year again when we ask our congregants to determine how much money they can contribute to UCN over the next year. Your contributions are critical to keep our church financially viable.

Your pledge is directed to the many costs associated with participating in UCN life, our goals and our objectives. This includes CUC membership fees as well as speakers, social action initiatives, educational materials and, most significantly, the general upkeep and maintenance of our building. The board has made significant cuts over the last year to streamline our expenses, most notably in using volunteer labour for the newsletter, directory and other publishing needs that formerly were handled commercially. We have also saved money by temporarily doing without a paid musician. This helped to offset the cost of the new furnace and ventilation system, as well as lower revenues. Though cuts in expenditures were made, we continue to rely on pledges from our congregation.

Erdwin Hueniken, our treasurer, will be passing out pledge forms to you. We will also be emailing an online pledge form. You can contribute in one lump sum, monthly, or in any interval convenient to you. Please have them completed and returned by December 12. Your pledge is a promise of what you want to give, but we recognize that situations change and so may your contribution. If so, there is no need to advise anyone.

Your pledge is confidential and only the treasurer knows what you give. A receipt will be provided in 2022 for income tax purposes.

Please contribute what you can afford. It is appreciated and essential to keep our congregation vibrant, functional and relevant.

Thank You!

Seniors' Hampers LesLee Turmel

Each year our congregation has generously given to St.Catharines' Community Care Christmas initiative for seniors who need extra support.

Covid demands a more restrictive way of giving than we have traditionally done. We can only accept money rather than the clothing and food as we donated in the past. All money collected will go towards gift cards and grocery buggies, a much-needed item so seniors can trolley their groceries home.

Please help those who do not have the resources to provide for all their needs. In the Unitarian and Christmas spirit of giving, please donate what you can. You can direct your contribution to Maurice or LesLee Turmel, who will ensure your gift is passed on to Community Care before Christmas.

The deadline for receipt of donations is on or before Sunday, December 5. Your help will be gratefully received by Community Care and, especially, the seniors who will receive a special Christmas gift this year.

Welcoming New Members to UCN

Doreen Peever

UCN is welcoming three new members during our service on Sunday, November 7. Our new members will be:

Brian Jones, who is new to Unitarianism. He has joined us on Zoom for several months and is now attending in person since our doors re-opened in September. He has already volunteered for committee work and often speaks at our services with a well considered opinion. He is inviting his wife, Dena, and his daughter, Leia, to the UCN for the membership service;

Connie Scott, who first came to UCN on Zoom. She moved to St.Catharines in December and is now attending in person. She has also shown her interest when she attended our Zoom board meeting on October 19. Connie is looking for a like-minded community as she has been thoughtfully questioning for some time;

Karen Walsh will be also joining our membership. Her grandparents, Steve and Mary Delhaas, were founding members of UCN, and her mother, Nellie Delhaas, was very active at UCN and was president at one time. Karen grew up attending our Sunday School and is one of the rare “born” Unitarians.

Please join us on Sunday, November 7 to extend a heartfelt welcome to Brian, Connie and Karen into our UCN family.

Remembrance Day

LesLee Turmel

As far back as I can recall, Remembrance Day was a day set aside to honour those who were lost in the Great War. Later, I grew to understand it was a day which honoured all who served in wars and the armed services, past and present.

As a child, November 11 began with all students in the City of Regina meeting at the Cenotaph in Victoria Park. We would gather en masse, wearing our poppies to recite 'In Flanders Fields' by John McCrae, and give thanks to the fallen soldiers of World War One and the signing of the Armistice.

My initial understanding of November 11 was limited and naive. It started small, literally and figuratively. In our home, Remembrance Day began with acknowledging my British grandfather who served and survived the Great War, albeit with indelible scars. In later years, after my grandfather died, I observed my grandmother placing her right hand upon her heart and standing quietly beside me at memorial services.

Never a tear. Always a sigh.



As my childhood passed, my understanding and appreciation of Remembrance Day grew. That understanding began from a social convention, and a commitment by family and community to honour something bigger than myself; not war, but valour, sacrifice and commitment.

I hear, these days, that Remembrance Day is no longer the day of commemoration that it was decades ago. There are probably many reasons for this: Maybe it's because those who served in World War One have passed on, or there is the mistaken understanding that Remembrance Day celebrates war and not lives, or the younger generations feel too removed from the Armistice signing over a century ago; Maybe, it's because not all provinces, including Ontario, recognize the day as a statutory holiday, or there is a lack of understanding and acknowledgement from parents, educators and other leaders. Sometimes, I fear the day will become no more than another date on the calendar. As it stands right now, Hallowe'en garners more notice than Remembrance Day.

If, perchance, you feel the same as I do, start small and commit to speak with at least one youth on or around November 11. Speak about Remembrance Day and its significance. Take the time to share what this day represents, what it means to you and what it meant to those who went before you. And, should you be fortunate to know or meet up with a veteran of any generation, approach them and convey a heartfelt thank you.

Tying the Knot

Congratulations are extended to Susan Velkers and Jim Glassford, who were wed on Saturday, October 23 at UCN, before family and friends. They originally planned their wedding for June 6, 2020. Unfortunately, it had to be postponed because of Covid-19. The service was performed by Karen Stovell and Doreen Peever. Penny Blake composed and sang a beautiful tribute to the love shared by Susan and Jim.

The bride and groom were dressed in authentic Scottish attire, and each one was radiating great joy and enthusiasm.

The service performed, referred to as a Handfasting Ceremony, is of ancient Celtic origins, dating back to 6000 BCE. Ribbons were wrapped around each of the bride's and groom's arms, symbolizing the binding of two lives. Each ribbon represented a series of vows spoken by the bride and groom. At the end of the binding ceremony, the ribbons were released from the couple's hands revealing a delicate and intricate knot. The knot symbolizes their commitment and love for each other.

We wish the couple many years of shared love and happiness. And lots of fun!



SOUP

Russell Baird

Are we in a Cosmic Soup? Did we originate in a Cosmic Soup?

Those are questions that arise from discussions about evolution and creation. I have seemingly intelligent associates who believe this world began less than 9000 years ago, and others who say it began billions or trillions of years ago. All claim to have evidence.

Some Creationists feel obliged to stand up for the idea that some God created “Man” in his present form straight from dust, which I think means by some magical wave of the hand. Hand is appropriate for them because we have hands and He created us in His image, so He must have hands.

I believe the book, “Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind”, by Professor Harari, is as close to the truth about the origin of Homo Sapiens as we can get at this moment in time. By truth, I mean the phenomenological, three-dimensional, objective “truth”.

Yet, I find that the Vedas and Dan Brown’s origin story are vaguely possible, which means to me they are worthy of trying to reconcile with what history seems to indicate as per Harari’s three-volume synopsis.

I find Ralph Waldo Emerson and the Vendantists have taught how to benefit individually and collectively from immersing ourselves in the study of spiritual matters. I don’t think anyone surpasses Vivekanada in understanding them. Simone Weil shows how to use Deism and effectively surrender in coming to a utopia in society and in one’s own life, while acknowledging God, Jesus, Krishna and Socrates as masterful illuminators.

But I prefer cabbage soup to cosmic soup. Even the cabbage soup that starts out as a bone button soup. The neighbours contribute to the pot and it goes from useless to tasty nourishment. Buddha brought the potato. Nanak brought the rice. Confucius brought the meaty part and Mahavira the pulse. Shankara stirred. Mohammed seasoned. Deganawida and Hiawatha told us how it was done in a North American epic mythology, and the Upanishads and Lao Tzu show why.

Universal Parallels Beryl Stovell

Recently, Brian Jones, his family, and I attended an Indigenous Smudging ceremony in the Niagara Region. There were so



many aspects to the ceremony which touched on universal symbols that I could not help but realize that all humanity reaches out for similar intrinsic spiritual gestures, across time and around the globe:

Fire, whether in the form of an open bonfire, or a simple candle, creates a sacred space. This is very much an integral part of the UU tradition;

Drumming, which reflects the sound of the heartbeat in all of us. Ancient Celtic drumming seems to parallel the Native drumming, calling the Spirits to us;

The four corners of the Earth, seen and unseen, are recognized. The Elders, after lighting the sacred fire, stand and acknowledge the four cardinal points; North, East, South and West. This ritual was utilized in one of the most recent weddings performed by one of our Lay Chaplains;

Prayers and meditations are universally applied. All cultures in every place on this globe, throughout all time, have used prayers and meditations to centre the body and open the mind;

Chanting is incorporated into prayer and meditation. At the smudging, the Indigenous Elder followed his prayer with chanting in his own language. I am reminded of the Latin choral harmonies I learned as a child and the beauty of this universal expression;

Rattles and the use of sound are used as an invitation to spirit or practitioners of a particular faith. In the smudging ceremony, the Elder shook and turned a rattle to call to the Spirits. It reminded me of the Buddhist prayer wheel, which is turned and turned to send prayers to the other world;

The ritual of Smudging consists of the sacred fire, fuelled with sweetgrass, tobacco and dried white sage. This smoking receptacle is passed along to all attendees, and each is encouraged to waft the smoke over their face to imbue sacredness into their sight, their hearing, their voice and their thoughts. This ceremony parallels Roman Catholic and Orthodox services where incense is cast over the congregation so all can be purified by the sacred smoke;

Food offerings, such as fruit, vegetables, meats and sweets, with tobacco sprinkled over, are provided to the Spirits present at the Smudging ceremony. This honours the Spirits and helps them on their journey. In Mexico, a very similar ceremony is performed for the Day of the Dead, where families go to the graveyards and take food, tobacco and alcohol to share a feast with their dead ancestors.

While the substances and items used are varied between and among groups, the items chosen and the ceremonies performed are culturally specific. This makes it all the more remarkable that the use of smoke for spiritual cleansing and healing is universal.

Adult Education

Karen Stovell

In our Adult Ed Class this month, we investigated the topic of Humans, Class and the Poor. I was encouraged to share some of the questions and discussion with all of UCN.

What does it mean to be poor in Canada? Is it the same as being poor in Haiti or Ghana or the United Kingdom? Or in Trinidad?

Where do you see yourself now? Are you financially comfortable? Would many people in the world be happy to trade places with you? How did you get to this place? Is it attainable for all?

Deuteronomy 5: 11

For there will never cease to be poor in the land; that is why I am commanding you to open wide your hand to your brother and to the poor and needy in your land.

Mark 14: 17

The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them whenever you want. But you will not always have me.

Questions:

Do you think of your childhood as a time when you were poor? Think of some examples.

Are you poor now?

Do you feel a responsibility to help the poor today? Do you act on it? How?

If the poor will be always with us, should we feel guilty for not being poor?

There have been many examples of people giving away all their worldly goods and going out to help the poor. I never felt moved to do that. Did you?

The comment was made during the service on September 19, that some people felt guilty about taking a third dose of the Covid-19 vaccine when so many poorer countries have not had the opportunity to get one dose. Do you feel, as Canadians, that we should encourage our government to give vaccines away and forego the third vaccine?

We also discussed the Basic Income Experiment in Dauphin, Manitoba (Mincome) carried out between 1974 and 1979. We examined some of the positive ramifications of the program, including an 8.5% decline in hospitalizations, fewer alcohol related accidents, mental health hospitalizations and visits to family physicians. There was an increase in the number of adolescents who completed high-school. One young boy, the youngest of six children, recalls that Mincome meant a visit to the dentist for the first time in his life. Police incidents were reduced, small businesses flourished and family dynamics improved.

The experiment ended when the federal Conservatives won the election in 1979 and Pierre Trudeau's Liberals were out of power.

Dr. Evelyn Forget, an economist and professor in the Department of Community Health Services and Academic Director of the Manitoba Research Data Centre at the University of Manitoba, states "many questions need to be answered surrounding the affordability of basic income on a larger scale ... the impact of the coronavirus pandemic could render it necessary to consider taking radical measures to plug gaps within existing welfare programs". Further, she contends "the arrival of Covid-19 coincided with high job loss revealing the suite of social programs as being inadequate ... You have a mismatch of inconsistent programs, and you have people falling through the gaps so they are not getting the support they need. That is only going to continue as many of the firms suffering now, because of the pandemic, are probably finished. With so much unemployment, I think basic income needs to be considered as it provides a much more coherent solution".

This is only one of many ideas for tackling poverty in the working poor and homeless people in Canada. There are many examples throughout the world which have worked and improved peoples' lives.

So, where can UCN fit in to the picture? Can we, as a community, as well as individuals, choose to focus our work to improve our fellow Canadians' lives? How much can we do? How do we do it? How much do we want to do?

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Guidelines for Newsletter Submissions

Editing the newsletter involves many layers of examination, communication, editing and re-editing before it is finalized for publication. To facilitate this process, I request the following when you are preparing an article for submission:

- single space between lines;
- no indentation;
- do not centre text or titles;
- no bold or italic print;
- no bullets;
- no coloured print;
- no copy and paste. It must be typed out by the writer from beginning to end. Failure to do so will result in your article being returned to you;
- any submission longer than five lines must be in a file format like doc or pages;
- consult with me if you want to use photos, graphs or tables.

I do genuinely enjoy being editor of the newsletter. These guidelines simply help create a more seamless process. Thank you all for contributions and your efforts in assisting Roy Blake and me in the newsletter production.

Deadline for the December Newsletter: November 17.

- LesLee Turmel