



# UNITARIAN CONGREGATION OF NIAGARA

**December 2021 Newsletter**

## **Upcoming Services**

December 5: Aging While Remaining Young at Heart - service presented and led by Guy Royal

December 12: A Unitarian Universalist's View of the Christmas Story - service presented and led by Jim Glassford

December 19: The Different Kinds of Love - service presented and led by Karen Stovell

December 26: Post Christmas: What Now? - service presented and led by LesLee Turmel

## **New Members**

UCN extends a heartfelt welcome to our five new members. Brian Jones, Paul Pipher, Eva Schwartzentruber, Connie Scott and Karen Walsh have joined our UCN family. We are grateful for your decision to join and look forward getting to know you better.

## President's Message

We have much to be grateful for as this year's holiday season begins. We are back to some in-person gatherings, such as services with coffee hour. There is more opportunity to socialize as Covid restrictions are loosened. More families and friends will no doubt gather this season with a renewed appreciation of how precious time spent together really is.

It is a season of holidays; Christmas, Diwali, Chanukah and Kwanzaa, to name the best known. They may have different origins, but all utilize the symbolism of light, which at this time, the darkest part of the year, gives us renewed hope. As the year wanes, we can begin again. Christmas celebrates a birth; Diwali, the triumph of good over evil; Chanukah, a rededication; and Kwanzaa, seven qualities necessary for a good life. No matter our faith or traditions, we need these affirmations.

As this year ends, I am most thankful for all the signs of renewal at UCN. So many new members! Many people participating at coffee hours, and expressing interest in renewing activities in the New Year such as circle dinners, film nights and book club that have been in abeyance for many months. I am also heartened to see many people provide music for services. We are truly blessed. With all this, my spirits soar.

I wish you all a blessed and joyous Holiday season, and look forward to more beginnings and renewals here at the UCN in the New Year.

- Penny Blake



## Resuming Social Activities in January

If all goes well, we are planning to resume many of our social activities next month. Mark your calendar! More details will be in the January newsletter.

Proof of full vaccination will be required for all of these activities.

### **Circle Dinner**

Our next dinner is planned for Saturday, January 15 at 5:00 pm, at the UCN. This is a fun and lively evening where you are invited to bring family and friends. It's a great opportunity to learn more about your fellow Unitarians and their friends and family.

As always, it is a potluck dinner. Please bring the course which corresponds to your surname: A to G, please bring a salad; M to P, please bring a main dish; Q to Z, please bring a dessert. As some attendees have food restrictions and allergies, please include a list of ingredients with your contribution.

### **Book Club**

We are meeting at the home of Karen and Abu on Tuesday, January 18 at 1:30 pm. January's book is 'The Best Laid Plans' by Terry Fallis. It is a comedic satire about Canadian politics, and is both funny and thought provoking.

### **Film Night**

We will resume film nights on Friday, January 21 at 7:00 pm. at the UCN. The January film is Cry, The Beloved Country.

## SENIORS HAMPERS

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 we donated in the past. All money collected will go towards gift cards and grocery buggies, a much needed item so seniors can trolly 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

## 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 up-keep and maintenance of our building. The board has made significant cuts over the last year to streamline our expenses, most notably in our music program and the work of Darcy Ewanchuk of Office Solutions, which included printing of the newsletter, our telephone directory, order of service, and more. This helped to offset the cost of the new furnace and ventilation system, as well as lower revenues. As many cuts that were made, we continue to rely on pledges from our congregation.

You can contribute in one lump sum, monthly or in any interval convenient to you. Please complete the online form before December 12. If you require a paper form, just ask Roy Blake for one at any service. 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!

## Elder's Circle on Decolonization (European Colonization)

What an exciting time in which we are living. What doors have been opened for many, including me, to use Zoom. Though the effects of Covid have been devastating to the world, this scourge has encouraged and opened up the validity of communicating via the internet.

I recently participated in an Elder's Circle, along with 91 other people, led by Mitch Michell. The guest speaker was Stephen Paquette, a First Nation Elder. He had been one of the children stolen in the 1960's Scoop, and his mother had been seized at age four and held in a Residential School for 12 years.

Stephen, in wise and calm words, shared the effects of European colonization upon the thousands of years of the previously established order in what we now call Canada. He clarified the word colonization as "some form of invasion and subjugation of people".

Europeans did not recognize the matriarchal societies of tribes wherein clan grandmothers were leaders and men were spokesmen only. Indigenous peoples had thousands of successful years of trade and commerce prior to European settlement. The European "Doctrine of Discovery" provided Europeans "legitimate" authority to convert Indigenous populations to Christianity and strip away their way of life. Those that resisted were enslaved or killed.

The years of negotiations and treaties were brutal for the Indigenous people. Negotiations and documents were in English or French and were rarely understood by the Indigenous people. And the few "translators" that were available, were generally biased toward European interests.

The Indian Act of 1876 attempted to generalize a vast and varied population and assimilate them into a non-Indigenous society. The First Nations Peoples were banned from practicing or promoting any of their customs and their movements were severely restricted. An on-site government appointed Indian Agent rigidly enforced the Indian Act. The legacy of systemic isolation, restriction and dehumanization through the creation of Reservations and Residential Schools resulted in the near extinction of a people, their culture and their spirit.

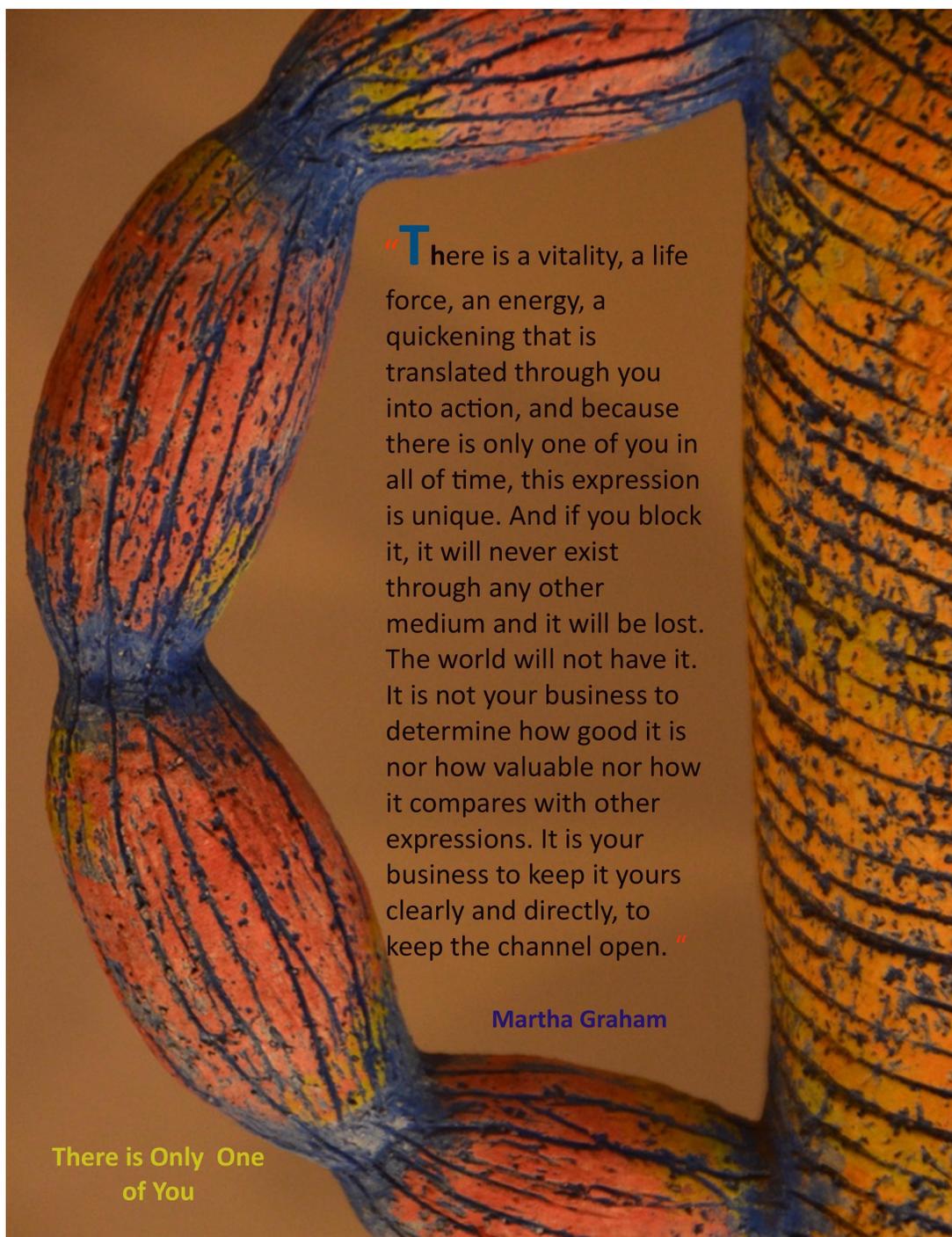
Despite the horrors and injustices of the past, Indigenous people are rising and beginning to speak for themselves. The Truth and Reconciliation movement is seen as a valid step towards acknowledging their rights and needs. Stephen sees Canada (Turtle Island) as a country of great potential when all of us work for the common good.

How should we start this journey? He says we can start to understand our local history and the local Indigenous peoples. We can connect with local knowledge keepers. He advised that the University of Alberta has an excellent free online course regarding the history of Indigenous peoples.

He humbly reaches out to share Indigenous history with schools in the Toronto area. He points to the urgent need for a review and update of our school books and libraries to include Indigenous history and thought. It is this process which will help negate the patina of colonization imbedded within our culture.

So be it. Miwetch.

Beryl Stovell - Social Action UCN



## A Letter from Santa

Oh gather ye round all my children  
For I have a tale to tell of the dawning of man  
She and He came to Earth a long time ago  
To celebrate this life that had been given and that was blessed

Oh what wonders befell them as they ventured forth on the Earth  
To discover their being in all that mattered  
It was never meant to be difficult this journey through time  
Only a gentle romp through the woodlands and across the plains

We have written many stories and poems to you over time  
To advise you of this sacred place within  
You faltered on your journey outward and failed to notice the signs  
So We came to you often, in prose, in poetry and in rhyme

Each year at this time you remember us softly  
In the heart of your yearning womb  
You can feel that presence sublime, pulsing within your frame  
More alive at this time than throughout the year

Have you ever wondered how this all started?  
Where it began, this special time?  
You call it Christmas; we call it Love  
In our world it makes no difference, as long as you feel the pulse inside

Remember when you were young and oh so eager then too  
Awaiting Santa's reindeer to appear on your roof  
You believed so easily then in the power of the mind  
You never doubted that He would arrive

Your parents helped with the story, taught to them in their youth  
And so on, and so on, all the way back in time  
Now you await your truth again, in the eyes of the children before you  
They are here to remind you of what you once knew

That the Power of Love has existed since before time  
Since before there was an Earth or Heaven above  
And the Power of Love insisted that it be known through time  
So this purpose of yours came to be born

Here on this Earth you can see afar  
Out to the planets and the stars suspended in the sky  
They teach of vastness, of triumph, and of destiny too  
They teach you to dream and to look way beyond whom you think you are

These beacons of Light, you can take deep into your heart  
And rekindle the flame that once burned bright  
You are great, you are Love's sacred ones  
Sent forward from the Light  
Here to learn "what you can do" to spread this message  
That all is really right with this world  
In spite of the troubles that lurk about

You see this eternal flame that burns brightly from within  
Is not ashamed of its presence, to have itself be known  
Its power is eternal, It is not shy  
To be expressed is all that It asks

So on Christmas morning, when you awake  
Remember this message from deep in your Soul  
You are not lost, you are not forsaken  
You are to be found where your feelings reside

When each of you surrenders to this guiding Light  
Another star lights up to cast its beam into the "forever void"  
Pushing back the darkness a little further  
Each time someone finds their way Home

Isn't it a great story that you all get to play a part in?  
A piece of living history that unfolds itself through you  
You are of the Light Everlasting  
You are a Beacon of the Creator's Love

This is our tale of Christmas, a message we give to you  
In a package that has shaped itself through your living history  
Each year we bring to you another such message  
To be added to the vast annals of unfolding time

The true path for all is illumined by one's Soul  
And that Soul was the Creator's to begin  
Now it is yours to take forward through Life  
To learn and then teach what truth you acquire

Everyone has purpose, and love and magic too  
Everyone has meaning in the Grand Design

As we bid farewell to this magical mystery tour  
In prose, in poetry and in rhyme  
We return to where It began, the very first Christmas  
Somewhere near the dawning of time

Merry Christmas We say to you all  
From Santa . . . and from . . . the Divine

-Maurice Turmel for Christmas 2021

## A Leafy Walk

*This article was forwarded to UCN by Russ Baird. It provides a snapshot of our community: the geography, beauty and history, and the challenges and opportunities.*

*Carpe Diem* seems to be my motto these days. Seize the day or opportunity, and walk when you have half-decent weather or location. So this morning, after dropping my daughter off at work, I stopped by Dick's Creek, the old canal at Oakdale and Westchester. I savoured the fresh air and the leafy aroma after last night's heavy rain. By the way, Dick's Creek was named after Richard Pierpoint, the de facto leader of the Black brigade in the War of 1812.

I looked forward to seeing the rush of water in the creek coming down from the old canal. The leaves left on the trees were at their best.

I have three kinds of walks: the quick soak up the atmosphere and see what's out there walk; the slow photography walk with camera at the ready; and the slowest walk, the bird-watching walk where you wait for the birds to come to you. There are also combinations of those walks.

Today was the quick walk, although I could hear songbirds around the parking lot. I stopped only once to watch birds when a small flock of kinglets flew into a nearby bush. I heard harsh bird calls, perhaps those of small hawks or other raptors. There was a small pup tent set up beside the creek and clothes hanging from a nearby branch. The site looked very wet and cold. There was a bicycle nearby, so I assumed that it was occupied. This must be St. Catharines tent city, close to a construction site near the Geneva Street overpass.

Farther along the creek was a car parked at the side of the trail. It was close to where someone had camped during the summer and to where someone could drive. If I had been less hurried, I would have checked it out, but it was beyond the point where I made my turn homeward.

One of my much-too-many projects is to compile a book of photography on "The Creeks of Niagara". Some of the best scenery, especially of a seasonal nature, is along creek valleys. I would focus on the creeks below the escarpment.

While yellow was the dominant colour, many of the smaller bushes were shades of orange and red. Towards the end of the walk there was a small tree, in full autumn colours, which had fallen into the creek where the water was rushing over some of its branches.

What I savour about the seasons is the suggestion of transformation, along with the hope that life itself can be likewise transformed. The first substantial snowfall of winter, the early leafing of spring, the colours of autumn are all food for the soul. "Physician Nature", a poetic phrase from Keats, can change one's focus and mood, even if it is only 30 minute quick walk.

Happy Trails.

Kevin McCabe  
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# Photos from our November 7 Service

- Courtesy of Matt Virro



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## Reiki Principles

Jim Glassford's October presentation addressing Reiki principles garnered interest from many UCN congregants. In response, Jim has submitted the Five Reiki Principles.

1. Just for today, I release angry thoughts.
2. Just for today, I release thoughts of worry.
3. Just for today, I am grateful.
4. Just for today, I expand my consciousness.
5. Just for today, I am gentle with all being.

Using the Reiki principles as a daily mantra helps to guide your thoughts and actions, promoting spiritual and personal growth, and facilitating a healthier, more fulfilling and balanced life.

**Deadline for January Newsletter:**  
December 22.

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